

The beginning of the path *

«The first step leading to liberation (*mokṣasya*) is detachment (*vairāgya*) from perishable things; the second step consists in cultivating calmness of mind, self-control, patience (*śama, dama, titikṣā*) and also in abstaining from all those actions that are indicated by the Scriptures»

If the aim is freedom from perishable things, and hence non-real, it follows that the first step of the *ascesis* must, indeed, be to duly detach oneself from the non-real in order to unveil the real. There is no limit to the process of detachment. It begins with some insignificant object all the way up to detachment from one's best friend, from family, and even from *Brahmā*. All the great Sages have said: if you want to follow the ways of the spirit, you must "abandon" everything, even your children, parents and personal ideals. Every aspirant can assess what is the level of his capacity to be detached from the world of names and forms. Naturally detachment should not be the result of reaction, inhibition, or irrational imposition, but should arise as the simple outcome of a profound, logical and intuitive recognition. Where there is comprehension, there cannot be inhibition or reaction. Every detachment that has not occurred through ripeness by an inner "recognition" is not true detachment. Besides, this is not a question of abandonment, indifference or isolation: such ideas are foreign to the consciousness of a Realized. *Detachment needs to take place at a psychological rather than at a physical level*¹. A rich person can be detached from wealth, while a poor one can be inwardly attached to it. One disciple can live in a large city and be detached from everything and everybody, while another can find himself in isolation on top of a mountain and not be detached at all. What matters is the inner attitude. The second step consists in disciplining the activity of our mind. In this regard one must follow "the four cardinal means" ...; [means or tools that are needed to penetrate into the world of causes and to break the chains of false superimpositions]².

«The first one is discernment between the real and the non-real (*nityānityavastuvivekaḥ*); the second is detachment from the fruit of all actions in both this world and other worlds; the third consists of the group of the six qualities, such as mental calm, and so on, and the fourth one is a firm and yearning aspiration for liberation»

It is evident that the fourth means becomes the first one in the order of importance. One who does not feel a strong yearning for liberation will certainly not be able to realize it. In the life of a person there are times in which consciousness raises some precise imperatives: Who am I? Why all this? What is it that appears to my eyes? What are the causes of my suffering, my anguishes, my conflicts? These are deeply philosophical and metaphysical questions which presuppose a sincere spirit of investigation; and the investigation is that of the soul that finally raises the problem. For

* Excerpt from Śaṅkara, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, sūtra* 69, 19 and Raphael's Translation Commentary. Aurea Vidyā, New York, 2006.

¹ Italics are ours.

² Square bracket are ours.

Vedānta, detachment entails total cessation of identification with all attraction-repulsion in all dimension and level of existence. Most individuals, however, look for emotional peace, for psychological ecstasy, for heavenly attractions. Their meditation aims at the grasping of ever finer “sensations”, of visions which give spiritual delights, of powers (*siddhi*) that lead to vanity and psychological security. The second means *Jñāna* (*Jñānamārga*, path of knowledge) entails detachment from all sensations of enjoyment, also those of worlds or spheres higher than the physical. What is needed is a revolution in our consciousness. What Plato calls: *περιωγωγή*: conversion, a complete turn. There is only one end: *Brahman*, One-without-a-second.