

CHAPTER ONE

The Rule Sanctioning Itinerant Asceticism

1. OM—at the time of meditation we hear
it proclaim Him!
Vedas, that string of texts, are a ladder
to reach Him!
He is Hari!
In Him we take refuge!
2. Śrī is His wife, the eagle is His banner.
Lord of the Universe,
victory is yours!
Once He took up the ascetic emblem,
and from heretic assaults He protected
the Threefold Veda.¹

3. I, Yādava, have collected all the vedic and scriptural² passages pertaining to renunciation, and I am now setting out to compose this “Collection of Ascetic Laws.” 4–5. It consists of eleven chapters: Rule, Age of Candidate, Insignia, Procedure, Principal Activity, Daily

1. There appears to have been a myth according to which Viṣṇu, incarnate as a triple-staffed Brahmin renouncer, once protected the vedic tradition from heretical attacks; cf. Ch. 6.303. The historical reference, if any, of this statement, however, is unclear.

2. Throughout this book, I have translated the term “*smṛti*” as “scripture” or “scriptural” and the terms “*veda*” and “*śruti*” as “Veda(s)” or “vedic.” The first refers to a variety of traditionally authoritative texts, including the technical literature on ritual and law, the Purāṇas, and the Epics. Yādava, by and large, reserves this term for the Dharmaśāstric texts.

Practices, Proper Conduct, Rules on Insignia, Wandering and Residence, Penances, and Funeral. In it I present systematically the Law of ascetics culled from the Law Books. 6–9. The authors of these Law Books are Manu, Viṣṇu, Yama, Aṅgiras, Vasiṣṭha, Dakṣa, Saṃvarta, Śātātapa, Parāśara, Kātyāyana, Uśanas, Vyāsa, Āpastamba, Bṛhaspati, Hārīta, Śaṅkha, Likhita, Yājñavalkya, Atri, Gautama, Bodhāyana, Dakṣa the Elder, Kāśyapa, Kapila, Kratu, Śaṅḍilya, Jābāla the Elder, Dattātreyā, Devala, Gārgya, Vasiṣṭha the Elder, Viśvāmitra, Gālava, Medhātithi, Bharadvāja, Jamadagni, Śaunaka, Paiṭhīnasi, Satyakāma, Vāyu, and so forth. 10. The Law that I present here has been gathered solely from those sections of their books devoted to the topic of renunciation and not from other sections of those books or from the Epics and Purāṇas.

11. To begin with, I will examine whether in fact there exists a rule authorizing renunciation.³

Opponent's Position

12. Some claim that there indeed is no such rule, because one is not found in the Veda, and because scriptures that contradict the Veda are without authority. 13. That is the view of Gautama:⁴

There is, however, only one order of life according to the Venerable Teacher, because the householder's life is expressly prescribed. [GDh 3. 36]

3. It is a basic assumption in Brahmanical theology and exegesis that there has to be a specific and identifiable vedic rule authorizing a given practice or rite for it to be considered part of *dharma*. Regarding the long-standing controversy on the legitimacy of ascetic and celibate modes of life, see Olivelle 1993.

4. For a detailed discussion of Gautama's and Bodhāyana's views on the orders of life, see Olivelle 1993, 83–91. The basic argument of both is that only the householder's life is explicitly prescribed in currently available vedic texts ("express vedic texts": see Ch. 1.16). It is a well-known principle of Brahmanical hermeneutics that the Veda is the supreme authority in matters of *dharma*. Other scriptures (*smṛti*) are considered authoritative because they are, at least in principle, based on the Veda. An express vedic text (*pratyakṣaśruti*) is a vedic passage that is preserved within a vedic school (*śākhā*) and available for examination. A purported scriptural (*smṛti*) passage that contradicts such a text is judged null and void. If no express vedic text exists to support a scriptural statement, then the latter retains its authority and is supposed to be based on a lost or unavailable vedic text. In such cases a vedic text is presumed—or more technically, inferred—to exist, although it is currently unavailable. Such a presumed vedic text—technically called *anumitaśruti* or "inferred vedic text"—is never allowed to contradict an express vedic text. Since the acceptance of celibate orders of life contradicts the vedic injunction to marry and to procreate, Gautama and Bodhāyana argue, scriptural passages authorizing such states are without authority.

14. Bodhāyana states:

Some maintain that there is a fourfold division of this very Law.

Four [paths leading to the gods traverse between heaven and earth. Place us on that among them, all you gods, which will bring us un-failing prosperity]. [TS 5.7.2.3]

This text has only an invisible purpose⁵ and, therefore, refers to categories of rites, namely, vegetable offering, soma offering, animal offering, and offering with a ladle.

Now, these orders are student, householder, forest hermit, and wandering ascetic. A student serves his teacher until death. A forest hermit kindles his fire according to the procedure for ascetics⁶ and lives in the forest, conducting himself in accordance with the Book on Hermits,⁷ eating roots and fruits, and practicing austerities. He should bathe at dawn, noon, and dusk, and subsist on wild produce.⁸ He may also subsist on almsfood, but he should never enter a village. Wearing matted hair and clothed in bark or deer skin, he shall not eat what has been stored for over a year.

