Introduction

The term ‘jīvanmukti’ means ‘jīvan eva muktiḥ – Liberation even while living’. When we read this description of a jīvanmukta, the questions that naturally arise in our mind are:

1. What is the jīvanmukta liberated from?

2. Why the expression ‘even while living’ (jīvan eva)?

1. **What is the jīvanmukta liberated from?** A ‘jīvanmukta’ or ‘the one who has attained jīvanmukti’, is liberated from bondage (bandha). By ‘bondage’ is meant suffering. The Self’s true nature is Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). Owing to ignorance of the Self, when one identifies with the upādhis (conditionings) of gross body, subtle body and causal body and thus takes them to be the Self, the pains and pleasures of the gross, subtle and causal bodies become one’s own. Further, when we are ignorant that our essential nature is ānanda (Bliss), we spend our life searching for happiness. Saints give the example of the musk deer, which wanders hither and thither, frantically searching for the source of the exquisite fragrance it perceives, unaware that the scent originates from its own navel. The whole exercise of ‘the pursuit of happiness’ is most thoughtless and futile, since happiness is the very nature of the Self and is not to be found elsewhere. In this impossible search, we encounter only incompleteness, experience the recurrent seesaw of pleasure and pain, undergo chaotic ups and downs, and go through needless suffering. This suffering is ‘bondage’ (bandha) and the jīvanmukta is free from this bondage.
2. Why the expression ‘even while living’ (jīvan eva)? The expression ‘(liberated) even while living’ (jīvan eva) indicates that a jīvanmukta is free of the bondage of pleasure and pain even while living in this world. ‘Even while living’ means that even when the body, mind and intellect are there; not after the fall of the body and the leaving of the mind and intellect. This is truly stunning – how can anyone living in this world with a body, mind and intellect ever be free of pleasure and pain?

Jīvanmukta

To appreciate better the state of a jīvanmukta, let us understand the nature of his conviction regarding the Self and his attitude to the world\(^1\). Sri Sankaracharya in Tattvabodha describes the jīvanmukta as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yathā deho'ham puruṣo'ham brāhmaṇo'ham śūdro'ham asmi} & \text{ iti śṛddhanīścayāḥ tathā naḥmah brāhmaṇaḥ na śūdraḥ na puruṣaḥ kintu asāṅgaḥ saccidānandānasvarūpāḥ prakāśarūpāḥ sarvāntaryaṁśi cidākāśarūpāḥ asmi iti śṛddhanīścayārupaḥ aparokshaśajñānāvān jīvanmuktaḥ.}
\end{align*}
\]

Just as (the ignorant person) has a firm notion ‘I am the body’, ‘I am a man’, ‘I am a brāhmaṇa’, ‘I am a śūdra’\(^2\) and so on, in the same way, the

---

1 The next sub-heading ‘Beyond Sorrow’ will elaborate on the jīvanmukta’s attitude to the world.

2 Brāhmaṇa (knowledge-class), kṣatriya (ruling-class), vaiśya (trader-class) and śūdra (labour-class) are the four classes of people recognised in the Indian society traditionally. These innate divisions of all human society – not only in India, but all over the world – are based on the individual’s inner disposition and the disposition-based occupation. Read “I am a brāhmaṇa” in the present day context as “I am a professor/teacher/student”; “I am a kṣatriya” as “I am a manager/administrator/politician/governor and so on”; “I am a vaiśya” as “I am a businessman/trader”; and “I am a śūdra” as “I serve the society with my talents in carpentry/plumbing/manual labour and so on.”
jīvanmukta is one who has the firm conviction ‘I am not a brāhmaṇa’, ‘I am not a śūdra’, ‘I am not a man’, but ‘I am the unattached Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, effulgent Indweller of all, and of the nature of infinite Knowledge’.

The important phrase in the above description is ‘drṣṭhaniscaya’ – ‘firm conviction’. By ‘firmness’ is meant unbroken, effortless and spontaneous abidance. The self-definitions that I hold presently - such as ‘I am a man/woman’ (body identification), ‘I am a mother/father’ (relationship), ‘I am a teacher/manager’ (work-based) and so on - are unbroken, effortless and natural. There is no effort required to remember that ‘I am a man/woman’. Every day I wake up with this thought and go back to sleep with this very same thought; this notion stays as the underlying unbroken thought-current in all my activities. Likewise, the ‘jīvanmukta’ has a spontaneous natural unbroken awareness of his real nature as ‘I am the pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss’. He knows himself to be the very substratum of the perceived world of objects and beings. He does not have to put in any effort to remind himself of this. Even when the body dies, he knows himself to be deathless.

