

What is Sannyasa?

by
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(based on Guru Pūrnimā 2007 talk)
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What is Guru Pūrnimā?

Guru Pūrnimā day [full moon, in the month of Ashadh (June-July)] is also called Vyāsa Pūrnimā day. This day is important for all spiritual seekers generally and all Sannyāsis [monks] particularly. On this day, Sannyāsis perform a Pūjā [ritual worship] for the entire Guru Paramparā [guru-disciple chain] and especially Vyāsāchārya who is considered to be an important link in the Guru Paramparā.

For orthodox Sannyāsis (who keep moving and do not stay more than 3 days in one place), this Guru Pūrnimā is also the beginning of their yearly Chātur-māsya Vratam [4-month vow]. They take a vow to remain in one place for either four months or two months.

And on this special day for Sannyāsis, we will see something about Sannyāsa. And all Vedāntik students know that for liberation, next to Jnānam [spiritual knowledge], the most important Sādhanā [spiritual practice] is supposed to be Sannyāsa. The primary means of liberation is spiritual knowledge. And next to spiritual knowledge, almost as important as spiritual knowledge is Sannyāsa or renunciation. That is why we have several Mantrās highlighting the importance of Sannyāsa.

*Na Karmanā Na Prajayā Dhanena
tyāgenaike Amritattvamānashuhu.
(Sannyāsa Sūktam)*

*Neither by rituals, nor by progeny nor by riches
but by renunciation alone one can attain immortality.*

Tyāga [renunciation] means Sannyāsa or renunciation. And in another Mantra in the same Sūktam, we have a reference which says Sannyāsa Yogāt - this, here highlights the Sādhanā of renunciation.

Āntara Sannyāsa - inner renunciation (for all)

And in the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Krishna also has highlighted the importance of Sannyāsa and fortunately Lord Krishna has given a concession with regards to Sannyāsa. Lord Krishna says, whether a person becomes a formal Āshrama Sannyāsi or not, a person should become an internal Sannyāsi compulsorily. To use a political language, “internal saffronisation” is compulsory.

*Anāshrita Karma Phalam Kāryam Karma Karoti Yaha
Sa Sannyāsi Cha Yogī Na Niragnir Na Chākriyaha (BG 6.1)*

*He who performs his bounden duty without leaning to the fruit of action—
he is a renouncer of action [a sannyasi] as well as of steadfast mind [a yogi]:
not he who is without fire, nor he who is without action.*

Whether a person becomes externally a Sannyāsi or not, whether a person takes formal Sannyāsa or not, one should take Āntara Sannyāsa Dīkshā. Āntara Sannyāsa means internal Sannyāsa or inner renunciation. Dīkshā [initiation] is compulsory.

Therefore every serious spiritual seeker, no matter whatever Āshrama [stage of life] he is in, must take Āntara Sannyāsa Dīkshā. This is by taking a Sankalpa [vow, decision] to become an internal Sannyāsi. And one should prepare the mind for that and one day or the other, one should become an inner Sannyāsi. And only when Jnānam is supported by Sannyāsa, it will fructify into liberation.

Naturally the question will arise - what should I do to become an internal Sannyāsi ? What should I do to become an Āntara Sannyāsi ? What are the Vratams or disciplines that I should follow to become an Āntara Sannyāsi ?

To become an Āntara Sannyāsi also, one has to renounce. This is because Sannyāsa means renunciation. So the question actually is - remaining in Grihastha Āshrama [Householder Stage of Life], if I should become an Āntara Sannyāsi, what should I renounce ? This is the theme of the talk.

Based on the Shāstram, to become an Āntara Sannyāsi, one should renounce three things. Remaining in Grihastha Āshrama, one should renounce the following three things

- a) Sarva Abhimāna Parityāgaha
[Renunciation of all ownership and controllership].
- b) Sarva Chinta Parityāgaha
[Renunciation of all anxiety & worry].
- c) Sarva Vishesa Prārthanā Parityāgaha
[Renunciation of all special prayers for objectives].

**a) Sarva Abhimāna Parityāgaha –
[Renunciation of all ownership and controllership]**

The word Abhimāna means the sense of ownership and controllership. The notion that I am the owner of such and such thing, such and such people refers to ownership. And the notion that I can control events refers to controllership.

