

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

It was Shelley who wrote "Die if thou wouldst be with that thou dost seek."¹ But the experiences and the teachings of the Āḷvārs are to the contrary. To the true lover of God Whose love is truly reciprocated, departure from this world and from this body is not essential for the realization of spiritual bliss. Encased in this material body and surrounded by this material world with all its temptations and allurements, he still finds it possible to realise the fulfilment of his soul and to reach the goal of his spiritual endeavour. In spite of his physical shortcomings and his material surroundings, he is able to centre his mind in God and convert this world of *samsāra*, in so far as he is concerned, into a world of eternal bliss. When that frame of his mind breaks into rhapsody, he sings in the following strain: "What is there wrong or low in my continuing in this life, if my beautiful lotus-eyed Lord so grant that my lips shall always utter His ever-increasing greatness and glory, my mind ever be filled by His rapturous and seductive Form, and my hands be unceasingly engaged in offering the choicest flowers at His divine Feet?"² Those who render service to Lord Kṛṣṇa are verily in the Paramapada and so need not aspire to reach that place.³ Offering greetings to Him shall be practised assiduously not minding the worlds here and hereafter.⁴ Toṅṭaraṭip-poṭiyāḷvār is fascinated by the Sleeping Beauty at Śrī Raṅgam. Therefore he emphatically rejects the offer of even Indra's post in heaven.⁵ Vedānta Deśika, who could be said without

-
1. *The Complete Poetical works of Shelley.*
 2. TVM 8.10: 4; cf. P. Tv. 48.
 3. P. Tv 79.
 4. *ibid.* 67.
 5. T.M. 2.

any exaggeration, to have lived a peaceful life dedicating himself for the service of the Lord, enjoyed the supreme and ineffable charm of Lord Varadaraja at Kāñci and swore that he did not have any attraction for Vaikuṇṭha.⁶ Devotees like these pious souls did not really choose to leave the world, but God chose them to be with Him in Vaikuṇṭha and so they had to leave their mortal frame.

It is true that the individual soul has not yet cast off its body which still ties it down to the material plane. But the centre of its existence has been shifted from itself to God. The Ptolemic theory has given place to the Copernican theory and it is now deeply realized and fully felt that our centre is outside us. When it was shown that the earth was not the centre about which the rest of the planets revolved, but was itself a microscopic speck revolving along one of several circumferences round another centre, then there came a revolution in the astronomical world. The shifting of the centre is so full of meaning and significance there. In a similar manner the individual soul is made to realize that the physical world, the animal world, the rest of mankind, the starry firmament above, and the warring elements below have not all been created for its pleasure and well-being, but that along with it viz., the individual soul, they are all revolving round one and the same centre, - God. And as concentric circles can never touch one another, clash or conflict cannot occur. Once this is understood in all its aspects and significance, there is no more trouble. The individual existence is no more in conflict with the cosmic existence. The motion of the planets round their own axis together with their moons and satellites is quite consistent with their motion round the sun. The individual beings have gravitated in like manner towards the Supreme Being and in that very gravitation, they find their source, sustenance and satisfaction.

This is the state that can be equated with the bliss of the Eternals. This is also the state referred to by Nammālvār

6. *Varadarāja-japañcaśat*, 49.

as one of the results flowing from the recitation of his hymns. Though they are born on earth as *samsāris* they will be superior to all others.⁷ They will be enjoying the divine experience without interval of day or night and they will be blessed by God.⁸ They will be blessed with the praises of the world and will lead a full life.⁹ In short, theirs will be a "*Pukal vaḷkkai*" - 'a life of renown'. On attaining this earthly - unearthly state, the individual soul feels all the security and all the bliss that are usually understood to be the lot of the *mukta*, and thinks that this state itself is *mokṣa* and not merely a pale foretaste of it. It even feels in the first flush that this stage is higher and sweeter and more difficult of attainment than *mokṣa* itself. Many of the Āḷvārs claim for this state greater excellence than for the state of *mokṣa* in the eternal region of Paramapada.¹⁰

Intense experience of God fills the mystic devotee with delectable enjoyment relieving him of the stress and storm of worldly life. This experience lasts only for short periods which may vary from individual to individual. Occasions when such an experience is not had make the mystics yearn passionately for a reunion with the Divine. While this is expressed by some mystics, others become conscious of the worldly ill^s and plead to God for an escape from them. The actual impact of the sufferings of people, mystical and non-mystical, impress alike upon the mystics. The inevitable nature of the sufferings of the world is admitted by them. Ailments of mind and body, old age and requirements of daily life and the social adjustments with people of different abilities and capacities which are invariably unpalatable to the mystics together with the arousing of the impressions in themselves that have been imbedded in the beginningless series of previous births show the mystics that the world and life here, however much they are kept beyond the comprehension by the mystic experiences, have to be got rid

7. T.V.M. 5:9 : 11.

8. *ibid.* 8.5 : 11.

9. *ibid.* 3.3 : 11.

10. For example, vide P. Tv. 51, 79.

of once and for all. This shall be sought after, if sufferings, which had fallen to their lot, should be ended never to recur. God too teaches His men only this by withdrawing from time to time the intense experiences which are afforded by Him, in order that the real nature of mortality could be made known to them. Thus arises the need for final release or emancipation.

Mokṣa is the state of release of the soul from bondage due to *karma*. It is a return from the becoming of *samsāra* to the being of Brahman. It is thus a reversal of the empirical process due to the complex of *avidyā*, *kāma* and *karma* and the infinite regress of causality. In other words, it is liberation from worldly and other-worldly limitations and entry into the infinite. It thus implies self-transcendence in the subjective aspect of mastery over *karma* and in the objective aspect of going beyond the limits of space-time. Thus in a true emancipation the eternal transcends the temporal, and it is only in the world of Brahman transcending the phenomenal world that the self is transformed or brahmanized and enjoys eternal life. The *mukta* belongs to the realm of Brahman. Nammālvār in his vision of *mokṣa* views himself so far advanced in realization that he transcends the realm of the senses, apprehends the key differences between *ātman* and *prakṛti*, rises above the joys and sorrows, *punya* and *pāpa* of the world, and thereby experiences the release of the soul. The verse under reference contains a full and apt description of the experience of *mokṣa* in and through the soul.

The state of final release is conceived differently by the different schools of thought and it is due to the concept of life that is idealised by the particular school. The schools like Sāṅkhya, Nyāya, Buddha and Jaina which stress on the worldly ills, declare the state of release as *nirvāṇa* (blowing out of everything that is distressing), *apavarga* (escaping from the material world), and *kaivalya* (existing in isolation). The Vaiśeṣika school, though closely allied to the Nyāya in its attitude to the world, mentions the state of release as supremely prosperous (*niḥśreyasa*), verily a state in which the self is free

from the material bonds and so lies in its own state. To the Advaitin, the state of *mokṣa* is an ideal one when the attributeless Brahman alone exists. The same is the case with the schools of Bhedābheda and Suddhādvaita. All the other schools of Vedānta and the theistic schools of religion believe in the omni-presence of God. God comes down to this world and enables His devotees to have communion with Him. The love which the devotees have for God must perforce be wished to be everlasting. The awareness that mortality could not permit this naturally makes them wish to have the same experience in a life hereafter when no material binding can cut it at any stage. God Who condescends to grant His devotees such an experience here by presenting Himself unto them must and will grant an experience of the same kind to the maximum degree of delectability when the selves are not bound by any limitations. Naturally, the state of release is held by all these schools to be marked by supreme bliss without the least trace of suffering.

It is also said that *mukti* is the realization of the meaning of the relation between the self and the Universal Self enshrined in the *Upaniṣadic* text "Thou art That".¹² There is more value in abolishing the *ahaṅkāra* of the *jīva* by self-effacement and surrender of the self to the true Self. *Kaṅkaryarasa* brings out the joy of selfless service. In attuning his naughted will to that of the *śeṣi*, the *mukta* feels that he is like a lute on which the supreme singer plays. Love is fulfilled in surrender and service; its cosmic value lies in attuning itself to the infinite. But it is the experience of the bliss of Brahman that expresses the supreme value of *mukti* in the Viśiṣṭādvaitic sense of the ecstasy of the unitive consciousness.¹³ Then the *mukta* is immersed in the supreme and unsurpassable bliss of Brahmānubhava without losing his self-being. It is a state of *sāyujya* in which the unitive experience of bliss is present without the loss of self-existence.¹⁴

12. Ch. Up. 6.8 : 7.

13. Ve. Sūt. 4.4 : 21.

14. R.T.S. Ch. 22.

Nammālvār conceives *mokṣa* as the God's abode and also a place of the freed souls who are the real immortals. The Ālvār refers to this place in his works as "viṭu",¹⁵ "tuyar illā viṭu",¹⁶ "viṇ nāṭu",¹⁷ "vān nāṭu",¹⁸ "vaikuṇṭham",¹⁹ "Vaikuṇṭha vān nāṭu",²⁰ "vaikuṇṭha-mānakar"²¹ and "pon-ulaku".²² The reference to "vaikuṇṭha nāṭan"²³ or the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha signifies that God is the ruler of the city Vaikuṇṭha. *Viṭu* is deliverance, deliverance from the worldly life or *samsāra*. The conception of *viṭu* is not given by Tiruvaḷḷuvar in unequivocal terms; but the nearest approach can be seen in *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.²⁴ The same concept is clearly expressed by Nammālvār as "Aṟṟatu paṟṟenil uṟṟatu viṭu uyir"²⁵ – the *jīva* (soul) once gives up its attachment to the worldly things attains *mokṣa*. The words 'viṇṇāṭu', 'vān nāṭu' suggest that the so-called place of *mokṣa* is situated far above the world in the endless space. The place is free from misery – "tuyar illā viṭu." The Ālvār while stating the specific result flowing from a recitation of his hymns gives expression to *mokṣa*. Generally the ideal is always described in a positive way such as "those who recite this decad of ten verses will reach Vaikuṇṭha,"²⁶ "those who sing these verses of the hymn will become the followers and lovers of the Lord",²⁷ "those who recite this decad will be freed from the cycle of births"²⁸

15. T.V.R. 95; T.V.C. 2; P. Tv. 48; T.V.M. 1.1: 10; 2.8: 1, 10; 2.9: 10; 2.9: 11; 3.4: 11; 3.10: 11; 10.5: 5; 10.10: 11.

16. *ibid.* 2.8: 2.

17. T.V.R. 9, 54; P. Tv. 48, 79.

18. T.V.R. 23.

19. *ibid.* 66, 68; P. Tv. 53; T.V.M. 2.1: 11; 2.5: 11; 4.7: 11; 4.8: 11; 5.3: 11; 5.4: 11; 5.10: 11; 9.10: 5; 10.7: 8; 10.9: 9.

20. P, Tv. 68.

21. T.V.M. 4.10: 11.

22. *ibid.* 6.8: 11.

23. *ibid.*, 7.9: 4.

24. *Kuṟaḷ* Ch. 35-37.

25. T.V.M. 1.2: 5.

26. T.V.M. 2.5: 11; 4.8: 11;

27. *ibid.* 2.6: 11; 3.6: 11; 5.5: 11; 6.4: 11; 6.9: 11; 7.3: 11.

