

Themes of Yoga Philosophy

4. Release and its means

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Release from suffering

Once the union of the observer and the observed is identified as the cause of suffering (II.17), it becomes clear that release from suffering results from the breaking of this union. This is equivalent to the isolation or liberation (*kaivalya*) of the observer, in which state the observer attains or regains its genuine nature, i.e., pure consciousness (I.3, II.25, IV.34) untouched by the three principles (*guna*-s) that permeate the world.

Isolation is defined as the dissolution of qualities or the repose of consciousness in itself. This is the logical end of the three principles which can exist only for another, having no purpose to serve when the isolation of the *purusha* takes place (IV.34). The end of the three principles spells the cessation of the machinery of the experience of worldly pleasures and pains. Since the mind is the principal instrument of this experience, liberation is in effect the total and permanent annihilation of the mind, while meditation is a tentative disabling of it. In both cases, the *purusha* attains its original pure character.

***Purusha* as a distinct entity**

This stand raises the question whether the *purusha* exists as a permanent entity distinct from the mind. Patanjali argues in the favour of its existence on the following grounds:

- (i) the mind is an object of constant cognition by the *purusha*, which may be termed the subject;
- (ii) it is illogical to think of the mind as both the object and the subject, – the subject-object relation cannot rest on a single entity;
- (iii) the hypothesis of the cognition of the mind by *another* mind as a substitute explanation would lead to *regressus ad infinitum* (*anavasthaa*), which is a logical defect.

The only logical explanation of worldly cognition has therefore to be based on the hypothesis that (a) the mind, lacking cognitive ability as it is a part of matter, houses reflection of the *purusha*; (b) as a result, the *purusha* appears to be the author of the cognitive process when an object is registered on the mind through the sense organs. This phenomenon is explained on the analogy that the victory or defeat of soldiers in battle is ascribed to their employer, the king (Vyaasa, on II.18). The corollary of this stand is that bondage and liberation are in fact attributes of the mind. Recognition of the principle of *purusha* as a distinct entity is therefore a logical necessity.

Liberation and death

This state of liberation has nothing to do with death; it can be experienced even while one is alive (see Vyaasa on IV.30). This possibility justifies the expression 'liberated-while-yet-alive', *jiivan-mukta*. This state of experience is viewed as the highest type of meditation and is hailed in Yoga as 'the cloud of spirituality (*dharma-megha*, the cloud that showers immortality on the practitioner, IV.29).

Status of the world after liberation

When a *purusha* is liberated, and the world ceases to exist for the particular *purusha*, it continues to exist for others (II.22), in the same way as it does for creatures in the waking state, even though not experienced by one in deep sleep. Deep sleep isolates a person from others and is thus similar to a limited extent to philosophical isolation. This implies the individual character of liberation. *Kaivalya* has no social relevance. Deliverance of mankind by a prophet, as is often said, can only mean that the prophet shows his fellow beings the path to release. Treading the path and the progress on the path depends on the will and the effort of the individual concerned.

Means of release

The direct means of release from suffering is 'discriminative knowledge' (*viveka-khyaati*) i.e. knowledge which distinguishes between *purusha* and *prakriti*. The causal relation between discriminative knowledge and liberation is more metaphorical than real. Suffering is caused by the union with *prakriti*, and this union is caused by the mistaken identity of *purusha* with it. What discriminative knowledge does is only to correct or annihilate this mistake. At its annihilation, liberation, which is in the very nature of *purusha*, manifests itself. This discriminative knowledge is attained through Yoga. Yoga basically means a means, which, in its common usage, stands for a chain of means and ends.

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