From the scriptures, we learn an important lesson that Bhagavān alone is the owner and controller of everything. By the study of Vishva Rūpa Darshanam [Vision of Universal Form] (Chap.11) in the Bhagavad Gītā, the lesson we learn is that Bhagavān is everything and Bhagavān is the owner of everything. This means that I do not now own any blessed thing in life. Bhagavān has given certain things for my temporary use only. These are meant only for my spiritual growth. And Bhagavān can take away anything from me at any time without seeking my permission and without giving me an advance notice.

Therefore Bhagavān can give anything to me at anytime and Bhagavān can take away anything from me at any time, be it tangible things like people and property or intangible things like name, fame, honours, prestige, health etc. Both tangible and intangible things belong to Bhagavān since he is the owner.

And if we claim ownership of anything, I am misappropriating Bhagavān's property. And misappropriation is a serious spiritual offence, for which the punishment is imprisonment in Samsāra jail. Every time I claim ownership of anything, which is called Abhimāna, I am committing the offence of misappropriation for which the punishment is Samsāra Kārāgrihavāsaha. Kārāgriha means jail.

Therefore I should understand that ownership is a spiritual offence and therefore I renounce all the sense of ownership. And in my heart of hearts, I always have a Vritti that I own nothing, therefore I have nothing to lose. So, what is the constant Vritti that is to be cultivated and nourished? I have nothing to own and therefore only, I have nothing to lose. This Vritti should not merely be from the lips but it should come deep from my heart.

And not only should I renounce the sense of ownership, I have to renounce the sense of controllership. I should know that I do not control anything or any event in the world. everything and every event is controlled by Bhagavān according to the Law of Karma. The Law of Karma involves several unknown and known factors. When, I do not even know what are the factors involved, then where is the question of I, controlling anything – I am only a contributor. I do have a freewill, I do have a choice. With my freewill and choice, I can become a contributor and that too, one of the contributors. Based on my contribution and based on several others factors Bhagavān controls events.

Even when I take medicine for a health problem, taking medicine is my contribution only. I can never control my health through that. Bhagavān will decide whether I should recover after 10 days of medication or 10 weeks of medication. Medication is my contribution, but health is controlled by Bhagavān.

Therefore I do not have ownership and I do not have controllership. I have got only contributor-ship, therefore I renounce the notion of ownership and controllership.

Ownership and controllership together are called Abhimāna.

Sarva Abhimāna Tyāga [Renunciation of all abhimana] should be practiced. And this is the greatest form of Bhakti called surrender or Ātmā Nivedana Rūpa Bhakti. Krishna talks about this in the words of Nir-mamaha and Nir-ahankāraha [non-mine-ness & non-I-ness].

Therefore the first renunciation is Sarva Abhimāna Tyāga, i.e renouncing claims of ownership and controllership.

**b) Sarva Chinta Parityāgaha –
[Renunciation of all anxiety & worry]**

Then the second renunciation is Sarva Chintā Parityāgaha. Chintā means anxiety or worry. If we analyse our mind, we can find that all our worries are centred around only those things and beings towards which we have Abhimāna. Where there is no Abhimāna, towards what we generally called third-party, with regards to those people and things, we have absolutely no Chintā. Therefore it is very clear that the psychological Law is that every Abhimāna is associated with worry and every worry is associated with Abhimāna. Abhimāna and worry are interconnected. Therefore they reinforce each other. Greater the Abhimāna, greater the worry and vice versa. The more I worry, the more I am reinforcing my Abhimāna in the object of worry.

Therefore an Āntara Sannyāsi recognises that worry promotes Abhimāna. Therefore if I should become an Āntara Sannyāsi, not only should I renounce all the Abhimāna, I should renounce my support for all forms of worry. The arrival of worry is the most natural thing because we have developed the habit of worrying. Therefore we cannot avoid the arrival of worry. But by becoming an Āntara Sannyāsi, I use all my resources to disengage my mind from all forms of worry.

The moment any form of worry comes, the red signal should light up inside me. Red would then refer to Abhimāna ! This is because, through my worry, I am actually nourishing Abhimāna. Abhimāna means spiritual misappropriation. And spiritual misappropriation is an offence. And spiritual offence means Samsāra Kārāgriha [imprisonment] extended by a few more years or Janmāhā [births].

Therefore an Āntara Sannyāsi should strongly reject all forms of worry as even they arise. We should use all the resources and skill and the aim should be not to allow the continuation or nourishment of any form of worry.

Therefore the second renunciation is Sarva Chintā Parityāgaha.

