CHAPTER - 11

Jīva - It's Bondage and Liberation

The concept of soul in Hinduism as propounded by Swāmī Vivēkānanda is conceived in two aspects. One the essential nature of the soul known as 'Ātman' and the other the empirical nature of the soul known as 'Jīva'. The ever-shining, pure consciousness which is the 'Ātman' when veiled with ignorance or avidya appears to be in bondage and is called Jīva. Although the distinction levelled on them is based on the different levels of consciousness yet in essence they are always considered to be one and the same. One finds that in the Kaṭha Upanīṣhad the buddhi or intelligence of man is referred to as a cave or guha in which dwell the finite self of man - the jīva and the infinite self of the universe - the Ātman or Brahman. These two are described as the chaya and atapa, shadow and light respectively. This goes to say that Brahman is the light of all lights and the Jīva or finite soul is its reflection in the buddhi or intelligence.

Jīva or the individual self is the highest thing that we know that is closest to the Absolute, although it is not the Absolute itself. Jīva on the other hand is more aptly described as a coupling of the real and unreal, for it is a sheer product of ignorance or avidya.

Ignorance is the root cause of bondage and liberation is the result of knowledge. Jīva shrouded in Ignorance is regarded as tainted with the false notions of the 'I' and the 'Mine', which
arise when the mind through senses comes into contact with the fleeting sensations or ideas of the external world. So long as jīva is bound in the cloak of ignorance, for it, there is no such distinction of the eternal and ephemeral. It holds in it, egoism, dualism and plurality. The Jīva seeing through the veil of avidya or ignorance sees even the intellectual knowledge as having the distinction of the subject and object. This knowledge is only of objects in the context of space, time and causality and such knowledge of the external world as an end in itself creates bondage to the individual soul.

Ego which plays a predominant role in the individual soul or jīva is born through ignorance. This ego is the main realm of bondage since it causes the jīva to wrongly identify himself with the sense organs, body or mind and intellect and due to the association of the self with the body - mind complex, come forth feelings concomitant with pain and pleasure and thus arise earnings for worldly passions, selfishness and attachments which are all meant only to knot up the jīva in bondage. The jīva bound by the finite sense world does not see anything beyond, nor does he care to see either, for he seems to have much at stake in the sense-material world, for its wealth, power and pleasure hold him in thrall. Conditioned by time and causality as he is, he does not get even a glimpse of the unconditioned and timeless dimension of his inner being. It is, as if all worldliness has entered into him and filled him like water filling a boat and quite naturally due to the weight of the sensate he begins to loose his spiritual freedom and this is what eventually spells his
spiritual doom.

The individual self or man, inspite of his obvious limitations thinks too much of his strength and glory, but does not realise that this only adds to his ignorance and bondage. For the jīva which is caught in the web of bondage, there is no escape from rebirth. Belief in rebirth has persisted from the time of Upanīshads, in which it receives an articulate expression. In truth a man becomes good by good works and evil by evil works and in this way it can be said that our lives incarnate our characters.

The future of the individual soul is not finally determined by its deeds of thought and action on this earthly life, but it has a lot of chances of acquiring merit and advancing to life eternal. The soul goes on transmigrating from body to body bound to the endless procession of events called sāṃsāra or worldliness, where man gets submerged in the objects of sensate experience, taking them to be the whole of Reality, man ignores the infinite, immortal dimension of his own personality. This worldliness is nothing but the negation of spiritual awareness. Through spiritual blindness we enter into such forms and ways of life where we cannot get even the slightest inkling of this Ātman, our true self -- the secret of spiritual progress is therefore to cultivate awareness of the Ātman, our divine nature;

to cultivate this in and through all life's experiences.

It is only when the ego gets negated and the jīva realises the nature of its true self as the union with the unity of all existence and reality that life gets fixed in the Divine Ground of Ātman-Brahman unity. Hence jīva remains jīva so long as he struggles to overcome his temporal nature and reach out from the darkness to the light. Only then does he realize that all life is trivial if it does not overcome death in the knowledge of the deathless self - the one self in all. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says - "Dying, meaning, rising above, renouncing this world which is of the nature of spiritual blindness and characterized by the notions of 'I' and 'mine', thus achieving the non-dual state of the unity of the universal self, they become immortal, thereby become verily, Brahman."

