

***Moksha* (liberation) in Kashmir Shaivism**

by John Hughes

The Sanskrit word *moksha* is commonly translated in English as spiritual “liberation” or “freedom.” With some exceptions in the devotional (*bhakti*) traditions it is held by all of the great philosophical and religious traditions of India to be the true and fitting purpose of all human endeavor. Although these traditions teach that the attainment of human emancipation is the end all and be all of spiritual life, they have quite different interpretations of what this term actually means. In fact, there are as many different interpretations of the meaning of *moksha* as there are philosophical understandings about the nature of God and the world. And, as the various schools differ in their understanding of the nature of *moksha*, so also do they differ in regard to the means (*upāya*) by which it is to be attained.

My intention in writing this article is to introduce the extraordinary soteriology of Kashmir Shaivism. In so doing I will describe the unique understanding of *moksha* and the means of its attainment as revealed by this important tradition. I believe that after the reader has a chance to reflect on this theory they will find it to be not only unique but also quite profound.

Introduction

The ancient tradition of Kashmir Shaivism is a non-dual (*advaita*) school of philosophy, which takes as its source the ninety-two Tantras of Lord Shiva. These include the sixty-four monistic Bhairava Tantras, the eighteen mono-dualistic Rūdra Tantras, and the ten dualistic Shiva Tantras. Its adherents also know this philosophical tradition as Trika. It is called Trika because it encompasses the three-fold science of man and his world. These three elements of Trika are Shiva, his Shakti (energy), and jiva (individual).¹ Also signified here are three primary energies: *parā* (supreme) energy, *parāparā* (medium, or the combination of highest and lowest energy) and *aparā* (lowest) energy. These three energies are also known to be *iccha shakti*, the energy of will, *jñāna shakti*, the energy of knowledge, and *kriya shakti*, the energy of action. These three energies represent the three-fold activities of the world: knower, knowing, and known. The Trika tradition known as Kashmir Shaivism encompasses four systems of philosophy: the Pratyabhijñā System, the Kula System, the Krama System, and the Spanda System.

¹ Shiva is the creator, Shakti, his energy, the means of creation, and jiva, the limited individual, the result.

The teaching of Kashmir Shaivism is so rich and detailed in its description of what it reveals, as the ascent of individual consciousness to Universal God consciousness (Paramashiva), that it is said to be the mystical geography of awareness. It includes a highly developed system of spirituality that emphasizes not only the intellectual understanding of its concepts but also the direct realization, the direct experience, of its truth. For the Kashmir Shaiva aspirant, the very nature of truth, its defining characteristic, is that it is unlimited and universal. The human intellect, on the other hand, is limited and individual. As such it cannot contain within its grasp that reality which transcends it. Words cannot express or reveal it. Any attempt to define and contain it with the spoken word only limits it. If truth is to be known and understood, it must be experienced through direct realization.

Kashmir Shaivism offers many different practical approaches to the realization of the ultimate reality. These different approaches are varied depending on the ability of the seeker. In his small book—*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*—Paul Reps introduced the English-speaking world to one of the central scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism, the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. In this Tantra are found no less than one hundred and twelve separate means (*upāyas*) to achieve realization of the ultimate reality.²

Cosmology

Understanding *moksha* and the means for its attainment in Kashmir Shaivism requires that we briefly examine its non-dual cosmology. The important and influential 10th century philosopher saint Abhinavagupta gave a lucid and revealing exposition of this cosmology in a short discourse entitled *Bodhapañcadaśikā* or “Fifteen Verses of Wisdom.” Swami Lakshmanjoo, the late great modern Kashmir Shaiva philosopher and saint, tells us that these verses capture the essence of the doctrine of Kashmir Shaivism.³

As Kashmir Shaivism is a monistic or non-dual tradition so, in describing the nature of reality, the Kashmir Shaiva explains that there is actually only one Being, known as Lord Shiva. This Being is the nature and existence of all beings. This Being is defined as being filled with the

² Paul Reps. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, n.d. 1957), 161–174. Years later Swami Lakshmanjoo gave an elaborate English translation of this same text: *Vijñāna Bhairava, The Manual for Self-Realization*, Swami Lakshmanjoo, ed. John Hughes (Lakshmanjoo Academy Book Series, Los Angeles, 2015).