5. This passage from the BDh differs considerably from the critical edition. That edition here reads *adr̥ṣṭatvāt*, which according to Bühler and the commentator, Govinda, means "Because no other meaning is to be found." This, according to Bodhāyana, is the reason for interpreting the vedic text "Four paths leading to the gods . . ." (TS 5.7.2.3) as referring to the four types of sacrifices and for rejecting the interpretation made by the proponents of the system of four orders, according to whom the "four paths" refer to the four orders of life. The variant reading recorded by Yādava appears, on the contrary, to be a reference to the well-known principle of Brahmanical hermeneutics that the Vedas, and therefore *dharma*, must always have an invisible purpose or aim; their results are manifested after death. According to this interpretation, Bodhāyana argues against the opponent's interpretation because the vedic text, having by definition an invisible purpose, can refer only to sacrifices. The implication appears to be that the various modes of life subsumed under the four orders serve only worldly purposes. This appears also to be the point made a little later on with the expression "*dr̥ṣṭārthatvāt*", "For they have a visible purpose."

6. Technically called *śrāmaṇaka*, this is a special ritual procedure for establishing a sacred fire before a forest hermit leaves for the forest. A version of this procedure is given in the VaiDh 2.1. The fire of a hermit itself is often referred to as "Śrāmaṇaka fire", see VaiDh 2.1-5.

7. Bühler, following Govinda, takes "*vaikhānasaśāstra*" to be a treatise composed by the sage Vikhanas, regarded as the founder of the institution of forest hermits. I prefer to translate this expression as referring merely to a treatise on hermits. It is also possible that it refers to such treatises in general rather than to a specific one.

8. Literally, "what is not grown in a village." The total physical separation of forest hermits from society is highlighted by their abstention from using anything mediated by civilization, whether it be cultivated food or manufactured clothing. One law book prohibits them from "stepping on plowed land" (GDh 3.32), the prime symbol of civilized geography.

A wandering ascetic should forsake his kin and wander about without possessions. After going to the wilderness, he should shave his head completely or keep only his topknot, wear just a loincloth, and reside in one place during the rains. Clothed in an ocher garment, he should beg for food when pestles have been set aside and embers extinguished, when the people have finished their meals and removed the dishes. He shall not hurt any creature by verbal, mental, or physical acts of hostility. He should carry a water strainer for use in purifications and use for ritual purposes only water that has been drawn out.⁹ They proclaim: "We stick to the middle, rejecting the fire sacrifices to the gods and separating ourselves from both sides."¹⁰

There is, however, only one order of life according to the Venerable Teacher, because a person does not bear children in the others. In this connection, they quote:

There was once a demon named Kapila, the son of Prahlāda. It was he who made these divisions in his effort to compete with the gods. A wise man, therefore, should pay no heed to them.

For they have a visible purpose. On this point, when they quote¹¹

9. Flowing water, such as that of a river, is always pure and can be used without straining. Stagnant water (for example, in wells and ponds) must be drawn out in a vessel, strained with a cloth, and poured from the vessel to make it run before it can be used for ritual purposes. See Ch. 6.41–44.

10. "We" probably refers to wandering ascetics. The meaning appears to be that ascetics take to their path with this type of belief or proclamation. The meaning of "both" (sides, ends, or extremes?) and "the middle" is unclear, however. Govinda, followed by Bühler, takes "both" to mean this world and the next and "middle" to mean Brahman. In a forthcoming article entitled "The Earliest Brahminical Reference to Buddhism?" Richard Gombrich has suggested that the middle may be a reference to the Buddhist "middle way" (the critical edition of BDh reads, in fact, *madhyamaṃ padam*, middle state or path). It may, however, be possible to interpret this difficult phrase within the context of the RV (10.71.9) passage cited later. There, people who do not participate in ritual are said to "proceed neither to this side nor to the other side." The meaning, at least within Bodhāyana's understanding of this text, appears to be that such people do not gain prosperity in this world or in heaven after death, two major goals of the vedic ritual. In this light, one may see the ascetics as rejecting both those goals in favor of the "middle," which may refer to the goal of final liberation.

11. See n. 5. The line of Bodhāyana's argument is that when supporters of celibate asceticism cite vedic proof-texts such as this from the TB, a passage that is also cited in the BaU 4.4.23 in support of Upaniṣadic doctrines, the upholders of marriage and ritual religion can quote many other texts that argue against celibacy. This is an excellent example of the internal controversies regarding proper belief and proper action that went on within the Brahmanical tradition itself. The targets of the legal authors' critique were mainly their colleagues who espoused different and often ascetic ideas, rather than Buddhists and other heretics, as it is often supposed.

This eternal greatness [of a Brahmin is neither increased nor reduced by rites. The self knows that greatness of his. When someone knows it, he is not stained by evil deeds]. [TB 3.12.9.7–8]

one should reply by quoting

At the time of death [a man without the knowledge of the Veda does not turn his mind to that great all-perceiving self], set ablaze by whose power the sun gives warmth [and a father in his son is provided with a father from generation to generation].¹² [TB 3.12.9.7]

These people who proceed neither to this side nor to the other side, who are neither Brahmins nor participants at Soma sacrifices—they make use of speech in evil ways and weave their web in ignorance.¹³ [RV 10.71.9]

Through offspring, O Fire, may we obtain immortality. [RV 5.4.10]

At his very birth a Brahmin is born with three debts: a debt of vedic studentship to the seers, a debt of sacrifice to the gods, and a debt of offspring to the forefathers. [TS 6.3.10.5]

There are innumerable such statements on people's association with debts, as well as direct prohibitions.¹⁴ [BDh 2.11.9–33]

15. Āpastamba says:

Study of the triple Veda, studentship, procreation, faith, austerity, sacrifice, gift giving—we are with those who perform these. Those who commend other things will become dust and perish. [ApDh 2.24.8]

16. Therefore, no celibate orders of life exist, because they are not sanctioned in the Veda and because scriptural texts lose all authority when they contradict an express vedic text [see Ch. 1.13 n. 4].

