

This is the seventeenth part of the serial article, continuation from Oct 2022 newsletter.

Jīvan-mukti, gaining liberation while living

Parimucyanti sarve means all of them become liberated. Liberation is described as two-fold: One is liberation even while a person is alive or *jīvan-mukti*, and the other is liberation after death or *krama-mukti*. Vedānta mainly concerns itself with liberation while one is alive. The teaching concerns the present life, here and now. We do engage in dialogs with people about life after death, about the law of *karma*, and so on, because people are very concerned about what happens after death, about why a given thing happened to them and why something else did not happen. When people get satisfactory affirmations of their concerns, there is relief and they can move ahead and continue their progress. If they don't get satisfactory answers to their questions, they get stuck.

However, Vedāntins do not concern themselves much with subsequent births or past births. They are concerned about one's present birth, about what is to be done here, because they want liberation here and now and not after death or in some other realm, such as paradise or heaven. What is important is *jīvan-mukti*, liberation while one is alive. *Parimucyanti* means they are *paritah*, totally, *mucyanti*, liberated. They continue to live in this world inspite of being liberated, because of their *prārabdha-karma* or actions whose results are in progress and still working themselves out. The body does not die when the knowledge takes place; it is the ego that dies. Hence, the wise person continues to live and function as he did earlier, except that he is now more like an actor playing a role and conscious of it. He is not a real beggar, but the actor-beggar; that is how the wise person functions. At the time of the death of the body, upon the *prārabdha-karma* coming to an end, he is liberated once and for all. That is called *videha-mukti*, liberation or deliverance through release from the body.

The first part of the verse has been explained as referring to an aspirant. It can also

be explained as describing a wise person. The explanation will then be as follows: The *vedāntavijñānasuniścītārtāḥ* are those who have ascertained the *vijñāna* or knowledge that Vedānta imparts, which is that one is *brahman*, *sannyāsayogāt*, because of which they are *sannyāsīs* or renunciates in a primary sense. The renunciation that one takes to as a way of life is renunciation in a secondary sense. Renunciation in the primary sense is to discover that *Sādhana* and *Sādhya*: Means and End one is ever a renunciate, *sannyāsyaham*, or that one is ever actionless. The 'real' renunciation is called *vidvat-sannyāsa*, renunciation as a result of the knowledge that one is *brahman*. Whether or not the wise wear ochre robes, they are *sannyāsīs* by virtue of this knowledge. A *vividīṣā-sannyāsī* is a person who has taken *sannyāsa* for the sake of knowledge and has yet to become a renunciate in the real sense, a *vidvat-sannyāsī*.

***Krama-mukti*, gaining liberation in stages**

In some places, the Upaniṣads also talk of *krama-mukti*. There are two forms of liberation: *sadyo-mukti* or *jīvan-mukti* and *krama-mukti*. *Sadyo-mukti* means liberation in the present. *Krama-mukti* means liberation in stages. It is believed that if, for some reason, a person does not gain total abidance in knowledge and is therefore not a *jīvan-mukta*, such a person will go to *brahmaloka*. Earlier, we saw the word *brahmaloka* to mean *brahma eva lokah*, meaning, *brahman* itself is the *loka*, in referring to a wise person, who is liberated by the knowledge of *brahman*. When referring to one who did not quite gain *jīvan-mukti*, *brahmaloka* would mean *brahmaṇaḥ lokah*, the world of Brahmā, meaning that such people would go to the world of Brahmājī. The word *parāntakāla* would then be the time when Brahmājī's life-span comes to an end. At the end of the cycle of Brahmājī, *parāmr̥tāt*, from the power of *māyā*, *parimucyanti*, all of them become liberated along with Brahmājī. That is the description of *krama-mukti* in some Upaniṣads. For us, however, the primary interpretation would be that this is a description of *jīvan-muktas*, the aspirants who become liberated even as they live their present lives.

To be continued...