



19. Fascination for Body Criticised (83-86)

अनुक्षणं यत्परिहृत्य कृत्यम् अनाद्यविद्याकृतबन्धमोक्षणम् ।
देहः परार्थोऽयमसुष्य पोषणे यः सज्जते स स्वमनेन हन्ति ॥ ८३ ॥

*anukṣaṇam yaṭparihṛtya kṛtyam anādyavidyākṛtabandhamokṣaṇam,
dehaḥ parārtha'�amamuṣya poṣane yaḥ sajjate sa svamanena hanti.* (83)

83. *This body is essentially an instrument for realising the Paramātman. He who does not constantly use it for liberating himself from the bondage born of beginningless ignorance but struggles to nourish it, is destroying himself.*

Every physical sheath, be it in the human, plant or animal life, is an instrument for its ‘mind and intellect’ to eke out from the world of situations a definite quota of experiences. The body provides for the time being, as it were, a locus for the mind and intellect to function from. Identifying one’s Self with the body because of ignorance, one may behave as if one was the doer and the enjoyer and use the physical body to its own damnation.

A drunken driver, identifying himself with his drunken hallucinations, may use his vehicle to drive recklessly and crash into a wayside tree. The very same physical body could be made use of properly by a discriminating intellect when it serves the ego as a vehicle to take it to its supreme goal. A sensible driver with his wits about him can drive his vehicle easily with speed and comfort, straight to his destination.

Śaṅkara thus reminds the students that the body is not meant merely for gross activities and indulgence in sensuous enjoyments but having experienced the imperfections of the world, it is also meant for striving hard for self redemption. Having gained this

wondrous instrument, if a person does not make use of it properly, he is, in effect, committing suicide.

The meaning of the verse pivots around the crucial word, ‘parārthah’. This word can be milked to yield two different and distinct meanings of which the nobler and more spiritual has already been discussed. From the same word we can coax out another meaning, ‘an object that is meant for others to enjoy’, is also parārthah. In this sense, we get in the single term, a beautiful summary of the biography of the body.

In the womb the body grew, nourished by the mother’s assimilated food; the body born in the world was fed by the milk of the mother and it grew to childhood. Till its death it is being fed, from within and without, with various nutritive diets and oil massages. But after death the very same body, so laboriously tended, so carefully nourished, so lovingly fattened, becomes a substantial meal for the worms of the earth, if it is lucky to be buried deep enough! Else it becomes food for the wolves and dogs, the vultures and crows. This is a timely reminder for discriminative spiritual students to realise the futility of paying court to their bodies and living a life dedicated to the health and comforts of this disgusting bundle of matter.



शरीरपोषणार्थी सन् य आत्मानं दिक्षते ।
ग्राहं दारुधिया धृत्वा नदीं तर्तुं स गच्छति ॥ ८४ ॥

*śarīrapoṣaṇārthī san ya ātmānam didṛkṣate,
grāham dārudhiyā dhṛtvā nadīm tartum sa gacchati. (84)*

84. Whoever seeks to rediscover the Self by devoting himself to the care of the body is like one who proceeds to cross a river, holding on to a shark which one has mistaken for a log of wood.

Śaṅkara here strikingly brings out how dangerous and suicidal is the attempt of the individual to perfect himself through physical