

CHAPTER – 4

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR

A full-scale philosophical system is necessary to engage with the problems in the following areas: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and theory of value, logic, and philosophical method.³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, above all, philosophy is an intellectual quest. It aims at the inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. The philosophy of realism is an attempt to understand the relationship between man and the world and as well as with the ultimate reality. On the other hand, as Rādhākṛṣṇan says, “philosophy in India is essentially spiritual.”³⁰⁸ In this manner, philosophy is a quest for freedom and the highest well-being, based on faith in the ideal, which is realizable through the practice of certain disciplines. Thus, the belief in Parabrahman as the ultimate reality, faith in Parabrahman to redeem one’s self from bondage, trust in the efficiency of the means and disciplines undertaken to realize the highest goal of freedom and the inspiring examples of those who have attained freedom are the chief marks of Indian Vedic *Darśana*.

For Svāminārāyaṇa, philosophy and spirituality are two sides of the same coin. Mere intellectual apprehension without its efficacy and application in life is useless and unproductive. It is not worth the trouble if it does not help in reaching the goal it talks of. Therefore, philosophy must sub-serve the ultimate spiritual goal of attaining freedom; and this spirituality with a philosophical basis to satisfy intellectual quests and should become a positive rational movement. So, instead of being an academic activity of intellectual discussion concerning metaphysical reals, *Svāminārāyaṇa sādhanā* is also a profound spiritual activity directed towards the

³⁰⁷Potter Karl H., The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Metaphysics and Epistemology_ The Tradition of *Nyaya-Vaisesika* up to Gangesa, Motilal Banarasidas, 1977

³⁰⁸ Rādhākṛṣṇan S., Indian Philosophy-1, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, p.24

realization of the goal of freedom, the fruit (*phala*) of all cognitive-affective-conative labor. Therefore, *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta begins with philosophical inquiry, which takes into account ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and culminates in practical spirituality aiming at realization of the goal of freedom in one's life time. Consequently, it discusses in detail the means (spiritual endeavor) to attain the goal (*sāadhanā-vicāra*) and the nature and kind of *mokṣa* (*phalavicāra*).

1. Spiritual Endeavor (*Sāadhanā*)

We already discussed that the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School accepts the existence of five eternally ontological entities.³⁰⁹ Among this, the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are bound by *māyā*. By practicing spiritual endeavors and through the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman, *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are able to free themselves from *māyā* and attain utmost *mokṣa*. All the efforts that an aspirant does by thought, word and deed to achieve the final goal of his life is called *sāadhanā* or disciplined and dedicated spiritual endeavor. After mentioning the importance of *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, Bhadreśadāsa elaborates:

कार्या तत्रैव भक्त्या प्रकटहरिसुधीर्दिव्यभावं निधाय ।

सेव्यो ब्रह्मस्थदेवो भवभयतरणे स्वामिनारायणोयम् ॥ SSSK-M p.306 ॥

“To overcome and become free from the fear of *māyic samsāra*, one should worship the manifest *Svāminārāyaṇa*, who resides within the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru with intense divinity.” The decisive aim of life is the ultimate liberation of one's *ātman* and attainment of Parabrahman. To accomplish this ultimate aim of life, an aspirant performs spiritual endeavors according to the precepts of the manifest form of Parabrahman.³¹⁰

The *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedanta aims to give an articulate system of philosophy combined with the tradition which satisfies aspirants to sustain their

³⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/7, p.36; Vac. Gadh. 3/10, p.599

³¹⁰ Brahmadarśana Sādhu, *Brahmavidyāno Rājamārga-2*, *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahamadābāda, p.1

faith and attain the spiritual goal. This goal can be realized during one's life-time through the Guru-directed discipline enlivened and enlightened by *brahmavidyā*. *Brahmavidyā* encompasses dutifulness (*dharma*), (*vairāgya*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotion (*bhakti*), which is crowned by the grace of Parabrahman earned through the devotion in its truly cognitive spirit.³¹¹

Moreover, Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy is realistic. In it, man, the world, and Parabrahman are all real. Man's stance on life and the world is real. The values, spiritual endeavor, bondage, and liberation are real. The rejection of these things would downgrade the whole spiritual efforts into a sort of mock-battle. The degrading of all these would lead to spiritual anarchy of virtues and values; and would cause apathy, inactivism, and a loss of inspiration and enthusiasm for self-ascend and freedom. Svāminārāyaṇa, therefore, holds that without assiduous spiritual endeavor (*sādhanā*), the *jīvas* cannot attain the highest goal.³¹² *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophy is centralized to Parabrahman, yet it emphasizes on spiritual endeavor. Therefore it includes '*puruṣārtha śāstra*' (pathway of endeavor to spiritual goal) in addition to being '*adhyātma-śāstra*' (the science of metaphysics) and '*pramāṇa-śāstra*' (the science of epistemology). It elaborately deliberates the *sādhanā- mārga*, the pathway to Parabrahman realization. The spiritual regulation, therefore, includes knowledge of reality, the goal, and the means. The supreme goal to be realized is *mokṣa*, and thus, also called '*paramapada*'. This designation signifies the attainment of communion with the Parabrahman as well His supreme abode.³¹³

Parabrahman is both the goal and the means. He is the Summum Bonum. He is the first and final reality without whom no *devas* (*iśvaras*), no worlds, no selves, and

³¹¹ SSSK-366, 387

³¹² Vac. Sar. 11

³¹³ SV 1/301

no spiritual efforts can ever be considered. *Karma* can find its fruition because He maintains the law of causation. Impartiality and retribution are there because He reigns supreme as the moral governor. He perceives to it that fortune is determined according to deeds. By His will and power, the values are preserved. Therefore, Parabrahman, in His plenitude with infinite bliss, glory, and power, is the highest goal for all seekers.³¹⁴ Additionally, Akṣarabrahman, by Parabrahman's eternal will, is the unavoidable means to attaining Parabrahman for all seekers.³¹⁵ In this chapter, we will be exclusively analyzing the *Svāminārāyaṇa sādhanā* explored in the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* in light of the *Vacanāmṛta*.

2. Grace and Self-Effort

What role does self-effort play and what is the significance of Parabrahman's grace to attain the ultimate spiritual goal? Or do both have equal weightage? These are some of the most discussed questions in the Indian Vedanta tradition. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, both factors are necessary to attain liberation. Yet, each factor has a perfect proportion and essential role, which are elaborated in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Firstly, *Svāminārāyaṇa* chides those who rely on their endeavors to achieve liberation while discounting the absolute need and power of Parabrahman. Evoking the classical imagery of crossing the ocean of life and death, *Svāminārāyaṇa* explains: "A person without such a resolute conviction of Parabrahman's nature attempts to attain liberation using the strength of his own endeavors, but he does not strive for it by relying on the grace of Parabrahman. Such a senseless person is as stupid as someone wishing to cross the ocean by his own efforts without the aid of a ship. On the other hand, one who wishes for liberation through the grace of Parabrahman is wise, like one who wishes to cross the ocean by traveling in a ship." (Vac. Gadh. 1/37, p.94)

³¹⁴ Brahmadarśana Sādhu, *Vacanāmṛta Rahashya- 2, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahamadābāda, 2004, pp.20-21

³¹⁴ SSSK-366, 387

³¹⁵ SSSK- 73

On the other hand, Svāminārāyaṇa highlights personal endeavor or self-effort as well: “Therefore, the personal endeavor itself is the greatest of all spiritual endeavors for attaining liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/12, p. 416). Now we will elaborately analyze the roles that each factor plays in attaining liberation. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, with the inspiration of the Guru, when the aspirant’s spiritual endeavor (*sādhanā*) reaches its acme of performance, it sketches a quicker answer from Parabrahman and His ensuing grace. He sprinkles His grace, draws a seeker closer to Him, uplifts him to the height of perfection and blesses him with the place in His divine abode. Parabrahman is the beginning and Parabrahman is the end of all endeavors. He is both an indispensable and sufficient means to realize the highest goal. Parabrahman’s grace motivates a seeker to tread the path of perfection, grants the necessary strength needed to perform spiritual endeavors, and provides inspiration in each stage. Bhadreśadāsa cites:

दयार्णवः कृपासाध्यः प्रसादात् सुलभा कृपा।

ब्रह्मभावात् प्रसीदेच्च ह्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमः॥SSSK 366॥

“Parabrahman is an ocean of compassion and attainable through His grace. His grace is easily attainable through his favor. Puruṣottama, who is accompanied with Akṣara, is pleased through *brahmabhāva*.” To remind the power of Parabrahman’s grace, the *Śruti* reveals:³¹⁶ “Paramātman cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing (i.e., learning). He is attained only by the one whom the Paramātman chooses. To such a one, the Paramātman reveals his own form.” (MU 3/2/3, KU 2/23). When elaborating on the term ‘chooses’ (*vrnute*).

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “यं मुमुक्षुं वृणुते स्वानुग्रहेन स्वीकरोति, यस्मिन् प्रसन्नो भवति इति यावत्, तेनैव परमात्मानुगृहीतेन कृपापात्रेण भक्तेन एषः परमात्मा लभ्यः साक्षात्कर्तुं शक्यः।” (KUSB 2/23, pp.118-119) “Of the worshipper who is dedicated solely to Him (*svaikanistha upāsaka*). Only to such

³¹⁶ Here, *ātman* term is used for *Paramātmana*

a vessel of Parabrahman's grace (*Parāmātmakspābhājana*) does he become realizable (*labhya*) and reveals himself.” Here, he describes Parabrahman as ‘an ocean of great compassion (*parāmadayāsāgara*) and a treasure of true love and grace (*kṛpānidhi*).” Bhadreśadāsa adds at KU 2/23 that preachings, intellectual power, and scriptural learning represent all endeavors that can be performed in an attempt to reach Parabrahman. They alone are inadequate. Parabrahman, eventually remains ‘*kṛpā sādhya*’, attainable by grace alone.³¹⁷

Bhadreśadāsa is cautious, however, of not forcefully pitting human effort against divine grace. In adding the word ‘*kevala*’ his comment above, he sheds light on that while all endeavors are adequate in realizing Parabrahman, they are insufficient alone. “They can still be effective in pleasing Parabrahman, who will then bequeath his liberating grace upon his beloved devotee. Convincingly, we can say that Parabrahman is pleased with the seeker's devout, sincere and persistent effort or striving. Parabrahman Himself remains infinitely beyond the reach of those actions. So, Parabrahman's grace is absolutely indispensable, useless either, even though they can only please Parabrahman and fulfill your endeavors through his grace.”³¹⁸

So, “परमात्मा न स्वतःकल्पितसाधनसाध्योपि तु तत्कृपैकसाध्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्” (MUSB 3/2/3, p.293) “Parabrahman is not realized by self-imagined means but by only His grace. This is the principle.” It is noteworthy that if there are any efforts that Bhadreśadāsa does dismiss as utterly pointless, they are the ‘self-imagined means’ (*Svataḥkalpitasāadhanā*) of a person who does not follow the authoritative instructions enjoined in revealed texts or by the Guru.

³¹⁷ KUSB 2/23, p.119

³¹⁸ KUSB 2/24, p.120

These qualifications are indispensable because in the subsequent verse of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: “Paramātman cannot be attained by one who is weak, nor by inadvertency, nor by austerities marked without authoritative endorsement.” It then concludes: “But the knower of *brahmadevyā* who strives by these means [i.e., learning, austerities, etc.] attains this Paramātman and enters Brahmadhāma. (MU 3/2/4) In consequence, when these same efforts - including those mentioned in MU 3/2/3 and all others are informed by correct philosophical knowledge, practiced according to the calling and guidance of the Guru and directed solely to pleasing Parabrahman, they can indeed play some useful part in fortifying liberation by Parabrahman’s grace.” (MU 3/2/3)

In this fashion, Parabrahman showers his grace upon whomsoever He pleases. Thus, even if Parabrahman’s grace is available entirely and equally for everyone, like the rain that showers upon the earth, it is only those who are adequate ‘vessels’ who can receive that grace and make use of it. Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on this in Vac. Sār.11. When Muktānanda Svāmi asks, “Personal endeavor is declared in the scriptures, but how much is actually achieved by personal endeavor and how much is achieved by Parabrahman’s grace?” Svāminārāyaṇa remarkably describes a worthy recipient of Parabrahman’s grace. Such a person, he illuminates, strictly observes *dhārmika* disciplines such as “nonviolence and eightfold *brahmacharya*, has an absolutely firm realization of him/herself as the *ātman*, is firmly detached from worldly pleasures and has extreme and enduring devotional faith. These four aspects of *sādhanā* correspond to what is traditionally termed within *Svāminārāyaṇa* texts as *dharma* (observance of scriptural injunctions), *jñāna* (*ātman*-Paramātman realization) (not to be confused with the broader, more philosophical knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman), *vairāgya* (detachment) and *bhakti* (devotion). Cooperatively, they are called ‘*Ekāntika Dharma*’ or ‘*Bhāgavata Dharma*’, which we will learn further is one of the reasons for

Parabrahman's manifestation on earth,"³¹⁹ and which features repeatedly in the *Vacanāmṛta* and *Svāmīni Vāto* as a milieu for pleasing Parabrahman.³²⁰ In Vac. Sār. 11, Svāminārāyaṇa is sure to add that all of these endeavors should be enjoined by the words of a true Guru and the scriptures, before concluding he says: "Parabrahman's grace is only bestowed upon one who has such characteristics." (Vac. Sār. 11, p.228)

Possibly sensing the scale of the task of perfectly cultivating these characteristics, Nityānanda Svāmi firstly acknowledges Svāminārāyaṇa's theme but then instantly asks that what becomes of one who has some deficiency in cultivating these characteristics? Svāminārāyaṇa straightforwardly replies that then he does not attain ultimate liberation, i.e. Parabrahman's Akṣaradhāma. Instead, he attains some other abode of Parabrahman.³²¹ Here, Svāminārāyaṇa refers to the abodes of other *avatāras* and paradisiacal realms of the *devas*, which, in comparison to Akṣaradhāma as good is extremely inferior. After further elaboration, Svāminārāyaṇa concludes by reiterating his answer, this time with added force: "Hence, whether it takes one life or innumerable lives, only when one develops the previously described characteristics and becomes extremely free of worldly desires, does one become a worthy vessel of receiving Parabrahman's grace, and only then will one attain ultimate liberation. Without it, one will definitely not attain it." (Vac. Sār. 11, p.228)

In this way, Svāminārāyaṇa candidly mentions that liberation is a result of Parabrahman's grace only, and that spiritual endeavor is required to receive and apply that liberating grace. BGSB echoes: "विधेयात्मा विधेयः शास्त्रगुर्विशवर्ती आत्मा यस्यास्वच्छन्दाचारः प्रसादं गुरुहर्यनुग्रहम् अधिगच्छति प्राप्नोति" (BGSB 2/64, p.64) "A devotee who treads

³¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/46, Gadh. 3/21

³²⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/21, SV 3/25

³²¹ Vac. Sār. 11

the path of righteousness shown by the scriptures and the Guru will attain the grace of Parabrahman and the Guru.” Moreover, the very next verse of the BG declares the benefit of this grace: “all the miseries and problems of that devotee are eliminated and he can engross freely in the form of Parabrahman.”³²² In this manner, the BG invariably demonstrates the micro role of both factors.³²³ The BSSB also highlights this fact.³²⁴

Now, we can figure a connection between the grace and the efforts by this example:

“परमात्मकृपयैव तदुपाकस्य स्वाभीप्सितसकलसाधनोद्योगसंभवात्तदृते केवलानां साधनानामकिञ्चित्करत्वात् सच्छास्त्रप्रतिपादिततदलौकिकमाहात्म्यानुसन्धानलक्षणस्तदभिसंबन्धः सर्वत्र साधनेषु नियमेन उपसंहार्य इति भावः”(BSSB 3/3/55, p.351) “Only by the immense grace of Parabrahman, an aspirant can accomplish his spiritual endeavors, without Him, all the spiritual efforts are worthless, so one must add the *brahmabhāva* in his spiritual efforts in order to make them fruitful, which are asserted in the scriptures.” At this stage, an important question is rising: in which form Parabrahman exhibits this grace? Bhadrēśadāsa replies while commentating on KU 2/23, the same verse found in MU 3/2/3 cited above. The answer of this question can be given on the basis of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* that the form of Paramātman’s grace is like by seeing his devotee sincerely endeavoring by several means to please him, “Parabrahman, the ocean of grace that He is, gifts that devotee access to the profound association of the Akṣarabrahman Guru – who is his Paramātman’s supreme worshipper, who has the greatest affection for Him, who eternally has a complete and perfect realization of Him, and who can be regarded as His own form - so that his devotee can easily realize him Paramātman.” Then, by listening, reflecting, etc. upon the Guru’s teachings, and serving him with the belief that he is the very form of Parabrahman - as directed by

³²² BGSB 2/65; p.64

³²³ BG 18/56,58,62,73,75

³²⁴ “प्रत्यक्षब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुदृढतमप्रसंगोपदेशाभिर्ब्रह्मात्मैक्यं संपाद्य प्रत्यक्षपरमात्मसमाराधान लक्षणभक्तावनुष्ठितायां तस्यैवानुग्रहतस्त्विद्व्यस्वरूपं साक्षात्क्रियते” (BSSB 3/2/23, p.300)

such statements as “who has the highest devotion to Parabrahman and, as he does to Parabrahman, also to the Guru (SU 6/23),” etc. – that devotee, having developed oneness with his self and Brahman and having received the grace of Parabrahman, realizes Paramātman. (KU 2/23) In this way, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School explicitly deciphers the role of Parabrahman’s grace and personal endeavors.

3. *Brahmavidyā*

People perform various spiritual endeavors in order to attain liberation. Out of them, who have taken shelter at the feet of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, learn the way to earn the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman. Consequently, their *sādhana* becomes easy and fruitful. For this process, one must understand the nature of these two eternal ontological entities. In short, the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is inevitable to attain ultimate liberation. In the general case, *vidyā* means knowledge. Here, Brahman indicates both Brahman; Brahman and Parabrahman.³²⁵ As a result, *brahmavidyā* encompasses the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman. Now we analyze how this knowledge results in the attainment of liberation.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains it in *Vac. Gadh. 2/3*, using '*brahmajñāna*' for *brahmavidyā*: “Brahman is the cause and support of all, including Prakṛti-Purusha, etc., and pervades everything by its *antaryāmīn* powers... Parabrahman, that is Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa, is distinct from that Brahman, and the supporter and inspirer of Brahman. With such understanding, one should cultivate oneness between one’s *jivātman* and that Brahman and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him. With such understanding, *brahmajñāna* also becomes a clear path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment.” (*Vac. Gadh. 2/3*, pp.390-391)

³²⁵ BSSB 1/1/1, p.3

Similarly, the MU defines *brahmavidyā*: “येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्” (MU 1/2/13) “By which Akṣara and Puruṣottama are truly known is called *brahmavidyā*.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments on this verse: “इत्थमिह 'येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद' इत्यक्षरशब्देनाऽक्षरब्रह्माख्यं परमात्मभिन्नं तन्मात्रन्यूनं दिव्यतत्त्वं, पुरुषशब्देन च तदक्षरादपि परभूतं परब्रह्माख्यं दिव्यतत्त्वं ब्रह्मविद्याघटकतया पृथक् पृथक् विज्ञातव्यत्वेन प्रस्थाप्य तद्विव्यतत्त्वद्वयविषयाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्त एव ब्रह्मविद्यारूपेण प्रस्थापितः।” (MUSB 1/2/13, p.257)

“Thus, by the revelation of this *mantra*, ‘Akṣara’ refers to the divine entity Akṣarabrahman, who is ontologically distinct from and inferior only to Paramātman. The term *puruṣa* on the other hand, refers to the divine entity Parabrahman, who is superior even to Akṣara. By identifying *brahmavidyā* as the means towards realizing these two ontologically distinct entities, the *Akṣarapuruṣottama* Doctrine is understood as an expression of *brahmavidyā*.” In this central announcement, Bhadrēśadāsa aims to show the cosmic role of Akṣarabrahman, its ontological distinction from and sub-ordination to Parabrahman, and also the *ātman*’s need for Akṣarabrahman to properly worship Parabrahman all of which constitute *brahmajñāna brahmavidyā*, or we might call ultimate knowledge.

In the previous chapter, we analyzed the *ātman*’s *karmika* dilemma - incessantly journeying through the cycle of births and deaths - and its cause as ignorance in the form of *māyā*. To disperse this shroud of dark ignorance and break free from this transmigratory cycle, *brahmavidyā* plays a vital role. *Vedāntic* texts unambiguously state: “By knowledge, one attains and enjoys the immortal state.”³²⁶ More specifically, when we analyze the essential role of philosophical knowledge in attaining to liberation from *samsāra*, the *Vacanāmṛta* also enunciates clearly about the both from *śāstric* statements cited in its discourse, such as “There is no liberation

³²⁶ KeU 2/4, IU 11

without knowledge” (*Hiranyakeśīyaśākhāśruti*)³²⁷ and “the knowledge of Parabrahman’s nature and the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness are the two extraordinary means to liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/57, p.135)

The *Shrutis* state: “Only by knowing Parabrahman does one pass beyond death; there is no other path for attaining liberation.” (SU 3/8) Likewise, many other scriptures declare the knowledge of Parabrahman as the sole means for liberation. “The most accurate description of His immeasurable and unfathomable greatness is that Parabrahman is greater than Akṣarabrahman” (MU 2/1/2). This being so, we cannot really begin to know Parabrahman without first fully knowing Akṣarabrahman, who also reveals Parabrahman’s greatness. Similarly, if knowing Parabrahman is absolutely essential for liberation, and the best that can be said about Him is that He transcends Akṣarabrahman, it follows that knowing Akṣarabrahman is also absolutely fundamental to securing ultimate liberation.

3.1 Knowledge for Information and Knowledge for Transformation

Knowledge of worldly affairs and knowledge of the ultimate reality sound like synonyms, but they are not. Though they all refer to the mind and an accumulation of thoughts and experiences, they have a vast difference in the essence of their meanings and their applications in our life. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and data that we have acquired through study, research, investigation, observation, or experience, being aware of something and having information. Knowledge is knowing which things, practices, people, and pleasures make us happy. Moreover, those who possess this type of knowledge may not have touched the glory of Parabrahman and the scriptures.³²⁸

³²⁷ Vac. Loya 7

³²⁸ Vac. Var. 11, p.552, Vac. Gadh. 1/50

Knowledge of ultimate spirituality which is sometimes referred to as wisdom, is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to our life. It's the ability to apply that knowledge to the greater scheme of life. It's also deeper; knowing the meaning or reason, knowing why something is, and what it means to our life. Wisdom is knowing that while those things may bring us pleasure, happiness is not derived from things or situations or people. It is an understanding that happiness comes from within. One acquires knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman in two ways. When an aspirant is in *sādhanaśā* (primely spiritual state), whatever he knows or feels is all informative knowledge. Even one who is the master of all Vedic texts and a winner of all philosophical debates still has primary knowledge. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* calls it *aparā vidyā*.³²⁹ It is utterly basic and primary knowledge. It helps the aspirant to earn name, fame, bread and butter. It deals with this physical body and the physical world but it has nothing to do with ultimate spirituality. However, it is still significant because for a true aspirant; it paves the way to the ultimate knowledge, which is known as *parā vidyā*.³³⁰

Parāvidyā, as Bhadreśadāsa explains, is the *vidyā* by which a spiritual aspirant becomes *brahmarūpa*- attains a state like that of Akṣarabrahman.³³¹ People call it wisdom as well. This knowledge is accomplished through the grace of Parabrahman and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. In this knowledge, the aspirant experiences oneness with Brahman. It is the *siddhāśā* (ultimate spiritual state). In this state, he experiences and enjoys the ultimate knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman. That is why it is identified as transformative knowledge. *Aparā vidyā* and *parā vidyā* have no quarrel between them. Though *parā vidyā* is ultimate knowledge, both are valuable and both have a place in our lives. The difficulty lies in the fact that many

³²⁹ MU 1/1/4-5

³³⁰ MU 1/1/4-5

³³¹ MUSB 1/1/5, p.237

of us are unclear as to their differences, often perceiving the terms and their application to be interchangeable. Being clear and consciously aware of how our minds are engaged may be important to get the most out of them. While acquiring and applying information is valuable in and of itself, we also need to distill and judge that information and ultimately find the deeper meaning and relevance to the whole of our lives. Bhadrēśādāsa describes the specific role of each knowledge by commenting them on MU: “*Aparā vidyā* provides supporting information for the explanation of *parā vidyā*.”³³² Furthermore, when an aspirant wants to attain this *parā vidyā*, he must first imbibe *brahmabhāva*.

