

Module 2 : Swami Vivekananda

Section 4 : Nature Of Liberation

If Maya, is only a name of the contradictions we see around, then should pose no problems as the previous thinkers thought. We should gladly accept it as facts and which is what Vivekananda wanted. However, one problem which even Vivekananda did not disagree to what Maya leads to as a consequence. This apparent contradiction leads man to doubt the existence of any absolute reality and in turn doubt the existence of this world as well. That waking-from-dream and finding dream to be illusion is all pervasive phenomena of human life. It is a psychologically valid extrapolation to extend that illusion to the world as a whole. After all, what we around is not absolutely certified! Though, Maya does not lead to any illusions, according to Vivekananda, owing to our ignorance about the truth, we are compelled to do actions, which we might not have done otherwise.

Vivekananda here endorses the prevalent theory of action in Indian philosophy. Our actions are determined by our desires, wishes, attitudes which are called *samskaras* in Indian philosophy. Every action brings with it its own consequences. We have to get the fruits of our actions, be it reward or punishment. Till, the consequences of all the actions are borne by us, soul takes birth after birth. This cycle of birth-rebirth traps the soul and makes it ignorant, and thus, away from its essentially divine and free nature. Freedom is the essential nature of soul, and so its divinity. But when it performs action because of ignorance according to its *samskaras*, it gets attached to the fruits of those actions which are borne by the body it is housed in. But this bondage, i.e. soul's being attached with the body, is only apparent, for essential nature of the soul is freedom. But, we don't know this truth. The moment we realize our true nature, the cycle of birth-death ceases to have its impact on soul. This realization leads to *mukti* or liberation of the soul. Vivekananda, through Yoga, gives us the way to bring this realization.

Too many things got coupled with one concept! Let's take all of them one by one. One can ask, ***first of all, if soul is essentially free, then how it gets enslaved? What leads to its bondage? What is bondage in fact?*** Vivekananda agrees the prevalent conceptions of bondage and slavery, but interpret them in his own terms. For Vivekananda, bondage means attached to the materialistic desires of the gross body. Bonding with senses for him is slavery leading to soul's incessant effort in fulfilling the sensual pleasures and avoiding pains. This leads to soul forgetting its inherently divine nature. This seems, at first glance, inconsistent with Vivekananda's conception of the nature of man. But it is only apparent. Vivekananda never rejected the body-aspect of man, rather he forcefully maintained that man consists of physical and the spiritual aspects. But, in bondage, soul concentrates only on physical aspects, forgetting the divine ones. The contradiction of life, which Vivekananda called Maya, is the result of this ignorance only. We want something else, and we do something quite differently leading to miseries. The moment the soul comes to know or realize its true nature, which is divine, it sheds the bonds of slavery. Thus, it is the ignorance of its divine nature that leads soul to bondage. The moment the soul realizes its inherent divine and free nature, it attains immortality. Vivekananda calls it the ultimate destiny of the soul. Soul's immortality is the result of all the effort of self-realization.

But one may ask ***what is the proof that soul would really attain immortality? What is the proof, in fact, that soul does attain immortality?*** Towards this end, Vivekananda replies that there are enough reasons to maintain that soul's immortality is a fact. First reason is purely psychological in that it is the, "inability of our mind to conceive our own annihilation. Even to imagine that my own annihilation, I shall have to stand by and look on as a witness."²⁵

Given that, it could be asked, ***what is realization? Is it possible to attain by everyone? What should soul do to realize its true nature, i.e. what are the ways of realization?*** To this, Vivekananda answers that realization consists in soul's realizing its true nature, which is divine and free, and this leads to immortality of the soul. The nature of immortality is pure bliss and full of knowledge. This is logical outcome. This is because, recall, what leads to bondage of the soul? The ignorance! What is the consequence of this bondage? Suffering! What perpetuates this suffering? The cycle of birth and death! So, naturally, when man achieves liberation, with it will go the ignorance and the suffering. On their place, would come, knowledge and bliss! Regarding its possibility, Vivekananda says that liberation is possible to attain by everybody. Soul's immortality is nothing new that happens to it by the conscious effort of the soul. Rather, as tree is potentially hidden in the seed, liberation is potentially existing in the soul. Only soul does not know about it. That is why, Vivekananda's repeated emphasis on self-

realization.

²⁵ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 4, p. 254