28. *ibid.* 3.2: 11; 3.7: 11; 3.9: 11; 8.3: 11; 8.4: 11.

“the recitors of the hymn of ten verses will be freed from *karma*”,²⁹ “the decad on His sacred Feet will lead us to His Feet”,³⁰ “this decad will purify and cleanse the heart”,³¹ “the recitors of the hymn will render service to Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa”,³² “those who learn this decad will attain His Feet”³³ etc. Other Ālvārs too have the same conception regarding *mokṣa*. They too refer to *mokṣa* more or less in the same words and phrases. The words and phrases referred to by them are “*peruntlam*” (Great Land),³⁴ “*peru vicumpu*” (Great Space),³⁵ “*umpar ulaku*”³⁶ (World of *Devas*), “*Vimṣakam*” (Celestial Abode), “*Nāraṇan ulaku*”³⁷ “*Inpavīlu*”³⁸ (an Abode of Bliss), “*Amarar ulakam*”³⁹ (World of Celestials), “*Vāṇōr kaṭṭinakar*”⁴⁰ (a City of Celestials with its ramparts) etc. Kulacēkarālvār describes the *mokṣa* idea in a negative way as “those who have mastered this decad of Kulacēkara will never go to Hell.”⁴¹ The description of *mokṣa* coincides more or less with the *Nitya-vibhūti* as described in the Vaiṣṇavite Āgamas and other Vaiṣṇavite texts.

According to Vaiṣṇavism, Īsvara is the object of the knowledge which is the means, *upāya*, and also the object of the knowledge which is attainment: He is the means as being the giver of the desired fruit and the bestower of Grace, and likewise, He is *upāya* because Himself the object that is to be

29. *ibid.* 4.6: 11; 7.1: 11; 10.1: 11.

30. *ibid.* 4.9: 11.

31. *ibid.* 5.2: 11.

32. *ibid.* 6.5: 11; 8.9: 11.

33. *ibid.* 10.4: 11.

34. *Peri. Tm.* 1.1: 9.

35. *ibid.* 5.6: 5.

36. *ibid.* 11.4: 10.

37. *M. Tv.* 68.

38. *Perum. Tm.* 7: 11.

39. *Tc. V.* 120.

40. *I. Tv.* 41.

41. *ibid.* 88.

42. *Perum. Tm.* 5: 10.

reached. He is the ever-attained means (*Siddhōpāya*).⁴³ As auxiliary to this means there are two other means, namely, *bhakti* and *prapatti*. The former is mainly based upon the teaching of the *Upanisads* and its adoption is restricted to the higher castes; the latter is meant for all and its source is to be traced mainly to the Vaiṣṇavite *Āgama*. In the case of those who have adopted *prapatti* as the sole and independent means, Īśvara takes the place of their *upāyas*. In the case of others (i.e.) those that adopt *bhakti*, Īśvara whose favour has been won by *prapatti* (adopted as an auxiliary means to *bhakti*) intervenes and, standing in the place of rites and duties which are too hard for them in those situations which lie between the beginning of *karma-yoga* and the completion of the (prescribed) meditation, brings about the removal of sins and the manifestation of *sattva* which can result from their performance. He sees to it that the meditation or worship which can be adopted as an *upāya* is so complete as to bear fruit.

The path to *mukti* or *mokṣa* is referred to "*celkati*,"⁴⁴ "*māk-kati*"⁴⁵ by the Ālvārs. *Celkati* is the good path which a *jīva* has to choose and *māk-kati* is *mokṣa*. These two concepts in combination may be interpreted to mean the straight and shining path of *arcirādi gati* as mentioned in the *Chandogya Upanisad*^{45(a)}. Tirumaṅkaiyālvār mentions this in his *Īrut-tirumaṭal*⁴⁶ and elaborates it in his *Periyatiru-maṭal*.⁴⁷ The soul travels through the solar rays, reaches the sun, enters through a minute hole in the sun and then attains the place called *mokṣa* where, it is said, it enjoys the Lord. The making of a single *mukta* is a cosmic event, as it were, and even the celestials hail the entry of the finite self into infinity and sing hallelujahs in their own celestial way. The glorious

43. T.V.M. 3.5: 10; P. Tv. 46.

44. Peri. Tm. 1.1: 5, 8

45. Mū. Tv 95.

45(a) Ch. Up. 4.15: 5.

46. C. TML Kaṇṇi, 7, 8.

47. P. TML Kaṇṇi, 16, 17.

ascent of the soul to its original home has been vividly described by Nammālvār.⁴⁸

The course of devotion involves a training in three stages known as *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, and *bhakti-yoga* in the progressive realization of *mokṣa*. These three stages constitute the to-be-attained means (*sādhypāya*). The path of *karma* means the performance of certain kind of *karma* or rites and duties⁴⁹ as the result of knowledge acquired from the *sāstras* in regard to the true nature of self and the Universal Self. One should perform one's duties for the fulfilment of God's purpose; the person should do them subordinating his will completely and whole-heartedly to the divine will. The duties are done solely to please God. By thus working for the Lord, one not only renounces the fruits associated with them, but purifies one's heart. This purification is looked upon as the necessary result of so dedicating all one's deeds to God. This *karma-yoga* has several subdivisions⁵⁰ which include such items as the adoration of the gods, the performance of austerities (*tapas*), pilgrimage to sacred places, giving in charity, and sacrifices. Some of these rites and duties are referred to by the Ālvārs. Nammālvār says: "Enjoying the sight of Thy presence with my eyes, and offering flowers, culled from all directions, at Thy Feet to my hands' content, and dancing and singing of Thy praises";⁵¹ "which deity other than the Lord Who created Brahmā to create the *Devas* and the whole universe deserves offerings of flower and ritual worship?";⁵² "without separation from the Lord, offering Him holy water, and, after that, incense and

48. T.V.M. 10.9.

49. The rites and duties consist of (i) *nitya karma* or regular duties to be performed compulsorily (like the daily *sandhyāvandanam*), (ii) *naimittika karma* or rites to be compulsorily performed on specific occasions (like the eclipse of the sun or the moon), and (iii) such *kāmaya karmas* or rites as are optional and as have been chosen to be within one's ability.

50. Bh. G. 4 : 25 and et seq.

51. T.V.M. 4.7 : 8.

52. *ibid.* 2.2 : 4.

flowers";⁵³ "Tiruvēñkaṭam where the *Devas* led by their leader (Indra) attain salvation by worship with the choicest flowers, holy water, lamp and incense";⁵⁴ "Devotees and *Pakavars* who with *Puruṣa-sūkta* on their lips, in strict accordance with the ritual code, offer service at the Feet of the Lord with plenty of flowers, incense, lamps, sandal paste and holy water";⁵⁵ "Are not the days near when I can circumambulate and worship with folded palms the deity at Tiruvāraṇ-ṇiṭai";⁵⁶ "Am I not sure to realize my aspiration to walk round the temple with fragrant holy water and to worship with folded hands";⁵⁷ "Let us emancipate ourselves by service to the Lord and by worship of Him with choice flowers, holy water, lamp and incense";⁵⁸ "How great is the merit of those who worship the Lord at Tiruvanantapuram with the offer of flowers in strict accord with the ritual code!"⁵⁹ In this process the self-regarding sentiments like self-love and self-possession are subdued. Animal instincts and inclinations are transmuted into an organic craving for God, like baser metals are transmuted into gold in the furnace. The whole process is one of self-realization by self-renunciation; the earth-bound self then becomes spiritualised.

The path of knowledge is a stage of constant and uninterrupted contemplation, by one who has conquered his mind by *karma-yōga*, of his essential nature or the self as being distinct from matter (the body, the senses and the like) – his *svarūpa* which is the mode of *īśvara* in virtue of its relation to Him as His body. *Jñāna-yōga* is a path of contemplation, of self-illumination and of self-renunciation leading to its positive sequel of self-realization. Contemplation is turning the out-going mind within with the help of *yogic* auxiliaries like *yama* (self-restraint), *niyama* (observation of rites) and

53. *ibid.* 1.6 : 1.54. *ibid.* 3.3 : 7.55. *ibid.* 5.2 : 9.56. *ibid.* 7.10 : 1.57. *ibid.* 7.10 : 2, 8, 9.

58. T.V.M. 9.3 : 9.

59. *ibid.* 10.2 : 4; cf *ibid.* 10.2 : 9; 10.2 : 10; 10.5 : 5; 10.5 : 10; I. Tv. 67:

prāṇāyāma (the control of the breath) and seeking the inner quiet. In this state all activity is swallowed up. The *yogin* can arrest the outgoing tendency by thinking on thought itself, on contemplation on the nature of the *ātman*. Nammālvār prays: "O Father! lend me the helping hand of *jñāna* so that I may reach Thy inaccessible Feet."⁶⁰ When the purified self reflects on itself, all the thoughts are thought away; the contractions caused by *karma* and the confusions due to *avidyā* are then destroyed by the fire of *jñāna*. The *ātman* at this stage returns to itself and shines by itself and enjoys the quiet of *kaivalya*. It is no longer bound by *prakṛti* and its three *guṇas*, but attains calmness and serenity. This self-cognition itself is an orientation towards God-cognition. The *yogin* who has intuited the *ātman* sees the same self in all *jīvas* owing to the similarity of their spiritual intelligence. The seer who has a soul-sight and sweet reasonableness intuits the same *ātman* in a dog as in a god. In a higher stage he has a glimpse of Paramātmān, the Supreme Self as the pervading identity in all *jīvas*, and sees Him in all beings and all beings in Him. Tirumaḷicaiyālvār says: "With a complete shutting of the gates of the senses, and with an opening of the gate of God-knowledge, by kindling the blaze of *jñāna*, by making the body and the heart pine away for God, by such fully mature devotion one can realise the Lord with the discus."⁶¹ In the next higher stage this spiritual experience is further enriched. Pēyālvār says: "The *jñānis* are those who can penetrate with knowledge the Lord Who is the inner meaning of the four *Vedas* and Who is immanent in their hearts."⁶² The spiritual insight of *ātmajñāna* is completely acquired in the fourth stage by the exhibition of universal sympathy in which the *jñāni* realizes the kinship of all *jīvas* and regards the joys and sorrows of others as his own. Nammālvār says: "May we all (entire mankind) never more wallow in this woeful state of false knowledge, evil conduct and filthy body?"⁶³ If he escapes the snare of being (perma-

60. *ibid.* 2.9 : 2; cf. *ibid.* 1.7: 1.