³ *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism, The Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo*, ed. John Hughes (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995), “Fifteen Verses of Wisdom,” ch1, p21.

infinite light (*prakāsha*) of God consciousness. The Shaiva also explains that the objective world, although experienced as being separate from one's self and limited, does not have a separate existence and it is not actually limited. This objective world comprised of the collection of objects, cognitions, and limited subjects is nothing but the expansion of the energy (*shakti*) of Shiva. It is not separate from Shiva's energy. Lord Shiva is the energy holder (*shaktimān*) and the objective universe is His energy.⁴

But what is the relationship of Lord Shiva to His energy? Does Shiva hold this energy as one might hold a tool, to be used in the act of creation? Swami Lakshmanjoo clarifies this by explaining that if, for the sake of argument, we make the distinction between Shiva and His Shakti we could say that Shakti is this whole objective universe—which includes not only the objects of perception (*prameya*) and the means of perception (*pramāṇa*), but also the limited subjects or perceivers (*pramāṭris*) attached to those objects—and that Shiva is that reality from which this universe issues forth. And yet it is said that Shiva and Shakti are not aware that they are separate. Why? Because in reality they are not separate at all, they are one, just as fire is one with its heat.⁵

Although Kashmir Shaivism and Advaita Vedānta both teach non-dualism, the non-dualism of Kashmir Shaivism is quite different from that of Advaita Vedānta. Essential to this difference is Advaita Vedānta's proposition that this universe is untrue and unreal, that it is a false projection of the magical principle of illusion known as *māyā*. This theory is completely opposed to the Kashmir Shaiva theory of reality. To counter this proposition Kashmir Shaivism argues that if Shiva is real, how could an unreal substance emerge from something that is real? If Shiva, the ultimate essence of existence, is real, then His creation must also be real. For the Kashmir Shaiva this universe is just as real as its creator.

But the non-dualism expounded by Kashmir Shaivism creates a dilemma for its adherents. If this universe is as real as its creator, then how does the latter create this diverse seemingly separate universe as one with Himself? To explain this apparent incompatibility, Kashmir Shaivism proposes the theory of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*).⁶ This theory explains that the universe is created in the same way as the image of an object, such as a house, can be reflected in a mirror. In the case of Shiva, however, there is no object such as the house which exists independently from the mirror of God consciousness, because if there were, it would

⁴ *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, ch1, verse 2, p22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ch1, verse 3, p22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ch1, verse 4, p22. See also: *Kashmir Shaivism, The Secret Supreme*, Swami Lakshmanjoo, ed. John Hughes (Lakshmanjoo Academy Book Series, Los Angeles, 2015), "The Theory of Reflection (*Pratibimbavāda*), chapter 4.

mean that there is an object which exists outside of God consciousness. The Kashmir Shaiva monistic theory proclaims that nothing can exist outside of God consciousness, because only God consciousness exists. Therefore, the Shaiva explains, in our example of the theory of reflection the only thing that exists is the house appearing in the mirror. There is no external object, no separate house, being reflected in the mirror. There is only the mirror of God consciousness existing. What then causes the “reflection” to appear in the “mirror” of Shiva’s awareness? To this question the Shaiva answers, it is *svātantrya*, the absolutely independent and free will of God. It is Lord Shiva that creates this whole universe in the mirror of His awareness by His ‘absolutely independent will’ (*svātantrya*), his unconditional freedom.

So, in summary, Lord Shiva creates the objective world through the expansion of His Shakti, His energy, which is absolutely one with Shiva. The universe is manifested in His own nature, like a reflection in a mirror, by His own absolutely independent will.

Concealing and Revealing His Nature

But why has Lord Shiva created this external objective world, this manifestation of supreme energy, in His own nature? It is the answer to this question that sheds light on *moksha* and the means of its attainment in the teaching of Kashmir Shaivism. Trika Shaivism teaches that Shiva has manifested this external world in His own nature for only one reason—Just to recognize His own nature. This whole universe is the means to recognize Lord Shiva. You can recognize Lord Shiva through the universe. You cannot recognize Lord Shiva by abandoning the universe. This objective universe, therefore, is a means, a tool, to be used to realize the Universal reality of Shiva.

