



SRI SHANKARACHARYA¹

A THOUSAND TEACHINGS (I)
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CHAPTER I

A METHOD OF ENLIGHTENING THE DISCIPLE

1. We shall now explain a method of teaching the means to liberation for the benefit of those aspirants after liberation who are desirous (of this teaching) and are possessed of faith (in it).

2. That means to liberation, viz., Knowledge, should be explained again and again until it is firmly grasped, to a pure *Brahmana* disciple who is indifferent to everything that is transitory and achievable through certain means, who has given up the desire for a son, for wealth, and for this world and the next, who has adopted the life of a wandering monk and is endowed with control over the mind and senses, with compassion etc., as well as with the qualities of a disciple well-known in the scriptures, and who has approached the teacher in the prescribed manner, and has been examined in respect of his caste, profession, conduct, learning and parentage.

3. The *Sruti* also says, “A *Brahmana* after examining those worlds which are the result of *Vedic* actions should be indifferent to them seeing that nothing eternal can be achieved by means of those actions. Then, with fuel in his hands he should approach a teacher versed in the *Vedas* and established in *Brahman* in order to know the Eternal. The learned teacher should correctly explain to that disciple who has self-control and a tranquil mind, and has approached him in the prescribed manner, the knowledge of *Brahman* revealing the imperishable and the eternal Being.” For only when knowledge is firmly grasped, it conduces to one's own good and is capable of transmission. This transmission of knowledge is helpful to people, like a boat to one who wants to cross a river. The scriptures too say, “Although one may give to the teacher this world

¹ We have to remember that René Guénon considered the Hindu tradition coming directly from the Primordial Tradition, and even though, today, many are more concerned with what it seems to be more “contemporary” traditions, disregarding India, the Hindu tradition is a fundamental source for meditation and spiritual achievement, regardless of someone's religious faith. Texts, like the present one, are very beneficent, if they are studied over and over again [*Oriens*].

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surrounded by oceans and full of riches, this knowledge is even greater than that." Otherwise there would be no attainment of knowledge. For the *Srutis* say, "A man having a teacher can know *Brahman*," " Knowledge received from a teacher alone (becomes perfect)," "The teacher is the pilot," "Right Knowledge is called in this world a raft," etc. The *Smrti* also says, "Knowledge will be imparted to you" etc.

4. When the teacher finds from signs that knowledge has not been grasped (or has been wrongly grasped) by the disciple he should remove the causes of non-comprehension which are: past and present sins, laxity, want of previous firm knowledge of what constitutes the subjects of discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, courting popular esteem, vanity of caste etc., and so on, through means contrary to those causes, enjoined by the *Srutis* and *Smrtis*, viz., avoidance of anger etc., and the vows (*Yama*) consisting of non-injury etc., also the rules of conduct that are not inconsistent with knowledge.

5. He should also thoroughly impress upon the disciple qualities like humility, which are the means to knowledge.

6. The teacher is one who is endowed with the power of furnishing arguments pro and con, of understanding questions and remembering them, who possesses tranquility, self-control, compassion and a desire to help others, who is versed in the scriptures and unattached to enjoyments both seen and unseen, who has renounced the means to all kinds of actions, who is a knower of *Brahman* and is established in it, who is never a transgressor of the rules of conduct, and who is devoid of shortcomings such as ostentation, pride, deceit, cunning, jugglery, jealousy, falsehood, egotism and attachment. He has the sole aim of helping others and a desire to impart the knowledge of *Brahman* only. He should first of all teach the *Sruti* texts establishing the oneness of the self with *Brahman* such as, "My child, in the beginning it (the universe) was Existence only, one alone without a second," "Where one sees nothing else" "All this is but the Self," "In the beginning all this was but the one Self" and "All this is verily *Brahman*".

7, 8. After teaching these he should teach the definition of *Brahman* through such *Sruti* texts as "The self, devoid of sins," "The *Brahman* that is immediate and direct," "That which is beyond hunger and thirst," "Not-this, not-this," "Neither gross nor subtle," "This Self is not-this," "It is the Seer Itself unseen," "Knowledge-Bliss," "Existence-Knowledge-Infinite," "Imperceptible, bodiless," "That great unborn Self," "Without the vital force and the mind," "Unborn, comprising the interior and exterior," "Consisting of knowledge only," "Without interior or exterior," "It is verily beyond what is known as also what is unknown" and "Called *Akasa* (the self-effulgent One)"; and also through such *Smrti* texts as the following: "It is neither born nor dies," "It is not affected by anybody's sins," "Just as air is always in the ether," "The individual Self should be regarded as the universal one," "It is called neither existent nor nonexistent," "As the Self is beginningless and devoid of qualities," "The same in all beings" and "The Supreme Being is different" — all these support the definition given by the *Srutis* and prove that the innermost Self is beyond transmigratory existence and that it is not different from *Brahman*, the all-comprehensive principle.

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9. The disciple who has thus learnt the definition of the inner Self from the *Srutis* and the *Smrtis* and is eager to cross the ocean of transmigratory existence is asked, "Who are you, my child?"

10, 11. If he says, "I am the son of a *Brahmana* belonging to such and such a lineage; I was a student or a householder, and am now a wandering monk anxious to cross the ocean of transmigratory existence infested with the terrible sharks of birth and death," the teacher should say, "My child, how do you desire to go beyond transmigratory existence as your body will be eaten up by birds or will turn into earth even here when you die? For, burnt to ashes on this side of the river, you cannot cross to the other side."

12, 13. If he says, "I am different from the body. The body is born and it dies; it is eaten up by birds, is destroyed by weapons, fire etc., and suffers from diseases and the like. I have entered it, like a bird its nest, on account of merit and demerit accruing from acts done by myself, and like a bird going to another nest when the previous one is destroyed I shall enter into different bodies again and again as a result of merits and demerits when the present body is gone. Thus in this beginningless world on account of my own actions I have been giving up successive bodies assumed among gods, men, animals and the denizens of hell and assuming ever new ones. I have in this way been made to go round and round in the cycle of endless births and deaths, as in a Persian wheel by my past actions, and having in the course of time obtained the present body I have got tired of this going round and round in the wheel of transmigration, and have come to you, Sir, to put an end to this rotation. I am, therefore, always different from the body. It is bodies that come and go, like clothes on a person," the teacher would reply, "You have spoken well. You see aright. Why then did you wrongly say, 'I am the son of a *Brahmana* belonging to such and such a lineage, I was a student or a householder and am now a wandering monk?' "

14, 15. If the disciple says, "How did I speak wrongly, Sir?," the teacher would reply, "Because by your statement, 'I am the son of a *Brahmana* belonging to such and such a lineage etc' you identified with the Self devoid of birth, lineage and purificatory ceremonies, the body possessed of them that are different (from the Self)."