



## The Concept of Liberation in the Svetasvataropanisad

\*<sup>1</sup>A.V.Krishna Rao

\*<sup>1</sup>Director MSFS Dhyanasramam Visakhapatnam, India

Note: \* Indicates corresponding author

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#### Corresponding Author

Email: venkyaravind@gmail.com

(Dr.A.V.Krishna Rao)

### ABSTRACT

Liberation, implying a sense of "deliverances" or "freedom", is an important philosophical concept in the area of Philosophy of Religion and Political Philosophy. Philosophy of Religion studies it for explicating human suffering and bondage, on the one hand, and moral and spiritual ways and means of deliverance or freedom, on the other. In many religio-philosophical traditions, the concept of liberation is understood as a release, deliverances, freedom or transformation from an undesirable state or condition. It is also understood as a favorable condition in which human well-being and fulfillment of individual as well as community life, in relation to nature. and God, can be possible. Political Philosophy, while engages itself with the concept of liberation concerns itself with the human struggle for peace and justice, the ideologies governing racial, ethnic and class struggles for freedom and the socio-cultural, economic and political structures which favor or threaten the integrity of the people and their land.

### 1. Introduction

The Hindu way of living views life as having four goals namely *Dharma* (duty) *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (enjoyment) and *moksa* (liberation) (*Purushartha Chatushtaya*) in a way corresponding to the four *Ashrama Dharmas* such as *Brahmacharya*, *Grihasta*, *Vaanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. All of them are needed for a sound human existence. In fact the first three goals should lead one ultimately to the attainment of liberation (*Moksa*). In the *Svetasvataropanisad* (SU) a greater emphasis is given to the concept of liberation. It addresses us as the sons of immortality (2.5). To attain immortality one has to be free from the chain of birth and death (*samsara*) (1.11) by means of the practice of *Yoga*, meditation and *bhakti* to enjoy *mukti*. And this is not enough. One needs also God's grace (*deva-prasada*) (3.20; 6.21) for the attainment of *moksa*.

### 2. Means of attaining liberation

#### 2.1 Yoga

How does SU help us in attaining liberation? Human beings are essentially spiritual in nature and their ultimate goal is God because ultimately they merge in God (1.7). Man wants to be united with Him. But it is not easy. It demands Sadhana or as Patanjali says *Citta-vrtti- nirodha*. To control the various agitations of the mind we need god's help in the SU god savitr (the Inspirer) is invoked for inspiration and strength (2.1-3) with the inspiration of god Savitr one begins to practice yoga.

One who practices yoga must sit erect and keep his head, chest and neck straight enough to get concentrated and restrain his mind from all kinds of distractions caused by his senses. To practice yoga one has to choose a conducive atmosphere wherein no distractions of any sort might become a hindrance to it (2.8-10). As one practice yoga in this way he may have the experiences of some signs of appearances of God as given in the following lines:

Fog, smoke, sun, fire, wind,

Fire-flies, lighting, a crystal, a moon-

These are the preliminary appearances,

Which produce the manifestation of Brahma in yoga (2.11)

As one advances in yoga he keeps away sickness, old age and enjoys lightness, good health, steadiness, clearness of countenance and pleasantness of voice, sweetness of odor and scanty excretions. He could even prolong his death by keeping himself physically and mentally fit while maintaining a very sound personality. These are the results of yoga. Gradually, he attains the vision of God and by his constant practice of yoga and meditation he becomes unitary, pure and free from sorrow (2.12-14). In this way he is released from all the clutches that bind him. The following stanza could express it more clearly:

When with the nature of the self, as with a lamp,  
A practice of yoga beholds here the nature of Brahma,  
Unborn, steadfast, from every nature free-  
By knowing God (deva) one is released from all fetters!

(2.15)

One can know God through meditation since He is hidden in our own selves as the fire is latent in the wood. The Lord can be realized in the body by the use of Om. By making use of his own body as the lower friction stick and the pranava Om as the upper friction stick one has to practice meditation (dhyana) then one may realize the Lord within oneself (1.13-14). The image being used here is the fire drill, by which we become aware of the indwelling presence of the Lord within us. The knowledge of this leads us to attain liberation, i.e., freedom from every kind of illusion. Though the SU does not mention the eight limbs of yoga it is good to mention them in this connection as they will be a great help to anyone who practices yoga. "The yoga-sutra enumerates yama, (It includes nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, continence, and detachment as the five yamas) niyama (It includes, Purity, contentment, penance, study and devotion of God.) Asana (It is comfortable posture conducive for long time meditation). Pranayama (It is not the suppression of breath, but its control by regulation of its three moments; inhalation, retention and exhalation. Pratyahara (It is with drawing the mind from sense objects) Dharana (It is concentration on any fixed object) Dhyana (meditation) Samadhi (It refers to illumination) as the eight limbs of yoga". (2.29).