**c) Sarva Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha –
[Renunciation of all special prayers for objectives]**

This is the third form of renunciation. And this is where most of us will be stumped. Vishesha Prārthanā means all forms of special prayers, vows etc which are meant for special purposes.

If we study the psychology of special prayers, we will note that we will offer special prayers only with regards to things and people where we have Abhimāna ! We do not offer our special prayers to any local third person on the streets whom we do not even know. We are not going to offer any special prayers when the thing or object is outside the precious Abhimāna circle. Only what falls within the Abhimāna circle has Vishesha Pūjā or Prārthanā. Therefore.

*Yatra Yatra Abhimāna Tatra Tatra Vishesha Prārthanā
Yatra Yatra Vishesha Prārthanā Tatra Tatra Abhimān*

Just as worry is integrally connected to Abhimāna, all special prayers are also integrally connected to Abhimāna. Therefore they reinforce each other - more the Abhimāna, more will be special prayers. And vice-versa, more the special prayers, I am increasing and nourishing Abhimāna fattening process.

And more the Abhimāna, greater the spiritual offence. And greater the spiritual offence, more is the perpetuation of Samsāra. Therefore every spiritual seeker should know that special Prārthanā will nourish Abhimāna. Therefore as even there is a tendency, one has to drop or reject that. This is the third renunciation – Sarva Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha.

So Āntara Sannyāsa is nothing but the following:

- a) Sarva Abhimāna Parityāgaha
- b) Sarva Chintā Parityāgaha and
- c) Sarva Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha.

For easy remembrance, we can have the mnemonic of CLASP !

- “CL” stands for **CL**aiming ownership and controllership-
- “A” stands for **A**nxieties, worries and fear etc.
- “SP” stands for **S**pecial **P**rayers.

So, CLASP rejection is Āntara Sannyāsa. Therefore serious spiritual seeker should one day or the other take Āntara Sannyāsa by taking a Sankalpa [decision]. We should prepare and choose one day. For a formal Sannyāsi, Sannyāsa day is CLASP rejection day. For a Grihastha, there is no formal Sannyāsa. Therefore a Grihastha should choose one day, either in this year or next or after a few years, take a Sankalpa. The Sankalpa should be that - from today onwards I reject CLASP.

This is Āntara Sannyāsa.

Important facts internal Sannyasi should remember

Now, suppose a spiritual seeker decides to take Āntara Sannyāsa Sankalpa [adopt the mindset of an internal Sannyasi] he should remember some important facts regarding this Āntara Sannyāsa.

They are

- a) Handling guilt
- b) Promotion of spiritual growth
- c) Continuation of regular Karma
- d) Body and mind renunciation

a) Handling Guilt

When a Grihastha chooses to renounce Abhimāna and Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā, Grihastha need not feel guilty. The above three things anyway, do not come under the duties of a Grihastha. Worrying is not a duty of a Grihastha. Vishesha Prārthanā or Kāmya Karma is not a duty of a Grihastha. And Abhimāna definitely is not a duty of the Grihastha. Since all the three do not anyway come under the duties of the Grihastha, the Grihastha can happily, without any feeling of guilt, choose to renounce the above three if he chooses to take up Āntara Sannyāsa.

b) Promotion of spiritual growth

In the 16th chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Krishna includes the three – Abhimāna and Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā – as Āsurī Sampat [demoniac qualities]. Lord Krishna refers to Dambo Darpo Abhimānaha Cha in one area (16.4), Chintām Aparimeyām Cha in another place (16.11), Kāmam Āshritya Dushpūram in another place (16.10).

Even in Uddhava Gītā, while enumerating the three Gunāhā we can see that all the above three come under Āsurī Sampat .

Lord Krishna boldly says that all these three – Abhimāna and Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā - will retard spiritual growth. This means that Vedāntik study will benefit more only when this Āntara Sannyāsa is taken. Without Āntara Sannyāsa, Vedāntik study will give benefit alright, but it will be very limited - it will be like walking with three iron balls tied to the legs, the three signifying the above three things to be renounced.

Spiritual journey will be heavily slowed down and retarded as long as these threefold spiritual offences, threefold Āsurī Sampat are preserved and promoted. Therefore Āntara Sannyāsa will promote spiritual growth.

To recap, one need not feel guilty and this renunciation will promote spiritual growth.

c) Continuation of regular Karma

Even after renouncing these three, a Grihastha can continue all the other activities, which will come under the duties of the Grihastha based on the family designation, based on the organisational designation etc. All the contributions can continue, in the form of Kāyika Karmāni, Vāchika Karmāni, Mānasa Karmāni [bodily, verbal, mental actions]. All the Karma can continue leaving aside these three factors: – Abhimāna, Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā.