12. The statement about the father becoming a father (*pitṛmān*) through his son is not altogether clear. It is clear, however, that it resonates with other vedic statements regarding the importance of procreation. In another place the TB (1.5.5.6) affirms that “in your offspring you are born again; that, O mortal, is your immortality.” The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (2.5) claims that a father is born a second time in his son, and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (7.13.1) asserts that a father attains immortality when he sees the face of his living son. The point of all this for Bodhāyana's argument is that the celibate state authorized by the system of the orders of life (*āśrama*) goes against explicit vedic statements on the necessity of begetting children, especially sons.

13. The meaning of this very difficult verse is unclear, especially the last phrase containing the hapax legomenon *sirī*. The reason for its citation here, however, is clear. The verse, as Bodhāyana understands it, condemns those who reject ritual practices and use speech (*vāc*), probably meaning the vedic texts, in evil ways. This, according to Bodhāyana, is precisely what the creators of the *āśrama* system did by using vedic proof-texts in support of their theory.

14. The vedic passages dealing with debts implicitly prohibit celibate states of life. Bodhāyana, further, affirms that the Vedas contain injunctions that directly and explicitly prohibit such modes of life. This last statement does not appear in the critical edition of the BDh.

Objection

17. Now someone may object that there indeed exists an express vedic text among the followers of the White Yajurveda:

Desiring this very world, wandering ascetics depart for the ascetic life.
[BaU 4.4.22]

And also:

Eschewing erudition, therefore, let a Brahmin live like a simpleton. Eschewing both erudition and simplicity, then, he becomes a sage. [BaU 3.5.1]

18. That text points out also the conduct:

On knowing this, indeed, the people of old did not wish for offspring, for they thought: "Our self is our world; so why should we need offspring?"
[BaU 4.4.22]

And also:

They did not offer the daily fire sacrifice. [?]

Reply

19. We answer this objection with a question: is itinerant asceticism enjoined for the benefit of the agent or, like rites such as holding the hand, for the benefit of some other ritual act?¹⁵ If, on the one hand, it is for the agent's benefit, then, according to the maxim "It should be heaven," its purpose has to be either heaven or something else.¹⁶ Now, its purpose cannot be heaven, because that would negate its inclusion within the subject of liberation, for obviously every treatise that enjoins itinerant asceticism does so exclusively within the section devoted to the subject of liberation. Consequently, we are compelled to affirm some degree of correlation between it and the subject of lib-

15. Brahmanical hermeneutics divides all ritual acts into those that directly benefit the ritual actor (*puruṣārtha*) and those that are required only by the rite itself and therefore perform a merely ritual purpose (*kratvartha*). In the example alluded to, the marriage ceremony as a whole serves the purpose of the ritual actors—the bride and groom—but the groom's particular act of taking the bride's hand serves a merely ritual purpose. For this hermeneutical principle, see PMS 4.1.2. In this entire discussion by Yādava, the terms for asceticism and renunciation (*pārvivrajya*, *saṁnyāsa*,) are taken to refer directly to the rite for becoming an ascetic rather than to the ascetic life in general. It is only within this context that the analogy to other vedic rites makes sense.

16. This maxim deals with an abstruse exegetical principle spelled out in PMS 4.3.7.13–16. Simply stated, the maxim asserts that the single goal of the various rites prescribed in the Veda is heaven. If we follow this maxim, then the rite of renunciation—if it qualifies as a vedic rite—should have heaven as its goal. If not, then the opponent has the burden of presenting something else as its specific goal.

eration. It is impossible, however, to make such an assertion, because the Vedas clearly teach that liberation is achieved only through knowledge:

Upon knowing him in this manner, one transcends death. There is no other path along which to travel. [VS 31.18]

Sacrificial presents do not reach there, nor do those who practice austerities but lack knowledge. Only through knowledge does a man reach that place where desires are vanquished. [SB 10.5.4.16]

20. Now, some claim that itinerant asceticism is enjoined as a necessary adjunct to the acquisition of knowledge. That is not true. Since the acquisition of knowledge is open to householders as well, it is improper to assume that there is an injunction establishing a separate order of life for that purpose. Even if we were to so assume, it would not establish a separate order of life. On the contrary, it would only institute a particular vow called “itinerant asceticism” intended exclusively for householders, in a manner similar to the vow of maintaining three sacred fires.¹⁷ And we understand it to be a particular observance entailing the abandonment of attachments, an observance that is not incompatible with the household life one has already undertaken. Practices found in the scriptural texts are not to be accepted when they contradict the Veda. The very term “itinerant asceticism,” moreover, is not noted elsewhere as referring to a separate order of life, for if it were, that order would be rendered nonvedic. So we must conclude that this vedic text contains only an illustrative reference¹⁸ to itinerant asceticism, an institution well known in the scriptures, and that the intention of that text here is only to praise knowledge—saying, in effect, that knowledge is so great that by its power people do not fall into sin even when they relinquish rites that have been enjoined on them.

17. Three sacred fires are required for the performance of several vedic sacrifices. Although all Brahmins were expected ideally to maintain all three fires continuously in their homes, from early times on only exceptional people who were professional priests did so. Such persons were referred to by the technical term “*āhitāgni*.” By the middle ages this practice appears to have become so rare as to be considered a special and extraordinary vow. According to the argument of Yādava’s hypothetical adversary, renunciation should be considered a similar vow that exceptional householders may undertake voluntarily.

18. The reference is to the texts of the BaU that the opponent had cited in support of renunciation as constituting a separate order of life; see Ch. 1.17–18. “Illustrative reference” (*anuvāda*) is a technical term in vedic exegesis and refers to statements that have no injunctive power of their own but merely repeats by way of illustration or commendation rules that have already been laid down. The opponent’s intent is to deny any injunctive force to this vedic text with regard to renunciation.

