

The Role of the Guru in *Sādhanā* in Light of the Svāminārayaṇa Vedanta

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Abstract: “Guru” is an intensely investigated, deeply discussed and commonly considered topic of Indian philosophy. However, there are considerable diversities in various branches of Indian philosophy regarding the conception, role, and need of a Guru.

A large amount of literature is available highlighting the role of a Guru in each branch of Indian philosophy. Similarly, the Svāminārayaṇa Saṃpradāya has a sufficient publication to provide the foundational characteristics of the Guru, however, it lacks connection from both the Vacanāmṛta and Prasthānatrayī Svāminārayaṇa Bhāṣya, which are the foundational scriptures of the Svāminārayaṇa Vedanta.

To cope with this issue, this paper targets to examine the role of the Guru in light of the Vacanāmṛta and Prasthānatrayī Svāminārayaṇa Bhāṣya. Based on this analysis, we will gain valuable new perspectives on the role of the Guru by exploring the Svāminārayaṇa-Sādhanā.

This article also provides a critical note through an investigation into the principles of Svāminārayaṇa Vedanta regarding sādhanā and clears the path for a spiritual aspirant to find a Guru and follow his teachings in order to associate with God and attain liberation.

Keywords: Guru, Prasthānatrayī Svāminārayaṇa Bhāṣya, Vacanāmṛta, Sādhanā.

Abbreviation:

IU- Ishavashya Upanishad – IUSB- Ishavashya Upanishad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya, KeU- Kena Upanishad, KU- Katha Upanishad, MU- Muṇḍaka Upanishad, SU- Shwetashvater Upanishad,

BG- Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, Vac.- Vacanāmṛta, SSS- Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhant Sudha, SSSK- Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhant Sudhā kārikā, SV- Svamīnī Vāto

1. Introduction:

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः।
गुरुः साक्षात्परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः॥

The Guru-Gītā adorns the Guru as Parabrahman,¹ convincingly, “The Guru-Gītā is the celebrated Sanskrit hymn exalting the figure of the authoritative spiritual master.”² Like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman also incarnates in this world in a human-like form as the Guru.³ This is a unique principle of the

¹ Gurugītā – 195/44

² Rigopoulos Antonio, Guru the Spiritual Master in Eastern and Western Traditions, p.169, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2002

³ Vac. Var.19

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.⁴ *Brahmabhāva* (qualitative oneness) is inevitable to offer devotion to Parabrahman.⁵ That *brahmabhāva* is possible only by association with the Guru.⁶ Thus, it is necessary to seek refuge under such a Guru to realize *brahmavidyā*. That Guru must be Akṣarabrahman himself.⁷ This principle is clearly elaborated within the SB⁸: “अनेन नित्यं परमात्मनिष्ठः साक्षाद् अक्षरब्रह्मैव ब्रह्मविद्याया विज्ञापयिता गुरुर्भवितुम् अर्हति नान्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्”⁹ “Only one who is Akṣarabrahman himself has the firm conviction of Parabrahman and is the master of preaching *Brahmavidyā*.” In addition to this Svāminārāyaṇa claims 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*, *sādhu*, *ekāntika santa*, etc.¹⁰ Now, we will discuss the role of the Guru in spiritual endeavors according to the Svāminārāyaṇa School of philosophy through the following points.

2. Ideal for *Sādhanā* :

Bhadreśādāsa, the Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra explains:

गुरोर्ज्ञानमिव ज्ञानं वर्तनमपि तत्समम् ।
देहार्पणं तथा भक्तौ ब्रह्मात्मैक्यं तदुच्यते ॥SSSK 369॥

“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. Bhadreśādāsa corroborates by giving the example of the *Īśāvāsya* principle:¹¹

“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 *sāstra*.”¹² A devotee who endeavors to offer devotion to Parabrahman faces external and internal myriad complications, hurdles, and hindrances.¹³ 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.