As Abhinavagupta tells us, when Lord Shiva is completely alone, bereft of His creation, He exists in the full splendor of His God consciousness. He does not need to recognize His own nature, because it is already there. But he wants His own nature to be recognized. This recognition gives Him great joy. But because it is already there, there is nothing to recognize. So, in order to recognize His nature, Shiva must become ignorant of His nature. He must seemingly separate Himself from His nature. It is only then that He can experience the joy of recognizing it.⁷ So, this universe is created solely for the fun and joy of this realization. It is Shiva’s play to seemingly leave His own nature so that He can find it and enjoy it again.

⁷ *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, ch1, verse 5, pp23-24.

This is the dance of Shiva, the joyous game, in which He is continuously creating this universe—to lose Himself and then find Himself.

In order to depart from His own nature, to lose Himself in His creation, Shiva must withdraw His God consciousness. And in order to find Himself He must again expand His God consciousness. This process is known as *nimesha* (closing) and *unmesha* (opening). It is the supreme energy of God which gives rise to *nimesha* and *unmesha*. *Nimesha* is the withdrawal of His God consciousness, and *unmesha* is the expansion of His God consciousness. Both of these states are contained within Shiva simultaneously.

By withdrawing His God consciousness, Shiva conceals Himself in His creation. Only Shiva has this power, the power of His own absolute independence, *svātantrya*, to totally disregard and hide His own nature and then to find it again. But what is it that He finds when He rediscovers His own nature? He finds, upon realizing His own nature, that it was already there. For the Kashmir Shaiva, this is the real essence of this teaching. Lord Shiva loses His nature only to find it again—and when He does He realizes that it was already there.

He wants, in the external universe that He has created, to completely disconnect his God consciousness and then to realize that it was never disconnected. For although it is disconnected, in the real sense it is not disconnected at all. In finding it He realizes that it was never lost. Shiva experiences that there was never really any separation from His God consciousness. Separation only seemed to exist. For Kashmir Shaivism this is the greatest mystery of existence and Lord Shiva's supreme act.⁸

Bondage through Ignorance

There is another point that will shed additional light on our topic. In creating this world Shiva conceals His real nature. How does He do this? The Shaiva says that He conceals it with particularity. His *māyā*, His illusive magic, brought about by His power of absolute freedom (*svātantrya shakti*), is to hide Himself in the particularity of the world. As a particular individual, Shiva loses the real undifferentiated knowledge of His real Self and possesses only differentiated knowledge of particularity. Through this *māyā* or *ajñāna* (ignorance) He veils himself. This is stated succinctly in the first two verses of the *Shiva Sūtras*: 1) “Awareness is the reality of everything.” 2) “Having differentiated knowledge and not having undifferentiated knowledge is bondage.”⁹

⁸ *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, ch1, verse 7, pp25-26.

⁹ “*caitanyamātmā / jñānam bandhaḥ.*” *Shiva Sutras—The Supreme Awakening*, Swami Lakshmanjoo, ed. John Hughes (Lakshmanjoo Academy, Los Angeles, 2002), chapter 1,

Ignorance, for Kashmir Shaivism, is not the absence of knowledge. Instead, ignorance is said to be the non-fullness of knowledge. The Kashmir Shaiva tells us that knowledge is always present in our conscious lives but it is limited knowledge. Real knowledge, which is in essence unlimited, is Self-knowledge. It is undifferentiated (*nirvikalpa*) and identical with consciousness. The Kashmir Shaiva argues that every limited being must have some knowledge because no one could exist without knowledge. Knowledge, being identical with consciousness, is the essence of reality.

Means (*Upāya*)

Kashmir Shaivism has revealed three methods or means (*upāya*) to be employed to enter Universal God consciousness from individual limited consciousness. The first and supreme means, for aspirants with very refined awareness, is called *shāmbavopāya*, the means associated with Shiva. The second, for aspirants with medium power of awareness, is called *shāktopāya*, the means associated with Shakti. The third means, for aspirants with inferior awareness, is called *āṇavopāya*. It is the means associated with the individual and is regarded as inferior. Essentially, the method of traveling from limited consciousness to Universal consciousness depends on the ability of the aspirant, their strength of awareness.

