

## A YOGA FOR LIBERATION:<sup>1</sup> RAMANUJA'S APPROACH

According to Ramanuja, and the Indian way of thinking in general, the association of the individual self with the body is considered to be a bondage. It is a bondage because it restricts the freedom of the self which is essentially spiritual and God-like. By itself the individual self is capable of participating in the divine bliss; but because of the body which is of material nature (*prakṛti*), it becomes attached to matter and to the pleasures and pains arising from the material nature. Body is, thus, the bondage of the self. Though essentially eternal and blissful, existentially the individual self is in bondage. This is the tragedy of the individual self, and the sad predicament it finds itself in.

This state of bondage is characterized by ignorance (*avidya*). Ignorance is the basic misapprehension of the self that "the self is this body". Due to this ignorance false tendencies develop, whereas the developed tendencies confirm the self in its state of ignorance.

Ignorance is related to work (*karma*). The state of bondage—the state of ignorance—is considered to be the result of one's past works (*karma*), the beginning of which is not known. In the state of bondage, ignorance inspires work (*karma*), and *karma* brings about rebirth and rebirth again a new series of *karma*. Thus the *karma*-bound process of transmigration goes on and on.

This existential predicament of the self is very depressing. There is still a ray of hope left and, thanks to this, the self is

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1. Liberation *mukti* or *moksa* is, derived from the root *muc* which means "to set free", "to release". *Mukti* or *Moksa* means both the act of liberation and the state of liberation in which the individual self enjoys the freedom of the Spirit. For a detailed discussion on the concept of *mukti* cf. A.G. Krishna Warriar, *The Concept of Mukti in Advaita-Vedanta* (Madras: University Press, 1961).

constantly striving to break the chains of its bondage. The breaking of this bondage is known as liberation, which is the Hindu equivalent of salvation. It is setting the self free from material superstructures it is subjected to. Once the self is liberated it comes out in the unblemished light and splendour of the divine. It becomes like God which it is supposed to be. This liberation from the material Nature is the immediate goal of the transmigrating self.

The quest for such a liberation is seen in the self along with its awareness of bondage. The idea of bondage, the encasement of the spiritual self in a material framework, reminds it of its ideal existence and forces it to strive after it.

Liberation is, thus, first of all the separation of the self from its bodily limitations. In this way, the ideal of liberation according to Hindu thinking entails a certain degree of discrimination between the self and its body. And since body in its wider sense represents everything that is material, the discrimination of the self from the body is to be understood as the separation of the self from the material universe. A minimum degree of discrimination is, therefore, necessary to begin the process of liberation.

This is the function of Yoga,<sup>2</sup> namely, to guide the aspirant of spirituality along the path of discrimination.<sup>3</sup> Though it begins with a sense of discrimination it—properly made use of—ends up with a fullness of vision in which one sees all in all. It does not however, mean that in the final vision all distinctions would vanish. Sankara's monism maintains the abolition of all distinctions in the final state. But according to Ramanuja, as we will see later, even in the final vision, the separation between the Supreme and the individual self is maintained.

Yoga, which is the way to final release, is said to be three-fold. They are the yoga of work (*karmayoga*), the yoga of knowledge (*jñānayoga*), and the yoga of loving devotion (*bhaktiyoga*). In his *Gītābhāṣya*, Ramanuja speaks at length on these three yogas, especially on the *bhaktiyoga* which, according to him, is the way *par excellence*. However, these three yogas are not to be

2. Yoga is derived from the root *yuj* which primarily means "to unite" and is related to the Latin "*jungere*" and the English "yoke".  
3. It is to be noted that yoga is related to the discriminative seeing of the differences about which the Samkhyan school of "Distinctions" speaks.

understood as unrelated and absolutely independent ways of salvation. They are highly inter-related and mutually complementary. As Yāmunaçārya, the predecessor of Ramanuja says "all three yogas are inter-connected."<sup>4</sup>

The teaching of the *Gītā* was traditionally understood as divided into three ways, viz., the way of work, the way of wisdom, and the way of devotion. This has been questioned by modern authors. Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gītā*<sup>5</sup> rejects this traditional division and Prof. R.C. Zaehner comments that "he is certainly right"<sup>6</sup> in doing so. It could be said that the *Gītā* teaches one way of salvation which comprises in itself different steps and culminates in the loving communion with the divine. This at least is the vision of Ramanuja, a view which has been clarified in what follows.

