

XIII BRAHMACHARYA

At this juncture it is necessary to consider Brahmacharya (continence) for a short space. It concerns equally the married and the unmarried, for it is the very basis of spiritual progress. Brahmacharya has been differently interpreted and doubtless it has many implications. But its simple and essential meaning is abstention from sexual thought and deed in every form. The grossest form of sexuality is sexual intercourse. This, of course, must be given up entirely. But persistence in the practice of Brahmacharya leads to the realization that this gross form is really the expression of inner impulses. The control and eradication of these impulses is the essential thing. Without it, mere outward abstention avails little. The root of sex-consciousness goes deep into our mind and life. It may almost be said to be contemporaneous with the very beginning of individual life. The idea of duality is in a sense the prop of the sexual consciousness. Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna said that until a man has realized God he cannot completely rid himself of lust. To recognize sexual difference in men and women is a kind of sexuality. When one has completely eradicated lust, one will not feel that difference. Only the Atman will be apparent, existing

in all, beyond all distinction of sex and body. Brahmacharya has all these wide significances among its implications. But of course, in the beginning, one cannot rise at once to such heights, but must begin on the lower plane. Nevertheless, the goal should never be forgotten. We must emphasize that we have said above about the forms of sex-consciousness, is not at all imaginary. They are true and real; and until we have eradicated them, we have not become true Brahmachârin.

If sex-consciousness is indeed so pernicious what should be our attitude towards it? Should we encourage it, or try to kill it in every way we can? It may be asked whether sexual control is essential to spiritual progress, and if so, why the Rishis of old married and begot children. We say with as much emphasis as we can command that it is absolutely necessary. There are reasons. Hindu readers know that our Sâdhakâs and scriptures have recognized the presence of certain Chakras or occult circles in our body. These, according to them, are generally seven in number. The lowest Chakras, Muladhârâ, Swâdhisthâna, and Manipura are situated in the lower parts of the trunk of the body, against the sexual organ and the stomach. Anâhata is situated opposite the heart, Vishuddhi against the throat, Âjna against the junction of the brows and Sahasrahâra the brain. The mind or our self-consciousness has its centre of gravity, at any particular moment, in one of these mystic centers. We feel the uprising of the mind and its going down. Wherever the mind is, the energy and blood are concentrated there. This is our common experience. When we have a high, pure thought, we feel that the upper parts of the body, the heart and the brain are stimulated. But when the thought is impure, it is the lower parts that are stimulated. What we do not generally perceive is that corresponding to these gradations of subjective experiences there are also gradations of objective realities. A man, whose mind is essentially located in the lower Chakras has one experience of reality. He who has his mind in the higher circles, has quite a different experience. To the former, the world is a hellish business (of course he does not feel it as hell); he does not see anything divine in it; it is material and sensuous to him. He is full of the body-idea. He aggrandizes himself physically. He is eager for physical comfort and enjoyment. He does not feel attracted to anything higher. His, in short, is an animal existence, and his experience is also animal. But if he can somehow remove his mind from those lower regions and locate it in the higher circles, his vision of the world immediately changes. He no longer finds it material and sordid. He perceives it as instinct with divine light and life. The world is no longer material to him, but spiritual. His own likes and dislikes, his desires and aspirations, his relations with others, all undergo a complete change. If he can lift his mind to the highest circle, there will be God only and nothing else.

This correspondence of the subjective Chakras with the visions of the objective reality is an essential consideration in the determination of the value and need of Brahmacharya. If we are to rise to the higher visions of reality - and spiritual progress means nothing but that - we must lift our mind to the higher subjective planes. But how can we do that if we stimulate the lower Chakrâs by thought and action? If we indulge in sexual thought and action, our lower circles will be excited and the mind perforce will remain there, and there will, therefore, be nothing but a low, sordid vision of reality for us, not the higher ones. So it is urgent, nay, absolutely necessary that there must on no account be any stimulation of the lower circles.

