

VISISTA ADVAITHA – MUKTI

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Mukti

The spiritual destiny of a *mumuksu*, according to Visistadvaita, is his attainment of the supreme abode of the Self, *Paramapada*. The ecstasy of union even in the mystic quest is only momentary, and has no security and stability. It is only by attaining *Paramapada* that the *mumuksu* has an integral experience of the Absolute, *paripurna-brahmanubhava* and enjoys eternal bliss.

The ladder to perfection, the *paramapada-sopana*, as described by Vedanta Desika, consists of nine stages, namely, *viveka*, *nirveda*, *virakti*, *bhiti*, *prasadana*, *utkramana*, *arciradi*, *divyadesa-prabhava* and *prapti*.

Viveka is the clear philosophic thought of the Brahman as *saririn* and *sesin*. *Nirveda* is the moral feeling of remorse arising from reflection on the sinfulness of sin and the sorrows of merit-demerit. The off-shoot of *nirveda* is *virakti* leading to *vairagya*, renunciation of the hedonistic pleasures. *Bhiti* is the spiritual dread of the hideousness of *samsara*, which awakens the religious consciousness inducing the *mumuksu* to practise *bhakti* and *prapatti*. When *bhakti* and *prapatti* develop into hunger and thirst for God, God grants the *jiva* His grace, *prasadana*. The last four stages deal with the *summum bonum* of spiritual endeavour, *purusartha* and portray, in a pictorial way, the ascent of the redeemed soul, *mukta* to his home in the Absolute. The mystic, *paramaikantin* is practically freed from the fetters of *karman* including *prarabdha-karman*, and *mukti* may be realized immediately or eventually. In any case, he is a *krta-krtya* who has no more problems to solve, or evil to subdue. At the

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time of the dissolution of the body, the *mukta* ascends to Vaikunta by the straight shining path of *arciradi*, and attains intimate union, *sayujya* with the Brahman.

Ramanuja establishes, following the interpretation of the *Sutrakara*, that *arciradi-gati* is the direct way to *mukti*. *Mukti*, according to him, is not only the direct apprehension of the Brahman, but a progressive attainment of *brahmaloka*. In the world of the Brahman, the *Paramapada*, matter shines without mutation and time exists in the form of eternity. 'The sun does not shine there, nor the moon, nor the stars; by His light everything is lighted.' 'The Brahman is before and behind, above and below'. The freed soul gloriously enters into *vaikuntha* which is the heart of *brahmaloka* and its headquarters, reaches the hall of *anandamaya*, bliss and has a direct soul-sight of the Supreme Light, *Paramapada*, with a shining form more luminous than a million suns on the couch, *paryanka*, of which, till then, the *mumuksu* had only inferential and *sastraic* knowledge.

The Brahman, as infinite Beauty, is enthroned on a *paryanka* supported by *dharma*, *jnaana*, *vairagya* and *aisvarya*. That throne is wisdom, *prajna* and the Brahman is the True of the true, *satya*. The released self on seeing the Brahman realizes the unitive consciousness. The infinite of space-time pales into infinitesimal littleness in the light of the Infinite and the eternal glory of *vaikuntha*, which transcends thought. The *brahmavid* enjoys all the perfections of *vaikuntha* such as identity of abode, *salokya*; proximity, *samipyaa*; similarity of form, *svarupa*; intimate union, *sayujya*; etc, and is ever immersed in the eternal bliss of the Brahman. *Salokya* leads to *samipyaa* and *sarupya*, and is consummated in the bliss of communion, *sayujya*.

The nature of *mukti*, as elucidated in Visistadvaita, as the attainment of the blessedness of *Paramapada*, cannot be described or defined. *Brahmaloka* is the nameless beyond, which cannot be proved by logical thinking or even scriptural knowledge. The Absolute of ontology is beyond space, *prakrti* and time, *kala*. It is, therefore, formless, *niravayava*; indeterminate, *nirguna*; or eternal, *kalatita*. As *Paramatman*, the Brahman transcends the limits of materialism and spiritualism. Ethical religion is equally helpless in knowing the redemptive will of Isvara as the Creator of creators, and overcoming the dilemma of freewill and determinism. From the religious point of view, He reveals Himself unto him whom He

chooses as He is Himself the *upaya*, the *upeya*. In this context, it is difficult to decide between voluntarism and predestination. On the whole, the Visistadvaitic idea of *mukti* transcends the theorizing activity of thought. It cannot be labelled as a form of theism, non-dualism or, for that matter, any ism.