Abhinavagupta tells us in the *Tantrāloka* that the aspirant should always try for the highest and best thing first. Failing that he should try for the next best, and so on. Thus, in his *Tantrāloka*, he has defined and elaborated the supreme *upāya*, *shambavopāya*, first. His descriptions of *shāktopāya* and *āṇavopāya* follow.

Abhinavagupta, drawing from the *Malinīvijaya Tantra*, defines *shāmbavopāya* as that *upāya* wherein the aspirant achieves entry (*samāvesha*) into Supreme consciousness just by preserving thoughtlessness and by the grace of his master. It is achieved without adopting any processes. He does not use thought (*dhyāna*), *mantra*, or any other aid of meditation.

Shāktopāya is defined as that *upāya* where the aspirant achieves mystical entry (*samāvesha*) through concentrating on that Supreme Being that is found in between any two actions without action. In the “Vijñāna Bhairava,” this practice is called centering.

Āṇavopāya is defined as that *upāya* where mystical entry takes place through concentration on parts of the body (*sthāna-prakalpanā*), contemplation (*dhyāna*), recitation (*varṇa*), taking the support of the breath (*uccāra*), and *mantras*.¹⁰

In Kashmir Shaivism, though the means may be many, the goal is only one: mystical absorption (*samāvesha*) in the *shāmbhava* state. What is the *shāmbhava* state? The *shāmbhava* state is where the *yogi* becomes instantly established in Supreme consciousness. For the Kashmir Shaiva, all absorption in the reality of God consciousness is, in the end, the absorption of the *shāmbhava* state.

What determines which *upāya* the aspirant is qualified for? The secret is the strength of awareness of the perceiver. As Swami Lakshmanjoo explains, strength of awareness means to possess such power of subjective consciousness that the practitioners one-pointed subjective awareness is not overshadowed, either by objective experience or thoughts. In the experience of the limited subject, the act of perception or thinking typically overshadows the subject, the perceiver, so that one is aware only of thinking or perceiving and not the perceiver who is perceiving or thinking. Thus, human beings live their lives completely absorbed in the objective or cognitive worlds. Although we might say, “I am seeing a butterfly,” in actual fact the “I” is eclipsed by the act of seeing and what remains is “seeing a butterfly.” In other words, the subject is lost, completely absorbed, in the act of perception. Because “I” consciousness is the basis for all thought or perception, it must be present for any perception or thought to take place. Yet it is eclipsed in such a way that in the act of thinking or perceiving it is not a part of conscious awareness. As we saw above in our discussion of the first two verses of the *Shiva Sūtras*, this is the nature of ignorance—being overshadowed by the world of diversity and not knowing one’s real Universal nature. Developing strength of awareness means gaining the ability to think thoughts and experience perceptions without losing self-awareness.

Shāmbhavopāya

In order to succeed in *shāmbhavopāya* the Shaiva *yogi* must possess supreme strength of awareness so that he does not need support to maintain his consciousness of self. Shaiva masters tell us that in *shāmbhavopāya* the aspirant has only to maintain the thoughtless (*nirvikalpa*) state continuously. For this reason, *shāmbhavopāya* is said to be the most refined *upāya*. Here the aspirant must reside in the subtlest

10 *Light on Tantra in Kashmir Shaivism, Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka* (with original audio), Swami Lakshmanjoo, ed. John Hughes (Lakshmanjoo Academy, Los Angeles, 2017), verse 169, p183.

state of knowledge, just at the starting point of perception. This starting point is found just at the beginning of any perception or thought, before it has become determinate. In this *upāya* the aspirant, by maintaining the thoughtless state, resides in this first starting point of perception or thought simply by willing it. This *yogi* has developed such strength of awareness that he has only to will this to happen and it is accomplished. The Kashmir Shaiva points out that, because in *shāmbavopāya* the *yogi* has only to maintain thoughtlessness, he has nowhere to go and nothing to do. Residing in the thoughtless state is the means and the end. Therefore, in *shāmbavopāya* there are no means separate from what is to be achieved. To explain this, Swami Lakshmanjoo says, “in *shāmbavopāya* the means exists in the state of the meant.” The *yogi* just wills to be there and he is there in his own limited subjective awareness, maintaining the continuity of thoughtlessness.

