

## Letter to a devotee on importance of marriage and whether it is a must

*By Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj,*

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An Indian girl from USA raised this morning to me over the phone two questions of importance and interest to many.

**Question:** Guruji, what exactly is marriage and in what way it is related to God? Is it a must for everybody or is it optional?

**Answer from Guruji:** To start the answer in a very lighter vein, “Matrimony is a trap wherein the people who are outside it are extremely eager to get into it and people who are inside it are equally anxious and eager to get out of it.” Even though it looks like a joke, it has got a lot of truth in it.

Marriage is a cooperative venture where only two people are involved and both are supposed to have equal rights. In actual practice however, the collective male ego in the entire world is so high and has been entrenched in all the male minds so firmly and strongly due to the conditioning of the mind for lakhs of births and so if we want peace of mind and happiness in the family life, the woman is forced to bow down to the male ego.

Even though in a married life there has to be a give and take on either side, but in practice it has been always giving on the part of the woman and taking on the part of the male even without a look of thanks.

Even if you have to spiritually evolve, it is necessary that we should have a comfortable and peaceful family environment even at the cost of our ego because the ultimate goal is so precious that at any cost, we would love to get it.

The second most important point is so long as we see ourselves as separate individuals with separate bodies, we have to be in this world and adjust ourselves to all environments in every field. And that is why we have to satisfy our appetite for food and we have to work for it. Apart from that, the appetite for food is a natural compulsive feeling which we have to satisfy in order to be able to lead our normal routine life and do our sadhana also to achieve our final goal of attaining the reality. Similarly, for most of the people, whether male or female, the sexual appetite of the body, is also a compulsive feeling and if not fulfilled, it may even lead to insanity in some cases, quixotic behaviour and last but not the least, in our inability to go on the spiritual path resulting due to the separation of a natural feeling.

So the satisfaction of this desire has to be channelized towards only one object as otherwise it can lead to an indiscriminate way of life which may spoil the unwary members of the other sex. The other benefit of this sociological tradition of a marriage is that after a living a happy conjugal life for 5-10 years, one should be able to withdraw his mind more and more from this carnal enjoyment and stop such a relationship all together and live like close friends. This also is not so easy but can be achieved either by intense prayers to the Lord or through the grace of the Guru. When the Lord sometimes gives us the role of guiding other householders in our later life of advanced sadhana or realisation, we will be better equipped to help them as we know the travails, the tribulations, etc. of a family man. Thus, the institution of a marriage is a must for our own spiritual growth provided we know when to abandon it or stop it and turn all our concentration to the spiritual growth.

Even the Upanishads prescribe that one should go through the stages of celibacy, of being a householder, of being a vanaprastha [a forest life] leaving off the comforts and luxuries and all the attachments to the family and to the objects of the world and then take up to renunciation formally and become a monk. The full maturity of a dispassion can come more easily when one has enjoyed an object and then renounced it. The great Adi Sankaracharya in his commentaries on Aitereya Unpanishad, etc. has stated that for the final liberation, a formal renunciation is a must. But at the same time, we see that in the earliest days, there were only maharishis who were householders who used to tilling their own lands, look after the teaching of wife and children, performing the day long fire sacrifice called Yagas, conducting satsangs [lecture sessions] to the public on the spiritual life, etc. There is no mention of a single monk having lived in the Vedic days as the collections of mantras have been done only by maharishis and there was not one single monk involved in it. It is also a point to note, that in the first Sanskrit dictionary called Amara Kosa, nowhere the word sanyasi or yati have been used. The earliest mention of these words were only perhaps in

the later time of the Upanishads where there is a mention of the words sanyasa [the one who has abandoned is called sanyasi] and yati [the one who has controlled is called Yati] in Mahanarayanopanishad. It does not mean that the institution of monk hood which is extolled and observed in Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism, etc. is meaningless and is not necessary at all. Taking into account the present day environment of corruption, distortion and avarice, the monkhood at the end is a must as otherwise there is a possibility of our slipping down in our path and never reaching the goal at all.

However, there is an exception to all the rules. Here and there, it would be a rare case of extraordinary spiritual brilliance and utter dedication to the Supreme goal perhaps from birth itself where he could bypass all the intermediary stages and take to monkhood or remain as a householder and attain his liberation just as in the case of some saints of Maharashtra like Gyaneshwar, Namdev, etc.

One has to guard himself against the external onslaughts by the temptations of the world.

Each one of us in this world we think that we are the highest religious practitioners, highly fit for liberation just now. That is our ego. Internally think we are the best.

Everybody will think that I can by pass various stages but it is not we who can help it. There, it is the interference of the Guru that comes into play and he looks after. So long as one has a good living Guru, the best available, so long as you have complete faith, any problems you can stride over it.

*Note: Certain portions of the letter were edited to protect privacy of individuals.*

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