

Argumentation Versus Truth

By HANUMAN PRASAD PODDAR

A Commentary on Two of the Bhakti-Sutras (Aphorisms on Divine Love) by Devarishi Narada, the greatest apostle of Bhakti.



The devotee should never enter into argumentation.

For the practicant in the path of devotion, the above aphorism is supremely valuable. There is absolutely no need for the devotee to enter into argumentation and controversy. He should know that every moment of his life stands dedicated to the remembrance of his beloved Lord, so that he has no right to devote it to any other work.

Moreover, what should he argue or reason about? When was the world created, how it was created, why it was created, and what is the root principle underlying the creation?—all these things he need not know. Knowing and believing in God as the be-all and end-all of life, he has made Him his exclusive goal. God will Himself

reveal His truth to him whenever He wills.

When God will reveal His truth to him, and whether at all He will reveal it to him—these thoughts too should not agitate the mind of the devotee. There should be no reason in his mind for entertaining any other thought than that of his beloved Lord.

It is certain that Truth can never be realized through logical argument. That is why the Brahma-Sutras lay down that "logical reasoning has no foundation or stability." The Kathopanisad says: "Truth cannot be realized through intellectual reasoning." Truth or Reality is automatically revealed to a pure-hearted individual having the sattva (goodness) element predominating in him.

The maxim, "Truth is known

through argument and reasoning," is also partially true; but here the vada (reasoning) has a different connotation. A devout disciple places his arguments before the preceptor actuated by a spirit of enquiry, and the preceptor on his part advances counter-arguments in order to dispel the disciple's doubts and bring home the real truth to him. This kind of reasoning is not harmful.

Discrimination Is Lost

But the reasoning which starts with certain preconceptions is invariably attended with harmful results. Controversy has a tendency to make one partial to his own views. The goal of arriving at Truth is eventually lost sight of and one gradually develops the tendency of catching at the weak points of his adversary and indulging in personal recrimination, culminating in mutual vilification and use of abusive language with reference to each other. The sense of discrimination is lost, the spirit of anger prevails, speech gets out of control and deep-seated bitterness ensues between the two parties.

Therefore, it is said: "The fire of animosity blazes up through controversial reasoning". The wayfarer on the path of devotion should find no time to enter into a controversy. So far as possible he should keep aloof from places where such disputations are generally held. If ever through a decree of Providence he should fall in with controversialists of this

type, he should assume an attitude of humility towards them and give a patient hearing to them, not prolonging the discussion by attempting a reply.

The Sanskrit proverb says, "When no fuel is added to the fire it will automatically go out." The disputant will be automatically silenced if we refuse to give answer to him. Therefore, the best course for the devotee is to keep silent. He should constantly remember the saying, "All objects are achieved through observance of silence".

Let him not hear any word which may create doubt in his mind in regard to his faith, the object of his worship, the path he has chalked out for himself, the course of discipline he is following; neither should he himself utter a word which may wound an other's feeling. When unavoidable, let him only hear what others have to say, but let him not in any case enter into argument for the sake of argument, or for vanquishing others, or for establishing his point over the point of another.

Guard His Speech

This does not mean that he should refuse to speak even to an earnest seeker after truth or to tender advice to friends when called for. The intention of the aphorism is that he should never enter into argument. Let him not speak where it is not necessary for him to speak; and when it becomes unavoidable, let him

Speak only to the extent it is absolutely necessary.

Use Time Wisely

Let there be no exaggeration in his speech, no spirit of wrangling or opposition to another; let him not cut jokes (sic) with another, let him not expose the faults of another; let him not hurt the feelings of another; let him not indulge in self-praise or extol his own views; let him not say unpleasant things to or speak ill of another; let him not speak with the motive of some gain; let him not mislead another through his words, nor create in the mind of another doubt about the latter's faith.

Let him speak only such words as are true, sweet, palatable and salutary, causing no annoyance to another; the rest of his time he should devote exclusively to the remembrance of the Divine Name. Let him regard the utterance of a single superfluous word as great loss, inasmuch as the time spent over it is wasted. The practice of Nama-Japa (a spiritual discipline of whispering the Lord's name) is disturbed during that interval, apart from the harmful influence exerted on the atmosphere by useless words.

Let him know it for certain that Divine Love, Divine Knowledge or God-Realization can never be attained through argumentation or controversial reasoning. These latter, on the contrary, gather together evils like egoism, hatred, anger, malice and violence. Therefore, the practicant should

keep himself aloof from controversial discussion. Goswami Tulasidas says:

"So thinking, the wise and the dispassionate betake themselves to Sri Rama, renouncing all speculative reasoning.

"O thou of steadfast intellect, knowing this, give up all sophistical reasoning and doubt; betake thyself to Sri Rama, the valiant hero, the repository of Compassion, the embodiment of Beauty and the bestower of Bliss."

Because (in argumentation) there is room for excess, and because it cannot determine anything.

Giving reasons for the above precept the author says that in a controversy a statement is followed by a counter-statement, and the process goes on ad infinitum. In order to maintain their respective positions both sides discharge volleys of arguments.

The truth which can be realized only through Divine Grace can never be realized through argumentative reasoning. Therefore such reasoning leads to no good. In course of a discussion one party may feel exhausted through continued speaking or may fail to hit upon a cogent argument at the spur of the moment, thus enabling the other party to score a victory over him; but such a victory does not necessarily lead to Truth; for a conclusion arrived at through this process is never the Truth.

Therefore, instead of wasting

his time over discussions, a devotee should surrender himself completely to God, and practise constant remembrance of Him in a sincere and disinterested spirit. Divine Love is attained not through argument, but through the practice of devotion.