61. Tc. V. 76.

62. MĪ. Tv. 84.

63. T.V.R. 1.

nently) attracted by the pleasure of enjoying this vision which is so great as to create a distaste for all sense-pleasures, then he begins the practice of *bhakti-yoga* which is the direct means for the attainment of the supreme goal of enjoying Bhagavān. While practising *bhakti-yoga*, the aspirant contemplates on Bhagavān as the Inner self of his own self which is His body. The vision that he has already acquired of his own pure self is then useful, for it is only through it that he reaches its Inner Self, just as the cloth within which a gem is tied up is first to be seen before the gem itself can be seen. In this way the vision of one's self serves as a qualification or a stepping stone for the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. The chanters of a hymn of *Tiruvāymoḷi*, according to Nammālvār, will be blessed with *jñāna*.⁶⁴

Bhakti-yoga is the special form of meditation which is of the nature of unsurpassed love and which has, for its object, the essential nature and form and qualities of Bhagavān Who is not dependent on any one else, Who is not subject to the authority of any one else, and Who does not exist for the fulfilment of the purpose of any one else. It is a process in which the seeker after salvation sheds his egoism and ego-centric outlook, attunes himself to the will of God and yearns for eternal communion with Him. *Bhakti* is of the form of a continuous stream of knowledge which is of the nature of uninterrupted memory like the flow of oil streaming down continuously; it has clearness similar to that of visual perception; it grows from strength to strength by being practised every day untill the day of journey to Parmapada and terminates in the remembrance of the past moment. This *yoga* is the direct path to perfection as it leads to the very heart of religious consciousness which consists in shifting the centre of reference from the *ātman* to the *Paramātman*. This stage effects a revolution in our life, which is of far greater importance than the Copernican revolution. While the astronomer realizes the littleness of the earth and the greatness of the sun that draws it to itself, the religious man or devotee knows the emptiness of the earth-bound self and the

saving might of God Who is the source and centre of all living beings. The knowledge of the finite self has its religious fulfilment in the integral experience of the Infinite which is its ground and goal. The self is merged in the Supreme Self like the sponge in the sea. Nammālvār says: "To the Lord, the sandal paste for wearing is my heart; the garland is the garland of verses composed by me; the silken garment too consists of these; the bright ornaments are the folding of my arms in worship".⁶⁵ To this saint Kappan (Kṛṣṇa) is everything: He is the food that he eats, the water he drinks, and the betel he chews.⁶⁶ Again the Ālvār says: "Even if it is not given to me to worship Thee with cool flowers at the appropriate hours, I give over my very life as ornament to Thy fair-head, well decorated with flowers".⁶⁷ "I cry (for the Lord); I bow (before Him); I dance before Him; and I sing and rave".⁶⁸ Periyālvār's sentiment of *bhakti* runs like this: "Laying out the shrine of the heart, and installing the deity of Mātavan there, and offering the flower of devotion at the point of death will enable one to escape the horrors of the world of death".⁶⁹ The whole hymn stresses this sentiment that thoughts of the Lord at the point of death will ensure salvation. The Ālvār's foster-daughter says: "To worship the Lord with fresh flowers in a state of purity, to utter His glory with one's tongue and to cherish it in one's heart would dispose of past and future demerits as dust in fire".⁷⁰ Kulacēkarālvār's god-love is so intense that he says "All are mad to me; I am a mad man to all..... I have grown mad after the Lord".⁷¹ In the whole of the decad the Ālvār's madness after the Lord that is expressed. Again he says: "Just as wealth, even though spurned on by the devotee clings to him āgain and again (by God's Grace), so also I (the property of the Lord) again and again cling to

-
65. *ibid.* 4.3: 2.
 66. *ibid.* 6.7: 1.
 67. *ibid.* 4.3: 4.
 68. *ibid.* 5.8 5.
 69. Periyālvār. Tm. 4.5: 3.
 70. T. Pv. 5.
 71. Perum. Tm. 3: 8.

Thee though Thou may reject me;"⁷² and further in the same hymn, "Even if You spurn me I have no one else to look up to; like a child put aside by its mother, in anger,"⁷³ like a true wife ill-treated by her husband,⁷⁴ like a citizen looking up to the king though he be a despot,⁷⁵ like the lotus flower which unfolds itself only to the burning rays of the sun,⁷⁶ and like the crops that always look up to the clouds that never come,⁷⁷ I look up to Thee and rely on Thee even though Thou does not want me". This is a rare idea, a very difficult concept which has been very beautifully brought out by the Āḷvār in this hymn which has no equal elsewhere even among the verses of the *Nalāyiram*. Tirumaṅkaiyāḷvār expresses his devotion: "I am not going to let Thee out, Who have entered the heart of myself, who has the firm determination to attain salvation by worshipping Thee with the offer of eight kinds of fragrant flowers".⁷⁸ Bhaktisāra has expressed his devotion as that he has controlled the uncontrollable senses, rid himself of the interest in things of the world and concentrated all his attention on Him;⁷⁹ as a humble devotee, he has rooted out wrath and malice, controlled the destinies of the senses, and his devotion has been multiplying.⁸⁰ Again the saint says that he spends his time in reciting His glory, writing about it, reading about it, listening to accounts of it, prostrating before Him, performing service to Him, and offering worship to Him;⁸¹ those who long for attaining to Paramapada soon, and so meditate constantly on the Lord are likely to regard their body itself as a disease;⁸² those who contemplate the

72. Perum. Tm. 5: 9.

73. *ibid.* 5.1.

74. *ibid.* 5.2.

75. *ibid.* 5.3.

76. *ibid.* 5.6.

77. *ibid.* 5.7.

78. Peri. Tm. 3.5. 6.

79. Tc. V. 95.

80. *ibid.* 98.

81. Nāṅ. Tv. 63.

82. *ibid.* 79.

Lord of the ocean of milk continuously will be rid of the sins of the past generations attached to the soul, and will reach Paramapada.⁸³ Among the first three Ālvārs Poykaiyālvār says: Those who unswervingly stick to the path of *bhakti* and worship Thee will find the Body of the Lord celebrated in the *Upaniṣads* incorporating Itself in them";⁸⁴ "My heart seeks nothing but Thy Feet; my tongue speaks of nothing but Thy glory".⁸⁵ Pūtattālvār says: "Making my heart the abode of the Lord, I offered Him the golden lotus of *bhakti*;"⁸⁶ "The faculties are ready; the heart is in it; the lotus flowers are in plenty; the time for His praise is so freely available;"⁸⁷ "My heart delights in meditating on Thy form; my tongue delights in celebrating Thy Feet; my body delights in dancing and singing the praises of Thy weapons;"⁸⁸ "It chanced me to perform service to Thee; I contemplated Thy Lotus-Feet; I identified myself with them in devotion"⁸⁹ Pēyālvār says: "Those who recite the *Vedas* well, acquire true knowledge, quell the five senses, practise self-control and then meditating on Him reach His presence;"⁹⁰ "If one, controlling the senses and prayerfully concentrating one's mind on the Lord, realises the pitfalls of *samsāra* and turns away from it, one can rise above the cycle of births."⁹¹ This *bhakti-yoga* is also a means in accordance with the specific desire of the aspirant for acquiring lordship (in this world or in *svarga*) and other fruits (like *kaivalya*). Among the four kinds of devotees referred to in the *Gītā*⁹² and *Mahābhārata*⁹³ the one who worships Bhagavān with exclusive devotion the best and he attains *moksa*.

83. *ibid.* 89.

84. M.Tv. 76

85. *ibid.* 88.

86. I. Tv. 4.

87. *ibid.* 21.88. *ibid.* 32,33.89. *ibid.* 80.

90. Mū. Tv. 12.

91. *ibid.* 79.

92. Bh. G. 7: 16.

93. M.Bh; Śānti. 350. 33-35

Bhakti-yoga which has thus been prescribed as the means of obtaining *mokṣa* has been called *para-bhakti*. Love of the Lord which results from intimacy with *sāttvikas* (and the scriptures) and which produces *para-bhakti* is also called *bhakti*, because it generates an eager desire to know *Īśvara* with perfect clearness. The statements of Nammālvār as "the lotus-eyed Lord takes his abode in my eyes,"⁹⁴ "He will not go out of my eyes"⁹⁵ and others⁹⁶ describe the stage of *para-bhakti*. When this *para-bhakti* develops in its turn into a thirst or eager desire and determination to see the Lord it is called *para-jñāna*. "O Lord, Thou art the abode of attributes like *jñāna*, be blessed to show Thy whole self!",⁹⁷ "Vouchsafe Thy Grace so that I may see Thee"⁹⁸ and "May I see Thee some day!"⁹⁹ - these statements of Arjuna and the Ālvār describe this stage of *bhakti*. By this keen desire alone the devotee wins the Grace of the Lord Who rewards him with a perfect visual perception of Himself for the time being. This visual perception is *para-jñāna*. From this perfect vision of the *svarūpa* of the Lord is born an excessive and unsurpassed love for Him and unquenchable spiritual thirst similar to that felt by a man suffering from great thirst at the sight of a tank. This (excessive and unsurpassed love for the Lord) is called *parama-bhakti* which produces an eager desire and determination to enjoy the Lord without any limitations,¹⁰⁰ as the devotee feels that it is impossible to live any longer without this experience of eternal bliss as described by Nammālvār¹⁰¹ where he cries out that he will not hereafter allow the Lord to leave Him (*ini nāṅ pōkal oṭṭēn*) and that he must become one with the Lord and

94. T.V.M. 1.9: 9.

95. *ibid.* 10.8: 8.96. *ibid.* 2.8: 10; 3.2: 10; 4.7: 7; 5.7: 5; 5.8: 1; 6.3: 1; 9.4: 8; 10.4: 9.

97. Bh. G. 11: 4.

98. T.V.M. 8.1: 1.

99. *ibid.* 6.9: 4.

100. R.T.S. Ch. 9.

101. T.V.M. 10.10: 1.

declares all this with an oath¹⁰² that cannot be ignored by the Lord. It causes likewise an excessive eagerness in the Lord to give him *mokṣa* immediately and makes him attain it after quenching his great thirst for union; they are finally united in the realm of *mukti*. The soul is a glow with divine fire, but is not identical with it. As the life of our life, God feeds the soul and divinises it. Likewise the soul feeds on God; and in the unitive stage 'I' becomes He and He becomes 'I'. In the bliss of unitive consciousness, the soul-hunger of God and the God-hunger of the soul are both finally satisfied. The temporal pleasures of earth, the seductive joy of *svarga* and the joy of *kaivalya* are nothing when compared to the integral experience of Brahman. The ecstasy is only a momentary rapture, but the instant is construed as eternity. The soul is not passive, but energises enthusiastically and shares its joy with others.

A simple way of reaching the ultimate goal is also envisaged. This way is unqualified and absolute self-surrender, known as *Prapatti*. It is also called *Saraṇāgati*. It is the highest stage of God-love. *Prapatti* stands in the place of *para-bhakti* to the man who adopts it as the direct and independent means. This way preserves the essentials of *bhakti*, dispenses with its predisposing causes or conditions, and omits the non-essentials like the need for ceaseless practice. It is thus a direct and independent means for salvation to those who do not belong to the three higher castes, and (likewise) also for those three higher castes who are wanting in *jñāna* or ability or both and to those who cannot endure any delay in the attainment of *mokṣa* and are extremely impatient. Since it will be the means of securing all desired objects, it has been prescribed in the place of *para-bhakti* for those who know their limitations. The only requisite for this means is the change of heart or contrition on the part of the *mumukṣu* and his absolute confidence in the saving Grace of the *Rakṣaka*. The supreme merit of this means lies in the universality of its appeal to all castes and classes, including even the *jīvas* in the sub-human bodies, the guarantee of salvation

to all *jīvas* who cannot follow the arduous and precipitous path of *bhakti*, its intrinsic and independent value as means and the naturalness and ease in securing immediate effect.

