



9. Courtesy of Approach and Questioning (32-40)

स्वात्मतत्त्वानुसन्धानं भक्तिरित्यपरे जगुः ।
उक्तसाधनसम्पन्नस्तत्त्वजिज्ञासुरात्मनः ।
उपसीदेद्गुरुं प्राङ्मं यस्माद्बन्धविमोक्षणम् ॥ ३२ ॥

*svātmatattvānusandhānam bhaktirityapare jaguḥ,
uktasādhanasampannastattvajijñāsurātmanah,
upasīdedgurum prājñām yasmādbandhavimokṣāṇam.* (32)

32. Others say that 'bhakti' means a constant enquiry into the real nature of one's own Self one who has the above-mentioned qualifications and is anxious to know the Self must, therefore, devotedly serve a Teacher, well-established in Knowledge, for redeeming himself from bondage.

Continuing the definition of bhakti, Śaṅkara quotes some other great writers who had declared before him that true devotion lies in a constant awareness of one's real nature. There is a subtle difference between the previous definition and the present. The previous definition prescribes the path by which devotion is gained, and this one declares love as its own goal. One is said to be devoted to his profession when he is constantly aware of his duties in his profession. A full-time dedicated life towards any activity is called, even in everyday life, as devotion. Examples of devoted wife, devoted son, devoted husband, devoted student and so on, are not uncommon usages in our language.

To live as the Self and to meet others in life, standing upon this solid foundation of the true nature of the Self, is the culmination of knowledge and this is termed by Śaṅkara as 'bhakti'. That is, he defines bhakti as both the means and the end, love is the means to gain love. The path of the seeker is to love through love.

In thus hinting at the glory of devotion, the author continues prescribing other practices necessary for a seeker of Vedānta during his evolution. A seeker who has the necessary qualifications, in order that he may be redeemed from his inner weaknesses, attachments, animalisms and false values is advised to serve with devotion a Teacher who is well-established in the experience of the Self.

We have already the guru-trick in India (see commentary on verse – 28), which has made a credulous society fall so precipitously into the depths of utter decadence. As without an instructor we cannot learn even a simple thing like opening the door of a car, or typing, or even the art of eating, we cannot deny the need of a Teacher for instructing us to live intelligently. The difficulty nowadays is to find the right type of Teacher whom the scriptures call the Guru. Śaṅkara indicates the qualities of the Guru by the pregnant expression, ‘prājñam’, meaning, one who is established in the intimate experience of the divine Consciousness in himself.

Upāsanā of the Guru is not a mere servile attendance upon him in an attitude of growing disgust or in a mood of melancholy dissatisfaction. The disciple, out of sheer love and reverence for the Master, forgets himself and serves him at all times and in all possible ways thereby the student is made to remember constantly, the glories and the noble qualities of the Master. This constant mental awareness of the ideal through the person of the Guru slowly and steadily raises the moral tempo and ethical goodness in the neophyte who finds himself well-established in his inner purity which would otherwise have taken him painfully long years to develop.

Again, this sort of ‘lovemaking’ with the Guru, not through the heart and its sentiments but through the intellect and its idealisation, makes the disciple efficient to set himself in unison with the Master which is essential for the student if he is to really benefit by the Master’s original ideas, minted in the seer’s own inner experiences. When suggestive words of deep import are given out by a Teacher in his moments of inspiration, the student