Swāmi Vivēkānanda advocated freedom - freedom from all bonds of nature, external or internal. He taught men how to fulfil themselves through spiritual realization. He saw freedom as the watchword of the cosmic process and the evolutionary drama, the spirit struggling to be free from the clutching tentacles of matter, first by transforming it and then transcending it. He believed that man is the only creature who is aware of himself and of the vast energies lying within him, at the same time, he

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2. Ibid, P.250.
is also aware of a sense of limitation in himself and as a result begins to struggle to overcome this limitation. This struggle he saw as a struggle between the sense of bondage and the sense of freedom. It is due to this struggle that life ensues in all its humanly claim, with its joys and sorrows, dreams and visions. In fact at the human level, it is the very meaning of life. But what is to be realised is that this struggle is not eternal nor is man perpetually doomed. For in the course of time if man reflects on the inner spiritual side, eventually he will gain in spiritual strength, and clarity of vision and will finally attain that true freedom and bliss through the realization of his true spiritual nature. It was Swāmī Vivēkānanda’s conviction that man’s life will not become fruitful nor hold any far reaching meaning unless he comes to realise the mystery that is within life itself.

It’s realization here and now, ‘iha’, is the consummation of man’s evolution - that is the true life of man. Life at the level of ego is only a shadow life. The Advaita Vedānta, Swāmī Vivēkānanda says, is deeply concerned to help man to find his true life, life lived in the light of truth. And that truth is realising the universal self as his own true nature.

Swāmī Vivēkānanda stressed that the goal of mankind was the attainment of liberation and liberation is that state of recognition and realization of one’s identity with Brahman. Jīva and Brahman are not two different realities, but, on the other hand, Brahman is the true nature and essence of jīva, but the

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1. Ibid. P.167;
jīva is unaware of this ever present truth of the Divine reality within itself which is ever liberated, infinite and non-dual. It is only through the grace of knowledge and when the heart becomes pure, purged of all impurities, that this individual soul awakens to the glaring truth of his oneness with the one and only one Reality - that is Brahman. It is this realization which is liberation or freedom from bondage.

According to Swāmi Vivēkānanda, realization can be attained by man only when he is able to pass beyond the cycle of births and rebirths and births are determined by the actions or karma performed by the individual self, and it is by right actions again that the activity of the body producing karma can be stopped. The ultimate realization of the oneness of the individual soul with the soul of the universe or Brahman, which is what is termed as liberation or mokṣa can be attained by following different paths like jñāna or knowledge, karma or actions, bhakti or devotion and psychic control. These different paths are not inconsistent as they appear to be with each other, but on the contrary they are complementary to each other.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda's approach towards the path of realization was psychological. Taking into consideration the different aspects of the human mind he preached the yōga of divine love (Bhakti-yōga), the yōga of work (karma-yōga) the yōga of spiritual knowledge (jñāna-yōga) and the Rāja-Yōga which involved the control of the psychic and prāṇa. The idea of a perfect man

and the ideal of all religion is to gain a harmonious balance in all the four elements. This could be best attained by yoga or union for all yoga is one in helping us to discern the being that is at the back of all becoming. "To the worker, it is union between himself and the whole community, to the mystic it is union between his lower self and his higher self, to the lover, union between himself and the God of love and to the philosopher the unity of all existence." The man who seeks to accomplish this union with the Divine is called a yogin. Those who endeavour to pierce the veil of ignorance through the adoption of knowledge are called Jhana yogins, those who go about spontaneously working selflessly for the upliftment and salvation of humanity are the Karma-yogins, those who try to establish communion with God through their unflagging love and devotion, are the Bhakti yogins and those who use their mind and the power of concentration to reach the truth of the universe follows the method of Raja-yoga. All the yogas though different yet aim at the merging of the microcosm with the macrocosm, describing the processes by which our consciousness grows into the life divine by the control of the thinking mind and senses. The Yoga-Sutra says, "that discipline of mental functioning, practised for long uninterruptedly and with satkāras (i.e. self-control, austerity, faith) is the surest means of realising the truth."