Since the ways of salvation have much to do with yoga, and since "yoga is the key-word of the *Bhagavad-gītā*"<sup>7</sup> on which Ramanuja himself comments, it will be good to see the meaning of the word yoga in the *Gītā* from the very beginning of this study. Yoga, which Patanjali defines as "concentration"<sup>8</sup> and "cessation of discursive thought"<sup>9</sup>, assumes a variety of meanings in the *Gītā*. The main objective of the yoga is integration of personality; this integration is necessary because man in bondage is split in himself and fragmented. Yoga is meant "to abolish multiplicity and fragmentation, to re-integrate, to unify, to make whole."<sup>10</sup> As the objectives intended, yoga is called "integration" and the integrated man is *yukta*<sup>11</sup> a participial adjective formed from the root *yuj* of the word yoga. This integration is obtained by spiritual exercises and hence yoga is also known as "spiritual exercises."<sup>12</sup> Since spiritual

4. *trayanam api yoganam tribhir anyonya-sangamah. Gītarthasamgraha*, 24; Eng. Tr. by J.A.B. Van Buitenen in *Ramanuja on the Bhagavadgita* (Delhi: Motilal Benarsidas, 1968) pp. 177-182.  
5. *Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1922) p. 88.  
6. *Concordant Discord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) p. 133.  
7. *Ibid.* p. 122.  
8. *Samādhi*, (*Yogasūtra*, I. 2)  
9. *cittavrtti-nirodha*, (*Yogasūtra*, I. 2).  
10. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (2nd ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 97.  
11. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.8. Throughout this article we have used Prof. R. C. Zaehner's edition and English version (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). Henceforward *BC*  
12. *BC*, 6.20.

exercise entails activities which are to be performed with skill, yoga is also defined in the *Gitā* as "skill in performing work."<sup>13</sup> But all the activities, no matter what they are, are to be performed in a spirit of complete detachment.<sup>14</sup> The resultant attitude or state of mind of such a yogin will be that of "sameness and indifference."<sup>15</sup> Yoga is, therefore, as Prof. R.C. Zaehner rightly summarizes, "integration" and "spiritual exercise" culminating in "sameness and indifference."<sup>16</sup>

The three yogas are sometimes called three *mārgas* (ways) which, though not identical, have a striking similarity with the three ways of Christian perfection: the purgative, illuminative and unitive.

### *The Yoga of Work (Karmayoga)*

*Karmayoga*, or the yoga of work, is supposed to be the first step in the path of salvation. "For the silent sage who would climb (the ladder of) spiritual exercise, the performance of duties constitutes the means."<sup>17</sup> *Karmayoga* has been known of old, is natural to man, and hence easy to perform.<sup>18</sup> It is that means of liberation in which *karma* predominates. The "works" mentioned here are primarily acts of worship such as performance of "obligatory and occasional rites."<sup>19</sup> Other duties such as the duties of one's own caste laid down by the *sāstras* are also included.<sup>20</sup> But mere performance of work is not *karmayoga*. It is the performance of the work with a particular disposition of mind. Referring to performance of duties Ramanuja defines yoga as follows:

Whatever disposition of mind (*buddhiyoga*) has to be spoken of in regard to the performance of duties preceded by a

13. *yoga karmasu kausalam*, (BG, 2.50)

14. BG, 5.7.

15. BG, 2.48.

16. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 25.

17. BG, 6.3.

18. *Gitābhāṣya*, by Ramanuja 4. 1-2, Eng. Tr. by Sampathkumaran M.R. *The Gitābhāṣya of Ramanuja* (Madras: Prof. M. Rangacarya Memorial Trust, 1969). Henceforward GB. For Sanskrit Original of all Ramanuja's works Cf. *Sri Bhagavad-Ramanuja Granthamala* ed. by P.B. Annangaracarya Swamy (Kancheepuram: Granthamala Office, 1956). Henceforward RG.

19. *nityeshu naimittikeshu karmasu* (GB, 2.41).

20. GB, 16.24; Cf. GB, 2.41.

knowledge of the self, forms the means for the attainment of salvation, that (disposition of mind) indeed, is here signified by the word, "yoga"... By practically adopting that attitude of mind, you will get rid of the bondage of *karma*.<sup>21</sup>

We have seen that *karma* was the cause of bondage which puts the self in the sea of *sāmsāra*. If action was the cause of bondage, action itself can become the cause of release too. In order that action become the cause of release, one has to act in due disposition. For this he has to apply his *buddhi* (mind and will) to the action. In other words *buddhiyoga* should characterize his *karma*. This is because it was action in which the *buddhi* was not properly applied that caused the bondage of the self. Such were the actions inspired by *avidyā*. After having obtained an amount of self-knowledge by the study of the *sāstrās*, the aspirant is now in a position to apply the *buddhi* properly to its action and thereby to gain the right disposition for it. And the right disposition consists in "renouncing all results, the main as well as the adventitious ones."<sup>22</sup> The actions should be performed to one purpose, release which is the only purpose of the *sāstrās*.<sup>23</sup>

Action as such is indifferent. It is desire and attachment to the result of action that matters. As Ranklin Edgerton puts it "desire or passion is more fundamental than action."<sup>24</sup> Action or work is, therefore, not something wrong. Performed selflessly, it can even become salvific, a means for final release. But desire is binding. Action binds through desire. Action binds by attaching the self to the result of the action. Action binds when it is done in ignorance of the real self and mistaking the body for the self. Action binds again by making the self believe that it is the real agent of work which in reality it is not. And from the very outset of his history man has been action-bound (*karmabaddhab*).

