



[Brahmacharya](#) is a Sanskrit word that is used in several ways. In the context of this blog post, it means taking the vow of celibacy to focus purely on spiritual studies and practices. A Brahmachari is a male (and Brahmacharini a female) who observes sexual abstinence and devotes one's life to surrendering to God. To read a much more detailed description, click on the word "Brahmacharya" above to link with the Wikipedia page.

I am a western yogini who is straddling two worlds. For several years I have been longing to renounce and be a **[sannyasini](#)** (female renunciate, like a nun in western terms), but I have not been able to take the required brahmacharini vow because of the strong seductive pull of the romantic lilas. "Lila" is a Sanskrit word that means "divine play" or "divine sport." All of our human interactions can be viewed as lilas – as "God playing or sporting with God." (For an entertaining read about some of my romantic lilas, in the context of me learning to apply spiritual teachings to break free from an addictive love pattern, check out my spiritual memoir,

[The Rita Lila: A Western Yogini's Journey to Bliss](#)
, by my former pen name, Rita Ann Shankara.)

My spiritual teacher, who is named Basil in my books, left his body in July 2009, at a time when I was already going through some intense heartbreak. That would have been a really good time to take the brahmacharini vow, but I just wasn't ready yet. Instead, despite all that I'd learned on the yoga path, I sought to escape all the grief and pain through some unhealthy romantic lilas. After nearly a full year of that, I realized that I needed to take the brahmacharini vow. For the first time, I knew that I could commit to at least six months, and maybe even twelve months. After taking the brahmacharya vow, I spoke with several women who had taken the same vow in the past, and they had really great experiences with it. Two of the women had started out like me, committing to a small bit of time, and then they just kept extending that time, until each of them ended up being brahmacharinis for 4 years.

Many modern brahmacharis commit to the vow for life, such as Mahatma Gandhi. He embraced the vow permanently at age 38. Swami Vivekananda spoke clearly about the importance of taking the vow for a minimum of 12 years! He said, "That power comes to him who observes unbroken Brahmacharya for a period of twelve years, with the sole object of realizing God. I have practiced that kind of Brahmacharya myself, and so a screen has been removed, as it were, from my brain." (**[Wikipedia, on Brahmacharya](#)** .)

After I took the vow, I felt so great for over one month. I felt incredibly centered in my own being and in my own energies. I experienced many deep states of Bliss. I remembered again and again that the only True Bliss Channel is INSIDE, and I understood clearly that looking for Bliss externally brings inevitable sorrows.

But then, about ten days ago, the sorrow in my heart rose up again. No amount of intellectual rationalizing could stop me from crying. As I cried, I mentally reviewed the situation over and over again: 'I'm in love with someone who I can't be with, and the lilas involved in that situation were draining my energies. I want to surrender to God and give my life to serving others, and that is hard to do when I'm distracted by the magnetic pull of the lilas. I need to remember that I took the last name Shankara in order to be a bride of Shiva. It is my intention to keep my attention on the Highest Light.'

So, even with the brahmacharya vow, I continue to straddle two worlds. Last night I bowed down before my Gurus ([Neem Karoli Baba](#) and [Ammachi](#)), and asked for Acceptance of what IS. I'm a western yogini who aspires to renounce, but clearly isn't ready to do so! I guess I just have to accept that I'm a sannyasini-wannabe!

May all beings everywhere know Peace and Happiness.

Om Shanti (Peace),

Yogini Tejaswini

Photo of Teja in sorrow by Teja Shankara's ten-year-old son.