In this state the Trika Shaiva *yogi*, maintaining unbroken thoughtlessness, is waiting at the threshold of Universal consciousness. Having accomplished this much there is nothing left for him to do. For Trika Shaivism this state is significant because up to this point the *yogi* has depended primarily on self-effort. Swami Lakshmanjoo tells us that from this point on the entry into Universal God consciousness is automatic.

Let us try to put this into perspective. Why does the Trika Shaiva hold that the *yogi*'s own efforts can only take him to the “door of Universal consciousness?” The Shaiva argues that the *yogi* is a limited being (*jiva*) and Lord Shiva is an unlimited Being. This *yogi* is manifested as a limited being by the supreme magical trick (*mahamāyā*) of Lord Shiva's independent will (*svātantrya shakti*) and depends upon Lord Shiva for his existence. Because this *yogi* is limited and dependent, he cannot force that unlimited divine reality of which he is a manifestation to reveal itself. Kashmir Shaivism holds that it is by the grace of God (*shaktipāta*)—in the form of the grace of the master—that Lord Shiva is revealed. When the disciple, by maintaining thoughtlessness, reaches the entrance of the *shāmbhava* state, he is said to be capable of receiving the master's grace. Swami Lakshmanjoo explains that it is this grace that carries the disciple to absorption in Universal God consciousness.¹¹

Shāktopāya

It is the nature of the world of particularity and diversity that our lives are filled with myriad perceptions and thoughts. Each of these perceptions and thoughts has a beginning and an end. Every thought and every perception comes into being, exists for some time, and then comes to an end. This, Shaivism teaches, is the nature of thinking and perception. I

¹¹ *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme*, ch5, p34.

look at the pen on my desk and then turn to look at a book lying just next to the pen. In the first instance, I look at the pen and the perception of the pen comes into existence, exists for some time, and then ceases to exist. This perception is replaced by the perception of the book, which comes into existence, exists for some time, and then ceases to exist. This, in turn, is replaced by another perception, and so on. And the same is true with thoughts. In fact, every moment of our lives is filled with these mental moments of creation, preservation, and destruction. For the Kashmir Shaiva, what is important and exciting in this understanding is that between the end of one thought or perception, and the beginning of another there is a gap. It may be ever so momentary but there is a gap. And—this is most important—within this gap shines that Universal Reality of Shiva, which lies in the background and is the ground of all diversity.

Unlike *shāmbhavopāya*, *shāktopāya* involves more readily definable practical techniques. In *shāktopāya* the aspirant achieves absorption in Universal consciousness by concentrating on the Supreme Being as found in the junction between any two actions or thoughts. In this *upāya* there is no need for the recitation of mantras or concentration on the breath. Here the aspirant has to mentally catch hold of that junction (*sandhi*) which resides in all of the activities and thoughts that make up our life. This, Shaiva masters call “centering” (*madhyama dhyātvā*). To accomplish this centering the aspirant must develop great firmness of awareness. Without this intensity of awareness, the aspirant will not be able to achieve the purpose of *shāktopāya*, which is to enter into Universal consciousness existing in the center between any two thoughts or actions. Such a *yogi* would then be only qualified for *āṇavopāya*.

Through developing this intensity of awareness, the *yogi* will be able to maintain a continuity of unbroken awareness. The Shaiva explains that this is important, for it is only by maintaining a chain of unbroken awareness that the *yogi* will be able to discover the reality of the gap. In *shāktopāya* all actions and all thoughts are fit for such practice, because this gap exist everywhere. While raising your arm, and putting it down, between two steps, between the waking state and the dreaming state, between the dreaming state and the state of deep sleep, between the outgoing breath and the incoming breath, at all of these moments and more these gaps or junctions exist. Furthermore, even though all practices are essentially *āṇavopāya*, still, for the aspirant residing in *shāktopāya*, even the *āṇavopāya* practices become *shāktopāya* practices if they are done with full unbroken awareness.

Swami Lakshmanjoo tells us that the goal of the *shāktopāya* aspirant is to develop ever-increasing firmness of awareness, making them capable of

receiving the master's grace. When the *yogi* reaches this state, he is said to be in that state which is described as "being at the feet of the master."¹² This aspirant is then fit to achieve absorption in Universal consciousness. When this *yogi* receives the grace of the master in *shāktopāya*, he reaches that state of mystical absorption which merges and is one with the supreme mystical absorption (*samāvesha*) existing in the *shāmbhava* state.