On the other hand, the Upanisads describe the inexpressible experience of the *mukta* by positive predicates. They insist on the fact of intuitive perception of the Brahman by the purified and perfected consciousness, *jnaana*. The *brahmavid* can apprehend the Brahman with the divine eye, comprehend His nature and have an integral experience of the Absolute, *paripurna-brahmanubhava*. He is led from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. Though this experience is alogical and amoral, the Upanisads make it intelligible to the empirical consciousness in terms of cognition, conation and feeling. The Brahman is the All-Self, and by the expansive consciousness of *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, the *mukta* realizes the unitive state. His self-feeling melts away at the sight of the bewitching beauty of the Brahman and his Vedantic thought expires in the ecstasy of the mystic union.

Ramanuja appears to understand by *mukti* the integral experience of the Brahman that has infinite *jnaana*, *ananda* and other perfections. This indeed is the true nature of the *jiva* realized by the destruction of *avidya-karman*. The *jiva* is a *prakara* or *sarira* of the Brahman, and its *jnaana*, which is infinite, has, as its essential nature, the unitive experience of the bliss of the Brahman. The Chandogya Upanisad explains *mukti* as the self-realization of the *atman* by self-transcendence, and the Sutras bring out its full implication. The serene self attains the Being of its being when it has a soul-sight of the boundless light of the Brahman. Thus it attains its essential and eternal nature. Self-realization is not the attainment of something new, but is the self-manifestation resulting from the cessation of the *avidya-karman*. In *mukti*, the *atman* is free from sin, old age, death, grief, hunger and thirst, and its desire of oneness with the Brahman is at once realized.

Karman conditions *jnaana* and creates the bodily self which is subject to contingency, change and sorrow. But in *mukti*, the mortal becomes immortal and the self regains its eternity. While consciousness in the empirical states of waking, dream and sleep is obscured by *avidya*, in the expansive state of the unitive life, it realizes its infinity. While the *atman* is, as it is,

changeless, *avikara* and eternal, *nitya*, the limitations and obscurations of its attributive intelligence affect its integrity indirectly. But in the state of self-realization, the self shines in its own effulgence like the cloudless sun. The *atman* itself is a ray of the *Paramjyothi*, Supreme Light, and its luminosity is the revelation of the boundless light, which is the source of the light of the suns and stars, and the serene self itself. Self-realization is thus the unitive knowledge of the *atman* and its self, and is not bare identity.

Ramanuja accepts the concept of *avibhaga* to explain the relation of the *mumukshu* to the Brahman in *mukti*. *Brahmajnaana* is the intuition of the Brahman as the Supreme Self. The *atman* has the Brahman as its inner self and *prakarin*, and the consciousness of the

mukta, in *mukti*, is revealed in the experience, 'I am the Brahman without any division, *vibhaga*'. This does not mean absolute identity, *svarup-aikya*, but *visista-aikya* in which the self is realized as inseparable mode, *aprthak-siddha-visesana*, and not as total mergence as in identity. The *jiva* abides as an entity different from the Brahman in that, though there is difference in denotation, there is identity in connotation, as every concept connoting the *prakara* also connotes the *prakarin*. This inseparability, *avinabhava* abolishes the sense of exclusiveness and externality that belongs to the bodily self of egoism, *ahamkara*. But it does not annul the ego consciousness of the *atman*. Rapt in love, the *mukta* is ever drawn by the beauty of the Brahman, and enjoys Its bliss. When the *brahmanized mukta* sheds his body, his self acquires the purity of the Brahman. This concept underlines the truth that the *sarira* depends for its life on the *saririn* and serves as an instrument of His will.