One thing to be noted about regular worship. When we say that “all the other duties can continue”, we also refer to all the regular worship of the Lord which can continue. Vishesha Prārthanā or Kāmya Pūjā [desireful worship] alone is banned. All the Nitya

Naimittika Pūjā [desireless worship] can and should continue.

Then a person can ask - If I become an Āntara Sannyāsi, and do my Nitya Naimittika Pūjā, what should I ask the Lord ? If Vishesha Prārthanā is to be avoided, and is to practice only Nitya Naimittika Pūjā, then as an Āntara Sannyāsi, what should be asked of the Lord ?

This is based on the biggest misconception that we should do Pūjā only if we have to ask something to the Lord. And we have concluded that Pūjā is concluded only if we ask for something. We should remember that we can happily do Pūjā for reinforcing our surrender to the Lord. We can convert every Pūjā into a reinforcement of the Āntara Sannyāsa - "O Lord I intensely remember that you are the owner and controller of everything, I do not want to claim any ownership or controllership." And I express this surrender of this ownership and controllership in the form of a Namaskāra. I need not ask anything. Pūjā can be converted into reinforcement of our surrender and thanking the Lord for whatever he has given. We can definitely thank the Lord once a while !

Therefore I convert every Pūjā in the form of thanksgiving and reinforcement of Ahankāra and Mamakāra Arpanam [sacrifice of I-ness and mine-ness] . And if I do such a Pūjā, it will automatically give me mental strength for facing life. And such a Pūjā, otherwise called Nishkāma Pūjā [desireless worship], will strengthen the mind, strengthen the Sannyāsa, strengthen the Sādhana Chatushtaya Sampattihi, strength the Jnānam, strengthen the Jnāna Nishthā.

Thus Āntara Sannyāsi can go to temples, do Pūjā, can do Namaskāra. And what is in such a person's mind ? - "O Lord, I own nothing and I have nothing to lose, You are the owner and controller of everything."

Therefore the third fact to be remembered is that Nitya Nishkāma Pūjā [desireless worship] need not be and should not be stopped. Renunciation of Vishesha Prārthanā [special prayers] does not mean ending the regular Pūjā.

c) Body mind renunciation

The fourth important fact to be remembered is this. When I disclaim my ownership and controllership with regards to everything, that everything includes my own body and mind. This is the toughest part of renunciation.

Disclaiming ownership and controllership, with regards to everything in the creation should include my own body and mind complex. Therefore with regards to my body also, I have to renounce these three things – Abhimāna and Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā. So this would mean:

–**Deha Abhimāna Parityāgaha** : "O Lord, I am neither the owner nor the controller of the body, I do not know the condition of the body even after a few years. I can contribute to the health of the body by proper eating, exercises etc. But I am not the controller of the bodily conditions, therefore with regards to the physical body also, I should practice Deha Abhimāna Tyāgaha."

–**Deha Chintā Parityāgaha** – this is the toughest part. Everybody will begin to worry about the body, once they cross 40 or 50 years. This worry is the most natural habit. And Āntara Sannyāsi should practice active and deliberate renunciation of worry about the future condition of the body.

–**Deha Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha** – Still tougher is this Deha Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha. Deha Vishesha Prārthanā includes performing all types of special prayer for the Deha [body]. This should also be renounced by an Āntara Sannyāsi. – But note : whatever needs to be done to maintain the general health of the body, should be taken up by every person. What is emphasised here is that an Āntara Sannyāsi does not perform any special Pūjā or prayer for the body. Otherwise, through the Vishesha Prārthanā, the person will nourish Deha Abhimāna, which in turn is misappropriation, which is in turn a spiritual offence and this will lead to more and more dwelling in Samsāra.

The above may make the Āntara Sannyāsa look difficult and almost impossible. But one day or the other, one has to take up Āntara Sannyāsa. Remaining in Grihastha Āshrama, the person has to take the Sankalpa and follow that from that day onwards.

A question may arise - what if others pray for me ? Is this OK, if others perform special prayer for my sake ? It is OK as long as it is not you who is imposing others to do those prayers.

