

Ten Incorrect Views of Liberation (mokṣa) according to Adi Shankaracharya

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Inspiration: Balasubramanian R. The Advaita View of Liberation. The Voice of Sankara Vol. 15_4_1991

- I. Liberation is "not going to" Brahman after departing from the body.
- II. Liberation is "not a transformation" of a Jiva into Brahman.
- III. Liberation is "not an absorption in" or "becoming one" with Brahman.
- IV. Liberation is "not attaining the causal condition" of Brahman.

Note: These wrong standpoints would indicate a "real" difference between a Jiva and Brahman, which contradicts Advaita Siddhānta. Also refuted by Adi Shankara [tasmānmithyāpratyañanimitatvātsaśārīratvasya **"Thus since embodiedness is the result of wrong perception"** Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 1.1.4].

Furthermore, Adi Shankara taught:

na ca deśakālanimitāpekṣo mokṣaḥ karmaphalavat bhavitumarhati
anityatvaprasaṅgāt [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 4.1.13]

"Besides, liberation, unlike the results of work, cannot be produced by a concurrence of place, time, and causation, since that would make it impermanent."

- V. Liberation is not an emptiness (śūnya).

Note: Why?

ekasya anekasvabhāvatvānupapatteḥ [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 3.2.21]

Since the same entity cannot have many natures.

sataśca anyasya ātmahānānupapattiḥ na ca asata ātmalābhah
[Taittirīya Upanishad Bhāṣya 2.8.5]

Something different that is true (sataḥ) cannot have its reality annihilated, nor can non-existence become (or attain) existence (na ca asata ātmalābhah).

- VI. The exhaustion of actions does not produce liberation.

anyathā hi anādikālapravṛttānām karmaṇām kṣayābhāve mokṣābhāvaḥ syāt [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 4.1.13]

For on a contrary supposition, if the results of works flowing down from eternity continue unhampered in their course, there can be no liberation.

VII. Liberation is not a form of meditation.

ato na puruṣavyāpāratantrā brahmavidyā [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 1.1.4] -- *Hence the knowledge of Brahman is not dependent on human action.*

VIII. Liberation is not an achievable state like types of Samadhi etc.

yathāprāptameva kartṛtvamupādāya samādhividhānāt | tasmātkartṛtvamapyātmana upādhanimittameveti sthitam [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 2.3.40]

For Samadhi is enjoined by accepting the conventional agentship [kartṛtvamupādāya]. Therefore, the conclusion stands firm that the agentship of the soul is a creation of the limiting adjuncts.

Again – na ca deśakālanimittāpekṣo mokṣaḥ karmaphalavat bhavitumarhati anityatvaprasaṅgāt [Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 4.1.13]

Besides, liberation, unlike the results of work, cannot be produced by a concurrence of place, time, and causation, since that would make it impermanent.

IX. Liberation is not "Mind-Extinction" (citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ) or the "Stillness of the Mind."

na hyātmavijñānatatsmṛtisantānavyatirekeṇa cittavṛttinirodhasya sādhanamasti abhyupagamyedamuktam, na tu brahmavijñānavyatirekeṇa anyanmokṣasādhanamavagamyate [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhāṣya 1.4.7]

*Besides there is no other means for the control of mental states except the knowledge of the Self and the train of remembrance about it. We have said this as a tentative admission; **really, we know of no other means of liberation except the knowledge of Brahman.***

X. Liberation is not really "true" (pāramārthika) but spoken of as figuratively

naiṣa doṣaḥ sarvasya pratyagātmatvādvagatireva gatirityupacaryate [Katha Upanishad Bhāṣya 1.3.11]

That is no fault. Since He is the indwelling Self of all, the fact of realizing Him is figuratively (upacaryate) spoken of as attaining Him.

Furthermore, in Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 1.1.4: atastadbrahma, yasyeyaṃ jijñāsā prastutā

"Therefore, liberation is the same as Brahman about which this deliberation is started." -- From the (ignorant) assumption of bondage, "liberation" is indicated as

nityamuktātmavarūpa (nature of being eternally liberated, Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya 1.1.4), because essentially there is no difference between liberation and Brahman.

As Gauḍapādāchārya said:

na nirodho na cotpattirna baddho na ca sādhaḥ |
na mumukṣurna vai mukta ityeṣā paramārthatā [Mandukya Karika. 2.32]

There is no dissolution, no birth, none in bondage, none aspiring for wisdom, no seeker of liberation and none liberated. This is the absolute truth.

Summary: What is termed as "liberation"?

Adi Shankara explained:

apī ca, avidyādisaṃsārabandhāpanayanameva mokṣamicchanti brahmavidāḥ, na tu kāryabhūtam [Mundaka Upanishad Bhāṣya 3.2.6]

The knowers of Brahman (brahmavidāḥ) accept only that liberation which consists of the removal of ignorance etc., and not that which is a product.

Another passage:

parasyāduḥkhitve 'nyasya ca duḥkhino 'bhāve duḥkhopaśamanāya
śāstrārambhānarthakyaṃ cet? na, avidyādhyāropitaduḥkhitvabhramāpohārthatvāt,
ātmani prakṛtasaṅkhyāpūraṇabhramāpohavat kalpitaduḥkhyātmābhyupagamācca
[Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhāṣya 1.4.7]

Objection: If the Supreme Self has no misery, and there is no other entity to be miserable, then it is useless for the scriptures to try to remove misery.

Reply: Not so, for they are meant to remove the false notion of misery superimposed by ignorance. And the Self being admitted to imagine Itself as miserable, the scriptures help to remove that error, as in the case of the failure to count the tenth man, although he was there.

Or as R. Balasubramanian formulated: According to Advaita, the realization [immediate recognition, aparokṣa anubhāva] of the true nature of the Self is release. It is ever free; it is of the nature of eternal release (nityamuktātmavarūpa). But its real nature is missed due to avidyā (ignorance). The Jiva is (essentially) Brahman itself. It is on account of the limiting adjuncts (upādhis) that it appears to be different from it.

OM TAT SAT

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