

ABSTRACTS



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PATHS TO LIBERATION IN HINDU AND SIKH TRADITIONS

An international symposium

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Johannes Bronkhorst
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The Vaiśeṣika Path to Liberation in Context

The path to liberation in classical Vaiśeṣika is a function of its ontology. This same ontology obliged many of its followers, much to the surprise of others, to look upon liberation as a state without consciousness, "like a stone" as they sometimes put it. The present paper will explore why this is the case. It will concentrate on the role of Yoga in the process, and on the possibility of liberation-in-life. The analysis of the thought of Śrīdhara, a commentator on the Padārthadharmasamgraha (better known as Praśastapādabhāṣya), in the light of other contemporary and more recent thinkers, will shed further light on the matter.

Michael Williams
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Knowledge, God and Yogic Practice in Bhāsarvajña's Theory of Liberation

The subject of this paper is the tenth-century Kashmiri philosopher Bhāsarvajña. Bhāsarvajña is widely known as a philosopher of the Nyāya school of epistemology, and he seems to have written two influential Nyāya works: the *Nyāyasāra* and the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*. However, Bhāsarvajña was also an ardent devotee of the god Śiva and a serious theorist of yoga. Unlike other Naiyāyikas, who generally said little about their sectarian commitments in their Nyāya works, Bhāsarvajña explicitly attempted to synthesise the particular elements of yogic practice and Śaivite devotional religion with the philosophical views of the early Nyāya school. Bhāsarvajña is known for being a renegade who was not afraid to challenge the mainstream views of Nyāya philosophy, and many of the most original and interesting elements of his work have been traced to these diverse influences.

In this paper, I will explore how these aspects of Bhāsarvajña's background led him to synthesise a novel account of liberation and the means to obtain it. Bhāsarvajña accepts the traditional Nyāya account (articulated in *Nyāyasūtra* 1,1.2), according to which liberation is the culmination of a series of events which begin with true insight (*tattvajñāna*) into certain parts of the world around us; however, he argues that this process needs to be aided by yogic practice. Early in the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*, Bhāsarvajña argues that while the sort of knowledge gained from the study of Nyāya is indispensable to obtaining liberation, Nyāya in itself cannot bring an end to a particular class of faults which arise from the merit or demerit accrued through acts connected with religious and ritual practice. Yogic practice, however, does have the power to bring an end to the impressions (*samskāras*) that cause these faults. In the paper, I will explore how Bhāsarvajña gives the details of how this is possible in later sections of the *Nyāyasāra* and *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* with extensive quotes from the *Yogasūtras* themselves.

In the *Nyāyasāra*, Bhāsarvajña goes on to argue that only a direct perception of God, obtained through yogic practice, can precipitate liberation. I will show how he uses various statements from the Upaniṣads to show that this is, in fact, the correct interpretation of the Nyāya view, because God, as a special kind of soul, is the primary object of knowledge that students of Nyāya should seek to understand. Finally, I will discuss how Bhāsarvajña also here articulates a novel theory of the nature of liberation itself, which seems to have been influenced by his commitments to Pāsupata theology. In a conspicuous deviation from the standard Nyāya theory, Bhāsarvajña argues that souls that have been liberated from *samsāra* experience bliss as well as the mere cessation of suffering theorised in the standard Nyāya view.

Jürgen Hanneder
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The Way to Liberation according to the *Mokṣopāya*

The *Mokṣopāya* (MU), as its name indicates, describes the way to liberation from the world of suffering. It envisions a person liberated within normal life – not an ascetic or saint – who continues to act as before and is not even recognised by the outside world. The text is also not a scholastic Śāstra, in which the concept of liberation is derived from authoritative sources, and is then defined and defended against other schools of thought by the ubiquitous argumentative method of Sanskrit scholarship. In a sense the text itself is the method, since the hearer is supposed to gain the liberating knowledge by simply listening to it. One gets the impression that the text does not just explain liberation, it wants to evoke a shift in consciousness by explaining repeatedly its different aspects and leading the reader into the right direction. For this reason we find in the MU an uncommon and – given that the MU is fairly voluminous text – quite elaborate description of liberation. In the passages explained in this lecture the author of the MU seems to explain to the readers that liberation is the normal state of consciousness, and that the way or ways to liberation are not to be taken too literally, for in the final analysis liberation occurs accidentally.

