

Mokṣa and the means of its attainment in Kashmir Śaivism

The Sanskrit word *mokṣa* is commonly translated in English as spiritual “liberation” or “freedom.” With some exceptions in the *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 this 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 *mokṣa* 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 *mokṣa*, 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 Śaivism. In so doing I will describe the unique understanding of *mokṣa* 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 he/she will find it to be not only unique but also quite profound.

Introduction

The ancient tradition of Kashmir Śaivism is a non-dual (*advaita*) school of philosophy which takes as its source the ninety two Tantras of Lord Śiva. This includes the sixty-four monistic Bhairava Tantras, the eighteen mono-dualistic Rūdra Tantras, and the ten dualistic Śiva Tantras. This philosophical tradition is also known by its adherents as Trika. It is called Trika because it encompasses the threefold signs of man and his world. These three signs are Śiva, his Śakti (energy), and *jīva* (individual).¹ Also signified are three primary energies *parā* (supreme) energy, *parāparā* (combination of highest and lowest) energy, and *aparā* (lowest) energy. These are also termed *iccha śakti*, the energy of will, *jñāna śakti*, the energy of knowledge, and *kriya śakti*, the energy of action. These three energies represent the threefold activities of the world: knower, knowing, and known. Kashmir Śaivism also known as the Trika tradition, encompasses four systems of philosophy: the Pratyabhijñā system, the Kula system, the Krama system, and the Spanda system.

The teaching of Kashmir Śaivism is so rich and detailed in its descriptions of what it reveals as the ascent of individual consciousness to universal God Consciousness (*Parama Śiva*) that it has been characterized as

¹ Śiva is the creator, *śakti*, his energy, the means of creation, and *jīva*, the limited individual, the result.

a 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 Śaiva, 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. For the Kashmir Śaiva truth, as universal, is said to be *anirvacanīya*, unspeakable. 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 Śaivism offers many different practical approaches to the realization of the ultimate reality. These different approaches are varied depending on the ability of the seeker. Paul Reps—in his small book entitled *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*—introduced the English speaking world to one of the central scriptures of Kashmir Śaivism, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*. In this Tantra are found no less than one hundred and twelve separate means to the realization of the ultimate reality.²

Cosmology

Understanding *mokṣa* and the means for its attainment in Kashmir Śaivism requires that we briefly examine its non-dual cosmology. One of the more lucid and revealing expositions of this cosmology is given by Abhinavagupta in a short discourse entitled *Bodhapañcadāsikā* or “Fifteen Verses of Wisdom.” Swami Lakshmanjoo, the great modern Kashmir Śaiva philosopher and saint, tells us that these verses capture the essence of the doctrine of Kashmir Śaivism.³

In describing the nature of reality, the Kashmir Śaiva explains that there is only One Being, called Lord Śiva. This Being is the nature and existence of all beings. This Being is defined as being filled with the infinite light (*prakāśa*) of God Consciousness. The Śaiva also holds that the objective world, although experienced as separate from one’s self, does not have a separate existence. It is the energy (*śakti*) of Śiva. Although one might conclude that the world is separate from his energy, thinking that his energy is the separate formal cause of the objective world. It is not. The objective world, comprised of the collection of objects, cognitions, and limited subjects,

² Paul Reps. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, n.d.), 161–174.

³ Swami Lakshmanjoo, “Fifteen Verses of Wisdom,” in John Hughes, *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism, the Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 21.

is nothing more than the expansion of the divine *śakti*. It is not separate from Śiva's energy. Lord Śiva is the energy holder (*śaktimān*) and the objective universe is his energy, his *śakti*.⁴

But what is the relation of Lord Śiva to his energy? Does Śiva hold this energy as one might hold a tool, to be used in the act of creation? Lakshmanjoo clarifies this by explaining that if, for the sake of argument, we make the distinction between Śiva and his *śakti* we could say that *śakti* 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 (*pramātṛi*) attached to those objects—and that Śiva is that reality from which this universe issues forth. And yet it is said that Śiva and Śakti are not aware that they are separate. Why? Because in reality they are not separate at all. They are one just as a fire is one with its heat.⁵

Although Kashmir Śaivism and Advaita Vedānta both teach non-dualism, the non-dualism of Kashmir Śaivism 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 *māyā*. This theory is completely opposed to the Kashmir Śaiva theory of reality. To counter this proposition Kashmir Śaivism argues that if Śiva is real, how could an unreal substance emerge from something that is real? If Śiva, the ultimate essence of existence, is real his creation must also be real. For the Kashmir Śaiva this universe is just as real as its creator.

