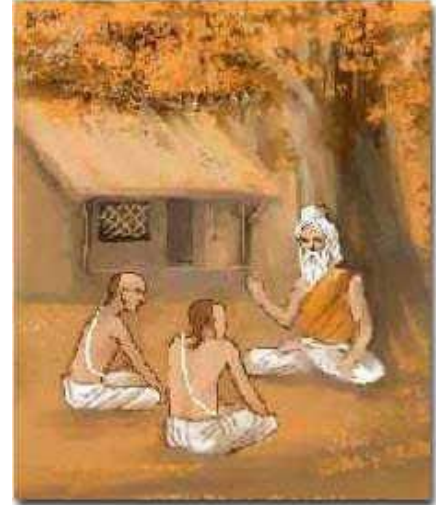


Brahmacharya – Student

A time of education in preparation for family life, a profession, for religious duties or other responsibilities

The first stage of life focuses on celibacy, study and respect.

The word *brahmacharya* is composed of two Sanskrit words: *Brahman* and *acharanam*; together they translate as 'practice that directs us to the knowledge of *Brahman*'. A child of about eight is initiated into this stage, which promotes disciplines like celibacy, study and respect. The *upanayana* ceremony marks entry into this stage of life. In ancient times the child would be expected to live with his teacher to acquire education. He is expected to develop skills that will allow him to earn a living.



Relevance today

Gender attraction is a major distraction during the student stage of life and a celibate lifestyle is the best way to counter this challenge. The ideals of celibacy and showing respect for teachers may be outdated but modern educationalists are now beginning to recognise their true importance and are seeking to reinstall them into modern teaching methods.

The process

This begins with the initiation rite of the sacred thread called *upanayana*, which is performed only on boys in the upper three castes. In the past, this stage would involve studying the Vedic scriptures under the guidance of a specially chosen guru or priest. It would involve leaving the family home and living at the guru's special school (gurukula), traditionally in the forest or some secluded place. It was a life that involved service to the guru and his family, the practice of yoga, the study of scriptures, the arts and sciences and a life of simplicity, celibacy and self-discipline. On their departure after training, the guru would urge his pupils to speak only the truth, to never forget dharma, to serve elders, to remember the teachings of the Vedas and to regard their mother, father, teacher and guest as divine beings to be honoured and revered.

Nowadays, very few boys attend the traditional schools to study the scriptures, instead they attend the primary and secondary schools in their neighbourhood, but it is still regarded as a student's duty to gain knowledge through study, to show regard for teachers and parents and to learn the rules and rituals of the Hindu tradition.