21. Thus, some teachers hold that there is no order of life called itinerant asceticism, because [a] there is no exclusive vedic observance that is not open to householders and constitutes a special order of life, an observance that would parallel, for example, the daily fire sacrifice,¹⁹ and [b] customs such as begging for food are just elements of good conduct, in much the same way as twilight worship and the like, and as such they are intended to promote observances that do constitute an order of life and are not observances that could on their own constitute an order of life.

Author's Position

22. To all this we reply. There is an exclusive observance known as the yoga of knowledge. The following vedic text, accordingly, notes at the outset the rites beginning with "truth" and ending with "mental,"²⁰ goes on to prescribe renunciation: "They say that renunciation, therefore, surpasses these austerities" [MNU 538], and finally enjoins the yoga of knowledge as what is expressed by the term renunciation: "One should attach oneself to the self" [MNU 540]. Now, the yoga of knowledge consists in the sole pursuit of knowledge. Such a pursuit, evidently, is not possible for householders, because they are required to perform in addition rites such as the daily fire sacrifice. Only the yoga of rites, consequently, is applicable to them. Now, the yoga of rites consists in the simultaneous pursuit of both knowledge and rites, from which pursuit its practitioners obtain liberation. Wandering ascetics, on the other hand, attain liberation solely through the yoga of knowledge. Because they do not perform rites, therefore, the same text in a subsequent passage shows how they accomplish the ritual and prescribes that a wandering ascetic should carry it out every day without fail: "In the case of a man who knows the sacrifice in this manner, [his self is the sacrificer, faith is his wife, his body is the fire

19. The daily fire sacrifice (*agnihotra*) is both a vedic observance and a practice that is meant exclusively for householders. The argument here is that such an exclusive practice meant solely for renouncers is not found in the Veda.

20. The reference is to section 505–15 in the MNU. These eleven statements define the "ultimate" (*param*) progressively as truth, austerity, control, tranquility, generosity, virtue (*dharma*), procreation, fires, fire sacrifice, sacrifice, and mental (offering).

wood . . .].”²¹ This is not merely a laudatory statement but a true injunction, because it has no precedent.²²

23. Is it not true that even wandering ascetics perform rites such as the twilight worship? Certainly, but they are customary practices, and as such they are performed solely to promote the duties of one’s order of life and not to obtain liberation. Only the yoga of knowledge aims at liberation. Practices such as twilight worship foster that yoga, because, as stated in the following scriptural passages, a person who does not perform the twilight worship is not qualified to perform such yoga:

A man who does not perform the twilight worship is always impure and is unfit to perform any rite.

And:

The Vedas do not cleanse a man who pays no heed to good conduct.

We will point out, moreover, that practices such as silent prayer, austerity, and begging are included within restraints and constraints.²³ Now, all branches of learning recognize that restraints, constraints, and the like are elements of yoga. Those practices, therefore, must also be included within the yoga of knowledge.

24. It is thus established that the yoga of knowledge pertains to wandering ascetics, while the yoga of rites pertains to householders. The Veda accordingly declares that a person can attain immortality only by abandoning rites:

21. This long passage (MNU 543–50) is an extensive allegory of the sacrifice that a renouncer performs internally. At this sacrifice his own body, bodily functions, and the act of eating are homologized with the various elements of the sacrifice. Such a renouncer performs a continuous and daily sacrifice by his very existence and by the daily activities he performs.

22. Here we encounter a bit of abstruse hermeneutical ratiocination. The issue addressed is whether the MNU passage cited here regarding the internal sacrifice has true injunctive power or is merely a laudatory statement. The latter type of vedic statements falls under the category known as *anuvāda*, or illustrative statements (see Ch. 1.20 n. 18). These are not injunctions in their own right but are authoritative only because they refer to *already-established* injunctions. The author denies that the passage in question can be such a noninjunctive statement by saying that it has no precedent, i.e., that there is no previously established injunction of which it can be an illustration or praise. Consequently, it must be what Brahmanical hermeneutics calls an “original injunction” (*apūrvavidhi*), that is, an injunction that prescribes a practice for the first time.

23. Restraints (*yama*) and constraints (*niyama*) are the first two steps of the eightfold yogic path: see Ch. 5.47f. The author wants to point out that the common practices of renouncers, such as begging for food, are in fact part and parcel of their yogic endeavor and are therefore also a part of their yoga of knowledge.

Not by rites, not by offspring, and not by wealth—but by renunciation did some people attain immortality. [MNU 227]

And also:

Firmly grasping the import of Vedāntic wisdom, their hearts purified by the practice of renunciation, all these ascetics attain at the end of time in the world of Brahmā final liberation from the highest immortality.²⁴ [MNU 229–30]

The Blessed Vāsudeva, likewise, declares:

[I have formerly taught, my dear, a twofold method of perfection:] the yoga of knowledge for followers of Sāṃkhya and the yoga of rites for yogins. [BhG 3.3]

25. Consequently, because an exclusive practice does exist [see Ch. 1.21 n. 19], we posit the existence of an order of life called “itinerant asceticism” that is sanctioned by the Veda. Because they are based on the vedic texts providing that sanction, moreover, the scriptural passages on this topic retain their authority. Now, practices connected with this order are not appropriate for householders, because, in the statement “They beg for their food” [BaU 4.4.22], the Veda enjoins on all ascetics the abandonment of property.²⁵

It is established, therefore, that itinerant asceticism is a clearly distinct order of life.

