

# YOGA RESEARCH

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## Brahmacharya

### Does It Give Longevity to Yogins?

**B**rahmacharya is one of the disciplines through which every student of Yoga must go before he can make any progress therein. It is stated by Patañjali as a Yama (control). He, however, gives no definition of the word. Brahmacharya has to be taken, therefore, in the sense which Yogic tradition ascribes to it, that is, sexual abstinence.

The question that naturally arises is whether Patañjali prescribes celibacy (total sexual abstinence) or chastity (abstinence from unlawful sexual intercourse)?

Later Yogic tradition stands for celibacy.

Reading the two Patañjala Yoga Sūtras bearing on Brahmacharya, however, there seems to be little doubt that Patañjali allows even chastity to be sufficient for Yogic development.

(Pada II) Sūtra 30 simply lays down the five controls. The 31st prescribes the same, but in a stricter form as it requires them to be practiced at all times and under all climes. Patañjali expressly calls this the

stricter form, Mahāvratam, suggesting thereby that the previous Sūtra requires their practice only in a milder form.

The stricter form of Brahmacharya is clearly celibacy as is seen from the conditions of the 31st Sūtra. But what is the milder form of Brahmacharya that the pre-

vious Sūtra allows? It can be nothing else than chastity, as illegitimate intercourse, which is the only alternative, has absolutely no place in real Yoga.

So it is clear that Patañjali allows a married life to a Yogin provided the marital bond is faithfully kept up, and provided within that bond strict moderation is observed according to scriptural injunctions. But it seems that he looks upon such Brah-

macharya as the minimum, because he also mentions celibacy (total sexual abstinence) and calls it the maximum.

So when the question, whether Brahmacharya in Yogins leads to longevity is to be scientifically examined, both chastity

and celibacy will have to be taken into account.

The physiological aspect of chastity and celibacy in relation to longevity bears on the sexual glands. Modern scientific opinion is unanimous in declaring that healthy sexual glands insure long life. Their arguments are as follows:

Historical records show that persons who kept up their youthful appearance until very late in life, or who reached an extraordinary old age, possessed very healthy and active sexual glands. So also people who have fire and courage in their eyes, people who defy dangers and rule circumstances, people who can mold their own destiny and that of others, are in possession of healthy sexual glands.

Castrated people, whether male or female, soon after their sexual glands are extirpated begin to show all the signs of old age. Their bloom disappears, their faces begin to look wrinkled and haggard, their cheeks become pendant and all other symptoms of premature senility present themselves vividly in them. The same is the case with the lower animals.

But if these glands were again introduced under their skin, they soon begin to revive their youthful appearance. People with degenerated sexual glands of both the sexes also exhibit symptoms of old age; but a treatment with the extracts of these glands lend them again their younger looks.

*continued*

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*"The Book of Life begins with  
 a man and a woman in a garden.  
 It ends with Revelation."*

Oscar Wilde



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### **Brahmacharya, continued**

This relation between youth and sexual glands is explained by the vitalizing effects of the internal secretions of these glands upon the organic tissues in general. According to Brown Sequard, these stimulate and sustain the energy of the nerve center and cord also. Whether these secretions really belong to these glands or whether they are the product of the adrenals — there is no difference of opinion that they are produced in these glands and have these effects on the organism as a whole.

Such being the relation between longevity and sexual glands, it only remains to be seen whether chastity and celibacy are capable of keeping these glands active and healthy; and if it is proved scientifically that they are, it would follow that Brahmacharya must be enabling the Yogins to live a long life.

The case of chastity is simple. Married life is, according to the modern sciences, the best way of keeping the sexual glands healthy. When the same is led with chastity and moderation, it is more effective. The agencies most deleterious to the sexual glands are the venereal diseases and excesses. A life of chastity and moderation precludes the possibility of both, and ensures longevity.

But unluckily celibacy stands on a different level. Modern science looks upon it with disfavour and the case of Patañjali appears to be hopelessly lost. Medical men on the strength of experiments, and clinical as well as anatomo-pathological observations, assert that total abstinence from sexual intercourse leads to premature old age and consequently to premature death.

They thus argue their case:

(a) Like other ductless glands, the sexual glands have an internal secretion which if produced in too large quantities

may have toxic effects on the system.

(b) The accumulation of this secretion may prove injurious to the condition of the glands themselves.

(c) Their complete disuse may lead to the atrophy of these glands.

(d) Celibacy may have very injurious effects on the nervous system; it assists in the development of hysteria and neurasthenia.

The following evidence is put forward in support of these propositions:

**Proposition (a)** This proposition is based on the experiments of Loisel who found that the extracts from the sexual glands, if injected into other animals, have toxic effects.

**Proposition (b)** Regaud and Mingazini are responsible for this proposition. The former tried experiments on guinea-pigs and the latter on female animals. Both of them found serious modifications in the sexual glands of these animals after enforced abstinence.

**Proposition (c)** Not only the general biological law but clinical observations also support this proposition. Kisch and Lorand have observed several cases where celibacy has resulted in impotence and early disappearance of menstruation.

**Proposition (d)** The high percentage of nervous diseases in the case of old bachelors and spinsters clearly shows, according to various authorities, that their celibacy is responsible for these ailments.

The only conclusion, that is reached in the light of this knowledge, is that celibacy poisons the system, deteriorates the sexual glands so much so that it may lead to impotency, develops nervous symptoms and thus brings on premature senility, and shortens life.

Hence it follows that the Yogins, if at all they live a long life, must be doing so on the strength of other practices. The only result of celibacy would be to counter-balance the effect of these other vitalizing practices.

Experimental evidence of modern sciences is generally so conclusive that it can hardly be challenged. And yet we humbly suggest that Patañjali was perfectly right in prescribing celibacy for Yogins, to give them the best chance for health and longevity. We shall examine the evidence of the Western scientists step by step.

*(to be concluded in the next issue of Yoga Research)*

— excerpted from —

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