

# LIBERATION

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – August 1966; Vol. 53; page 179

THE Hindu scriptures speak of the four Purushārthas (aims of existence of man) viz., *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (acquirement of wealth), *kāma* (gratification of desire), *mokṣa* (final emancipation). One who is in the world, that is one who leads a life in the household must pursue all these. He cannot be said to be living the life according to the mandates of the Śāstras, if he follows the first three to the neglect of the fourth. Neither should his desires be in conflict with righteousness nor his wealth be acquired unrighteously. Though all the four are set forth as aims of human existence, actually the real and the supreme aim is emancipation. For that alone is eternal while the other three are transitory.<sup>1</sup> The Bhāgavata informs, 'He, who wants to go beyond the darkness of *samsāra*, of transmigration, should not have attachment for anything which goes against the four aims of existence. Among these too *mokṣa* alone is to be always desired. For the other three are subject to the rule of time (i.e. transient).'<sup>2</sup>

Why are they then mentioned as aims of existence? The Hindu seers were aware that it was not possible for one and all to take up the final aim all at once. Most of the people are born with a great many desires and impressions. Sometimes the impressions are so strong, the desires so turbulent that human beings even go so far as to break all codes of conduct to get them fulfilled. To overcome such a deplorable state the Hindu sages laid down a scheme of life which ultimately led man to emancipation. He would have to work out his *samskāras*, tendencies and yet must be aware of his own shortcomings. That was why the Śāstras enjoined certain rules, and accepted even acquirement of wealth and satisfaction of desires within the limits of righteousness as aims of existence. However, all the while they remind man that *mokṣa*, liberation alone is the final goal. There is no joy in the tinsels of this world, in the

---

<sup>1</sup>Vedanta Paribhasha.

<sup>2</sup>Bhagavata, IV. 22.34-35.

Great alone is bliss.<sup>3</sup> But he would have to experience this for himself, that there is really nothing worth acquiring or enjoying in this world, that the life in the world is a sugarcoated pill. In the *Bhāgavata*, we come across a dialogue between the Rishi Maitreya and Vidura in which Vidura requests the seer to teach him how to live in the world. 'People do actions', says he, 'for the sake of enjoyment but they neither get joy nor rest or peace of any kind. On the contrary they suffer miseries again and again'.<sup>4</sup> This becomes obvious to all sometime or other. Maybe this idea will remain for a short time in some and in others it may persist. When it becomes an obsession with a person then he refuses to pursue desire and wealth. His life takes a new turn. For finding no rest elsewhere he retraces his steps and goes back to the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this fact with a parable: "A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. It flew toward the north hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew very tired but could find no shore. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After a long while the bird flew away again, this time toward the east. It couldn't find land in that direction either; everywhere it saw nothing but limitless ocean. Very tired, it again returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the south, and then toward the west. When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again, but sat there without making any further effort. It no longer felt restless or worried. Because it was free from worry, it made no further effort".

Continuing the Master said, 'Worldly people wander about to the four quarters of the earth for the sake of happiness. They don't find it anywhere; they only become tired and weary. When through their attachment to lust and lucre they only suffer misery, they feel an urge toward dispassion and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce lust and lucre without first enjoying them'. What is the way out? The *Bhāgavata* declares, 'As long as people do not take shelter at Your feet, which grant fearlessness, so long will there be fear, misery, desire, frustration and enormous thirst for wealth, possessions and relations. Further, the false notion of possession, of "mine", which is the root of all tribulations too persists till then'.<sup>5</sup> Sridhara commenting on this sloka

---

<sup>3</sup>Chandogya Up., 7.23.1.

<sup>4</sup>Bhagavata, III.v.2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., III.ix.6.

says, fear of losing, misery at loss, desire for more, frustration at failure to obtain the objects, and enormous thirst on account of such frustration will be there for people who have not taken shelter with God.