This effortless Knowledge has been made possible because of his direct experience of the Self (aparokṣajñāna). The one who has touched fire need not remind himself or be reminded by others that fire is hot; for a direct personal experience annuls such extraneous need and results in spontaneous unbroken knowledge. So too, one who has the direct Experience of the Self, no more needs to be reminded by the śāstras (Scriptures) that he is Brahman. He does not have to do japa (continuous verbal or mental repetition) - ‘I am Sat-Cit-Ananda Brahman’. Self-Knowledge is a solid reality to him, obvious and plain. He ever abides in it, without any break or any need to maintain this awareness with effort. Just as the ignorant person wakes up with the thought of himself being the body and goes to sleep with the very same idea, so too the jīvanmukta wakes up.
with the natural awareness of the Self being the *Sat-Cit-Ananda Brahman* and goes to sleep with this very same understanding.

In short, only a *'Brahmaniśṭha'* , the one who ever abides in *Sat-Cit-Ananda Brahman* effortlessly, can be called a *'jīvanmukta'*, the one who is liberated even while living. Sri Nṛṣimhasarasvatī, the author of *Subodhini*, a Sanskrit commentary on Sri Swami Sadananda's *Vedānta-sāra*, gives this clear definition of what constitutes bondage and who a *jīvanmukta* is:

```
जीवतः पुरुषस्य हि कतर्वभोक्त्वसुखातुः स्वल्पक्षणेऽक्षितो यथित्तघ्रमः
स क्षेषरहस्तत्वादृ बन्धो भवति तेन रहितं परित्यक्तवन्धनो ब्रह्मणि निश्वा
तदेरकरता यत्व स ब्रह्मनिष्ठो जीवनमुक्ते इत्यर्थः।
```

*jīvataḥ puruṣasya hi katrtvabhogāthasukhadūḥkhalakṣaṇo’
khilo yāscittadrharmah sa kleśarūpatvād bandho bhavati tena
rahita parityaktabandhano brahmaṇi niśṭhā tadēkaparatā
yasya sa brahmaṇiṣṭho jīvanmukta ityarthah.

In a living person, all mental notions characterised by the sense of doership and enjoyership, pleasure and pain, being of the nature of pain are called ‘bondage’. The one who is devoid of this bondage (and) is ever established in *Brahman*, that is, the one who is ever absorbed in *Brahman*, such a *Brahmaniśṭha* is termed *'jīvanmukta'*.  

**Beyond Sorrow**

Is it ever possible that a person, however wise he may be, will remain unaffected by the dualities of heat and cold (body-related), pleasure and pain (mind-related) and honour and dishonour (intellcet-related)\(^3\)? Is it not true that these pairs of opposites cannot be avoided as long as one has a body, mind and intellect and lives in this world?

None escapes pain; experience corroborates that even great saints experience the above-mentioned pairs of opposites and go through their own quota of diseases, dishonours and anguish, just the way we ignorant individuals do. How then

---

\(^3\) 'Heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and honour and dishonour' are termed ‘pairs of opposites’ (*dvandva*) and are indicative of all the various see-saw experiences that are undergone by the body, mind and intellect respectively.
can the description of a *jīvanmukta* as being free of suffering ever be true?

‘Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional,’ is a well-known saying. The Brahmanīśīha, the one who ever abides in *Sat-Cit-Ananda Brahman*, on account of his (1) vivid perception of the Self being distinct from the body, mind, intellect and the other upādhīs (conditionings) and (2) crystal clear awareness of the unreality of the world, neither takes the world to be true, nor considers the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold (experienced by the body), pleasure and pain (felt by the mind) and honour and dishonour (undergone by the intellect) to be his own. An individual who is devoid of Self-Knowledge alone superimposes all these pairs of opposites on the Self and considers these experiences as his own; never the *jīvanmukta*, who has put an end to the erroneous notion of himself being the not-Self (gross, subtle and causal bodies).

When we say that the *jīvanmukta* is unaffected by the pairs of opposites, it is not to be construed that he has become inert and stone-like. He certainly knows that ice is cold and fire is hot. Heat and cold, pain and pleasure and honour and dishonour are all very much experienced by his senses, mind and the intellect; but the *jīvanmukta* sees those experiences as the experience of the senses, mind and the intellect and does not take them as his own experiences.

In the *Bhagavad Geeta* (5.8,9), Sri Krishna explains his state of non-identification with the upādhīs (equipments of the senses, mind and so on) as follows:

पश्यन् शुन्नूः स्पृशन् निजनूः अश्नूः गच्छनूः स्वपन् श्सनूः ॥
प्रश्नूः विस्तुजनूः गृहुः उन्मप्यनू निमिस्त्रति ।
इन्द्रयाणीन्द्रियार्थेः वर्तन्त इति धारयन ॥

naïva kičit karomiti yukto manyeta tattvāvit,
pasyaṁ śrṇvan sprśan jighran aśnan gacchan svapan śvasan.
pralapan visriyṛa grhṇam unmiṣan nimiṣaṁnapī,
indriyaṁ indriyaṁṛtheṣu varṇanta iti dhārayan.