26. That ends the first chapter, entitled “The Rule Sanctioning Itinerant Asceticism,” of the *Collection of Ascetic Laws* composed by Yādava Prakāśa.

24. The meaning of this phrase is unclear. It may mean that these ascetics first attain the world of Brahmā, defined here as “highest immortality,” and from there are finally liberated (*mokṣa*) at the end of time. This verse occurs also in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.2.6) and in the *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* (1.4), where the reading is *parāṃṛtāḥ* (this reading is also found in some recensions of the MNU). The translation thus would be “ at the end of time, being supremely immortal, attain final liberation in the world of Brahmā.”

25. The argument is that begging is enjoined on all wandering ascetics. Begging implies abandoning all possessions. Such an abandonment is impossible for householders, both because of family responsibilities and, more importantly from a hermeneutical standpoint, because their obligation to perform rites requires that they possess the wealth needed to perform them. Consequently, the *dharma* of renouncers is exclusively theirs and cannot be practiced by householders. This supports the author’s claim that renunciation constitutes an order of life distinct from that of the householder.

CHAPTER TWO

Age of Eligibility of a Candidate for Itinerant Asceticism

1. We will now consider the candidate's age of eligibility.

Renunciation after Marriage

2. According to one opinion, itinerant asceticism is permitted only after a person has lived as a forest hermit and not while a person is still a vedic student. 3. This view is supported by the following vedic texts:

After giving to the teacher a gift that would please him, let him not cut off his line of offspring. [TU 1.11.1]

4. At his very birth a Brahmin [is born with three debts]. [TS 6.3.10.5: see Ch 1.14]

Procreation is the very foundation. Spinning out well the thread of progeny, a man becomes free from his debt to the forefathers. [MNU 525]

5. Manu, likewise, states:

Only after paying his three debts should a man set his mind on renunciation.¹ Should he take to renunciation without paying them, he will fall.² [MDh 6.35]

6. Yājñavalkya says:

No one but a man who has studied the Veda, recited silent prayers, fathered sons, distributed food, established the sacred fire, and offered sacrifices according to his ability may set his mind on renunciation. [YDh 3.57]

1. The term "*mokṣa*" (lit., "liberation") in Manu and in Yājñavalkya (below, Ch. 2.6) refers specifically to the renunciatory mode that constitutes the fourth order of life devoted exclusively to the pursuit of personal liberation. For an extensive discussion of the meaning of this term in Manu, see Olivelle 1993, 137–42.

2. The meaning of "fall" here (and in similar contexts elsewhere) is not clear. It may refer to the falling into hell after death, to the fall from caste, or more generally to falling into a state of sin.

7. Śāṅkha and Likhita state:

After he has lived as a forest hermit and has reached an advanced age, a man may freely take to itinerant asceticism.

8–10. Medhātithi says:

Detached from ties to sons, wife, home, fields, cows, gold, and the like, as well as from human and divine pleasures revealed in the Vedas; freed from sin by reciting the Vedas and by performing sacrifices and austerities; with his heart made pure and his senses subdued through religious practices carried out over many lifetimes; and counseled by the Epics, Purāṇas, and the Veda—he strives after the highest state. Because he strives, he is called an ascetic.³ Only such an ascetic attains this highest bliss, and no one else.

Renunciation Permitted at Any Time

11. Some, on the other hand, are of the opinion that a person may take to itinerant asceticism freely either while he is a vedic student or from home or the forest. 12. This position is supported by a vedic passage from the *Jābāli*:

After completing his vedic studies, he should become a householder. After he has been a householder, he should become a forest hermit. After he has been a forest hermit, he should depart for the ascetic life. Or rather, he may depart for the ascetic life while he is still a vedic student, or from home or the forest. [JU 64]

13. Yama says:

After he has observed his vedic vow,⁴ a learned Brahmin who is impartial toward all creatures, both the mobile and the immobile, may devote himself to renunciation [see Ch. 2.5 n. 1].

14. Or else, a householder who has fathered sons and subdued himself and his senses, who yearns not for any pleasure, and who has done all he has to do may become a wandering ascetic.

15. We gather from this passage that, if someone is a vedic student, he should depart for the ascetic life only after he has completed his vow; if he is a householder, he should depart only after he has fathered a son—because it was already stated, “. . . one who has performed sac-

3. The author derives *yati* (“ascetic”) from *yatana* (“striving”). The etymological connection between the two is uncertain, but it was a common practice in ancient India for an author to use such phonetic similarities to point out what he may have regarded as the essential nature of some institution or practice.

4. The vedic vow refers to the period of vedic studentship following a boy’s vedic initiation.

rifices, after drawing his sacred fires into his heart . . .”;⁵ and if he is a forest hermit, he should depart only after he has performed austerities. This interpretation should be applied to what follows as well.⁶ This is also the object of Manu’s statement: “Only after paying his three debts . . .” [see Ch. 2.5]. 16. Some declare:

After he has truly come to know the highest Brahman, a vedic student, a widowed householder, or a forest hermit should give up attachments and become a wandering ascetic.

17. From this passage we gather that, if he is detached, itinerant asceticism is open to a widowed householder even before he has completed such duties as fathering a son. 18. Bṛhaspati says:

Seeing that saṃsāra is without any substance and longing to see the true substance,⁷ a man imbued with deep detachment should depart for the ascetic life even before he has married.

19. Or someone may do so after he has fathered children and offered a variety of sacrifices, while another may do so after his “half-body” has died, and yet another from the forest.