In order to free himself from this bondage of *karma* he has to perform action in a new spirit. He has to reverse the process. If action with attachment caused the bondage of the self, it has to strive for its release by performing action with detachment. Detached activity becomes the threshold of salvation.

21. GB, 2.39.

22. GB, 2.41.

23. *Ibid.*

24. BG. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964; first published in 1944 as Vol. 38 in the Harvard Oriental Series) p. 159.

With body, mind, soul and senses alone, and, isolated (from the self) do men engaged in spiritual exercise engage in action renouncing attachment for the cleaning of the self.<sup>25</sup>

Action is to be performed with the spirit of detachment. This is what makes *karma* a *karmayoga*. *Karmayoga* is, thus, "renunciation in action and not renunciation of action."<sup>26</sup> Of the two states of action and non-action the *Gītā* recommends that of action,<sup>27</sup> but action with the spirit of perfect detachment. One has to renounce not only the result of action but also the title of agency. In fact man is not the agent of the action. In the last analysis, action belongs to God alone.

Cast all your works on me your thoughts (withdrawn) in what appertains to self; have neither hope nor thought that this is mine: Fight.<sup>28</sup>

*Karmayoga* demands a radical renunciation, an uncompromising spirit of giving up. This has already been suggested in the *Gītā* before.<sup>29</sup> But by merely giving up one may not advance in the spirit of perfect detachment. As Prof. Zaehner puts it, "a more fruitful way of 'giving-them-up' is here suggested: giving them up by casting them on the Lord."<sup>30</sup> In doing so man only remains true to himself. He acknowledges the real agent of the work, who is God. Commenting on the verse quoted above Ramanuja writes:

Therefore, make over to me who am the Supreme Person, all activities regarding them as being done by Me, meditating on the form of self as to be set into activity by Me only, on account of its being My body. And perform them, looking upon them merely as acts of workshop to Me. Becoming free from hope in regard to their fruits and hence free from any thought that they are yours, perform actions like fighting in the war without the fever (of anxiety).<sup>31</sup>

25. BG, 5.11.

26. N.S. Anantharangachar; *The Philosophy of Sadhana in Visishtadvaita* p. 104.

27. BG, 5.2

28. BG, 3.30.

29. BG, 3.4.

30. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita* p. 172.

31. GB, 8.30.

In giving up works to God man is giving them up to the very source they came from. In asking man to work with a dispassionate spirit the *Gītā* demands man to be like God in his works. For "the truly perfected man resembles God both in his unutterable tranquillity and spontaneous activity."<sup>32</sup> And this is the high ideal the *Gītā* asks man to strive for. We see here a kind of dilemma: on the one hand there is work which ensures liberation or spiritual freedom. On the other hand there is transcendence over all works which is the state of repose in liberation. The eternal rest that is of the nature of God can only be won by acting like God, viz., by acting without being involved. In spite of his action, man should remain unattached. One way of doing this is to leave all action to God,<sup>33</sup> the real agent of the work, who makes use of all the creatures which form his body to suit his purposes.

To act so dispassionately is not easy for human nature. It is not in line with man's tendency. He needs the divine grace to proceed along his path of self-denial.

Among thousands of men but one, may be, will strive for (self) perfection, and even among (these) athletes who have won perfection ('s) crown but one, may be, will come to know Me as I really am.<sup>34</sup>

But in their ascent to God they do receive generous help from God who is "a shoreless ocean of compassion, goodness, love and generosity,"<sup>35</sup> and has revealed himself "repeatedly to various worlds in order that He might be worshipped by the beings who live in these worlds."<sup>36</sup>

Once man has learned to act dispassionately casting off all his words on God he becomes integrated and his state is that of "sameness and indifference" in all things.

As one indifferent he sits, by the constituents unruffled: "So the constituents are busy": thus he thinks. Firm-based is he, unquavering. The same in pleasure as in pain and self-assured, the same when faced with clods of earth or stones of gold; for him wise man, are friend and

32. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita* p. 18.

33. R.C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* p. 134.

34. BG, 7.3.

35. GB, Introduction.

36. *Ibid.*

foe of equal weight, equal the praise or blame (with which men cover him). Equal (his mind) in honour and disgrace, equal to ally and to enemy, he renounces every (busy) enterprise: "He has transcended the Constituents": so must men say.<sup>37</sup>

The constituents of the material Nature are Goodness (*satva*), Passion (*rajas*) and Darkness (*tamas*). The misapprehension of the self was effected by the interplay of the constituents and remains unruffled by them. As to the meaning of the passage, Rāmānuja adds:

He is wise: he is skilled in distinguishing between the *prakṛti* and the self. For him praise and blame are equal: he is equal-minded toward praise and blame that are raised by the good or bad qualities associated with the human and such other states of being, thinking that he is not connected with them.... Thus he gives up every enterprise arising from his embodied self. He who is like this is said to have transcended the constituents.<sup>38</sup>

In the beginning of this discussion on yoga we spoke of discrimination as an essential step in the path of salvation (liberation). Now discrimination bears its fruit. According to Rāmānuja, dispassionate activity is the fruit of proper discrimination. The spirit of discrimination leads man to right evaluation of things and the right evaluation leads him to the spirit of renunciation. He renounces all renunciation. He renounces all attachment to material Nature. This gives him balance of mind. He acts dispassionately and his works are no more mere *karma* but *karmayoga*. They are no more binding; on the contrary they turn out to be salvific.

