



What Is True Freedom?

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

BECAUSE THE innermost Self is absolutely free, a deep love for freedom exists in every living being. Freedom, in the true sense, is the state of Liberation, when the soul is released from the bondage of karma and embodiment. The attainment of freedom is the goal before every spiritual aspirant.

An interesting parable illustrates this point:



The Wisdom of a Parrot

There was once a farmer in the Middle East who had a parrot for a pet. It so happened that this farmer had an opportunity to go to India. Before departing, he asked his daughters what they would like him to bring back as gifts. Each one of them had some idea of what she wanted— silken dresses, rare spices, and other luxurious things.

Then he asked the parrot what he would like, and it said, “Please find a flock of parrots there and give them a message. The message is ‘How can I attain freedom?’”

The farmer turned to the parrot and said, “You silly bird, you should forget about freedom. Aren’t you happy inside the cage? I give you food and water. I also talk to you and give you a lot of attention. Why should you seek freedom? Nevertheless, for curiosity’s sake, I will convey your message even though I already know the answer. Whatever it is, it’s going to stay right there with you in the cage, because I’m not letting you go. I love you so much.”

“All right,” said the parrot, “Just convey my message and bring back the answer, whatever it might be. I have heard that the parrots in India are Sages and that they have profound wisdom and insight.”

So the farmer traveled to India and bought the things that his daughters had requested. Then suddenly, he remembered the parrot’s message. Accordingly, he traveled by the banks of the Ganges River until, in a certain Himalayan valley, he found a group of parrots gathered together. He approached them and called out, “I have a parrot in the Middle East, and he has given me a message to convey to you.”

Many of the parrots flew away, but one of their leaders stayed there and listened to him. The farmer continued, “My parrot wants to know, ‘How can I attain freedom?’”

After hearing the message, the wise Indian parrot didn’t say a word. He just turned stiff and cold and then fell down dead. The man felt miserable. “Why did I come here to convey this unnecessary message?” he thought to himself.

Deeply regretful, he returned home, bringing back the things that his daughters had requested. And then his parrot, lifting its foot, asked him, “What about my message to the parrots? How did they answer the question?”

The farmer replied, “Don’t ask me for the answer. It was the wrong thing to do. I shouldn’t have done it, but still I did it for your sake. I really regret it.”

The parrot said, “Please tell me what happened.” And the farmer answered, “I went there and told a flock of parrots that my parrot wanted to attain freedom. The other parrots flew away, but one of their leaders listened to me. Unfortunately, by the time I finished talking, it had fallen down dead, and then I left.”

As he turned to his parrot, suddenly, much to his horror and amazement, that beloved bird too became cold and stiff and fell down dead. The man started beating his head and ripping his clothes, but he couldn’t do anything more. He opened the door of the cage, brought the parrot out, and started grieving over it. Then he thought about how he was going to dispose of the body.

Amazingly though, the minute the man turned away, the parrot began to flutter his wings and flew up to top of the roof. From there he said to his master, “I understood the message that the Indian parrot gave to you. The secret of freedom lies in dying. The moment I adopted that secret, you let me go. You had no choice.”

THE MEANING behind this mystic story is that the soul is as if in prison and the ego keeps it locked up. Prison implies a life that

is confined to the mind and senses and guided by the ego. In Vedanta philosophy, it is called *Jiva Shrishti*. Every individual has adopted values and concepts that are based upon his conditioned mind. Such a world is liked a cage. From morning to night the mind is trying to obey the concerns of the ego. There is constant thought about the memories of the past and the expectations for the future.

In the midst of all these worries and expectations, there is no possibility for a person to commune with universal life, even though that is the essence of one’s soul. The soul does not belong to this prison-world. Its real world is the world of freedom.

HOW, THEN, does one attain freedom? The secret lies in dying to your egoistic life and to the values that are based on the mind and senses. It lies in dying to *Jiva Shrishti*—the creation you have evolved because of egoistic vision. You must understand that this death is a subtle, mystical transformation.

In practice, what this implies is to allow your intellect to be above attachment and hatred and above praise and censure, as if you were dead to this world. The world that is so important to the senses and the egoistic mind should become in-

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significant. You are dead to the world when you are in deep sleep, but in this state, you have not understood the illusion of the world. So when you wake up, the world is real again. If you were to be dead to the world even during the waking state, then you would be enlightened. That is possible only when intellect becomes intuitive. Thus, developing intuition must be your goal.

In order to attain this goal, you must reduce the sway of attachment and hatred and preoccupation with the procession of thoughts about past, present, and future events that captures the mind. This is possible by first developing *shubbha vasanas* or Divine impressions.



The Bondage of Ego's Creation

Jiva Srishti—the creation based on your ego—is of two types: *satwic* or *rajasic-tamasic*. When you begin to delight in *satsanga* (good-association), meditation, *samadhi* (super-consciousness), serenity and goodness, you gather impressions that are like a thin veil, allowing you to see the Self beyond your individualistic creation. On the other hand, *rajasic-tamasic* impressions are like a thick veil. You can't see beyond them, and life becomes a prison. The moment your creation is *satwic* and you see beyond your mental impressions, you begin to die to this

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world, and your ego becomes dumbfounded. It doesn't know what to do.

When this happens, your soul slips beyond the cage, unfurls its wings of infinity and eternity and soars in the realm of transcendence. It becomes one with *Brahman*. This is the art of spiritual Enlightenment. The parrot knew this art. It is up to human beings to appreciate the teachings of the parrot in order to be free.

Freedom through Discipline



Real freedom cannot be attained if one is driven by the senses and by desires. Therefore, sincere seekers of spiritual freedom must learn how to discipline the mind and senses in a profound and artful manner.

