

AWAKENING OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS (ASRAMA)

The asrama is the designation of the four stages of existence in which, according to the Vedic prescriptions, Hinduism organizes human life. These four stages are:

Brahmacarya: period of learning. In this period the young man learns from his parents and teachers and receives worldly and religious instruction, developing his intellectual and creative faculties and the virtues proper to a spiritual life.

Grihastha: owner or master of the house. In this second stage the young man marries and founds a family. Marriage constitutes in Hinduism a spiritual practice, by which the human being not only broadens his consciousness but also receives a lesson for self-control.

Vanaprastha: retreat to the forest. In this third stage, and only after having fulfilled the duties of homeowner and community service, retires to the solitude of the forest to devote himself completely to the study of the sacred texts and the intensive practice of meditation.

The sacred texts of Hinduism affirm that man is, in essence, atman (himself), the pure spectator or witness, beyond body and mind, and, as absolute consciousness, identical with Brahman, the eternal and immutable Absolute.

Meditation is, in turn, the technique through which man as jiva (embodied atman, who identifies with body and mind) can become a jivan-mukta (liberated in life, who has stopped identifying with the body and the mind, and that, having realized the self (atman), he knows he is one with the Brahman).

Samnyasa: resignation. This is the fourth, last and highest stage in the life of a traditional Hindu, in which he detaches himself from mundane things and abandons all interests centered on the self, so that all his effort is directed towards liberation (moksa) or union with the divine.

The effort of the samnyasin or renouncer culminates when he reaches the state of moksa (liberation or act of letting go) becoming a jivan-mukta. This achievement implies the definitive liberation of all the conditioning of the world, due to the conscious union with God or knowledge of the ultimate reality, through which the liberated one knows he is one with Brahman.