Daniele Cuneo
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Naṭamārga: Dead End or Highway. From Abhinavagupta to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

The present paper aims at sketching the historical trajectories of some South Asian conceptions of theatrical acting as a path towards salvation, the alleged *naṭamārga* of the title. As early as Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the seminal treatise of Sanskrit dramaturgy, some relatively unambiguous textual passages point to the soteriological efficacy of acting and to astounding 'spiritual' results that actors can achieve thanks to their practice on stage. However, in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta's commentarial masterwork on Bharata's text, an incredibly sophisticated account of the actorial practice and emotional experience is paired with a seeming denial of their proximity with religious practice and spiritual *Erlebnis*, although numerous clues in the works of Abhinava hint at even deeper parallels between the conceptions of actoriality and the śaiva notion of the supreme being. But it is the novel idea of *bhaktirasa*, the aesthetic emotion of devotion, quickly dismissed by Abhinavagupta, that becomes centuries later the linchpin of a revolutionary move, brought about by figures such as Rūpagosvāmin, Jīvagosvāmin and their followers. As if history came full circle, almost back to the close contiguity that aesthetics, soteriology and ritual enjoyed in the text of Bharata, the boundaries between theatre and life, religious worship and aesthetic delectation, salvation represented on stage and salvation proper dissolve in the intentionally paradoxical figure of the spectator-actor-devotee that was invented and fostered by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.

Elisa Freschi
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The Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta Path to Liberation: *bhakti*- and *prapattimārga* in the Writings of Vedānta Deśika

Veṅkaṭanātha (also known as Vedānta Deśika, traditional dates 1269--1370) is likely to be the most important systematiser of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school. His main achievement was finding a balance between the Vedānta element of the school and the Āḷvār-based one. When it comes to *mārga*, the former school upheld *bhaktimārga*, whereas the latter did not formalise a specific *mārga*, but its poems highlighted one's personal commitment to God as the only way left to unworthy human beings. Consequently, Veṅkaṭanātha systematised the idea of a *mārga* called *prapatti* 'surrender to God' as an autonomous way to salvation, alternative to *bhakti*. The paper will trace the early history of *prapatti* from Rāmānuja's acceptance of it as a preliminary to *bhakti* to

Veṅkaṭanātha's acknowledgement of its autonomy. Moreover, the paper will explain how Veṅkaṭanātha used the Mīmāṃsā approach to alternative rituals to explain how both *mārgas* could be valid alternatives to the same goal.

Andrew Nicholson

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Unifying Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta: Vijñānabhikṣu's Paths to Liberation

The 16th century philosopher Vijñānabhikṣu has held an ambiguous place in histories of Indian philosophy, in part because of disagreements about his philosophical affiliation. Historians have portrayed him alternatively as a Sāṃkhya, Yogin, or Vedāntin, often based on a selective reading of his large textual corpus. However, I argue that running throughout all his works is the theme of unity of these three *darśanas*. For Vijñānabhikṣu, release can come through following any of these three paths, whose goal he understands to be the same. However, he privileges Vedānta over Sāṃkhya insofar as he claims that the ultimate goal of Sāṃkhya, *kaivalya*, is best understood in terms of the Bhedābheda Vedānta concept of non-separation (*avibhāga*) from *brahman*. At the same time, he says that even a Sāṃkhya atheist can achieve liberation. From the perspective of praxis, Vijñānabhikṣu describes the Yoga school of Patañjali as supreme. While following the techniques described in the Brahma Sūtras and Sāṃkhya Sūtras will lead to eventual liberation, they are less efficient than the methods of the Yoga school. He claims that by means of Patañjali's Yoga one can obliterate even those karmic seeds that have already begun to come to fruition (*prārabdhā-karman*), thereby achieving immediate liberation.

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Peter Bisschop

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The Pāśupata Path of Liberational Death in the *Skandapurāṇa*

Among the various soteriological movements of ancient India, the Pāśupatas followed a path of extreme asceticism and devotion to Rudra, held to be the supreme lord and ultimate saviour. Our understanding of the Pāśupata system largely derives from the foundational *Pāśupatasūtra* and its commentary, the *Pañcārthabhāṣya*, along with the subsequent *Gaṇakārikā* and *Ratnaṭikā*. Aside from these Sāstric works, however, the Pāśupatas also left their stamp on several Śaiva Purāṇas, such as the *Liṅgapurāṇa*, the *Śivapurāṇa* and the *Kūrmapurāṇa*. In this talk I will discuss some of the unique teachings found in the Pāśupatayogavidhi, the final ten chapters of the 6th/7th-century *Skandapurāṇa*, which includes very rich unexplored material on Pāśupatayoga. After an introduction to Sāṃkhya and Yoga, the text teaches the supreme path to liberation, the Pāśupatayoga, as a path that culminates in liberating death (*utkrānti*). I will specifically address the way the text positions the Pāśupata path in relation to the soteriologies of Sāṃkhya and Yoga and look into the relations between the Sāstric and the Purāṇic models of the Pāśupata path to liberation.