4. *Brahmabhāva*

Brahmabhāva is the most prominent spiritual endeavor in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition. *Brahmabhāva* encompasses all spiritual endeavors. Bhadrēśādāsa cites:

यद्वैभवात् परा शान्तिः कर्माऽलेपोऽप्यवाप्यते। सुकरः कर्मयोगश्च देहभावनिवारणा॥

स्वजने ममताऽभावः स्त्रीविषयादिनाशनम्। परभक्त्यधिकारित्वं जीवन्मुक्त्यनुभावनम्॥

दिव्यभावोऽक्षरप्राप्तिरित्यादि सहजं भवेत्। इहोच्यते ब्रह्मभावो ब्रह्मसङ्गप्रभावितः॥SSS p.307॥

“Upon attaining *brahmabhāva* through the association of Brahman (Guru), an aspirant attains ultimate peace. The bondage of *karma* and the affection towards his body dissolve. *Karmayoga* becomes easy. The sense of I-ness, my-ness, and attraction towards the opposite gender are removed. He attains the ability for ultimate devotion and experiences divinity and the abode of Parabrahman in this very life.” What exactly is this *brahmabhāva*? Bhadrēśādāsa answers the question in the SSS: *Brahmabhāva* means to acquire oneness with Brahman. One who attains this *brahmabhāva* state is identified as being *brahmarūpa*. Here oneness means to acquire the virtues of Brahman, which are indispensable for attaining ultimate liberation.³³³ Svāminārāyaṇa invariably states the importance of *brahmabhāva*: For utmost devotion - “Only one who is *brahmarūpa* has the right to

³³² MUSB 1/1/5, p.235

³³³ SSS, p.308

offer *bhakti* to Puruṣottama.”(Vac. Loya. 7, p.303) To attain the highest level of *nirvikalpa* faith- “One possessing the highest level of ‘*nirvikalpa* faith’ realizes that countless millions of *brahmāndas*, each encircled by the eight barriers, appear like mere atoms before Akṣara. Such is the greatness of Akṣara, the abode of Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa. One who worships Puruṣottama realizing oneself to be *akṣararup* can be said to possess the highest level of ‘*nirvikalpa* faith.” (Vac. Loya. 7, p.324) Moreover, to become an *ekāntik bhakta* (Vac. Gadh. 1/11), to procure firm conviction of Parabrahman (Vac. Sār. 12), to attain wisdom (Vac. Gadh. 1/56), to achieve *nirvikalpa samādhi* (Vac. Gadh. 1/40), to accomplish *yogayajna* (Vac. Gadh. 2/8), to eradicate *māyic* bondage (Vac. Gadh. 2/30) etc., *brahmabhāva* is indispensable.

4.1 Oneness with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru³³⁴

As we began this chapter, we understood that liberation is a situation of complete spiritual purity and clarity in which the *ātman* becomes *brahmarūpa* - like Brahman. This not only results in eliminating *māyic* impurities born of a material self-misunderstanding but, more positively, acquiring the qualities of Akṣarabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa makes clear in the Vac. how both are made possible. The *jīva*, however, has united with the body, the senses, and the sense-objects. As a result of this indecorous association, the *jīva* has become one with the body, senses, etc. After forsaking their association, the *jīva* realizes: “My self is Brahman, which transcends and is free from *māyā*. If one amalgamated with Brahman through continuous contemplation in this manner, the *jīva* attains the virtues of Brahman....The *jīva* remains continuously attached to *māyā* ... Only when one continuously associates with Brahman, one’s inspirer, through contemplation - as previously described - is that attachment broken.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p. 460) This

³³⁴ We are using G capital for Akṣarabrahman (*Brahmasvarūpa*) Guru.

constant contemplation³³⁵ on the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru³³⁶ as one's true self is the ultimate *sādhanā*.

Guṇātītānanda Svāmi explicates in SV 2/41 on why this association leads to acquiring the qualities of Akṣarabrahman, i.e., becoming *brahmarūpa*: “First, one should attach one's *jīva* to the *ekāntika sādhu*. Because that *sādhu* is absorbed in Parabrahman, he possesses the qualities of Parabrahman. Hence, the *sādhu*'s qualities are imbibed by whoever associates with the *ekāntika sādhu*.” Then stressing the absolute vitality of this form of association with the Guru, he ends the discourse with the following statement: “Whether one applies this method today or after a thousand lives, ultimately, there is no alternative but to apply it.”³³⁷ Correspondingly, the *Upaniṣads* also provide statements regarding joining one's self with Akṣarabrahman. For instance, the BU 1/4/10 proclaims ‘*Aham brahma'smi*’ (I am Brahman).

Bhadreśādāsa comments: “स्वात्मनः सर्वशरीरिभूतेनाक्षरब्रह्मणैक्येनानुसन्धानमकरोद् इति भावः।” (BUSB 1/4/10, p.49) “I am cultivating myself with Akṣarabrahman which is the *śarīrī* (controller) of all being.” Bhadreśādāsa draws our attention that oneness with Guru is a significant spiritual endeavor. Especially in the *Upaniṣads*, we find actual teachings to know or meditate on that Brahman as one's own self (e.g., TU 2/5/1, MU 2/2/5, and MU 2/2/6). One such series of teachings can be found figuratively in MU 2/2/4, where one is called upon to ‘target’ Akṣarabrahman with one's *ātman*, the arrow, and ‘pierce it unflinchingly’. Like an arrow that becomes one with its target, so, in the same fashion, the aspirant of liberation makes the Guru his/her center and becomes one with him (*śaravat tanmayo bhavet*). It's a deep explanation

³³⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/31

³³⁶ In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Tradition the Guru is one of the four form of Akṣarabrahman (Vac. Gadh. 1/63; MU 2/1/1). It incarnates on earth to grant liberation to the countless jivas and *ishvaras* (Vac. Gadh. 1/27,54; KU 3/2, MU 2/2/5). Moreover, Parabrahman manifests through the Guru (Vac. Gadh. 1/27, 3/26, Var.19; KeU 2/4).

³³⁷ SV 2/41

of what the earlier verse in MU 2/2/3 had said, where the oneness is explained as taking on aspects of the Guru's nature (*tadbhāva*). Bhadreśadāsa describes this as a form of awareness (*anusandhāna*), contemplation (*anucintana*) and engrossment (*sanlagnatā*).

The BG tells the same story. To attain *brahmabhāva* is the most important part of the BG. Right from the second chapter of the BG, this incumbent spiritual flow proceeds unto the last chapter. After describing the attributes of an enlightened person, it reveals: “एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः” (BG 2/72) “Arjuna, this is the *Brāhmic* state. Attaining this state, one is no longer confused. Gaining this state, even at the end of one's life, a person attains the goal of human life and becomes one with Akṣarabrahman.”

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “ब्राह्मी ब्रह्मणः इयमिति ब्राह्मी साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मसंबन्धिनीति यावद् तदक्षरब्रह्मवरूपगुरुमननप्रकर्षलभ्या स्वात्मानस्तदक्षरब्रह्मगुणसाधार्म्यलक्षणतद्भावरूपापरमात्मोपासनपरमानुकूला स्थितिः।” (BGSB 2/72, p.68) “*Brāhmic* is related to Akṣarabrahman, the great glorified state which is attained through Akṣarabrahman. An aspirant attains this state by constant and unwavering thinking of the Akṣarabrahman Guru; then, he imbibes the qualities of that Brahman through which he can engross in the utmost devotion of Parabrahman.” This principle is seen in every chapter of the BG while discussing the various topics: To achieve *karma yoga* (3/30, 4/25), to attain *jīvanmukti* (liberation while living on earth) (5/19, 20, 21); to become a *yogi* (6/8, 9, 27, 28); to become a *jnāni* (7/17,18); to know the process of the association with Brahman (8/13); to accomplish the *jnānyajna* (9/15); to gain *adhyātmavidyā* (10/32); to exposed the concealed knowledge (11/1); to attain Parabrahman (12/5); to eradicate the obstacles hindering perfect devotion (13/11) to become *gunātita* (14/26); to acquire a place in Akṣaradhām(15/5); to highlight the divine qualities (16/1); to express the *Oṅakāra* (17/24) and the acme narration of eighteenth chapter: “Giving up body-consciousness, violence, pride, lust, anger, and desire for possession; free

from the feeling of ‘I and my’, and peaceful; one becomes fit for attaining oneness with Brahman.” (18/53) The peaceful one who is absorbed in Akṣarabrahman neither grieves nor desires. He becomes *brahmarūpa* and obtains the highest devotion for Parabrahman.” (18/54)

In the various documented discourses, Svāminārāyaṇa establishes this fact. Svāminārāyaṇa puts forward: “One should develop a conviction of one’s *ātman* as follows: One develops *ātmabuddhi* with the *santa* who has attained the manifest form of Parabrahman, and one should believe only that *santa* to be one’s self.” (Vac. Jet. 1, p.691). As far as the *Brahmasūtra* is concerned, the term ‘*ātmabuddhi*’, means oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is described explicitly there. This also helps explain how the association with the Guru is a form of loving devotion. This is found in the *Ātmagrhyadhikarana* (BS 3/3/15-18), where Bhadreśadāsa links ‘*grhiti*’ literally, ‘acceptance’ to ‘*buddhi*’ (perception), thus centering the discussion on *ātmabuddhi*. He eulogizes such Guru-centered self-perception as the best and most key means to serving Parabrahman.³³⁸

Bhadreśadāsa highlights: “ब्रह्मात्मैक्यलक्षणया अस्य आत्मगृहितीरेव परमात्मोपासनसाधनेषु श्रेष्ठत्वादित्यर्थः।” (BSSB 3/3/15, p.324) “*Ātmagrīhiti*, which is known as the firm oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is the most prominent spiritual endeavor of all spiritual endeavors to complete *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman.” In this way, in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta oneness with Guru is the most prominent spiritual endeavor.

5. The Role of the Guru in *Sādhana*

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरो।

गुरुः साक्षात्परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः॥

³³⁸ BSSB 3/3/15-18, pp.323-326

The Guru-*Gītā* adorns the Guru as Parabrahman,³³⁹ convincingly, “The Guru-*Gītā* is the celebrated *Samskṛta* hymn exalting the figure of the authoritative spiritual master.”³⁴⁰ Like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman also incarnates in this world with a human-like form as the Guru.³⁴¹ This is a unique principle of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy. The ultimate objective of life is the realization of *brahmavidyā*. This objective is attained through the association with the Akṣarabrahman Guru.³⁴² *Brahmabhāva* (qualitative oneness) is inevitable to offer devotion to Parabrahman.³⁴³ That *brahmabhāva* is possible only by the association with the Guru.³⁴⁴ Thus, it is necessary to seek refuge under such a Guru to realize *brahmavidyā*. That Guru must be Akṣarabrahman himself. This principle is clearly elaborated within the SB³⁴⁵: “अनेन नित्यं परमात्मनिष्ठः साक्षाद् अक्षरब्रह्मैव ब्रह्मविद्याया विज्ञापयिता गुरुर्भवितुम् अर्हति नान्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्”³⁴⁶ “Only one who is Akṣarabrahman himself has the firm conviction of Parabrahman and is the master of preaching *Brahmavidyā*.” We discussed earlier in the previous chapter that Akṣarabrahman has four forms. Out of these four, one form is incarnated on earth as the Guru. Only through this Guru, one can attain *brahmabhāva* and is able to offer undeviating devotion towards Parabrahman. The Guru is identified in the *Vacanāmṛta* with many names such as *satpuruṣa*, *santa*, *ekāntika santa*, etc. Now we will discuss how spiritual endeavors which are not possible without the Guru.

5.1 Ideal for *Sādhanā*

Bhadreśadāsa explains:

गुरोर्ज्ञानमिव ज्ञानं वर्तनमपि तत्समम् ।

³³⁹ Gurugītā – 195/44

³⁴⁰ Rigopoulos Antonio, *Guru the Spiritual Master in Eastern and Western Traditions*, p.169, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2002

³⁴¹ Vac. Var.19

³⁴² Vac. Gadh. 3/27

³⁴³ Vac. Loyā. 7

³⁴⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

³⁴⁵ MU 1/2/12

³⁴⁶ MUSB 1/2/12, p.254

“Becoming one with Akṣarabrahman means having an understanding like that of the Akṣarabrahman Guru, behaving like the Akṣarabrahman Guru, and dedicating one’s physical being towards *bhakti* as the Akṣarabrahman Guru does.” The Guru is first, foremost, and always the perfect devotee. Hence, he provides a model for all others to try to be like. Therefore, if ‘oneness’ with Brahman is an acquisition of the Guru’s virtues, in becoming more like him (Brahman-like, or *brahmarūpa*), it follows that these *brāhmic* qualities foster and boost the highest devotional relationship of the aspirant with Parabrahman, which is itself a mark of liberation. Nevertheless, a spiritual aspirant has an example on which to model his/her sustained endeavors and intentions and craft a spiritually pure life that leads to Parabrahman, like the Guru’s. This should not, however, be demoted to understand the Guru’s role. Bhadrēśadāsa corroborates by giving the example of the *Īśāvāsya* principle:³⁴⁷

“The *Īśāvāsya* principle can be easily understood through the life of the *satpuruṣa* (Guru), since the life of the *satpuruṣa* is a living commentary on the elusive words of *śāstra*.”³⁴⁸ A devotee who endeavors to offer devotion to Parabrahman faces external and internal myriad complications, hurdles, and hindrances.³⁴⁹ Consequently, a number of aspirants abjure the path of spirituality. Here, the Guru comes and helps them to recover from their miseries and again inspires them to walk on the path of liberation.

5.2 To Attain *Brahmabhāva*

We vastly analyzed *brahmabhāva* in the previous sub-topic. Svāminārāyaṇa called it *ātmabuddhi* or immense love towards the Guru. Such *ātmabuddhi* with the Guru

³⁴⁷ IU 16

³⁴⁸ Bhadrēśadāsa Sādhu, *Essence of the Upaniṣads, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2012. p.20

³⁴⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/39, 1/44, 3/1, 3/21

most readily manifest itself as concentrated spiritual love, what Bhadreśadāsa calls ‘*Prakṛṣṭānurāgodbhāva*’,³⁵⁰ “because the aspirant of liberation is now attached to the Guru, not the body or its associates. The Guru becomes the priority, the ultimate focus of all devotion and efforts, not worldly matters or *māyic* pleasures. Even while assiduously fulfilling every personal and social responsibility, all actions, thoughts, and intentions of the aspirant are now instilled with a spiritual awareness of the Guru and thus take on a wholly devotional character and spirit. This releases the aspirant of his/ her *karmika* bondage.”³⁵¹ Svāminārāyaṇa therefore confirms: “For an aspirant who desires his own liberation, nothing in this universe is more blissful than Parabrahman and his *santa*. Therefore, just as a person has *ātmabuddhi* towards his own body, he should similarly have *ātmabuddhi* with Parabrahman and his *santa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/7, p.593) This is not limited to the body only but it includes relatives of the body as well and specifying the relationship as one of profound love towards the Guru. Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa states *ātmabuddhi* is attained through the Guru only.³⁵²

5.3 The Gateway to Liberation

Svāminārāyaṇa expresses, “*Bhāgavad dharma* is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the *ekāntika santa or sādhu* of Parabrahman, who possesses the attributes of dharma, knowledge, detachment, and devotion coupled with the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness. Maintaining profound love towards such a *sādhu* also opens the gateway to liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/54, p.129) Bhadreśadāsa also supports it while commenting on the KU. He explains ‘अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन हर्षशोकौ जहाति’ as by the company of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru one is released from all his miseries and becomes a *Jīvanamukta*.³⁵³ Moreover, the wise sage Kapila teaches

³⁵⁰ BSSB 3/3/15, p.324

³⁵¹ BG 2/72, 18/54, BS 3/3/15

³⁵² Vac. Gadh. 2/59, Vac. Gadh. 1/54, MU 2/2/3,4,5, KU 3/2

³⁵³ KUSB 2/12, p.96

that affection (for others) firmly binds the *ātman*. However, if that same affection is directed towards the *Sādhu*, the gateway to liberation is opened.³⁵⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa's intention is clear that the Guru is the gateway to liberation. An intense and loving association with him opens that gateway.³⁵⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes in another important statement: "Intense love for the *satpuruṣa* Guru is itself the means to realizing one's *ātman*, is itself also the means to realizing the greatness of the *satpuruṣa* and is itself also the means to having the direct realization of Parabrahman." (Vac. Var. 11, p.553) Outstandingly, Svāminārāyaṇa provides a doctrine here that love for the Guru not only leads to a realization of the Guru and the *ātman* (self), with whom the individual develops a spiritual relationship, but also of Parabrahman. It again indicates to the substantive presence of Parabrahman within the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, and expounds the *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad*'s³⁵⁶ call to offer the highest devotion to the Guru on par with that offered to Parabrahman.

The *Vedaras* also goes on the same principle, where Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly explains that such *ātmabuddhi* with Akṣarabrahman leads to *jīvanamukti*. For illustration, in one part of the letter, after narrating the cosmic powers of Akṣarabrahman, he enhances that that Akṣarabrahman is among us, referring to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in human form. Svāminārāyaṇa then teaches: "O *Paramahaṃsas*! One should develop *ātmabuddhi* with him Akṣarabrahman, and with that thought, become a *jīvan-mukta* (living liberated *ātman*)." (VR, p.166)

5.4 For the Supreme Devotion Towards Parabrahman

It is extremely difficult to attain true conviction of the form of Parabrahman.³⁵⁷ Since our *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇas* are *māyic*, whereas Parabrahman is not

³⁵⁴ *Śrīmad Bhāgavat* 3/25/20

³⁵⁵ MU 3/1/8, MU 2/2/7

³⁵⁶ यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ । तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥SU 6/23॥

³⁵⁷ Vac. Loya 18

māyic,³⁵⁸ hence, Parabrahman is imperceptible to our *māyic indriyas* and inner faculties.³⁵⁹ Thus, the *santa* becomes the means to help us achieve the true conviction of Parabrahman and acquire the privilege to offer devotion to him. Bhadreśadāsa asserts: “प्रतिबोधविदितं परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाय शिष्येण जिज्ञासिते सति तं प्रति ब्रह्मस्वरूपेण गुरुणा दीयमान उपदेश एव प्रतिबोधः, तेन विदितमिति प्रतिबोधविदितमिति” (KeUSB 2/4, p.44) “When an aspirant asks the way to attain the firm conviction of Parabrahman, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru gives the discoursing which is called ‘*pratibodha*’. Through this preaching, he attains the firm conviction of Parabrahman and is able to offer devotion to Parabrahman.”

In this manner, the Guru is the mediator between *ātman*s and Parabrahman, making possible the personal encounter that Svāminārāyaṇa had stressed, was the reason for Parabrahman’s manifestation on earth.³⁶⁰ Similarly, then, to see the Guru is to see Parabrahman; to have been blessed by the Guru is to have been blessed by Parabrahman.

5.5 To Understand the *Śāstras*

The Indian ancient *śāstras*, texts or scriptures-exegesis requires one to go further than the rules of language, theoretical interpretation, and grammar, for it is the *samādhi bhāṣa*. It needs non-literal interpretations for understanding many obscure passages and their sequential order, ideas, arguments and themes. The difficult philosophical and spiritual elements involve the use of figurative language, symbols, metaphors, analogical arguments and anecdotes which inevitably complicate and extend the task of the Vedic exegesis. Svāminārāyaṇa adds that understanding the scriptures without the Guru leads us in the opposite direction.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Vac. kar. 1

³⁵⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/78, Vac. Panch. 4

³⁶⁰ Vac. Kār. 5

³⁶¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/13, Loya. 11, Var.12

Therefore, Bhadrēśādāsa discloses the ultimate fact: “गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थीस्तु प्रकाशयेत्”³⁶²
“Truth is only revealed when śāstra is heard from the Guru’s mouth.”

Thus, human intellect, logic, speculations or hypotheses cannot do righteousness to the central theme of the Vedas and the scriptures. Only the Guru, who is in perpetual communion with Parabrahman,³⁶³ knows the intention of Parabrahman and thereby is able to interpret the Vedic exegesis thoroughly. Consequently, the role and importance of the Akṣarabrahman Guru is highly extolled both for fathoming the thorough meaning and insinuations of the scriptures³⁶⁴ and correctly molding one’s thought process.

5.6 The Way to Serve the Guru

Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on how to serve the Guru in Vac. Var. 5 by directing equal service of both Parabrahman and the Guru, further establishing the full presence of Parabrahman in the Guru. He affirms: “Just as one implements the *mānsi pūjā* (worship by mental visualization) of Parabrahman, if one also implements the *mānsi pūjā* of the highest *Bhakta* along with Parabrahman; and just as one arranges an offering of food for Parabrahman, similarly, if one also arranges an offering for Parabrahman’s highest *Bhakta* and serves it to him; and just as one donates five rupees to Parabrahman, similarly, if one also donates money to the *Santa* - then, by performing with extreme affection such equal service of Parabrahman and *Santa* who possesses the highest qualities, even if such a person

³⁶² SSSK 271

³⁶³ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

³⁶⁴ गुरुश्च पञ्चमो वेदस्तच्छब्दश्रेष्ठता ततः॥२६०॥

सिद्धान्ताऽनुगमन्यतु सर्वथा साम्प्रदायिकम्।

गुरुप्रमाणितं ह्येव प्रामाण्यपदवीं भजेत्॥२६२॥

शास्त्रशब्दोऽपि नो सेव्यो गुरोराश्रयणं विना।

गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थीस्तु प्रकाशयेत् ॥२७१॥

गुरुहरिबलं श्रेष्ठं शास्त्रवचोबलादपि।

शास्त्रात्तु केवलात् क्वापि न ज्ञानं निश्चयः सुखम्॥२७२॥

अतः शास्त्रं बलीयो न साक्षाद् ब्रह्माऽक्षराद् गुरोः ।

नाऽसत्याद् वारयेच्छास्त्रं गुरुस्तु वारयेत् ततः॥२७३॥

साक्षाद्देवो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः ।

is a devotee of the lowest caliber and was destined to become a devotee of the highest caliber after two lives, or after four lives, or after ten lives, or after a hundred lives, he will become a devotee of the highest caliber in this very life. Such are the fruits of the equal service of Parabrahman and Parabrahman's *Bhakta*." (Vac. Var. 5, p.542) The *Sūtrakāra* reveals the same truth that serving the Guru is thus serving Parabrahman, the fruit of which can accelerate one spiritually a hundred-fold.³⁶⁵

The *Gītā* declares: 'तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥'³⁶⁶

The *Bhāṣyakāra* comments: "ये हि ज्ञानिनः श्रोत्रियाः शास्त्ररहस्यज्ञाः तत्त्वदर्शिनः भगवन्नित्यदर्शना सकलशब्दबोधपरमतत्त्वपरमात्मसाक्षात्कारवन्तश्च साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरवः ते तुभ्यं ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविद्याम् उपदेक्ष्यन्ति"(BGSB 4/34, p.110) "Acquire this Parabrahman's knowledge from a Parabrahman -realized Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. These *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus (plural application also includes the manifestation of the Gurus in the future) who have realized the truth will teach you."

The *Upaniṣad* asserts: 'तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्'³⁶⁷ "In order to understand that *brahmavidyā*, one must go to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has realized the extract of scriptures and has a firm conviction of Parabrahman." For the attainment of knowledge and resolute understanding of Parabrahman the best faith, good spatial-temporal conditions and the best preacher with superlative knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman is required. And in the company of a true *sādhu* (Akṣara Guru), a person of firm faith gains all virtues, including the right knowledge. An aspirant who has trust and faith in the words of the Guru alone gains the right knowledge and resolute understanding of the nature of Parabrahman; he alone leftovers unfaltering in *dharma* and attains liberation. Svāminārāyaṇa invariably expresses the glory of such a *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in his teachings as

³⁶⁵ BS 3/3/20

³⁶⁶ BG 4/34

³⁶⁷ MUSB 1/2/12

well.³⁶⁸ He discloses this in terms of: having firm association of the *satpuruṣa*, the importance of the company of a *santa* and the need to develop intense attachment towards such a *sadhu*. By becoming a pupil of a Guru, who is the manifest form of Akṣara, one obtains Puruṣottama's favor.

5.7 Warning

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, the Guru is the key to attain liberation; he is the manifest form of Akṣara, so one should beware of spiting him. Svāminārāyaṇa also firmly and repeatedly warns against hurting or maligning him, often showing dire and irreparable consequences if one does this thing.³⁶⁹ By the way, Vac. Var. 14 is especially noteworthy for its mention of seeking the refuge of the *satpuruṣa* and the pre-eminence of this above other forms of *dharmic* living.

