

Action and Liberation

Ram (James Swartz)

2018-04-06

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3538>

Action and Liberation

The first stage of the spiritual journey is *karma* (action) *yoga*, and last stage is *jnana* (knowledge) *yoga*. Both are equally important and must be followed sequentially. These *yogas* have been taught by generations of teachers for millennia.

Without knowing which stage you are in, how can you know where you are going? A *karma yogi* has several goals of which liberation is the primary goal. Liberation is freedom from change and mortality. It is freedom from dependence on objects (*samsara*) for one's happiness.

To gain freedom, several contributory spiritual practices cultivate the required qualities of mind and heart. Explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*, they are called *dharma*s, right actions. *Dharma* is the means, and liberation is the goal of *karma yogis*, who consistently follow a *dharmic* lifestyle under the guidance of a qualified *guru* to gain freedom. Without a *dharmic* lifestyle, liberation is impossible.

Eventually, as a result of his study of the scriptures, a dedicated *karma yogi* will arrive at a deep and disturbing conclusion regarding liberation, which may take some time to fully assimilate: liberation is not an achievable goal. **Chasing freedom is futile, like chasing mirage water. Scripture gives a logical reason: freedom is eternal, meaning that it exists in the past, present and future. Therefore it is available here and now.**

So it is never separate from me. It is an already accomplished fact. Hence liberation is paradoxically described as "accomplishing the already accomplished." **If it is only gained in the future, it is not possible, because it exists in the past and present as well.** Just as darkness and light cannot both exist in the one place, freedom cannot be both a goal and our real nature (*siddham*). Scripture repeatedly drives home the message that you are immortal, which does not imply that the body-mind-sense complex will last forever. Only you, the knower of the body-mind, is immortal. A *karma yogi* must fully imbibe this fact and imprint it firmly on his mind by repeated study of Vedantic scriptures. When it has been assimilated, the first stage of the spiritual journey is over and the *karma yogi* becomes a *jnana yogi*.

A *jnana yogi* is determined to root out the idea that liberation is a wondrous experience that will happen one fine day. *Jnana yoga* takes time because we stubbornly cling to this idea; all our actions since birth are centered around getting things we don't have. This idea needs to be stricken from both the conscious and unconscious minds by internally asserting the truth – "I am limitless, ever-present, unchanging, existence/awareness" – and other identity *mantras* found throughout the scriptures. A *jnana yogi* practices this affirmation until it is his or her natural state of mind. Unlike a *karma yogi*, liberation is not a goal for a *jnana yogi*, so *dharma* is not a practice for him.

Who is a *jnani*? One for whom *dharma* is spontaneous, not a practice, and who knows "I am free whether or not I 'feel' free." To claim that you are free is not a declaration of your greatness, because freedom is the nature of everybody. There

was never a time when you weren't free. It is just a simple, truthful statement about the nature of the self.

A *jnana yogi* is a doer deliberately engaged in the practice of asserting his ever-free nature at all times. When this knowledge completely destroys his belief that freedom is an event that happens in the future, the doership-achievership mindset dissolves and he is a *jnani*, not a *jnana yogi*. In all "stages" we diligently observe *dharma* as a goal or as a spontaneous expression of our nature, our *svadharma*.