The non-dualism expounded by Kashmir Śaivism creates a dilemma for its adherents. If this universe is as real as its creator, how does the latter create this diverse universe as one with himself? To explain this seeming incompatibility, Kashmir Śaivism proposes the theory of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*). This theory explains that the universe is created in the same way that the image of an object, such as a house can be reflected in a mirror. In the case of Śiva, however, there is no object such as the house which exists independently from the mirror of God Consciousness, because if there were, it would mean that there is an object which exists outside of God Consciousness. The Kashmir Śaiva theory proclaims that nothing can exist outside of God Consciousness, because only God Consciousness exists. Therefore, the Śaiva explains, 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. What then causes the "reflection" to appear in the "mirror" of Śiva's awareness? To this question the Śaiva answers, it is *svātantrya*, the absolutely independent

⁴ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "Fifteen Verses of Wisdom," 22.

⁵ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "Fifteen Verses of Wisdom," 22.

will of God. It is Lord Śiva that creates this whole universe in the mirror of his awareness by his absolutely independent will (*svātantrya*), his freedom.

In summarizing the essence of the non-dual cosmology of Kashmir Śaivism, Lord Śiva creates the objective world through the expansion of his *śakti*, which is absolutely one with him. The universe is manifest 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 Śiva created this external objective world, this manifestation of supreme energy, in his own nature? The answer to this question that begins to shed light on *mokṣa* and the means of its attainment in the teaching of Kashmir Śaivism. Trika Śaivism teaches that Śiva has manifested this external world for only one reason—to create the possibility of recognizing his own nature. And furthermore, the Kashmir Śaiva understands that this objective universe, a manifestation of Lord Śiva's *svātantrya śakti*, is a means, a tool, to be used to realize the universal reality of Śiva.

As Abhinavagupta tells it, when Lord Śiva 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, Śiva 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.⁶

This, Kashmir Śaivas say, is the play of the universe. Because of Lord Śiva's freedom, his *svātantrya*, this universe is created solely for the fun and joy of this realization. It is Śiva's play to seemingly leave his own nature so that he can find it and enjoy it again. This is the dance of Śiva, the joyous game in which he is continuously creating this universe—to lose himself and then find himself.

In order to seemingly depart from his own nature, to lose himself in his creation, he must withdraw his God Consciousness. And in order to find himself he must again expand his God Consciousness. This process is known as *nimeṣa* (closing) and *unmeṣa* (opening). It is the supreme energy of God which gives rise to *nimeṣa* and *unmeṣa*. *Nimeṣa* is the withdrawal of his God Consciousness, and *unmeṣa* is the expansion of his God Consciousness. Both of these states are contained within Śiva simultaneously.

By withdrawing his God Consciousness, Śiva conceals himself in his creation. Only Śiva has this power, the power of his own *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 Śaiva, this is the real essence of this teaching. Lord Śiva loses his nature only to find it again—and when he does he realizes that it was already there.

⁶ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "Fifteen Verses of Wisdom," 23, 24.

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. He experiences that there was never really any separation from his God Consciousness. Separation only seemed to exist. For Śaivism this is the greatest mystery of existence and Lord Śiva's supreme act.⁷

Bondage through Ignorance

Another point will shed additional light on our topic. In creating this world Śiva conceals his real nature. How does he do this? The Śaiva says that he conceals it with particularity. His *māyā*, his magic, brought about by his power of absolute freedom (*svatantrya śakti*), is to hide himself in the particularity of the world. As a particular individual, Śiva 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 very succinctly in the first two verses of the *Śiva Sūtras*: "Awareness is the reality of everything. Having differentiated knowledge and not having undifferentiated knowledge is bondage."⁸

Ignorance, for Kashmir Śaivism, is not the absence of knowledge, rather it is said to be non-fullness of knowledge. Jai Deva Singh in his translation of the *Śiva Sūtras* calls it "shrunken knowledge."⁹ The Kashmir Śaiva tells us that knowledge is always present in our conscious lives but it is limited knowledge. Real knowledge, which is unlimited, is Self-knowledge. It is undifferentiated (*nirvikalpa*) and identical with Consciousness. The Kashmir Śaiva argues that every limited being must have some knowledge because none could exist without knowledge. Knowledge, being identical with consciousness, is the essence of reality.

⁷ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "Fifteen Verses of Wisdom," 26.

⁸ *caitanyamātmā/jñānam bandhaḥ*
"Swami Lakshmanjoo, translation and commentary on ŚivaSūtras I, June 7, 1975, tape recording in possession of the author."

⁹ Jaideva Singh, trans., *Śiva Sūtras, The Yoga of Supreme Identity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 16.