### 3. Bhakti

It is derived from the root bhaj understood in the Rgveda as something shared or enjoyed in a materialistic sense. It was also used in the sense more of deeply expressed feelings of love and communication; which directly concerns the person himself rather than any thing just material or external to the person only. Bhakti is an attachment or a single pointed, un divided attention towards the Lord. This idea is clearly seen in the last two stanzas of SU where we see that the supreme mystery contained in the Upanishads can be given to the one who is tranquil or one who possesses the attitude of a son or a pupil or one who has the highest devotion (bhakti) for God as well as for his spiritual teacher (guru). It is to them that these matters which are declared in the Upanisads become manifest by virtue of their bhakti (6.22-23). A Bhakta can approach the Lord and ask for various needs and he can express his desires to the Lord. The Lord grants desires and blesses His devotees. He protects us (4.21) and gives us shelter (6.18) in Him. He becomes our liberator (6.16,18). Through bhakti one can attain peace of mind (shanta) and freedom from every kind of bondage and the consequent moksa. Bhakti transforms one into an authentic free person and it radiates selfless love to everyone and establishes a true friendship with one another. Thus we realize that we are all sons and daughters of immortality (3.15,6.19) and there fore we should help one another in the journey of attaining the Ultimate goal of life i.e; liberation.

### 4. Grace (Deva-Prasada)

Every human being who is desirous of attaining liberation is in need of divine grace coupled with his efforts. We attain immortality when we are favoured by him (1.6). We can see the greatness of God by his grace alone (3.20).

The sage *Svetasvatara* has realized *Brahma* by his effort, austerity and by God's grace (*Deva-Prasada*). The following quote expresses this idea:

By the efficacy of his austerity and by the grace of God  
(Deva – Prasada)

The wise *Svetasvatara* in proper manner declared *Brahma*.

Unto the ascetics of the most advanced stage as the supreme means of purification –

This which is well-pleasing to the company of seers.

This gives us an insight into the fact that anyone who realizes God in his life and experiences his love and grace must be generous enough to impart such divine knowledge and love to others like the sage *Svetasvatara*. God is the supreme Lover and He is always ready to respond to us. "His response to man is always gratuitous gesture, an act of grace, a revelation of love, because He is the supreme Lover."

Every thing that God does for us is a matter of His love and an expression of His grace. In the first chapter of SU brahmavadins (theologians) were trying to explain the ultimate cause of the universe (1.1). In that process they realized that their inquiry, meditation and yoga helped them to understand that the Lord is the cause of the universe (1.3). Here we have to understand that though the effort was made by the human beings it is ultimately God who manifests Himself as the cause of the universe. We cannot attain such knowledge about the universe without God's will. God's grace comes to us through the pleasant and even apparently unpleasant situations of every day life. Having gone through the 'pilgrimage' of life man finally seeks rest in 'God. "At the end of this pilgrimage, the soul which hitherto regarded itself as a separate, attains immortality by the grace of God". God is eager to love us and is always ready to bestow His grace upon us if only we are open to His love. He gives us freedom and never imposes His will. His grace is a free gift. "Grace as an expression of love contains that gift of oneself. It entails self-surrender". When we surrender ourselves to God, He reveals Himself more and more to us and by acquiring His knowledge and thinking in His way and enjoying His grace, we ultimately merge in Him (1.7). The Bhagavad-Gita too which is the culmination of all Upanishads gives a prominent place to grace. "By His grace you will obtain supreme peace and permanent abode". (BG. 18:61-62).

## 5. Conclusion

The *Svetasvatara* Upanishad is one of the most popular Upanishads and is often referred as a "Monument of Theism" Since it deals not only with the philosophical problems but also the spiritual needs of the human kind with beautiful insights on worship *Bhakti* and *Prasada* which ultimately leads one to the realization of the personal God who is very close to us as our creator (4.14), protector (3.2) and liberator (6.16,18). The Message of SU is so relevant in the present day society where one is all the time engaged in the pursuit of Mundane comforts at the cost of one's inner life. Though we are called to experience the wholeness of life by the practice of four *Purusharthas* (four goals of life) yet in today's world the human beings are highly engaged in the realization of *Artha* (wealth) and the enjoyment of *Kama* (pleasure) and neglected to a great extent the practice of *Dharma* and the need for the realization of *Moksha*. Hence the SU invites us all to follow the inward journey (Nivritti-Marga) and acquire a *Prema–Drishti* (vision of Love). The modern education is also responsible for the lack of this broader vision of life. Even though the present system of education enhances intelligence but not broad mindedness. It makes the students stone hearted. So the SU urges us to acquire a true education (Suvidya) which instills in us various human values like forgiveness, devotion, compassion, understanding, sharing, a sense of good will, peace and surrender (*prapatti*) to God. In short it offers us a comprehensive approach to life which in turn leads to the attainment of liberation (*mukti*).

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