But *karmayoga* is only one aspect of the great yoga of liberation which includes also the aspects of *jñāna* and *bhakti*. These are dealt within the following sections.

### *The Yoga of Wisdom (Jñānayoga)*

From what has been said, it is clear that self-renunciation is the special feature of *karmayoga*. This is analogous to what is obtained in the tradition of the Christian perfection by the

37. *GB*, 14. 23-25.

38. *GB*, 2. 24-25.

purity of intention. By the practice of purity of intention the aspirant is always instructed to remain unselfish in all his actions.

This kind of *karmayoga* already involves in itself aspects of *jñāna* and *bhaktiyoga*. The renunciation is made easy when the true self is encountered and action is attributed to God, the real agent of all actions. Thus both *jñāna* and *bhakti* blend in the *karmayoga*. Continued practice of *karmayoga*, however, deepens one's knowledge of the self.

*Karmayoga*, which is preceded by a knowledge of the real nature of the self, based on the *sāstras*, leads to a firm devotion to knowledge known as the state of steady wisdom; and the state of steady wisdom which is in the form of devotion to knowledge, brings about the vision of the self known as yoga.<sup>39</sup>

The path of salvation begins with the knowledge of the self obtained from the *sāstras*. This leads to self-renunciation. And self-renunciation in action leads to an equanimity of mind and a firm devotion to knowledge (*jñānanishta*). *Vedāntadesika* interprets *jñānanishta* as *jñānayoga*.<sup>40</sup> This interpretation seems to be right because it agrees with Rāmānuja's own reference to *jñānayoga*,<sup>41</sup> where he speaks of *yāthātmyadarsana* (self-vision) of the self-accomplishable by *jñānayoga*. In the same way, *jñānanishta* brings about a profound vision of the self (*ātmāvalokana*). *Jñānayoga* is defined by Yamunacārya as follows: "the fixation on the completely purified ātman with all his selfish end subdued."<sup>42</sup> From all these references it is clear that a deeper and clearer vision of the self is the goal of *jñānayoga*. Rāmānuja calls it *ātmāvalokana*<sup>43</sup> and *yāthātmyadarsana*.<sup>44</sup>

This vision of the self attained through *jñānanishta* or *jñānayoga* is not to be understood in the sense of the advaitin's *ātmaikyajñāna* which means the knowledge of self's identity with Brahman. In the school of *advaita* (non-dualism) *jñāna* means knowledge of the oneness of the self and *jñānayoga* is the supreme yoga

39. *GB*, 2. 53.

40. *Tatparyacandrika*. II. 53.

41. *GB*, 3. Introduction.

42. *Jñānayogo jītasvantaiḥ parisuddhatmani sthitiḥ* (*Gītarthasamgraha*, 23).

43. *GB*, 2. 53.

44. *GB*. 3. Introduction.

meant for the acquisition of this truth. "Pure self-knowledge alone is the means to the highest bliss".<sup>45</sup> This knowledge of the self culminates in the complete isolation of the self (*kaivalya*)<sup>46</sup> by which the self realizes itself to be Brahman. Since, in the system of *advaita* as we have seen before, no finite self exists apart from the Supreme Self, the question of self-realization does not arise apart from that of Brahma-realization. Self-realization itself is *brahmanization*. Accordingly, the paths of *karma* and *bhakti* are proposed in this system as the means for obtaining *cittasuddi* and *cittaikārgrya*, purification and concentration of mind and *jñānayoga* for *ātmaikyajñāna*.

This is not so in the school of *visishtādvaita* where *bhaktiyoga* is superior to the other two yogas. The *ātmaivalokana*, on the other hand, means the vision of the self as it is. And it sees itself similar to other selves all of whom have the same form of wisdom.

Because there is similarity between his self and other beings when they are in the state of separation from the *prakṛti*, (i.e. other selves), on account of all of them having only the nature of knowledge, and because the inequality among them rests on the *prakṛti* one whose mind is engaged in yoga has equality of vision everywhere, in respect of all selves as separated from the *prakṛti*, on account of their having the nature only of knowledge. He sees his self existing in all beings and all beings (or selves) in his self.<sup>47</sup>

Devoid of material Nature the self is of the form of pure knowledge. In this respect one self is similar to the other. It is material nature that veils the vision of this similarity. The integrated man, since he is free from the confusion caused by the material Nature, can see deep into the true nature of the self and thereby realizes the basic similarity the selves bear to one another when they are devoid of the material Nature.