Āṇavopāya

Āṇavopāya, the most inferior of the three *upāyas* in Kashmir Shaivism, is the one concerned with *aṇu*, the individual soul. In *āṇavopāya* the aspirant needs support and help from all sides to maintain, focus, and strengthen his awareness. We have seen how the *shāktopāya* aspirant has more strength of awareness than the *āṇavopāya* aspirant. His strength of awareness is such that only one point is needed as a support for his concentration, namely, the center. And in *shāmbavopāya* the aspirant has developed such strength of awareness that he only needs to will to be in his own nature and this takes place. There is nowhere for him to go and nothing to be done. He is already residing in the object of this *upāya*, his own nature. So, in *shāmbavopāya* the aspirant needs no support, in *shāktopāya* the aspirant needs some support, and in *āṇavopāya* the aspirant needs all support.

In *āṇavopāya* the aspirant takes the help of many different processes to aid him in maintaining and strengthening his awareness. He may employ concentration on breathing (*uccāra*), concentration on experience through a particular sense organ (*karāṇa*), meditative contemplation (*dhyāna*), or concentration on some particular place (*sthāna-prakalpanā*). All of these various practices, details of which follow, may be undertaken together or separately as an aid to developing the aspirant's awareness.

Uccāra, concentration on the breath, is a fundamental element of practice in *āṇavopāya*. In *uccāra* the aspirant concentrates on the flow of the breath and, in particular, on the point between where the outgoing breath ends and incoming breath begins and the point between where the incoming breath ends and the outgoing breath begins.¹³

In *karāṇa* the aspirant maintains one-pointedness through vision or another sense such as hearing. The sense of sight, however, is the most important. For example, the aspirant may go on gazing at a particular

12 Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism "The Secret Supreme,"* p35.

13 This is the first of the 112 practices given by Lord Shiva (Bhairava) to his consort Pārvatī (Bhairavī) in the ancient text – *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*. See *Vijñāna Bhairava, The Manual for Self-Realization*, verse 24, *Dhāraṇa* 1, page 31.

object without blinking his eyes. In this process, he attempts to maintain an unbroken chain of awareness. When that perception vanishes, as it will vanish when he enters into the vastness of the center, this practice is complete.

Meditative contemplation (*dhyāna*) is another practice in *āṇavopāya*. There are many different forms of *dhyāna*. To meditate on the lotus in your heart, or on the meaning of a *mantra* such as “*so’ham*” or “*Shiva*,” are forms of *dhyāna*. In this practice the aspirant concentrates on these sounds, locations, or forms along with thinking and reflecting on their meaning. It is said that contemplation on the meaning of spiritual words is a higher form of contemplation than contemplation on an object with form. Anytime an aspirant uses *mantras* in their practice it is considered *dhyāna*. And, it is not uncommon to find *dhyāna* combined with *uccāra* and *karaṇa*, as in the practices of *cakrodaya* and *ajapā gāyatrī* to be described below.

Sthāna–prakalpanā means concentration on some particular place. In the lower, ordinary form of *sthāna–prakalpanā* the aspirant must concentrate on different points in the body. In Kashmir Shaivism, there are three main places for concentration: 1) between the two eyebrows, 2) the pit of the throat, and 3) the heart. In the higher more refined practice of *sthāna–prakalpanā* the aspirant must see the vastness of this universe existing symbolically in the span of one breath. Swami Lakshmanjoo explains that in this higher form of *āṇavopāya* the aspirant must discover where each aspect of reality is found in the span of one breath. The “reality” Swamiji is describing is said to encompass the realm of the gods (*devas*), the locations of the protectors of the world (*lokapālās*), and the astronomical locations including but not confined to the location of the dawn, sunset, midnight, and so on. All of these points and positions are to be located and concentrated on in the span of one individual breath.¹⁴

Of the numberless practices, which are found in *āṇavopāya*, there are two practices which stand out as most typical: *cakrodāya* and *ajapā gāyatrī*. Both of these practices incorporate *uccāra*, concentration on breath, *dhyāna*, contemplation with *mantra*, and *karaṇa*, meaning here one-pointedness through the sense of sight. Furthermore, according to the advice of the aspirant’s master, *sthāna–prakalpanā* may also be included.¹⁵

In the practices of *cakrodaya* and *ajapā gāyatrī*, *uccāra* functions as the central element. In both of these practices the *yogi* continues breathing deeply seeking to become aware of the center between the outgoing and

14 Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism “The Secret Supreme,”* 38.