3. To Attain *Brahmabhāva* :

In the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, *brahmabhāva* is essential for liberation.¹⁴ Svāminārāyaṇa called it *ātmabuddhi* or immense love towards the Guru. Such *ātmabuddhi* with the Guru most readily manifests itself as concentrated spiritual love, what Bhadreśādāsa calls ‘*Prakṛṣṭānurāgodbhāva*’,¹⁵ “because the aspirant of liberation is now attached to the Guru, not the body or its associates. The Guru becomes the priority, the

⁴ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

⁵ Vac. Loyā. 7

⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

⁷ Mukundcharandas Sādhu, Vachnamrut Handbook, p.173, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, Third Ed. April 2007

⁸ MU 1/2/12

⁹ MUSB 1/2/12, p.254

¹⁰ Paramattvadas Swami, Swaminarayan Hindu Theology, p.201, Cambridge University Press, 2017

¹¹ IU 16

¹² Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, Essence of the *Upaniṣads*, p.20, *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2012.

¹³ Vac. Gadh. 3/39, 1/44, 3/1, 3/21

¹⁴ Shrutiprakashdas Sādhu, Aksharapurushottam mahatmyam, p.240, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, Oct. 2012

¹⁵ BSSB 3/3/15, p.324

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.”¹⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa, therefore, confirms: “For an aspirant who desires his own liberation, nothing in this universe is more blissful than Parabrahman and his *sādhu*. Therefore, just as a person has *ātmabuddhi* towards his own body, he should similarly have *ātmabuddhi* with Parabrahman and his *sādhu*.” (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.¹⁷

4. The Gateway to Liberation :

Svāminārāyaṇa expresses, “*Bhāgavad dharma* is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the *ekāntika sādhu or santa* 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) Bhadrēśadāsa 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*.¹⁸ Moreover, the wise sage Kapila teaches that affection (for others) firmly binds the *ātman*. However, if that same affection is directed towards the *Sādhu*, the gateway to liberation is opened.¹⁹

Svāminārāyaṇa’s intention is clear that the Guru is the gateway to liberation. An intense and loving association with him opens that gateway.²⁰ Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes it 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 the substantive presence of Parabrahman within the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, and expounds the *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad*’s²¹ 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. For the Supreme Devotion Towards Parabrahman :

It is extremely difficult to attain true conviction of the form of Parabrahman.²² Since our *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇas* are *māyic*, whereas Parabrahman is not *māyic*,²³ hence, Parabrahman is imperceptible to our *māyic indriyas* and inner faculties.²⁴ Thus, the *sādhu* becomes the means to help us achieve the true conviction of Parabrahman and acquire the privilege to offer devotion to him. Bhadrēśadāsa asserts: “प्रतिबोधविदितं परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाय शिष्येण जिज्ञासिते सति तं प्रति ब्रह्मस्वरूपेण गुरुणा दीयमान उपदेश एव प्रतिबोधः, तेन

¹⁶ BG 2/72, 18/54, BS 3/3/15

¹⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/59, Vac. Gadh. 1/54, MU 2/2/3,4,5, KU 3/2

¹⁸ KUSB 2/12, p.96

¹⁹ Śrīmad Bhāgavat 3/25/20

²⁰ MU 3/1/8, MU 2/2/7

²¹ यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ । तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥ISU 6/23 ॥

²² Vac. Loya 18

²³ Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Vac. kar. 1

²⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/78, Vac. Panch. 4



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.²⁵ Similarly, then, to see the Guru is to see Parabrahman; to have been blessed by the Guru is to have been blessed by Parabrahman.

6. 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.²⁶ Therefore, Bhadrēśadāsa discloses the ultimate fact: “गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत्”²⁷ “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,²⁸ knows the intention of Parabrahman and thereby is able to interpret the Vedic exegesis thoroughly. Consequently, the role and importance of the Akṣarabrahman Guru are highly extolled both for fathoming the thorough meaning and insinuations of the scriptures²⁹ and correctly molding one’s thought process.