This is that path of realization of the unity of Brahman which adopts knowledge as it means or in other words knowing Brahman through knowledge. This forms a very rational and philosophic side of ṣāṇa system. It is based on the idea that all bondage is due to ignorance and that true knowledge wipes out all traces of ignorance, opening the gates to liberation. Swāmi Vivēkānanda believed that ignorance is the root cause of all our misery in the world. He said, "Ignorance it the great mother of all misery, and the fundamental ignorance is to think that the infinite weeps and cries, that He is finite. This is the basis of all ignorance, that we, the immortal, the ever pure, the perfect spirit, think that we are little minds, little bodies, it is the mother of all selfishness." This goes to say that ignorance is the inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. What lies to be recognised by the erring individual is that knowledge is concealed in ignorance and when the latter is removed it manifests itself. Our thought, our life and our being is made one with Truth.

It is also to be known that mere external knowledge about the reality is not adequate for the realization of Brahman - the Truth of all reality. There are three stages Śravana, Manana and Nīḍīhyāsana. Śravana means study on listening to the words of knowledge from a teacher. Manana is the contemplation of what has been heard and Nīḍīhyāsana is the stage where the seeker

1. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete Works Vol. 11, P. 285
meditates continuously with one pointed concentration upon the arrived truth. This concentration is not easy for the entire energy of the being is concentrated in the direction of the Absolute truth pervading the entire existence of being and this calls for detachment or vairāgya. It is only the pure in heart that can see God. The Śvetāśvatāra Upanīṣad tells us that we should cleanse our natures to reach the goal. So also Śvāmi Vivēkānanda stresses the importance of moral character in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, for spirituality is not a mere scholarship but it is being and becoming, it is a growth development and realization. It is that knowledge which does not arise in the mind of man so long as it is morally impure. The Pras'na Upanīṣad says that realization is for these, "In whom there is no crookedness, no falsehood and no deception." Śvāmi Vivēkānanda insisted that one should renounce all selfish desire, surrender materialism and become bereft of egotism. It is by controlling the body, the senses and the mind that one can concentrate on the highest reality and through this attain perfect peace. As a preparation for this sādhanā, the seeker of knowledge or the jñāna-yōgi must give up all the superstitions, and the realization is achieved by the power of reflection and pure reason. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda said, "As the Bhakti-Yōgi works his way to complete oneness with the supreme through love and devotion, so also the jñāni-yōgi forces his way to realization of God by the power of reason. He must be prepared to throw away all old idols, old beliefs and superstitions, all desire for this

1. Pras'na Upanīṣad I. 16
world or another, and be determined only to find freedom."

Thus, true knowledge is an integral creative activity of the
spirit which does not know anything external at all. For
everything is its own self. 'Knowledge presupposes unity of
oneness of thought and being, a unity that transcends the
differentiation of subject and object such knowledge is found
revealed in man's very existence.' So in the true sense
knowledge is only unveiled rather than acquired. Truth in
spiritual life is neither the reflection nor the expression of
any other reality. It is reality itself. Those who know the Truth
become the Truth or to be more explicit. He who knows Brahman
becomes Brahman" "Brahma-vid Brahmaiva Bhavati"

It is through quietening the strivings of the will and
empirical intellect, by becoming calm, subdued and collected that
one sees the self in the Self. This is the much sought liberation
for in it, all savour of the phenomenal vanishes for everything
is seen steeped in the noumenal.

Karma-Yoga

Karma is the principle which governs this world of becoming.
The law of Karma prevails in the world of saṁsāra, where our
deeds lead us to higher or lower stations in the world of time.

1. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works, Vol.III. P.92
3. Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad IV, 4.0
This Karma is not external to the individual, it is the very unfolding of our being. All the actions performed by man, mental and physical are nothing but Karma. All the actions that we see in the world, all the works of human society that take place are nothing other than the simple display of thought and the manifestation of will of man. This will in turn is caused by character and character is determined and brought out by actions or karma. It is our Karma which determines what we deserve and what we can assimilate. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "Our Karma determines what we are and what we can assimilate we are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions." Man is in this stage not bound by any other laws except these which he makes for himself.

