



5. Means of Wisdom (8-13)

अतो विमुक्त्यै प्रयतेत विद्वान् संन्यस्तबाहार्थसुखस्पृहः सन् ।
सन्तं महान्तं समुपेत्य देशिकं तेनोपदिष्टार्थसमाहितात्मा ॥ ८ ॥

*ato vimuktyai prayateta vidvān samnyastabāhyārthaśukhaspr̥rahā san,
santam mahāntam samupetya deśikam tenopadiṣṭārthaśamāhitātmā.* (8)

8. Therefore, the learned seeker who is striving to gain this freedom within and who has renounced all his desires for pleasures in the sense objects should duly approach a good and generous Master and must live attuned to the true significances of the words of the Master.

If Śruti declares that a man cannot achieve victory over his lower self and inner weaknesses through actions, however glorious and noble they may be, one is apt to conclude that there is no method by which one can redeem oneself. This despair, perhaps, the Master noted on the face of the disciple and so hastened to console him. We have here a positive declaration of what exactly a seeker should do in order that he may be well-established on the path of Truth.

A seeker in Vedānta is not a nonentity who has walked into the sanctum of a temple or has casually thought of sitting in prayer or visiting a sacred place. These constitute but the very primary steps in spiritual life. A student entering the halls of wisdom, can gain admission only when he has a good education, not only in the marketplace but also in the great works discussing the theory and meaning of life. Hence, the word ‘vidvān’ is used here to indicate a true seeker. When, therefore, a student having a cursory knowledge of life and its meaning realises the futility of running after sense objects, he comes to a certain amount of renunciation of desires and

thus he approaches his Master. Śaṅkara in this verse also lists the special qualifications necessary for a seeker on the spiritual path.

santam – The word ‘santa’ is often used in vernacular to indicate a sannyāsin, but rarely does one realise what exactly the term means. He is a santa who is firmly established in the consciousness of pure Existence (Sat). A Guru must not only be a Man of Realisation and experience but he should be a ‘mahānta’, a large-hearted, sympathetic, kind person. Without these qualifications of the heart, he will not be able to come down from the high seat of his experience and mingle with the imperfect seekers who come to him to fully understand their difficulties on the path. One can be a Guru only if one has the required magnanimity, intimate personal experience of the Divine and great familiarity with scriptures.

A thorough study of the scriptures gives the Teacher the necessary language of expression and also the required intellectual arguments to resolve a student’s doubts into abiding convictions. There are innumerable great santas who have been sitting silently in their caves, brimful with their experiences and yet unable to communicate to the world of seekers. There are, on the other hand, many among us, who have the music in them but no flute to transform it into a melody. Therefore, the word ‘deśikam’ one who is well read in the scriptures is of special importance.

Even if a seeker discovers such a perfect Master, he will not be able to react favourably in the Master’s presence or even to his discussions, if he has not the necessary mental attitude, denoted by the word ‘samupetya’. The manner of approaching a Master is not merely a prescription for a sapless formality; it specifies, mainly, a mental attitude. If we approach a Master with the objective of judging him or evaluating his knowledge, certainly we are not going to benefit. There are some, who approach a Man of Wisdom to make him understand how far they are Men of Wisdom themselves. This exhibitionism of their laboriously gathered second-hand information will choke their hearts and they will not be able to gain anything from the Master’s words which rise from his own