7. 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 *Sādhu* - then, by performing with extreme affection such equal service of Parabrahman and *Sādhu* who possesses the highest qualities, even if such a person 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

²⁵ Vac. Kār. 5

²⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/13, Loya. 11, Var.12

²⁷ SSSK 271

²⁸ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

²⁹ गुरुश्च पञ्चमो वेदस्तच्छब्दश्रेष्ठता ततः ॥२६० ॥

सिद्धान्ताऽनुगमन्यत्तु सर्वथा साम्प्रदायिकम्।

गुरुप्रमाणितं हेव प्रामाण्यपदवीं भजेत् ॥२६२ ॥

शास्त्रशब्दोऽपि नो सेव्यो गुरोराश्रयणं विना।

गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत् ॥२७१ ॥

गुरुहरिबलं श्रेष्ठं शास्त्रवचोबलादपि।

शास्त्रात्तु केवलात् कापि न ज्ञानं निश्चयः सुखम् ॥२७२ ॥

अतः शास्त्रं बलीयो न साक्षाद् ब्रह्माऽक्षराद् गुरोः ।

नाऽसत्याद् वारयेच्छास्त्रं गुरुस्तु वारयेत् ततः ॥२७३ ॥

साक्षाद्भेदो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः ।

the same truth that serving the Guru is thus serving Parabrahman, the fruit of which can accelerate one spiritually a hundred-fold.³⁰ The *Gītā* declares: ‘तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥’³¹

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।’³² “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 well.³³ He discloses this in terms of having a firm association with the *satpuruṣa*, the importance of the company of a *santa* and the need to develop an intense attachment towards such a *sādhu*. By becoming a pupil of a Guru, who is the manifest form of Akṣara, one obtains Puruṣottama’s favor.

8. 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 *sādhanā* in order to achieve the grace of Parabrahman. Thus, the Guru possesses a prominent place within *Svāminārāyaṇa Sādhanā*.

9. Is the Guru the Ultimate Goal?

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy, as we have discussed, 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

³⁰ BS 3/3/20

³¹ BG 4/34

³² MUSB 1/2/12

³³ Vac. Gadh. 1/27, 37, Var 11, Gadh. 3/26

³⁴ 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

³⁵ BGSB 9/12, p.210



Akṣarabrahman Guru, yet the ultimate goal is Parabrahman, who resides there with infinitive qualities.³⁶ However, what then is the meaning of the *Śrutis* which say: ‘*Gurumevābhigacchet*’³⁷ or ‘*lakṣyam tadeva Akṣara*.’³⁸ One may question that if Puruṣottama is the ultimate goal, then why does this *mantra* identify Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) as the final goal?

Bhadreśādāsa 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.³⁹ He further argues that this is similar to how wanting to meet one’s beloved in some village also includes wanting to reach or 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.⁴⁰ By analogizing Akṣarabrahman with the aim of 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*.⁴¹

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 a 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 *ātman*s of Akṣaradhāma by His own divine light and prevail alone. Also, if He wishes, He can accept the devotion of the liberated *ātman*s 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 *ātman*s by His own power, without even needing Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Loya 13, p.327)

It is Parabrahman’s eternal wish that Akṣarabrahman does its ultimate works like creating the universe etc.⁴² moreover, Parabrahman eternally dwells in the Akṣarabrahman Guru.⁴³ 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*.

10. Conclusion:

The Svāminārāyaṇa School of Vedanta emphasizes that the ultimate goal of life is to become liberated from the endless cycle of birth and death. This final liberation can only be attained when a spiritual aspirant realizes *brahmavidyā*, which is attained through the association with the Akṣarabrahman Guru. Thus,

³⁶ Williams Raymond, Swaminarayan Hinduism, p.156-171, Oxford University Press, April 2016

³⁷ MU 1/2/12

³⁸ MU 2/2/3

³⁹ This is also discussed in BSSB. 3/3/24.

⁴⁰ "The abode of Paramātman is the goal." Vac. Gadh. 2/22

⁴¹ 'Bhedavyapadeshat' BS 1/3/5

⁴² MU 1/1/7,

⁴³ Vac. Gadh. 1/41



surrendering to the Guru is the lifeline of spiritual endeavor or *sāadhanā*. As a result, the aspirant becomes *brahmarūpa* and becomes eligible to offer devotion to Parabrahman.

Moreover, the significant characteristic of this philosophy is, that the Akṣarabrahman Guru himself incarnates on earth and remains here through his succession of future Akṣarabrahman Gurus.⁴⁴ In this way, the role of the Guru is unique and inevitable to attain liberation in the Svāminārāyaṇa School of Vedānta.

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⁴⁴ Shrutiprakashdas Sādhu, Aksharapurushottamcharitam(Sankshipt Anuvaad), p.308, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, Nov 2006