20. “Half-body” means wife, according to the statement:

When a man’s wife drinks liquor, half his body dies. [VaDh 21.15]

and according to the vedic text:

The wife is a full half of a man’s body. [TS 6.1.8.5]

21–24. Śāṅkha states:

Having thus spent some time in the forest, a twice-born man should enter the celibate order of life.⁸ Even a vedic student may do so, however, if he has attained a high intensity of detachment by his knowledge of various Upaniṣads; if he has withdrawn all his senses and keeps them far from sensual objects; if he finds delight only in himself; if with his mind he

5. It is unclear where this statement was already made. No manuscript records it in any other section of the work. It may well refer to that part of Yama’s text which Yādava does not include in the citation made here. Yādava may just be assuming that his readers are aware of this passage.

6. This means that when a text permits a student, householder, or forest hermit to renounce, we should assume that its author means that such people are eligible to renounce only when they have completed the duties of their respective states.

7. There is a play here on the Sanskrit word “sāra” (“pith” or “substance”). Saṃsāra, if one ignores the nasal, can mean “with substance.” In reality, however, saṃsāra is *asāra* (or *niḥsāra*), that is, “without substance.” The true substance that he seeks is Brahman; see also NPU 139. This is another example of the phonetic etymology I commented on in n. 3.

8. The expression “*brahmāśrama*” may also mean the order devoted to (acquiring the knowledge of) Brahman. In either case, it clearly refers to the last order of life, i.e., renunciation.

has vanquished his adversaries; if he has got hold of his self and keeps it securely fastened by repeatedly engaging in yogic practices; if he has banished all attachments; and if he adheres strictly to his vow. Or even a twice-born householder, if he possesses the above qualities, may enter the celibate order of life after he has offered a sacrifice to Prajāpati, given all his possessions as a sacrificial gift to the priests according to the prescribed rules, and deposited his sacred fires in himself.

Renunciation before Marriage Only for the Handicapped

25. In this manner, some vedic and scriptural texts advocate itinerant asceticism directly from vedic studentship, while others permit it only after a man has paid his debts and fulfilled other similar obligations. Given the resultant contradiction,⁹ some argue that the vedic and scriptural statements advocating renunciation directly from vedic studentship are made with reference to people such as the blind and the lame who are disqualified from performing rites. 26. This is supported by Likhita:

As a result of merits he has accumulated over ten million lifetimes or by divine intervention, a man may become detached and display a strong yearning for Brahman.

27. After he has learned the true meaning of the Veda, it may become impossible for such a man to live at home. So he may depart for the ascetic life either while he is a student or, when he is old, from home or the forest.

9. The contradictions that result when vedic or scriptural texts prescribe mutually exclusive actions provided much of the grist for the hermeneutic mill of Brahmanical exegetes. Briefly, the hermeneutic rules provided three avenues to resolve contradictions: (a) A person could show that one of the statements in question is less authoritative than the other, either because one is vedic and the other is not (see Ch. 1.13 n. 4), or because there is some doubt regarding the injunctive power of one (see Ch. 1.20 n. 18). According to a well-known exegetical maxim, only statements of equal authority that contradict each other's provisions can give rise to an option (GDh 1.4). (b) One could show that the contradiction is only apparent by demonstrating that the provisions of the two have in view two different groups of individuals or two different periods of the same individual's life. This is called "restrictive option" (*vyavasthitavikalpa*), even though there is no true option here at all. This is by and large the preferred method of conflict resolution in Brahmanical hermeneutics (see Ch. 2.28 n. 10) and the one advocated by those who would restrict renunciation to ritually handicapped people. (c) When the first two avenues fail, the contradiction between equally authoritative texts creates an option. An individual may choose to follow either one. In the discussion below, and in general throughout the book, we will see these methods of conflict resolution used by various factions to buttress their own positions and to invalidate those of their opponents.

28. A young and healthy man should live diligently as a householder, while the blind, the lame, the old, and lepers should resort to asceticism.¹⁰

Renunciation before Marriage for Detached People

29. Others, however, argue as follows: “Should we rather not assume that there is no real contradiction in either the vedic or the scriptural passages? Unable as he is to undertake itinerant asceticism, why should not a man who is not detached become a householder? For surely it is impossible for a man who is not detached to undertake itinerant asceticism.” 30. Their position is supported by Dakṣa:

Even those beings who are endowed with the highest virtue¹¹ fall under the control of sensual things. How much more, then, creatures with paltry virtue? And need we even talk about human beings?

31. Only a man whose passions have been extinguished, therefore, should take up the staff.¹² Others do not have the capacity to do so, attracted as they are to sensual things.

32. There are a lot of twice-born men who make a living by using the emblem of the triple staff. According to scripture, however, a man who does not know Brahman is not worthy of the triple staff.

33. Likhita:

After a twice-born man has performed the rite at which he renounces all things, if he returns to the world, the king should brand him with a dog’s paw and make him a slave.

34. A man should renounce, therefore, only after he has first examined the purity of his heart for a long time and ascertained that his mind will not waver from the Law.

10. The first two verses of this quotation appear to contradict the view they are expected to support. If we were to argue in the manner of a Brahmanical exegete, however, we could take the last verse as qualifying the injunction that permits a detached person to renounce either before or after marriage. Thus, a detached person should get married if he is young and healthy, while he may renounce if he is old or handicapped. The option given in the injunction is thus not a true option, since the two alternatives refer not to the same but to different individuals. See the alternative (b) in the previous note.

11. The term “*sattva*” is used in Sāṃkhya cosmology as the highest of the three strands (*guṇa*), which constitute material reality. The term here may have a cluster of meanings, including goodness, power, wisdom, and purity. It is unclear who these beings are, but their opposition to humans suggests that they are supernatural beings such as gods and seers.

