



S.K.S. SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE (LONDON) – BAL YUVAK MANDAL

Westfield Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 9EA Est. 1966 Charity Reg. No. 271034

Tel: [020 8909 9899](tel:02089099899) Fax: [020 8909 9897](tel:02089099897) Email: balmandal@sksst.org

FOUR ASHRAMS

In Vedic times, the normal human life was regarded as eighty-four years, consisting of four sections of twenty-one years each

Bramcharya (1-25 years)

This is the stage of youth or learning, which requires a certain discipline, guidance and purity for its full flowering. In the Brahmacharya ashram, the adolescent is a celibate, religious student, called a Brahmachari. In this ashram a young boy should live with and be devoted to his guru, and study the Vedas. He should live simply and humbly, follow the requisite customs, fast and worship the gods. A student should study, practice penance, and tend the sacrificial fire. This stage lasts for 12 years after the Upanayanam. However, if a student wishes to attain higher knowledge, he can continue in this stage until he is 31 years old. After completing his studies, the student gives guru dakshina and enters the next stage: the Grihastha ashram.

Grhastha or householder phase (26-50 years)

This stage begins with marriage. The duties of a man in this phase of life include raising children, caring for the family, performing the five daily sacrifices and being a responsible member of society. He remains a Grhastha until his son's son is born, his hair has turned grey, or when he is about 50 years of age. Thereafter he enters the Vanaprastha. This is the main time for having children and raising a family, as well as for working and fulfilling our duties to society.

Vanaprastha (hermitage phase) (51-75 years)

This is a time for return to contemplation and for guiding society in the distance. Vanaprastha means, " forest dweller". This stage indicates the beginning of old age. Living away from society in the forest, he should live simply, perform sacrifices, and prepare to renounce all worldly associations. These austerities are treated as penance for the sins committed, knowingly and unknowingly, as a householder.

A man may take his wife to live with him in the Vanaprastha ashram, in which he stays until he is 70 years of age. He then returns from the forest and a purification ceremony initiates him into the Sanyasa ashram.



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Sanyasi or renunciation phase (76+ years)

The person, now an elder full of wisdom, inwardly aims to renounce all the outer goals of life. He also becomes a teacher of the spiritual knowledge and no longer partakes in social or political concerns. In this we see that only twenty-one years are allotted for the outer duties of life. Three-quarters of life is to be devoted primarily to spiritual study.

In this last phase, a man renounces wealth and worldly pleasures, and is called a sanyasi. He is completely detached from the rest of the world giving up even those family ties allowed in Vanaprastha. Instead, he seeks alms from householders and spends his time meditating, in an effort to achieve salvation.

In the Vachnamrut, maharaj has stated that we are supposed to choose one path between Grahasta and Sanayas. As in this Kali Yug, it is not possible to go through Vanaprastha i.e. who would go to the forest in the UK? We must choose one of the two as it is not possible to stay out of the ashrams without falling from the path of Dharma and Bhakti.