From Jivanmukti to Videhamukti

SWAMI ADVAYANANDA

This series of articles by Swami Advayananda ends with this issue. Starting in June 2002, Swamiji has sent the articles continually, without any break, well in time to meet our requirements, in spite of his busy schedule and varied responsibilities as Acharya of the Tamil Vedanta Course conducted at Chinmaya Gardens, Coimbatore and later, in his present position as Acharya-in-charge of Chinmaya International Foundation at Veliyanad, Kerala. Vedanta Unveiled is perhaps one of the rare comprehensive and systematic studies of Vedanta in English for any serious spiritual seeker, opening the door to the inner sanctum sanctorum of Upanishadic Knowledge. We began the series as Vedanta Made Easy, but realised after a few issues that it was not going to be that easy after all! Hence we changed the name to Vedanta Unveiled. Our readers have conveyed their deep appreciation of the clarity with which this subtle and lofty subject has been unfolded. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to Swamiji for blessing the magazine with this series of articles.

—Tapovan Prasad Editorial Team

Introduction

In the earlier essay on Jivanmukti\(^1\) (Liberation while living), we have seen how the Jivanmukta is free from the bondage of the three karmas: (1) sañcitakarma, (2) āgāmikarma and (3) prārabdhakarma.

- Sañcitakarma is destroyed at the very moment of Self-Realisation.
- The Jivanmukta's crystal clear Knowledge of the Self being a non-doer (akartā) and non-enjoyer (abhoktā) leaves no scope for āgāmikarma to arise.

\(^1\) Refer to the essay Jivanmukti which appeared in the April 2006 issue of Tapovan Prasad.

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Finally, the prārabdhakarma is exhausted by the Jīvanmukta’s experience of the dvandvas (pairs of opposites) like pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, honour and dishonour and so on.

An important point in the context of prārabdhakarma for a Jīvanmukta is that even when the upādhis of body, mind and intellect go through the seesaw-swings of these dvandvas (pairs of opposites), the Jīvanmukta remains utterly unaffected, firstly because of his Knowledge of the Self and secondly, his conviction about the unreality of the perceived world.

Who Suffers?

When we see a Jīvanmukta, the one liberated even while living, going through the varied experiences of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow etc., and stating “I am suffering,” or “I am enjoying,” an onlooker is bound to question – which entity in the Jīvanmukta is the ‘I’ i.e., the locus of the experience in the Jīvanmukta’s utterance “I am suffering” or “I am enjoying”. The Jīvanmukta knows for sure that as the Pure Self, he is beyond the pale of enjoyment and suffering. Yet, he too, like the ignorant, says, “I am suffering,” “I am enjoying,” “I am hungry,” “Give me food,” and so on. To answer this question, let us take a concrete experience such as that of fever and study the commonness as well as the differences between the jñāni’s and ajñāni’s experiences.

Irrespective of whether one is a jñāni (a Knower of Truth) or an ajñāni (an ignorant one), the following upādhis are there – body, prānas, the antaḥkaraṇa which is constituted of the manas (mind), buddhi (intellect), citta (memory), and ahaṅkāra (ego) as well as the vāsanās (habitual tendencies such as ‘I prefer tea to coffee’ and so on). In an instance such as fever, whether it be a jñāni or an ajñāni, both of them go through the following experiences – the body is afflicted with high temperature, the prānas become weak, the mind experiences a kind of ‘low-feeling’, the intellect becomes dull and the memory vague. Apart from the above-mentioned experiences is the function of the
'ahaṅkāra-thought' i.e., the 'ego' or 'identification thought', which identifies with all the upādhis such as the body, prāṇas and so on. It is this ahaṅkāra which identifies with the feverish body and says 'I am running a fever', identifies with the weak prāṇas and says 'I am feeling weak', identifies with the 'low-feeling' mind and says 'I am feeling low' and so on.

What about a jñānī? What will his experience be while going through fever?