Sri Ramakrishna asks, 'What is there to enjoy in the world? Lust and wealth?' Then he himself answers the question, 'That is only a momentary pleasure. One moment it exists and the next moment it disappears'. But what a deep attachment it is! How difficult to get rid of! Even when the objects are absent the impressions do not give respite, like the smell of the flower they persist and the subtle body experiences them through the mind in dreams.<sup>6</sup> What then to speak of objects that are perceptibly present? They subdue him who hankers after them and make him their slaves. So one should repeatedly convey to one's mind that all things of this world are transient. Perhaps when a thousand times the mind has been told, it may, by the grace of God, be able to comprehend and try to carry out the idea into practice. Once the mind takes up the idea, half the battle of life is won.

## II

What is meant by liberation? What is that state? There are different concepts of liberation in the different schools of thought, even among the Hindus. For instance the Advaitin will say that becoming one with Brahman i.e., realizing one's identity with the Supreme is liberation. The Viśistādvaitin will say, 'to live in the proximity of God and be blissful is the highest aim'. We need not go into the details of these concepts here. What a spiritual aspirant has to know is that there is a state to be attained which is most blissful, reaching which there is no return to this world of tensions and sufferings. And the way to reach such a state is within the grasp of every human being if he but tries sincerely. This state is to be attained here and now. The Upanisads point this out. 'If man fails to know (the Self) here, before the fall of this body, he will be subject to rebirth in different bodies, in this creation.'<sup>7</sup>

One notion that is accepted by all Indian philosophers is the theory of rebirth and its concomitant theory of Karma. For unless these two ideas are accepted there seems to be no foundation whatsoever for any effort towards righteousness. If this world is all that exists then there is no necessity for anyone to strive for liberation, for as soon as the body falls,

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., IV.29.35.

<sup>7</sup>Kathopanisad, 6.4.

the soul, if there is one in the concept of such philosophers, automatically gets rid of bondage. Supposing that they do accept birth in a new sphere, heaven or by whatever name they may call it, that also is a rebirth. This earthly body does not go there. And once a phenomenon is accepted as possible it will be illogical to refuse to admit a possibility of its repetition, for in all our experience here in this world, we find recurrence of every phenomenon, at a nearer or a distant time. The morning is followed by noon and noon by evening and evening by night and so on. Endlessly this has been happening. What special reason can we adduce to assert that what has happened once will not happen again? Unless a satisfactory reason is forthcoming we cannot brush aside this theory of rebirth sentimentiously and arbitrarily.

Again, the theory of karma, as we have often pointed out, falling in the hands of the ignorant has acquired, to a superficial student, a disparaging meaning. He thinks that this theory has made people imbecile and weak, take everything lying down. But belief in the theory of Karma is not fatalism, but a reminder that what actions you are doing now are going to form your future. Swami Vivekananda points out, 'Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself... Once we set in motion a certain power, we have to take the full consequences of it. This is the law of Karma'. It is the law of cause and effect, given the cause the effect is sure to come; so take heed says the Indian sage. If you are not careful how you behave now, you will have to reap the consequences later on. Not only are the bad thoughts and deeds reflected in the results which plunge one into misery but the good ones also do manifest their power for succour. Swamiji maintains that 'as bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever'. So let us remember that if anyone attains a high state of evolution of mind and character, he has worked for it and so too can we, if we have the will and strength to strive for it.

If *mokṣa* is such a high state, so covetable why do not people hanker after it, will be the next question we will face. The word *mokṣa* literally means release. Release from the prison of this world, from the chains of bondage to the wheel of birth and death. How can the release be achieved? By finding out its cause. The cause of birth is unsatisfied desires. How do the desires arise? Due to false identification of our real

being with the body and mind. The mind fed with the panorama of this world through the different senses craves for the objects of the senses and thenceforth rise desires. This false identification is due to ignorance of our Self. Desires compel man to work. Work again produces results good and bad, to reap the results of which we have to take birth repeatedly. So we see this is a vicious circle. It is a wheel set in motion by ourselves and therefore we have the capacity to get away from it if we but attempt. This too is an instance of the law of Karma. How then can we condemn it?