15 Maintaining awareness on one the three places previously mentioned.

incoming breath, and the incoming and outgoing breath. Here, while the aspirant must be aware of the flow of the breath in the total breathing cycle, predominance is given to the beginning point and the ending point. These two practices, however, differ in one important respect. In *ajapā gāyatrī* the *yogi* maintains a slow and silent movement of the breath, while in *cakrodaya* he maintains a slow movement of the breath along with the sound of breathing. In both of these practices, along with breathing, the aspirant mentally repeats the *mantra* given to him by his master.

The aspirant in these practices must maintain full awareness in the center between the two breaths. Swami Lakshmanjoo specifies that this awareness must be lively, indeed, it should be “continually fresh, new, and filled with excitement.” Certainly, it should not become routine like. The *yogi* should be excited by his practice.¹⁶ Through the strengthening of his awareness the aspirant will enter into the center between the two breaths. At that point his practice will become *shāktopāya* and he will enter into the mystical absorption (*samāvesha*) of *shāktopāya*. And finally, the *yogi* will attain the mystical realization of *shāmbhavopāya*.

It is important to realize that though there are different *upāyas*, all of these *upāyas* lead the *yogi* to the state of one transcendental consciousness. The difference in the *upāyas* is that *ānavopāya* takes longer, *shāktopāya* is a shorter way, while *shāmbhavopāya* is the quickest. Although the means are different, the end to be achieved is only one.¹⁷

Mokṣa

One might assume that *shāmbhāva-samāvesha*, the mystical absorption in the state of Shiva, is equivalent to *moksha*, liberation, but in fact, it is not. Certainly, *shāmbhāva-samāvesha* must exist if *moksha* is to occur but it is not its defining characteristic.

Abhinavagupta tells us in his *Tantrāloka*, “*Moksha* only exists when your ‘being’ becomes absolutely independent (*svātantrātmaka*).”¹⁸ What is this “independence” that Abhinavagupta specifies as the necessary condition of *moksha*? We have seen above that it is repeatedly declared that the essential characteristic of Lord Shiva is His independence. It is explained that Lord Shiva created this universe by means of His independence. Shiva’s independence means complete unbridled freedom, freedom to will, freedom to know, freedom to do.¹⁹ According to Abhinavagupta, a *yogi* can

16 *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, ch2, p40.

17 *Kashmir Shaivism, The Secret Supreme*, ch5, p40.

18 *Light on Tantra in Kashmir Shaivism, Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka*, v31, p34

19 Independent freedom in *icchā*, *jñāna* and *kriyā shakti* respectively.

only be said to be liberated when he possesses this absolute independence. For a *yogi* to be independent, nothing must be able to limit him or overshadow his Universal consciousness. This means that this *yogi* must experience the same state of Universal consciousness, the same independence, in the external world as he does in the mystical absorption of the *shāmbhāva* state. From the Trika Shaiva point of view, until he attains this state he cannot be said to be absolutely independent or to have attained *moksha* (liberation), i.e. to be truly liberated.

Swami Lakshmanjoo in discussing the supreme mystical absorption of *shāmbhāva* explains how the *yogi's* internal mystical trance becomes fused with and transforms his external experience (*vyutthāna*). He tells us that this process begins when the *yogi* experiences the state of internal mystical awareness, i.e., when he is relishing the fullness of his God consciousness. At that moment, he is pulled out into the world of external experience. His eyes open and he experiences the world, but this external experience is different. This external experience is now filled with the oneness of Universal consciousness. He may experience a chair but the experience of this chair is filled with God consciousness. He may see a tree but the experience of this tree is filled with God consciousness. Everywhere he looks, whatever he sees is filled with God consciousness. Then again his eyes close and he is drawn inside. And then again, after a few moments he is drawn outside and opens his eyes experiencing the world filled with the oneness of God. The *yogi* cannot stop this process. Even though he may try to stop this process he cannot. This process of going from inside to outside, back inside, and again outside is automatic and continues for some time. This is the process known as *krama-mūdrā*.²⁰