Tapovan Prasad
‘I do nothing at all’ (read this as ‘I do nothing and enjoy nothing’), thus would the one united with the Self think even while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing, speaking, letting go, holding, (or even when) opening and closing his eyes, all the while convinced that it is the senses that are moving among the sense-objects (and not he, the pure Self).

Further, it is the reality given to the world that poses a threat to one’s peace. To the jīvanmukta the world is not true even when it is perceived. The waters of the mirage, though seen clearly by the eyes, are known to be false; so too the blueness and the curvature of the sky; the universal experience of the rising and the setting of the sun is also known to be false. In all these instances the vision of knowledge has falsified the sense perception. The jīvanmukta does not give reality to the world of objects, feelings and thoughts even when they are seen by his senses, felt by his mind and known by his intellect. To him even the very perceiving senses, mind and intellect are false; what need is there to mention that he also considers the perceived objects, feelings and thoughts as false! It is this abidance in the Realm of Truth that takes him beyond sorrow.

In Upadeśa-sāhasrī, Sri Sankaracharya gives us a glimpse of his state, wherein the world of diversity is false:

सुपुण्वता जागरि तो न पद्यति द्वयं च पद्यत्रापि चाहुदयत्वतः।
तथा च कुर्वत्रापि निन्दिक्यत्व यः स आत्मविद्यात्य इति निधयः॥

susuptatvat jaigrati yo na pasyati
dvayam ca pasyannapi ca dovayatvatah,
tathaa ca kurvanapi niśkriyaśca yah
sa aṭmavinnānya itiha niścayah.

Just as an individual in dreamless sleep does not see any diversity, the one who, because of the Knowledge of the non-dual Self, does not see any diversity in the waking state also, even when perceiving such diversity, who, though engaged in action, is really inactive, such a person is the knower of Brahman; none other – that is the final truth here.
Three Types of *Karma*

Identified with the body, mind and intellect, man performs countless actions in thought, word and deed. The *jīvanmukta* too, after his Self-Realisation, performs actions, although he does not identify with the body, mind and intellect and consequently has no sense of *kārtṛtva* (notion of ‘I am the doer’) and *bhoktṛtva* (notion of ‘I am the enjoyer’).

The results of actions are classified into three types: 1. *āgāmi-karma* 2. *saṅcita-karma* and 3. *prārabdha-karma*.

1. *Saṅcita-karma* (*saṅcita = collection; karma = fruits of actions*): This is the term used to denote the collection of all the fruits of one’s past actions – of countless former births as well as one’s past actions in this present birth.

2. *Prārabdha-karma* (*prārabdha = that which has begun; karma = fruit of action*): Out of this *saṅcita-karma* those fruits of actions which have become mature and have started yielding results are termed *prārabdha-karma*. The present birth, be it human, animal etc., and the various experiences that an individual goes through – heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour – are all one’s *prārabdha-karma* in expression.

3. *Agāmi-karma*: The fruits of the actions that will arise on account of the actions that will be performed in the future are termed *āgāmi-karma* (*āgāmi = future; karma = fruits of action*).

---

4 The term ‘*karma*’ in Sanskrit is indicative of both ‘action’ as well as the ‘fruit of action’ (*karma-phala*). The ‘*karma*’ here stands for the ‘result of action’.

---

**Sweet Thought**

Try to live wiping tears, wherever it may be and replacing it with a smile, however temporary it may be.

*Swami Chinmayananda*  
Sri Krishna Sweets
Since our discussion pertains to the *jīvanmukta*, we shall discuss these three types of ‘results of actions’ (*karma-phala*) with reference to the *jīvanmukta*.

**Jīvanmukta’s Sañcita-karma**

The *sañcita-karma* of a *jīvanmukta* is put to naught the very moment he realises the Self. Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda gives the example of a prisoner whose ‘file is closed’ the moment he dies. No one can execute the court order to hang him for the murder he had committed, for the simple reason that he is no more present for undergoing such a punishment. In the same way, the moment Self-Knowledge dawns, the individuality i.e., the performer of the actions, to whom the results should accrue, ends, and when the individuality has ended, the results of the actions (corresponding to the file) are, so to say, ‘written off’.