Thus, if one is in quest of the refuge of the *satpuruṣa*, who is the manifest form of Parabrahman, regardless of how terrible a sinner a person may be, he becomes extremely pure and attains *samādhi*. Conversely, a person who maligns the *satpuruṣa* is still a terrible sinner regardless of how sincere he may seem to be in abiding by *dharma*. Moreover, he can never have the realization of Parabrahman in his heart and will be the subject of suffering in the cycle of death and birth.³⁷⁰ When the Guru is pleased, the devotee experiences togetherness with Parabrahman. He realizes Parabrahman in his heart and experiences the highest joy of divine abode in an embodied state here on the earth. All his sins and stock of deeds get consumed promptly and his *vāsanā* (desires) perishes. In this manner, a seeker who wants to attain ultimate liberation should always insist on harboring affection towards the Guru, and keep him in the center point of the *sāadhanā* in order to achieve the grace

³⁶⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/27, 37, Var 11, Gadh. 3/26

³⁶⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/1, Gadh. 1/35, Gadh. 1/53, Gadh. 1/58, Gadh. 1/73, Sār. 18, Loyā. 1, Gadh. 2/46, Gadh. 3/12

³⁷⁰ BGSB 9/12, p.210

of Parabrahman. Thus, the Guru possesses a prominent place within *Svāminārāyaṇa Sādhanā*.

5.8 Is the Guru the Ultimate Goal?

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy, the Guru plays a vital role to accomplish any type of spiritual endeavor an aspirant engrosses in. However, the Guru is not the ultimate entity or an ultimate spiritual goal for an aspirant. The ultimate and supreme goal is only Parabrahman. Even though, when a seeker, after death, goes to the abode of Parabrahman, which is another form of Akṣarabrahman Guru, yet the ultimate goal is Parabrahman, who resides there with infinitive qualities. However, what then is the meaning of the *Śrutis* which say: ‘Gurumevābhigacchet’³⁷¹ or ‘lakṣyam tadeva Akṣara.’³⁷² One may question that if Puruṣottama is the ultimate goal, then why does this *mantra* identify Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) as the final goal?

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “अक्षराधिपतिरेव लक्ष्यमिति तु सिद्धान्त एव तथापि ब्रह्मभावाप्तभक्तानुभूयमानः स स्वदिव्यधाम्नि सदैव विराजमानस्तिष्ठति अत तत्परब्रह्मप्राप्तीच्छया एव तदधिष्ठानरूपस्य ब्रह्मलक्ष्यत्वम्” (MUSB 2/2/4, p.273) “The goal is Parabrahman only, who is beyond Akṣarabrahman; it is the principle. Obviously, Parabrahman resides in Akṣaradhāma, so if someone wishes to achieve Parabrahman, generally means to attain Akṣaradhāma.”

There is no doubt that Puruṣottama, the lord of Akṣara, is the ultimate goal. Nevertheless, since Puruṣottama is forever present in his divine abode, Brahmadhāman (Akṣaradhāma), the desire to attain Parabrahman encompasses the desire to attain Brahmadhāman.³⁷³ He further argues that this is similar to how wanting to meet one’s beloved in some village also includes wanting to reach or

³⁷¹ MU 1/2/12

³⁷² MU 2/2/3

³⁷³ This is also discussed in BSSB. 3/3/24.

attain that village. It is also similar to how desiring to attain gold, gems, and other precious materials affixed to a casket includes wanting the casket itself. Additionally, Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa also confirms attaining Akṣaradhāma, the abode form of Akṣarabrahman, as the goal within his teachings.³⁷⁴ By analogizing Akṣarabrahman with the aim in this *mantra*, the *Upaniṣad* discloses Akṣara to be distinct from the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, who are identified as the arrow. Vyāsa also presents a similar discussion on this topic within the *Brahmasūtra*.³⁷⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa writes in his letter that he who offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman Puruṣottama Paramātman while realizing one's *ātman* to be one with Akṣara is worthy of great honor. However, Svāminārāyaṇa simplifies in the same passage that there should be no perception of selfhood with Parabrahman. "He who does not have a servant-master relationship with Puruṣottama, but behaves as if one with him, is worthy of scorn." (VR 214) Exclusively, in another part of the letter, Svāminārāyaṇa formulates reference to himself as 'Parabrahman Puruṣottama Paramātman' before explicitly instructing: "O *Paramahaṃsas!* Offer *upāsanā* to me while having *ātmabuddhi* with that (Brahman)." (VR 158) Svāminārāyaṇa elucidates the vast difference between him and the Akṣarabrahman Guru in the *Vacanāmṛta*: "Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is the controller of all, all-doer, the cause of all; He is extremely attractive, extremely radiant, and extremely powerful; also, He possesses the *kartum*, *akartum* and *anyathākartum* powers. If He wishes, He can eclipse all of the liberated *ātmans* of Akṣaradhāma by His own divine light and prevail alone. Also, if He wishes, He can accept the devotion of the liberated *ātmans* and reside with them. He can eclipse even Akṣara, in the form of Akṣaradhāma in which He dwells and presides alone independently. If He so chooses, He is capable of supporting the countless liberated *ātmans* by His own power, without even needing Akṣaradhāma." (Vac. Loya 13, p.327)

³⁷⁴ "The abode of Paramātman is the goal." Vac. Gadh. 2/22

³⁷⁵ 'Bhedavyapadeshat' BS 1/3/5

It is Parabrahman's eternal wish that Akṣarabrahman does its ultimate works like creating the universe etc.³⁷⁶ moreover, Parabrahman eternally dwells in the Akṣarabrahman Guru.³⁷⁷ That is why a seeker can take refuge in the Guru. At that time, that inquirer attaches with the Guru by the firm conviction that he is the manifest form of Parabrahman. This principle shows the classical appellation for the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedanta denoted as Akṣarabrahma-Parābrahma-*Darśana*.

6. Śaraṇāgati (Refuge)

To take refuge or total surrender at the feet of Parabrahman is the brighter and live part of Indian *bhakti* tradition. *Śaraṇāgati*, *āśraya*, *prāpti* etc. are synonyms for taking refuge in Parabrahman. The greater the knowledge of the glory and greatness of Parabrahman, the stronger is the love, attachment, and devotion to Parabrahman. *Śaraṇāgati* (complete surrendering) is a fundamental part of devotion. A servitude (*dāsabhāva*) cannot be comprehended without total submission or surrender of one's yearnings and will at the feet of Parabrahman. *Dāsabhāva* can erase ego totally and eliminate attachment to one's body, which is a very significant endeavor in the way of liberation. Consequently, surrendering (*prapatti*) has a glorious place in Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy. However, it does not accept the view that a single act of surrender is the end of all efforts. Svāminārāyaṇa does not accept the hypothesis that a surrendered one has nothing to do and that now the whole responsibility of a devotee rests exclusively on Parabrahman. It is true that the surrendered is redeemed of all fears, sins, metempsychosis etc. Nevertheless, the surrendered one ought to act in accordance with Parabrahman's command and will in order to please Him and receive His grace.

³⁷⁶ MU 1/1/7,

³⁷⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/41

Svāminārāyaṇa discloses the highest glory of *āśraya*: “Accepting the firm refuge of Parabrahman is the greatest and only endeavor amongst all spiritual endeavors for pleasing Parabrahman. That refuge, though, must be extremely steady and without any inadequacies.” (Vac.Gadh. 1/33, p.86) Although, the firm refuge of Parabrahman is titled the greatest endeavor, then someone may question the importance of Parabrahman’s command, norms, and the rules and regulations of the *satsaṅga* fellowship. Svāminārāyaṇa unpacks the principle of balance in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Liberation is possible only through Parabrahman, whereas those other spiritual endeavors and norms are for the purpose of pleasing Parabrahman. That is the only solution to the question.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/66, p.522) In this way, to counteract and annihilate the effects of past *karmas* and to overcome the effects of the *māyā-avidyā*, one must come in contact of (perceptibly) the all-transcendent Puruṣottama.³⁷⁸ Similarly, the BG advocates:

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥³⁷⁹

“Totally relinquish all *dharmas* (duties as conceived by you) and seek me alone as a refuge. I shall definitely release you from all sins. Grieve not.” Bhadrēśadāsa adds in his commentary that “मामित्येकवचनेनैवैकत्वसिद्धावापि पुनरेकमित्यनन्यशरणागत्युपदेशाय” (BGSB 18/66, p.368) “Although, the word ‘*mām*’ is able to provoke un-faltering refuge, yet the term ‘*eka*’ word consolidates this *śaraṇāgati* towards Parabrahman.” Furthermore, Bhadrēśadāsa elucidates that, there are two *śaraṇāgati* mentioned in the *Gītā*. The first *śaraṇāgati* was taken by Arjuna in the second chapter. And now in the last chapter, Bhagavān himself talks about *śaraṇāgati*. The main distinction 14 between these two faces of *śaraṇāgati* can be defined by its giver-taker relationship. In the second chapter, Arjuna is not firm to accept *śaraṇāgati*; however, he goes to Kṛṣṇa directly and seeks refuge based on his own term. On the other hand, in the last chapter, Kṛṣṇa has delivered his full wisdom to Arjuna, realizing that Arjuna,

³⁷⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/73, lōya 10, Gadh. 2/10, 2/13, 2/35, Var. 5, Gadh. 3/35, Jet. 1

³⁷⁹ BG 18/6

now, is mature and able to accept undeviated *śaraṇāgati* at the feet of Parabrahman. As a result, he grants *śaraṇāgati* to Arjuna.

Thus, whatever way one surrenders, be it with blind faith like a doltish, or be it out of self-interest or be it out of intense love for Parabrahman or be it with right knowledge/understanding (*mudhatvena, vaiśvānavena, svārthena, snehena, Jñānen*), but it has to be the total submission to Parabrahman without any gap in it.³⁸⁰ In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Kṛṣṇa says; “As apart from my pious devotees to whom I am the highest goal, I covet neither myself nor Śrī (My consort) who is eternal (like myself), O holy sage! How dare I forsake them who, having renounced all attachments for their wife, house, children, and relation (nay) their (very) life and wealth and their welfare in this and the other world, have sought me as their protector?”³⁸¹ Additionally, The *Mahābhārata* reiterates: “Those who seek refuge in Parabrahman, are never deluded/infatuated and the Lord Janārdana redeems all of them from the most deadening fear of hell.”³⁸² And the *Gītā* reaffirms that “This divine *māyā* of mine consisting of three *guṇas* is extremely difficult to cross over. However, those who take refuge in me alone cross beyond it.”³⁸³ “Therefore, those who “supplicate to Him for shelter with all thy being, O Arjuna; they by His grace attain supreme peace and eternal abode.”³⁸⁴

Therefore, Parabrahman alone is the redeemer of *ātman*s and *īśvaras*. Ultimate emancipation cannot be attained unless one seeks refuge at the feet of Parabrahman with a resolute and unyielding faith in His power of granting liberation. Thus, one ought to surrender one’s *ātman* totally to Parabrahman, and devotedly associate oneself with Parabrahman, and do all that is required to prompt the grace of Parabrahman. The form of Parabrahman is the truth, so pure and perfect that

³⁸⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/33

³⁸¹ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 9/4/64-65

³⁸² MBT *Bhīṣma parva* 64/20

³⁸³ BG 7/14

³⁸⁴ BG 18/62

however imperfect and impure we may be, He undoubtedly purifies and perfects us, when we wholeheartedly affiliate, love, and surrender ourselves to Him, with the conviction that He is eternally divine and faultless.³⁸⁵ When it is realized that no degree of self-effort and knowledge is sufficient to draw the grace of Parabrahman, the inclination for a total refuge at the feet of Parabrahman is the only way. As a result, the servitude nature of an aspirant develops.

6.1 Guru-śaraṇāgati

The Indian Vedic tradition invariably acknowledges the Guru's *śaraṇāgati*, taking refuge at the feet of the Guru. To realize the glory of Parabrahman and to cultivate one's faith in Parabrahman, *Guru-śaraṇāgati* is inevitable. Especially when Parabrahman is not present in his own form on earth, then the Guru, who is the manifest form of Parabrahman, is the only choice for the revelation of Parabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa proclaims: "However, when Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the *santa* who has the realization of Parabrahman - because the *jīva* can also accomplish liberation through him." (Vac. Var. 10, p.550)

Svāminārāyaṇa reiterates the power of *Guru-śaraṇāgati*: "Therefore, by seeking the refuge of the *satpuruṣa*, regardless of how terrible a sinner a person may be, he becomes extremely pure, untainted, and attains *samādhi*." (Vac. Var. 10, p.558) In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, it is declared that Parabrahman perpetually manifests (*pragaṭa*, *pratyakṣa*) on earth, whether He is in the guise of a monarch or a *sādhu*, He is the subject and object of the highest contemplation and meditation. Both the forms are equally adorable and worshipfully admirable. The two (Parabrahman manifest as a monarch and as a *sādhu*) do not seem to have resemblance in terms of overt appearance and conduct; still, both are the same because both of them

³⁸⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/35

definitely have the power and excellence to redeem the *ātman* who seek refuge at their feet. Accordingly, the two forms of Parabrahman seem to differ in external appearance (body-figure), ways of working, and life-style. They nevertheless have the same power and transcendental divinity to redeem the seekers of their refuge. They, as such, are nondifferent despite differences seen in them from our conditioned perspective. In this manner, The ancient scriptures also corroborate the *Guru-śaraṇāgati*. The BG extols:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥³⁸⁶

“Acquire this ultimate knowledge from the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise who have realized Parabrahman will teach you.”

Bhadreśadāsa provides a unique principle by commenting on this verse: “यद्यपीदानीन्तु साक्षादहमेव तव गुरूपदेष्टृभूतः किन्तु भविष्यति काले मन्मनाट्यलीलासमाप्त्यनन्तरमपि ममात्मभूतान् मत्परमप्रीतिमतः मन्तिकटतमान् साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपज्ञानिगुरून् द्वारीकृत्य तत्कार्यं करिष्ये इति ।” (BGSB 4/34, p.110) “The use of the future tense ‘उपदेक्ष्यन्ति’ reveals a sublime principle. Parabrahman wants to say to Arjuna that at present, I am here, as your Guru and Parabrahman both, but in the future, when I finish all my human-like activities and will return to the abode of mine, I will accomplish my work of granting liberation to the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* through the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru succession, since they are utmost near to my beloved devotees and me.”

Human nature, however offensive (*pāmara*) and fallen (*patita*) may be, but if the aspirant submits himself totally to Parabrahman or His best devotee (*sādhu*), he too becomes qualified for the final release. Hence, *śaraṇāgati* with firm faith in the feet of Parabrahman is the best of all means to please Parabrahman. Even Nārada accepts the refuge of Guru Sanatkumāra for peace and happiness: “अधीहि भगव इति

³⁸⁶ BG 4/34

होपससाद सनत्कुमारं नारदः”³⁸⁷ “Nārada takes refuge of Sanatkumāra and said, ‘Teach me, Sir’” Similarly, the MU also confirms this fact, where the Guru-*śaraṇāgati* is consolidated: “तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम् ॥”³⁸⁸ “The pupil must go and take refuge under the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has the revelation of all scriptures and has a firm conviction of Parabrahman.”

Bhadreśādāsa comments here: “ब्रह्मविद्या तु अक्षरब्रह्मगुरुसमाश्रयेण एव संपादयितुं शक्या” (MUSB 1/2/12, p.256) “*Brahmavidyā* is accomplished only through the refuge of the Akṣarabrahman Guru.” In this manner, like Parabrahman, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru is also the appropriate person to whom a seeker can approach and take refuge at his feet in order to free from the clutch of *māyā*, since the Guru is the manifest form of Parabrahman.

6.2 The Process of *Āśrayagrahaṇa*

Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Irrespective of how evil a person may be before joining the *satsaṅga* fellowship, he should be admitted into *satsaṅga* after he takes the appropriate vows.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/18, p.55) When a seeker takes refuge at the feet of Parabrahman, through a process of initiation called ‘*vartamāna*’, he is assured of freedom from the whole stock of past *karmas* known as *sañcita-karma*. This implies that he will be relieved from the transmigratory cycles of birth and death forever. However, the surrendered one has to work out all the necessary efforts, acquire the appropriate resolute knowledge, and obey all codes and commands of Parabrahman faithfully; failing here means he loses the golden opportunity of freedom forever. Thus, the act of initiation does not give the surrendered one a license to act in an unrestrained or immoral and unethical way.

³⁸⁷ CU 7/1/1

³⁸⁸ MU 1/2/12

First of all, an aspirant must have a burning desire to be free from the clutch of *māyā*. Secondly, he must be polite and childlike aumous. Then he should approach the Guru or Parabrahman. Bhadreśādāsa explains the system of *āśraya grahaṇa* from the MU: “शौनको महाशालो विधिवत् शास्त्रादिष्टविध्यनुसारं समित्पान्याधिर्भूत्वा उपसन्न :”(MUSB 1/1/3, p. 233) “Śaunaka the son of Sunaka, was wealthy. His great sacrificial hall attested his wealth. One day, Śaunaka approached Aṅgiras in a traditional manner, he approached as a humble disciple presents himself to a Guru.”

Regardless of holding immense wealth, there was something else that he sought to attain. The *Upaniṣad* also proves to Śaunaka’s modesty. Being able to humbly approach Aṅgiras as a young disciple would approach a Guru, Śaunaka is depicted as willing to put aside his pride to acquire *brahmavidyā*. The admission or initiation into the fellowship of Parabrahman through *vartamāna* has another significant benefit that now the surrendered one need not fear any harassment from malevolent spirits, the malefic influence of stars and deities of lower order. He has come under the protective umbrella of the Supreme Parabrahmanhead, who controls all, rules over all, and is the redeemer of all. Subsequently, the devotee leads his spiritual life audaciously under the nurture and shelter of Parabrahman. His *vāsanās* (latent desires/inclinations of past) shall get consumed and his causal body (*kāraṇa-śarira*) shall wear away only through accurate knowledge and perfect obedience, for he has sought refuge in Parabrahman. Therefore, he enjoys the privilege of freeing himself forever, which otherwise is not available to careless and motiveless *jīvas*. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, the present Guru Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja has given the *vartamāna mantra* for all the householders and renunciates:

धन्योस्मि पूर्णकामोस्मि निष्पापो निर्भयः सुखी ।
अक्षरगुरुर्योगेन स्वामिनारायणाश्रयात् ॥ 19³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Mahant swami Maharaj, *Satsangdiksha, Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpith*, Ahmedabad, 2020

“I am fortunate, fulfilled, sinless, fearless and happy because I have taken the refuge of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa through the Akṣarabrahman Guru.” An aspirant who has surrendered himself to Parabrahman with complete faith and commitment knows that as a finite, limited being, all his efforts and endeavors are deficient and incomplete. They are not totally efficacious and sufficient, and hence, with persistence, he keeps his reverent efforts continuous- like an enthusiast child endeavoring to reach for a fruit on a tree by constant high hops and jumps. A kind-hearted elderly man sees it; he comes to the rescue of a child and gets it. Equally, Parabrahman seeing the efforts of his devotee, takes mercy on him and, holding his hand, He elevates him, liberates him.

In quest of shelter and refuge at the feet of Parabrahman as the only liberator from the bondage and transmigration is the exclusive way of attaining ultimate emancipation.³⁹⁰ Benefaction from Parabrahman entails the growth of all other means (including *ekāntika-dharma*) of the highest accomplishment. Refuge at the feet of Parabrahman takes care of the devotees from great danger. The devotees are reliant on Him, who takes care of the rise and effervescence of *dharma* (dutifulness), *jñāna* (knowledge) *vairāgya* (detachment) and *bhakti* (devotion) in their heart.³⁹¹ In devotee’s heart, resolved Parabrahman’s knowledge rests in the act of seeking refuge at the feet of Parabrahman as my only shelter, protector, supporter and liberator. Such an *āśraya* or refuge is possible when the currently manifest (*pragaṭa*) Parabrahman’s true transcendental form is resolutely known.³⁹² When the devotee is well-anchored with Parabrahman as the surrendered-servant, he, through right efforts, can assuredly win the grace of Parabrahman and attain final emancipation; which otherwise remains an ideal which is simply unattainable. It is noteworthy that when ‘*āśraya*’ i.e., ‘shelter or refuge’ is inscribed as the sole or

³⁹⁰ BG 9/22, Vac. Gadh. 2/13

³⁹¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

³⁹² Vac. Panch. 2

exclusive means, there is no intention to deny or undermine the value and importance of other means such as duty, morality, knowledge, renunciation, devotion etc. It is eulogized to the highest position simply because it can bring forth all of them.³⁹³

6.3 Is *Āśrayagrahan* Important?

Svāminārāyaṇa shows a straightforward way to tread on and attain the ultimate spiritual goal. He states: “Hence, there is no other obstacle-free way like that of having the firm refuge of Parabrahman Nārāyaṇa.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p.422) By these words, we can realize that the firm refuge of Parabrahman is a crucial factor as far as the ultimate spiritual goal is concerned. Bhadreśadāsa also explains this factor while commenting on the MU: “तथा चैतादृश गुरुम् एवाभिगच्छेद् विधिवत्तत्छरणं गृह्णीयादित्यर्थः एवाकरश्च नैकार्थज्ञापकः प्रथमं ब्रह्मविद्याप्राप्त्यर्थं गुरुपसत्तौ नियमविधिं ज्ञापयति ब्रह्मविद्याभीप्सा चेद् गुरुः अवश्यमेवाश्रायणीय इति” (MUSB 1/2/12, p.255) “One should only (*eva*) take the refuge of such a Guru. The term only here has many implications. First, it implies that association with such a Guru is necessary to attain *brahmavidyā*. Therefore, all those who desire to attain *brahmavidyā* must take the refuge of such a Guru.” Bhadreśadāsa explains further that the *Upaniṣad* also disapproves seeking refuge under liberated selves like *muktas* or *muktātmas*, who have attained *brahmabhāva* through the association of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. Since the *muktas* are not Akṣarabrahman, they cannot enlighten others-or have others realize *brahmavidyā*. This is also mentioned by Svāminārāyaṇa.³⁹⁴

As Svāminārāyaṇa mentioned earlier that the time of death is very critical and dangerous, in that condition, the only ray of hope is the firm refuge of Parabrahman or the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.³⁹⁵ Now the question arises that if refuge is inevitable,

³⁹³ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

³⁹⁴ Vac. Var. 3

³⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/61

then what are the attitudes, preparations, and qualifications required of a refugee (an aspirant) who surrenders to Parabrahman. One who seeks refuge at the feet of Parabrahman and affiliates himself with Parabrahman has to remember that: Parabrahman is the only substratum, liberator, and redeemer.³⁹⁶

1. Even if the suffering is as great as the total tragedy of the whole world befallen, there should be a conviction that no one can protect except my Parabrahman, who is the only protector.³⁹⁷
2. Whatever I desire or expect, I should ask it from none other than my Parabrahman.³⁹⁸
3. I should give up all my unpleasant habits and tendencies and should wholeheartedly change my nature to please Parabrahman, I should eliminate the vices and refill my life with virtues and moralities to please Him.³⁹⁹
4. I should live completely in tune with the will of Parabrahman and never wander away from His will and word.
5. I should give up all my rigidness and decisions now and live life according to His wish.⁴⁰⁰
6. I should remain without a doubt; for now, I do not have any fear of getting lost into Indra-loka (svarga), Brahmaloaka or any other celestial region on the way to attaining *paramapada*. I now am sure of my final accomplishment by the grace of Parabrahman. I have resolutely known that there is nothing more blissful and blessed than my Parabrahman, who will bless me with the ultimate happiness.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ Vac. Loya 3, Loya 1

³⁹⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/28

³⁹⁸ Vac. Var. 5

³⁹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/24

⁴⁰⁰ SV 1/165

⁴⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 3/7

7. Upāsanā

The Sanskrit word *Upāsanā* is a compound of two words: *upa* – meaning near; and *āsanam* – meaning to sit. Thus, *upāsanā* is how an aspirant endeavors spiritually to forever reserve a seat near Parabrahman. More specifically, it is one’s way of worshipping Parabrahman, the mode in which one offers devotion to Him. Bhadrēśadāsa provides a simple definition of *upāsanā*: भगवदुपासनं भक्तिविशेशरूपम् तद्धि समाहात्म्यं परमानुचिन्तनविशेषरूपम् ।⁴⁰² “*Upāsanā* is a type of devotion. In this devotion, there is constant remembrance of Parabrahman with the glory of Him.” Thus, *upāsanā* means ‘*upāsanam* syād *dhruvānuSmṛtirdarśanānirvacannacca*,’ i.e., “Scriptures proclaim the importance of the word *upāsanā* as constant, incessant remembrance of the Lord.” ‘*Vedanamupāsanām* syād *tadvisaya śravaṇāt*’ i.e. “*Upāsanā* also means knowledge of Parabrahman: The Highest Reality, because *śrutis* also state so clearly. Here, the word ‘*upāsanā*’ implies knowledge because *śrutis* use it in the sense of knowledge. ‘*tailadhārāvāt avicchinnā smṛti*’ is described as *dhyāna*, i.e., ceaseless meditation-contemplation. And on the attainment of the (*smṛtilambhe sārve granthinām vipramokṣa*) stage of constant remembrance of Parabrahman, all the self-entangling knots (*granthi*) perishes, and the self attains emancipation. Here, ‘*smṛti*’ (thinking-remembrance) is equated with ‘*darśana*’ because the *Śruti* says; ‘*ātmā vā* are *dṛṣṭavya śrotavya* and *nididhyāsavya* be seen, heard and meditated upon. When mind exceedingly keeps remembering Parabrahman with the perfect intensity of love (*Bhāvanāprakarṣaṇa*), it culminates into direct vision realization (*darśana*) of Him.⁴⁰³

According to Svāminārāyaṇa: “Many people become great *yogis*, many become realized omniscient and many become deities, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the supreme state of enlightenment. All this is acquired through the force of the *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. Without *upāsanā* though, nothing can be

⁴⁰² SSS p.351

⁴⁰³ BU 2/4/5

accomplished.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/56, pp.133-134) In this way, all spiritual significance and the accomplishment of the supreme goal (namely-paramapada) are attainable through firmness in *upāsanā*. No spiritual advancement is possible without firm standing in *upāsanā*, whether a man has realized self-knowledge (*ātmaniṣṭhā*) or not, death (and cycles of birth and death) cannot be overcome without absorbing the essence of *upāsanā*. Besides, self-realization (*ātmadarśan*) and brahman-realization are unattainable without the commitment to the *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. Thus, there should not be any omission in *upāsanā*.

