



SRI SHANKARACHARYA¹

A THOUSAND TEACHINGS (IV) UPADESA SAHASRI

41. If it be so, Sir, why do the *Śrutis* speak of diverse ends to be attained, their means, and so forth, as also the evolution and the dissolution of the universe?

42. The answer to your question is this: Having acquired (i.e., having identified himself with) the various things such as the body etc. and considering the Self to be connected with what is desirable and what is undesirable and so on, though eager to attain the desirable and avoid the undesirable by appropriate means — for without certain means nothing can be accomplished — an ignorant man cannot discriminate between the means to the realization of what is (really) desirable for him and the means to the avoidance of what is undesirable. It is the gradual removal of this ignorance that is the aim of the scriptures; but not the enunciation of (the reality of) the difference of the end, means and so on. For it is this very difference that constitutes this undesirable transmigratory existence. The scriptures, therefore, root out the ignorance constituting this (false) conception of difference which is the cause of phenomenal existence by giving reasons for the oneness of the evolution, dissolution, etc. of the universe.

43. When ignorance is uprooted with the aid of the *Śruti*, *Smṛti* and reasoning, the one-pointed intellect of the seer of the supreme Truth becomes established in the one Self consisting of pure Consciousness like a (homogeneous) lump of salt and all-pervading like the ether, which is within and without, without the interior or exterior, and unborn. Even the slightest taint of impurity due to the diversity of ends, means, evolution, dissolution and the rest is, therefore, not reasonable.

44. One, eager to realize this right Knowledge spoken of in the *Śruti*, should rise above the desire for a son, wealth and this world and the next which are described in a five-fold manner and are the out-come of a false reference to the Self of castes, orders of life and so on. As this reference is contradictory to right Knowledge it is intelligible why reasons are given regarding the prohibition of the acceptance of (the reality of)

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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difference. For, when the Knowledge that the one-dual Self is beyond phenomenal existence is generated by the scriptures and reasoning, there cannot exist (side by side with it) a knowledge contrary to it. None can think of chillness in fire or immortality and freedom from old age: in regard to the (perishable) body. One therefore, who is eager to be established in the Knowledge of the Reality should give up all actions with *yajnopavita* and the rest, their accessories, which are the effects of ignorance.

45. A certain *Brahmacarin*, tired of the transmigratory existence consisting of birth and death, and aspiring after liberation, approached in the prescribed manner a Knower of *Brahman* established in It and sitting at ease and said, How can I, Sir, be liberated from this transmigratory existence? Conscious of the body, the senses and their objects I feel pain in the state of waking and also in dream again and again after intervals of rest in deep sleep experienced by me. Is this my own nature or is it causal, I being of a different nature? If it be my own nature I can have no hope of liberation as one's own nature cannot be got rid of. But if it be causal, liberation from it may be possible by removing the cause.

46. The teacher said to him, Listen, my child, this is not your true nature, but *causal*.

47. Told thus the disciple said, What is the cause, what will bring it to an end and what is my true nature? When the cause is brought to an end, there will be the absence of the effect, and I shall attain my own true nature, just like a patient who gets back to normal condition (of his health) when the cause of his disease is removed.

48. The teacher said, The cause is Ignorance. Knowledge brings it to an end. When Ignorance, the cause, is removed, you will be liberated from the transmigratory existence consisting of birth and death, and you will never again feel pain in the states of waking and dream.

49. The disciple said, What is that Ignorance? (What is its seat) and what is its object? What is Knowledge by means of which I can realise my own nature?

50. The teacher said, You are the non-transmigratory Supreme Self, but you wrongly think that you are one liable to transmigration. (Similarly), not being an agent or an experiencer you wrongly consider yourself to be so. Again, you are eternal but mistake yourself to be non-eternal. This is Ignorance.

51. The disciple said, Though eternal I am not the Supreme Self. My nature is one of transmigratory existence consisting of agency and experiencing of its results as it is known by evidence such as sense-perception etc. It is not due to Ignorance. For it cannot have the innermost Self for its object. Ignorance consists of the superimposition of the qualities of one thing on another, e.g., well-known silver on well-known mother of pearl or a well-known human being on a (well-known) trunk of a tree and *vice versa*. An unknown thing cannot be superimposed on a known one and *vice versa*. The non-Self cannot be superimposed on the Self which is not known. Similarly, the Self cannot be superimposed on the non-Self for the very same reason.

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52. The teacher said to him, It is not so. There are exceptions. For, my child, there cannot be a rule that it is only well-known things that are superimposed on other well-known things, for we meet with the super-imposition of certain things on the Self. Fairness and blackness, the properties of the body, are superimposed on the Self which is the object of the consciousness “I,” and the same Self is superimposed on the body.

53. The disciple said, In that case the Self must be well-known owing to Its being the object of the consciousness “I.” The body also must be well-known, for it is spoken of as “this” (body). When this is so, it is a case of mutual superimposition of the well-known body and the well-known Self, like that of a human being and the trunk of a tree or that of silver and mother of pearl. (There is, therefore, no exception here.) So what is the peculiarity with reference to which you said that there could not be a rule that mutual superimposition was possible of two well-known things only?

54. The teacher said, Listen. It is true that the Self and the body are well-known, but, they are not well-known to all people to be objects of different knowledges, like a human being and a trunk of a tree. (Question). How are they known then? (Reply). (They are always known) to be the objects of an undifferentiated knowledge. For, no one knows them to be the objects of different knowledges saying, “This is the body” and “This is the Self.” It is for this reason that people are deluded about the nature of the Self and of the non-Self, and say, “The Self is of this nature “and” It is not of this nature.” It was this peculiarity with, reference to which I said that there was no such rule (viz. only well-known things could be superimposed on each other).

55. Disciple. — Whatever is superimposed through Ignorance on anything else is found to be non-existent in that thing, e.g., silver in a mother of pearl, a human being in the trunk of a tree, a snake in a rope, and the form of a frying pan and blueness in the sky. Similarly, both the body and the Self, always the objects of an undifferentiated knowledge, would be non-existent in each other if they were mutually superimposed, just as silver etc., superimposed, on mother of pearl and other things and *vice versa* are always absolutely non-existent. Likewise, the Self and the non-Self would both be non-existent if they were similarly superimposed on each other through Ignorance. But that is not desirable as it is the position of the Nihilists. If, instead of a mutual superimposition, the body (alone) is superimposed through Ignorance on the Self the body will be non-existent in the existing Self. That is also not desirable. For it contradicts sense-perception etc. Therefore the body and the Self are not mutually superimposed due to Ignorance. (If they are not superimposed) what then? They are always in the relation of conjunction with each other like pillars and bamboos.

56. Teacher. — It is not so. For in that case there arises the possibility of the Self existing for the benefit of another and being non-eternal. The Self, if in contact with the body, would be existing for the benefit of another and be non-eternal like the combination of pillars and bamboos. Moreover, the Self, supposed by other philosophers to be conjoined with the body must have an existence for the sake of another. It is, therefore, concluded that devoid of contact with the body the Self is eternal and characteristically different from it.