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 sumnum 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 ktra-ktrya 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, *samipya*; similarity of form, *svarupa*; intimate union, *sayujya*; etc, and is ever immersed in the eternal bliss of the Brahman. *Salokya* leads to *samipya* 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 *brahmaavid* 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 *dharma-bhuta-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,

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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 mumuksu 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, samipya. 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 experiencers 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, aprakrti, 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, aprakrt 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, nirayava. The Brahman, who is nirguna and nirayava, 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 Visistadvata. 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 *mumuksu to mumuksu*, 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 *mumuksu* may be a *jnanin*, a devotee or one of works or of *yoga*, and he attains the realization of the Brahman in *mukti*. The *mumuksu* 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 *mumuksu* 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-renunciation, virakti, freedom from the desires of the terrestrial and celestial pleasures. The idea of self-renunciation 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 ahankara 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.