



SRI SHANKARACHARYA¹

A THOUSAND TEACHINGS (II)
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CHAPTER I

A METHOD OF ENLIGHTENING THE DISCIPLE

16, 17. If he asks, "How is the body possessed of the diversities of birth, lineage and purificatory ceremonies (different from the Self) and how am I devoid of them?," teacher would say, "Listen, my child, how this body is different from you and is possessed of birth, lineage and sanctifying ceremonies and how you are free from these." Speaking thus he will remind the disciple saying, "You should remember, my child, you have been told about the innermost Self which is the Self of all, with its characteristics as described by the *Srutis* such as 'This' was existence, my child etc., as also the *Smrtis*, and you should remember these characteristics also."

18. The teacher should say to the disciple who has remembered the definition of the Self, "That which is called *Akasa* (the self-effulgent one) which is distinct from name and form, bodiless, and defined as not gross etc., and as free from sins and so on, which is untouched by all transmigratory conditions, 'The *Brahman* that is immediate and direct,' 'The innermost Self,' 'The unseen seer, unheard listener, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower,' which is of the nature of eternal knowledge, without interior exterior, consisting only of knowledge, all-pervading like the ether and of infinite power – that Self of all, of hunger etc., as also of appearance and disappearance, by virtue of Its inscrutable power, the cause of the manifestation of unmanifested name and form which abide the Self through Its very presence, but are different from It, which are the seed of the universe, are describable neither as identical with It nor different from It, and are cognized by It alone.

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*].

A Thousand Teachings (II)

19. "That name and form though originally, unmanifested, took the name and form of ether as they were manifested from that Self. This element called the ether thus arose out of the supreme Self, like the dirt called foam coming out of transparent water. Foam is neither water nor absolutely different from it. For it is never seen apart from water. But water is clear, and different from the foam which is of the nature of dirt. Similarly, the Supreme Self, which is pure and transparent, is different from name and form, which stand for foam. These – corresponding to the foam – having originally been unmanifested, took the name and form of the ether as they were manifested.

20. "Name and form, as they became still grosser in the course of manifestation, assumed the form of air. From that again they became fire, from that water, and thence earth. In this order the preceding elements penetrated the succeeding ones, and the five gross elements ending with earth came into existence. Earth, therefore, possesses the qualities of all the five gross elements. From earth, compounded of all five great elements, herbs such as paddy and barley are produced. From these, after they are eaten, are formed blood and the seed of women and men respectively. These two ingredients drawn out, as by a churning rod, by lust springing from ignorance, and sanctified by *mantras*, are placed in the womb at the proper time. Through the infiltration of the sustaining fluids of the mother's body, it develops into an embryo and is delivered at the ninth or tenth month.

21. "It is born, or is possessed of a form and a name and is purified by means of *mantras* relating to natal and other ceremonies. Sanctified again by the ceremony of investiture with the holy thread, it gets the appellation of a student. The same body is designated a house-holder when it undergoes the sacrament of being joined to a wife. That again is called a recluse when it undergoes the ceremonies pertaining to retirement into the forest. And it becomes known as a wandering monk when it performs the ceremonies leading to the renunciation of all activities. Thus the body which has birth, lineage and purificatory ceremonies different (from the Self) is different from you.

22. "That the mind and the senses are also of the nature of name and form is known from the *Sruti*, 'The mind, my child, consists of food.'

23. " You said, 'How am I devoid of birth, lineage and sanctifying ceremonies which are different (from the Self)?' Listen. The same one who is the cause of the manifestation of name and form, whose nature is different from that of name and form, and who is devoid of all connection with sanctifying ceremonies, evolved name and form, created this body and entered into it (which is but name and form) – who is Himself the unseen Seer, the unheard Listener, the unthought Thinker, the unknown Knower as stated in the *Sruti* text, '(I know) who creates names and forms and remains speaking.' There are thousands of *Sruti* texts conveying the same meaning; for instance, 'He created and entered into it,' 'Entering into them He rules all creatures.' 'He, the Self, has entered into these bodies,' 'This is your Self.' 'Opening this very suture of the skull He got in by that door,' 'This Self is concealed in all beings,' 'That Divinity thought – let Me enter into these three deities.'

A Thousand Teachings (II)

24. "*Smṛti* texts too elucidate the same truth; for example, 'All gods verily are the Self,' 'The Self in the city of nine gates,' 'Know the individual Self to be Myself,' 'The same in all beings,' 'The witness and approver,' 'The Supreme Being is different,' 'Residing in all bodies but Itself devoid of any,' and so on. Therefore it is established that you are without any connection with birth, lineage and sanctifying ceremonies."

25. If he says, "I am in bondage, liable to transmigration, ignorant, (sometimes) happy, (sometimes) unhappy, and am entirely different from Him; He, the shining One, who is dissimilar in nature to me, and is beyond transmigratory existence, is also different from me; I want to worship Him through the actions pertaining to my caste and order of life by making presents and offerings to Him and also by making salutations and the like. I am eager to cross the ocean of the world in this way. So how am I He Himself? "

26. The teacher should say, "You ought not, my child, regard it so; because a doctrine of difference is forbidden." In reply to the question, "Why is it forbidden," the following other *Sṛuti* texts may be cited: "He who knows 'that *Brahman* is one and I am another' does not know (*Brahman*)," "He who regards the *Brahmanical* caste as different from himself is rejected by that caste." "He who perceives diversity in *Brahman* goes from death to death," and so on.

27. These *Sṛutis* show that transmigratory existence is the sure result of the acceptance of (the reality of), difference.

28. "That, on the other hand, liberation results from, the acceptance of (the reality of) non-difference is borne out by thousands of *Sṛutis*; for example, after teaching that the individual Self is not different from the Supreme One, in the text, "That is the Self, thou art That," and after saying, "A man who has a teacher knows *Brahman*," the *Sṛutis* prove liberation to be the result of the knowledge of (the reality of) non-difference only, by saying, 'A knower of *Brahman* has to wait only so long as he is not merged in *Brahman*.' That transmigratory existence comes to an absolute cessation, (in the case of one who speaks the truth that difference has no real existence), is illustrated by the example of one who was not a thief and did not get burnt (by grasping a heated hatchet); and that one, speaking what is not true (i.e. the reality of difference) continues to be in the mundane condition, is illustrated by the example of a thief who got burnt.

29. "The *Sṛuti* text commencing with 'Whatever these creatures are here, whether a tiger or' etc. and similar other texts, after asserting that 'One becomes one's own master (i.e. *Brahman*)' by the knowledge of (the reality of) non-difference, show that one continues to remain in the transmigratory condition in the opposite case as the result of the acceptance of (the reality of) difference, saying, 'Knowing differently from this they get other beings for their masters and reside in perishable regions.' Such statements are found in every branch of the *Veda*. It was, therefore, certainly wrong on your part to say that you were the son of a *Brahmana*, that you belonged to such and such a lineage, that you were subject to transmigration, and that you were different from the Supreme Self."

A Thousand Teachings (II)

30. Therefore, on account of the rebuttal of the perception of duality, it should be understood that, on the knowledge of one's identity with the Supreme Self, the undertaking of religious rites which have the notion of duality for their province, and the assumption of *yajnopavita* etc., which are the means to their performance, are forbidden. For these rites and *yajnopavita* etc., which are their means, are inconsistent with the knowledge of one's identity with the Supreme Self. It is only on those people that refer classes and orders of life etc., to the Self that *vedic* actions and *yajnopavita* etc., which are their means, are enjoined, and not on those who have acquired the knowledge of their identity with the Supreme Self. That one is other than *Brahman* is due only on account of the perception of difference.