Avibhaga, non-division, thus connotes existential difference between the Brahman and the *mukta*, and experienced unity owing to the joy of intimate communion, *sayujya*. It is not the loss of personality. In the mystic sense, the self-feeling is swallowed up in the supra-personal experience of *avibhaga*, that is, the unitive experience of the bliss of the Brahman. This brings out the nature of *brahmarasa* more than coexistence, *salokya*; similarity, *sarupya*; and intimacy, *samipyā*. The Visnu-purana says that the *mukta* attains *atmabhava* like magnetized iron, but is not identical with the Brahman. The Gita defines *mukti* as the attainment of equality of attributes with the Brahman.

Though the Brahman imparts Its nature to the *atman* of the *mukta*, and infinitizes its *jnaana*, the *atman* persists in its monadic being with a view to utilizing the freedom gained in *moksa* in service to the Supreme Self. The finite-self lives, moves and has its being in the Brahman as the All-Self, *sarva-saririn*. The *mukta* has the freedom to move in both the worlds – the world of eternity and the world of *samsara*. While the ascent to the world of eternity is an escape from the sorry scheme of *samsara*, the descent of the freed self into the finite world expresses the cosmic freedom of the *mukta*. His all-pervasive consciousness destroys the barriers of space and time. The worlds of *lila* and *nitya* constitute the world of the Brahman as a whole, and are comprised in the all-inclusive cosmic consciousness.

In Visistadvaita, *mukti* is realization of the meaning of the relation between the *jiva* and Isvara as stated in the Upanisad, ‘Thou art That’. Visistadvaita explains that the self, in *mukti*, surrenders to the Self with total self-effacement, but still retains its identity. In this state, what the self experiences is *kaimkarya-rasa*, not *kaivalya-rasa*. It is the experience of the bliss of the Brahman, the ecstasy of the unitive consciousness that expresses the supreme value of *mukti*. The *mukta* is immersed in the supreme bliss of *brahmanubhava*, without losing his self-being. It is a state of *sayujya* in which the unitive experience of bliss is present without the loss of self-existence. In this state, according to Visistadvaita, the soul-hunger of God and the God-hunger of the soul are satisfied and the separate consciousness of both is swallowed up in the enjoyment of bliss.

Mukti is not the cessation of sorrow, but is the positive experience of *ananda*, ineffable and incommunicable. In this *ananda*, the experients exist, but their feeling of separateness melts away in the irresistibility of ecstasy. In the mystic union, the *mukta* is mad with God and sings His glory and greatness. The bliss of the union is ever fecundative, and it enhances the value of the released state. The bliss of the self-realizedness signifies the self that is realized and its value is eternally conserved. This concept is fully in line with the recorded self-realization of the mystics like Nammalvar, Andal, etc.

Visistadvaita establishes that reality is realizable and is, therefore, the home of eternal values. The Brahman is the Absolute, and finite thought purified by the *sadhanas* can transcend finiteness and intuit the Brahman. The *vedantin* as a philosopher can think God's thought after Him, and realize His godliness. By knowing the Brahman as the reason of the universe, the *jnanin* is freed from worldliness and attains the realm of ethical values.

It is only when the soul reaches perfection in *mukti* that perfect satisfaction arises. The universe as *lila-vibhuti* exists not for pleasure, but for moulding the soul into a *mukta*. *Cit* and *acit* are eternally real, and do not admit of degrees of reality. But values admit of levels or degrees. Values have meaning only in relation to the self and the satisfaction of its desires. The values of spiritual life are more lasting than those of the sensuous life in the phenomenal world. But it is only in *mukti* that the *jiva* is perfected and *brahmanized*. The *mukta* is no longer affected by the flux of *prakrti* or tainted by evil, error or ugliness. The values of truth, goodness and beauty then attain their highest degree of perfection. *Mukti* is not merely freedom from ignorance, sin and sorrow, but is also the regaining of *Paramapada*, the realm of eternal values.