The reward of *upāsanā* cannot be gained by a mere stock of merits, nor by rigorous efforts solely, and not even by mere learning and meditation, but by the redemptive mercy of Parabrahman, the supreme protector (*raṅṣaka*) and liberator (*tāraka*). *Upāsanā* suggests the devotional worship born of conviction and knowledge of His perfect personality and ultimate glory. Thus, *upāsanā* has the utmost worth in the path of spirituality. *Upāsanā* means cognitive devotion to Parabrahman, who is eternally divine and with a form. Bhadreśadāsa discloses the contains of *upāsanā*:

सर्वकर्ता समुत्कृष्टः साकृतिः प्रकटः सदा।

इत्यादिगुरुलब्धा धीर्ज्ञेया हरेरुपासना॥⁴⁰⁴

Thus, the term ‘*upāsanā*’ encompasses the following:

- Parabrahman is all doer and uppermost entity;
- Firm faith and conviction that Parabrahman eternally has a form, and He is the only substratum and shelter to seek refuge;
- Metaphysical knowledge of Parabrahman’s essential nature at the same time with the knowledge of essential nature of Akṣarabrahman;
- Proper knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental glory, divinity, and superiority; Parabrahman always manifests on earth through the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.

⁴⁰⁴ SSSK 412

- Refuge at His feet with one-pointed ardent devotion (*ekāntiki-bhakti*) unto Him, with the resolute apprehending (*niścaya*) that He alone is my supreme guard, protector, liberator, mentor and the consolation of myself in this life and after-life (i.e., in life eternal).
- This understanding is attained through the immense grace of the Guru.

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, *upāsanā* consists in realizing with a firm conviction that, Parabrahman is the divine Lord, always possesses a form. He can never be conceived as a formless and impersonal being. He is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the countless number of universes (*brahmāndas*). He eternally dwells in His highest abode, and as the manifest (incarnate) Parabrahman, becomes perceptibly visible to the devotees on earth through His divine descent.⁴⁰⁵ Parabrahman can never be considered as a mere infinite mass of worship or realization. For us, It is indeed tough to make Him an object of worship or realization, but through the immense grace of the Guru, *upāsanā* becomes fruitful.

The Bhāṣyakāra reveals: “स्वात्मब्रह्मैक्येन यदुपासनबलाद् उपासकोपि... कल्याणमयगुणयोगं भजते” (BSSB 3/2/25, p.301) “Through the oneness with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, a seeker (aspirant) can attain the liberative qualities.” When a person is committed to the *upāsanā* with form (*sadāsākāra*), Parabrahman is never realized, appealed or satiated as the experience just a mass of light to Him, (the formless light of consciousness). If He sees only light in his meditation as a first step of realization, he feels extremely sorrow at his failure to visualize the beautiful form of Parabrahman. Only when he visualizes beyond this light the all satiating most beautiful form of Parabrahman, he feels exceptionally blissful and fulfilled.⁴⁰⁶ For an aspirant, if *upāsanā* is unchangeable, he does not engage himself in the devotion

⁴⁰⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/35

⁴⁰⁶ Vac. Loya 14

to a deity of lower order. He cannot circumvent or neglect his duties (*dharma*) and cannot give up his servitude (*sevākabhāva/dāsabhāva*) to Parabrahman.⁴⁰⁷

Though a long term *sāadhanā* (spiritual endeavor) of a seeker on one's *ātman* or on impersonal (*nirakaar* Brahman) may be, it is of no avail, for it does not carry anywhere beyond the merger in the formless *cidākāśa* form (aspect) of Akṣarabrahman. It does not empower one to acquire similitude with the formful Akṣarabrahman to eternally serve Parabrahman-Puruṣottama and enjoy His ultimate bliss. Thus, the *upāsanā* (knowledge-cum-worship) of Parabrahman as the supreme Parabrahman is the prima facie requirement for the highest achievement and accomplishment. According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, *upāsanā-bhakti* is a perfect blend of devotion and intellect. Love and knowledge are amalgamated together to engage both the heart and head in the service of Parabrahman. It is neither mere sentimentalism, nor mere emotionalism, nor even dry intellectualism. It is a consequence of reflective study and metaphysical knowledge and *triguṇātīta ātmic* love. He persists in the purity of conduct and moral perfection from a devotee of Parabrahman. He incorporates moral, philosophical, religious, emotional, and aesthetic aspects of devotion in his conception of *upāsanā*.⁴⁰⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa, in Vac. Gadh. 2/27 hints that the path of excessive self-restraint is dry, puritanical, and *upāsanā*-corrosive. Thus, asceticism is diluted and made it practicable to protect, promote and perpetuate the '*Upāsanā*' through upbringing mandirs, installing murtis therein, and promulgating the *bhakti*-rituals.

7.1 The meaning of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Upāsanā*

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Upāsanā* is not the *upāsanā* of two separate entities, Akṣara and Puruṣottama. However, it means to become *akṣararūpa* and worship Puruṣottama; that is, to become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman.

⁴⁰⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, 2/19, 2/27

⁴⁰⁸ BSSB 1/1/2,3; pp.12-18

The principle meaning of *upāsanā* is to understand Parabrahman as the all-doer, supreme, with a form and manifest, as clearly explained by Svāminārāyaṇa in *Vacanāmṛtas*, Panchālā 7, Gadhadā 1/40, Gadhadā 3/35 and others. The powers of Akṣarabrahman and the other entities with Akṣarabrahman are entirely dependent on Parabrahman, and so, clearly, there is no question of offering *upāsanā* to them. After the manifest form of Parabrahman returns to his divine abode, the *mumukṣu* (seeker or aspirant) who associates with the manifest Guru still offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman only. Since Paramātman himself is fully present through the form of the manifest *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.

Even Akṣara offers *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman. Bhadreśadāsa explains it in the BS commentary: “उपास्यपरमोपासकभावलक्षणः संबन्धो वाच्यः । शास्त्राणि हि निष्ठम्, अत्रैतत्समर्पितं, मत्परः इत्यादिभिः अक्षरब्रह्मणो नित्यं परमात्मपरमोपासनपरायणतां दर्शयन्ति” - “The relation between Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman is like *upāsya* (to whom *upāsanā* is offered) and *upāsaka* (one who offers *upāsanā*). The scriptural statements like *niṣṭham* (MU 1/2/12), *atraitatsamarpitam* (MU 2/1/1), *matparaḥ* (BG 2/61) etc., elaborate this fact.” In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, when a seeker develops such *upāsanā* (devotion coupled with the knowledge of Parabrahman) in the heart, holds that Parabrahman with the definite form, present now (in the incarnate form) together with His devotees exist in eternity also after the total dissolution (*ātyantika-pralaya*) of everything. In short, Parabrahman, devotees, and His all entourage are always with a definite personal form (*sadāsākāra*) and are uneclipsed by the sweeping floods of ultimate dissolution (*ātyantika pralaya*).

In *upāsanā*, love-devotion, faith-knowledge, conviction-commitment, and dedication are all amalgamated together. *Upāsanā* or *dhyāna* consists of constant reflection over the glory of Parabrahman together with intense devotion, love, and concentration. There is ever-growing mutuality between love and devotion on one hand and knowledge and understanding on the other hand. They nourish and

multiply one another. *Bhakti* is living love for Parabrahman and self-absorbing devotion unto Him. When *bhakti* matures to the acme of magnitude and secures the depth of oceanic unfathomability, it becomes illuminating like accurate knowledge. In simple words, *upāsanā* entails in having the resolute knowledge of the supremely venerable (*upāsyā*) Parabrahman's essential nature as *sadā-sākāra* (always endowed with a form), *sarva-avatārāṅgām-avatārī* (transcendental supreme Lord of lords) and with such a firmly rooted conviction in the heart, engaging oneself in the meditation, contemplation, name-recitation and singing glory of His *leela* (actions, incidents, and exploits).⁴⁰⁹

Conversely, this '*upāsanā*' rejects to accept Parabrahman as a formless-qualityless-attributeless abstract personality. To express Parabrahman as formless (*nirguṇa-nirākāra*) is to rebuke His power, sovereignty, and absoluteness. It is an act of ignoring Parabrahman's splendor, and veracity, and existence. It is '*svarūpadroha*' (spitting his form) of Parabrahman, an act of committing the unpardonable sin of blasphemy.⁴¹⁰ The right knowledge of the nature of Parabrahman consists in realizing Him as an eternally perfect personality having a divine form and an infinite number of infinitely auspicious qualities. The entire *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta is roaming around the *upāsanā* principle, in which one has to realize that to become identical (analogous/similar) to Akṣarabrahman (the supreme devotee) and worship the supreme Parabrahman with the relationship of dedicated-devoted servant to His Master (Parabrahman), is the core aspect of *upāsanā*.⁴¹¹

In this manner, when death, which is like an ocean, is to be overcome, it needs the help of unwavering devotion and dedication (i.e., *upāsanā*) to Parabrahman even for a devotee who may have developed *ātmaniṣṭhā* (self-knowledge/self-

⁴⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/9

⁴¹⁰ Vac. Var. 2

⁴¹¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, Kar. 10

realization). One, thus, should profoundly learn and tread the path of *upāsanā*. This reflects that *upāsanā* ought to be resolutely deep-rooted in the mind because it is not *ātmaniṣṭhā*, but the submission at the feet of the all protector-redeemer Parabrahman alone that comes to the rescue of a *upāsaka* (devotee) at the time of death. Therefore, *upāsanā* is like a life-saving ship in the binding condition of *jivātman* in *saṃsāra*. This is the reason why, even for a totally surrendered-one, the *upāsanā* of the transcendental Parabrahman, singing His splendor, actions, and incidents of His life and chanting His name are vital for the supreme liberation.⁴¹²

7.2 What to Understand in *Upāsanā*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, the terms 'Svāmi' and 'Nārāyaṇa' found within the *Svāminārāyaṇa mantra* refer to Akṣara and Puruṣottama, respectively. We will now learn the incarnate forms of Svāmi and Nārāyaṇa, otherwise as Akṣara and Puruṣottama, according to the preaching of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus.

7.2.1 *Guṇātītānanda is Akṣarabrahman*

“Mūlajī Bhakta is the incarnation of my divine abode, Akṣaradhāma.”⁴¹³ Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa himself disclosed Guṇātītānanda Svāmi’s true identity through these immortal words. The ‘Akṣara’ of 'Akṣara-Puruṣottama' and 'Svāmi' of ‘*Svāminārāyaṇa*’ both refer to Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi Mahārāja. This is well-known within the *Sampradāy*. Guṇātītānanda Svāmi Mahārāja was born on 28 September 1784 CE (Aso sud 15, *Samvata* 1841), the auspicious day of *Śarada pūrṇimā*, in the village of Bhādarā, Gujarat. He was named Mūlajī Śarmā. His mother's name was Sākarabā and his father's name was Bholānātha. Śrīhari Sahajānanda (Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa) performed a grand

⁴¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/61

⁴¹³ Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi: Life and Work, Part 1, p.54

yajna in Ḍabhāṇa on 20 January 1810 CE (Posh sud 15. Samvat 1866 and initiated Mūlajī Śarmā as a *sadhu*, naming him Guṇātītānanda Svāmi.

Sahajānanda nda Śrīhari is Puruṣottama: The term 'Narāyaṇa' within 'Svāminārāyaṇa' and 'Puruṣottama' in Akṣara-Puruṣottama both refer to Śrīhari Sahajānanda, who is known as Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa. This identification is extremely verified within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*. Within this *Darśana* only Śrīhari Sahajānanda is Puruṣottama Narāyaṇa. *Bhakti* is offered to him with the understanding that He is the Supreme Being, the all-doer, the cause and controller of all, and the granter of ultimate liberation.

7.2.2 Puruṣottama's Self Revelation

There is no superior authentication than Puruṣottama Bhagavān himself unpacking His own identity. Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly uncovers the above principle in his preachings. For example : “It is that same supreme Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavāna who manifests on this earth out of kindness - for the purpose of bestowing liberation to the *jīvas*. He is presently visible before everyone; He is your *Iṣṭadeva*; and is accepting your service.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38, p.664) Thus, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, the Akṣara Puruṣottama *upāsanā* is the most powerful spiritual endeavor.⁴¹⁴

8. Physical Sādhanā

After hearing that there is so much weightage put on *brahmabhāva* and *brahmavidyā* in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, someone might claim that there is no need for physical endeavors such as *kartvya karma*, *niyamas*, *sevā*, austerities etc. in this tradition, but Svāminārāyaṇa has given a unique and perfect balanced path of spiritual endeavors. In the *Vacanāmṛta*, Svāminārāyaṇa magnified

⁴¹⁴ SV 2/2

svarūpaniṣṭhā,⁴¹⁵ *Upāsanā*,⁴¹⁶ knowledge,⁴¹⁷ *brahmavidyā*,⁴¹⁸ *brahmabhāva*⁴¹⁹ but at the same time, he advocated austerities,⁴²⁰ *sevā*,⁴²¹ *niyamas*,⁴²² studying of scriptures,⁴²³ constant effort⁴²⁴, etc. Bhadrēśadāsa also elaborates this fact in his commentary: “यथा अश्वो देशान्तरगमनसाधनभूतोपि तद्गमनाकूलसामग्रीकलापमपेक्षते तथैव परलोकसाधनभूतापि ब्रह्मविद्या गार्हस्थ्यनिबन्धनाग्निहोत्रादिकर्मापक्षतो अतो ब्रह्मविद्यानिष्ठैरपि गृहिभिर्नित्यनैमित्तिकादिसर्वकर्मानुष्ठानं न परिहीयत इति सूचितार्थः ।” (BSSB 3/4/26, p.369) “A person who wants to travel far to reach the other region uses a horse. The horse is an essential means to reach there; However, additionally, he takes other stuff like food, water, etc., with him for his convenience. In this manner, *brahmavidyā* is a prominent means to attain liberation, yet, other *karmas* are also essential to accompany it. Even the *brahmarūpa* devotees must involve themselves in *nitya* and *naimittika karmas*.” Moreover, a devotee should abjure the *niṣiddha karma* (prohibited deeds). Bhadrēśadāsa warns: “तस्माद् ब्रह्मणः सुरां न पिबति पाप्मना नोत्सृजा इति इति । पापभिया ब्राह्मणः सुरापानं न कुरुत इति भावः।”(BSSB 3/4/31, p. 371) “Devotees of Parabrahman do not drink wine considering it as a sinful act. Thus, devotees should not have liquor.” Along with this, a devotee must keep his diet pure in order to remain firm on the path of spiritual endeavor. The CU states:

आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धौ ध्रुवा स्मृतिः

स्मृतिलम्भे सर्वग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः ।⁴²⁵

Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना परब्रह्मपरमोपसनानुकूलतया अवश्यानुष्ठेयं साधनमाहा आहारशुद्धौ चक्षुरादिसकलेन्द्रियाणां तत्तद्विषयग्रहणरूपाहारस्य शुद्धौ सत्यां सत्त्वशुद्धिः सत्त्वाख्यान्तः करणस्य तदुपलक्षितस्य चात्मनः शुद्धिर्भवति” (CUSB 7/26/2, p.340) “When the inputs of *indriyas* have been purified, the *ātman* becomes purified. When the *ātman* has been purified, the memory

⁴¹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/9

⁴¹⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/56

⁴¹⁷ Vac. Loya. 7

⁴¹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/3

⁴¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

⁴²⁰ Vac. Kar. 10

⁴²¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

⁴²² Vac. Jet. 5

⁴²³ Vac. Gadh. 3/1

⁴²⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁴²⁵ CU 7/26/2

becomes firm. And when the memory (of the Highest Self) remains firm, then all the ties (which bind us from *māyā*) are loosened.”

The BG shows the way how to control our diet habits in order to become a *yogi*.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥⁴²⁶

“The *yoga* destroys all sorrow for the one who is moderate and vigilant in eating, recreation, working, sleeping, and waking.”

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।

यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥⁴²⁷

“Acts of sacrifice, charity, and sense-control should not be abandoned, but should be performed, because sacrifice, charity, and discipline purify our mind.” Bhadrēśādāsa comments: यज्ञादीनि एतानि परमात्मप्रसन्नताहेतुकानि सत्कर्माणि इति यावद् मनीषिणां मतिमतां पावनानि बाह्यान्तःकरणपरिशुद्धिकराणि” (BGSB 18/5, pp.341-342) “If the acts of sacrifice, charity, and sense-control are accomplished to please Parabrahman, then, the seeker’s inner faculties become pure.” When one accepts the *vartamāna mantra* from the Guru, he has to follow certain rules and regulations, codes, and conducts according to one’s *āśrama*. Though in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, there is no discrimination according to one’s caste, creed, culture, color or gender but *Svāminārāyaṇa* insisted that a devotee must follow the rules given by the scriptures, Guru, and the state where he or she lives. This physical *sādhanā* ultimately leads him to liberation.⁴²⁸

8.1 Niyamas

Niyamas are mostly known as *dharma*. To attain ultimate liberation, an aspirant has to follow the codes of conduct of the *Satsaṅga* fellowship. They are included in the devotees’ daily behavior. *Niyamas* are essential for making our daily deeds or

⁴²⁶ BG 6/17

⁴²⁷ BG 18/5

⁴²⁸ Mahant swami Maharaj, *Satsaṅgiksha* - 12-17, *Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpith*, Ahmedabad, 2020

actions pious and pure that is called *sadācāra*. Actually, *sadācāra* is asserted in the scriptures by ṛṣis. *Sadācāra* is called *dharma* as well. Even bhakti without dharma is unacceptable in the tradition. For a spiritual aspirant, observance of *dharma* is very important in order to attain liberation.⁴²⁹ However, *niyamas* are concerned with *bāhya āchār* (external behavior). They help us to lift our personal pious behavior (*sadācāra*), consequently *dharma* becomes firm. Generally, *niyamas* and *dharma* are connected to each other. Collectively, they are called ‘*niyamdharma*’ in a pragmatic way. Since the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya* is known as a *śuddha sampradāya*⁴³⁰ (pure fellowship) because of its pious codes in every aspect of life. Svāminārāyaṇa states the importance of *niyamas* in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Whether or not one has *vairāgya*, if one diligently observes the *niyamas* prescribed by Parabrahman, then the desires for the *pañcaviśayas* can be conquered.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/16, p.429)

Niyamas are related to *indriyas* and their respective subject of pleasures. In order to satisfy one’s physical or mental urge, one engrosses in the *pañcaviśayas*. So, if there are no rules and regulations or codes of conduct regulating the indulgence of *viśayas*, then the *jīva* falls from the path of liberation and suffers miseries in its own daily life as well. That is why Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Keep the behaviors of your five senses (*indriyas*) extremely pure.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/18, p.57). Svāminārāyaṇa strongly opposes those who believe that knowledge is everything to achieve a spiritual goal and it is ok if there is a lapse in observing *niyamas*: “From today onwards, then, whosoever abandons *dharma* – in the form of the five religious and *sāmpradāyika* vows – solely advocating the potency of *bhakti* or *jnāna*, is a blasphemer of the Guru and Guru’s word.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/77, p.191) Svāminārāyaṇa likes those who are firm in observing the non-lust vow: “In fact, the

⁴²⁹ Mahant swami Maharaj, Satsangdiksha - 117, *Ibid*.

⁴³⁰ Vac. Gadh. 3/3

very cause that I have resided here is because of these devotees' firm resolve to observe the vow of non-lust." (Vac. Gadh. 2/33, p.465) The ancient scriptures also advocate the glory of norms and regulations of the religion, which was the way of life. The TU reveals:

वेदमनूच्याचार्योन्तेवासिनमनुशास्ति ।
सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः ।
आचार्याय प्रियं धनमाहत्य प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः ।
सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यम् ।
कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । भूतै न प्रमदितव्यम् ।
स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ॥⁴³¹

“After teaching the Vedas, in the end, the teacher instructs the pupil. Speak the truth. Accomplish your duty. Do not abandon the self-study of the Vedas. After giving the gift desired by the teacher, do not break the chain of your progeny. Do not abandon truth. Do not abandon duty. Do not abandon your health. Do not abandon your material wellbeing. Do not abandon the self-study and the teaching of the Vedas.”

देवपितृकार्याभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् । मातृदेवो भव ।
पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ।
यान्यनवद्यानि कर्माणि । तानि सेवितव्यानि । नो इतराणि ।
यान्यस्माकं सुचरितानि । तानि त्वयोपास्यानि ॥⁴³²

“Do not neglect your duties to deities and ancestors. May your mother be honored as a deity by you; may your father be honored as a deity by you; may your teacher be honored as a deity by you; may your guest be honored as a Parabrahman by you. Whatever actions are free from vanity, they should be practiced, not others. Whatever good behavior you find among us (teachers), that alone should be practiced, not others.”

⁴³¹ TU 1/11/1

⁴³² TU 1/11/2

Bhadreśadāsa comments: “कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतं समाः इत्यादिवदत्रापि आवश्यककर्तव्यानि कर्माणि उपदिश्यन्ते... ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरूपदिष्टश्रुतिस्मृति प्रतिपादितसदाचारं परिपालया(TUSB 1/11/1, pp.353-354) “*Īśopaniṣad* declares, one should indulge in the *karmas* and live for hundred years in this world. In the same way, the TU sings the glory of the daily behavior of a disciple. (so) Follow the rules and regulation asserted by the scriptures and preached by the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.”