As mentioned above, the body, prāṇas, the four aspects of the antahkaraṇa - manas, buddhi, citta, as well as the ahaṅkāra - are common to both the ajñānī (ignorant) as well as the jñānī (Wise Person). It would be wrong to consider that the 'ahaṅkāra' or 'identification thought' is absent for a jñānī. The antahkaraṇa does not get crippled because of Self-Knowledge. If the antahkaraṇa is accepted to exist for a jñānī, then its component of ahaṅkāra will also have to exist. One is thus bound to question, "If the 'ahaṅkāra' i.e., the 'ego' or 'identification thought' is present even in a jñānī, what then is the possible difference between the ajñānī and the jñānī?" The reply is this, "The ajñānī has no Knowledge of the Self and hence considers the 'ahaṅkāra' itself as the Self. Therefore, when the ahaṅkāra does its job of identifying with the body, prāṇas, manas, buddhi, citta and superimposes their suffering on to the Pure Self, the ajñānī imagines that he himself, the Self, is suffering. But the jñānī, the Jīvanmukta, the one who is liberated even while living, is ever aware of the Self's true nature as Sat-Cit-Ananda and hence does not give reality to the ahaṅkāra claiming itself to be the Self. Therefore, even when the ahaṅkāra identifies with the body, prāṇas, manas, buddhi, citta and says 'I am suffering from fever', he gives no reality to this bogus self-thought. The jñānī-Jīvanmukta knows that it is only the ahaṅkāra which suffers in

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2 This ahaṅkāra or the ego-thought is only a limb of the antahkaraṇa, an aspect of the not-Self. That prompts us to the question, "Where does this ahaṅkāra get the notion of 'I-ness' if it were not the Self but only a thought?" The reply is, "Consciousness, the Self, gets reflected in the ahaṅkāra-thought and it is this reflection of Consciousness, termed 'ciddabhāsa', that provides the 'I-ness' to the ahaṅkāra-thought."
the experience 'I have fever' and not the Pure Self; but the ajñānī, who is ignorant of the Self's true nature, considers the Self Itself to be suffering. Thus, there is an ocean of difference between a jñānī and an ajñānī, even though both of them say, "I have fever." Unlike the ajñānī, the jñānī's suffering stops at the level of the ahaṅkāra, without its being transferred to the Self.³

Bādhita-Ahaṅkāra

If ahaṅkāra is the notion of 'I am the upādhis – body, prāṇas, mind, intellect, memory and so on', leading to the notions of kartṛtva (sense of doership) and bhokṛtva (sense of enjoyership), can a jñānī ever have ahaṅkāra? Has he not overcome identification with the upādhi?

The answer is this – "It is not the jñānī, who is the Pure Self, who has ahaṅkāra, but it is the inner-equipment of antaḥkaraṇa which has the ahaṅkāra." After Self-Realisation, one does not take oneself to be the ahaṅkāra. Ahaṅkāra is an integral aspect of the antaḥkaraṇa. In fact, it continues to remain for the welfare of the jñānī's upādhis. Thus, when a thorn pierces his leg, the ahaṅkāra goes into action and he immediately withdraws the leg. When someone cheats the jñānī and tries to deprive him of what is rightfully his, the ahaṅkāra comes to protect the jñānī's interests. Even though the ahaṅkāra is not placed on a high pedestal (with the notion of its being the Self), as it was before the dawn of Self-Knowledge, it still exists in a shadowy form.

This watered-down ahaṅkāra is further falsified i.e., it is no more considered to be the true Self and the notions of kartṛtva (sense of doership) and bhokṛtva (sense of enjoyership) that it generates by identifying with the upādhis are also falsified. Such a falsified ahaṅkāra is termed 'bādhita-ahaṅkāra' by the Vedānta

³ The jñānī-śvānasāyana gives no sense of reality either to the fever or to the body, prāṇas, manas, buddhi, citta and the ahaṅkāra. His experience is, brahmaṇaṣayaṁ jāganāṇmāyaṁ.

It is because of this the Vedānta Acāryas assert that for a śvānasāyana there is no prārabdhakarman also.

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Ācāryas and Mahātmās. They strive to explain this presence and absence of ahaṅkāra with the following examples:

(1) A burnt rope seems like a rope – has the outer form of a rope – but cannot be used for binding anyone. In the same way the 'bādhitaḥaṅkāra' (i.e. the falsified ego) exists – but is incapable of binding the jñānī.

(2) A snake which has its poisonous fangs removed cannot harm anyone. In the same way the ahaṅkāra which has been falsified cannot affect the jñānī.