Means (*Upāya*)

Kashmir Śaivism has revealed three means to enter from individual limited consciousness to universal God Consciousness. The first and highest means is called *śāmbavopāya*. The second, for aspirants of medium qualifications, is called *śāktopāya*. The third means, called *āṇavopāya*, is regarded as inferior. The method of traveling from limited consciousness to universal Consciousness depends on the ability of the aspirant.

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 highest *upāya*, *Śāmbavopāya*, first. His descriptions of *śāktopāya* and *āṇavopāya* follow.

Ahinavagupta, drawing from the *Malinīvijaya Tantra*, defines *śāmbavopāya* as that *upāya* wherein the aspirant achieves entry (*samāveśa*) into Supreme Consciousness just by the grace of his master, without adopting any process. He does not use thought (*dhyāna*), *mantra*, or any other aid to meditation. *Śāktopāya* is defined as that *upāya* where the aspirant achieves mystical entry (*samāveśa*) through contemplation of that mental object which cannot be spoken or recited. *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 Śaivism, though the means may be many, the goal is only one: mystical absorption (*samāveśa*) in the *śāmbhava* state, the reality found in *śāmbavopāya*. What is the *śāmbhava* state? The *śāmbhava* state is where the *yogi* becomes instantly established in Supreme Consciousness. For the Kashmir Śaiva, all absorption in the reality of God Consciousness is, in the end, the absorption of the *śāmbhava* state, because in *śāmbavopāya*, unlike *Śāktopāya* and *Āṇavopāya*, the *yogi* has no where to go. Instead he/she only has to be in his/her own nature. This is real mystical absorption .

What determines which *upāya* the aspirant is qualified for? The secret is the strength of awareness of the perceiver. As Lakshmanjoo explains, strength of awareness means to possess such power of subjective consciousness that the practitioner's one-pointed subjective awareness is not overshadowed, either by objective experience or thoughts. In the experience of

¹⁰ Swami Lakshmanjoo, translation and commentary on *Tantrāloka* 1: 167 & 169, October 1975, tape recording in possession of the author.

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. Thus human beings live their lives completely 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 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 *Śiva 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.

Śāmbavopāya

In order to succeed in *śāmbavopāya* the Śaiva *yogi* must possess supreme strength of awareness so that he/she does not need support to maintain his/her consciousness of self. Śaiva masters tell us that in *śāmbavopāya* the aspirant has only to maintain the thoughtless (*nirvikalpa*) state continuously. For this reason, *śāmbhavopāya* is said to be the most refined *upāya*. Here the aspirant must reside in the subtlest 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/she has only to will this to happen and it is accomplished. The Kashmir Śaiva points out that, because in *śāmbavopāya* the *yogi* has only to maintain thoughtlessness, he has no where to go and nothing to do. Residing in the thoughtless state is the means and the end. Therefore in *Śāmbavopāya* there are no means separate from what is to be achieved. Lakshmanjoo says, to explain this, “the means exists in the state of the meant.” The *yogi* just wills to be there and he/she is there in his/her own limited subjective awareness, maintaining the continuity of thoughtlessness.

In this state the Trika Śaiva *yogi*, maintaining unbroken thoughtlessness, is waiting at the threshold of Universal Consciousness. Having accomplished this much there is nothing left for him/her to do. For Trika Śaivism this state is significant because up to this point the *yogi* has depended primarily on self-effort. 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 Śaiva hold that the *yogi's* own efforts can only take him to the “door of universal Consciousness?” The Śaiva argues that the *yogi* is a limited being (*jīva*) and Lord Śiva is unlimited. This *yogi* is manifested as a limited being by the supreme magical trick (*mahamāyā*) of Lord Śiva's independent will (*svatantriya śakti*) and depends upon Lord Śiva for his/her existence. Because this *yogi* is limited and dependent he/she cannot force that unlimited divine reality of which he/she is a manifestation to reveal itself. Kashmir Śaivism holds that it is by the grace of God (*śaktipāta*)—in the form of the grace of the master—that Lord Śiva is revealed. When the disciple, by maintaining thoughtlessness, reaches the entrance of the *śāmbhava* state, he/she is said to be capable of receiving the master's grace. Lakshmanjoo explains that it is this grace that carries the disciple to absorption in universal God Consciousness.¹¹

Śāktopāya

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, Śaivism teaches, is the nature of thinking and perception. I look at the pen on my desk and then turn to look at a book lying just next to it. In the first instance I look at the pen and the perception of the pen comes into existence, exists for some time, and ceases to exist. This perception is replaced by the perception of the book which comes into existence, exists for some time, and 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 Śaiva 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 the gap shines that universal Reality of Śiva, which lies at the background and is the ground of all diversity.

