

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

पैत्रो लोकोऽधिगम्यः क्रतुभिरधिगतो विद्यया देवलोको
यद्वा चेतःकषायक्षपणमिह तयोः स्मार्तमेवाऽस्तु साध्यम् ।
यज्ञेनेत्यादिवाक्याद्भवतु विविदिषा तत्फलं वेदनं वा
ज्ञानादेवाऽमृतत्वं न हि शशकवधूः सिंहपोतं प्रसूत ॥९॥

Pitrloka, the worlds of manes, is attained by performing *nitya* and *naimittika* actions. *Devalokāḥ*, the worlds of the gods, are attained by performing (the mental action of) worship. Or the result of that *vidyā*, worship, or action is spoken of in Smritis like: ‘The impurities of attachment and aversion are destroyed through actions, and knowledge is the means of liberation; after the impurities are destroyed through actions, knowledge arises.’⁵⁵ (The result is) the destruction of the impurities of the *citta*, mind-stuff. Even if we hold that by the statement, ‘the brahmanas seek to know It through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charity, and austerity consisting in a dispassionate enjoyment of sense-objects,’⁵⁶ the desire for knowledge, or knowledge itself, is attained, liberation is attained only through knowledge, just as a female hare or a doe can never give birth to a lion cub.

The world of enjoyment, that is the world of the manes like the Aryaman, is attained by the performance of *nitya* and *naimittika* actions. This is established by Vedic statements like: ‘*Karmanā pitrlokaḥ*; the world of manes (is attained) through rites’ (1.5.16). The mental action of worship leads one to the worlds of gods, like those of Indra, Hiranyagarbha, and so forth. This is also supported by Vedic statements like: ‘*Vidyayā devalokaḥ*; the world of the gods (is

attained) through worship’ (ibid.). The ignorant person attains to the world of the worshipped god. This occurs to the person who becomes one with that particular god. Thus the results of actions and worship performed merely through the use of the intellect have been spoken of.

Now the results of actions done with an attitude of offering to the Lord are being told. Such actions purify the mind-stuff by removing various *samskaras* like attachment and aversion, which cause innumerable births. These *samskaras* are further intensified by repeated births. But the knowledge of Brahman alone is the means of attaining liberation.

The performance of Vedic rites, charity, and austerities may lead to the strong desire for knowledge arising as a result of hearing Vedic statements before taking *sannyasa*. This knowledge can be the means of liberation. The performance of *nitya* and *naimittika* actions, like Vedic sacrifices, may also result in such knowledge. The scriptures say: ‘*Sarve vedā yat padam āmananti*; the goal that all the Vedas propound.’⁵⁷ By using the *samyoga-prthaktva nyāya*, the maxim of conjunction and disjunction, the result of the performance of actions may be taken to be the desire for attaining knowledge, or knowledge itself. The *samyoga-prthaktva nyāya* postulates that two different meanings can be attributed to the same sentence or word depending upon the context. For instance, the word *khādira* has different

meanings in statements like, '*khādiro yūpo bhavati*; the *khādīra* wood can be used for making the sacrificial post', or '*khādiram vīryakāmasya*; *khādīra* increases virility'. Similarly, in the present context, by the mental action of worship both the meanings—*vividiṣā*, thirst for knowledge, and the result of such thirst, knowledge itself—are meant.

The word '*vividiṣanti*, seek to know,'⁵⁸ is derived from the root *vid*, used here to mean knowledge. The indefinite future tense *ly* has been applied with the suffix *sanī* to mean desire, and thus is derived the meaning 'seek to know'. If in the word '*yajñena*, through sacrifices' (ibid.) the suffix *sanī* is used to mean desire—due to the prominence of the object of the sentence submitted by the *karana*, instrument—it can be held that the meaning will be 'seeking to know'. If, however, the word *vividiṣā* is used in its natural meaning of knowledge, without the use of any suffix, then it is held that the meaning will be 'knowledge' here. In the sentence 'desires to go to the village by horse' the meaning is brought about by the logical connection of the instrument 'horse', with the natural meaning of 'going'.