It is with this bādhitaḥaṅkāra or the falsified ego that the jñānī transacts with the world outside and says, "Today I shall teach the Upanishads," "I am hungry, get me food," "I would prefer coffee to tea," "How dare you cause disturbance to others in my ashram!" and so on. To the jñānī, the ahaṅkāra is a useful entity, albeit a weak one. For the ajñānī, the ahaṅkāra is the source of all misery. The ajñānī gives validity and has a sense of fact about the ahaṅkāra and hence it binds him. The jñānī is free of this error and hence the ahaṅkāra creates no bondage for him, rather it comes in handy for his transactions (vyavahāra) with the world. In fact the jñānī’s ahaṅkāra becomes his veritable alaṅkāra (ornament)!

The jñānī remains utterly detached (udāsīna) from everything, the ahaṅkāra and its vyavahāra – 'The false ahaṅkāra transacts with the false world – what have I got to do with them?'

Yatheśṭācāraṇa

This term means 'behaviour as per one’s wishes' (yathā-iṣṭa – as you wish; ācaraṇa – behaviour or action). Since the Jīvanmukta is unaffected by the puṇya (merits) and pāpa (sins) of his actions, will his life tend to be adhārmic? Will he be tempted to live a wanton and disciplined life, oblivious to dharma, which alone sustains societal order, nurtures peace and engenders happiness to the totality? Will the Jīvanmukta be careless about his actions and cause needless pain to those around him?

Even though the Jīvanmukta is unaffected by the puṇya
(merits) and pāpa (sins) of his actions and is indifferent (udāśīna) to the actions themselves, his behaviour in the world will spontaneously continue to be dhārmic (righteous) because of the reasons listed below.

(1) The Jīvanmukta perceives himself in everyone and himself everywhere; in his experience the whole world is he himself. Such a person who sees the Self alone everywhere cannot harm or pain anybody, because of his all-pervading Self-vision. Even if somebody were to harm him, he would tend to take a compassionate view, since the one who harms and the one who has been harmed are both himself in his vision. Will anyone be foolish enough to visit the dentist to remove the offending tooth which has bitten his tongue? The Isāvāsya Upaniṣad (verse 6) asserts the Jīvanmukta’s all-encompassing compassion born out of his ‘sarvātma-bhāva’ (the feeling of being the Self of all), when it declares that the jñāni hates none:

यस्तू सर्वांणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपस्यति ।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥

yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmanyevānupasyati,
sarvabhūteṣu cātmānanṁ tato na vijugupṣate.

He who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that Realisation.

(2) It is a sādhaka (seeker), who becomes a Siddha by purifying his heart. As a sādhaka, one works hard to remove the negativeities of mind that propel one to adharma (unrighteousness). When these negativeities are overcome by cultivating sādhana-catuṣṭaya (viveka, vairāgya, śamādi-śaṭka-sampatti and mumukṣutva), the mind becomes pure and the intellect single-pointed and such an individual alone marches on in his spiritual pursuit to attain the Self. Verily, by force of habit, noble virtues like humility, compassion etc. that have existed prior to his Realisation, will continue to be witnessed in the Jīvanmukta’s life even after his Self-Realisation. Unlike the sādhaka (seeker), who has to cultivate and maintain these good qualities with
conscious effort, the *Siddha* possesses these virtues naturally.\(^4\) Sri Sureswaracharya makes a poignant statement in this regard in his *Naiškarmya-siddhi* (verse 4.69):

उत्तप्नात्मप्रबोधन्त्य ह्यद्वैतवादयो गुणं।
अयद्भो भवत्यस्य न तु साधनस्पर्शं।

utpannavatmaprobodhasya hyadvaitvadayogunah,
ayatnato bhavantyasya na tu sadhanarupinah.

But, in the case of one who has attained the Knowledge of the Self, virtues such as non-enmity make their appearance spontaneously, without having to be sought after.

Hence there is no question of *yatheṣṭācarāṇa* leading to immoral or indisciplined behaviour in the case of a *Jīvanmukta*. He is ever *dhārmic*... spontaneously and effortlessly *dhārmic*.