The spiritual experience of the Tamil seers (Āḷvārs) is epitomized in the *Saraṇāgati* of Nammāḷvār who is extolled as the *super-prapanna* of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. The Āḷvār says: "Tariyēṇ inī un caraṇam tantu eṇ caṇmam kaḷaiyāyē."¹⁰³ 'Henceforward it is impossible for me to possess myself in misery without the *darsan* of Thy Feet'. He extends the hospitality of his divine experience to the whole world of *jīvas*, with a view to establishing a spritual community of *bhaktas*. Says the saint: "What else is protection save to serve Kṛṣṇa born in Mattra?"¹⁰⁴ In another place the Āḷvār advising the people, says: "(God is) the Protector of those that surrender at His Feet";¹⁰⁵ "Lover of those that seek refuge at His Feet;"¹⁰⁶ and "is nearer to those who bow to His Feet."¹⁰⁷ The saint records his experience of performing the act of self-surrender at the Feet of the deity at Tirumōkūr; "There is no salvation other than surrender to Kāḷamēkam, the presiding deity at Tirumōkūr"¹⁰⁸ and "the lotus-like Feet of the deity is the only salvation."¹⁰⁹ The peak of his action is seen performed in the presence of Lord of the Tirupati Hills. The Āḷvār confesses to the Lord: "We have been for generations enslaved to Thee. May I be blessed with the attainment of Thy Feet;"¹¹⁰ My love and devotion to Thee are immeasurable. My I be blessed with the gift of attaining Thy Feet;¹¹¹ For me to reach Thy holy Feet I plead for sympathetic compassion in respect of me.¹¹² May I be guided,

103. *ibid.* 5.8: 7.

104. *ibid.* 9.1: 3; 5.

105. *ibid.* 9.10: 5.

106. *ibid.* 9.10: 6.

107. *ibid.* 9 10: 8.

108. *ibid.* 10.1: 1; cf. *ibid.*, 10.1: 2.

109. *ibid.* 10.1: 6.

110. *ibid.* 6.10: 1.

111. *ibid.* 6.10: 2.

112. *ibid.* 6.10: 3.

sinner as I am, to attain Thy Feet filled with flowers.¹¹³ As long as Thou bearest the strong bow, I cannot lose hope. All that I need is to know when I can attain Thy Feet.¹¹⁴ When is it that I can really attain Thy Feet not as in a dream, but in reality.¹¹⁵ I have not performed penances to attain Thy Feet, but not for a moment can I possess myself because I am overborne by eagerness.¹¹⁶ Like Kṛṣṇa Who has made His appearances to all those that deserved His *darsan*, even for me Thy presence should be ensured.¹¹⁷ I cannot refrain even for a moment separation from Thy Feet, having trodden the footprints of my past generations enslaved to Thee.¹¹⁸ Lakṣmī that has, abandoning Her abode of flowers, sought Her abode on Thy handsome bosom to abide in perpetuity, I, that have no stake in life, had entered the shelter of Thy Feet most appropriately to abide there for ever.¹¹⁹ Almost all the Ājvārs speak of their self-surrender to the Lord. They are satisfied with their relationship to the lordship of God instead on the relationship of the mother or the father. All of them have practised this *tapas* or self-surrender to the Lord. Poykaiyālvār says: "The only means to dispel *karma*, disease and sin is self-surrender to the Lord."¹²⁰ Periyālvār says that God has planted His tender Feet on his head as one Pāṇṭiya king planted his Fish-empem on the Mahāmēru mountain.¹²¹ Tirumaḷicaiyālvār requests the Lord to tell him 'Don't fear' as he had surrendered to Him.¹²²

The Hindu religious tradition has recognised the place of intellect in spiritual development. It never encourages blind faith. Taking its clue from the words of Yājñavalkya

113. *ibid.* 6.10: 4.

114. *ibid.* 6.10: 5.

115. *ibid.* 6.10: 6.

116. *ibid.* 6.10: 7.

117. *ibid.* 6.10: 8.

118. *ibid.* 6.10: 9.

119. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

120. M.Tv. 59.

121. Periyā]. Tm. 5.4: 7.

122. Tc V. 92.

in his discourse to his wife Maitreyī in the *Upaniṣad*,¹²³ the Vedānta system recognises three stages in the path of self-realisation, viz., *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. There is the teaching of the Master, the revelation of the Truth. The disciple listens to it and learns the Truth. This is *śravaṇa*, which is the study of the scriptures under a qualified Master. Religion, it is said, is not taught, but caught. Mere intellectual study of the Scriptures is not of much avail. The purport of them may be mixed. And so the meaning of the *Upaniṣads* should be learnt from a realised soul. *Manana* is reflection. After studying the teaching of the *Upaniṣads*, one should reflect upon it and try to understand why it alone is true and not any other teaching. There may arise innumerable doubts which should be dispelled by the process of cogitation. *Manana* does not reveal any new truth. It only serves to remove the doubts regarding the final truth that has already been received through *śravaṇa*. Intellectual conviction alone will not do for self-realisation. Old habits of thought may reassert themselves and stand obstacles in the way. To get over them, *nididhyāsana* or deep contemplation is needed and this leads to the clarity of the vision of the Truth. Bhaktisāra indicates these three stages.¹²⁴ Through this graduated process what was at first was a mere theoretical knowledge of the Self becomes the direct perception or intuitive experience of the Absolute. It is the stage of inseparable communion or unity with God. The *Ītu* interprets the terms “*terital*,” “*ninaital*” and “*enṇal*” as referring respectively to *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*.¹²⁵ Perimēlaḷakar translates them as *kēlvi*, *vimarṣam* (*vimarsa*) and *pāvanai* (*bhāvana*).¹²⁶ Nammālvār uses the terms “*aṟivu*”,¹²⁷ “*ninaivu*”,¹²⁸ and “*uṇarvu*”.¹²⁹ “*Aṟivu*” is learning through

123. Br. Up. 2.4

124. Nāṇ. Tv. 63.

125. *Ītu* on T.V.M. 6.9: 11.

126. Kuṟaḷ. 353 (Commentary).

127. T.V.M. 1.1: 8; 5.5: 11.

128. *ibid.* 1.1: 3.

129. *ibid.* 1.3: 6; 3.5: 6.

"śravaṇa", "niraiṅ" is *manana*, and "uṅarvu" is *nididhyā-sana*. The phrase "aṅṅ-cērtal"¹³⁰ used by the saint may be taken to mean self-surrender, the final communion—the "prapatti" or "āṅma nivēṅana" referring to what Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives us as His final message.¹³¹ The phrases "tāṅ-cērtal,"¹³² "śruvaṅṅ aṅṅtal",¹³³ and "pāṅtam cērtal"¹³⁴ may also be taken as referring to this *niṅṅṅha*. Out of the clearness of vision and of the firmness of conviction comes the unloosening embrace of real communion. Does not this saint say in another context, "uṅṅai nāṅ piṅṅṅtēṅ koṅ cikkeṅavē"¹³⁵?

The Āṅvār speaks of *yoga* also, besides *caryā* and *kriyā*. The above description is in a way *yoga*. But the *yoga* system refers to the eight stages of contemplation.¹³⁶ Those stages are specially designed to draw the mind from the outgoing tendency and dispersal, to subdue its *vāsanās* and to centre it in *samādhi*. As bondage is a descent to the world of *samsāra*, *mukti* is the process of retracing the steps and returning to the spiritual home in God. The whole scheme of *upāsana* is governed by this central concept. The *upāsana* promotes spiritual intimacy and the unitive consciousness. The Lord accepts the flower of devotion more than the flower offerings of outer devotion and it is the eight-petalled flower of *ahimsa*, kindness, patience, truth, self-control, *tapas*, inwardness and *jñāna*. The result is that the Lord, with all the three worlds in His stomach, had filled 'my mind'.¹³⁷

The final state is what is called communion or identity. That is *jñāna*. It is not mere emotion divorced from intellect. It is emotion born out of *jñāna*. It is spoken of variously by

130. *ibid.* 6.10: 2; 4.1: 2; 4.9: 11.

131. Bh. G. 18: 66.

132. T.V.M. 3.2: 2.

133. *ibid.* 4.9: 10.

134. *ibid.* 6.10: 5.

135. *ibid.* 2.6: 1.

136. *Yogasūtra* 2: 29.

137. T.V.M. 8.7: 8.

Nammālvār as " *kātal* ",¹³⁸ " *kātanmai* ",¹³⁹ " *vēṭkai* ",¹⁴⁰ " *anpu* ",¹⁴¹ and " *avā* ".¹⁴² It is a melting of the heart. 'They (the devotees) will', says Nammālvār, 'like the sands amidst a fountain, melt as a liquid product' - " *ūṟṟiṅkaṅ nuṅmanal-pōl urukā-nirpār nirāyē* ".¹⁴³ We know that love is a union and inseparability and both these aspects are emphasized in the poems of Ālvārs. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism defines Brahman the Absolute as Bhuvanasundara or God the Beautiful and regards the mystic experience of communion with Him as the consummation of the philosophy of love. This Divine Love is Universal Love and the seers and saints are characterized by their love and sympathy. It is a happy blend of *jñāna* and *bhakti*. It is " *matinalam* "¹⁴⁴ as our Ālvār calls it and " *jñānam-kaninta nalam* "¹⁴⁵ as Amutaṅgar terms it.

The paths of devotion and self-surrender have more relevance to the position of God in Vaiṣṇavism than those of *karma* and *jñāna* as such. To fall in line with the *Upaniṣadic* concept that knowing Him is the means of obtaining final release,¹⁴⁶ the great exponent Rāmānuja evolved a very convincing exposition of *bhakti*, *jñāna* and *prapatti*, according to which all these represent certain stages of *jñāna* itself. All the same, stress is laid more on the *bhakti* and *prapatti* aspects of *jñāna*. It is in the light of this stress that the three esoteric doctrines have come to be formulated as the basis of the Vaiṣṇavite religion. These three secrets (*rahasya-traya*) contain the essentials of Vedānta in terms of *tattva*, *hita* and *puruṣārtha*. The Lord Himself has expounded the technique and value of self-surrender. The three secrets are known as *mūla-mantra*, *dvaya* and *carama-śloka* of which the first states

138. T.V.M. 4.7:11; 7.3:8.

139. *ibid.* 6.1:1.

140. *ibid.* 10.3:2.

141. P.Tv. 8.

142. T.V.M. 10.10:10; TVR. 84.

143. *ibid.* 6.8:11.

144. *ibid.* 1.1:1.

145. R.N. 66.

146. Taitt. Ar. 3.12:7.

in a nutshell, the second makes the meaning more explicit and the third elaborates it still further. These three mysteries (*mantram*) which are an epitome of the truths that ought to be known and of the means of attaining salvation, which are the distinctive, unique and exclusive doctrines of this system of religion and philosophy are invaluable and therefore to be preferred like ambrosia in the ocean.