12. This is a reference to the renunciatory rite at which the ascetic takes a bamboo staff as the emblem of his new state. See Chs. 3 and 4.

35. Yama:

Only when a man has quenched his passion and lust, attained perfect tranquillity, and become totally intent on Brahman does he become qualified to be a renouncer. Others do so just to gain a living.

36. There is no justification, moreover, for assuming that the vedic passage prescribing immediate renunciation¹³ is directed at those who are disqualified, because later on in the following passage the same text prescribes it separately for them:¹⁴

Further, regardless of whether he has taken the vow or not, whether he has graduated or not, and whether he has a sacred fire or not, [let him renounce on the very day that he becomes detached].¹⁵ [JU 64]

37. Jābāli the Elder states:

Regardless of whether he has taken the vow or not, whether he has graduated or not, whether he has the domestic fire or not, whether he offers the daily fire sacrifice or not, let him fetch some fire from the village and...¹⁶

38. Now, the statement “the blind, the lame, the old, and lepers should resort to asceticism” [Ch. 2.28] does not contradict our position, because the terms “blind” and so forth have been explained in a different way.

39. Thus, for instance, Medhātithi says:

When a man remains as unmoved when he sees a sixteen-year-old young lady as when he sees a newborn girl or a hundred-year-old woman, he is called a “eunuch.”

13. I believe that the technical meaning of the term “*utthānaśruti*” (lit., “vedic text on rising up”) is that the text prescribes immediate departure from society without regard to any other condition. See, for example, Ch. 2.25 above, where the same term is used with reference to texts that advocate renunciation directly from vedic studentship. The term *vyuthāna* is used with this meaning by Śaṅkara in his commentary on BaU 3.5.1: see Olivelle 1986, 79–91. The text to which Yādava refers here is the *Jābāli* cited at Ch. 2.12.

14. The referent of “them” is unclear, but in all likelihood the author means that in the following passage the *Jābāli* enjoins immediate renunciation specifically on those who are totally detached. “Separately” may signify the following: In the earlier passage (Ch. 2.12) immediate renunciation while a person was still a student was presented within the context of prescribing renunciation within the sequence of the orders of life for ordinary people. In that context there may be some justification in taking the rule of immediate renunciation as directed at those who are disqualified from marriage. In this text, on the other hand, no such doubt is possible, because the text speaks specifically and solely of those who are detached.

15. “Vow” refers to vedic initiation, and a *snātaka*, here translated as one who has graduated from vedic school, is a young adult who has performed the ceremony that concludes the period of vedic studies. This ceremony concludes with a ritual bath, and hence the graduate is called *snātaka*, “one who has taken the bath.”

16. The author cites only the beginning of the passage, a common practice in this type of literature. He expects his reader to be familiar with these citations. I have been unable to trace the rest of this passage.

40. When a man walks only to beg food and to answer nature's calls, and even then does not travel beyond a league, he is called "lame."

41. When a wandering ascetic, as he stands or walks, does not look beyond six feet in front of him, unless there is some danger, he is said to be "blind."

42. As he hears words that are kind or unkind, soothing or scathing, when a man remains as if he had not heard them, he is said to be "deaf."¹⁷

43. The blind, moreover, are not qualified to become wandering ascetics because of the rule "He should place his foot on the ground after determining its purity by inspection."¹⁸ 44. Neither are the lame or lepers, because of rules such as the following:

Traveling to holy bathing places and temples, let him roam the earth like a worm along the path pointed out by the sun.¹⁹

45. The rule of celibacy disqualifies eunuchs from itinerant asceticism, for celibacy is abstention from sex. Now abstention from sex does not arise at all in the case of a eunuch, because, remaining unmoved like a pillar, he does not have the capacity to engage in sex. Clearly abstention becomes a vow only for those who have the capacity.

46. Consequently, the vedic passage on debts is directed at those who are not detached. For those who are detached, on the other hand, only one path is open, and that is itinerant asceticism. 47. Accordingly, Bṛhaspati states:

... a man imbued with deep detachment should depart for the ascetic life even before he has married. [see Ch. 2.18]

48. Kratu:

After he has truly come to know the highest Brahman, a vedic student, a widowed householder, or a forest hermit should give up attachments and become a wandering ascetic.

49. Śāṅkha:

Even a vedic student may do so, however, ... if he has banished all attachments; and if he adheres strictly to his vow.

17. These verses and other similar ones are contained in the NPU 146–47; see also Ch. 7.130–36.

18. MDh 6.46. The verse literally means that he should place his foot purified by his gaze; that is, he should look carefully to see whether there are any insects or bugs before putting his foot down as he walks, lest he kill them. Jain mendicants use brooms to brush insects from their path. The point here is that this rule of Manu disqualifies the blind because they cannot visually inspect the ground.

19. The second half of the verse is found in the MBh 14.46.32. The point of the argument is that the lame would not be able to roam the earth or to visit holy places. How this text would disqualify lepers is less clear. Perhaps they would not be allowed to enter temples or sacred bathing places (*tīrtha*).

50. Or even a twice-born householder, if he possesses the above qualities, may enter the celibate order of life after he has offered a sacrifice to Prajāpati, given all his possessions as a sacrificial gift to the priests according to the prescribed rules, and deposited his sacred fires in himself.

