

Setting Free

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Abstract

We always want freedom, even a child wants to get free from the clutches of his studies, an adult from the eternal sufferings faced by them as their demands never get fulfilled. Is there really a way out to get out of such sufferings? The Indian schools of Philosophy has actually talked of these ways out calling them liberation, salvation, moksha, mukti and Nirvana. But the very important question is do we want temporary or permanent happiness? Those who are happy with the glimpses of happiness that the material world provides them with would not want moksha, but only the wise realize that the material world can provide us with temporary pleasures. If we never want to face sufferings and want eternal pleasure then one must seek the ways of liberation as mentioned in our Shastras. The ways are not easy but are not impossible as the world often showed us the examples of such wise men. Their journey showed us that they reached the ecstatic stage of life where no sorrow could ever affect them. Come let us in this paper at least theoretically experience what it takes to be free in the truest sense. After all everyone of us are trying to be free in this world, who wants to be enslaved?

KEYWORDS: bondage, freedom, Shastras, suffering.

No one wants to remain in bondage, as we have experienced only sufferings while being bound. We get bound by our thoughts which continuously crave for something, such thoughts become obsession and obsession becomes our habit, further habit becomes our character and finally we are enslaved by the compulsions of different cravings of our character without which life seems to be impossible. We think we are free while we harp on substances or relations or habits which constitute our so-called free lives. But true salvation is found in freeing oneself from such compulsions of the first order, there would be still more to surpass; the secondary, tertiary. But once we learn the art of freeing ourselves from a few, then we can free ourselves from anything whatsoever. Swami Vivekananda like many others enlightened beings believed that our souls can never undergo bondage; our karmas create such dispositions upon the soul which make it bound. Such dispositions can be eradicated either by the constant practice of deep meditation, or by performing non-attached karma, or through complete surrenderance to the Ultimate or by acquiring true knowledge of the Ultimate reality. He asks us to choose anyone of the four and be liberated. Thus Hindu Shastras state liberation is the other name for renunciation and sacrifice. The Islam believes that obeying Allah's prescriptions would terminate the sufferings here and would then lead the free beings to the Paradise. Christianity believes that liberation leads to an increasing capacity to do what is just, by the power of God. The more one does what is good the freer he becomes. They believe there is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice is to disobey and do evil which would lead to abuse of freedom and 'the slavery of sin'.

Let us now envisage a journey through the different schools of Indian Philosophy stating the several ways of liberation or Moksha, which according to them is the highest good or charam Purushartha of one's life.

The Jain school of Indian tradition believes that ignorance of truth, the four passions such as anger, greed, pride and delusion ultimately form sticky substances where karmic particles stick and attract the flow of karmic matter towards the soul. According to them Karma is the link which unites the soul to the body and makes the former bound. The state in which these particles actually infiltrate into soul and bind it is called bondage. In bondage the karmic matters unite with the soul just as water unites with milk or as fire unites with red-hot iron. By possession and practice of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct [the Triratnas of Jainism] the influx of fresh karmas can be stopped. This they call Samvara. Thereafter already existing karmas must be exhausted; this is called Nirjara. Only a Kevalagyani can attain this stage of complete liberation in which he transcends Samsara and goes to Siddha-Shila which is the top of the world and dwells there in eternal knowledge and bliss¹.

In Buddhism bondage means the flow of an impure series beginning with ignorance, while liberation means the transformation of this flow into pure series beginning with knowledge. The Shunyavadi, Nagarjuna condemned Nihilism by saying negation leads to hell². Affirmation leads to heaven; but the non-dual truth which transcends affirmation and negation ultimately leads to liberation. This pure knowledge where affirmation and negation, good and evil, heaven and hell are merged is called liberation. Thus the Buddhists state that from the Absolute stand point there is no thesis, no morality, no intellect; because they are all grounded in Pure Knowledge or Reality. As long as the subject-object duality exists, one is in bondage. They add, as long as the individual consciousness does not realize its essential unity with Pure Consciousness, so long will the intellect go on giving rise to the subject-object duality leading to bondage and suffering. Aging and death, birth-rebirth, desire to born, clinging attachment, craving, feeling sensation, sense-object contact, six senses, body-mind constitution, rebirth consciousness, dispositions and finally ignorance—these twelve causes lead us to towards birth again and again. By Right understanding, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness and Right Concentration one can come out of the causal chain of sufferings and this would also eradicate ones bondage leading one to Liberation.

The Shankhyas who believe in Purusha and Prakriti tattva, state that Purusha, the consciousness is by nature free but when it mistakes its reflection in the buddhi for itself and identifies itself wrongly with the internal organs—the intellect, the ego and the mind; then that Purusha is said to be bound at that juncture. They state originally it is the ego and not the Purusha which is bound. Purusha when realizes its own nature, it gets liberated atonce which it always was. According to them bondage takes place when one fails to discriminate between matter (Prakriti) and consciousness (Purusha) and wrongly presumes consciousness as the body. Prakriti never appears before that Purusha who had seen her in its true colours³.