This type of vision of the self is difficult and requires great concentration of mind. Hence Rāmānuja suggests *jñānayoga* only to those who are advanced in self-discipline. He prescribes *karmayoga* to the beginners "whose minds are agitated by the object of the senses"<sup>48</sup> and *jñānayoga* to those already advanced in the knowledge

45. Sankaracarya, *Gītabhāṣya*, 18. 66.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *GB*, 6. 29.

48. *GB*, 3.3.

of self<sup>49</sup> and "whose minds are not agitated by the sense objects".<sup>50</sup> This does not, however, mean that he understands them as two completely different disciplines. They are highly intertwined and are subordinate to *bhakti*. Both are capable of giving or yielding same fruit of the vision of the self.<sup>51</sup>

But the knowledge of the self, however good and desirable it may be, is not the final goal of salvation. It cannot bring man to that perfect felicity which he finds only in communion with God. *Bhaktiyoga* leads man to this blissful communion with God.

### *The Yoga of Devotion (Bhaktiyoga)*

In the preceding two sections we saw how self-renunciation and self-vision are important for an aspirant of liberation or spiritual freedom. In order to gain a perfect vision of the self, the *yogin* has to transcend the constituents (*gunas*) of the material Nature. Renunciation set the path for this goal. We also saw that renunciation is made easy by casting all the works on God.<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere the *Gītā* presents *bhakti*<sup>53</sup> as a direct means for conquering the constituents as well as attaining the knowledge of the self.

49. *GB*, 2. 53, 72.

50. *GB*, 3.3. Sometimes Rāmānuja speaks of the superiority of *karmayoga* over *jñānayoga* (*GB*, 3. 7-8) and hence *karmayoga* as preferable to *jñānayoga* (*Ibid.* 3.35). This may be understood as a reaction against the school of *advaita* where *jñānayoga* is superior to *bhaktiyoga*.

51. *GB*, 4.4.

52. See above footnote 28 of this article.

53. The word *bhakti* is derived from the root *bhaj* the original meaning of which is "to share in", "to participate in". In the Great Epic the root *bhaj* receives a variety of meaning such as "to inhere in", "to belong to", "to cultivate", "to enjoy", "to have sexual love", "to be loyal and devoted" etc. (Cf. M. Dhavamany. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. pp. 13-23). For Rāmānuja, as in the *Bhagavadgīta*, "it means devotion and loyalty to Krishna, the personal God, trust in him and love of him", (R.C. Zaehner *The Bhagavadgīta*, p. 26). For a general discussion on *Bhakti* apart from Dhavamany's work mentioned above (pp. 47-103). Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 125-246.; Olivier Lecombe, *L'Assolu selon le Vedanta*, (Paris 1973) p. 363ff. For the inter-relationship between *bhakti* and *dhyana* two different ways of experiencing the divine. Cf. Niniaian Smart, *The Yogi and the Devotee*. especially p. 36ff.

And as those who do Me honour with spiritual exercise, in loyalty-and-love (*bhaktiyogena*) undeviating, passed (clean) beyond these constituents, to becoming Brahman they are conformed.<sup>54</sup>

And Rāmānuja's commentary of this reads as follows:

Whoever serves me with loyalty-and-love, viz., with devotion that is qualified by singleness of purpose, such a man transcends the constituents (of *prakṛti*) such as goodness and others which are hard to transcend; He is fit for "becoming brahman", namely, for the state of brahmanhood. (In other words) he becomes worthy of the condition of brahman. The meaning is that he attains the immortal and imperishable self as it is in itself.<sup>55</sup>

Rāmānuja clearly understands the expression "becoming brahman" as attaining the self as it is in itself. The expression "becoming brahman" coupled with *brahmanirvāna* has already been used in the *Gītā* 5.24, where Rāmānuja understands *brahmanirvāna* as the bliss of brahman, which again consists in the "bliss of experiencing the self".<sup>56</sup> Both these expressions *brahmabhūta* (past participle of *brahmabhū*) meaning one who has become brahman, and *brahmanirvāna*, refer back to the *brāhmi sthitiḥ* (the fixed still-state of brahman) of 2.72 where also the expression *brahmanirvāna* occurs. Rāmānuja is consistent in his interpretations of all these passages. All these expressions, *brāhmi sthitiḥ* (2.72), *brahmanirvāna* (2.72; 5.240), *brahmabhū* (5.24; 14.26) to which he now adds *brahmatva* and *brahmabhāva* (GB. 14.26) mean for him the knowledge of the self as it is, the *ātmāvalokana* or the *yāthātmyadarsana* about which we spoke in the preceding section. The *brahmanirvāna* as well as its kindred noun *brahmabhūta* mark the Buddhist influence on Hindu thinking and is a Hindu equivalent of the Buddhist *Nirvāna*.<sup>57</sup> This kind of self-knowledge expresses itself in *samādi* (*Gītā*, 2.53) which is "that