Unlike *śāmbhavopāya*, *śāktopāya* involves more readily definable techniques. In *śāktopāya* 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

¹¹ Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism “The Secret Supreme”* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 34.

has to mentally catch hold of that junction (*sandhi*) which resides in all the activities and thoughts that make up our lives. This Śaiva masters call “centering” (*madhyam 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 *śāktopāya*, which is to enter into universal Consciousness existing in the center between any two thoughts or actions. Such a *yogi* would then be qualified only for *āṇavopāya*.

Through developing this intensity of awareness the *yogi* will be able to maintain a continuity of unbroken awareness. The Śaiva 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 *śāktopāya* all actions, all thoughts are fit for such practice. These gaps 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 junctions exist. Furthermore, all practices which are essentially *āṇavopāya* practices are, for the aspirant residing in *śāktopāya*, *śāktopāya* practices if they are done with full unbroken awareness.

Lakshmanjoo tells us that the goal of the *śāktopāya* aspirant is to develop ever increasing firmness of awareness, making him/herself capable of receiving the *guru*'s grace. When the *yogi* reaches this state he/she is said to be in that state which is described as “being at the feet of the *guru*.”¹² This aspirant is then fit to achieve absorption in universal Consciousness. When this *yogi* receives the grace of the *guru* in *śāktopāya*, he/she reaches that state of mystical absorption which merges and is one with the supreme mystical absorption (*samāveśa*) existing in the *sāmbhava* state.

Āṇavopāya

Āṇavopāya, the most inferior of the three *upāyas* in Kashmir Śaivism, is the one concerned with *anu*, the individual soul. In *āṇavopāya* the aspirant needs support and help from all sides to maintain, focus, and strengthen his/her awareness. We have seen how the *śāktopāya* aspirant has more strength of awareness. His/her strength of awareness is such that only one point is needed as a support for his/her concentration, namely, the center. And in *sāmbhavopāya* the aspirant has developed such strength of awareness that he/she only needs to will to be in his/her own nature and this takes place. There is no where for him/her to go and nothing to be done. He/she is already

¹² Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism “The Secret Supreme,”* 35.

residing in the object of this *upāya*. So, in *āṇavopāya* the aspirant needs all support, in *śāktopāya* the aspirant needs some support, and in *śāmbavopāya* the aspirant needs no support.

In *āṇavopāya* the aspirant takes the help of many different processes to aid him/her in maintaining and strengthening his/her awareness. He/she 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 his/her 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 the outgoing and incoming breath and the point between the incoming and outgoing breath.

In *karāṇa* the aspirant maintains one pointedness through vision or another sense such as hearing. The sense of sight, however, is most important. For example the aspirant may go on gazing at particular object without blinking his eyes. In this process he/she should try to maintain an unbroken chain of awareness. When that perception vanishes, as it will when he/she 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 “*Śiva*,” 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 his/her practice it is considered *dhyāna*. And it is not uncommon to find *dhyāna* combined with *uccāra* and *karāṇa*, 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 Śaivism there are three main places for concentration, between the eyebrows, the pit of the throat, and 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. 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” Lakshmanjoo 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, and midnight, and so on. All of these points and positions are to be located and concentrated on in the span of one individual breath.¹³

Of the numberless practices which are found in *āṇavopāya*, there are two practices which stand out as most typical: *cakrodaya* and *ajapā gāyatrī*. Both of these practices incorporate *uccāra*, concentration on breath, *dhyāna*, contemplation with *mantra*, and *karāṇa*, 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.

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 incoming breath, and the incoming and outgoing breath. While also being aware of the flow of the breath in the total breathing cycle, predominance is given to the the beginning point and the ending point. The 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/she maintains a slow movement of the breath along with the sound of breathing. In both these practices, along with breathing, the aspirant mentally repeats the mantra given to him by his/her master.

The aspirant in these practices must maintain full awareness in the center between the two breaths. 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. The *yogi* should be excited by his/her practice.¹⁴ Through the strengthening of his/her awareness the aspirant will enter into this center between the two breaths. His/her practice will become *śāktopāya*, he/she will enter into the mystical absorption (*samāveśa*) of *śāktopāya*. Finally, the *yogi* will attain the mystical realization of *śāmbhavopāya*.

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 *āṇavopāya* takes longer, *śāktopāya* is a shorter way, while *śāmbhāvopāya* is the quickest. Although the means are different, the end to be achieved is one.¹⁵

¹³ Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism “The Secret Supreme,”* 38.