A small child's concept of freedom involves entering into the cookie jar and eating all the sweets. Whenever he sees his mother nearby looking at him sternly, he feels his freedom is being taken away. But if he were given the freedom that he desired, the child would become quite ill.

Once in India a group of college students thought of creating a society identified as a "free-thinking society." Their idea was that everyone should think according to the way fancy drives the mind. There should be no restriction in thought.

They invited a prominent man to give an opening lecture, and to their surprise he said, "What type of people are you, free-thinking? Only two types of people indulge in absolutely unbridled thoughts: children and lunatics! Cultured people always put a restriction on their thoughts and fancies." Of course, the very commencement was bad for the society, and it dissolved before it was ever formed.

It is common in modern times for people to feel that only if they are given complete freedom can they unfold their potentiality and prosper. If they are not given freedom, they feel restricted and hopelessly thwarted. There is a tremendous error in a concept of freedom that boasts an abhorrence towards discipline.

DISCIPLINE is of two types: discipline that is imposed upon a person and discipline that a person adopts by his choice. When a discipline is imposed upon a person, that discipline can, in certain situations, be highly detrimental to one's growth.

As a humorous example, suppose a person who has no spiritual aspiration is pushed into a temple by an over-eager devotee and given a *mala* (rosary). The devotee then waits with a whip in his hand until the person has finished his repetition of mantra and says, "I won't let you up until you have attained Liberation."

Of course this is absurd! One cannot impose spirituality on another person. But, if a person enjoys repetition of mantra by his own choice, that spiritual discipline joyously leads him to higher experiences.

A SUBTLE INSIGHT into disciplining is important in bringing up children. Without a loving environment in the home, discipline takes the form of pressure and compulsion. But when parents radiate the warmth of love, children begin to understand the need for the discipline that their parents promote, and realize that things are not being cruelly imposed upon them. Once that understanding develops, they become grateful to those who are disciplining them.

SIMILARLY, suppose you have planned to wake up early in the morning to practice meditation or other spiritual disciplines, and someone, seeing you sleeping, wakes you up. At the moment they awaken you, you feel a little bitter because you have been enjoying a comfortable sleep. But, nevertheless, you thank the person who woke you up because you have chosen that discipline and you know that they are helping you keep your resolves.

In ancient times, aspirants went to an ashram with fuel on their heads and approached the Guru saying, "We have come. Discipline us. Lead us to Self-realization. Just as the fuel burns, let our karmas, *samskaras* (subtle unconscious impressions), and *vasanas* (subtle desires) burn under

your guidance." Thus, they adopted and accepted the discipline in a very simple and symbolic way.

Sometimes you see that when a little puppy learns how wonderful it is to be trained by his master, he even brings his leash to the master, as if saying, "Here, take it and lead me around." So too, a spiritual disciple brings the "leash" of his personality and places it in the hands of their spiritual preceptor, in the hands of God, as if saying, "Discipline me, lead me to Self-realization. Let me not remain bound to the realm of the senses."

TO THE VAST majority of people, uninhibited exploration of the world of senses seems like freedom, and doing things according to whim seems most wonderful. But that development is actually slavery because one's will becomes weak. When will becomes weak, you cannot relax. Your mind is always imagining and expecting. You are always planning what to do next to experience some excitement.

Most people are constantly expecting some gratification from the world of senses. What they interpret as prosperity is to own big cars and yachts, to fly in planes, to run from one place to another—never to sit quietly, but always to have something to chase after.

But that is not prosperity. That is actually a state of bondage—a state in which the mind

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never relaxes, there is no reflection, and negative karmas are created day by day. Prosperity is that state in which one has stopped creating karmas and burned up the old ones through Enlightenment. To attain that goal, the mind should control the senses, pure intellect should control the mind, and pure intellect should be guided by Divine Will. If that development occurs in your personality, you enjoy prosperity beyond your imagination.

Aitareya Upanishad tells of Sage Vamadeva's attaining Enlightenment while still in his mother's womb. In his previous life he had destroyed so many negative karmas and was a highly advanced Yogi. But due to some small obstruction, he did not complete the process of Enlightenment. As he was about to be born, the obstruction was removed, and even while he was in the womb his spirit attained Enlightenment.

Since the spirit has an amazing way of expressing itself, it can speak out without vocal chords. So, the unborn Vamadeva cried out, "I have been fettered by a thousand iron bars, but I have broken them all and I fly like a hawk and nothing can pull me down! I have been the gods, I have been all and I am all." That is the state of Enlightenment—which is the highest freedom.

One must, therefore, view life as a journey to freedom and one should be diligent. Exercising their reason, one should follow a process of austerity and allow their mind and senses to be well-disciplined.

Whenever adversity comes, realize that apparent adversity is Nature's way of urging you to be more and more disciplined. God operating through Nature is urging you to face adversity and bitterness in your life with a philosophical understanding and a spirit of austerity.

You are never crippled by adversity; rather your will becomes enhanced by it. Austerity and discipline, if properly understood, will lead you to a state of invincible will and the enjoyment of limitless freedom!!



FROM SWAMIJI'S KITCHEN

Mango Yogurt

Sugar: 1/2 Cup or to taste
Cardamom Powder: 1/4 tsp
or to taste
Sour Cream: 6 oz
Cottage Cheese: 6 oz
Yogurt: 16 oz
Mango Puree, filtered: 3/4 - 1 cup

Mix cardamom and sugar in a mixing bowl.

Add sour cream and mix until sugar dissolves and mixture is pudding-like.

Add yogurt and mix well.

Add cottage cheese and mix.

Puree mango in a blender and then strain using large strainer and round bottom ladle.

Stir strained mango into yogurt mixture. Chill and serve cold.

Enjoy, while meditating on the beautiful mango grove and luscious mangoes at Swamiji's ashram!