Sexual abstention is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. There is a further reason. Spiritual practice causes a great strain on the nerves and the brain. A nervous system and brain which are impaired by incontinence, are too weak to bear that great strain. They will give way before a high spiritual impulse; and the result will be total collapse and incurable disease. Besides, the perception of the higher phases of reality requires the activity of very sensitive nerves. Without Brahmacharya they die and become inoperative. Higher experiences are impossible for people who are not Brahmachârin. As regards the Rishis, we know so little about them that it is extremely difficult to say anything definitely about their actions. There is no doubt that the word Rishi was loosely applied. A physician was a Rishi; a grammarian was a Rishi; a writer of law-codes was a Rishi; and of course a man of spiritual realization was also a Rishi. Naturally all Rishis were not spiritual, and not all of those Rishis who practiced spirituality, were highly spiritual. How then can we deduce anything definite from their conduct as regards the essential conditions of high spiritual life? Then, it may be that though they begot children in the prime of life, in after-life, when they gave themselves seriously to spiritual practice, they observed strict Brahmacharya. That this supreme claim of Brahmacharya is not new-fangled, is clear from the fact that in the Upanishads themselves there are statements declaring the necessity of Brahmacharya for spiritual realization. Moreover, even in those ancient times there was a body of men who never entered the world or came into contact with women, but observed complete continence. At all events actual experience is a thousand fold superior to historic evidence. Let us practice Sâdhanâ and we shall feel for ourselves what a place Brahmacharya holds in spiritual life.

There are many modern ideas prevailing in our country now, which consider Brahmacharya as unnatural and detrimental to all-round development. These are all foolish ideas and Hindus at least should scorn to listen to them. It may be that sexual restraint will generate some pathological symptoms. What does it matter? Do we not gain something infinitely superior? Let us put it to the test. In spite of suffering we must proceed on our way. Surely, surely, if we can believe the saints and sages of all climes and times, the way will lead to the golden gate. Without effort, Brahmacharya cannot be practiced. Restraint is necessary, although it may produce complexes, but the complexes will not be the only products of our endeavor. There will also be spiritual illumination. And that alone counts.

It is quite true that all cannot and should not practice Brahmacharya. We are, of course, considering the case of those who are seriously aspiring after spirituality and not of all and sundry. Without spiritual enthusiasm, Brahmacharya cannot be practiced. A yearning after God is the primary condition of the practice of Brahmacharya. The secret is to forget the body. It is often found that when one is intent on the practice of Brahmacharya, too much attention is given to small physiological details and the details of food and living. There is too much consciousness of the practice of continence. This ultra-awareness is psychologically harmful and in the long run is not productive of success. The more we dwell on sexuality, whether with the desire of indulging or of checking it, the less we shall succeed in getting rid of it. To forget it is the way to success. Let the thought of God so engulf you that you will not think of the body or its comforts. For this, the repetition of the

name of God is very efficacious. Of course, some helpful habits may be formed. They are necessary. But let them not become obsessions. Some restrictions about food are necessary. We must not come in contact with man or things that are reminiscent of sexuality. It is urgent that we should give up the company of those who indulge in sexuality. Too much culture of the softer feeling is harmful. We must not sleep too long or too little. The night meal should be spare; and we should not go to bed until it is at least half digested. It is good habit to repeat the name of God and thus glide into sleep. Too much warm clothing should not be used. Nor should the body be unnecessarily tormented. But let us repeat, nothing is of any avail unless there is an all-absorbing passion for God in our heart. It is on its wings that we shall be able to cross the morass of sexuality.

There is no need for perturbation if there are nocturnal emissions. They do not much matter at first. Let us push forward inspite of these. By and by as our mind becomes calm and pure, even these nocturnal emissions will become rare. But of course we must always be careful not to agitate our mind in any way, for such agitations produce bad dreams and peaceful sleep is a necessity, It is a good and very beneficial practice to observe partial or complete fast on the day after a nocturnal emission, praying and thinking of God. This has a wonderful counter-effect.

To those who want instruction for success in their practice of Brahmacharya, our best advice is that they should practice regular Sâdhanâ and forget the body and the world in the thought of God. This is the only way to success; there is none other.