The Karma-Yōga preached by Swāmi Vivēkānanda is mostly based on the teaching of Bhagavad Gītā. According to him, "Karma-Yōga is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works, and by renunciation of the fruits of one's actions. Gradually the sense of agency and individual ego are relinquished. The Karma-Yōgi need not believe in any doctrine whatsoever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor indulge in any metaphysical

speculation. He has got his special aim of realising selflessness, and he has to work it out himself."

Karma-Yoga emphasizes action, established in equanimity and which abandons all attachments. All work is simply to bring out, the power of the mind which is already there, to wake the soul Swami Vivekananda's heralded the motto 'work for work's sake. To work we have the right, but not to the fruits thereof. Karma-Yoga does not advocate asceticism, on the contrary man has to remain in the world in the midst of evil or good, pain or suffering and he has to keep on working as best as he can selflessly. The most essential feature of the Karma-Yoga is that man is not to be judge by his works but the manner and spirit in which he goes about performing them. Lord Krishna says in the Gita "Established thus in equanimity, renouncing all ego-centric attachments, forgetting to worry over the results of success or failure in the activities, act on." The emphasis in Karma-Yoga lies in working with equipoise in all situations, for in such performance of work when the worker has gained a self-forgetfulness, he will be beyond caring for the results of his work as he has abandoned even attachment.

Swami Vivekananda was greatly influenced by the Gita's ideal of Niskama-karma. This Naishkarmyam cannotes that state of perfection in which all activities are transcended leading to

actionlessness in perfect fruition. The secret of perfect action is that one must not expect anything in return for the action performed. The Bhagavad-Gīta explaining the principle of Karma-Yoga says, "To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; neither let there be there in any attachment to inaction."

Life means activity. Where activity ends death enters. Life being dynamic cannot, even for a moment cease to function. It is in an active life alone that we progress or deteriorate. Spiritually, as the self, everyone of us is All-full and All-perfect. Due to our ignorance of this spiritual experience, in our intellect are aroused unending desires and along with them thoughts. The nature and quality of thoughts at every moment are conditioned and controlled by our desires. In turn these thoughts in the individual, when expressed in the external world of objects become his actions. Actions are nothing but the individuals thoughts projected and expressed in the world. It is in the chain of ignorance constituted of desires, thoughts and actions that binds the individual with the bond of bondage. In order to come out of this bondage the true self should emerge as that state of desirelessness, that condition of thoughtlessness and existence of actionlessness. But by this again what is advocated is not a mere renunciation from actions which would only enhance deterioration, but on the contrary vigorous action performed with the right attitude of mind "He who recognises

1. Bhagavad-Gīta II. 47 - Translated by S. Radhakrishnan, P.119
inaction in action and action and inaction is wise among men, he is a yōgi and a true performer of all actions.” This is to say that a karmayōgin is one who ought to be in the world but not of the world, for devoid of all desire prompted actions and attachments to their results and therefore having no selfish end in view although seeming engaged in actions, he does not do anything for he has established himself in the Eternal, Infinite Self.

Śvāmi Vivēkānanda taught that Karma-Yōga is the attaining, through unselfish work, of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature and that every selfish action only retards our progress to the goal. The message of Karma-Yōga is a message of freedom, freedom from the bondage of desire, from the subjection to the ego on the modes of nature and it is a clarian call to man to rise above and establish himself beyond nature, stationed in the knowledge of the Divine Truth. Karma-Yōga never calls for renunciation of duties and obligations for we have not only duties towards ourselves but also a widening field of duties towards the world around, which we have to fulfil. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda says, “Do not fly away from the wheels of the world machine, but stand inside it and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out. Through this machinery itself is that way out.”

It is with a continuous performance of selfless work and a

1. Bhagavad-Gīta IV-18
2. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works Vol. I P-115
constant practise of non-attachment in all actions of life that man can rise above himself to realize the oneness of the Supreme Truth. Thus with his atmabodham or spiritual consciousness awakened he is finally freed from his state of bondage, for all his bondage creating actions get converted into freedom creating actions and with this he gains both the here and the hereafter.