Visistadvaita does not agree that values alone survive in the Absolute, and not selves. The freed self is not a vanishing illusion, nor does it merge in the whole like the dew-drop slipping into the shining sea. Its content is no doubt transmuted; but it is not true to say that it contributes to the whole. The offering the freed self makes to the Brahman is self-gift without selfishness. Every value is trans-valued and perfected. The self gains itself by renouncing its empirical and exclusive nature and acquires the colour, *brahmarupa*; flavour, *brahmarasa*; and fragrance, *brahmagandha*. It is immersed in its everlasting and fecundative bliss.

Free of the limitations of *prakrti* and time, it lives in spaceless space and timeless time. It is supra-personal, but not impersonal. In *Paramapada*, the *jiva* attains its infinite consciousness and regains the eternal values. Eternity is not the prolongation of the present life, nor is it personal survival, but is a state of self-transcendence. In this state, the self renounces the phenomenal activity and realizes its noumenal state.

The world of *Paramapada* is a shining spiritual world, and is made of bliss itself, *aprakrta*, *paramakasa* and *anandaloka*. It is the realm of *suddhatattva* made of peculiar kind of matter that is immutable. It is *ajada*, and is self-luminous like *jnaana*, and exists for the enjoyment of the *atman*. Space and time do not disappear in the Absolute, but are transfigured and contribute to the infinite riches of divine experience. *Paramapada* transcends the world of *prakrti*, *tamas*, and has more resplendence than that of a million suns and stars. In its purity and perfection, it is beyond the obscuration of *avidya*. It is a noumenal realm which can be neither perceived by the senses nor conceived by the intellect. It cannot adequately be described by *sastra*, and can only be intuited in the form of eternity by the *mukta*. Only the *mukta* can experience the bliss of *anandaloka*. He, too, cannot explain it as it is beyond the conception of mind.

Ramanuja explains in his *Vaikuntha-gadya* the nature of experience of bliss in the *anandaloka*. The Brahman has His own transcendental nature, *svarupa*; infinity of perfections, *guna*; and supreme, unsurpassed form of beauty, *rupa*; which are alogical, amoral and supra-mystical. Metaphysics deals with what can be known, and that is the world of the Brahman. Ethics deals with what should be known and that is service, *kaimkarya*. Religion deals with what we may hope for and that is the attainment of the immortality of

bliss. In this way, metaphysical knowledge ripens into virtue and virtue is crowned with happiness. The supreme end of life is the enjoyment of the bliss of the Brahman. Logic and ethics have their consummation in aesthetics and mysticism, and the crowning glory of mystic experience is to revel in the beauty of *anandaloka*. *Visistadvaita* is the only philosophy of religion that identifies existence and value, and defines the Brahman as real Reality, *satyasya satyam*, which *brahmanizes* the *mukta* and imparts its beauty and bliss to him.

Paramapada is the realm of self-luminous *suddha-sattva*, free from the evolutionary, *parinamic* modifications of *prakrti* and the influence of its three *gunas*. *Paramapada* is beyond *prakrti* and its twenty-three successive emanations. It is, therefore, not conditioned by the five elements that compose the cosmic matter. It is also not affected by the psycho-physical changes of the mind-body of the migrating *jiva*. In *Paramapada*, *Visistadvaita*

claims, matter exists, without modification, in a non-material, *aprakṛta* form. But its value in *mukti* is more important than its eternal existence. It shines in its own light as *ajada*, but exists as a medium and means for the enjoyment of the *mukta*. Beauty consists of form and matter and can never be attribute-less, *nirguna* or formless, *niravayava*. The Brahman, who is *nirguna* and *niravayava*, wills to be and becomes the Beautiful by creating a body of His own which has divine symmetry, softness, fragrance, colour and eternal youthfulness with a view to imparting His beauty and bliss to the *mukta*. The radiant form of the Brahman is set forth in matchless lyrics in the Bhagavata, the Vaikuntha-gadya and the Paramapada-sopana, the chief scriptures of Visistadvaita. The *jnaana* of the *mukta* is all-pervasive. If he desires the enjoyment of his cosmic freedom with the body, the desire is immediately realized, and he attunes himself to the will of Isvara as in the waking consciousness. The freedom of the *mukta* is no longer obscured by *avidya-karman*, and he enjoys eternal self-rule and universal sovereignty.