[see Ch. 2.23-24]

51. Dattātreya:

The triple staff is the emblem of Viṣṇu. It is the means of liberation for twice-born people and signals the cessation of all rules.²⁰ That is the teaching of the Veda. It was prescribed of old by the Self-Existent One for those who had become disaffected with household life.²¹

52. The teachers²² are of the opinion that a temporary vedic student²³ is free to choose²⁴ any of the four orders of life. 53. Vasiṣṭha accordingly states:

There are four orders of life: vedic student, householder, forest hermit, and wandering ascetic. After studying one, two, or all the Vedas, a student who has not violated his vow of celibacy may enter whichever of these he prefers. [VaDh 7.1.3]

54. Āpastamba also says:

After learning the rites, he may undertake whichever he likes. [ApDh 2.21.5]

20. The term “*dharma*” in this context probably refers to the duties and laws of castes and orders of life. The renunciatory life is often depicted as transcending *dharma*.

21. The referent of “it” is unclear, but in this context it may refer to the triple staff. This half-verse is given within a different context in the YIs 2.32 (Olivelle 1987, 50, 65).

22. This could, of course, be an honorific plural. In this type of literature such plurals invariably refer to authoritative figures of old whose views support those of the author. It also may be a literary device rather than an actual reference to a particular teacher.

23. Such a vedic student is distinguished from one who resolves to live as a student all his life. According to the original formulation of the *āśrama* system, which is presented here by Yādava, it was the temporary student who, at the completion of his period of study, chose an order in which he would spend his entire adult life. The first order in this scheme is permanent studentship, which, among others, the temporary student may choose. The choice of an *āśrama* was limited to this crucial period of a man’s life when he is about to assume adult responsibilities. On the original *āśrama* system and for a discussion of the texts cited here, see Olivelle 1993, 73–101.

24. The term “*icchāvikalpa*,” “free or unrestricted option,” means that any student may freely choose an order of life he prefers. This type of option is different from the *vyavasthitavikalpa*, which restricts the choice to a particular group or class of people. See Cg. 2.25 n. 9.

55. The Blessed Vyāsa states:

After duly acquiring vedic knowledge by serving his teacher, a twice-born man should give a gift of a cow to the teacher and, with his permission, take the ritual bath.

56. Then, that learned Brahmin may live in whichever order of life he prefers, either as a permanent student, or as a sage, or else as a wandering ascetic.²⁵

57. Gautama declares:

For him, some assert, there is a choice of orders.²⁶ [GDh 3.1]

58. Now with regard to the statement “Only after paying his three debts . . .” [see Ch. 2.5], that too—when we interpret it within the restrictions imposed on it by vedic and scriptural statements enjoining itinerant asceticism straight from vedic studentship for those who are detached—must refer exclusively to people with attachments. Alternatively, it may intend to point out that debts once assumed must be paid.²⁷

59. It is established, therefore, that a man who is detached may become a wandering ascetic while he is still a student, or from home or the forest. 60. Bṛhaspati accordingly states:

When a man is attached to the Supreme Self and detached from all else, and when he is freed from all desires, he is fit to eat almsfood. [see NPU 139]

25. Only three of the four orders are listed here explicitly. However, the term “*muni*” (“sage”) is ambiguous. It may refer to a householder or a hermit, and here it may perhaps include both.

26. “For him,” that is, for a temporary student who has completed his vedic studies.

27. Yādaḥ’s intention is to show that Manu’s passage must refer to people who are not detached, for otherwise it would be rendered null and void by contradicting vedic texts. Alternatively, Manu may intend to state only that those who have assumed debts must pay them before taking to renunciation. As Vijñāneśvara, another great medieval theologian, points out (commenting on YDh 3.56–57), it is foolish to think that a person is literally born with these debts. One assumes them when one becomes qualified to pay them by undertaking a particular mode of life. Thus, when a man is initiated he assumes the debt to study, as when a man gets married he assumes the debts to procreate and to offer sacrifices. According to this interpretation, Manu’s statement does not contradict other texts that permit a detached man to renounce before he gets married, because before marriage he is not burdened with the debts of procreation and sacrifice. For an extensive discussion of this point, see Olivelle 1993, 177–82, 237–43.

Renunciation When Death Is Imminent

61. Aṅgiras permits itinerant asceticism also for those facing imminent death:²⁸

One who is tired of forest life may depart for the ascetic life after performing the appropriate rite. A twice-born man may renounce if he is afflicted with a disease, if he is detached, or if he has acquired the knowledge of Brahman.

62. A man may depart for the ascetic life while he is vedic student or from home or the forest if he is learned or if he is sick and in great pain.

63. The sage Aṅgiras has ordained renunciation for a man overcome by fear at the sight of a robber, a tiger, and the like or when a dreadful peril is at hand.

64. Śātātapa likewise states:

If a man says, "I have renounced," even with his last breath, he will obtain a reward equal to one thousand sacrifices.

65. Dattātreyā declares:

The practice of carrying the emblem of Viṣṇu is the prerogative of those born from the mouth, and not of those born from the arms or the thighs.²⁹

66. That ends the second chapter, entitled "Age of Eligibility of a Candidate for Itinerant Asceticism," of the *Collection of Ascetic Laws*.

28. The term "ātura" generally refers to a person who is sick or infirm. Within the context of renunciation, however, it acquires a technical meaning and refers to a person who is in danger of imminent death either through sickness or when attacked by robbers or wild animals. A definition of this term is given at Ch. 4.42. For the procedure of renunciation in such an emergency, see Ch. 4.39–47.

29. The reference is to the cosmogonic hymn of the *R̥gveda* (10.90), which portrays the Brahmins as originating from the mouth of the primeval man dismembered in sacrifice and the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas from the arms and the thighs, respectively. The eligibility of non-Brahmins for renunciation is a hotly debated point of medieval Brahmanical theology, a topic, however, that Yādava does not address explicitly.