

VANAPRASTHA AND MODERN LIFE

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The Indian tradition is that when one attains the age of fifty, one should retire from the ordinary wordly life and go to live in the forest in search of the inner spiritual life. Modern scientific research seems to be coming round to the same view. In modern times it is the leading psychiatrist, Dr. Jung who has done most to emphasise this aspect of the crisis of the middle age, the crisis that occurs when one has reached the limits of one's mature adult life, when in a sense one can go in the external world no further and has to get to turn back to one's own inner existence increasingly with age. Failure to make this spiritual transition to the second half of life is, according to modern physicians, responsible for the increase of such diseases as cancer and heart troubles. "It seems to me," says Dr. L. R. Twentyman, M.B., B.Ch. (Cantab), "that the danger of cancer develops in the life of the individual in association with this crisis and the change of life, when the ascending arc of life, reaches its Zenith or noon-tide and one must develop a new orientation for the future." Citing some case histories in support of this view, he remarks: "Most of the cases I am referring to are of patients with symptoms of tiredness, a certain depression, a certain lack of former active interest and without any very definite and marked symptoms—the sort of conditions which it seems to me is today extremely common and very difficult in the ordinary way to treat. Not all patients with such symptoms do I find to be pre-cancerous, but a considerable number I do." Similar observations have been made by Dr. K. Venkata Rao in connection with coronary heart disease. He says: "Since hypertension ranks foremost among the predisposing causes of coronary disease, hypertension must be prevented. A religious mode of life should be lived in order to prevent hypertension. Reliance on the Almighty is the first and most important step in this direction. Once this is done the load on your shoulder is shifted. Our duty is to do the

work, and the reward is entirely in the hands of God. If this attitude is maintained, there will not be frustration, and consequently no shock to our nervous system. We will be strong enough to withstand any shock, business, professional or for that matter any other frustrations. Nervous tension is removed, and an important active aetiological factor in the causation of hypertension is got rid of."

There is no doubt that if one can enter into the spiritual consciousness, one can have a prolonged healthy life, full of peace and happiness, as has been illustrated in the life of yogins and rishis. It is a gross popular mistake to suppose that only youth and young age is the period for enjoying the good things of life and that old age is dry and barren. The body has its proper joys, but the joys of the spirit are nothing less, they are rather deeper and more intense. One who has contact with the Spirit (or Brahman) enjoys exceeding bliss, says the Gita (6/28). But the question of questions is how to make this transition to spiritual life from the worldly. It does not come automatically with age, unless one has prepared it beforehand; that was the *raison d'être* of the *Brahmacharya ashram* in ancient India; from a very young age people were initiated in spirituality. That ideal has practically disappeared even from its original home, India, and the modern world is for secularity, for the exclusion of all spiritual values as superstitions and hallucinations; Science which deals only with the material and most outward aspects of things is accepted as the supreme knowledge, and that is at the root of all the evils of the modern age.

But the ancient Indian ideal of the four ashrams was also not perfect; indeed it was accepted more as an ideal, than as a practical way of life, and very few people actually went to the forest after attaining the age of fifty. One vital objection is that this scheme takes away the most wise and experienced men from society, which suffers grievously for want of proper guidance. Political leaders are often so much preoccupied with pressing problems that they cannot have a broader and comprehensive vision, and they can work properly if only wiser men stand behind them, as was the case with Shivaji who was

backed by his spiritual guru, Ramdas. If all our saints and sages retire to the forest, society will fall to pieces. Thus the Mother says in one of her recent messages with reference to the serious crisis in the modern world : "When I say that the Wise should rule the world, it is not from a political but from a spiritual point of view. The various forms of government can remain as they are ; that has only a secondary importance. But whatever be the social status of the men who are in power, they should receive their inspiration from those who have realised the Truth and whose will is one with the Supreme's Will." That is why writers like Kalidasa suggested a compromise in the ancient ideal. He said that the kings of the Raghu dynasty, after retiring from the throne at the ripe age, did not go to the forest, but lived and did spiritual sadhana in the outskirts of the city, so that they might be consulted by the men in power in times of grave crisis.

But the Gita did not favour any such compromise and did not suggest retirement or vanaprastha or outward sannyasa at all. The Blessed Lord said : "Whoever does the work to be done without resort to the fruits, he is the Sannyasin and the Yogin, not the man who lights the sacrificial fire and does not do the works." (6/1). Thus the Gita's interpretation of Vanaprastha and Sannyasa is not the abandonment of worldly or household life, but the abandonment of all desire and all attachment. The ideal king or political leader of the Gita is a king-sage, *rajarshi* like Janaka, "Ramadasa born in the same body with Shivaji", as Sri Aurobindo puts it. In this way, "Doing verily works in the world one should wish to live a hundred years", says the Isha Upanishad. This implies that you must remain young and healthy up to at least hundred years, keeping all your organs of knowledge and action in a perfectly working order. This cannot be achieved merely by medicines and material means, though they can be helpful to a certain extent. There is a higher power than the material which is at the base of this cosmic play, the spiritual power, and we must be able to draw from it, to put ourselves in

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other forms of attack have been successfully combated with phytoncides, so writes Zalutovsky.

These may not be very big news to homœopaths, except the word phytoncide. But are not these researches unique and practical in many respects? If these researches on plants are pushed on, a time may come when many of the present terrifying and dangerous long atom chain Syntheticals will be displaced from their high pedestals. This will be a great gain for official medicine and indirectly to homœopathy too. For have we not been advocating almost from the very inception of our theory that cures should be "sure, gentle and permanent."

In conclusion, from a practical standpoint, it behoves us homœopaths to test, or prove if one prefers, in our own way by our own methods the substances mentioned, whose emanations alone can "Kill Steptococci" and "wipe out whooping cough germs".

How much more should the whole tinctures and potencies perform!

Yours faithfully,
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conscious and direct union with it. Then what will happen has been well described by Sri Aurobindo in Savitri :

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill.

Humanity has to go through some discipline before it can attain this goal of a divine life on the earth. It is not sufficient that our boys and girls should be initiated into spirituality at an early age, the very atmosphere of the society in which they are born and brought up must be surcharged with spirituality, and all the modern ideal of a materialistic basis of life must be given up completely. India can show to the world the ideal of such a spiritualised society, God has prepared her for this mission throughout the ages.