In conclusion, it is being held that by showing a different interpretation—not only due to the lack of a plausible argument or evidence but also due to the inability of actions—actions cannot cause liberation. Immortality or one's true nature of being deathless—the realization of the nectar-like supremely blissful nature of the Atman, also called *kaivalya*—is brought about only by the knowledge of Brahman and not by any other means. Actions cause only the accumulation of fruits of actions, which are exhaustible. They do not manifest the ever-established, supremely blissful Atman. Suppose a person is wearing a golden chain around the neck and forgetting this thinks that the chain is lost. The golden chain cannot be regained even by performing a thousand actions; it is gained only by the knowledge

that it is and was around the neck all the time. For this no action is necessary, knowledge is sufficient. There is another illustration: A female hare, a small animal with long ears, runs in fear at the slightest rustling of dry leaves. The playful lion cub is capable of crushing the frontal lobes of a mad elephant. With such a big difference in their traits the female hare cannot give birth to a lion cub. Similarly, small prayers and other actions giving smaller results, of destroying the effects of small mistakes, cannot lead to liberation from the beginningless bondage. As taught in the scriptures: 'Even the gods cannot prevail against him, for he becomes their Atman' (I.4.10), after the advent of the knowledge of the Self, even Brahma and other gods cannot create bondage. Only knowledge can remove bondage.

The different qualifications needed for performing actions and attaining knowledge of Brahman are being described, and the contradictions between such qualifications are shown to denounce those who hold the conjunction of actions and the knowledge of Brahman.

अर्थी दक्षो द्विजोऽहं बुध इति मतिमान् कर्मसूक्तोऽधिकारी
शान्तो दान्तः परिव्राडुपरमपरमो ब्रह्मविद्याऽधिकारी ।
इत्थं भेदे विवक्षन् समुदितमुभयं मुक्तिहेतुं सुशीतं
नीरं वैश्वानरं चोभयमहह तृषोच्छेदकामः पिबेत्सः ॥१०॥

[It is mentioned in the Mimamsa texts that] only a person who has the pride of 'I am wealthy', 'I am an able person', 'I am twice-born', 'I am a scholar' is fit for performing actions. [According to Vedanta] only a sannyasin who has controlled his external and internal organs and is free from impurities like attachment and aversion is fit for the knowledge of Brahman. Though such distinction [is found in the scriptures], the person who wishes to hold that both [actions and the knowledge of Brahman] together are the means of liberation, is like a person who, desirous of quenching thirst, drinks both cold water and fire.

One who is skilled in earning a livelihood by performing the duties of one's caste in society, has enough wealth to perform Vedic sacrifices, and is desirous of obtaining the results of such sacrifices, is a wealthy person. An able person is one who can perform Vedic rites without the assistance of priests and other people. The twice-born belong to the first three castes of society: brahmana, kshatriya, and vaishya. These three castes have the ritual of *yajñopavita*, investiture with the sacred thread, when one is considered to have had a second birth. A scholar is one who has studied the Vedas and the Mimamsa philosophy propounded by Jaimini and has understood the meaning of the Karma Kanda, the portion of the Vedas dealing with rituals. Apart from being proud of being wealthy, able, twice-born, or a scholar, one can be proud of belonging to a higher caste among the twice-born, being of advanced age, or belonging to a particular place or time. A person with such pride alone is fit for doing actions.

One who is free from attachment and aversion, has controlled the mind and senses, moves about having renounced everything, properly studies the Vedas and becomes a *paramahansa*, and does not engage in any activity other than the preservation of the body for listening to Vedic dicta is alone best fit for attaining the knowledge of Brahman. The Smritis say: 'There is no wealth of a brahmana like unity, equanimity, truthfulness, moral character, austerity, carrying the staff of renunciation, and straightforwardness—these are great in that order.' A person having these qualities is the best among human beings and is fit for the knowledge of Brahman.

It is well known that the qualifications for performing Vedic rituals and for attaining the knowledge of Brahman are very different. Yet, some people claim that the conjunction of these two is the means of liberation. Their condition is like that of a person who wants to quench his

thirst by consuming cold water and fire, as it were, at the same time. This is the plight of a fool who is ignorant of the opposites. Cold water and fire cannot go together, as water destroys fire and there is no use of fire in quenching thirst, rather it increases it. Similarly, actions and the knowledge of Brahman cannot coexist, as the knowledge of Brahman destroys actions, and on the arising of this knowledge actions become useless. Actions bind rather than cause liberation.