According to Visistadvaita, time does not vanish in the Absolute. Time is the succession of events, and not a series of exclusive moments. Nothing is static, and everything is in a state of ceaseless becoming. Worlds are dissolved periodically at the end of each epoch, *kalpa*. The destruction and withdrawal of the cosmic process is itself conditioned by time, *kala*. Even the cosmic will of Isvara is self-conditioned by *kala*.

In the exposition of time, Visistadvaita affirms the eternal as immanent in the temporal and transcending it. The world of splendour, *lila-vibhuti* which exists for the sport of the Lord, is the play of the eternal in the temporal; and the eternal splendour of *Paramapada*, *nitya-vibhuti* is time as eternity. The *lila-vibhuti* is the realm of causal necessity, *karman* without any contingency. It is the sphere of soul-making and is not a realm of relativity rooted in *avidya*. The finite self feels its finitude, and seeks freedom from the empirical life by attaining immortality. As the eternal alone gives meaning to the temporal process and is its final consummation, the reality of the progressive attainment of eternal life is assured.

Moral and spiritual endeavour is a *sadhana* for such transcendence. Truth is the passage of the self from the *lila-vibhuti* to the *nitya-vibhuti*. In *lila-vibhuti*, time is finite and affected by *gunas*. *Nitya-vibhuti* is infinite and beyond space-time. *Samsara* is determined by time series,

but *mukti* determines the time series by the self gaining mastery over it. The Lord is the link of love between the two realms. In the attainment of eternal life, the self transcends the transient dimensions. The *mukta* views everything in the form of eternity; and

his bliss of *sayujya* is ever creative, and is an eternal now. No human experience can ever explain the ecstasy of eternal life.

Visistadvaita states that *brahmanubhava* differs from *mukta* to *mukta*, though the Brahman is the *sat* without a second. The *mukta* is free to realize the Infinite in infinite ways, and this function is determined by his own will. While the nature of the meditation, *upasana* varies from *mumukshu* to *mumukshu*, the goal of intuition or realization of the Brahman remains the same. Every *upasana* has its own adequacy and efficacy in securing the stability of *mukti*. Every specific experience of *mukti* is immediate experience of the Brahman. The *mumukshu* may be a *jnanin*, a devotee or one of works or of *yoga*, and he attains the realization of the Brahman in *mukti*. The *mumukshu* may meditate on some single quality of the Brahman such as *satyatva*, *jnatrtva*, *anantatva*, *apahatapapmatva*, *ananda*, according to his inclination. According to scriptures, even the eternal seers have sought and enjoyed one aspect of the divine nature. The bliss of the Brahman is irresistible and every Vedantic philosophy seeks *ananda* as the supreme end and aim of life.

Mumuksutva

A *mumukshu* is a spiritual seeker after the Brahman. He is a metaphysician who enquires into the nature of ultimate reality and truth at the religious level.

Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, is founded on the fundamental Vedantic truth that the knower of the Brahman attains the highest, *brahmavid apnoti param*. The enquiry into the Brahman, *brahmajijnasa* is governed by the spiritual end of attaining immortality, *na ca punar avartate*. The knowledge of the Brahman as the ground of existence obtained by employing the *pramanas* enables the self to determine the practical methods of attaining liberation, *mukti* from the hazards of birth and death.

Ontology is to encompass teleology and value philosophy if it is to be a logical account of reality. The Brahman, as the ultimate *tattva*, is spiritually realizable as the supreme *purusartha* by moral and spiritual discipline, the *hita*. The word *vedana* in the Upanisads connotes not merely the philosophical apprehension of the Brahman, but also the spiritual attempt at realization in which *jnaana* deepens into meditation, *upasana* on the Brahman. The attainment of God is a supreme and ultimate good which includes the moral and spiritual effort to realize it.