8.2 *Sevā*

“सेवाधर्मो परमगहनो योगिनामपि अगम्यः”

“To perform *seva* is indeed very difficult for yogis also.” In every religion of the world, *sevā* (service) is accepted as an active part of religion and spirituality. Though, it is very difficult to accomplish it in the manner through which it becomes the means to attain ultimate liberation. That is why it is called difficult even for *yogis*. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedanta, *sevā* is a glorious spiritual means that can please the Guru and *Hari*. *Svāminārāyaṇa* highlights the benefit of *sevā* in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “If the *vruttis* of the *indriyas* are engaged in the service of Parabrahman Bhagwān and His utmost devotee, then the *antaḥkaraṇa* is purified and the sins that have been attached to the *jīva* since time immemorial are eliminated.”(Vac. Gadh. 1/8, p.37)

Sevā is not just a matter of debate or proverb which finds its place in the scriptures only. *Svāminārāyaṇa* gives a live example of a devotee who had achieved the highest peak of *sevā*. He states: “Just as Ukā Khāchar has become passionate to serving the *sādhus*, in the same manner, if one becomes passionate to serving Parabrahman and His *Santa* to the extent that one would not be able to stay for even a moment without serving them, then all of the malign desires in one's *antaḥkaraṇa* will be destroyed.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/25, pp. 449-450) The BG also speaks the glory of *sevā* in the fourth chapter. “Acquire this knowledge from a

Parabrahman-realized master by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise who have realized the truth will teach you.”⁴³³

Bhadreśadāsa comments on ‘by service’: “सेवया प्रकटपरमात्मभवप्रकर्षविभूषितया दिव्यभावयुक्ताभि- स्नेहशीलया शुश्रूषया” (BGSB 4/34, p.109) “A devotee when serves another devotee with the understanding that this devotee is associated with the manifest form of Parabrahman. This understanding brings the super quality in *sevā*.” In the field of *sevā*, a great example is of Satyakāma Jābālī. In his childhood, he wanted to go to a *Gurukula* and study the scriptures in order to become a great scholar. He took the permission of his mother and walked straight to the Guru, Gautama Rṣi. After noticing his innocence, the Guru accepted him as his disciple. Satyakāma was very happy. He wanted to fulfill his wish to study the scriptures and attain knowledge. But to his astounding, the Guru said:

तं होवाच नैतद्ब्राह्मणो विवक्तुमर्हति समिधं
सोम्याहरोप त्वा नेष्ये न सत्यादगा इति तमुपनीय
कृशानामबलानां चतुःशता गा निराकृत्योवाचेमाः
सोम्यानुसंभ्रजेति ता अभिप्रस्थापयन्नुवाच

नासहस्रेणावर्तेयेति स ह वर्षगणं प्रोवास ता यदा सहस्रं सम्पेदुः ॥⁴³⁴

“Having initiated him, he chose four hundred lean and weak cows, and said: ‘Tend these, dear.’ He drove them out and said to himself, ‘I shall not return unless I bring back a thousand.’ He stayed a number of years in the forest, until the cows had become a thousand.” Satyakāma was a firm disciple. He did *sevā* of the cows as per his Guru’s wish. After obeying the Guru’s command with perfection, he returned to *Gurukula*. His face was shining due to *brahmabhāva*. The Guru observed it in first glance. He said:

⁴³³ BG 4/34

⁴³⁴ CU 4/4/5

ब्रह्मविदिव वै सोम्य भासि को नु त्वानुशशासेत्यन्ये

मनुष्येभ्य इति ह प्रतिजज्ञे भगवान् स्त्वेव मे कामे ब्रूयात्॥⁴³⁵

“The Guru said: ‘dear, you shine like one who knows Brahman. Who then has taught you?’ He replied: ‘Not anyone. But you only, Sir, I wish, should teach me’”
श्रुतं ह्येव मे भगवद्दृशेभ्य आचार्याद्धैव विद्या विदिता, साधिष्ठं प्रापतीति तस्मै हैतदेवोवाचात्र ह न किञ्चन, वीयायेति वीयायेति ॥⁴³⁶
“Satyakāma said, ‘For I have heard from men like you, Sir, that only knowledge which is learned from a teacher (*ācārya*) leads to really good.’ Then he taught him the same knowledge.” In this manner, *sevā* captures a sublime place amongst the spiritual endeavors. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, *sevā* becomes a part of life. The devotees serve other devotees with understanding their glory.⁴³⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa himself declares: “Therefore, in order to please Parabrahman, I desire only to serve devotees of Parabrahman in this life and all subsequent lives. Furthermore, just as this is my resolution, all of you should also make the same resolution.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/28, p.456)

8.3 Austerities

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, *tapa* (austerities) plays a major role as far as the physical-spiritual endeavors are concerned. Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly states: “To please Parabrahman, Nārādji accomplished stringent austerities by tolerating cold and heat, hunger and thirst for many *yugas*; and due to this, he was able to please Parabrahman. In the same manner, a person who is wise deliberately performs austerities by restraining his body and *indriyas*.”(Vac. Kar. 10, p.270)

Bhadreśadāsa explains the meaning of *tapa*: बाह्यान्तःकरणसंयमनलक्षणं तपः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

“A seeker should pacify the power of his internal and external *indriyas* and restrain them from the sense pleasures.” Svāminārāyaṇa also shows the way to control them:

⁴³⁵ CU 4/9/2

⁴³⁶ CU 4/9/3

⁴³⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

“The physical *indriyas* can be regulated by observing the *niyamas* specified for a renunciant in the *dharmasāstras*; by governing one’s diet; by observing vows like *taptkrucchha chāndrayanā*, etc.; by deliberately enduring cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; by engaging in the discourses, talks, and devotional songs related to Parabrahman; by engrossing in worship and remembrance; by governing one’s posture and by other spiritual endeavors. The *antahkarana* can be controlled by contemplating upon Parabrahman’s greatness, by meditating on Parabrahman and by realizing oneself to be the *ātman*.”(Vac. Loya 5, p.293)

9. *Dikṣā*

Dikṣā is an ancient Indian tradition in which a seeker abides by his own wish to follow some particular rules and regulation described by scriptures and directed by the Guru. There are two types of *dikṣā*. (1). Common (2) Special. The common *dikṣā* is for householders and the special (additional) *dikṣā* is for those who want to remain celibate renunciates throughout their life.⁴³⁸

9.1 *Dikṣita* Housholder’s *Niyamas*

When a seeker takes refuge of the Guru and receives the *vartamāna dikṣā mantra*.⁴³⁹
The Guru gives him five vows to enter the *satsaṅga* fellowship.

व्यभिचारं सुरापानमभक्ष्यमांसभक्षणम् ।

चौर्यञ्च सर्वथा त्यक्तुं सुदृढनिश्चया द्विज ॥

मुमुक्षवस्तु विज्ञेया साधारणाधिकरिणः।⁴⁴⁰

After a firm resolve of abjuring meat-eating, liquor, theft, addictions, and adultery, aspirants are eligible to take common *dikṣā*. Svāminārāyaṇa clearly states: “One who follows the path of unrighteousness is immersed in evil deeds such as stealing, adultery, eating meat, drinking alcohol, changing someone’s caste by force and

⁴³⁸ APM 2/10/27-33

⁴³⁹ *Satsaṅgādikṣha* 18-19

⁴⁴⁰ APM 2/10/38-39

having one's own caste changed by force. Consequently, no one in the world ever trusts him.” (Vac. Sār. 10, p.225)

9.1.1 Meat Eating

One has to kill animals to eat meat. Killing is a grave sin. It must be abjured.⁴⁴¹ Svāminārāyaṇa has recommended performance of only non-violent *yajñas*. “So, one should never eat flesh, even if it is the remnants of offerings in a sacrifice or in circumstances of great difficulty. One should not eat or drink the offerings made to a deity to whom flesh and wine are offered.”⁴⁴² To prevent one from the bad food one should understand, “Even unclean food grains and unsieved flour should not be used, as they are likely to contain small insects which may be killed. So, this should also be avoided.”⁴⁴³ No one should bathe with dirty water, which breeds insects. The *Mahābhārata* declares, “A man who does not take wine and meat is as good as a man who performs the *Aśvamedha Yajña* every month.”⁴⁴⁴

9.1.2 Liquor

Mahanta Svāmi says,

सुराभङ्गातमालादि यद् यद् भवेद्भि मादकम्
तद् भक्षयेत् पिबेन्नैव धुम्रपानमपि त्यजेत्॥⁴⁴⁵

“One should never consume intoxicating substances, such as alcohol, bhang and tobacco. One should also refrain from smoking.” Drinking liquor arouses *tāmas* (darkness) within. Even if it has been offered to a deity, it should not be taken. The scriptures state that if even a drop of liquor falls on one's shoes, the animal whose skin was utilized for making those shoes goes to hell. “*Manusmṛti* lists wine drinking as one of the five grave sins. One should never take medicines in which

⁴⁴¹ *Satsangdiksha* 29

⁴⁴² APM 4/53/11

⁴⁴³ Vac. Gadh. 1/29, 1/48

⁴⁴⁴ APM 4/53/23-25

⁴⁴⁵ *Satsangdiksha* 27

liquor or meat has been mixed or which are prescribed by a physician whose conduct is not known. Meat-eating and wine drinking are considered a necessity in this modern age. They have been adopted either for making money in business or for promoting a person's social status. But such indulgence is a grave sin."⁴⁴⁶ *Satsangis* should never take meat or drink alcohol. "Those followers going abroad for the sake of studies or for some other purpose should also strictly observe these rules. Experience confirms that one can live even in a foreign country without taking meat and alcohol, i.e., as a strict vegetarian and teetotaler. So, this rule must not be violated under any temptation of social status, company or material benefit. Observance of this rule holds great importance for obtaining the grace of Parabrahman."⁴⁴⁷

9.1.3 Theft

An aspirant should never steal. Even for the sake of dharma, one should never commit theft. Even taking fuel, flowers, etc., without the consent of their owners is regarded as theft. Not returning things that are borrowed is also regarded as a form of theft.⁴⁴⁸ "Wealth obtained through fraudulent means does not bring happiness. No one should stealthily enter a house or shop, pass through any field or put up in a place without the owner's permission. Theft, along with drinking liquor, is also considered one of the five grave sins people should not commit. Therefore, none should commit theft in any way."⁴⁴⁹

9.1.4 Addictions

One should always renounce all harmful addictions, as addictions cause numerous illnesses and miseries.⁴⁵⁰ Intoxicating substances like hashish, morphine, marijuana, opium, tobacco, heroin, etc. should not be taken, drunk or inhaled. They artificially

⁴⁴⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/29, 1/48

⁴⁴⁷ APM 4/53/11, BSSB 3/4/31, p.371

⁴⁴⁸ *Satsangdiksha* 31,32

⁴⁴⁹ APM 4/53/13

⁴⁵⁰ *Satsangdiksha* 26

stimulate the body and mind, thus making man a slave of addictions. Guṇātītānanda Svāmi has said, “The amount wastefully spent by *kusaṅgis* is more than enough to meet the daily needs of a *satsaṅgī*.” Gambling in any form – playing cards, betting on races, speculating, etc. – are also various kinds of vices. “Vulgar films and dramas must not be seen. Addictions increase our greediness and consequently ruin us. Therefore, one should keep away from these vices. However, if by bad company, one is lured into the indulgence of any one of these habits, then it must be eradicated off by *Satsaṅga* and the company of *sādhus*.”⁴⁵¹

9.1.5 Adultery

All women and men should never engage in any form of adultery. One must not commit adultery either by mind, speech or body.⁴⁵² One should not even look at women with an immoral eye. *Brahmacarya* is the greatest virtue and earns the immense blessings of Parabrahman. “In this day and age, when, innumerable vices arise from men and women mix freely with one another and take undue liberty. These incidents ultimately spell moral degeneration for the people involved. Therefore, today, there is a need for the strict practice of this virtue. *Satsaṅgis* should never look lustfully at women with evil thoughts and should abide by the ethical codes given. A householder must limit his intimate relation with his wife only, while the other hand, renunciate has to observe the eight-fold celibacy.”⁴⁵³

9.2 *Dikṣita* Renunciate’s *Niyamas*

Mahant Svāmi explains that those who wish to join the *sādhus-ashram* (ascetic-hermitage or monastery) should receive initiation from the Akṣarabrahman Guru. All *sādhus* (monks) should always observe eight-fold *brahmacharya*.⁴⁵⁴ After accepting the advanced level *dikṣā*, a renunciate has to follow some additional codes

⁴⁵¹ APM 4/53/14, Vac. Loya. 8

⁴⁵² *Satsaṅgīkṣha* 28

⁴⁵³ APM 4/53/14, Vac. Gadh. 1/18, Vac. Gadh. 1/72

⁴⁵⁴ *Satsaṅgīkṣha* 281

and conducts along with the aforementioned *niyamas*. To affect this, Svāminārāyaṇa gave them five vows, the *pañca-vartmān*. Renunciates are required to follow all these *niyamas* with profound perfection. Bhadrēśadāsa consolidates: “उत्सन्नाग्निरनग्निको वा यदहरेव विरजेत् तदहरेव प्रवजेद् इत्यादिश्रुत्यन्तरे विधिप्रत्ययप्रयुक्तभावशब्दश्रवनादनुष्ठेयमेव-पारिव्रज्यमपीत्यर्थः।” (BSSB 3/4/22, p.366)

“A person whether he follows the *Agnihotra Karma* or not, if he feels detachment towards worldly affairs, he should abjure the home and accept the garb of a renunciate. In this *śruti*, the term ‘*virājita*’ and ‘*pravrajita*’ reflects the action. Therefore, the renunciate has to indulge in the actions.” These additional *pañca-vartmān* (*niyamas*) are:

पञ्चैवावश्यजेतव्याः सन्ति दोषेषु तेष्वपि । जितेषु येषु सर्वे ते जिताः स्युर्नात्र संशयः ॥

लोभः कामो रसास्वादः स्नेहो मानश्च पञ्चम । अन्तःशत्रवः एते हि दुर्जया विदुषामपि ॥⁴⁵⁵

“To eradicate the internal spiritual enemies like lust, avarice, attachment, craving for the taste of food and ego, a renunciate has to follow the order of ascetic-monks (*sādhus*). In order to fulfill that purpose, the *śāstra* prescribes five fundamental precepts (*vartamāna*), namely, *niṣkāma* (strict continence), *nirlobha* (non-avarice), *nihsneha* (non-attachment), *nirmāna* (utter humility) and *niḥsvāda* (indifference to food-taste). By following these vows, one can overcome all his internal enemies.” The Svāminārāyaṇa initiated *sādhus* (the ascetics) should live a life of self-refrainment and self-denial, and therefore, they are supposed to give up all sense-fascinations and sense-attachments. They are obliged to live in a society surrounded by people. They have a duty to serve mankind, but with a sense of detachment and constant Parabrahman-consciousness. In the midst of people, they are supposed to enjoy the bliss of Parabrahman with solitude while working for them.

⁴⁵⁵ APM 4/54/11-12

The *sādhus* must be indifferent towards attachment or aversion for anyone. He does not wish ill of anyone in thought, speech, and action. They ought to give back love and goodwill for hatred and attacks hurled on them. They do not hurt any living creature. They should see Parabrahman in all and good in all. Their life of dutifulness ought to consummate in the life dignified. The BG reminds:

प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥⁴⁵⁶

“When one is completely free from all vicious and good desires and is satisfied with his *ātman* by the joy of knowing Parabrahman, then one is called an enlightened person.” In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, it is the attitude and good will that matter most and not the pomp, nor the details of acts and not even the failure or success. He is truly a renunciate, a hermit, an ascetic who has an intense love for Parabrahman alone. On the other hand, he should not have any love or attachment for anything except Parabrahman. Renunciate ascetics do not attend to anything but one's *ātman*. He abandons interest in everything except his *ātman*, and with *ātman*-consciousness he worships Paramātman.⁴⁵⁷ He is a true recluse-ascetic who once, after renouncing the world, never thinks (desires) anything of it again. The worldly pleasures cannot deviate one whose mind is drowned in Parabrahman-consciousness.⁴⁵⁸

The sadhu worships Parabrahman and at the same time abides by His commands. For no other motives but to please Parabrahman alone.⁴⁵⁹ A true ascetic-*sādhu* (*tyāgi*) ought to have thirty portent virtues of Parabrahman.⁴⁶⁰ The *sādhu* makes an effort to absorb virtues and develops in him by the right resolute knowledge of the essential nature of Parabrahman. A *tyāgi-sādhu* sternly practices continence in all

⁴⁵⁶ BG 2/55

⁴⁵⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/36, 1/38, 1/44

⁴⁵⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/36, 1/38, Vac. Gadh. 2/23

⁴⁵⁹ Vac. Kar. 10

⁴⁶⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/77, 1/78

genuineness with its eightfold requirements. He practices atonement with great sincerity when the fault occurs. He seldom pays attention to the things of worldly value. He treats them as insignificant objects and is not tempted by them.⁴⁶¹ He remains the lowly servant of the servants (devotees) of Parabrahman. He remains calm composed, and equipoise. Self-abnegation and self-denial constitute the lifestyle of a *sādhu*. Proper restraint and right thinking are the necessary disciplines for a *sādhu*. Abiding himself by the rules and vows prescribed for ascetic-monks, a *sādhu* should neither crave for nor be allured by the pleasures of the world, as they are valueless.⁴⁶² As far as the *sādhu* of the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition are concerned, they are the brand ambassador of the philosophical knowledge. These *sādhus* (ascetic monks) have been playing a vital role in enriching and spread this philosophical knowledge around the world.

9.3 Relaxation in the Observance of *Niyamas*

The Svāminārāyaṇa tradition is firm but not inert. For example, on the day of a fast, one has to renounce water and food strictly, but the *śāstras* permit one who is seriously ill to eat on the day of a fast. This indicates that all the religious norms are to help humans, not against them. These relaxations of duties are prescribed by the *śāstra* for absolute emergencies only. This is known as *āpad dharma*. This is the *dharma* allowed in periods of great difficulty. One should never relax in the performance of one's duties in the face of very normal difficulties.⁴⁶³ The *Mahābhārata* instructs, “*Āpad dharma* should be resorted to only in the face of death. Once the calamity has cleared, then one should observe the normal rules of *dharma*.” In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, there is a story of Uśasti Ṛṣi. Uśasti did not get food for many days. He was about to die. On his last breath, he went to a *mahāvāt* (elephant rider), who was at that time eating putrefied black lentils and

⁴⁶¹ KeUSB 2/4, pp.46-47

⁴⁶² Vac. Gadh. 1/69

⁴⁶³ APM 4/53/35

asked for some food. The *mahāvat* gave him the half-eaten food from his dish, which Uśasti ate. Subsequently, the *mahāvat* offered him water. Uśasti said, “No, I can stay alive with the black lentils for now. I shall not drink the water from which you have already drunk.” This should be recognized as the appropriate practice of *āpad dharma*. Today, the observance of *dharma* has deteriorated because people have started treating minor problems as *āpad dharma*.⁴⁶⁴

Bhadreśadāsa also comments on the CU: “एवमनेन प्राणात्ययसंकटे सर्वान्नानुमितिरापद्धर्माचरणविवेकश्चोपदिष्टौ” (CUSB 1/10/4, p.53) “Thus, an act of *āpad dharma* is permitted only at the face of death. But it should not be accepted as a routine habit. This wisdom is preached here.” The BS also describes this fact in the form of a *sūtra*: सर्वान्नानुमितिश्च प्राणात्यये तद्दर्शनात्⁴⁶⁵ The Bhāṣyakāra explains that सर्वभक्षणानुज्ञा न सर्वकालिकापि तु प्राणात्यये प्राणसंकटलक्षणापत्काले एव । (BSSB 3/4/28, p.370) “The act of accepting the food which is tasted by another person is permitted only at the face of death.”

9.4 Atonement

We have learned some of the various moral, physical rules prescribed by Svāminārāyaṇa. But he knows the human tendency that knowingly or unknowingly any of these rules would be transgressed, then for purification, rules for atonement are also given in scriptures like the *Satsaṃgadīkṣā*⁴⁶⁶ and *Akṣarapurūṣottama Māhātmyam*. Similarly, the words of a param ekāntika *sādhu* who has attained Parabrahman-realization are also measured to be *dharma*. Thus, whatever he instructs one to do in atonement for a sin purifies one from that sin, but it should be done with full faith. After having atoned for the sin, the devotee becomes purified. He should not then be known as a sinner.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ CU 1/10/1-4

⁴⁶⁵ BS 3/4/28

⁴⁶⁶ *Satsaṃgadīkṣā* 273

⁴⁶⁷ APM 4/54/57

10. Bhakti (Devotion-Worship)

Bhadreśadāsa declares: “किमपि साधनं भक्तिं विना नैव प्रसिद्ध्यति”⁴⁶⁸ “No endeavor is successful without *bhakti*.” The word ‘*bhakti*’ is derived from the *Sam̐skṛta* root ‘*bhaj*’, meaning to ‘to worship’ ‘to seek refuge’, ‘to serve’, and ‘to love’. Since the word ‘*bhakti*’ suggests the intellectual and emotional act of seeking refuge with love and dedication, the path of *bhakti* is described as the most important means to please Parabrahman.

माहात्म्यज्ञानयुक्स्नेहः सुदृढः सर्वतोधिकः। भक्तिरित्युच्यते मातः शास्त्रेषु परमात्मनि॥⁴⁶⁹

“Intense and centered love towards Parabrahman coupled with the knowledge of his greatness identified as *bhakti* in the scriptures.” Simply, *bhakti* is described as an elite attachment to Parabrahman with intense love.⁴⁷⁰ *Bhakti* consists of constant remembrance of Parabrahman similar to an uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel into another.⁴⁷¹

Svāminārāyaṇa defines: “*Bhakti*, an intense affection for Parabrahman which is devoid of all desires for fruits, and which is escorted with an understanding of Parabrahman’s magnitude.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, p.60) *Bhakti*, assisted by the knowledge of Parabrahman's glory (*māhātmyajñāna*) remains ever blooming both in its intensity and extensity. However, it is *bhakti* only when it is unprovoked and desireless.⁴⁷² Bhadreśadāsa explains:

भक्तिर्नानाविधा प्रोक्ता श्रवणकीर्तनादिका

भक्ताभिरुचिभेदाद् हि तत्र वैविध्यदर्शनम्॥⁴⁷³

“*Bhakti* (devotion) implies nine-fold forms of worship (*navadhābhakti*); actually, the nine types of differences are due to worshiper’s interest or preferences.” This *bhakti* is described as ‘*sādhana-bhakti*’ i.e. *bhakti* as a means. Prahlādajī states:

⁴⁶⁸ SSSK 386

⁴⁶⁹ APM 1/38/2

⁴⁷⁰ Shandilyasūtra 1/2

⁴⁷¹ Nārada bhaktisūtra 1/2

⁴⁷² Vac. Sar. 5

⁴⁷³ SSSK 410

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥⁴⁷⁴

“Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, actions, and pastimes of Parabrahman, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of Parabrahman, offering Him respectful worship with sixteen types of accessories, offering prayers to Parabrahman, becoming His servant, believing Parabrahman one’s best friend, and submitting everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him by the deed, mind, and speech)—these nine processes are acknowledged as pure devotional service.”

In addition to this, in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, the Guruparampara explains that beyond this nine-fold form of *bhakti*, there is '*parā-bhakti*,' i.e. 'devotion-par-excellence'. Which is described as '*phala-rupā*' i.e. '*bhakti* as the climax'. It is described as '*prema-lakṣaṇā-bhakti*' in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*,⁴⁷⁵ while as '*ekāntiki-bhakti*' in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School.⁴⁷⁶ This *bhakti* is characterized by complete Parabrahman-oriented intense love and the awareness that he chants 'I am Brahman', “Akṣaram *aham* Puruṣottama *dasosmī*”.⁴⁷⁷ Means my actual form is Akṣara and I am a servant of Parabrahman. It is the highest devotion, love, and servitude unto Parabrahman after transcending the gamut of three *guṇas* of *māyā-prakṛti*. In the BG, ‘अनन्या भक्त्या’ is described where Bhadrēśadāsa defines it as unfaltered *brāhmic* devotion to Parabrahman. Thus, the word '*bhakti*' finds a new dimension in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, for it advocates, *nirguṇa*, *brahmarūpa*, *ātmic prīti* for Parabrahman.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ *Śrīmad Bhagavatam* -7/5/23

⁴⁷⁵ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*-11/3/31-32

⁴⁷⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/21, 3/21

⁴⁷⁷ Satsangdiksha 57

⁴⁷⁸ BGSB 8/22, p.194

10.1 Intense Love Due to Glory

Bhadreśadāsa defines the glory of Parabrahman through which the intense love rises:

भक्तिस्तु सहजानन्दे माहात्म्यज्ञानविभूषिता ।

दिव्यानन्यापरा प्रीतिलौकिकभाववर्जिता ॥⁴⁷⁹

“*Bhakti* towards Parabrahman should be coupled with the glory of Him. This love in the form of *bhakti* should be focused, divine, and without worldly sentiments.” When a seeker has the resolute knowledge (*mahatmyajnāna*) and conviction (*niścaya*) of the glory of Parabrahman, the highest love for Parabrahman arises in which the seeker understands that the currently manifest form of Parabrahman (*pratyakṣa-parāmātma svarūpa*) is the inner self of all, omnipotent all-doer. There is no other else such as *puruṣa*, *kāla*, *māyā* and deities (like-*brahmā* etc.) as the cause, the creator and the controller of the universe. He is the Master of masters and God of the infinite number of universes. He alone is the transcendental reality endowed with the highest excellence and glory.⁴⁸⁰

A person who has a profound affection for Parabrahman cannot love anything else besides Him, even if forced to do so. True devotee loves Parabrahman alone singularly. The dedicated love of the ultimate quality arises in the heart, caused by constant remembrance of the glory of Parabrahman.⁴⁸¹ A *bhakta* possessing the deepest love for Parabrahman cannot do anything contrary to the will and command of Parabrahman.⁴⁸² He persists incessantly drowned in Parabrahman-consciousness, and that he cannot forget Him even for a fraction of a second.⁴⁸³ Generally, love brings conditions and demands but the love for Parabrahman must be unconditional and free from demand. It must be unmatched, unmitigated, steady, and unflinching.