There are statements in the Scriptures such as – “A person, who does not have the feeling of egoism, whose intellect is not tainted, does not kill, nor becomes bound even by killing these beings”\(^5\) and “When a person sees Oneness, he is not the least bound, whether he is performing thousands of *aśvamedhayajñas* or killing hundreds of Vedic scholars.”\(^6\) Such statements are only to show that the *Jīvanmukta* is absolutely unaffected by the fruits of his actions; they are not to be construed mischievously to mean that the *Mahātmā* may engage himself in wanton destruction and prohibited actions (nīṣiddha-karma) that bring pain to others and harm the society.

**Siddhis**

Another common point of discussion regarding *Jīvanmuktas* is whether they will have special *siddhis* (occult powers) like *aṇīmā* (becoming miniscule), *mahimā* (taking a gigantic form),\(^7\)

\(^4\) Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa explains this with an example: “An accomplished singer will find it impossible to make a mistake in *rāga* (harmony) and *tāla* (rhythm) even if he is woken up from deep sleep and asked to sing. So too a *Jīvanmukta* is incapable of unrighteous actions.”

\(^5\) *yasya nāhaṅkṛtyo bhāvo buddhirasya na lipyate, hātvapi sa imaṁśākāmāna hanti na nibadhyate.* (Bhagavad Geeta 18.17)

\(^6\) *aśvamedhahasasrāṇi brahmahatyāśatāni ca, kurvannapi na lipyeta yadyekatvम prapaśyati.* (Śūta-saṁhitā)

\(^7\) The following verse of *Amara-kośa* summarises the eight famous *siddhis*: *aṇīmā mahimā caiva garimā laghīmā tathā, prāptīḥ prākāmyamiśītvam vaśītvam caṣṭabhumātayaḥ.*

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flying in the sky (ākāśa-gamana) and so on. The following verses from Yoga-vāsiṣṭha, presented as a dialogue between Sage Vāsiṣṭha and Sri Rama (5.89.9-14 & 31) clarify this point:

śrīram uvāca,
jīvanmuktāsārāṇāṁ kathamātmanavidāṁ vara,
śaktayo na dṛṣyanta ākāṣagamanādikāh.
śrīvāsiṣṭha uvāca,
anātmanavidamukto’pi siddhijālāni vānchati,
dravyamantrakriyākālayuktyāpnotyeva rāghave,
āatmajñasyaiva viśaya ātmajno hyātmanātmadrk,
ātmanātmano santuṣṭo nāvidyāmanudhāvati.
ye kecana jagadbhāvāh tānavidyāmayānviduḥ,
kathāṁ teṣu kilātāṁjñāstāuktāvidyo nimajjati.
dravyamantrakriyākālayuktaṁ sādhusiddhīdāh,
paramātmapadapráptau nopakurvanti kaścana.

Sri Rama questioned,
"How is it that we don’t see siddhis like the ability to travel in the sky in the body of the Jīvanmukta, even though he is the best among the Knowers of the Self?"

Sri Vāsiṣṭha replied,
"It is only the one who is devoid of Self-Knowledge and not liberated, who is ensnared by the web of siddhis (occult powers). O Raghava! These siddhis are attained through the means of
dravya (specific medicinal herbs etc., that give the occult powers), mantra (chants that invoke these powers), kriyā (ritual performances), kāla (appropriate time for performing the rituals). Only the one who is ignorant of the Self indulgences in these practices for attaining siddhis and never the knower of the Self, who always perceives the Self by the Self. The one who is ever revelling in the Self, by the Self, never comes under the sway of ignorance (siddhis belong to the realm of ignorance). Those siddhis, whatever they may be, fall under the category of the world alone; knowing that to be so, how can the one who is free of ignorance immerse himself in them? These much admired siddhis are attained by dravya, mantra, kriyā and kāla and are in no way helpful in the attainment of Self-hood."

As evidenced in the above discussion from Yoga-vāsiṣṭha, there is no correlation between Jīvanmukti and the siddhis. Even the ignorant can come to possess these siddhis by specified practices involving japa of specific mantras, worship of deities and so on. The greatest siddhi (accomplishment) is Self-Knowledge and in its presence all occult powers pale into insignificance.