The Brahman is eternally self-realized and perfect, but the *jiva* in its empirical state forgets its divine destiny. The finite self has its source and sustenance in the Brahman, but it forgets its divineness, wanders in the wilderness of *samsara*, and finally regains the paradise, *Paramapada*. *Brahmajnaana* is a spiritual ascent of the enlightened self to its home in the Absolute. The supreme end of the *mumuksu* is thus the realization of the Brahman, the consummation of moral discipline.

The *atman* is essentially free and eternal, and has its being in the *Paramatman* as its inner Self. Visistadvaita states that, somehow, owing to the influence of *avidya-karman*, the *atman* falsely identifies itself with *prakrti* and images itself to be the mode of matter. As like attracts like, the *prakrti*-ridden *purusa* acts as if it was a body-self, drawn by the objects of sense, and thus becomes the slave of sensibility. It is then caught up in *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, and pleasure and pain. *Avidya* creates the confusion of *dehatma-bhrama*, *abhimana* owing to failure to distinguish between the self and the body. *Abhimana* generates lust, *kama*. *Kama* leads to hatred if the desire for the objects of sense is frustrated. The effect of *avidya-karman* is conserved in the mind-body as the infinite causal change of *karman* leading to the possibility of future births and deaths.

The *jiva* ascends to *svarga* by its meritorious *karman*, or to *naraka* by its demerits in action. The pleasures of *svarga* or the pains of *naraka* follow the law of retribution with mathematical precision. With exhaustion of merit and demerit of the *karman*, the *jiva* enters into the body of another living being – human, sub-human and celestial – and subjects itself to the hazards of metempsychosis. Visistadvaita accepts the reality of the cosmic order and

the solidarity of society in all its levels in the three layered universe of the sub-human, human and celestial orders.

If the *jiva* seeks the infinite bliss of the Brahman, to become a *mumuksu*, the first requisite is self-renouncement, *virakti*, freedom from the desires of the terrestrial and celestial pleasures. The idea of self-renouncement as a spiritual ideal implies the abandonment of the lower self of sensibility in favour of the higher self in the state of *kaivalya* or the aloneness of

the *atman*. The *mumuksu* regards God as a centre and source of his life, and gets totally absorbed in Him. Renunciation of *ahamkara* and the realization of the self go together. *Virakti*, essential to spiritual life, destroys the sensualism and the self-complacency of the worldly life. A *mumuksu* is one who realizes that the desire for the pleasures of sense, *visayaraga* is insignificant, *alpa* and evanescent, *astira*, but the love of God, *bhagavad-raga* leads to infinite and eternal bliss.

The ontology of Vedanta establishes that the Brahman is the ground of existence as well as the supreme good of life, *purusartha*. The good that which all rational beings aim as of supreme value is four-fold - *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*. What is right or *dharma* cannot be separated from the goodness of the end, and moral good has no value apart from the supreme good. In this context, the highest end of life is neither the acquisition of wealth and power, nor the performance of moral duty or *dharma*, nor the satisfaction of desires, but the realization of the Brahman which is the highest good, the supreme duty and the infinite bliss.

When virtue and knowledge go together, bliss is inseparable from them. *Brahma-jnaana*, *brahma-prayatna* and *brahmananda* are not really separate. The *mumuksu* who enquires into the nature of the Brahman as the supreme *Sat* or Reality also desires to realize the Brahman as the highest end of moral and aesthetic life. What is apprehended as the most valid truth is also attained as the most valuable end or good.

Visistadvaita recognizes the value of spiritual progress and the philosophical truth of the self-realized nature of the Brahman. The *mumuksu* endowed with *jnaana* and *vairagya* seeks the Brahman because he is aware that the Brahman is his self. He lives in moral discipline

brought about by the performance of *duty, karma-yoga*; spiritual illumination, *jnaana-yoga*; and loving meditation on the Brahman, *bhakti-yoga*. The *mumuksu* with his *sadhana* transcends a philosopher who only speculates on the nature of Reality. The *mumuksu*, seeker after immortal bliss, realizes that there is no bliss in anything finite, but in the infinite alone. The Brahman alone is free from evil, sin and suffering, and the *mumuksu* seeks to return to the Brahman, his real self to regain the eternal values of divine life.