⁴⁷⁹ SSSK 409

⁴⁸⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/59

⁴⁸¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/48

⁴⁸² Vac. Kar. 11

⁴⁸³ Vac. Gadh. 1/44

The love based on the appealing physical qualities is not trustworthy, for it may divert onto a person or thing other than Parabrahman. The love for Parabrahman must be as intense and strong as one's love for his body and its relations.⁴⁸⁴

Those *bhaktas* who love Parabrahman with an understanding of His divine glory become the vessel to receive the stream of intense love of Parabrahman. Bhadreśādāsa confirms: “यतस्ते यथोक्तब्रह्मगुणैर्युता मां भजन्ते तस्मान्मेतीव प्रिया इति भाव ।” (BGSB 12/20, p.275) “Those who worship me with *brahmabhāva* are my utmost beloved devotees.” The most significant barrier in the way of unwavering love towards Parabrahman is our three *māyic* *guṇas*. The aspirant must rise above the influence of three *guṇas*, his body-awareness knowing that he is a pure *ātman* and loving Parabrahman alone. Such *nirguṇa ātmic* love alone is the true basis of *bhakti*. The efflorescence of *nirguṇa brahmasvarūpa-prīti* (non-ephemeral Akṣara-like *ātmic* love) has the superior quality of affiliating one to Parabrahman with intense exclusive love and undivided fidelity. In it, there is self-forgetting. He rises above from these three *guṇas*. Nothing lures and attracts him, for he sees Parabrahman as the supreme value and the fountainhead of all joy and happiness. He experiences unceasing novelty and ever-increasing joy of bliss in the *svarūpa* of Parabrahman.⁴⁸⁵

10.2 The Way to Learn *Bhakti*

In the way of spiritual fulfillment, one needs an ideal role model. We learned that *bhakti* is the essential means to reach the ultimate; therefore, Akṣarabrahman is the ideal for the seekers to learn *bhakti*. Just as a bridge serves as a medium to help one cross easily over from one side of the river to the other, Akṣarabrahman manifests as the Guru and serves as a bridge. He saves us from drowning in *māyā*, helps us to

⁴⁸⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/57

⁴⁸⁵ BGSB 3/28, p.83

cross the ocean of *saṃsāra* and teaches us to attain Paramātman through his *bhakti*.⁴⁸⁶ Along with it as the Bhāṣyakāra claims: “परब्रह्मणि भक्तिं तु ब्रह्मभावोप्यपेक्षते”⁴⁸⁷

“*Bhakti* needs *brahmabhāva* for its completion.”⁴⁸⁸ And for *brahmabhāva* Akṣarabrahman’s company is inevitable. Thus, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru is the only means to attain *bhakti*. This is called *pratyakṣa bhakti* as well. A *mumukṣu* (seeker) having *mumukṣutvam* (earnest desire for *mokṣa*) should have first of all firm faith in the words of the genuinely great *sādhu* (the Akṣarabrahman - Guru); should listen carefully to and ponder over the words of the great *sādhu*; should serve him in thought, speech and action; should keep up sincerely the company of him. Certainly, then the right devotion based on the knowledge of Parabrahman's greatness and glory grows and blooms in the heart.

This great sadhu is the *Akṣara*-Guru, who himself is the finest devotee, the perfect obedient servant of Parabrahman, and the knower of the secret wisdom of Parabrahman. Thus, he is our best friend, philosopher, and guide to nourish and nurture devotion in our hearts. Therefore, one who lives by the words of Parabrahman, and sees Parabrahman and the Guru (the truly great *sādhu*) as faultless, and sees in them all good and divinity - finds the spontaneous growth of devotion in one's heart and consequently, he becomes *brahmarūpa*.⁴⁸⁹ Bhadreśadāsa avers while discussing on *bhakti* at the famous verse *brahmabhutah*: “ब्रह्मरूपो यो मुमुक्षुः स एव परमात्मपराभक्तियोग्यो भवति इति सिद्धान्तितम्” (BGSB 18/54, p.361)

“Only one who is *brahmarūpa* is eligible to offer *bhakti* to Parabrahman.” Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa makes a decision: “One who does not proffer *bhakti* to Parabrahman after becoming *brahmarūpa* cannot be said to have accomplished

⁴⁸⁶ KUSB 3/2 pp.123-124

⁴⁸⁷ SSSK 386

⁴⁸⁸ BSSB 3/2/23, p.300

⁴⁸⁹ APM 4/53/60

final liberation.” (Vac. Loya 7, p.303) It is clear that in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, the profound company of the great *sādhu* (the *Akṣara-Guru*) brings the intense love for Parabrahman with the deepest attachment towards him. The union with the *Akṣara-Guru* should rest on the principles of devotion, affection, closeness, esteem, unreserved frankness, servility, and compliance. The affection for the great *sādhu* (the *Akṣara-Guru*) should be as deep and natural as is for one's body and its relation. Such an overwhelming love and attachment for the *Akṣara-Guru* is the best means for self-realization, the best means to understand the transcendental splendor of Parabrahman, and the best means to have the Parabrahman-realization.⁴⁹⁰

This type of extraordinary love and keenness for Parabrahman, trust, faith, and firm knowledge of the manifest (perceptibly present/*pratyakṣa*) form of Parabrahman are predestined factors. Thereafter the devotee is unable to live without Him even for a fraction of a second, forget his Parabrahman-consciousness, he constantly remains drowned in Parabrahman-remembrance, and he dwells in most obedient servility. As a result, he is a worthy and a great devotee to remain in the service of Parabrahman Himself.⁴⁹¹ However, not all seekers can achieve such a great company of sadhus. Therefore, to serve the *parama-ekāntika satpuruṣa* (the *Akṣara-Guru*) is a rare fortune earned by a person of great merits (*punya*).⁴⁹² He who serves the *Akṣara-Guru* with heart and *ātman*, stands favored by Parabrahman and he certainly finds a place in the highest abode to serve Parabrahman eternally.⁴⁹³ Consequently, this service to the *Akṣara-Guru* brings the highest form of devotion blooms in the heart. He attains the *samādhi*-state of *upāsanā*.⁴⁹⁴

In this manner, the Guru teaches us that all the *seva* in the *satsang* fellowship should be cultivated without any selfish motive, ego, discrimination, or fault-finding. One

⁴⁹⁰ Vac. Var. 11

⁴⁹¹ BGSB 7/17, p.165

⁴⁹² Vac. Gadh. 2/59, BGSB 7/3, p.157

⁴⁹³ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

⁴⁹⁴ Vac. Var. 3, Vac. Amd. 3

earns the favor of Parabrahman only when the *Akṣara*-Guru and the devotees of Parabrahman are served with a changed vision of seeing them as divine, faultless, and vice-free. Thus, one should think of himself as the most fortunate of getting the chance to serve Parabrahman and His devotees.⁴⁹⁵

10.3 *Bhakti* Purifies the Self

The most significant benefit of *bhakti* is its power to eradicate the vicious nature and faults of an aspirant. When an aspirant serves and offers *bhakti* with heart and *ātman*, his sins get eliminated, his vices get destroyed, his rebirth-causing desires (*vāsanā*) and inclinations get worn out and he becomes the best devotee dearer to Parabrahman.⁴⁹⁶ Thus, *Bhakti* helps in purifying the self, destroying *māyā*, fixing the mind perpetually on Parabrahman, and accomplishing detachment from worldly objects.⁴⁹⁷

Bhadreśadāsa also confirms that a devotee who is offering *bhakti* with *brahmabhāva* “न शोचति न काङ्क्षति” neither grieves nor desires.⁴⁹⁸ However, *bhakti* is the loving devout worship of a pure heart. It entails giving up on deceit, anger, lust, greed, pride, ego, jealousy, envy, etc. The most intense untainted love and attachment (*premalaksanā-bhakti*) towards Parabrahman encompasses the virtues of Akṣara. Therefore, *Akṣarabrahman-Gunātītā satpurush* is the prerequisite of the whole range of the *bhakti-sādhanā*.

Bhadreśadāsa explains that *bhakti* is love for Parabrahman supported by knowledge of Parabrahman's glory and faithful conviction of His power of granting liberation. *Bhakti* reinforces in intensity and extensity when Parabrahman as the source of all joy and bliss is well-known as such. It is the certitude that Parabrahman is the

⁴⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/41

⁴⁹⁶ Vac. Var. 5

⁴⁹⁷ Var. Gadh. 1/19

⁴⁹⁸ BGSB 18/54, p.360

embodiment of imperishable, infinite, inexhaustible bliss, and whatever little joy and happiness we find in the world of material existence is just a tiny droplet from His unfathomable ocean of happiness. The bliss supplying from Parabrahman assuages all the senses, the mind, and the *ātman* simultaneously. Once this kind of highest glory of Parabrahman is known decisively, the detachment in everything except Parabrahman develops naturally. When the senses, the mind, and the *ātman* are totally anchored in Parabrahman, the highest consummation occurs, giving rise to the rapturous union with Him. Seeking Parabrahman by way of *bhakti* leads to authentic self-ascent and oneness (qualitative) with Him.⁴⁹⁹ The BG states:

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।

साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥⁵⁰⁰

“Even if the most sinful person chooses to worship me with single-minded loving devotion, such a person must be regarded as a Sadhu because of making the right resolution.” Bhadrēśādāsa comments here: “परमात्मानन्यभावपूर्वकभजनैकव्यवसाययुक्तः” (BGSB 9/30, p.219) “Here, the single-minded devotion towards Parabrahman is extolled.” According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, devotion to Parabrahman is the exclusive means to liberate oneself from the incumbrance of *māyā*. Therefore, Parabrahman should be worshipped with undaunted devotion.⁵⁰¹ But norms and regulations must not be violated. *Bhakti* should be supplemented by righteous conduct. One should not worship the Supreme Parabrahman, disregarding the codes of pious moral life.⁵⁰²

Moral laws are Parabrahman's commands. So, a devotee should not ignore them. They must abide by them. For example, A true devotee does not accept or enjoy anything without offering it first to his Lord. He does not waste his time in fruitless talks and activities. In all his activities, he keeps his mind fixed on Parabrahman. In

⁴⁹⁹ MUSB 2/2/8, p.278, BGSB 18/54, pp.360-361

⁵⁰⁰ BG 9/30

⁵⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/19

⁵⁰² Vac. Gadh. 1/77

other words, he remembers Parabrahman ceaselessly, by constantly chanting Parabrahman's name, and thus does not forget Parabrahman-consciousness even for a moment, because the reward (even) for a virtuous scholar lies in engaging oneself in *satsaṅga* and *bhakti*, without which there is certainly a possibility for a fall and degeneration in spiritual life.⁵⁰³ And he who keeps his mind fixed on Parabrahman whilst abiding by all regulations; as a result, his actions fail to bind him. Therefore, a devotee should not abandon norms established by Parabrahman out of fear of slander by ignorant and cruel people.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* counsels: “Also a wise scholar, whether he has no desire at all, or is actuated by all sorts of desires; - he should worship the Supreme Person with intense love-devotion.”⁵⁰⁴ The knowledge of Parabrahman's highest glory (*māhātmya-jñāna*) makes a devotee cherish Him as the Supreme value. He, therefore, practices devotion both as a discipline and as a fulfillment. Thus, devotion with intense love, knowledge of Parabrahman's glory, and undivided fidelity to the eternally perfect Parabrahman can remove all our miseries and internal sorrow. This is the exclusive path of *bhakti* on which billions of devotees are trading today.

10.4 Pativrātā-Bhakti

The most accepted type of devotion amongst all the *bhakti* movements is *pativrātā-bhakti* (loyal or faithful devotion). Parabrahman likes the devotees who are associated with Him by the strong bonds of love, loyalty, and dedication like that of a wife who is most loyally committed to her husband (*pativrātā-stri*). Such love and attachment and devotion unto Parabrahman is portrayed as '*pativrātā-bhakti*'. Such '*pativrātā-bhakti*' is expected of everyone who wishes pleasing Parabrahman. Such singular devotion with undivided fidelity helps in drawing the grace of

⁵⁰³ Vac. Var. 11

⁵⁰⁴ *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* 1/7/10

Parabrahman. The concept of *pativratā-bhakti* is endorsed to extricate a man from his chronic tendency of viewing Parabrahman as a human being.⁵⁰⁵

Thus, *pativratā-bhakti* is to understand that, my Parabrahman is the abode of an infinite number of infinitely auspicious qualities and He is free from all imperfections, and He is the bottomless ocean of all bliss and happiness such that even a single act of seeing (*darśana*) Him is so fulfilling that he stands in need of nothing. On the other hand, the worldly pleasures are fractional, for each sense-organ is able to enjoy its own limited pleasure. What eyes enjoy, ears, tongue etc., cannot experience, while in the case of Parabrahman, all pleasures come jointly in a synthetic conjoined form like a flood of bliss which simultaneously satisfies all the senses and the mind.⁵⁰⁶ The concept of *pativratā-bhakti* has its roots also in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (9/34), wherein Kṛṣṇa says:

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।

मामेवैष्यसि युक्तत्वैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः ॥⁵⁰⁷

“Focus your mind on me, be my devotee, and be my propitiator. Offer obeisance to me alone. Affixing your mind in this way on me, regard me alone as your supreme goal, and you will attain me.” Thus, when a devotee holds supreme Parabrahman Puruṣottama alone as his sole foundation, rescuer, and peer of the realm. He engrosses his heart and *ātman* in meditating upon Him and pleasing Him; he reaches none else but alone in his state of liberation.

For *Pativratā-bhakti*, the best examples are the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana. The *gopīs* used to say: from the day we had the great fortune to touch the holy feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, all the inclinations of the world have become scornful like deadly poison. Just as a *pativratā* woman is not captivated and charmed by the handsomeness of

⁵⁰⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/19, 2/62

⁵⁰⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁰⁷ BG 9/34

the personality of Indra, demi-gods or a royal prince, and rather withdraws her gaze with antipathy and disgust, so *pativrata-bhakta's* mind is totally united with Parabrahman. He is so committed to Parabrahman that he can never be pleased by any being other than Him.⁵⁰⁸ In this way, the devotee should always meditate upon that form of Parabrahman, who has assumed human form and has become visible (perceptibly manifest) before them. The other forms of previous incarnations, though they are of the same Parabrahman, need not be meditated upon. Thus, unalterable fidelity should be offered to one's Parabrahman only. For example, Pārvatiji (Goddess Umā) had resolved to marry Lord Śivā, and with such a determination she tied up herself in severe tapas (austerities) to invoke and please Lord Śivā to accept her as his bride. She used to say: ‘I don't mind remaining unmarried for many births but shall not marry anyone except my Lord Śivā.’⁵⁰⁹ The BG confirms it:

भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन ।

ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परन्तप ॥⁵¹⁰

“However, through single-minded devotion alone, I can be seen in this form, can be known in essence, and also can be reached.” Bhadreśadāsa comments: “*त्वनन्यया मत्स्वरूपैकनिष्ठया अव्यभिचरितया भक्त्या परमदिव्यभावसभरप्रकृष्टप्रेमलक्षणया ... अखण्डिततया साक्षात्कृतार्थनिमग्नतां प्राप्तुं शक्यः।*” (BGSB 11/54, p.262) “Through this focused and undeviated profound loving devotion, the seeker can experience the constant bliss of Parabrahman forever.” He explains further that a devotee should, therefore, offer such loyalty to Parabrahman. A faithful devotee would never equate the manifest form of incarnate Parabrahman with other (mortal) human beings. Conversely, a devotee who engages himself in the meditations disregarding the form of Parabrahman visible (perceptibly-manifest) before him, is likely to be drawn towards other forms also, either human or semi-divine. Thus, one should develop complete fidelity to the currently manifest

⁵⁰⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/62

⁵⁰⁹ Vac. Loya 11

⁵¹⁰ BG 11/54

form of Parabrahman visible before him in human form, even though there is no difference between this manifest Parabrahman visible to him in human form and His previous incarnations. The whole logic of the concept of *pativratā-bhakti* aims at uprooting from the mind the tendency of conceiving Parabrahman's form on par with ordinary mortals, in addition to making the *vṛtti-nirodha* (arrest of mental modifications) on a single goal.⁵¹¹

In this manner, as per the principle of *pativratā-bhakti*, none but Parabrahman Puruṣottama alone ought to be contemplated as the highest goal. In whatever form/guise a devotee comes in a personal face-to-face relationship with Him during His manifestation on earth, He becomes the singular and sufficient object of worship for him. This further suggests that no other *avatāra* of the past, nor any deity or object, can serve as a substitute for Him.⁵¹²

11. Ekāntiki Bhakti

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, in the *nitya-prārthana* (daily prayer) sung before Parabrahman in the evening, where the followers request the Lord to bless them with *ekāntiki bhakti* based on the knowledge of the magnificence and merit of Parabrahman, and the company of the best *ekāntika-bhakta*.⁵¹³ *Ekāntiki bhakti* includes four factors:⁵¹⁴

1. *Dharma* (righteous duties)
2. *Jñāna* (knowledge)
3. *Vairāgya* (detachment)
4. *Bhakti* (devotion)

⁵¹¹ BGSB 7/17, p.165

⁵¹² Vac. Gadh. 3/16

⁵¹³ Premānanda svāmī's *prārthanā, Kirtana muktāvalī*, Vol. 1, p.7

⁵¹⁴ Vac. Panch. 3

Bhadreśadāsa also reiterates:

धर्मो ज्ञानं च वैराग्यं भक्तिश्चैतैस्त्रिभिर्युता।

ज्ञेय एकान्तिको धर्मः प्रभुप्रसादसाधनम् ॥⁵¹⁵

“*Bhakti* that is accompanied by *dharma*, *jñāna* and *vairāgya* should be known as *ekāntika dharma*, which is the means to attain Paramātmā’s grace.” This *ekāntika dharma* is also called *bhāgavata dharma*. Bhadreśadāsa mentions the reason:

अयं भागवतो धर्मः सम्बन्धादुच्यते हरेः।

यस्य संस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवस्तु हरेरिहा॥⁵¹⁶

“This *ekāntik dharma* is also called *bhāgavata dharma* because it pertains to Paramātmā to establish *bhāgavata dharma*.” Here, *ekāntika dharma* is equal to *ekāntiki bhakti* since both consists of the abovementioned four parts.⁵¹⁷ Svāmīnārāyaṇa holds the view that the teleology behind the descent (incarnation) of Parabrahman on earth is the establishment and promotion of '*ekāntika dharma* ' also known as '*bhāgavata-dharma*'.⁵¹⁸ “It is this *dharma* that is known as *bhāgavata* or *ekāntika dharma*. In fact, this type of *dharma* is not distinct from *bhakti*; they are both one.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/21, p.621)

It is not thoroughly correct that Parabrahman’s descent on earth is merely to establish moral order and ethical standards. But it is more comprehensive *dharma* called '*ekāntika-dharma*' whose goal is to perfect a person both morally and spiritually to attain ultimate emancipation. The ethical norms and moral order may be established and restored even by the efforts of a moralist or a sage or a more influential social worker. As against this, *ekāntika-dharma* does not divorce devotionalism (*bhakti*) from morality/righteousness (*dharma*), for no *dharma* has to be sovereign of direct reference and relatedness to Parabrahman. The concept of

⁵¹⁵ SSSK 387

⁵¹⁶ SSSK 388

⁵¹⁷ Vac. Var. 3

⁵¹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 3/21

bhāgavat-dharma/ekāntika-dharma does not dichotomize between *dharma* and *bhakti*; rather, they are treated as the two sides of the same coin.

The daily norms of individual & social ethics are much below the role and status of *ekāntika-dharma* (i.e., *bhāgavat-dharma*). And it is with the help of *bhāgavat-dharma* alone that a *jīva* (an individual self) can overcome the influence of *māyā* and intersect the continuity of *saṃsāra*.⁵¹⁹ More specifically, as we knew that the *varṇāśrama*-duties and the norms of individual and social ethics possess value much less compared to *ekāntika-dharma*. They in themselves at the most fulfill the desires for *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, give social recognition, fame, and worldly peace and happiness, but cannot fulfill the highest goal of ultimate emancipation.⁵²⁰ Thus, pure ethics of dutifulness devoid of its reference to Parabrahman (as enjoined in the *ekāntika-dharma* concept) is a votary of the place in celestial, heavenly abodes of deities (*svargādidevaloka*). The consequence of this achievement is also stressed in *Bhāgavat-Gītā*.

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं

क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।⁵²¹

“On the expiry of the stock of merits, the soul has to return to the world of pain and suffering.” Svāminārāyaṇa traces the genesis of *ekāntika-dharma* alias *ekāntiki-bhakti* in the *Vāsudeva-māhātmya* section of *Viṣṇukhaṇḍa* of *Skandapurāṇa*.⁵²² In *ekāntiki-bhakti*, righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), and total detachment (*vairāgya*) are interpreted as the head, the heart, and the feet respectively of *bhakti*. Such one centered (*ananya*) exclusive (*ekāntiki*) *bhakti* alone is capable of uniting seeker with Parabrahman. And it is this *ekāntiki-bhakti* that is considered to be supreme (*parā-bhakti*) in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School.

⁵¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/21

⁵²⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/21

⁵²¹ BG 9/21

⁵²² *Vāsudeva mahātmya* 2/1,3,4

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, over-all purification and all-round development is emphasized to become eligible to receive the grace of Parabrahman. The transparency of thought, speech, and action, in its true sense can be achieved, when *ekāntika-dharma* is realized. As said earlier, *ekāntika-dharma* comprises of four complementary virtues, namely, righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), detachment (*vairāgya*), and undivided devotion to Parabrahman with the knowledge of His glory (*māhātmya-jñāna-yukta-bhakti*). For two hundred years, *ekāntika-dharma* has been burgeoning in the tradition; specifically, Svāminārāyaṇa restored and re-established the long-lost tradition of *ekāntika-dharma*, he is described as '*ekāntika-dharmappravartaka* by Niṣkulānanda Svāmī, the author of '*Bhaktacintāmaṇī*'.⁵²³

The *ekāntika-dharma* (i.e., *bhāgavat-dharma*) is lived, nourished and nurtured by the *parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa* (*Akṣara-Guru*). Therefore, in order to realize it, one must live in the close company of *parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa*.⁵²⁴ Although *ekāntika-dharma* is described in the scriptures, it is not realizable through the self-taught method; nor can one claim to teach it autonomously. In and through the company of an *ekāntika-dharma* realized *satpuruṣa*, one can realize and acquire it, and not otherwise. And this '*dharma*' and '*bhakti*' are not two distinct components. They are a single organic whole, and hence, whether one speaks of *ekāntika-dharma* or of *ekāntiki-bhakti*, it implies the same integrated spiritual (*ādhyātmic*) endeavor (*sādhanā*).⁵²⁵

The performance of righteous actions as enjoined in the SSS is called *dharma*.⁵²⁶ Right knowledge of essential nature of the *jīva* (individual self), *īśvara* (cosmic selves), *māyā-prakṛti* (matter), Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman is called *jñāna*.⁵²⁷

⁵²³ Nishkulanandswami, Bhakta Chintamani, at the end of every chapter.

⁵²⁴ SSS p.331, Vac. Gadh. 1/54

⁵²⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/60

⁵²⁶ SSS, p.333

⁵²⁷ SSS, p.339, APM 1/36/7

The absence of interest, involvement, and attachment in everything except Akṣarapuruṣottama is called *vairāgya*.⁵²⁸ Intense love for the manifest form of Parabrahman, together with the knowledge of His greatness, is called *bhakti*.⁵²⁹ And all these four components together constitute what is known as *ekāntiki-bhakti*. When all these four virtues are fully realized, the devotee is called *ekāntika-bhakta*, *ananya-bhakta*.⁵³⁰ These four components are interrelated. *Dharma* (moral-ethical-righteous conduct) aids in the attainment of *jñāna* (right knowledge); *jñāna* breeds *vairāgya* (detachment in the world); *vairāgya* produces *parama-jñāna* (supreme wisdom) of the transcendental glory of Parabrahman with eternal form (*sadā-sākāra-Parāmeśvara*), which in turn engenders the highest form of *bhakti*. The knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-jñāna*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) bereft of *bhakti* are neither appealing nor emancipating. Of course, *dharma*, *jñāna*, and *vairāgya* have their own value (as means) in leading one to Parabrahman; nevertheless, *bhakti* alone has the supreme value. Bhadrēśadāsa explains:

भक्तेरेवेह प्राधान्यं धर्मादिकचतुष्टये।

भक्तेरगतयैवैषां साधनत्वप्रबोधनात् ॥⁵³¹

“*Bhakti* alone is paramount amongst the four components of *ekāntik dharma*. In fact, the other three (*dharma*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*) are described as tools that are supplementary to *bhakti*.” The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates that *bhakti* unites one with Parabrahman, and liberates from the chains of *māyā*. It is the *māhātmya-jñāna-yukta-bhakti* which has the exclusive superiority of liberating man from the clutch of *māyā*, even without the help of the other three components. It alone is capable of deracinating hardened *vāsanās* (cravings-desires), and cutting the bondage of benighted actions (*avidyā-karma*) asunder.⁵³² Therefore, if, ever, the righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), and detachment (*vairāgya*) distract

⁵²⁸ SSS, p.344

⁵²⁹ SSS, p.348

⁵³⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/19, SSS p.331

⁵³¹ SSSK 390

⁵³² Vac. Var. 3

from or arrest the growth of *bhakti*; then it is they that should give way to *bhakti*.⁵³³ Thus righteousness (*dharma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and detachment (*vairāgya*) are the complementary components of *bhakti*.⁵³⁴ Moral or righteous conduct (*dharma*), as enjoined in the scriptures, is the promoter of *bhakti* and *jñāna*. And *vairāgya* (detachment) is the complementary counterpart of *bhakti*. Non-attachment to everything except Parabrahman is *vairāgya*. Thus, both union with Parabrahman and ultimate liberation is achievable with the help of *bhakti* alone. Nevertheless, to keep *bhakti* untainted and make it most effective forever, the other three are advocated as ancillary means to *bhakti*.⁵³⁵ If *bhakti* is escorted by the righteous conduct (*dharma*), then only it is valuable. How can a lover of Parabrahman ever disregard the duties ordained by Him and thus displease Him? For a devotee, being duty-bound (*dharma-baddha*) also is a part of *bhakti*.