**Bhakti-Yōga**

This yōga is the way of realising God through intense feeling of devotion. It is the path of love, devotion and emotion. It is the surrendering of everything, especially one's limitations to the Supreme. It is that ascent of the devotee towards the Divine where the devotee merges into the oneness of the Divine. He attains the realisation of the essential oneness of everything. Bhakti-yōga, being the religion of love, is for those who are primarily emotional and have religious faith. Swāmi Vivekānanda believed that strong emotions have the capacity to awaken and activate the potential powers of man which would enable him to realize God. The main aspect of Bhakti-Yōga is to channelise the emotions and feelings and give the soul a higher direction, which is the direction towards God. Bhakti involves an unconditional belief in a Divine Being. It is the conscious recognition of and whole hearted response to the source of all goodness or in other words the Divine. It is rightly said, "In this world, not vows, not pilgrimages, not yōga practises, not study of scriptures, not sacrificial rites, not philosophical discourses only devotion can give us freedom."

Bhakti-yoga is that emotional attitude towards God where the devotee or Bhakta through pure faith and love suppresses his false egoism by recognizing in God the whole source of his own ego. It is not mere intellectual understanding alone but through emotional attachment with God that the firm and unshakable faith in Him is manifested. The Bhakta or devotee developing this love and emotional attachment towards God transcends all ordinary empirical reality and ethical rules. God’s omnipotence and compassion arouses in him that sense of pure devotion and love which destroys all past evil karmas. The mind gets stripped of all its sensate attachments and thus the Bhakta surrenders his ego, its activities and his very being to God, realizing his limitations and intellectual impotence. In response, God extends his hand of compassion, love and protection which makes the devotee fearless of any worldly consequence, for the Lord is the master of the whole Universe and the devotee also becomes the master by associating Himself with the Lord.

Devotion implies obedience to the will of the Supreme in all our activities. It brings deliverance from anxiety about the necessities of life and develops a spirit of humbleness and service to God. God is the reward of those who wait on him and it is He who helps them to act in this world as partners in his divine work. A true bhakta is one who has a sense of self humility in face of God and this sense of humility is what becomes the foundation of true religious worship. God likes meekness and a true bhakta feels himself worthless apart from God.
Swami Vivkananda classifies the steps through which the Bhakti-Yoga advances itself towards the ultimate realization. In the first or preparatory stage, one unavoidable stands in need of concrete help so that he may go on. This is the stage of external worship and in it figure the mythological and symbolic parts of religion. This is a necessary factor for ordinary man cannot immediately grasp nor concentrate on the subtle expressions of the Supreme or God.

In the next stage prayer and chanting of God's name, religious hymns and songs on the glory of the Lord become prominent. The third stage is where this prayer gives way to meditation and Swami Vivekananda says that in this stage there exists nothing for the devotee but God. But in the final stage even this distinction is transcended and the devotee becomes one with the Supreme. No doubt the cultivation of states of mind and body which permits the full realisation of the ultimate truth requires disciplined effort yet the Yoga-sutra says "that discipline of mental functioning practised for long, uninterruptedly and with the satkāras, that is self control, austerity and faith is the sure means of realising the truth".

The Bhakti-marga is the way of pure and unbounded love in which the object of love is not the finite or limited but the very Supreme. Such pure and divine love is one that is ever selfless and unchanging and this kind of love can be only love

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1. Swami Vivekananda - Complete works Vol. IV P-15
for God. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "The love for our children and our wives, is mere animal love, that love which is perfectly unselfish is the only love, and that is God, it is very difficult to attain it." What in fact begins in quiet prayer and contemplation goes on, to develop, into a longing for the sight of the Divine and this ends in an irresistible rapture of love. Therefore, the devotee reaches a stage of emotional ecstasy where he merges himself with God and the love that ensues from such a union is Universal love, for all alike, for this would be based on the realization of oneness of everything.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "When this renunciation comes, the gate opens for the soul to pass through and reach the lofty regions of Supreme devotion or para-bhakti. Then it is that we begin to understand what para-bhakti is, and the man who has entered into the inner shrine of para-bhakti alone has the right to say that all forms and symbols are useless to him as aids to religious realization. He alone has attained that supreme state of love commonly called the brotherhood of man; the rest only talk. He sees no distinctions, the mighty ocean of love has entered into him and he sees not man in man, but beholds his Beloved everywhere."