type of introverted" mystical experience in which there is experience of nothing, except an unchanging, purely static oneness,<sup>58</sup> and is rightly translated by Prof. R.C. Zaehner as "enstasy" in contrast to ecstasy which means going out of oneself. For the *advaitin* this *nirvāna*-type enstasy ends up in *kaivalya* (pure simplicity which is final liberation). But for Rāmānuja, this state of brahmanhood or the vision of the self as it is, in itself, is only an intermediate step on man's way to a personal God. For, the Lord of the *Gītā* has already revealed himself even above *nirvāna*<sup>59</sup> as the Supreme Person who is Wisdom's highest goal.<sup>60</sup> This personal God is to be worshipped by *bhaktiyoga* and that is a more efficient way of transcending the constituents and obtaining the knowledge of the self. This is so because the search for the meaning of the self does not stop unless it finds itself founded on God in whom "*nirvāna* which is brahman too" subsists,<sup>61</sup> and, therefore, is to be prized even above Brahman.<sup>62</sup> And only when one pays homage to God in this manner does he attain the real self as it is, for God is "the base-supporting-brahman"<sup>63</sup> in which the self sees itself and also its righteousness and absolute beatitude which the self sees is ever after.<sup>64</sup> Hence, here the *ātmāvalokana* of the self ceases to be pure seeing of the self in itself and orientates itself to the seeing of the self in God. Thus the enstasy of the *kevalin* turns out to be the ecstasy of the devotee. The supreme path of liberation is neither mere performance of the sacrificial rites, nor the pure knowledge of one's own self-identity with Brahman. It is rather one's loyal devotion to the Supreme Brahman who is the Highest Person, which is to be fostered by the devotee by way of continued remembrance of the Supreme God. Krishna, the personal God of the *Gītā* makes it clear:

(There) let him sit, (his) self all stilled, his fear all gone, firm in his vow of chastity, his mind controlled, his thoughts on Me, integrated, (yet) intent on Me.<sup>65</sup>

58. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 143.

59. BG, 6. 15.

60. BG, 11. 18.

61. BG, 6. 15.

62. BG, 11. 37.

63. BG, 14. 27.

64. BG, 14. 27.

65. BG, 6. 14.

54. *man ca yo'vyabhicarena bhukti-yogena sevate sa gunan samitiy'aitan brahma-bhuyaya kalpate* (BG, 14.26).

55. *avyabhicarena = esantya-visishtena, bhaktiyogena ca (man) yas-sevate, sa etan sattvadin gunan duratyayan atitya brahmabhuyaya = brahmatyaya, ...kalpate = brahma-bhava = yogyo bhavati; yathavasthita'manam-amrtam-avyayam prepnoti-tyarthah* (GB, 14.26).

56. *atmanubhavasukham*. (GB, 5.26).

57. Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita*, pp. 159, 212-15, 358.

And again,

On Me your mind, on Me your loving-service, for Me your sacrifice, to Me be your prostrations: now that you have thus integrated self, your striving bent on Me, to me you will (surely) come.<sup>66</sup>

To be a devotee means for Rāmānuja to be one whose mind is placed on God by meditating on him as exceedingly dear.<sup>67</sup> This agrees with the definition of *bhakti* in *bhaktisūtra* and *Sandilyasūtra*. In the *bhaktisūtra*, Narada defines *bhakti* as “the deepest love towards someone.”<sup>68</sup> According to the *Sandilyasūtra* *bhakti* is the supreme attachment to God.<sup>69</sup> That unflinching fixation of one’s loving attention of God is essential to *bhakti*. Rāmānuja maintains that this *bhakti* is synonymous with *dhyāna*, (meditation) on, and *upāsana* (devotion), to the Supreme Self often recommended in the Upanishads.

The Upanishads presents the Supreme Brahman as “the Self who is to be seen, to be heard, to be reflected on and to be meditated upon.”<sup>70</sup> It recommends meditation for the further knowledge of Brahman: “Let a wise Brahman knowing him bend his mind toward him.”<sup>71</sup> Time and again, the same idea of meditation recurs in the Upanishads in different terminologies. Thus the *Mundaka Upanishad* recommends the meditation on the Self as *Om*<sup>72</sup> whereas the *Bṛhadārnyaka* suggests the meditation on the self as one’s world.<sup>73</sup> According to the *Chāndogyā*, the Self is “what one must seek out and what one must want to understand”<sup>74</sup> and whosoever has found this self and understood it is freed from the jaws of death,<sup>75</sup> and “wins all states of being

66. BG, 9. 34.

67. *mad-bhaktah = atyārtha-mat-priyatvena yukto man-mana bhavetyarthah*, GB, 9. 34.

68. *sa kasmāi parama-pṛema-rupa*, *Bhaktisūtra*, 2.

69. *sa paranurakt’isvare*, *Sandilyasūtra*, 1. 2.