**Jīvanmukta’s Prārabdha-karma**

*Prārabdha-karma*, being those fruits of actions that have already started yielding results, will inevitably affect the *jīvanmukta’s* upādhis of body, mind and intellect. This is unavoidable: “*prārabdham bhogena naśyati – prārabdha comes to an end only after experiencing them.*” No one – be he a *jñānī* (the one who has Self-Knowledge) or an *ajñānī* (the one who is ignorant of the Self) – can avoid his *prārabdha-karma*. This point is made clear by Sri Sankaracharya in his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇि* (vide verses 452 & 453):

That action which was performed before the dawn of Knowledge and because of which this body is conjured up, is not destroyed by the Self-Knowledge, without yielding its fruits... it is like the arrow shot at an object. Thinking it to be tiger, if an arrow is shot at an object, it does not then stop, just because it turns out to be a cow. It still pierces it with full force.5

The arrow shot will not return to the quiver; for it has already embarked on its journey. In the same way, the

---

5 3नोद्यातु पुरुसः कर्माणं न विनियोजितः। अद्वैतस्वाभवं विद्युमित्योक्तस्वविशेषायं।।
व्याववृक्षम विनिमुखो बाणः पक्षातु गोमती। न तिष्ठति धिनत्तेव लक्ष्यं वेगेन निमंत्रितम्।।

26 April 2006
jīvanmukta’s prārabdha-karma exhausts itself only after giving its results. Pleasure and pain are the fruits of past puṇya (meritorious actions) and pāpa (sinful actions) respectively. We observe that even Māhātmas, who have realised the Self, go through the effects of their prārabdha-karma, they too undergo physical ailments, mental anguish and so on. But, as explained earlier, the jīvanmukta is utterly unaffected by this prārabdha-karma because of his Self-Knowledge and the crystal clear knowledge of the unreality of the world. The jīvanmukta sees the pleasure and pain undergone by his body, mind and intellect as illusory, nay, the very body, mind and intellect itself to be illusory and remains completely detached from them. Since he is utterly unaffected by the pleasures and pains of the world, he is glorified in the Scriptures as ‘jīvanmukta’ – ‘the one who is liberated even while living’.

Jīvanmukta’s āgāmi-karma

The jīvanmukta’s āgāmi-karma suffers the same fate as that of his saṃcīta-karma. Just as the ‘saṃcīta-karma file’ is closed, the other remaining āgāmi-karmas which are supposed to mature and give their effects at a later point, in a future birth – had he been ignorant and were to have further births – also become ineffective. On the jīvanmukta’s āgāmi-karma, the Law of karma has something special to state – the jīvanmukta’s meritorious āgāmi-karma accrues to those who have loved and served him, while his sinful āgāmi-karma accrues to those who have disrespected and distressed him.

---

6 किम ये ज्ञानिन्म स्त्रुवन्ति भजनि अर्चयिन्ति तान्त्रियि ज्ञानिकृत आणामिपुर्वं गूढः। ये ज्ञानिन्म निन्दृन्ति

दिशिन्ति हृदः क्रिपदन्ति कृत्वं तान्त्रियि ज्ञानिकृत सर्वभागिमि कियमाणि यद्वाद्वै कर्म पापतत्त्वे तदद्दृढः।

सूर्दं

पुर्वकृत्त्यु कुडः। पापकृत्त्यु गूढः। II (Tattva-bodha of Sri Sankaracharya)
Conclusion

Describing the fruit of the jīvanmukta’s Self-Realisation, the Munḍaka Upaniṣad (2.2.8) states:

भिद्यते ह्रदयग्रंथिः छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशया:।
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मान् हष्टे परावरे॥

bhidyate hṛdayagranthih chidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsa karmāṇi tasmin drṣte parāvare.

When that Self, which is both the manifest and the unmanifest, is realised, the knot of the heart is cut asunder; all doubts are destroyed; and all his karma is consumed.

By the term ‘knot of the heart’ (hṛdaya-granthi) is meant the identification with the not-Self (body, mind and so on) which ties the Self to the not-Self; by ‘all doubts’ (sarva-saṁśaya) is meant vacillations – whether the Self could ever be the all-pervading Brahman, whether Liberation really ensues from the Knowledge of the Self’s identity with Brahman, whether the world is truly false and so on; and by karma is meant the three types of results of actions – sañcītakarma, āgāmikarma and prārabdhakarma.

All the seven wonders of the world pale into triviality when contrasted with the incomparable glory of a jīvanmukta. Living within a body he is all-pervading; even though he eats and sleeps, talks and works, he remains a non-doer and non-enjoyer of his actions and their results; he does not live in the world, rather the world lives in him. He himself is the eternal Existence, unattached Consciousness and immaculate Bliss.