Peter Schreiner

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“The path is the goal”: Liberating practices in the *Viṣṇu-* and the *Narasimha-Purāṇa*

Purāṇas being encyclopedic texts the first question to be asked concerns the problem whether Purāṇas as textual unities can represent one tradition. Hence, the paper begins by looking at *how* the two selected source texts speak about path(s), tradition(s) and liberation (terminology, literary genres, dialogical embedding).

I shall present examples of characters *who* reached the goal and describe (analyse) *what* they did

on their way. If possible I shall classify these practices (number of steps, avoidable obstacles, doctrinal assumptions, crossroads and choices) and explore whether the way(s) and the goal(s) are intrinsically connected (divine interference, karmic causality, ritual tools).

Ideally the observed differences will lead to plausible chronological hypotheses concerning textual and doctrinal history. The unavoidable fact that I shall restrict my observations to two (and only those two) source texts should be sufficient guarantee against undue generalizations.

Marion Rastelli
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Is Ritual Initiation Sufficient for Achieving Salvation? Paths to Liberation in the Pāñcarātra Tradition

This paper will explore the paths to liberation described in two of the earliest extant Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās, namely, the *Jayottaratantra* (9th c. CE?) and the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*, which is an extended and later version of the *Jayottaratantra*. A comparison of the two can thus provide insights into historical developments of the Pāñcarātra tradition. Both texts explicitly state that ritual initiation (*dīkṣākarma*) is the path to liberation (*muktimārga*), as opposed to the path to worldly pleasures (*bhuktimārga*), which consists of rituals aimed at “mastering” a mantra (*mantrasādhana*).

The paper will first investigate the ritual procedure of initiation as described in the *Jayottaratantra* (based on a forthcoming critical edition being prepared by Diwakar Acharya, which he has kindly made available to me) in order to explain why this ritual is considered liberating. This will be contrasted with the later *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*, which in addition to the above path, contains chapters depicting another path to liberation. While ritual initiation is also considered necessary in this different path, the central factor leading to liberation here is knowledge (*jñāna*).

The second part of the paper will examine this additional path and address the question why the author of these chapters did not consider ritual initiation sufficient for achieving liberation.

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Jivan-mukt: Releasement in Living this Life

While some concept of liberation/soteriology/salvation/freedom can be readily found in Western classical Indian philosophical traditions, it is not easy to find an equivalent in the primary sources of Sikh thought, notably 1431 page central text of Sikhism known as the Guru Granth Sahib. Part of the reason is that in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus (*gurmat*) the term *mukt* or *mukti* (freedom/emancipation/liberation) is not necessarily tied to a metaphysics designed to negate life, material attachments etc. Indeed the most productive approach to any potential path to liberation in *Sikhi* is to look carefully at the term *jivanmukt* which refers simultaneously to a *process* of releasement in and through life, and to an *embodied being* who has striven to achieve this end goal while alive. The key point to note is the centrality of life and the potential it offers for releasement. Consequently although *jivanmukt* refers to release/liberation as a concept, its philosophical sense is somewhat nebulous simply because that very sense is intrinsically tied to the body.

In this paper I will try to bring some level of philosophical clarity to the term *jivanmukt* by reading across three different discourses that touch this notion in the Sikh texts: ontological, epistemological and psycho-somatic. An ontology can be found in Guru Nanak’s composition on cosmology (the so called *Rag Maru* hymn); epistemology in the verses focused on the nature of ego-mind (*haumai*) in the Siddh Gosht hymn; while the psycho-somatic element can be adduced from a variety of compositions that deal with emotions and affects. Reading across these discourses it may be possible to develop a sustained philosophical understanding of the term *jivanmukt* and thus to try and gain some purchase not only on what a Sikh concept of liberation looks like, but just as importantly, translates into actual practice.