**Videha-mukti**

The prārabdhakarma of the Jīvanmukta gets exhausted as he experiences the pair of opposites of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, honour and dishonour and so on. We have already mentioned that he remains utterly unaffected by these experiences, for in his understanding he is the Self, the very illuminator of these experiences.8 Once the entire prārabdhakarma has fructified and completely exhausted itself as pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow and so on, the body of the Jīvanmukta drops. The mind, intellect, memory and ego, the four components of the antahkarana, merge with the five subtle elements (the tanmātras). In the case of the ignorant, they remain intact to

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8 Refer to the essay Jīvanmukti under the sub-heading Jīvanmukta’s Prārabdha-karma which appeared in the April 2006 issue of Tapovan Prasad.
take a fresh birth, but for the Jīvanmukta, they merge with the Totality. 9 When thus the gross body as well as the subtle body has been dismembered and dissolved, all that remains is Brahman alone. This idea has been asserted by many Śruti, the following Upaniṣadic statement being a sample –

योःकामो निष्काम आत्मकाम आत्मकामो न तस्य प्राणा: उत्क्रामन्ति
ब्रह्मेऽव सनूः ब्रह्माप्येति।

yo’kamo niśkāma āptakāma ātmakāmo na tasya prāṇāḥ
utkrāmanti brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti.

The organs do not depart of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desire have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Self. Being but Brahman, he is merged in Brahman.” (Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad 4.4.6)

Prior to dropping the body also he was free, albeit in his understanding and vision. This Liberation with the final dropping of the body is termed Videha-mukti (videha – without body; mukti – Liberation).

Even with the body he was ever liberated, without the body he is merged with the Infinite without a trace. To explain, even when the pot exists, the space that seems to be conditioned as pot-space is, actually speaking, not bound; when the pot is broken, the space is clearly seen by all to be limitless. The distinction of the space being limited or limitless is only from the angle of the perceiver and never from the point of view of the space, for it knows no limitation whatsoever. Here also, the

9 However, in the case of those who have a prārabdha to fulfil a divine mission, the case is different. Thus, Rṣi Apāntaratama was reborn as Sri Vyāsa, and Sanatkumāra as Skanda. So also other rṣis like Vasiṣṭha and Nārada were born again and again. Jñānis may be reborn to fulfil some divine mission ordained by the Lord. After their prārabdha to accomplish the mission is fulfilled, they are not born again. But even when they are born, they never come under the sway of ignorance. Their case is akin to that of a Jīvanmukta, who even after attaining Knowledge, continues his corporeal existence as long as prārabdha-karma lasts. This idea is made clear by the Brahma-sūtra (3.3.31) – “yāvad-adhikāram avasthitīḥ ādhikāriniṁ – of those who have a mission to fulfil, there is the corporeal existence, so long as the mission is not fulfilled.”
distinction between Jīvanmukti and Videha-mukti is only from the ignorant perceiver’s view; for the Jīvanmukta, it makes no difference whatsoever. The Kaṭha-upaniṣad (5.1) makes this idea clear when it declares:

विमुक्तः विमुच्यते ।

vimuktaśca vimucyate.

‘He is freed, being already free.’

When the traditional go-pūjā (cow-worship) is done and a garland is placed on the cow’s neck, the cow is oblivious of it and when the garland falls down and is trampled by other cows, then also it pays no heed to it. In the same way, the Jīvanmukta gives no special importance to either the presence or absence of the body.

**Conclusion**

Our salutations to all such Jīvanmuktas who have lived in the past, are adorning the present and those who are yet to come in the future. Every individual is an inherent Jīvanmukta, only waiting to claim his birthright of Liberation. May the Grace of the Lord and the Blessings of the Guru guide us to this pristine Wisdom of the Rṣis and may we all soon becomeliberated!

With this essay the series of articles on ‘Vedanta Unveiled’ has come to an end. The author wishes to thank the editorial team of Tapovan Prasad and its august readers for the encouragement given while writing these essays.10

These essays are dedicated with reverence to the mothers of all renunciates, who by their exemplary renunciation, have blessed and permitted their sons and daughters to walk the path to God-Realisation.

**(Concluded)**

10 Forty four essays have thus been written in the series ‘Vedanta Unveiled’ that started in June 2002 with the first one titled, ‘What is Vedānta?’.