In this way, the central theme of *ekāntiki-bhakti* is to keep Parabrahman alone in view, and hence, one remains engrossed in Parabrahman-consciousness throughout. Parabrahman alone is the goal and He alone is the means and the strength. An *ekāntika-bhakta* does not desire for anything else but union with Parabrahman through devotion. The BU explains this ultimate goal:

मैत्रेय्यात्मनो वा अरे दर्शनेन

श्रवणेन मत्या विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वं विदितम् ॥⁵³⁶

“Verily, Parabrahman is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, to be marked, O Maitreyī! When we see, hear, perceive, and know Him, then all this is known.”

Bhadresādāsa comments: “पुनः पुनः प्रवर्तनात्मकाभ्यासबलेन प्रकर्षं गतः स स्मरणव्यापारो यदाभ्यासमनपेक्ष्यैव साहजिकः स्वाभाविकश्च भवति स साक्षात्कार उच्यते तदा तस्य तैलधारावदविच्चिन्नस्मृतिसन्तानलाभात् प्रत्यक्षसमानाकारोनवरतः परमात्मानुभवो जायते।” (BUSB 2/4/5, p.125)

⁵³³ Vac. Gadh. 2/26

⁵³⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/32

⁵³⁵ Vac. Var. 3

⁵³⁶ BU 2/4/5

“If one does constantly *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsa* in this way, one attains *sākṣātkāra* (realization) automatically. After that, one can remember Parabrahman like the constant flow of oil without any interruption as he sees Parabrahman in front of his eyes. That experience is the true fruit of *ekāntiki bhakti*.” Thus, *ekāntiki bhakti* is a blend of devotion, worship, and service. It is a combination of two fold devotional forms, namely, *pativrata-bhakti* and *dāsatva-bhakti*. It is a deep devotion like that of a most loyal, dedicated wife having total fidelity to her husband and devotion in-servitude. She keeps only her husband in her heart and desires only her grace. “Single-minded devotees do not crave for worldly wealth but aspire for the grace of Parabrahman.”⁵³⁷

Nevertheless, in *ekāntiki-bhakti*, a devotee thinks of himself as *ātman*; but neither as man nor as a woman. He transcends earthly peculiarities of sex, caste, class etc. He thinks of himself as *ātman*, distinct from three *guṇas* (of *prakṛti*, *māyā*), identifies himself with Akṣarabrahman, and having thus attained similarity with Akṣarabrahman. He worships the supreme Puruṣottama Parabrahman.⁵³⁸ In short, having become pure and pious and consummate like Akṣarabrahman, one can truly attain the highest level of *parā-bhakti*. The *Gītā*, too, stresses the same point. “He who attains me and worships me with undivided devotion attains *brāhmic*-state beyond three *guṇas*”⁵³⁹ Thus becoming *brahmarūpa* (Akṣarabrahman-like) and worshipping Parabrahman with intense love is the basis of *ekāntiki-bhakti*. So, in the final lonesome (*ante*) stage, Parabrahman alone (*ekam*) remains in view, and hence, it is called *ekāntiki-bhakti*.⁵⁴⁰

The *ekāntika-bhaktas* are profoundly soaked in the love of the personality of Parabrahman. For them, Parabrahman's love is enormously more remarkable than

⁵³⁷ *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* 8/3/20, Vac. Gadh. 3/25

⁵³⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, 2/30

⁵³⁹ BG 14/26

⁵⁴⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/48

what devotees can bear towards Him. Here, love, reverence, knowledge of His greatness, non-attachment to worldly objects, awe, wonder, singular loyalty and faith - all mix and mingle with one another to produce a fusion of the *ekāntiki-bhakti*, supreme-*bhakti*, *parā-bhakti*, *bhagvata dharma* and *upāsanā*.⁵⁴¹ Since Parabrahman is the only object of their goal in life, worldly loss or gain is not a thing of concern. “Everything of Parabrahman they see and like, everything for Parabrahman they are ready to do, and everything that takes them to Parabrahman, they pine for.” In all the three states, namely, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, - Parabrahman is the center of their life.⁵⁴²

11.1 Components of *Ekāntiki-Bhakti*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, the *ekāntika-dharma* system is unique. Without *brahmabhāva*, it cannot be achieved either. The whole of *ekāntiki-bhakti sādhanā* rests on four complementary virtues, namely *dharma*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti*, which are based on the aspirant’s own interest and inclination. It, therefore, becomes imperative to discuss the nature of each of these component-virtues in detail. So, let us have the analytical exposition of each of them to have a meaningful understanding of the same.⁵⁴³

11.1.1 *Dharma*

Bhadreśādāsa states:

आज्ञा हरेर्गुरोश्चैव सदाचारादिरूपिणी।

शास्त्राऽऽदेशाऽऽत्मको धर्मो विधिनिषेधलक्षणः ॥⁵⁴⁴

“*Dharma* is defined as Paramātma’s and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru’s *ājñā* (command) to live morally and follow guidelines in the form of scriptural injunctions.” In this manner, words, commands, and directives given by

⁵⁴¹ SSS, p.331

⁵⁴² BGSB 6/30-32, pp.45-146, IUSB 7, pp.16-17

⁵⁴³ SSS, pp.331-332

⁵⁴⁴ SSSK 391

Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa* (God-possessed, Guru) is defined as *dharma*. For the followers of Svāminārāyaṇa, the five vows (*pañca-vartamāna*) included in the basic eleven duties (*ekādaśa-niyama*) are the stepping stones to *dhārmik* life. The eleven ethical norms include the abstention from violence (*hiṃsā*), illicit sex-relation (*para-strī-saṅga*), non-vegetarianism (*matsya-māṃsa-bhakṣaṇa*), drinking (*madya-pāna*), suicide (*ātma-ghāta*), theft (*stenakarma/cori*), false accusation (*mithyā-apavāda*), vilification of any deity or *sādhu* (*deva-nindā*), tactual relationship with widows (*vidhavā-sparśa*), consumption of non-edible & non-potable foods and drinks (*abhakṣya-bhakṣaṇa*) and listening discourses from speakers who are anti-God.⁵⁴⁵

In addition to these, Svāminārāyaṇa has very clearly spelled out the daily duties, occasional duties, common duties, and the duties specific to one's station in life. He has also prescribed the codes for outer-inner purification and personal sanctity. It contains the codes of conduct for inter-personal dealings and relationships and also a reference concerning expiation and atonement. The precepts concerning religious life and the performance of rituals are included in it.⁵⁴⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa warns them who infringe the commands of *dharma*: “If one does not observe *dharma*, he should be known to be as foolish as one who tries to cross the ocean carrying a stone slab upon his head; he should also be considered to be like an outcast.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/35, p.470). Therefore, *bhakti* should be strengthened by *dharma*. For an aspirant, the control of senses and mind and overcoming chronic attachment to fivefold objects of enjoyments (*pañca-viśayas*) is possible through *dharma*. Hence, it is inevitable to be very sincere and cautious in obeying and observing all the norms and regulations (*ājñā*) established by Parabrahman, the Guru, and the scriptures. It

⁵⁴⁵ Satsangdiksha 26-43

⁵⁴⁶ Mahant Swami Maharaj has included the entire codes of conducts and norms for the devotees of the Svāminārāyaṇa faith in the *Satsangdiksha* scripture.

is required for a devotee-seeker ought to know all *dharma* (*niyama*), i.e., do's and don'ts applicable to him, and practice them sincerely and unconditionally.

Bhadreśadāsa comments on the BG: “One who does not know do's and don'ts, acts under the influence of their desires, disobeying scriptures, neither attains perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.”⁵⁴⁷ Then he warns: “एहिकमामुष्मिकं वा किमपि सुखमयं फलं न लभते” (BGSB 16/23, p.327) “He or she will not attain happiness not only here but also in the abode of Parabrahman.” Moreover, one who recites the name of Parabrahman and yet consistently indulges in deliberate transgression of Parabrahman-ordained moral laws enjoined through scriptures, is an imposter. It is an act of committing the unpardonable sin of betraying one's master, Parabrahman.⁵⁴⁸

9.1.1.1 Novel Contribution Towards *Varṇa-Āśrama*

Bhadreśadāsa avers:

विप्रः क्षत्रश्च वैश्यश्च शूद्रश्चेति चतुष्टयम्
वर्णविभजनं प्रोक्तं सर्वाभ्युदयहेतुकम्॥⁵⁴⁹

Varṇa is a fundamental concept underlying Hindu society. In fact, it is not a social arrangement or segregation; it is rather a statement of how any society is arranged. It does not say society should be classified into classes. It says what classes or kinds of people exist in any society. There are four *varṇas*, 1. *Brāhmaṇa*, 2. *Kṣatrīya* 3. *Vaiśya*, 4. *Śūdra*. This classification is based on the functions people perform in any society. Then the four *āśramas* as Bhadreśadāsa explains:

ब्रह्मचर्यगृहस्थौ च वानप्रस्थस्तथा यतिः।
चत्वार आश्रमा ह्येते व्यवस्थातः प्रकीर्तिताः॥⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ BGSB 16/23, p.327

⁵⁴⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/77

⁵⁴⁹ SSSK 393

⁵⁵⁰ SSSK 392

Āśrama in Hinduism is one of four age-based life stages discussed in Indian texts of the ancient and medieval eras. The four *āśramas* are: *Brahmacarya* (student), *Gr̥hastha* (householder), *Vānaprastha* (retired) and *Sanyāsa* (renunciate). The *āśrama* system is one facet of the *dharma* concept in Hinduism. It is also a component of the ethical theories in Indian philosophy, where it is combined with four proper goals of human life (*puruṣārtha*), for fulfilment, happiness and spiritual liberation.

Although in ancient India there was no discrimination by the name of one's *varṇa* (caste) and *āśrama* (particular period of life). But under foreign rule, this discrimination was at its peak. It was a dark chapter of Indian history. The *Śūdra Varṇa* faced so many miseries due to this caste system. They were kept away even from spirituality and liberation. Which caste and creed is eligible for *brahmavidyā*? This question is vastly discussed in Indian philosophy. Among the hundreds of commentaries and expositions on the scriptures, Bhadrēśadāsa's view includes and highlights real humanity with spirituality. He echoes the ancient voice in the *Śugādhīkaraṇa* of BS: “यो हि सकलदुःखात्यन्तनिवृत्तिपूर्वकं परमात्मपरमसुखाभिलाषी स सर्वोऽपि ब्रह्मविद्याधिकरयोग्यः” “One who wants to become free from the miseries and attain the bliss of Parabrahman is eligible for *brahmavidyā*.” Bhadrēśadāsa clearly mentions that one's liberation does not depend on one's caste or *āśrama*.

He further adds: “वर्णादिव्यवस्था हि संसाररक्षकप्रयोजना निर्विघ्नपरमपुरुषार्थोपायानुष्ठानसहकारिणी च। अतो न हि श्रेयसः पथि ब्राह्मण एव श्रेष्ठः शूद्रश्च कनिष्ठ इति समयः। कदाचिद् विप्रोऽप्यज्ञोऽसदाचारः, शूद्रोऽपि प्राज्ञः प्रकृष्टाचारो वा स्यात्। तस्मात् सर्वे वर्णाः स्वस्वकर्मभिः समानमुपकारं भजन्त इति सर्वादरमात्रसंरक्ष्यः सर्वेषामुत्कर्षः।” “*Varṇa* and *āśrama* systems are applied in the society not to differentiate the people, like this is important and that is ordinary, but to support to fulfill the goal of attaining the ultimate liberation. Therefore, on the path of liberation, neither *Brahmin* is great, nor the *Śūdra* is inferior. Sometimes it is possible that a *Brahmin* lacks good qualities and a *Śūdra*

may possess those qualities. Thus, each and every caste who wants to attain higher spiritual goal has its significance.” As far as the Indian philosophical system is concerned, this *Svāminārāyaṇa* view adds a great contribution in the form of reformation to the entire Indian Vedanta system, which is based on liberty and harmony of society.⁵⁵¹

11.1.2 *Jñāna*

Jñāna reflects the knowledge one attains. Although every live being possesses knowledge but their proportion differs. In a specific term, Knowledge molds the metal of the self and uplifts it to the highest spiritual height. Knowledge (*jñāna*) implies self-knowledge (*ātma-niṣṭhā*), Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman-knowledge (*Akṣarapurūṣottama-niṣṭhā*).⁵⁵² Therefore, there is no liberation without the right knowledge.⁵⁵³ (*Ṛte jñānān muktiḥ*), because the attainer of the right knowledge attains supreme peace. As mentioned in the BG “ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परं शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति.”⁵⁵⁴ Right knowledge yields contentment and a sense of complete accomplishment in an elevated state.⁵⁵⁵

When we talk about self-realization, it is *ātmaniṣṭhā*. It consists of knowing oneself essentially as *ātman* (conscious-principle) distinct from psycho-physical body and its relations. More simply, The knowledge that the self is the knower and the body is the known, is *ātmaniṣṭhā*. The *ātman* is consciousness and has knowledge as its essential intimate quality. It is separate from and transcendent to *prakṛti* and its three *guṇas*. Thus, nothing that applies to the body applies to the *ātman*. The properties of the body and *ātman* are distinct, apart, and opposite. Such realization is *ātmaniṣṭhā*.⁵⁵⁶ When the devotee realizes *ātmaniṣṭhā*, a person is not moved or

⁵⁵¹ *Satsangdiksha* 12-17

⁵⁵² Vac. sar. 1, IUSB 15, pp.22-23

⁵⁵³ Vac. Loya 7

⁵⁵⁴ BG 4/39

⁵⁵⁵ Vac. Loya 2

⁵⁵⁶ Vac. sar. 1

affected by insult, honor, blame, praise, name, form, pain, pleasure, disease etc. His patience and perseverance are everlasting.⁵⁵⁷ Bhadreśadāsa also confirms: “एनम् आत्मानम् एवं नित्यत्वनिर्विकरत्वदेहाविलक्षणादिगुणविषिष्टतया विदित्वा गुरुकृपया विज्ञाय नानुशोचितुमर्हसि” (BGSB 2/25, p.32)

“By knowing from the Guru that the *ātman* is eternal, unchangeable, and distinct from the body,⁵⁵⁸ you are not supposed to indulge in sorrow.” In the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, when *ātmaniṣṭhā* combines with knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental glory, the seeker feels fulfilled. He stands in need of nothing. It helps in deracinating vices such as anger, greed, lust etc. Thus *ātmaniṣṭhā* (self-realization) brings the inflow of all other good qualities and virtues. It dispels the *vāsanās* (desires) from the self.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, those who want to eliminate worldly desires and attachment from worldly objects of enjoyment, and keep the mind focused on Parabrahman, should cultivate *ātmaniṣṭhā*.⁵⁶⁰ *Ātmaniṣṭhā*, therefore, is one of the significant means for pleasing Parabrahman and attaining emancipation.⁵⁶¹ Deficiency in *ātmaniṣṭhā* may cause fall and degeneration, because it sways the mind away when ups and downs of life vacillate one in pleasure and pain, and his mind gets fogged by ideas other than that of Parabrahman.⁵⁶² It seems that *ātmaniṣṭhā* alone is enough to fulfill the ultimate spiritual goal.

9.1.2.1 *Ātmaniṣṭhā* Alone is Not Sufficient

However, mere *ātmaniṣṭhā* without *brahmabhāva* and *Paramātmaniṣṭhā* is neither fruitful nor emancipating.⁵⁶³ Bhadreśadāsa explains by commenting on the *Kena Upaniṣad*:

⁵⁵⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/61

⁵⁵⁸ KU 2/18,19, PU 4/9, CU 8/8/3

⁵⁵⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/73, 3/20

⁵⁶⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁶¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/62

⁵⁶² Vac. Gadh. 3/1

⁵⁶³ Vac. Gadh. 2/65, 2/35, 2/26

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥

“तद् वाक्प्रेरकं एव ब्रह्म परं ब्रह्म इति त्वं परमात्मस्वरूपजिज्ञासुः विद्धिः ॥”(KeUSB 1/5, p.39)

“Parabrahman ought to be known and worshipped thoroughly since it is an ultimate entity to be known.” Therefore, If the knowledge does not develop into Parabrahman’s devotion (*bhakti*), it is of no reward. If the knowledge does not arouse the highest love and oneness with Parabrahman, it is all an intellectual gymnastic. It is knowledge-backed devotion that helps in pleasing Parabrahman and drawing His grace. Thus, Bhadrēśādāsa defines the *jñānī* as with *brahmabhāva* and total devotion towards Parabrahman.⁵⁶⁴

In the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, knowledge always goes with devotion. When *Parāvidyā*, the higher knowledge of Brahman is realized, then the devotee sees Parabrahman alone in the intense light of consciousness-bliss and miscarries to perceive any other name or form which is under the range of *Mūla -prakṛti*.⁵⁶⁵ When Parabrahman alone remains shining in the consciousness, it forms a total emptiness (the state of absence of all names and forms in mind), the devotee stops to perceive one's body (*piṇḍa*) and the whole universe (*brahmānda*). He then sees the beautiful divine personality of Parabrahman in the radiating light of his heart.⁵⁶⁶ Bhadrēśādāsa expresses the true meaning of *ātmaniṣṭhā*:

अहमात्मास्म्यहं ब्रह्म ब्रह्मरूपे मयि प्रभुः।

इति साक्षाद्ब्रह्म योगाद् यो भावः सात्परूपता॥⁵⁶⁷

“The state of being *ātmaniṣṭhā* means believing through direct association with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, I am the *ātman*, I am Brahman and Parabrahman resides in my *ātman*, which is *brahmarūpa*.” Similarly, he describes the ‘*ātmavān*’ as who is associated with *Akṣarabrahman* Guru.⁵⁶⁸ Only through this way, the

⁵⁶⁴ BGSB 7/16,17,18, pp.164-65

⁵⁶⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/24

⁵⁶⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/26

⁵⁶⁷ SSSK 402

⁵⁶⁸ BGSB 2/45

Svāminārāyaṇa School's *ātmaniṣṭhā* completes. When a devotee affiliates himself with Akṣarabrahman (the *Akṣara*-Guru) and gets in unison with him, the right knowledge blossoms to the greatest extent.⁵⁶⁹ Such a *jñānī* devotee (wise man) is described as the best among the devotees and spiritual aspirants, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁵⁷⁰

Thus, the *jñānī* is believed of his own self as the pure *ātman*, being-consciousness bliss (*sat-cid-ānanda*), stain-free, uncontaminated, immortal being; conversely, the food, sex, fashion, comforts, luxury, etc. pleasures of the world are perishable, insignificant, temporary, and repeated sources of pain; he assumes that his body, senses, mind ego, name, form, relations, properties etc. are also subject to the debacle. He, therefore, remains withdrawn from the external world while being well-settled internally in the meditation of Parabrahman in his heart. To him, life in the forest is as joyful-comfortable as it is in a royal palace in the kingdom; and vice versa. He is equipoised in honor and insult. For him, gold and dust are equal in value. In short, nothing agitates his mind, nor does anything attract or distract or bind him.⁵⁷¹

11.1.3 *Vairāgya*

Svāminārāyaṇa states, “Remaining detached from the body and the *brahmānda*, is the characteristic of *vairāgya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/44, p.110) In this manner, the absence of interest and attachment in everything except Akṣara-Puruṣottama is called *vairāgya* (detachment).⁵⁷² *Vairāgya* is indifference and detachment both to one's body and the world. *Vairāgya*, in its true sense, emerges only after the realization of the right knowledge of the self, Brahman and the supreme self (Parabrahman). Here, the word 'right knowledge' denotes the metaphysical knowledge concerning

⁵⁶⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/24, 2/20

⁵⁷⁰ BG 7/18

⁵⁷¹ Vac. Loya 10, Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁷² SSS p.344

Parabrahman and philosophical principles, the knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental greatness, and fourfold cosmic dissolutions. When *vairāgya* advances entirely, all desires for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and the desires for body-care come to an end. True *vairāgya* uproots all names and forms except Parabrahman, the eternal supreme truth.⁵⁷³

Vairāgya defines the relationship between self and the world. It consists of remaining detached from one's body and the whole world. *Vairāgya* sprouts in the self when one (1) realizes self-knowledge (*ātmaniṣṭhā*), (2) realizes the perishable character of the objects of enjoyment of the world and all other celestial regions and abodes through the reflection of the four kinds of dissolutions (*pralaya*) (3) comprehends the transcendental glory and greatness of Parabrahman with great love and faith and (4) obtains the metaphysical knowledge of Parabrahman.⁵⁷⁴ The generation and steadfastness in *vairāgya* occur only through the words and *satsaṅga* (holy company) of the *sadGuru* (i.e., Akṣarabrahman Guru, *parāma ekāntika-satpuruṣa*).

This type of *vairāgya* certainly results in attaining supreme Parabrahman (*parama-pada*).⁵⁷⁵ Bhadreśadāsa clears the point: ब्रह्मपरात्मभिन्नेषु रागाभावो विरागता । ज्ञानांशसहिता नित्यं भक्त्युपकारिणी भवेत् ॥⁵⁷⁶ “Dispassion towards all except for Brahman and Parabrahman is detachment. However, such detachment only supplements *bhakti* if it is perennially equipped with spiritual wisdom.” The knowledge of discrimination between eternal and non-eternal develops disinterest and distaste for the enjoyments pertaining to one's body and worldly pleasures. Thus, *vairāgya* brings freedom from worldly and bodily attachments. As long as these attachments are not connected with the proper

⁵⁷³ Vac. Var. 16

⁵⁷⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/1, *Vāsudeva mahātmya* 25/60

⁵⁷⁵ Vac. Sar. 11,18

⁵⁷⁶ SSSK 407

knowledge and right attitude, intense love and devotion to Parabrahman cannot be possible.

A devotee with profound detachment thinks that Parabrahman has created the fivefold objects of enjoyments (*pañca-viṣaya*) and the regions (or abodes) for the enjoyments (such as *svarga*, *satyaloka* etc.). The superior objects of enjoyment are created to eliminate the suffering caused by the painful objects of enjoyment. When the objects of enjoyment heavenly abodes of Indra, Brahmā etc., are so superior, then how limitlessly superior would be the joy and happiness in the highest abode of Parabrahman Himself? With this thought of wisdom, he turns away from the worldly objects of enjoyment and treads the path of *Paramapada*.⁵⁷⁷ The BG affirms:

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥⁵⁷⁸

“Undoubtedly, the mind is restless and difficult to restrain, but it is subdued by *abhyāsa* (constant vigorous spiritual practice with firm determination), and *vairāgya* (or detachment).” The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “वैराग्येण च स्वलक्ष्यातिरिक्तसकलविक्षेपक-पदार्थनिर्वेदोद्रेकेण प्रकृतिपुरुषादिपिपीलिकान्तेषु निखिलप्राकृतपदार्थेषु ध्येयप्रत्यनीकेषु दोषानुसन्धान-संजातवैतृष्ण्येन वा भक्तिमद्भिः गृह्यते वशीकर्तुं शक्यते । तुशब्दो मनोनिग्रहसम्भवं द्योतयन् पार्थोत्थापितां दुर्निग्रहस्याप्यनिग्रहताशंकां वारयति। आह च पतञ्जलिः 'अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः' (यो.सू. १/१२) इति” (BGSB 6/35, p.148) “The mind is controlled through *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* is the detachment towards everything except Parabrahman from a small ant and to the entire universe. If one possesses such *vairāgya* then, obstacles in the way of attaining the ultimate goal are perceived as flawed. The term ‘tu’ is used to show that the mind can be controlled even it may seem difficult. Patañjali also supports by saying that by constant effort and *vairāgya* mind comes under control.” Bhadreśadāsa explains that to control the

⁵⁷⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/37, Panch. 1, 4

⁵⁷⁸ BG 6/35

mind, *vairāgya* is the most prominent factor. In every branch of Indian philosophy, the concept of detachment is accepted. Unless one is not detached from worldly enjoyments, one can not connect to the ultimate reality. This unbroken principle is invariably described in the ancient scriptures.⁵⁷⁹ After analyzing the four components of *ekāntiki bhakti*, we can conclude by drawing the broad picture in one line that *ekāntiki bhakti* is the key principle of *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta. In this manner, it also becomes the firm conviction of Parabrahman.⁵⁸⁰

12. Satsaṅga: Sādhanā for Daily Life

If spiritual endeavor and practice are not able to solve daily-life problems, then what is the benefit of doing it? Svāminārāyaṇa was more attentive in dealing with the practical problems faced by the seekers of liberation and their solutions which would enable them to reach the target effortlessly. In his *Vacanāmṛta*, we discover an extensive section dealing with these problems put forth by the disciples in the form of queries, inquiries, and questions. The practical advice and explanations suggested by him, after discussing each of the factors which assist or aid the spiritual perfection, is a unique contribution of Svāminārāyaṇa which is driving us to call his teaching a ‘practical philosophy’. Therefore, under this topic, we shall disclose some *Svāminārāyaṇa* traditions which are practiced in daily life.