The *mūla-mantra* is otherwise known as *tirumantra*; it is the eight-lettered formula whose meaning is 'Om! salutation to Nārāyaṇa!' It has been stated to contain everything within itself, and, if it is known the meaning of everything becomes known. This *mantra* helps us to understand such things as our essential nature (*svarūpa*) which finds true happiness only in being the *śeṣa* of the supreme Being. By that (revelation), it creates a longing for the supreme Goal of attainment preceded by the removal of all obstacles thereto and also a feeling of urgency (in regard to that attainment) whereby the competency for the adoption of the means becomes perfected. "This eternal *mūla-mantra* is therefore the highest of all *mantras*; of all secrets this is the supreme secret; of all things that purify, this is the most purificatory".¹⁴⁷ It is the essence of all the *Vedas*; it is capable of removing all evil influences; it is the means of obtaining all the objects desired by men; it helps in the adoption of all *upāyas*; it can be uttered by all castes either in its *Vedic* form (with *aum*) or in its *tantric* form (without the *aum*), in accordance with their respective competence. The Āḷvārs sing its praise with delight; "with the help of the garland of verses (which constitute the *Prabandha*) I could acquire a full realisation of the great *tirumantra*, namely, Namō Nārāyaṇa";¹⁴⁸ "with the highest and the learned in the Scriptures listen to and learn by heart (*śravaṇa* and *manana*) are the names of the Lord (which constitutes the *mantras*)";¹⁴⁹ "the tongue is ready in the mouth; it does not require to be chanted without taking breath, the comparatively short,

147. *Nāradyam*, 1:11.

148. M.Tv. 57.

149. *ibid.* 66.

eight-lettered *mantra* which is the easiest means of salvation";¹⁵⁰ "those who constantly chant the name of Nārāyaṇa with a full understanding are blessed";¹⁵¹ "I cannot deem those who omit to chant the name of the Lord to be men at all O mind! deem it thy duty to utter His name";¹⁵² "the name of the red-eyed Lord is pleasant to the ear; it is the refuge of all the inhabitants of the earth; He is the theme of all verses.....and the essence of the *Vedas* too"¹⁵³ "those who have been initiated by the *ācārya* into the *mantra* with eight letters and utter it with proper *nīṣṭha* are capable of ruling over Paramapada";¹⁵⁴ "you were devotees that sang the name of the Lord saying 'Namō Nārāyaṇāya' so that country and town might understand";¹⁵⁵ "by uttering the holy name 'Namō Nārāyaṇāya' in the proper way (i.e.) without seeking any material gain";¹⁵⁶ "if one utters on one's lips the great *tirumantra* with folded palms on one's head at the time of death, one is not likely to be sent afterwards back to this world at all, but only to Paramapada"¹⁵⁷ and again "the utterance of the *praṇava mantra* in the proper fashion and worship of the sea-hued Lord are sure to place one among the Eternals".¹⁵⁸ In one of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār's hymns the phrase "Nārāyaṇa eṇṇum nāmam" (the name of Nārāyaṇa) occurs as a refrain in the last line of all the verses, the whole of which is a celebration of the efficacy of the *mantra*.¹⁵⁹ The babbling of the name of the Lord Vāmana-Tirivikrama will wipe out the sorrow of birth"¹⁶⁰ Nammālvār says: "Ye who aspire to reach the twin Feet of Kaṇṇaṅ, meditate on no name

150. *ibid.* 95.

151. I.Tv. 20.

152. *ibid.* 44.

153. Nāṅ. Tv. 69.

154. Tc. V. 77; cf. *ibid.* 78.155. *Tiruppallāṅṭu*, 4.156. *ibid.* 11.

157. Periyal. Tm. 4.5 : 2.

158. *ibid.* 4.5 : 4.159. Peri. Tm. 1.1; cf. *ibid.* 6.10.160. *ibid.* 3.2 : 4; cf. *ibid.* 5.9 : 7, 8; 8.10 : 3.

else than Nārāyaṇa's".¹⁶¹ The seers (*ṛṣis*) too, have declared: "Many were the great seers like Sanaka who attained the abode of Viṣṇu by uttering the eight-lettered *mantra*".¹⁶² "Just as among the deities there is no one superior to Nārāyaṇa, there is, among the *mantras*, no *mantra* superior to *aṣṭākṣara*".¹⁶³

The *praṇava* in the *mula-mantra* sums up the wisdom in the sacred sound. The *Upaniṣadic* text distinguishes *praṇava* as the bow, the self as the arrow, Brahman as the target and the act of surrender as the hitting of the target.¹⁶⁴ Sāṅḍilya has explained the way in which the meaning of *praṇava* should be considered: "This supreme Being is of such and such a nature and the *jīva* is of such and such a nature. *Yoga* is said to be a knowledge of the relationship between the two (that *Īvara* is the *śeṣī* and the *jīva* the *śeṣa*)".¹⁶⁵ This meaning is elaborated as follows: The *a* in *praṇava* (*aum*) is Viṣṇu Who creates, sustains and destroys the world; the *m* (in it) means the *jīva*, who exists for the fulfilment of the purposes of Viṣṇu. The *u* (in it) indicates that this relationship between the two can exist *only* between them (and no others). So *praṇava* which consists of three letters and is the essence of the (three) *Vedas* reveals this meaning"¹⁶⁶ Tirumaṅkaiyālvār also explains this meaning: "I am the servant of Bhagavan, the Lord of Tirukkannapuram; how am I entitled to be the servant of any one else?"¹⁶⁷ The word '*namō*' of the *mantra* which means 'I adore' prescribes the abandonment of all egoism (*ahaṅkāra*) or self-naughting, and *saraṇāgati* as the chief *hita* or *upāya*, and it also connotes the truth that God is the only goal of life. The term '*Nārāyaṇa*' in the *mantra* is significant and singular. It signifies God as the One without a second, not in the

161. T.V.M. 10.5:1.

162. *Nāradyam*. 1:16.

163. *ibid.* 1:42.

164. *Mun. Up.* 2.2:4.

165. *Sāṅḍilya Smṛti* 5.17.

166. *Aṣṭa Śloki*, 1.

167. *Peri. Tm.* 8.9:3.

mathematical, but in the metaphysical sense. As the letter *a* and Nārāyaṇa, Paramātman is immanent in all beings as their life without losing His transcendental eminence and is the Saviour of all that redeems all *jīvas* from their evil career. He is the ground of all existence and the giver of all good. Nara is the letter *m* of *praṇava* and it refers to the universe of *cit* and by implication (*upalakṣaṇa*), *act* also of which Nārāyaṇa is the pervading Self. Nārāyaṇa is immanent in *nara* and is also the goal or *ayana* of the *nara*. Thus the *mūla-mantra* as a whole and in each of its parts proclaims that Nārāyaṇa alone is the source of all existence, the goal of all experience and the means of realizing that goal.¹⁶⁸ Nammālvār distinctly brings out the meaning of the word 'nārāyaṇa': "He who has, as His *śeṣas*, countless *jīvas* with knowledge and bliss as their attributes and with self-luminousness as their nature and also His own noble qualities - that Nārāyaṇa"¹⁶⁹ and "Nārāyaṇa is the Lord of all the seven worlds".¹⁷⁰ In these two passages are implicit (Bhagavan's) possessing the two kinds of attributes, namely, freedom from defects and possession of all auspicious and noble qualities and likewise, His possession of the two *vibhūttis* viz., this material universe (*līlā-vibhūti*) with all the sentient and non-sentient beings in it and the transcendental region of eternal glory (*nitya-vibhūti*) with all that it contains. The *mūla-mantra* is also an expansion of the *praṇava* and it makes the meaning more clear by equating Brahman with Nārāyaṇa and explaining the means to *mokṣa* as self-gift to the *śeṣa* to whom the self belongs by divine right.

The *dvaya* is so called because it treats of two points, namely, the means and the goal of attainment (the *upāya* and the *upēya*). It is a gem of a *mantra* and has pre-eminence over the other *mantras* as it brings out the full implications of the supreme *tattva* or truth as Śrīman Nārāyaṇa or Nārāyaṇa and Śrī, namely, "I take refuge at the Feet of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. Salutation to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa". The first

168 R.T.S. Ch. 23 and 27.

169. T.V.M. 1.2: 10.

170. *ibid.* 2.7:2.

part reveals that the *jīva* has no other refuge than Nārāyaṇa, and the second that he exists for no purposes other than those of Nārāyaṇa, while in both parts, the idea of the *jīva* having no other support (*ādhāra*) is evident (from the word 'nārāyaṇa'). The idea enshrined in this *mantra* is implicit in the *Upaniṣad*¹⁷¹ and it is elaborated by Rāmaṇuja in his *Gadya* and by Vedānta Deśika in his *Rahasya-trayaśāra*¹⁷² and exemplified by Ālavantār.¹⁷³ The meaning of this *mantra* is also implicit in the two *ślokas* of *Rāmāyaṇa* viz., "He (Lakṣmaṇa) fell at the two feet of his brother" and said in the presence of Śītā,¹⁷⁴ "Thou shalt be happy Thyself with Śītā on the slopes of the mountains. Whether Thou art awake or asleep, I (Lakṣmaṇa) will render every form of service to Thee"¹⁷⁵ The man who is not for any other *upāya* or for any other end or object (in view) has full competence for the adoption of this *mantra*. Nammālvār has stated the meaning of this great *mantra*: "Meditate soon on the Feet of Nārāyaṇa and His consort and acquire a new life"¹⁷⁶ Here the words up to 'and acquire' express the *upāya* stated in the first part of the *mantra* and what follows indicates the meaning of the second part. Again the Ālvār says "The man that has sought the Feet of the Lord dark as the raincloud (*mukilvaṇṇan*) and who has thereby attained new life"¹⁷⁷ and "O Thou on Whose chest abides Lakṣmī because She cannot endure separation from Thee even for an instant"¹⁷⁸ etc. Thus the meaning of this *mantra* is that redemption is the result of Lakṣmī's mediation, and that the soul should realize its utter destitution and seek no other refuge than the Lord.

The *carama-śloka* which is the final instruction of the Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the *Gītā* teaches how self-surrender

171. Sv. Up. 6: 18.

172. R.T.S. Ch. 28.

173. *Śloka-ratna* 21.

174. Ram. Ayodya 31: 2.

175. *ibid.* 31: 27.

176. T.V.M. 4.1: 1.

177. *ibid.* 7.2: 11.

178. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

is to be performed. A knowledge of this supreme secret is intended to remove the sorrows of life and afford the stability of salvation. The *mantra* declares that Bhagavan is Himself the already existing and established means for attaining Him, for He is ever ready to help us to attain Him, and that, in order to secure His help, we have yet to accomplish or adopt a means which is self-surrender to the Lord. "Renounce all *dharmas* and take refuge in Me; I shall release you from all sins. Grieve not."¹⁷⁹ Here *prapatti* is explicitly enjoined as the sole means for the release of the soul. All other *sādhana*s such as external worship, deeds of piety, study of the scriptures, *yogic* meditation etc., are only auxiliaries that may lead to the final act of surrender. The woman saint Āṅṅāl says: "If the Lord reclining on the serpent should forget His own word of assurance (the *carama-śloka*) that He is the first and last refuge, He will be guilty, in the opinion of the world, of cruelty to a maid."¹⁸⁰ Nammālvār says: "Those who know the Lord's word of assurance (the *carama-śloka*) cannot but be His slaves, and no other person's."¹⁸¹ According to this *mantra* the Lord is ultimately both the endeavour and the goal, the *upāya* and *upēya*. The *sādhyōpāya* is the act of self-surrender to the will of the Saviour Who is the inner ruler and the *siddhōpāya* is the Lord Himself. The Lord reveals Himself to the *prapanna*, who seeks Him as His absolute refuge. The sinner seeks God and is saved, and God seeks the sinner and is satisfied. The unique value of this *mantra* lies in its universal appeal to all sinners to seek refuge in Him and be saved.

The mercy of the Lord could not brook the sight of the misery and at the mere sight of the pitiable plight of His devotee the flood-gates of the Lord's mercy will be opened as in the case of Arjuna; and on account of him the whole race of grieving humanity, who are out to reach Him, has been deluged by the divine out-pouring of Mercy, Grace and Love.

179. Bh. G. 18 : 66.

180. Nāc. Tm. 8 : 9.

181. T.V.M. 7.5 : 10.

The words 'Do not grieve'¹⁸² have been addressed, as it were, from the Charioteer's seat in Arjuna's car to the whole of humanity who crave for the Lord's company, hanker for His Grace and pine away in love. The cult of *prapatti* is based on this Declaration of Divine Dispensation. The first and foremost qualification for this act of self-surrender is the feeling of unutterable woe and dire helplessness. *Ākincanya* or the realization of self-nothingness (the utter feeling of inability to other means) is a *sine qua non* for *prapatti*. *Ananyagattiva* or a feeling of not having any other means and a turning away from all other refuge than Bhagavan is another condition for the person who adopts this means. One must feel one's desolateness in all its aspects, and comprehend the full significance of one's spiritual solitariness. One must also realize that one is alone, absolutely alone in this huge and vast world with nothing, and no one, not even himself, to rely on except God. The sense of solitariness must be forced upon one to such an extent that one can clearly see one's soul in naked helplessness, when the encasing body, and not merely friends and relatives, is cast off, and it is left to march out on its lonely quest after God. Nammālvār says: "God only is everything for me; He is the group of beautiful damsels, abundant wealth, good children and revered father and mother to me"¹⁸³. The sense of one's weakness must be so deeply realized that what will be left to him here below is only to cry helplessly even as a Nammālvār who felt that he had been banished from God's Grace and locked up in a prison. It is only such intense grief that can provoke and invoke the Grace of the Lord, for He is not an unwise Being to waste His love on those who do not want Him, however much He may feel compassionate towards them. The words 'Do not grieve' clearly indicate that the person to whom they are addressed is afflicted and depressed by a consuming grief from which nothing but the Lord's assurance can uplift him. If, however, the seeming devotee lulls his consciousness by the thought that the Lord is *dōṣa-bhōgya* (lover of sins), and that therefore his very sins will save him, or if he hypocritically says

182. Bh. G. 18 : 66.

183. T.V.M. 5.1 : 8.

that as God's Grace is not conditioned by any effort on the part of the devotee (*nirhētuka*), and thereby gets confirmed in his spiritual indolence, no God can or will save him. No doubt God is *dōṣa-bhōgya* and loves His true devotees with all their faults. He is certainly *avyāja vatsala*, and gives of His love for no recompense or return. But He must and will be satisfied that there is true love or craving in the *upāsaka* (devotee) towards Him, and that it is not a lip-deep avowal, having its root in indolence, hypocrisy and sinfulness, with never the slightest pangs of grief or remorse in the heart. To say that a *Vasiṣṭha* or a *Vāmadeva* pursuing the path of *bhakti-yōga* is rejected and preference is accorded to a pretending *prapanna*, who gloats over his sins as his saviours, and revels in his ignorance and indolence with a covert sneer and an illconcealed contempt for spiritual effort and spiritual endeavour, may be a catching system; but it cannot be true. God rewards the *prapanna* sooner because of the intense and consuming desire of his heart that cries for quick realization. *Prapatti* is a momentary action and it has been truly remarked that it is more severe and more difficult than *bhakti*. An archer's action in discharging an arrow for hitting a target may be constituted of several separate acts (like observing the object, taking the aim and discharging the arrow) and yet it is all accomplished in a single moment. Similar is the act of surrendering (to the Lord) the responsibility of one's protection.¹⁸⁴ That this surrender of the responsibility of protection (*bhāra-samarpaṇa*)¹⁸⁵ should be chiefly thought of while uttering *mantras* of *prapatti* is clearly stated by the Saviour Himself, Who undertakes the responsibility: "With this *mantra* one should surrender one's self to Me. The one who has surrendered to Me the responsibility of doing what should be done will become one who has done one's duty."¹⁸⁶ God must be made to feel that nothing but His saving Grace can put an end to the *mumukṣu's* disconsolate affliction, born of love towards Him, and seeking for ultimate and early fulfilment in Him. Till that stage is reached wherein love

184. Mun. Up. 2 4.

185. For the *aṅgas* (accessories of *prapatti*) vide R.T.S. Ch. 11.

186. *Sātvakt Tantra* (Quoted by Vedānta Deśika.)

finds response, and desire gets satisfaction, one has got to go on weeping, wailing, sorrowing, bemoaning, and lamenting, tearing out one's heart in misery and in despair as Nammālvār did under the celebrated Tamarind Tree at Ālvārtirunakari. And not till the Glory of God has settled on one, and one has been gathered to the breast of his Beloved, and folded within the loving embrace of the Divine Arms, can this weeping cease, and yield place to the endless ecstasy of the *mukta*, rejoicing in the company of the Lord, revelling in the Beauty of His auspicious Form, and rhapsodying in the highest Bliss of Divine Communion.

These three *mantras* reveal also the role of Divine Grace in the play of God seeking man and man seeking God. The self which cries unable to bear the mundane suffering, manages to bring God near itself.¹⁸⁷ The *mūla-mantra* explains the theory of self-surrender, the *dvaya-mantra* elaborates it and also shows how it is to be practised, and the *carama-sloka* explicitly prescribes self-surrender as the means to be adopted by the aspirant to *mokṣa* who is incapable of *Bhakti-yoga* and expressly promises him release from all the accumulated load of sins that prevents his enjoyment of birthright of absolute service to the Lord in Vaikuṇṭha. It has been stated by our ancient *ācāryas* that these three *mantras* have been enshrined in the four compositions of Nammālvār: the purport of *īrumantra* has been included in his *Tiruvīruttam* and *Tiruvācirtum*, that of *carama-sloka* in his *Periyātiruvantāṭi* and that of *dvaya* in his *Tiruvāymoṭi*.¹⁸⁸

The Ālvārs advise people not to put the physical frame or its limbs to any undue strain and subject it to mortification. Even the adoption of the postures of *yoga* for *bhakti* puts the senses to considerable strain. The limbs shall not be allowed to wither away nor need any one fast. The five senses shall not be mortified. The soul shall not suffer thus and perform

187. cf. Tyāgarāja's kirtana "*Tanayuni brovo*" in Bairavi raga where the child's cry to the mother is described to bring the mother to the spot where the child is lying.

188. A.H. Sūt. 208, 209, 210.

penance.¹⁸⁹ There is no need also to eat raw and unripe fruits, nor shall one stand on aching legs. It is also not necessary to perform severe penance amidst five fires. It is enough instead to think of God and proceed to Citrakūṭam.¹⁹⁰ It is thus found that a synthetic approach is more in the Vaiṣṇavite religion in the matter of adopting the means for obtaining final release. Basic knowledge is essential to ascertain the particular means which one can take up with confidence. Every aspirant shall get instructions from a spiritual preceptor who alone could guide him in the path which he is competent to pursue.¹⁹¹ Curiously enough, it is not every individual that gets the desire aroused in him for feeling the need to have spiritual guidance. God's Grace, merit, acquired involuntarily, His compassion, absence of hatred for God and inclination towards Him and talks with good men arouse in man a desire to get a spiritual teacher and make him to get one.¹⁹²

Above all this, devotion to Viṣṇu is essential to get any thing, whether one has or not a spiritual preceptor or qualification for adopting the particular means for obtaining salvation. This devotion may begin with simple adoration such as worshipping with flowers and bowing at His Feet. The concept of the God-head, as evolved by the Āḷvars, consists in the admission of Viṣṇu as the Supreme Deity. According to these saints a careful study of the nature of several deities are to be attempted in order to arrive at the idea of Supreme God. Worship of such a deity bestows supreme knowledge and devotion on the person who offers it. That person could get rid of the evil effects of the deeds committed by him.¹⁹³ Not any amount of self-mortification enables the

189. Peri. Tm. 3.2: 1.

190. *ibid.* 3.2: 2? cf. P. Tv. 13; Mu. Tv. 76.

191. Vide. *Guruparamparāsāra* where Kṣatrabhaṇḍu and Puṇḍarīka are said to have attained final release through having a spiritual preceptor.

192. R.T.S. Ch. 1.

193. Tc. V. 74; T.V.M. 1.6: 8.

aspirant to behold Him.¹⁹⁴ Love for Him brings Him near the devotee.¹⁹⁵ That Viṣṇu is the Supreme deity to be worshipped is evidenced by Mārkaṇḍeya.¹⁹⁶ There is no protector for humanity other than Kṛṣṇa.¹⁹⁷ He is to be worshipped not merely for obtaining *mokṣa* but also for any pursuit in life.¹⁹⁸ A concept of this kind leads to the conclusion that other deities need not be worshipped for any favour.¹⁹⁹ Viṣṇu is not merely the Supreme Deity but the foremost and first among the spiritual preceptors.²⁰⁰

Srī Vaiṣṇavaite theism equates God-head with the dual self of Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇa or Śrīyah-pati²⁰¹. The Vaiṣṇavite *Āgamas* describe Him as being always with Lakṣmi who Herself is designated as *Viṣṇu-śakti*.²⁰² The two-fold spiritual form of Brahman as Lord and Śrī is philosophically inseparable though functionally distinguishable.²⁰³ The cosmic ruler is ruled by love, and Lakṣmi resides in the ever-blooming lotus of love and is the very heart of the divine nature. Nammālvār speaks of this concept of dual self as 'Harbouring Lakṣmi with gazelle-like eyes in Your bosom' - "māṇ ēy nōkki maṭavālai mārpil koṇṭāy"²⁰⁴; 'the bosom with Goddess Lakṣmi on it draws my spirit towards it' - "tirumaṭantai cēr tiru-ākam eṇ āvi Irum";²⁰⁵ 'the One on Whose bosom sits the Goddess of the Lotus Flower' - "allimātar amarum tirumārpiṇaṇ"²⁰⁶; - 'Nārāyaṇa, the kindly eyed one, with Lakṣmi eternally resting

194. *ibid.*, 75.

195. *ibid.* 76.