Dealing with the mind

After dealing with the body, an Āntara Sannyāsi will also have to deal with the mind. Mind Abhimāna Parityāgaha, Mind Chintā Parityāgaha, and Mind Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha should also be practiced. With regards to the mind also, one can do whatever is required to keep the mind fit - this is duty. But worrying about the mind is not a duty and will instead come under the three spiritual offences – Abhimāna and Chintā and Vishesha Prārthanā. Vedānta does not accept any form of worry.

Similarly worrying about the mind's state after death i.e. whether the mind will get Videha Muktihi, will the mind travel and take another body etc. is also not proper. What is needed is doing the duty to the mind but not worry.

So thus, Sarva Abhimāna Parityāgaha plus Sarva Chintā Parityāgaha plus Vishesha Prārthanā Parityāgaha is Āntara Sannyāsa. An Āntara Sannyāsi should remember all these four facts.

Is Antara Sannyasa compulsory?

Lastly, before conclusion we will discuss one more topic and conclude. Is this Āntara Sannyāsa compulsory or not.

Inner renunciation is compulsory if Moksha is the goal. It may not be compulsory immediately as in today. We can postpone it but we can never avoid that. Therefore Āntara Sannyāsa is compulsory.

Then the next question is - what about Bāhya Sannyāsa [external Sannyāsa], i.e., Āshrama Sannyāsa [formal Sannyāsa] ? Is this form of Sannyāsa compulsory or not ? This is a technical topic of academic interest, but we will briefly discuss this and conclude. Is formal renunciation, which is taking to monastic order, compulsory or not ?

There are two types of view with regards to this. Generally, when we discuss this, invariably the topic will be centred on King Janaka. Janaka will be the example taken for finding whether external Sannyāsa is required or not.

When we read the scriptures, we find that everywhere, wherever Janaka is mentioned, it is clearly said that Janaka is an Āntara Sannyāsi and Janaka is a liberated person. We see that in Bhagavad Gītā and Ashtāvakra Gītā, we find that Janaka is a Grihastha as well as an Āntara Sannyāsi. Based on this instance, the question arises whether external Sannyāsa is required or not ?

Generally we infer that Janaka became an Jnāni and Janaka became liberated remaining a Grihastha. From this the conclusions that we make are two.

One group of people say that external Sannyāsa is not compulsory because in the case of Janaka, he is not an external Sannyāsi as he is a Grihastha, yet he is liberated.

There is a second group of people who say, external Sannyāsa is not required in this Janma. If Janaka has practiced Āntara Sannyāsa and has got liberation, it only proves that he was an external Sannyāsi in his Pūrva Janma [previous birth]. So their argument is that in the Pūrva Janma, Janaka had taken external Sannyāsa. But because of some reason, he could not gain Moksha and therefore he became a Yoga Bhrashtaha [fallen yogi] and then in his Janma (as King Janaka), because of his Sannyāsa Vāsanā [Sannyasa tendency], he became an Āntara Sannyāsi. Therefore their argument is that every Āntara Sannyāsi Grihastha has been an external Sannyāsi in the Pūrva Janma - therefore external Sannyāsa is also part of liberation either in the previous Janma or in the current Janma.

Therefore if you all successfully practice Āntara Sannyāsa in Grihastha Āshrama, you have taken Bāhya Sannyāsa in Pūrva Janma. Therefore the conclusion is that both Sannyāsa are there and therefore both Sannyāsas go with Jnānam. Therefore whether Bāhya Sannyāsa [external Sannyasa] is taken in the Pūrva Janma or in the present Janma or future Janma, we need not bother. We focus on Āntara Sannyāsa like King Janaka.

Therefore we, all serious spiritual seekers, should prepare the mind for becoming Āntara Sannyāsi one day or the other. There afterwards, Jnānam and Sannyāsa put together will give both Jīvan Muktihi [liberation while living] and Videha Muktihi [liberation upon dropping of body].

With this we conclude the talk on Sannyāsa.

Posted by aprameyaha at [21:24:00](#)

Welcome Message

This blog contains the transcription of lectures of Swami Paramarthananda of Madras.

Please note that there is no substitute for Guru Mukha Dvara Shravanam and this is the best way to appreciate the beauty of the topics and relish the clarity of delivery.

But for the benefit of others, these lectures are available in text format. Every attempt has been made to transcribe the lecture as accurately as possible. Any inadvertent errors are purely attributable to the blog owner.

Hari Om

About Me aprameyaha

I am a student of Vedanta. Through this blog, I want everyone to benefit from the wonderful teachings of Swāmi Paramārthānanda. Hari Om

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