¹⁴ Swami Lakshmanjoo, “Talks on Practice,” in John Hughes, *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism, the Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 42.

¹⁵ Swami Lakshmanjoo, “Talks on Practice” 40.

Mokṣa

One might ask whether *śāmbhāva-samāveśa*, the mystical absorption in the state of Śiva, is equivalent to *mokṣa*, liberation. In fact, it is not. It certainly must exist if *mokṣa* is to occur but it is not its defining characteristic. Abhinavagupta tells us in the *Tantrāloka* “Mokṣa only exists when your being becomes absolutely independent (*svatantrātmaka*),”¹⁶ What is this “independence” that Abhinavagupta specifies as the necessary condition of *mokṣa*? We have seen above that it is repeatedly declared that an essential characteristic of Lord Śiva is his independence. It is explained that Lord Śiva created this universe by means of his independence. Śiva’s independence means complete unbridled freedom, freedom to will, freedom to know, freedom to do. According to Abhinavagupta, a *yogi* can only be said to be liberated when he/she possesses this absolute independence. For a *yogi* to be independent, nothing must be able to limit him/her or overshadow his/her universal consciousness. This means that this *yogi* must experience the same state of universal Consciousness, the same independence, in the external world as he/she does in the mystical absorption of the *śāmbhāva* state. From the Trika Śaiva point of view, until he/she attains this state he/she can not be said to be absolutely independent or to have attained *mokṣa* (liberation).

Swami Lakshmanjoo in discussing the supreme mystical absorption of *śāmbhāva* explains how the *yogi*’s internal mystical trance becomes fused with and transforms his/her external experience (*vyutthāna*). He tells us that this process begins when the *yogi* is experiencing the state of internal mystical awareness, when he/she is relishing the fullness of his universal Consciousness. At that moment he/she is pulled out into the world of external experience. His/her eyes open and he/she experiences the world. But this external experience is different, it is now filled with the oneness of universal Consciousness. He/she may experience a chair but the experience of this chair is filled with God Consciousness. He/she may see a tree and the experience of this tree is filled with God Consciousness. Everywhere he/she looks, whatever he/she sees is filled with God Consciousness. Then again his/her eyes close and he/she is drawn inside. And again, after a few moments he/she is drawn outside and opens his/her eyes experiencing the world filled with the oneness of God. He/she cannot stop this process. Even though the *yogi* may try to stop this process he/she 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*.

¹⁶ Swami Lakshmanjoo, translation and commentary on *Tantrāloka* 1: 31, July 1975, tape recording in possession of the author.

In clarifying this process, Lakshmanjoo tells us that what this *yogi* is experiencing is the fusing of his/her inner and outer worlds in the oneness of God Consciousness. He says that the aspirant's I-Consciousness, his/her universal Consciousness, is diluted in consciousness-of-this, consciousness of the external world, and consciousness-of-this is diluted in I-Consciousness. Here the fullness of I-Consciousness absorbs "thisness," 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-mudrā*—resulting in the absolute oneness of universal Consciousness and the outer 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 same. This independence and absolute oneness gives rise to the state of *jagad-ānanda* (universal bliss).¹⁷

To further explain this state of *jagad-ānanda*, Abinavagupta says, "My master Shambhunātha described *jagad-ānanda* 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."¹⁸

This aspirant, whose being has become absolutely independent (*svatantrātmaka*) and who possesses the state of *jagad-ānanda*, is said to be a *jīvanmukta*, a being who is liberated while living. In the *Bodhapañcadasikā*, Abhinavagupta tells us that when the aspirant attains real knowledge of reality, which is the existent state of Lord Śiva, that is final liberation.¹⁹ 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 Śiva. That does not mean that it is a trick which creates an unreal world. For the Trika Śaiva 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 Śiva. 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

¹⁷ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "The Secret Knowledge of Kuṇḍalinī," in John Hughes, *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism, the Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 112-13.

¹⁸ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "The Secret Knowledge of Kuṇḍalinī," This is translation of *Tantrāloka* 6:51-52, 113.

¹⁹ Swami Lakshmanjoo, "Fifteen Verses of Wisdom," 31.

possessing real knowledge he/she knows that the world of differentiation is not actually different from Śiva, the supreme reality.

The cycles of bondage and liberation are both one with Lord Śiva. It is only his trick that we think that some souls are bound in ignorance while others are elevated. As only Lord Śiva 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 Śiva. 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 Śaivism there are three *upāyas*, *śāmbhavopāya*, *śāktopāya*, and *āṇavopāya*. 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 Śhaiva *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 Śiva and that this world is their own playground.