196. T.V.M. 5 2: 7.

197. Periyā]. T.m. 5.3: 6; T.V.M. 2.2: 1.

198. M.Tv. 59.

199. Nāṇ. Tv. 66, 75.

200. Periyā]. Tm. 5.2: 8.

201. *Puruṣa-sūkta* describes Him as "Hriśca le laksmīśca patnyau".

202. L.T. 2: 11, 12.

203. *Śrī Sūkta* speaks as "Īśvarim sarva bhūtānām".

204. T.V.M. 1.5: 5.

205. *ibid.* 9.9: 6.

206. *ibid.* 9.10: 10.

on Himself' - "eṅṅum tiru mey uṛaiṅṅa ceṅkaṅmāl";²⁰⁷ 'Lakṣmī on the lotus, determined not to part from Him even for a moment' - "akalakiḷḷeṅ iṛayum eṅṅu alarmēlmaṅkai uṛai mārpā";²⁰⁸ 'Śrīman Nārāyaṇa with Goddess Lakṣmī set on His bosom' - "tikaḷṅṅa tirumārpil tirumaṅkai taṅṅōṭum tikaḷṅṅa tirumālār";²⁰⁹ 'the one harbouring the lotus-seated Śrī in His garlanded bosom' - "vaṅkamalat tirumāṭiṅṅait taṭaṅkoḷ tārmārpīṅṅil vaittavar";²¹⁰ 'O Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, into Whose bosom the fair Goddess Lakṣmī on the lotus with Her collirium-blackened eyes throws Herself' - "maiyaṛ karuṅkaṅṅi kamalamalar mēl ceyyāḷ tirumārpīṅṅil cēr tirumālē";²¹¹ 'the one who seats in His bosom the flower-seated Lakṣmī' - "malarmēl uṛaiṅṅaḷ uṛaimārpīṅṅaṅ";²¹² and so on. There are innumerable references both in the works of this Āḷvār and in those of other Āḷvārs to this dual concept. The Lord revealed Himself to the three seers at Tirukkōvalūr only in the dual form and the God-possessed Pēyāḷvār gave expression to this form beginning his verse with "tiruk-kaṅṅēṅ" (I saw Lakṣmī). 'The One on Whose chest abides Lakṣmī' - "tiru amar mārpāṅ";²¹³ "malarmakaḷ niṅ ākattāḷ";²¹⁴ "neṭu-malarāḷ mārvāṅ";²¹⁵ "pūmakaḷ tikaḷum tirumārpaṅ";²¹⁶ "mātu ukanta mārvār";²¹⁷ "tiru irunta mārvāṅ";²¹⁸ and "the One with Śrī in His bosom" - "Tirumārpaṅ";²¹⁹ can be cited as examples. The word 'tirumāl' meaning 'Nārāyaṇa with Lakṣmī' (tiru-Lakṣmī; māḷ-Nārāyaṇa) occurs in a number of

207. ibid. 10.4: 2.

208. ibid. 6.10: 10.

209. ibid. 10.6: 9.

210. ibid. 4.2: 7.

211. ibid. 9.4: 1

212. ibid. 4.5: 2.

213. ibid. 8.6: 3.

214. M. Tv. 28.

215. I. Tv. 52.

216. Mū. Tv. 37.

217. ibid. 54.

218. ibid. 57 and Nāṅ. Tv. 92

219. T. V. M. 3.7.: 8; 7.6: 6, 7; 8.3: 7; Periyāl. Tm. 1.8: 4; Perum. Tm. 2: 8. Perī. Tm. 3.1: 2; 6.2: 2; 6.3: 9; 6.10: 3; 7.7: 1; 8.4: 1; 8.6: 1.

places in the Ālvārs' hymns.²²⁰ The Lord rules the world by His relentless law of *karma* and His holy wrath against the evil-doer is inescapable, but the rigour of *karma* is overpowered by the redemptive love of *kṛpā*. Evil is destroyed and the evil-doer saved. As the Lord rules by law and Śrī rules by love, the love of law and the law of love are so vitally intertwined in the divine nature as to render nugatory any attempt at the philosophic analysis of their exact nature. The majesty of the holy law of justice is eternally wedded to the all-conquering might of mercy.²²¹ Śrīyahpati as Lord and Śrī as a second self constitute a kind of one in two and two in one and their co-operative identity is indispensable to the seeker after salvation. The concept of Śrīyahpati therefore reconizes the foundational truth of ethical religion, that the holiness of law is ever wedded to the forgiveness of love. Each acts and reacts on the other, and in their interaction lie the stability of the social and moral order and the salvability of the sinner. Nammālvār says: "I have taken refuge with my Mother: one of my Mothers, - the Earth; for Her sake You undertook a mighty exploit by incarnating Yourself as a boar; for obtaining the other Mother Lakṣmī, You churned the very ocean. If they are dear to You, and I am dear to Them, how can You not but be dear to me? Hence my salvation by mediation is secure against everything that might conspire such an end. Once bound to You thus, I am so secure that neither You cannot shake me off, nor I can shake You off".²²²

Even in worldly life the father punishes a way-ward son while the mother pleads for him and lessons the punishment

220. T.V.R. 7; 48, 62, 87, 88, 95, 100; P. Tv. 10, 69; *Periyāl. Tm.* 1.1: 10; 3.5: 6; 3.6: 1; 3.6: 10; 4.1: 5; 5.1: 3; *Nac. Tm.* 5.8; 9.3; 14.8; *Perum. Tm.* 4: 9; *Peri. Tm.* 5.6: 7; 6.3: 2; 6.5: 10; 6.10: 6; 7.7: 9; 8.9: 2; 10.6: 4; 10.6: 6; 10.4: 10; 10.7: 10; *Nag. Tv.* 14.

221. T.P. 85.

222. T.V.M. 10.10: 7; It is said that Parācara Paṭṭar in his dying exhortation to his disciples has advised them to recite this holy verse of Nammālvār along with the holy *dvaya* - *mantra* (Vide: Bhag. Vis. Book X. 10.10: 7). Lakṣmī is therefore said to have three forms or play three roles, namely, *śiddhopāya* *sādhyōpāya* and *puruṣa-kāra*.

or saves him from punishment. The very nature of the father is generally enshrined in law and justice while that of the mother always goes with love and excuse. The Vaiṣṇavite theology has based its dual form of God-head on this analogy. The concept typifies the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God designed to inspire the hope of universal salvation. It reminds the seeker after God that Nārāyaṇa is not only the source and centre of the universe, but He is also the Lord of Love and that Śrī resides in the heart of Nārāyaṇa to redeem the sinning sundered self from its sinfulness. Among the six meanings of the word 'Śrī' the most relevant one is the idea of Her converting Īśvara as Ruler into Saviour by Her timely intercession and mediation on behalf of the repentent sinner. In the epic conflict between the ideas of retribution and forgiveness, law rules over love in the moral realm, and the two are balanced in ethical religion. But in the sphere of the religion of redemption, mercy dominates over retributive justice and transforms the love of law into the law of love. Lakṣmī is *svāmin* to the *jīva*, and as mediator (*puruṣa-kāra*) she mediates on behalf of the sinner and is the eternal link of love between the Ruler and transgressor. She transforms the former into the Saviour and the latter into the penitent seeker after pardon. By virtue of her motherhood in relation to the souls and wifehood in relation to the Lord, she is eminently fitted to play the role of mediator between the two. She becomes the Īśvara and changes His law of *karma* into the rule of *kṛpā*.²²³

223. The conversation said to have taken place between Nañciyar and Paṭṭar may be quoted as relevant to our point. Nañciyar put this question to Paṭṭar : "For salvation, is it enough to resort directly to the Universal Lord? Why should it be necessary to go to Him by mediation of the Mother?" To which Paṭṭar replied: "In nature we know the protection which the mother affords to a child when it is found guilty and the father is thereby angry. The mother knows exactly the opportunity when the father is in the proper mood to be appeased and made to forgive the child, and renew his natural love for him. Even so is the case with God in protecting His creatures He is the Judge; as mother He is the Forgiver". This is the principle of vicarious redemption and the quality of mercy existing in God to overflowing. This is also the meaning of the holy formula : "Śrīman-Nārāyaṇa". (Vide : *Ittiṅ Tamilākkam* Vol. I (Commentary on T.V.M. 1.3: 8).

The mind-body of the empirical self is composed of the twenty-four *rativas* or principles of *prakṛti* including psychic material and cosmic stuff²²⁴ and freedom from embodiment connotes the withdrawal of *jīva* from the psycho-physical sphere of *avidyā-kāma-karma* and the cosmic sphere of space-time. At the time of the dissolution of the physical body, which may happen at any time and in any manner, the released self withdraws from the gross to the subtle state and ascends to the absolute. The dissolution is not the destruction of the psychic make-up, but it is only a process of withdrawal and involution. Death to the wise man who knows Brahman is the re-entry of the self into the realm of the infinite. At that stage the *indriyas* enter into *manas* and *manas* into *prāṇa* and *prāṇa* is absorbed in the *jīva*; the self, with its homing instinct, sheds the body for ever and retires from functioning in the world of sense and understanding and returns to its centre which is the heart of Brahmapuri. It is at this stage there is the parting of the ways known as *arcirāti*²²⁵ or the path of the gods and *dhūmāyana*²²⁶ or the path of the smoke. The bound self that has not intuited Brahman follows the second path and descends into the wilderness of *samsāra* after a temporary enjoyment of pleasures of *pitṛloka* or the world of the manes and of *svarga*. But the wise man who has esoteric knowledge of Brahman prefers the first path and ascends into it. The *Brahmarandra*²²⁷ is the gateway to God and is illumined by the indwelling self; the enlightened soul then finds the hole and soars gloriously to the world of eternal beauty by the radiant path of the gods. The released self realizes the unitive consciousness. The infinite of space-time, which staggers the scientific imagination, pales into infinitesimal littleness in the light of the infinite and the eternal glory of Paramapada which transcends the limits of thought. The wise man enjoys

224. T.V.M. 10.7: 10.

225. Restrictions about the place and time of death as recorded in M.Bh. Anusāsana, 220-31 do not apply to one who pursues this path.

226. Vide: *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* 4: 166 to 169.

227. It is an aperture on the top of the head of the human beings through which the self leaves the body on its way to *mokṣa*.

all the perfections of Vaikuṅṭha like *sōlokya* or identity of abode, *sāmīpya* or proximity, *sārūpya* or similarity of form and *sāyujya* or intimate union; he is ever immersed in the eternal bliss of Brahman. *Sōlōkya* (coexistence) leads to *sāmīpya* (fellowship) and *sārūpya* (transformation and deification) and is consummated in *sāyujya* (the bliss of communion).