70. *atma va are drastavyas’srotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyah*, *Bṛh. Up.* 4. 5. 6.

71. *tam eva dhiro vijñaya prjñam kurvīta bhrahmanah*, *Bṛh. Up.* 4. 4. 21.

72. *om’ityev’atmanam dhayatha*, *Mund. Up.* 2. 2.6.

73. *atmanam’eva lokam’upasita*, *Bṛh. Up.* 1. 4. 15.

74. *So’nceshtavyas savijñasitavyah*. *Ch. Up.* 8. 7. 1.

75. *nicayya tam mrtyu-mukhat-pramucyate*. *Kath. Up.* 1. 3. 15.

and all objects of desire.”<sup>76</sup> Rāmānuja refers to all these Upanishadic texts in order to confirm his position that the knowledge which the *Vedānta-texts* aim at inculcating is other than a mere knowledge of the sense of sentences, and is denoted by *dhyāna* or *upāsana* and similar terms.<sup>77</sup> *Bhakti* is synonymous with this *dhyāna*<sup>78</sup> and *dhyāna* is defined by Rāmānuja as follows:

Meditation (*dhyāna*) is the steady remembrance, i.e., the continuity of the steady remembrance, uninterrupted like the flow of oil, in agreement with the spiritual passage that declares steady remembrance to be the means of release: “on the attainment of remembrance all ties are loosened.” (ch. 7.26.2) Such remembrance is of the same character (form) of seeing (intuition).<sup>79</sup>

And referring to *bhakti* he adds:

Steady remembrance of this kind is designated by the word devotion (*bhakti*); for this term has the same meaning as *upāsana* (meditation).<sup>80</sup>

76. *sa sarvams’ca lokan apnoti sarvams’ca kaman (Yastam atmanam anuvīdya vijñanati)*. *Ch. Up.* 8. 1. 7.

77. *ato vakartha-jñanad— anyad-eva dhyānopasanadi-sabda-vacyam jñanam vedānta-vakair-vidhishitam*. Rāmānuja, *Sribhashya*, 1.1.1. Eng. Trans. by George Thibaut, *The Vedāntasūtras with the commentary of Rāmānuja*. *Sacred books of the East*, Vol. XLVIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904) p. 13. Henceforward SB for *Sribhashya* and T for Thibaut’s translation.

78. We have four terms here: *bhakti*, *dhyāna*, *upāsana* and *vedāna*. All these four terms are synonymous for Rāmānuja. In SB, 4. 1. 1. (T p. 716) Rāmānuja refers to the roots of the words *vedāna*, *dhyāna* and *upāsana* which are *vid dhyay* and *upas*, respectively, and shows that they all mean the same. In *Gītabhashya* (7. Introduction); he quotes *Svet.* 3. 8. and *Tait.* 3. 12. 7. where the root *vid* occurs and proves that this knowledge is synonymous with *bhakti*. In *Gītabhashya* 3. Introduction he clearly says that *bhakti* is also expressed by words such as *vedāna*, *upāsana* (meditation, worship) and *dhyāna* (meditation). All these four terms mean the “steady remembrance” *dhrūva smṛtiḥ* (*Ch. Up.* 7.26.2.) which Rāmānuja uses to describe meditation and *bhakti* in SB 1. 1. 1. and GB 6. 34.

79. *dhyānam ca taila-dharavad’avicchinna-smṛti-santana-rupam...* (SB, 1. 1. 1. : RG, p. 53; T pp. 14-15).

80. SB, 1. 1. 1. (RG, p. 53); T 16.



Meditation is steady remembrance and steady remembrance is *bhakti*.<sup>81</sup> The expression "steady remembrance" coupled with the simile of the uninterrupted flow of oil is used by Rāmānuja also in the *Gītābhāshya* where, speaking of devotion, he puts the following words in the mouth of Sri Krishna:

On me your mind, that is, have your mind fixed well on Me, without any interruption like a stream of oil.<sup>82</sup>

*Bhakti* is the uninterrupted fixation of one's mind on God by way of steady remembrance. This is the higher knowledge of Brahman taught in the Upanishads. One who has to know Brahman, Rāmānuja maintains, has to acquire two kinds of knowledge "both of them having Brahman for their objects."<sup>83</sup> One is an indirect knowledge "which springs from the study of the *sāstras*" the other is a direct one "which springs from concentrated meditation (yoga)." Of these "the latter kind of knowledge is the means of obtaining Brahman, and it is of the nature of devout meditation (*bhakti*)."<sup>84</sup> The knowledge from the study of the *sāstras* has its due place in the system of Rāmānuja. It is a necessary pre-requisite. But it is not the supreme knowledge bringing about liberation. The *vidyā* (wisdom) "which effects the highest purpose of man, and is designated by such words as *dhyāna* and *upāsana*, is something different from the mere cognition of the nature of Brahman."<sup>85</sup> This is so because for Rāmānuja God is not something to be known alone, but is someone to be devoted to and to be worshipped by the devotee with love and affection.<sup>86</sup> Rāmānuja's God is a personal God<sup>87</sup> who personally

81. Though for Ramanuja both meditation and devotion are synonymous a subtle difference is possible and this is beautifully spelled out by Prof. Ninian Smart: "*Dhyana* involves a purification of consciousness, a kind of higher emptiness" "*bhakti*, on the other hand, feeds on the imaginative apprehension of the numinous." "It (*bhakti*) involves reliance on the other, while *dhyana* can be self-sufficient." (*The Yogi and the Devotee*, p. 36). This distinction is clearly valid when *dhyana* is understood as in the school of *advaita*. In theistic systems, however, *dhyana* can be directed to a personal God.

