

[Monastic Life](#)

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Since Rig Veda times, some Hindus have renounced this world of joys and sorrows to seek and find a more permanent

Most Hindu religious leaders are sannyasins, souls who have surrendered a personal life in favor of selfless service and spiritual advancement. Supreme among are the satgurus, enlightened masters able to bring dedicated disciples into God Realization. Ours is the world's oldest and largest monastic tradition. On the next three pages we explore who they are, why they give up worldly pursuits and what disciplines and ideals they follow.

What Is the Hindu Monastic Tradition?

In the Hindu tradition there have always existed among men a few for whom the world held no attraction and karmas were on the wane. Some are solitary mendicants. Others reside with their brothers in monasteries. Aum.

Certain men are by nature inclined toward realization of the Self, and disinclined toward desires of family, wealth and property. Some among them are sadhus dressed in white. They are anchorites living in the seclusion of distant caves and remote forests or wandering as homeless mendicants, itinerant pilgrims to the holy sanctuaries of Hinduism. Others dwell as cenobites assembled with fellow monastics, often in the ashrama, aadheenam or matha of their satguru. These monks, both anchorite and cenobite, may live with no formal vows or take certain simple vows. When initiated into the order of sannyasa, they don the saffron robes and bind themselves to a universal body of Hindu renunciates whose existence has never ceased. Scriptural doctrine states that the two paths, householder and renunciate, are distinct in their dharmas and attainments, affirming that true renunciation may not be achieved by those in the world even by virtue of a genuine attitude of detachment. The holy Vedas declare, "The man who has found Him

becomes a silent monk. Desiring Him alone as their world, ascetics leave their homes and wander about." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Are the Goals of Renunciate Life?

The two fundamental objectives of sannyasa are to promote the spiritual progress of the individual, bringing him into God Realization, and to protect and perpetuate the religion through his illumined leadership. Aum.

Renunciation and asceticism have been an integral component of Vedic culture from the earliest days, the most highly esteemed path of the Hindu Dharma. Monastic life has both an individual and a universal objective. At the individual level, it is a life of selflessness in which the monastic has made the supreme sacrifice of renouncing all personal ambition, all involvement in worldly matters, that he might direct his consciousness and energies fully toward God Siva. Guided by the satguru along the sadhana marga, the initiated sannyasin unfolds through the years into deeper and deeper realizations. Ultimately, if he persists, he comes into direct knowing of Parasiva, Transcendent Reality. At the universal level, Hindu monasticism fosters the religion by preserving the truths of the Sanatana Dharma. Competent swamis are the teachers, the theologians, the exemplars of their faith, the torchbearers lighting the way for all. The ancient Vedas elucidate, "The ascetic who wears discolored robes, whose head is shaved, who does not possess anything, who is pure and free from hatred, who lives on alms, he becomes absorbed in Brahman." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Sannyasin's Kundalini Path?

The sannyasin balances within himself both the male and female energies. Complete unto himself, he is whole and independent. Having attained an equilibrium of ida and pingala, he becomes a knower of the known. Aum.

There arises within the sannyasin a pure energy, neither masculine nor feminine. This is the sushumna current coming into power through which he gains control of the kundalini force and eventually, after years of careful guidance, attains

nirvikalpa samadhi. Eventually, in one life or another, all will turn to the renunciate path. However, it would be equally improper for a renunciate-minded soul to enter family life as for a householder to seek to be a sannyasin. A word of warning. Be cautious of those who promise great kundalini awakenings and spiritual rewards from severe practices without preparation, initiation and renunciation. Those entering the serious life of sannyasa must be prepared to follow the traditional path of unrewarded sadhana through the years, apart from dear family and friends. Such is the way to reach the truth of yoga. It takes many, many years for the soul to thus ripen and mature. The Tirumantiram affirms, "Many are the births and deaths forgotten by souls shrouded in ignorance, enveloped in mala's darkness. At the moment Great Siva's grace is gained, the renunciate attains the splendid light." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Sannyasin's Initiation Rite?

Young, unmarried men of the Hindu religion may qualify for renunciation, called sannyasa diksha, which may be conferred by any legitimate sannyasin. But the most spiritually potent initiation comes from a satguru. Aum.

Traditionally, sannyasa diksha is restricted to unmarried men, though some modern orders have accepted qualified women. As a rule in most orders, if a candidate enters monastic training before age twenty-five and meets other qualifications, he may, generally after a minimum of twelve years of preparation and training, take the sannyasin's lifetime vows, called holy orders of sannyasa. Only a sannyasin can bring another into the ancient order of sannyasa. However, since the purpose is God Realization, most candidates seek initiation from a spiritually advanced knower of God who can bring them into Parasiva. Sannyasa diksha is given in simple or most formal ways. The formal rites include the shaving of the head, conveyance of certain esoteric teachings, abjuration of the worldly life and dharma, administration of monastic vows, conducting of the novitiate's funeral rites and the giving of the kavi vestments. The Vedas proclaim, "The Self within the body, pure and resplendent, is attained through the cultivation of truth, austerity, right knowledge and chastity. When their impurities dwindle, the ascetics behold Him." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Are the Holy Orders of Sannyasa?

The holy orders of sannyasa are lifetime vows of poverty, obedience and chastity, never to be relinquished or rescinded. The sannyasins are the religious leaders, the bedrock of the Sanatana Dharma. Aum Namah Sivaya.

The sannyasin's first sacred vow is renunciation, the surrendering of the limited identity of the ego that the soul may soar to the depths of impersonal Being. It is a repudiation of worldly dharma and involvement, and thus includes poverty and simplicity. The sannyasin owns nothing, not even the robes he is given to wear. The second vow is obedience—a pledge to follow the traditional ways of the sannyasa dharma and the specific directions of his satguru. It embraces obedience to his own conscience, to scripture, to God and the Gods and to his illustrious guru parampara. The third vow is purity—a pledge to remain pure in thought, word and deed, to be continent throughout life, to protect the mind from all lower instincts: deceit, hatred, fear, jealousy, anger, pride, lust, covetousness and so forth. It includes the observance of ahimsa, noninjuriousness, and adherence to a vegetarian diet. Some orders also give vows of humility and confidentiality. The Vedas elucidate, "Henceforth being pure, clean, void, tranquil, breathless, selfless, endless, undecaying, steadfast, eternal, unborn, independent, he abides in his own greatness." Aum Namah Sivaya.