We are drunk with worldliness, by infinite desires, seemingly wholesome as also obviously unwholesome and therefore invite only unrest. Now the question is how to get rid of this worldliness. Here we do not speak of those who do not want to be cured of this disease but of those who at times want to, but are unable to do so, because of the long-time habit. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Just as the habitual drunkards are given rice-water to bring down the inebriation they are in, so too man must keep company of the holy to get rid of worldliness'. Hearing about God or about our true nature loosens our bonds, our attachments to the things of the world.

People have forgotten their true nature and are running after the gratification of desires, both of the body and the mind, like on a wild goose chase. So they have to be reminded as to who they are. Do they not know it? Yes, they know it in the wrong way; that is why there is all the trouble. 'This Self is to be seen; (for that, it is) to be heard, thought over and meditated upon.'<sup>8</sup> For after realizing it alone, is man liberated. 'Reaching which people do not return to this world that is my Supreme abode,'<sup>9</sup> declares Sri Krishna in the Gita.

### III

It is a long and difficult terrain that we have to traverse before we reach God. And mostly it is our own mind that stands as a great hurdle or barrier to our realization of the Godhead as the Dvaitin will say, or to find our identity with Brahman as the Advaitin will put it. Sri Krishna asks us to go cautiously in handling the mind which is too much engrossed in things mundane. First, we have to attain the intellectual conviction of what is ultimately good for us. If once this problem is settled, other things are slowly gathered unto you. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and everything will be added unto you,' assured Jesus Christ. 'Gradually and

---

<sup>8</sup>Brihadaranyaka Up. II.iv.5.

<sup>9</sup>Gita, XV.6.

slowly the mind is to be calmed down by the well discriminated intellect, and made to abide in the Atman; one should not think of anything else. As and when the fickle mind wanders there and then it should be controlled and gathered unto the Self,<sup>10</sup> says Sri Krishna. It is known to everyone, who has tried, how rebellious the mind is. Only continuous and constant practice, along with intense dispassion for everything other than God can give us emancipation. There is no short cut to liberation, for nothing worth having even of this world, has been attained without much sacrifice, what then to speak of reaching the highest consummation of life without effort! If anyone assures you to the contrary, that an easier road is possible, beware of such a person. For does not the Rishi categorically state, 'I know that great Purusa who is of the effulgence of the sun, and is beyond darkness. Knowing Him alone one goes beyond death. *There is no other path to reach the Supreme*'?<sup>11</sup>

Lastly the question is: Will this all happen in some other life or has anyone attained liberation here? If it is only a hypothesis which cannot be verified here, you may say that, 'We have no use for it'. If it is a thing attainable here, how to know about it? Saints and sages are the instances of persons who have attained liberation while living. The test of such attainment is in the life of the saint. The scriptures give us descriptions of such a person *in extenso*. 'By them transmigration has been overcome here and now whose mind is in equilibrium. Brahman is faultless and even, therefore, they who are of poised minds are established in Brahman.'<sup>12</sup> 'Seeing the Lord manifest evenly and everywhere one does not harm the Self by the self and therefore attains the Supreme state.'<sup>13</sup> 'The man whose mind is absorbed (in the Atman) through Yoga and who sees the same (Brahman) everywhere perceives the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'<sup>14</sup> 'To the Yogi whose mind has become calm, whose activity has abated, who is sinless and identified with Brahman, comes Supreme bliss.'<sup>15</sup> These are some of the signs and indications by which one can know the knower of Brahman, a realized soul, a liberated soul.

---

<sup>10</sup>Bhagavad Gita, VI.25.

<sup>11</sup>Svetasvatropanisad, 3.8.

<sup>12</sup>Gita, V.19.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., VI.31.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., VI.29.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., VI, 29.