

## LIBERATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE UPANIṢADS AND BUDDHISM

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### Introduction

6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is the era in which the Buddha was born and the period that marks the development of many philosophical thoughts with regard to understanding the nature of things and liberation from Suffering. This is an indication that even before the Buddha people paid attention to the concept of liberation in terms of getting out of the cycle of birth and death. Different religious teachers emerged prescribing different paths of practice and goals related to liberation. For instance, the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* refer to liberation by the term *Mokṣa* and those of the Buddha by the term *Nibbāna*. The main objective of this work is to show the similarities and differences between *Mokṣa* in *Upaniṣads* and *Nibbāna* in Buddhism. The main focus would be on comparing and contrasting these two philosophical systems in related to the following topics, namely, (1) the concept of liberation, (2) the practical methods relation to the path leading to liberation, (3) the state of liberation, and (4) views with regard to liberation.

### Methodology

This study is analyzed mainly based on a comparative study of the two above mentioned philosophical systems in order to help a reader of Buddhism to distinguish the differences and similarities between these two ancient systems.

### Discussion

As far as the meaning of the term "liberation" is concerned these two philosophical systems do agree that both "*Mokṣa*" and "*Nibbāna*", are the state of freedom from suffering (cycle of birth and death) and that they are transcendental. It is a state that can be fully comprehended and experienced by the liberated ones.

With regard to methods of attaining liberation, first of all, both philosophical systems recommend their followers to renounce all the worldly things in order to liberate themselves and also to destroy the *Ahaṅkāra*, the I-making or egoism. In Buddhism, the three trainings (*Ti-sikkhā*), namely, precepts (*sīla*), concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are greatly emphasized as a practice in the path to liberation, while in the *Upaniṣads* the following three are recommended: (1) *Sīla* (precepts through self-restraint), (2) *Nididhyāsana* (concentration on the word "OM") and (3) *jñāna* (acquisition of wisdom).

With regard to the state of liberation, Buddhism uses the term "*Arahat*" for the liberated ones whereas *Upaniṣads* uses the term "*Sanyāsi*". There are similar qualities like calmness, subdued state, quietness and detachment that can be found in both systems but what makes Buddhism different from the *Upaniṣads* is that the former denies any union of a self with a creator God (*Mahābrahman*).

In the *Upaniṣads*, there are two views with regard to attainment of *Mokṣa*, 1. *Jīvan-mukta* (*Mokṣa* in this life) & 2. *Videha-mukta* (*Mokṣa* after death). In Buddhism, we find two stages of *Nibbāna*, 1. *Sopādisesa* (with the remaining of the aggregates) & 2. *Anupādisesa* (without the retention of the aggregates).

### Conclusion

In the *Upaniṣads*, the term *Nirvāna* is used as a synonym for *Mokṣa* meaning complete union with the *Mahābrahma*. This statement is well supported by the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV.iv.6) and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads* (III.ii.5) as follows: "Life flowing stream disappearing in the ocean. Abandoning name and form, do the wise enter into Brahman, freed from all that is finite". But, in the case of Buddhist Nirvana the liberated sage seems to enjoy full freedom without any union with greater being. It is the highest mental purification which is free of rebirths or re-becoming. The state of *Nibbāna* is selfless (*anatta*) whereas *Mokṣa* is with the self (*atta*). It is also noteworthy to mention that these two terms *Mokṣa* and *Nibbāna* should be kept and used as they are without being translated. However, practitioners of both systems could lead a peaceful life individually and socially.