

## Chapter VIII. Bondage

People can discard as many gross bodies in which they take temporary residence as the number of times they pare their nails. But the subtle body cannot be changed; it lasts and persists. This is the most secret doctrine of Indian spiritual thought. Going further along this line of discovery, it can be revealed that person means: a complex of the gross body, subtle body, and individual soul (*jivi*). *Vedantic* philosophy would declare that the individual soul shares the quality of eternal, unchanging, everlastingness (*nithya*).

The objective world (*prakriti*) is also eternal, but with a difference: it undergoes perpetual change. It is never the same, but it persists forever. The basis for the objective world, namely the life force (*prana*) and space (*akasa*), are eternal, but they act and interact without rest and manifest variously and manifoldly.

The individual *Atma* (the *jivatma*) did not have its origin in either space or the life force; it is not material in nature. It is eternal, without change. It did not happen through the impact of the life force on space or space on the life force. Things brought together will disintegrate. But things that are themselves *ab initio* cannot so come apart. For, disintegration means resuming the original nature, becoming what it originally was, reducing itself to its native substance. The gross body is the result of the combination of the life force and space, so it dissolves itself into its components. The subtle body also dissolves, but only after a long long time. The embodied soul (*jivi*) is not brought together, so it cannot fall apart. It has no birth. It cannot be born. A unitive part-less being can have no moment of origin.

The objective world, consisting of billions of varied things, forces, and events, is governed by the will of God. God is all-knowing, all-penetrating, all-pervading; He is activating the objective world and acting through the objective world all the time. Creation is ever in His care. His sovereignty is beginningless and endless. This is the doctrine of the dualists (*dwaitins*).

### Ignorance, the source of evil

This gives room for a question. When the world is ruled by God, how does He permit it to be so wicked and evil? The answer given is that God is not responsible for the grief and pain. The sins we commit are the progenitors of the grief we suffer. Joy and sorrow are the consequences of the good and evil that people perpetrate. God is the Witness. He doesn't punish or cause grief.

The embodied soul (*jivi*) is beginningless, that is to say, has no birth, but it involves itself in incessant activity and thus has to go through the inevitable consequences of that activity. This is the experience of everyone, the characteristic of everyone's mind. This is the unbreakable law of the objective world. Grief or joy is the image of the activity in which one engages. It is the resound, the reflection, the reaction. The individual soul can be the witness without concerning itself with the good and bad of the activity. When involvement happens, good has to be experienced when good is done; evil, when evil is done.

*Vedanta* asserts that the individual soul is, by its very nature, pure and unblemished. This is the accepted doctrine, according to Indian (*Bharathiya*) thought. But this truth has been befogged by ignorance and neglect, so illusion (*maya*) pollutes the experience, and the shade of ignorance breeds evil. But when beneficial activity is engaged in, the clouds of illusion are scattered and the reality of the Self is realized. All beings, all souls (*jivis*)

are pure, by their very nature. Good acts can remove the taints of evil deeds and preserve this essential purity. Then, the soul is led into the Godward path. The Godward urge will transform the thoughts, words, and deeds of the individual.

### **Solar and lunar paths of liberation**

We cannot think without words; words are the essential material for thought. When the individual drops the body, the words enter the mind, the mind enters the life force (*prana*), and the life force merges in the *Atma*. The embodied soul (*jivatma*), when it liberates itself, rushes to the region of the solar principle (the *surya-loka*). From there, it reaches the region of Brahma (the *Brahma-loka*). Having reached that region, the individualized *Atma* has no more concern with nature (*prakriti*). It will exist there till the end of time. It will experience boundless delight. It will have all powers except the powers of creation.

The authority to rule over the cosmos is exclusive to God. God is free from desires of all varieties. One's duty is but to offer Him love and to worship Him through love. This raises one to the highest status among beings.

Those who are unaware of this status or are incapable of discharging their responsibilities belong to other categories. They also offer and worship; they also engage themselves in beneficial activity. But they crave the fruits they hope to gain; they perform acts motivated by a desire to benefit from the results that emerge therefrom. "We have helped the helpless, so our path will be smooth and safe. We have uplifted the downtrodden, so we can avoid troubles on our road. We have busied ourselves in singing the Lord's Glory in chorus, so we are sure of Heaven." These are the calculations of people of this nature who engage themselves in "good acts".

When such people give up their bodies, that is to say, when such people die, their words will merge in their minds, their minds will merge in their life force, the life force thereafter will merge in the soul (*jivi*), and the soul will travel to the region of the moon principle (*chandra-loka*), that is to say, the world (*loka*) of the presiding deity of the mind—suggesting that they have to enter again the realm of the mind, with all its agitations and turmoils of wants and wishes. In this region, such souls experience some satisfaction and delight as long as the consequence of the good acts lasts. That is why the scriptures say, "When the acquired merit is spent, they reenter the world of mortal people (*Ksheene punye, marthya lokam visanthi*)". The soul encases itself in a body equipped with sense organs, etc. appropriate to the earned consequences of the deeds of the previous body and starts another life career.

### **Heaven and Hell**

The residence of the soul in the world of the moon is what the Hindus refer to as the time spent as a god (*deva*) in Heaven, or as an angel according to Christian and Islamic religions. The name Devendra, given to the Lord of these *devas*, is an indication of a position of authority. Thousands have risen to that position.

According to the *Vedas*, when the highest good is observed, that person is elevated to the position of Devendra-hood. The soul raised previously to that position will descend to the earth and resume its career in human form. Just as on earth monarchs change, so in Heaven rulers cannot escape rise and fall. The residents of Heaven are also subject to the law of ups and downs. Only the region of Brahma is free from birth and death, rise and fall, ups and downs. This is the basic doctrine of Indian thought, its eternal nectar, administered to humanity.

When the individual soul is as a god (*deva*) in the region of the moon, it cannot manifest any *karma*. Only humanity can express itself through action (*karma*) that binds by its consequence. *Karma* means activity under-

taken with desire, with an eye on the result. When the soul is in the region of the moon as a god, it is content and satisfied, so it will not crave activity for earning pleasure or achieving some success. Residence in that world is the reward the soul has secured for good deeds done by it in the past, or it may be the prize won for such goodness. When the delight emanating from the good deeds is experienced and spent away, the balance of the consequence accumulated has to be suffered, so the soul has to come as a person on earth. Then, attaining the highest good and engaging in acts of highest potency for merit, the person can cleanse the heart and reach the world of Brahma (*Brahma-loka*), whence there no is coming back.

### **Nondualism posits neither Heaven nor Hell**

The word Hell (*naraka*) cannot be found in the *Vedas*. The conception of Hell is foreign to the spiritual thought of the Indians (*Bharathiyas*). The idea of Hell and the various descriptions of Hell are all later additions in the scriptures (*sastras*) and ancient tales (*Puranas*). The authors of these texts believed that religion would be incomplete if it did not posit Hell. They laid down diverse tortures as part of Hell, but they laid down one limitation to the pain Hell inflicts. They declared that there can be no death in Hell. Hell was created only to incite fear among people, in order to make them desist from sin.

But nondualism (*a-dwaitha*) does not posit Heaven or Hell. It is concerned only with bondage and liberation, ignorance and illumination. It is known as *Vedanta*. There is no faith higher than what *Vedanta* stands for.