12.1 Satsaṅga

Millions of devotees are practicing *satsaṅga* today. The word *satsaṅga* is composed of two words, namely, *sat* + *saṅga*. The word ‘*sat*’ connotes ‘true’, ‘real’ and ‘immutable’; whereas the word ‘*saṅga*’ connotes ‘congenial company’. Thus, the word ‘*satsaṅga*’ means the sincere maintenance of the company of the immutable

⁵⁷⁹ ‘अथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम्’ (ई.१७), ‘अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वं प्रतिपश्य तथापरे। सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः’ (कठ.१/६), ‘श्रोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः। अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते’ (कठ.१/२६), ‘परिष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन’ (मु.१/२/१२), ‘येनाहं नामृतास्यां किमहं तेन कुर्याम्’ (बृ.२/४/३) ‘जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य चा तस्मादपरिहार्येयं न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि’ (गी.२/२७), ‘अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते’ (गी.६/३५), ‘अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः’ (यो.सू.१/१२), ‘दृढवैराग्यवानेव जनः प्राप्नोति परमं पदम्’ (वच.का.७) ‘यस्तु वैराग्यवान् धार्मिकश्च भवति तस्य तु सर्वाण्यपीन्द्रियाणि वशीभूतानि भवन्तीति सर्वदा स सुखभाग् भवत्येव’ (वच.ग.अ.८) इत्यादिवाक्यानीह विरत्यनुकूलान्यनुसन्धेयानीति निरूपितं वैराग्यम्।

⁵⁸⁰ SSS p.331, Vac. Gadh. 1/75

(which is true and real). The word '*sat*' refers to the '*ātman*', 'Paramātman', *satpuruṣa* (the Akṣarabrahman Guru) and the holy scriptures (*satśāstra*).⁵⁸¹

In its larger sense, the word *satsaṅga* refers to the spiritual fellowship of the devotees consisting both of *sādhus* (monks) and *gṛhasthas* (householders) who are committed and dedicated to a spiritual and pious life. Thus, the study of the scriptures, listening to religious discourses from the Guru and competent authorities, singing the glory of Parabrahman, participating in devotion-oriented activities and sharing the company of the Parabrahman-committed fellow-devotees is *satsaṅga*. *Satsaṅga* is also an act of attending the religious assembly and participating in Parabrahman-centered activity. In this *saṃpradāya* (faith, movement), popularly, the word '*satsaṅga*' is also used for denoting the spiritual fellowship of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* followers.⁵⁸²

Svāminārāyaṇa here⁵⁸³ unpacks the glory of *satsaṅga* by referring to *Śrīmadbhāgavatam*: “Parabrahman is pleased mainly by *satsaṅga*. It alone puts an end to all bondages and attachments. Through *satsaṅga*, one can easily attain Parabrahman. Compared to *satsaṅga* neither the *yoga* of eight-fold disciplines, nor *Sāṃkhya* knowledge of discrimination; neither righteousness (*dharma*), nor the regular study of the Vedas (*abhyāsa*); neither severe austerity (*tapas*), nor renunciation (*tyāga*); neither offering oblations in the sacrificial fire and works of public utility (*iṣṭapurtam*), nor bestowal of gifts and charity (*dakṣiṇā*); neither observances of vows and fasts (*vratam*), nor sacrifices and constant muttering of Parabrahman's name (*yajñā*); neither the holy acts of pilgrimages (*tirtha-yātra*), nor the fivefold observances of body-mind purity (*niyama*), and not even the fivefold

⁵⁸¹ *Satsangadiksha* 8, 9

⁵⁸² IUSB 15, pp.22-23

⁵⁸³ Vac. Gadh. 2/54

abstention rules of self-restraint (*yama*) can please Parabrahman as much as the *satsaṅga* does.⁵⁸⁴

By accepting *satsaṅga*, without any selfish motive, one certainly can have self-realization (*ātman-darśana*), which is the best means to attain emancipation. When one envisions over *satsaṅga* concerning the *ātman* and Parabrahman, all his thoughts and desires arising as a consequence of three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *tamas*) get exterminated. His doubts get dispelled, and resolute knowledge of glory becomes firm, and constant Parabrahman-consciousness (God-remembrance) becomes habitual. It unites one with Parabrahman through extraordinary affection. One becomes fault-free (*dosa-rahita*/viceless).⁵⁸⁵

Now the question may arise that how can one get this *satsaṅga*? Well, as the fruition of all good efforts and the meritorious deeds of the past lives, one gets *satsaṅga*. Of all means to reach Parabrahman, nothing equals *satsaṅga*. After attaining *satsaṅga*, one can bear pains and sufferings adamantly. The pain and calamity equal to the death sentence on the gallows gets softened and substituted by pain and suffering worth a thorn prick to him when a man does *satsaṅga* with a pure heart.⁵⁸⁶ Thus, *satsaṅga* must be viewed as pure, spiritual, and divine. And one who is convinced of the transcendental greatness of Parabrahman and Parabrahman-possessed *sādhu* (the *Akṣara*-Guru) has his roots firm in the *satsaṅga*.⁵⁸⁷ When *satsaṅga* becomes precious for a devotee, he develops oneness or identity with the great *sādhu* (the Guru). He cannot forsake the company of the great Sadhu and the devotees of Parabrahman. The accurate knowledge is attained, and love and attachment for Parabrahman become stronger through regular *satsaṅga*.

⁵⁸⁴ *Śrīmad bhāgavatam* 11/12/1-2, SV 1/17

⁵⁸⁵ Vac. Sar. 9

⁵⁸⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁵⁸⁷ Vac. Loya 17

When a person in the company of the Guru listens humbly to all his preaching and discourses; The ego-identification and identification with one's body and its relations come to an end only; thereafter, he reflects upon Guru's words and discovers valuable truths and exhortations of a pious life. As a result, disinterest and detachment towards worldly pleasures develop, and love and attachment for Parabrahman naturally flourish in the heart. *Ātma*-realization and Parabrahman-realization become effortlessly feasible through *santa-samāgama*, particularly through the *parama-ekāntika satpuruṣa* (the Akṣara Guru). Guṇātītānanda Svāmi states: "Without the association of the great *sādhu*, one does not get the bliss of *satsaṅga*."⁵⁸⁸ Bhadreśadāsa confirms and explains the form of Guru-*Satsaṅga*: "प्रतिबोधविदितं प्रतिबुद्ध्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरोः सकाशात् परमात्मस्वरूपाद्यनेनेति प्रतिबोधो ह्युपदेशः। तथा हि परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाय शिष्येण जिज्ञासिते तं प्रति ब्रह्मस्वरूपेण गुरुणा दीयमान उपदेश एव प्रतिबोधः, तेन विदितमिति प्रतिबोधविदितमिति" (KeUSB 2/4, p.44)

"This *satsaṅga*-statement can be understood through *parātibodh*. *Pratibodh* is the preception understood from the Guru to disciple in order to understand Paramātmā's form and qualities." The Bhāṣyakāra mentions the consequence of *satsaṅga*" Moreover, without *bhakti* and *satsaṅga*, even a great scholar may degenerate in life.⁵⁸⁹ Therefore, *satsaṅga* ought to be carried out with all honesty and sincerity. However, *satsaṅga* should not be done out of a desire for some worldly attainment such as getting a child, wealth, health, fame, power, worldly happiness, freedom from pain/punishment or other motives. It must be done purely for pleasing Parabrahman, for our own emancipation. When with such a selfless approach, *satsaṅga*, *santa-samāgama* is done, the seeker becomes free from vices, *vāsanās*, and ignorance, and attains *mokṣa* (emancipation).⁵⁹⁰ "इत्थमनेन मन्त्रेण सश्रद्धं साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुणातितगुरोर्दिव्योपदेशवचनैरेव प्राप्ताध्यात्मविद्या सद्यः सत्फला भवतीति सिद्धान्तितम्" (KeUSB. 2/4,

⁵⁸⁸ SV 1/29

⁵⁸⁹ *Satsangadiksha* 222

⁵⁹⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

p.46) “In this way, the *mantra* shows that through the preaching of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, *adhyātmavidyā* becomes fruitful in the true sense. This is the principle.” Further, the BG preaches directly to a seeker to have a company of such a *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and become ‘नित्यसत्त्वस्थः’. Bhadresādāsa explains it: “साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपसत्पुरुषमागमेन त्वमपि तद्ब्रह्मसाधर्म्यं प्राप्य ब्रह्मरूपो भवेति” (BGSB 2/46, p.52) “Through the company of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru you will also become *brahmarūpa* devotee by attaining his similar qualities.”

12.2 Virtues Helpful in Spiritual Progress

For a true devotee, to develop good virtues and to eradicate untoward elements and vicious habits is an integral part of spiritual perfection. The discipline, qualities, and virtues that ought to be acquired and developed with sincere systematic efforts and constant goal-awareness and practice are discussed hereunder.⁵⁹¹ The nature and place of each one in the life of a seeker is also mentioned here.

इन्द्रियसंयमो मायाविकारादिविदारणम्
 एकान्तधर्मपुष्टिश्च स्वात्मनि ब्रह्मरूपता॥⁵⁹²
 माहात्म्यसहितः सम्यङ्निश्चयः परमात्मनः।
 मोक्षः सर्वार्थसिद्धिर्हि प्रत्यक्षब्रह्मसङ्गतः॥⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ परमदिव्यभावनरसितप्रत्यक्षपरमात्मैकान्तिकभिवाञ्छा (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

श्रेयसाभिकाङ्क्षा तत्परमप्रसादलाभः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

बाह्यान्तः करणसंयमनलक्षणं तपः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

वेदान्तादिशास्त्राणां वचनेषु चाऽऽस्तिक्यादिरूपः परमो विश्वास इत्यादि (BSSB 1/1/1, p.4)

यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद्यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपः। (BSSB 1/1/1, p.6)

हि यतः ततः परमात्मसङ्कल्पलक्षणाभिध्यानादेव अस्य जीवेश्वरात्मनः बन्धविपर्ययौ जाग्रत्स्वप्नादितत्तदवस्थासु गमनरूपं बन्धनं तद् विपर्ययेण तत्तदवस्थातोवस्थान्तरप्राप्तिलक्षणा

मुक्तिश्चेत्युभौभवतः। (BSSB 3/2/5, p.287)

तं स्वाच्छरीरात् प्रवहेन्मुञ्जादिवेषीकां धैर्येण। (BSSB 3/2/13, p.294)

अविवक्षितार्थव्युदासको मात्रशब्दः। (BSSB 3/2/16, p.295)

सेव्यसेवकभावाद्यापादको भेदसम्बन्ध इष्यत इत्यत्राह। (BSSB 3/2/28, p.303)

परब्रह्मप्राप्तिपरमोपायतया सेतुत्वेन व्यपदेशात्। (BSSB 3/2/30, p.304)

⁵⁹² SSSK 136

⁵⁹³ SSSK 137

“Control over the senses,⁵⁹⁴ eradication of worldly desires,⁵⁹⁵ nourishment of *ekāntik dharma*,⁵⁹⁶ realizing one’s *ātman* as *brahmarūpa*, a complete conviction in Parabrahman along with the knowledge of his glory,⁵⁹⁷ *mokṣa*,⁵⁹⁸ and achievement of all there is to be achieved, all this is realized through association with the manifest Akṣarabrahman Guru.”

उत्साहोऽभ्यसनं धैर्यं विश्वासः संयमो बलम्
सुहृद्भावस्तथैक्यं च दासत्वं गुरुसेवनम्॥⁵⁹⁹
प्रार्थना च मुमुक्षा च सहस्र गुणग्राहिता
प्राप्यादिकाऽनुसन्धानमनन्तर्दृष्टिस्थाहिकम्॥⁶⁰⁰
एतानि साधनानि स्युर्गुरुप्रसन्नता यतः।
साक्षाद् बह्वप्रसङ्गस्तु तेष्वपि प्रमुखं भवेत्॥⁶⁰¹

“Enthusiasm,⁶⁰² repeated practice of spiritual endeavors,⁶⁰³ passion,⁶⁰⁴ faith,⁶⁰⁵ self-control,⁶⁰⁶ strength,⁶⁰⁷ fraternity, unity,⁶⁰⁸ humility, service towards the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru,⁶⁰⁹ prayer,⁶¹⁰ a desire for *mokṣa*,⁶¹¹ tolerance,⁶¹² perception of the good in others⁶¹³ awareness of such concepts is the significance and glory of that which we have attained in the form of *satsaṅga*, introspection, and daily offerings of *bhakti*. These are spiritual endeavors through which one earns the Guru’s grace. However, amongst all of these, association with the *Brahmasvarūpa*

⁵⁹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/8, 2/1

⁵⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/18

⁵⁹⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/19

⁵⁹⁷ Vac. Loya 7

⁵⁹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/54

⁵⁹⁹ SSSK 140

⁶⁰⁰ SSSK 141

⁶⁰¹ SSSK 142

⁶⁰² Vac. Kar. 10

⁶⁰³ Vac. Sar. 11

⁶⁰⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/29

⁶⁰⁵ Vac. Sar. 18

⁶⁰⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/2

⁶⁰⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/12

⁶⁰⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/61

⁶⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/7

⁶¹⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/47

⁶¹¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁶¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/27

⁶¹³ Vac. Gadh. 1/6

Guru itself is truly the foremost endeavor.” Thus, here, we have discussed the virtues briefly to be attained by a devotee in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta.

12.3 Śraddhā (Patience, Faith)

Śraddhā means the doubt-free state of mind while walking towards the ultimate goal of life according to the guidance of the Guru. It is the powerful belief or faith in the words of the Guru. It produces patience and perseverance in the path of goal-accomplishment. A devotee with *śraddhā* does not back out half-way. He fights the battle till his last breath.⁶¹⁴ In this way, when *śraddhā* (faith) is combined with total trust in the words of the Guru (*parāma-ekāntika-satpuruṣa*) and Parabrahman, a seeker becomes free from all sins and bondage causing deeds (*tāmasa-karma*), his *vāsanās* (transmigrating desires and passions) get perished, and he experiences moral inclinations and dutifulness worthy of *sat-yuga* in his heart.⁶¹⁵ The seeker of faith successfully receives the right knowledge, while a faithless doubter ruins oneself. We can conclude the glory of *śraddhā* (faith) with the famous *Gītā* verse:

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।

ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परं शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥⁶¹⁶

“The one who has faith in Parabrahman is sincere in *sādhanā*, and has control over the senses gains this knowledge. Having gained this knowledge, one soon attains the supreme peace.”

12.4 Sravanādi-Sopānas (Steps for Grasping Knowledge)

We examined that in *satsaṅga*, one has to listen to the spiritual discourses with keen interest. Since it is a critical factor to attain knowledge, why? Well, when a thing is learned or perceived with rapt attention and concentration, its apprehension becomes so vivid and complete that the idea (image/ picture) of the thing gets firmly

⁶¹⁴ Vac. Sar. 5, 9

⁶¹⁵ Vac. Sar. 18

⁶¹⁶ BG 4/39

imprinted on the mind, and it can be recalled unmistakably any moment in the future, and whenever recalled, it occurs as it is its Spatio-temporal order and details.⁶¹⁷ Therefore, listening prudently with gripped attention is called *śravaṇa*. From whatever is listened, when one retains the relevant and deletes the irrelevant and thinks of it mentally, it is called *manana*. It involves the use of the sense of discrimination and activity of the mind to retain it. When, what is resolutely known by the mind, is reflected upon and remembered often and again through regular practice, it is called *nididhyāsana*. Furthermore, when it is recalled and remembered instantaneously as it is, unflinching with all details, it is called *sākṣātkāra*. It is an act of realization of truth in its entirety.⁶¹⁸

This process of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, and *sākṣātkāra* is used for realizing *ātman* (*ātma-sākṣātkāra*) and for realizing Paramātmān (*Parāmātmā-sākṣātkāra*). The *Upaniṣad* states: ‘आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः’ (BU 2/4/5) “One must listen to his glory, then contemplate upon Him, imbibe the appropriate thoughts that one has heard and contemplated.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments on this verse that if one does *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* in this way, one attains *sākṣātkāra*- realization.⁶¹⁹

12.5 *Viveka* (Discernment)

In the spiritual path, one requires to know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. The sense of knowing the difference between the both is *viveka*. *Viveka* means the sense of discrimination needed for the purpose of spiritual self-ascend. It refers to the adeptness of discriminating between real and unreal, eternal and transient. *Viveka* consists in knowing oneself as *ātman* distinct from mind, ego, vital breath etc. It consists of knowing oneself as the eternal, immortal *ātman*, the

⁶¹⁷ Vac. Sar. 2

⁶¹⁸ Vac. Sar. 3

⁶¹⁹ BUSB 2/4/5, p.125

servile devotee of Parabrahman, as against the body and mind that are changing and perishable.⁶²⁰ Bhadresādāsa also adds that one must discern the distinction between Brahman and Parabrahman. He calls it “विवेकः”⁶²¹

12.6 Gunagrāhaka-Dṛṣṭi (Perceiving Virtues of Others)

In the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition, the most effective *sādhanā* to flourish one’s *satsaṅga* is *gunagrāhaka-dṛṣṭi* (perceiving virtues of others).⁶²² A devotee should always perceive well in others, to enrich oneself, and he always endeavors to find out one's own faults and vices to get rid of them. He thus is described as ‘*viveki*’, i.e., a person who is judicious and prudent. He keeps on advancing promisingly in the path of perfection (spiritual self-ascent). Therefore, one ought to see the good in the devotees of Parabrahman. Moreover, when the Guru or the preacher-*sādhu* points out his faults and vices, he feels happy and obliged. He thanks him and appreciates his corrective gesture, and accordingly mends his conduct to perfect the personality.⁶²³ Bhadresādāsa writes: “कस्यापि दुर्गुणस्य वार्ता कदापि अन्य समक्षं नैव कार्या। भक्तदोषदर्शनं तत्कीर्तनादिकं विषयानामार्ग एवेति योगिमहाराजः।” (SSS p.366) “One should never speak ill words of others. To perceive and speak about others faults is like to drink poison; this was the principle of Yogiji Maharaja.” Thus, the *Guruparampara* always promoted this *sādhanā* in the tradition.

12.7 Antardṛṣṭi (Introspection)

A devotee has to examine his progress in the *Satsang* fellowship. Introspection is the examination of one's own conscious thinking and feelings. In psychology, the process of introspection relies exclusively on observation of one's mental state, while in a spiritual context, it may refer to the examination of one's *ātman*. Introspection is closely related to human self-reflection and self-discovery and is

⁶²⁰ Vac. Sar. 4

⁶²¹ IUSB 1, p.2

⁶²² Satsangadiksha 168, 233

⁶²³ Vac. Gadh. 1/6

contrasted with external observation. Introspection generally provides privileged access to one's own mental states, not mediated by other sources of knowledge, so that individual experience of the mind is unique. One should think in the introspection process as Mahant Svāmi explains, “With a composed mind, one should introspect every day: “What have I come to accomplish in this world and what am I doing?”⁶²⁴ Svāminārāyaṇa provides another definition too: *antardṛṣṭi* (inner-vision/) consists in keeping the eyes fixed on the incarnate Parabrahman perceptibly present before the seeker. Focusing of the mind on the form of Parabrahman visible inside the heart or out there in front is called *antardṛṣṭi*.⁶²⁵

12.8 Divyabhāva (Divinity)

All the actions of Bhagavān and His *sādhu* are divine and pure. When Parabrahman incarnates on earth, he does some actions which are seen as doubtful, but these all incidents are generated through his master plan. However, we may understand or not; these are all correct and divine. Besides this, these actions and incidents are for our liberation.⁶²⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “However, when Parabrahman Bhagavān, who transcends both the perishable and the imperishable, assumes a human form... His actions are just like those of all humans... but they are all for the liberation of the *jīvas*. So, a true devotee sings the divine actions of Parabrahman and attains the highest elevated state of enlightenment, whereas a non-believer perceives faults in them.” (Vac. 1/72, p.177)

Bhadreśadāsa confirms by saying that परमदिव्यभावनरसितप्रत्यक्षपरमात्मैकान्तिकभिवाञ्छा (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3) “A seeker wants only the manifest form of Parabrahman with profound divinity towards Him.” The substances that are basically insentient cannot impure Parabrahman; instead, Parabrahman overlaps them with his eternal divinity. He says

⁶²⁴ *Satsangadiksha* 145

⁶²⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/49,

⁶²⁶ *Satsangadiksha* 131

further “स्वकीयदिव्यभावेन तानेव लेपयतीत्यर्थः” (BSSB 3/2/14, p.294). In this manner, *divyabhāva* is the most prominent endeavor in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. Conversely, *manuṣyabhāva*, to perceive faults in Parabrahman or the Guru, is the worst drawback in a devotee’s life.

12.9 Niṣkapaṭabhāva (Undeceptfulness)

The word ‘*niṣkapaṭa*’ is used in its technical sense in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* way to Parabrahman to imply an ingenious trait of the mind while doing *satsaṅga*. More simply, the word ‘*niṣkapaṭa*’ means ‘frank and open’, but in its specific sense, it also includes unhiding, unreserved, unhypocritical, undeceptive approach before the Guru (the *Parama ekāntika sādhu*). A *niṣkapaṭa bhakta* frankly admits and confesses his vices and shortcomings before his Guru who is perfect in the observance of his fivefold vows (*pañca-vartamān*), is free of vices and has the resolute knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman's transcendental greatness.

The disciple confides and confesses his failures and slips (lapses) in his observance of norms of tradition. He frankly confesses and admits the faults and vices he keeps seeing in Parabrahman and His devotees. He openly admits all the obstacles and problems that are upsetting him in his perception of (manifest-*pratyakṣa*) Parabrahman. Any act of mistaking Parabrahman as lesser than divine should be confidently confessed before the Guru. Bhadreśādāsa explains: “तथा हि श्रेयोभिलाषी गुरुं प्राप्य स्फुटं तत्पुरः तद्दर्शितादर्शितस्वदोषोद्धाटनेन कपटमपाकुरुते” (BGSB 2/7, p.22) “A disciple who wants to liberate should reveal and accept all his faults after attaining the Guru. Consequently, he removes his deceitful nature.” The improvement and atonement in the conduct according to the counsels, advices, corrections, expiations, and atonements suggested by the Guru remove all faults from the disciple and make his spiritual journey safer, swifter, and quicker.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁷ Vac. Loya 5

12.10 Prayer

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to Parabrahman or the requesting of good things from Parabrahman. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. Svāminārāyaṇa also speaks about the importance of prayer: Devotees should pray: “Protect us from *māyā* in the form of I-ness and my-ness, and may the love burgeoning within us for you. May we also have the company of the *Santa* who has transcended *māyā* and has affection for you; and may we acquire affection and a sense of my-ness towards him as well.” Bhadreśadāsa also provokes the importance of prayer in his comments on the IU. He states elusively that the true and best way of attaining the ultimate goal, Brahman and Parabrahman, is through prayer. Prayer is the humble voice of surrender.⁶²⁸ While offering prayer, one can think of the glory and greatness of Parabrahman. Everything else which is the production of *māyā* is perishable. One should ponder upon His power of all doer and at the same time, one should think that He is the Parabrahman, whom I have attained and I want to please only Him in this life.⁶²⁹

13. Conclusion

Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and his *Gunātīta Sādhus* have lived and taught a unique and practical path of spiritual *sāadhanā* that leads to the realization of *ātman*, Brahman and Paramātman. *Svāminārāyaṇa sāadhanā* provides a detailed description of the importance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by which all aspirants can succeed in their spiritual quest and experience the ultimate bliss of Parabrahman. When we analyze any traditional *sāadhanā*, especially the spiritual endeavor, it is God-centric.

Any spiritual endeavor, be it in Indian tradition or in the western tradition, possesses its unique qualities. I have tried to cover the broad, cumbersome, and exceptionally

⁶²⁸ IUSB 15, p.23

⁶²⁹ *Satsangadiksha* 147-151

complex topic in a few pages. We must content ourselves with the upper mentioned sections, wherein we discussed important points of Svāminārāyaṇa the tradition. But these all points are capable of explaining the Svāminārāyaṇa *sādhanā* on the base of the *Prasthānatrayī*. In short, we can say that this *sādhanā* process is unique among the various schools of Vedanta.