Objection: Let it be held that knowledge alone is the condition for liberation. But, one does not find any system supporting the position that the knowledge of Brahman is the means of liberation. The followers of Sankhya and Patanjali hold that the knowledge of the difference between Prakriti and Purusha is the means of liberation. The possessing of fourteen special qualities like *buddhi*, intellect, endowed with the knowledge of the characteristics of and the difference between sixteen or seven entities causes the dawn of knowledge, according to the followers of Gautama [Naiyayikas] and Kanada [Vaisheshikas]. The Pashupatas believe that liberation is caused by the knowledge of the difference between *pasu*, the created, and *pāsupati*, the Lord of creation, who is the cause. The followers of Bhartriprapancha believe that liberation is caused by the realization of Brahman, which is brought about by the understanding that the effect and cause are the part and the whole. This further helps one comprehend both the identity of and the difference between Brahman and the universe. This also gives the *saprapañca*, cosmic, and *niṣprapañca*, acosmic, understandings of Reality. The Bhartriprapancha school believes that in this manner one understands that Brahman is both identical with the universe and different from it. The Advaitins hold that liberation is attained upon the realization of Brahman, which is one's true nature and is Satchidananda, absolute,

independent, unchanging, and without a second.

The view of Bhartriprapanča is being explained here. Bhartriprapanča lived before Acharya Shankara, and he may be the same person mentioned as Bodhayana. Shankara refers to Bhartriprapanča's thoughts in his commentary on the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣad*. Bhartriprapanča's philosophy is called *bhedābheda-advaita*; Bhaskara was also an adherent of this school. *Bhedābheda-advaita* is the relation between Brahman and the jiva on one hand and Brahman and the world on the other hand—this is a relation of identity-in-difference. According to this view, both jiva and the world evolve out of Brahman, and so this doctrine is also called *brahma-pariṇāma-vāda*. Brahman is transformed into the *antaryāmin*, inner controller, and the jiva. On the physical side, Brahman is transformed into *avyakta*, unmanifest, *sūtra*, subtle universal person, *virāj*, gross aspect of the universal person, and *devatā*, deity, which are all *saprapaṅca*; and *jāti*, genus, and *piṇḍa*, species, which are *niṣprapaṅca*. These are various modes of Brahman and are the eight classes into which the variegated universe is divided. They are again classified into three *rāśis*, groups: *paramātmārāśi*, *jīva rāśi*, and *mūrttāmūrtta rāśi*, corresponding to god, soul, and matter.

Bhartriprapanča recognises *pramāṇa-samuccaya*, which means that the testimony of common experience is quite as valid as that of the Vedas. He upholds *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, the conjunction of actions and knowledge. According to him, since Reality is a unity within differences, differences are as true as the unity. Duties or actions have to be performed even after attaining knowledge. Hence, both actions and knowledge are necessary. Liberation is attained by achieving Self-knowledge followed by the performance of selfless actions. This view gives equal importance to Self-knowledge and the performance of rites,

which have been prescribed by the Vedas. Here the extremes—that only knowledge leads to liberation, as believed by the Advaitins, or that only actions lead to liberation, as believed by the Mīmamsakas—are avoided. The ultimate truth is *dvaitādvaita*, duality in non-duality. Liberation is achieved in two stages. The first stage is *apavarga*, emancipation, where *sarīsāra* is overcome by overcoming *āsaṅga*, attachment, and the second stage is leading to Brahmanhood through the dispelling of *avidyā*.⁵⁹

In this manner different schools hold different kinds of knowledge as means of liberation and also stipulate contradictory methods to attain this knowledge. It is difficult to decide which position to accept and which to discard. It is also not logical to hold that the opinion of the Advaitins alone is proper. The Advaitins hold that upon hearing the Vedic dicta the aspirant gets an immediate indubitable knowledge, realizes Brahman, and does not again come into the transmigratory cycle of births and deaths.

Reply: It may be contented that the various stands regarding the means of liberation posited by different schools sometimes go against experience and make futile exercises like contemplation. This leads to hopelessness. This contention is countered in the next verse.

(To be continued)

References

55. 'Kaṣāyapaktiḥ karmāṇi jñānaṁ tu paramāgatiḥ. Kaṣāye karmabhiḥ pakve tato jñānaṁ prajāyate', quoted by Acharya Shankara in his commentary on *Brahma Sutra*, 3.4.26.
56. *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
57. *Katha Upaniṣad*, .2.15.
58. *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
59. See Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1952), 2.43–4, 100 and *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, ed. Karl H Potter, 13 vols (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 3.40.