The Yoga school of Indian Philosophy believes that liberation can be attained through a particular disciplinary life consisting of⁴ Abstention, Regulations, Discipline of body through practicing physical postures, Regulation by breathing techniques of inhalation and exhalation, Disciplining senses to become withdrawn, Fixing mind on object of meditation, Deep meditation and deep concentration or Samadhi. Samadhi is

the highest means to realise mental modifications which is the end. It is the ecstatic state in which the connection with the external world is broken and through this according to this school one ought to pass before liberation. Yoga generates certain supra-normal powers. But they should be avoided and attention should be fixed only on liberation which is the end of human life. The ideal is Kaivalya, absolute independence of the Purusha, as being free from Prakriti. Thus as per this school of philosophy be it dispassionate act or realization of true object of bliss can only be attained by a disciplined body and a meditative mind whose highest point Samadhi would help the being into Final Liberation.

The Vaisheshikas state that the soul performs actions which lead to fruits either good or bad depending on the nature of action it performed. The merits and demerits of the individual souls make up Adrishta, the fate of an individual. Ishvara or God does the correct coordination between the actions and their respective results providing the latter to the beings. To get rid of enjoying temporarily and suffering the fruits of good and bad actions, one has to stop to act with desire. When actions stop new merits and demerits stop accumulating and the old ones get faded away. At this threshold the soul is separated from the fetters of mind and body and realizes its own pure nature. This according to them is liberation; the absolute cessation of all pains. Liberated soul is not connected with the mind and body—thus it has neither knowledge, nor bliss. The liberated soul is free from all qualities (good or bad); it retains its peculiar qualities of knowing nothing, feeling nothing and doing nothing⁵.

The Vedantins believe that due to Adhyasa or delusion we do not become aware of our Pure consciousness as possessed by the Brahman too, the Ultimate Reality. In Nirupadhik Adhyasa the body completely covers the identity of the Self, and in Sopadhik Adhyasa the soul thinks that it is active as body whereas the body thinks that it is conscious as soul. These misidentifications all take place due to our delusion. True knowledge of the Ultimate Reality eradicates our ignorance and also sufferings coming through ignorance. When the Ultimate Reality or Brahman is realized then there is a unique bliss which transcends happiness and misery and this is called Nirvana. The Brahman is never touched by 'is', 'is not', both 'is and is not' and 'neither is nor is not'. He who transcends these categories embraces Pure Self. He who has transcended the duality of subject-object and the trinity of knowledge, knower and known—has become One with Pure Consciousness.

Ramanuja, the Vishishtadvaita Vedantin states that the duties enjoined by the Vedas, if rightly performed would help the soul in removing its karmic dross. He says both correct knowledge and complete surrenderance to God taken together can remove all our misunderstandings and break the cycle of birth and rebirth. With Gyana and Bhakti will the soul realize that matter and soul qualify the God, who is the inner ruler ⁶. The matter and soul form the body of the God who is the real soul. Ramanuja asserts that real knowledge at once leads to liberation and this kind of knowledge is obtained only by highest bhakti or Prapatti by constant remembrance of God as the only object of devotion. Immediate intuitive knowledge leads to liberation, which happens only due to God's grace. To Ramanuja unlike the Shankara Avaitins, liberation is not merging with Brahman [the Ultimate truth] but liberation is to have the immediate knowledge of the Ultimate truth. Though liberated souls in essence are similar to God but they differ from God in two aspects—souls are atomic and finite, God is infinite. Again souls do not have God's power of controlling and being the creator, preserver and destroyer.

Last but not the least the Charvakas⁷ did not believe in rebirth or Karmavada as such, to these materialist philosophers heaven or hell did not exist. According to them liberation is liberation of the being from the physical and mental pain faced by him. Thus they believed in pleasure to be the highest form of freedom. As pleasure to them was cessation of all sufferings. And they could go to any extent to obtain such a pleasure.

Conclusion

Sree Ramkrishna Paramhangsa stated that our condition is like that cow which is free to loiter about in the green meadow but is ultimately tied to the tree nearby. Similarly we are provided with the will to act freely but are ultimately tied to our destiny of facing the consequences of our actions, which cannot be escaped at all. But if we really want to be free then we need to stop acting for getting things we hanker for, as we have to know that our demands would never be fulfilled even after receiving them and moreover those material objects can never give us eternal happiness. Thus we need to know the object of peace and bliss and try to achieve ways to know it and attain it. As of now we are amidst the dazzling world created by the magician where we think that we are free to do whatever we feel like, but do not understand that this is an illusory world thus it can never be able to give us true and permanent happiness.

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