Thus recognizing that all creation is only the divine self in various forms, one has to adore the Supreme in his various

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2. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works III, P-96
expressions of multiplicity realizing that there is nothing beyond this feeling of oneness in everything, this is the highest experience and sublime peak of spiritual fulfilment.

**Rāja-Yōga**

This Rāja-Yōga proposes to put forth, before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching the Truth. This yōga teaches that by concentrating the mind itself and so discovering the innermost recesses of our minds we can come to the basis of belief and the real truth of religion. Rāja-Yōga can be said to be that way of realisation of immorality which is attained by controlling the mind and body.

According to Rāja-Yōga the external world is but a gross form of the internal or subtle. So it teaches us that by controlling our inner nature, we can control the whole external nature. Raja yoga is the way of physical and mental discipline for it has for its ground the proposition that bondage is due to the distracting activities of the body and mind. It is believed thereof that by right concentration of mind, the tremendous power of the mind can be channelised in the right and proper way which is towards realisation of the Truth.

Rāja-yōga is divided into eight steps. The first step is Yama-non killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non receiving of any gifts. Next is Niyama-cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study and self-surrender to God. Then comes Āsana or posture; Praṇāyama or control of Praṇa; Pratyahāra or restraint of senses from their objects; Dhārana or fixing the mind on a
Yama and Niyama form the ethical foundation on which the aspirant progresses in his practice of yoga and ultimately self-realisation. Āsana is a series of exercises mental and physical which serve to bring the muscles and the body under one's control. Prānayama is controlling the breathing. But this prānayama has wider significance than control of mere breathing. Prāṇa is actually the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this Universe. Just as the whole Universe has been generalized into one Absolute Existence, so also all forces have been generalized into this Prāṇa. He who grasps Prāṇa, grasps all the forces of the Universe. He who has controlled the Prāṇa has controlled his body and mind and all minds and bodies that exist for it is the generalized manifestation of force. It is the knowledge and control of this prāṇa that is the aim of prānayama and that part which tries to control the manifestations of the prāṇa as mental force by mental means is Rāja-yoga.

Pratyahāra is the controlling of the mind and not allowing it to attach itself to physical centres. It is that part of yoga which keeps in check the outgoing powers of the mind, freeing it from the clutches of the senses. He who has succeeded in controlling his mind by detaching his mind from the centres at will is one who has succeeded in pratyahara.

1. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works Vol. I P-137
Dhārana which forms the next step is where the mind is held or confined to certain, definite points.

Dhyāna is meditation. This meditation state is the highest state of existence. It is only the contemplative, witness like study of objects that brings to us real enjoyment and happiness. After this stage the mind transcends consciousness and all sense of egoism is lost. When the mind goes beyond this level of self consciousness it is called Samādhi or Super-consciousness. All the different steps in yōga are intended to take the aspirant to the final state of Superconsciousness or Samādhi.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda taught the four different yōgas as different ways of realizing the same Truth and this realisation the Supreme Being as one without a second is what is sought after as liberation or mokṣa. Swāmi Vivēkānanda believed that self realisation is not an other worldly experience but it is a real and palpable experience that can be got in this world itself. But to have that realisation the individual needs to be radically regenerated morally, religiously and spiritually. The main aim of the yogas taught by Swāmi Vivēkānanda help us to discern the being that is behind all becoming. No doubt it is not easy to reach it, but one should know and concentrate on that which exists of itself above and continues to be such when the seeker with one pointed determination sees the truth he becomes spiritually free. By undergoing these yōgas the mind gets purified and truth dawns and the ineffable peace is experienced for the self is realised as Brahman itself in this very life and this is liberation.