Chastity's Strength, Power and Purity
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The 2003 world Sri Hanuman Conference, April 18-20, was an outstanding success with more than 14,000 people attending over the three days in Durban, South Africa. Jointly organized by the Ramakrishna Centre and Divine Life Society, the primary objective was to "awaken the great ideals synonymous with Sri Hanuman of bhakti, jnana and shraddha (devotion, knowledge and faith), and to inspire aspirants to tread the path of God Realization with great zeal and sincerity." Many scholars, pundits and artists joined Sri Swami Sahajananda of the DLS and Swami Saradananda of the RK Mission and gave excellent talks on the mission of Lord Hanuman and the power of recitation of Lord Rama's name. We at Hinduism Today were most impressed with the presentation of the two swamis, who focused on a central but often ignored aspect of Lord Hanuman, His brahmacharya or celibacy, source of His enormous physical and spiritual strength. The following are excerpts from their presentations.

Swami Sahajananda: "Besides being an unparalleled votary of Ram-Nam (the name of Lord Rama), Sri Hanuman was also a great brahmachari (celibate). Today, we pay homage to Him for this quality of His. Since this is a very auspicious occasion, it will be appropriate if all those attending this conference take the vow of brahmacharya. Boys and girls should take the vow of brahmacharya until they get married. Married couples, as advised by our Divine Master, Sri Swami Sivananda, may observe lifelong brahmacharya after they have one or two children. He says that if householders utilize the vital force for procreative purposes only and, according to the rules laid down in the scriptures, they are considered brahmacharis also. These rules can be found in our Master's book, Sthree Dharma.

"Thousands of years ago, the Bhagavata Purana predicted that sex would be the main cause of sufferings in this Kali Yuga. We see how true this is, what havoc sex is causing in the whole world through TV and the media. Wastage of the vital force weakens the mind and brings about all sorts of problems, like deterioration of health, suicides, domestic conflicts, giving vent to anger, hatred, jealousy, etc.

"When Dhanwantari had taught the details of ayurveda, Indian medicine, to his disciples, they enquired about the essence of the science of ayurveda. The sage remarked: 'I tell you that brahmacharya is truly a precious jewel. It is the one most effective medicine to destroy diseases, decay and death. For attaining brightness, peace, knowledge, memory, health and God-vision, one should observe brahmacharya. It is the greatest and highest dharma. Saluting brahmacharya first, the cases beyond cure, I cure! Aye! Brahmacharya can undo all signs that are not good.'

"Our most beloved Lord Rama Himself set the best example for us in the practice of brahmacharya. Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Swami Sivananda and Papa Swami Ramdas state that not an iota of spiritual progress can be made without the observance of brahmacharya."

Swami Saradananda: "The subject of brahmacharya is as intrinsic to this conference as oil is to a lamp. It is all too important a subject, and its omission or neglect at a conference of this nature would do grave injustice to a figure like Sri Hanuman. Scripturally and traditionally speaking, Sri Hanuman is always eulogized as an eternal brahmacharin. A brahmacharin is one who controls his senses in order to reach Brahman or the Supreme Being. At a more common level of definition, a brahmacharin is one who controls his passions or sex instincts and transmutes or sublimates these thoughts and energies into resources that are capable of giving him the highest realization of God. In the case of Sri Hanuman, He is not a spiritual aspirant striving to practice brahmacharya. He has already attained mastery in this field. He epitomizes excellence and the ultimate maturity in brahmacharya. It gives us the necessary purity which is the basis of spiritual life. No impure person can be spiritual.

"The concept of brahmacharya is as ancient as the Vedas themselves. All Hindus who were below the age of twenty-five and were going through their student life had to practice it. Total abstention from sex and a life of self-control were the hallmarks of our students. This stage in life was known as the brahmacharya ashrama. It is a way of life or a convention which we as Hindus seem to have forgotten.

"In some of the earliest sruti texts, such as the Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya, Chandogya and Mundaka Upanishads, we get a good glimpse of the vibrant student life lived under the conditions of chastity. Today our students seem to be jaded and

lacking in mental stamina in an environment of excessive sense pleasures. Drawing a vivid and sharp contrast between those students who observe brahmacharya and those who indiscriminately waste their energies in passion, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan wrote in the introduction to his Principal Upanishads, 'Brahmacharya is not sex-destruction. Ancient Indian thinkers were of the opinion that the seed within man and woman is intended for the purpose of creating a body by which another soul may come into physical embodiment. When thus controlled, brahmacharya helps creative work of every description. When the seed is wasted in sex excesses, the body becomes weak and crippled, the face lined, the eyes dull, hearing impaired and the brain inactive. If brahmacharya is practiced, the physical body remains youthful and beautiful, the brain keen and alert and the whole physical expression becomes the likeness and the image of the Divine.'

"The values of our brahmacharya ashrama must be studied and carefully cultivated. Without it, student life will lack the resource of spirituality, and with it student life will lead to sainthood. Hence, the ideal of brahmacharya, Sri Hanuman, must be before our students.

"Sri Hanuman's eternal appeal is solely through the power of brahmacharya. The yogis say that that part of human energy which is expressed as sex energy, in sexual thought, when checked and controlled, is transmuted into the highest and subtlest energy called ojas. Swami Vivekananda states in his book, Raja Yoga, 'This ojas is stored in the brain, and the more ojas there is in a man's head, the more powerful he is, the more intellectual, the more spiritually strong. One man may speak beautiful language and beautiful thoughts, but they do not impress people; another man speaks neither beautiful language nor beautiful thoughts, yet his words charm. Every movement of his is powerful. That is the power of the ojas.'

"Swami Vivekananda said, 'By the observance of strict brahmacharya, all learning can be mastered in a very short time. One has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country.'

"Brahmacharya also gives one the power to grasp and remember the subtle truths imparted by the guru and the scriptures. People forget spiritual teachings due to the lack of brahmacharya. Deep meditation and higher spiritual states of consciousness cannot be achieved and retained without brahmacharya. It is through the power of ojas that a person attains God Realization.

"Those that practice brahmacharya see all females as Sita or the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Women will consider all men to be the images of Lord Rama. The practice of this insight will have far-reaching effects on our domestic, social and spiritual lives."