In clarifying this process, Swami Lakshmanjoo tells us that what this *yogi* is experiencing is the fusing of his inner and outer worlds in the oneness of Universal God consciousness. He says that the aspirant's I-consciousness, his Universal consciousness, is diluted in the consciousness-of-this, consciousness of the external world, and consciousness-of-this is diluted in I-consciousness. Here the fullness of I-consciousness absorbs "this-ness," external objectivity, and produces the oneness of internal mystical trance (*samādhi*) and external experience (*vyutthāna*). The nature of this *yogi* and the external world become one; they are experienced as being completely united, one with the other. There is absolutely no difference between them. This process of *krama-mūdrā*—resulting in the absolute oneness of God consciousness and the external world—is the state of absolute independence. The *yogi*, in this state, experiences that the internal world of mystical trance and the external world are absolutely the

20 *Kashmir Shaivism, The Secret Supreme*, ch16, p114

same. This independence and absolute oneness gives rise to the state of *jagadānanda* (Universal bliss).²¹

To further explain this state of *jagadānanda*, Abhinavagupta says, “My master Shambhunātha described *jagadānanda* as the state that is completely unencumbered, where bliss (*ānanda*) is found shining, where it is universally strengthened by the Supreme I-consciousness of God, and where the six limbs of yoga—*bhāvanā*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, *pratyāhāra*, *yoga*, and *samādhi*—are no longer used or required.”²²

This aspirant, whose being has become absolutely independent (*svātantrātmaka*) and who possesses the state of *jagadānanda*, is said to be a *jīvanmukta*, a being who is liberated while living. In the *Bodhapañcadashikā*, Abhinavagupta tells us that when the aspirant attains real knowledge of reality, which is the existent state of Lord Shiva, that is final liberation.²³ What is this real knowledge? Real knowledge exists when the aspirant comes to understand that this whole objective universe of diversity and duality is just a trick, the play of Lord Shiva. This does not mean that it is a trick which creates an unreal world. For the Trika Shaiva liberated *yogi* the world does not disappear, as the teachers of Advaita Vedānta like to proclaim. The goal is not the world-oblivion of *kaivalya* (isolation). We have seen how this objective world is just as real as Lord Shiva. The trick lies in the fact that it causes the limited individual to experience this world of diversity as the only reality. Real knowledge exists when the aspirant becomes one with God consciousness, which is the same as attaining perfect Self-knowledge. In possessing real knowledge, he knows that the world of differentiation is not actually different from Shiva, the supreme reality.

The cycles of bondage and liberation are both one with Lord Shiva. It is only His trick that we think that some souls are bound in ignorance while others are elevated and free. As only Lord Shiva exists, there is not any second thing that could cover or bind Him. It is only His play that we think that this covering of diversity actually exists as a separate reality which covers Him. There is not a second being or reality. His trick, therefore, is *our trick*. Why? Because we are Lord Shiva. We have concealed ourselves in order to find ourselves. This is His play, and therefore it is our play.

This is clearly illuminated by the concept of *anupāya*. The Sanskrit word *anupāya* literally means ‘no *upāya*.’ We have already seen that in Kashmir Shaivism there are three *upāyas*, *shāmbhavopāya*, *shāktopāya*, and

21 *Kashmir Shaivism, The Secret Supreme*, ch16, p114.

22 *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, ch5, p113.

23 *Ibid.* ch1, 31.



ānavopāya. In addition to these three *upāyas*, another called *anupāya* is also mentioned. As the name implies, *anupāya* is not actually an *upāya*, for in *anupāya* there are no means. The one who has attained *anupāya* has only to observe that nothing is to be done. Just to be is enough. In *anupāya* the aspirant experiences that everything is filled with his own God consciousness. In fact, *anupāya* is the unexplainable reality of the liberated aspirant. In *anupāya* the Shaiva *yogis* are filled with the realization that they were never ignorant and are therefore not now liberated. They know that nothing was lost and nothing is gained. What could they have been ignorant of and what are they liberated from? They experience that it was their own play, their trick, that they appeared ignorant before and liberated now. They know that they are Shiva and that this world is their own playground.

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