

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

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“I am bound, I must become free”. This thought is the real kick-start to the spiritual life! When the realization dawns that one is truly and irrevocably bound, and the equally powerful desire to be free of all bondage rises, one becomes what is known in Sanskrit as a **“Mumukshu”**, some one who ardently desires Moksha or emancipation. This is the seed of the first real striving towards Yoga.

Perhaps 100 percent of the human race feels they are bound, held captive, caged. Does this mean everyone is a **“Mumukshu?”** Emphatically no! For almost everyone assigns an external cause to the sense of bondage. I am caged by my family, I am hemmed in by my job; my parents limit my freedom, society keeps me prisoner etc. This is not to even consider those who are really bound; in prison, in concentration camps, in hospitals etc. Perhaps a handful of persons in hundreds of thousands will realize, deeply and profoundly, **“I am bound. I must be free. And the fetters which hold me fast are those of my own nature”**. **“Such a rare soul is called a “Mumukshu”, one who desires Moksha, Ultimate Freedom, with his whole heart, mind, body and soul.**

We are prisoners of a great tyrant, a dictator who holds us fast in his iron grip. Who is this horrible personage? Our very own self, our very own ego, our very own lower, animal nature! As the famous war time story goes, when the General charged over the hill to meet the enemy with guns blazing, he stopped short in horrified amazement. He found he was firing on his own men from another battalion. **“We have met the enemy!”** he shouted. **“And it is US!”**

Our only jailor is our own self. Our **“sense of self”** confines us in its **“Cell-F”**, What a shock when we come face to face with such an intimate enemy!

“Pasyati iti Pasu” declares the Sanskrit saying. **“A Pasu (animal) is one who sees only on the surface of things”**. A Pasu, an animal, lives a superficial life, a life literally **“above the skin”**. His perceptions are only **“skin deep”** and based totally on sensual impressions, which are fueled by pleasure and pain and a fierce desire for survival. Such a person is firmly bound by **stimulus - response**. He is an entity conditioned solely by the environment in which he lives and his genetic heritage. He is a bundle of conditioned reflexes which have evolved over millions of years to ensure survival of the species in a particular environment.

In other words, a Pasu is a prisoner of his own nervous system, a prisoner of his evolutionary history. This is the classical definition of an animal. A lion can only act within the perimeters of its lion nature. It cannot fly like a bird, nor swim in the ocean like a whale. It cannot live on grass like an elephant, nor swing from the branches of trees by its tail like a monkey. It must live and move within the boundaries of its own nature. Like that, every

animal, reptile, insect, bird and plant is imprisoned in its own nature. It has no freedom to move outside its own genetic pattern. Its perceptions are limited to sensual impressions and a collection of conditioned responses to those impressions developed over millennia of evolutionary unfolding.

“**Pasu**” is such an interesting Sanskrit word. It means “animal”. As we have seen, it also means a creature which sees only the surface of things, does not see deeply, has no capacity to think, reflect, or contemplate. “**Pasu**” also means “fettters”. “That which binds”. An animal is bound by its own nature and cannot move outside of it. We do not expect a frog to act like a lion nor a donkey to act like an eagle. They have their own genetic limitations. “Pasu” also means “noose”. These fettters are like a noose which bind us. Another interesting observation that the best and most traditional way to tame an animal is to put a “noose” or a “leash” around its neck!

When “**Manas**” or “Consciousness” developed manifesting in the creature called “Man” (“Man”, “one who manifests “Manas”) the great evolutionary leap forced the animal body upright, onto its own two feet from its previous four-footed stance. The new creature “man” which appeared only about 40,000 years ago, now had a power that freed it from its genetic structure. Its brain now possessed neurons, which were capable of thinking and reasoning, of looking into matters more deeply than from the sensual, superficial level of the Pasu. A certain amount of freedom from bondage was gained in this evolutionary step. The ability to reason, to ponder and to know things which could not be perceived through the senses, now was available to man.

But the new creature still had a heavy evolutionary past, a baggage, very much conditioned by its millions of years as an animal, responding to sensory stimuli. That animal past is still a bondage. Though the “thinking brain” or “Manas” gave man the power to create machines which allowed him to fly in the air like a bird, and explore the depths of the ocean like fish and the power to dominate and use all other life forms on earth for his own safety and pleasure, even “Manas” could not free him totally from the wild surge of animal passions which still raged in his heart, fueled by the ancient animal needs of dominance, territoriality, sex, power and survival.

Man created social structures which gave him the sense of safety in a hostile environment, but that safety which soothed could also stifle. The relationships which satisfied, could also disgust. The restlessness which promoted adventure, exploration and discovery, also ate into his soul like a potent acid. And, still he blamed everything in his environment for the sense of confinement and sought that exhilarating sense of freedom by running away from wherever he was. Some wise souls asked, “Where will I go when I get where I am going?” They realized that wherever they went, whatever the circumstances were, they still felt bound, they still felt fettered, they still felt imprisoned. Some fortunate few found Gurus whether it be in the forests of the American wilderness, or the high mountains of Tibet, or the caves of the Himalayas. And they asked their wise men, “Guruji, what shall we do? In the summer it is too hot here. In the winter it is too cold. What shall we do? Where shall I go?” And the Guru smiled and said, “Go some place where it is neither hot nor cold!”

Where is that place? Somewhere in the high reaches of consciousness, the high Himalayas of the human soul, beyond the body with its animal nature, needs and its dependence on the senses for survival and enjoyment; beyond the emotions which sicken and cloy with over-stimulation; beyond the mind which constantly probes and chews but can only think about it but never can penetrate; beyond the ego, which centres all things in its tiny self and draws walls of religion, of social status about its self, and then, cries out in despair, "I am bound! I am imprisoned!" Beyond all that, there is a place where it is neither hot nor cold, where one is neither free nor bound.

That is the mountain we yearn to climb. That is the immense space into which we wish to free ourselves. That is the blue sky through which we wish to soar, freer as than a bird! For birds do not, cannot possess the freedom which we seek. The lower freedoms were nothing compared to this: the freedom from the prison of one's own mind, one's own evolutionary past, one's own lower animal conditioning.

"I am bound! I wish to be free!" This declaration is the first step. Realising that no one binds us but our very own self is the second step on this difficult path. Knowing that without stirring from our room, we may comprehend the whole Universe is our first taste of freedom. Knowing that That Ultimate Final Freedom lies within us, wherever we are, in stillness, not in movement, inwardly, not outwardly puts us firmly on the path.

The **Mumukshu** has understood all this. His goal, his last burning goal, is only to reach that Moksha that Ultimate Freedom. He is at the pinnacle of the mountain of evolution and is ready to fly, free at last, really and truly free, even freer than a bird!