82. *manmana-bhavamayi...taila-dharavadiavicchedena nivishtamano-bhava* GB, 9.34.

83. SB, 1.2.23, T. p. 284.

84. SB, 1.2.23, T. p. 284.

85. SB, 3.4.12. T. p.692; Cf. also SB, 1.1.1. T. p. 13.

86. BG, 9.24.

87. BG, 88:15. 19.

takes interest in his devotees.<sup>88</sup> He is not the impersonal absolute of the earlier *Upanishads*, but is the personal God of the *Bhagavadgītā* who bestows his grace on his devotees,<sup>89</sup> dispels their darkness with wisdom's shining lamp<sup>90</sup> and returns their love in the same way they approach him.<sup>91</sup> This intimate personal relationship between God and the devotee characterizes his knowledge of Brahman (God). When this is accomplished, knowledge no longer remains pure knowledge, but turns out to be loving devotion. *Vedana* (experience, knowledge) of the Upanishads becomes the *bhakti* of *Bhagavadgītā*. Hence, according to Rāmānuja the knowledge (*vedana*) which the Upanishads present as the means of release is to be characterized by a loving devotion.<sup>92</sup>

This kind of devotional knowledge itself is worship (*ārādhana*)<sup>93</sup> and the devotee is asked to worship the Lord with a spirit of self-sacrifice. God is greatly pleased with the minutest offering he makes, be it "a leaf, flower, a fruit or water"<sup>94</sup> provided it is made with a pure mind. Doing everything for the love of God, the life of the devotee becomes a continuous act of worship.

The devotional knowledge is, however, a gift of God and is effected by the grace of God who is pleased with the devotee.

Such meditation is originated in the mind through the grace of the Supreme Person, who is pleased and conciliated by the different kinds of acts of sacrifice and worship duly performed by the devotee day by day.<sup>95</sup>

The devotee has to prepare himself for the bestowal of this great grace. This is primarily done by his dispassionate acts of sacrifice and worship. This agrees with what *Yamunācārya* says: "*bhakti* is brought about by observance of *dharma*, acquisition of knowledge, and renunciation of passion."<sup>96</sup> But as *Kath Upani-*

88. BG, 10, 10-11.

89. BG, 18,56.

90. BG, 10.11.

91. BG, 4.11.

92. See above footnote no. 78.

93. SB, 3.4.26.

94. BG, 9.26

95. SB, 3.4.26. (T. p. 699).

96. *svadharmajñāna-vairāgya-sadhya-bhaktiyoga* (*Gītāthasamgraha*, 1).

*shad* says: "The Self cannot be won by preaching (Him), not by sacrifice or much more heard; by him alone can he be won whom He elects: to him the Self reveals his own true (form)."<sup>97</sup> The devotee keeps this form by way of "steady remembrance". This is true *bhakti*, the supreme knowledge and, though it is by nature a representative thought, its "intuitive clearness is inferior to the clearest presentative thought."<sup>98</sup> The devotee encounters his God in and by loving devotion and his relationship with God is not arid and abstract, but very intimate and personal.

By constant daily practice his *bhakti* "becomes ever more perfect and duly continued upto death secures final release".<sup>99</sup> In his *Vedārthasamgraha*, Rāmānuja summarizes his ideas on *bhakti* as follows:

We have already declared that the means of attaining Brahman is a superior *bhakti* in the form of re-memorization staggered to a state of extremely lucid perception, which is immeasurably and overwhelmingly dear the devotee. It is achieved by complete devotion of *bhakti* which is furthered by the performance of one's proper acts preceded by knowledge of the orders of reality as learnt from the *sāstras*. The word *bhakti* has a sense of kind of love, and this love again, that of a certain kind of knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

In the last analysis, Rāmānuja knows only one Yoga for liberation and that is the Yoga of *bhakti*, which, however, includes in itself the yoga of duties (*karmayoga*) and wisdom (*jñānayoga*).

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97. *Kath. Up.* 2.23.

98. *SB*, 3.4.26. T.p. 699.

99. *SB*, 3.4.26. T. p. 699.

100. *Vedarthasamgraha* Ed. and trans. by J.A.B. Van Buitinen (Poona: Deccan College, Research Institute, 1956) para 141.