The *mukta* is immersed in the supreme and unsurpassable bliss of *Brahmānubhava* without losing his self-being. It is a state of *sāyujya*, according to *Sūtra-kāra*, in which the unitive experience of bliss is present without the loss of self-existence.²²⁸ *Brahmānanda* is the state of blessedness of the divine communion which 'passeth all understanding'. It is the *Brahmajñāni* alone that can give, from his experience, a definition of that exalted state which transcends the imperfect medium of thought and language.²²⁹ In that [state of *sāyujya* the soul-hunger of God and the God-hunger of the soul are satisfied, and the separate consciousness of both is swallowed up in the enjoyment of bliss. Expressing of this state, the *Upaniṣad* bursts into ecstasy: "I, who am food, eat the eater of food".²³⁰ "As a man embraced by his beloved wife knows nothing that is without or within, even so the self when embraced by the All-knowing Self knows nothing without and nothing within".²³¹ Thus in *Brahmānanda* the experients exist, but their feeling of separateness melts away in the irresistibility of ecstasy. Even wisdom is, as it were, swept away and sunk in rapture. In the rapt love of mystic union the *mukta* is mad with God and sings about His glory and goodness by chanting the songs of the *Sāma-veda*. The bliss of union is ever fecundative, and it enhances the value of the released state. The bliss of self-realizedness signifies the self that is realized and its value is eternally conserved".²³²

228. *Ve. Sūt.* 4.4: 21.

229. *Taitt. Ānand.* iv.

230. *Taitt. up.* Bhrgu. 10.

231. *Br. Up.* 4.3: 21. cf. This concept with the Tamil concept of 'Akapporu'.

232. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, pp. 491, 492.

The soul's ascent to the Absolute is beautifully described in the *Paramapada Sēpāna* by Vedānta Dēśika. The author indicates nine steps in the path to perfection. The first five viz., *vivēka*, *nirvēda*, *virakti*, *bhiti-bhāva* and *upāya* constitute the means and awaken the religious consciousness and induces the *mumukṣu* to practise devotion and self-surrender. The remaining four steps consisting of *utkramaṇa*, *arciṛādi*, *divya dēśa prabhāva* and *prāpti* deal with the *summum bonum* of spiritual endeavour. They portray in a pictorial way the ascent of the redeemed soul to its home in the Absolute. The author follows the *Vaikunṭha-gadya* of Rāmānuja and the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* in his description. The soul soars on the two wings of freedom and wisdom along the solar path of *arciṛādi*²³³ and goes beyond the cosmic sphere of space-time consisting of seven spheres. There it is led by the ambassador of eternity; at last it enters the waters of immortality, or *Vraja* as it is called. This holy river marks the boundary line between the transcendental sphere of Brahman and the empirical sphere of *karma*. The soul then plunges spiritually into the Ocean Pacific, and frees itself from the contractions of *karma* in its dual aspect of *puṇya-papa* and the pairs of opposites. It then goes to the other shore, purified and perfected, like the stranded islander crossing the sea, and enters its own home in the country of the universal Soul where "the sun does not shine, nor the moon nor the stars; by His light everything is lighted"²³⁴. When Brahman is intuited the fetters of the

233. It is *devayāna* or the path of gods. The Lord Himself helps the *mukta* to climb up by a ladder to Vaikuṇṭha through the sphere of the sun whose hot rays dispel the darkness and then removes the ladder (Periyā]. Tm. 4.9: 3). He leads the *mukta* with the following to guide him, namely *arcis* (fire), day, the bright half of the month, *Uttarāyāna*, and the year, Vāyu, Sun, Moon and Lightning, Varuṇa, Indra and Brahmā. (Ch. Up 4.15: 5, 6; cf. ibid. 5.10: 1, 2 and also Br. Up. 6.2: 15, 16). Mention about the route of the soul is found in the poem of Ālvārs (vide Peri. Tm. 4.5: 10; P.TML. Kaṇ. 16, 17; C. TML. Kaṇ. 7, 8; Tc.V.67). It may be noted in this connection that the presiding deities (*abhimānt-devata*) of fire, day etc. are referred to as guides, since fire, day etc., are themselves inanimate.

234. Kath. Up. 5. 15.

heart are broken, ²³⁵ all doubts are solved and all *karma* is destroyed. As the flowing rivers disappear in the ocean losing their name and form, a wise man freed from name and form, goes to the divine *Puruṣa* and becomes immortal.²³⁶ The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* portrays the ineffable ecstasy of attaining *Brahmalōka* or *Vaikuṇṭha* in the language of sense symbolism and artistic imagery.²³⁷ The process of transfiguration is explained metaphorically as *Brahmalāṅkāra*, *Brahmagandha*, and *Brahmarasa*. The form, flavour, and fragrance of *Brahmānubhava* are not physical, or psychical, but are super-sensuous (*aprākṛta*).

The redeemed self gloriously enters into Śrī *Vaikuṇṭha* which is the heart of *Brahmalōka* or *Paramapada* and its headquarters. This city is situated in the realm of eternal manifestation with twelve enclosures and surrounded by many gates and ramparts.²³⁸ The soul then reaches the diving abode of *ānandamaya* or bliss and has a direct soul-sight of *Parañjyōti* or Supreme Light in a hall known as *mahāmaṅḍapam* constructed with thousands of pillars made of jewels. Brahman as infinite Beauty is seated on the throne known as *prajña* (wisdom) with its couch being placed on *Ananda* (*Ādiśeṣa*) and supported by *dharma*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya* and *aiśvarya*. The soul is ever drawn by the beauty of Brahman and enjoys its bliss. The sense of dependance is revealed by the truth that *sarira* depends for its life on the *saririn* and serves as an instrument of His will. In the mystic sense, the self-feeling is swallowed up in the supra-personal experience of inseparability (*avibhāga*) of the bliss of Brahman. As the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* says, the *mukta* attains *aṭma-bhāva* like magnetised iron and is not identical with Brahman.²³⁹ This concept of *mukti* is similar in all respects to that as defined in the *Gītā*.²⁴⁰

235. Mun. Up. 2.2: 8.

236. *ibid.* 3.2: 8.

237. Kaus. Up. 1: 2 to 5.

238. Yat. Dip. VI. 11.

239. V.P. 6.7: 30.

240. Bh. G. 14: 2. cf. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect". *Mathew* V. 48.

The departed soul reaches Brahman according to many *Upaniṣads*, and continues to exist as a separate entity and enjoys personal immortality.²⁴¹ The cosmic gods like Agni, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Indra and Brahmā greet the soul as a rare spiritual victor which has regained its spirituality by subduing worldliness. The spiritual ascent is facilitated by the help of a trans-human person known as *amānava puruṣa* who is really the ambassador of the Absolute.²⁴² The Āḷvār says: "with these guides who are immortal, the soul reaches Vaikuṇṭha and casts off this beautiful prison-house of *samsāra*"²⁴³ The *mukta* can apprehend Brahman with the divine eye, comprehend His nature and have an integral experience of the Absolute. He is led from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality. The *mukta*, with the expansive consciousness of *dharmabhūta-jñāna*, realises the unitive state. He overcomes the moral distinction of *puṇya-pāpa* and realizes all his desires. His self-feeling melts away at the sight of the bewitching beauty of Brahman and his *Vedāntic* thought expires in the ecstasy of mystic union. In true *mukti*, the eternal transcends the temporal, and it is only in the world of Brahman transcending the phenomenal world that the *jīva* is transformed or brahmanised and enjoys eternal life. In this state, the *mukta* is free from sin, old age, death, grief, hunger and thirst, and the taint of error, evil, ugliness and other imperfections. He enjoys the perfections of Brahman with Brahman and enjoys everything everywhere by his mere will without any external aid or constraint. He wills the true and the good and every conation of his is immediately fulfilled. He is no longer subject to *Vedic* and *Vedāntic* imperatives and injunctions and other external determinations. He has cosmic freedom to move in

241. The poems of Āḷvārs too agree to this view which can be seen in the last verses of their hymns (vide: TVM 5.1:11; 6.5:11; 10.8:11; Peri. Tm. 8.1:10; 8.5:10; 8.6:10, 8.10:10; 9.2:10; 9.10:10 etc., Periyāḷ. Tm. 1.2:21; 1.8:11; 2.1:10; 3.4:10; 3.5:11; 3.10:10; 4.6:10; 4.9:11; 5.1:10; Nāc. Tm. 2:10; 3:10; 9:10; 12:10. Perum. Tm. 1:11; 7:11; 10:11.

242. Ch. Up 5.10:2.

243. T.V.M. 1.3:11.

both *lilā-vibhūti* and *nitya-vibhūti*, and can even meet departed loved ones, as in the dream life, which is here taken as a foretaste of the world of Brahman.²⁴⁴ His all-pervasive consciousness destroys the barriers of distance and time and so he lives in spaceless space and timeless time. The mortal becomes immortal and the self regains its eternity as it were. Self-illumination in the state brings out the infinite intelligence and omniscience of the finite self. Its *viśṭāpa alkya* is then apprehended in non-difference from Brahman. Prahlāda describes in his ecstasy the onset of cosmic consciousness and brings out this state: "As the infinite is all-pervading, He is myself, all things proceed from me, I am all things, all things are in me who am eternal".²⁴⁵ So it is clear that the *ātman* is non-different from the Supreme Self by attaining the being of its being. Nammālvār also affirms the truth of this cosmic experience. In the excess of his love, the Ālvār, in the guise of a bride, imitates and mirrors forth the glory of God and claims the two *vibhūtis* of the cosmic and ultra-cosmic functions as his own. The saint feels that he owns the infinite when he has a soul sight of "that divine thread which holds the whole congeries of things". Thus the *makta* with his all-inclusive cosmic consciousness, views himself and the cosmos with the eye of Brahman. He experiences his *aham* as the *prakāra* or mode of Brahman and his *jñāna* mirrors forth the whole universe and he realises his oneness with Brahman.

Nammālvār gives a graphic description of his proceeding to Śrī Vaikuṇṭha. This is the result of his intuiting his departure from the world.²⁴⁶ The Ālvār is able to visualise the experience in anticipation, and to live in his imagination the experience, in vivid detail and in the graphic present, of the great welcome that will be accorded to him in Heaven as he enters it. Nature celebrates the occasion by wearing a festive garb; and the entire cosmos rejoices. The elements

244. Br. Up. 8.1:5.

245. V.P. 1.19:85; cf. T.V.M. 5.6.

246. Pillāṅ on T.V.M. 10.9:1.

themselves such as the clouds and the ocean signify welcome to him. All the clouds roar giving peals of thunder resembling the sound of the tabors announcing the auspicious occasion; all the seas dance in ecstasy at the emancipation of the soul of the Ālvār.²⁴⁷ The *ṛṣis* and the gods welcome and show him the way standing in rows in the sky.²⁴⁸ The *kinparas* and others sing and offer all honours; the celestial damsels sing the praises of the Ālvār.²⁴⁹ The *Māruts* and the *Vasus* accompany him to regions beyond theirs and extol him.²⁵⁰ All of them take him to the limits of the material world.²⁵¹ On the borders of the Eternal realms, the Eternals bid him welcome and wash his feet with the ladies of moon-like faces offering him, jars filled with holy waters (*pūrṇa-kumpam*), treasures, fragrant powders and auspicious lamps.²⁵² Then he lives for ever with the Eternals enjoying eternal bliss.

247. T.V.M. 10.9: 1, 2.

248. *ibid.* 10.9: 3, 4.

249. *ibid.* 10.9: 5, 6.

250. *ibid.* 10.9: 7.

251. *ibid.* 10.9: 8.

252. *ibid.* 10.9: 9, 10.