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WHAT AM I?

Extracts from Sri Sankaracharya's *Ajnana-Bodhini,* or *Ignorance-Informing.*

INSTRUCTOR—



YOU are not this body, which is the object of your perception, which is material, impermanent, unclean, and full of faults.

PUPIL—How?

I.—You had not this body before its creation; therefore you are not this body. You will not have this body after its destruction; hence you are not this body. Therefore as you do not possess this body before its creation or after its destruction, you are not this body.

From the very fact that you perceive this body to be yours, you are not this body even at present. You are the subject, and the body the object, of perfection. Because the subject is different from the object, you are therefore different from your body.

The materiality of the body is thus shown. You know the five

[primordial] elements which have combined together by the process known as Panchikarana. But they [the elements] do not know themselves or each other. Therefore you are not those five elements which are extremely material. Therefore you are not this body which is sprung from their parts.

N. B.—The process of Panchikarana is as follows: Divide each of the five primary elements into two halves; take a half of each of these elements and divide it again into four equal parts. The combination of the undivided half of an element with a quarter of the divided half of each of the other elements is known as Panchikarana. Each of the five elements known to us as earth, water, etc., is really a compound body, being a result of the combination of the five primary elements in the above manner. To make this clear, let us represent the five primary elements, earth, water, fire, air, and Akas by A, B, C, D, and E, respectively. Let A₁ and A₂, B₁ and B₂, etc., represent the two halves; and A₈, B₈, C₈, etc., represent each a quarter of the second half of each of the primary elements. Then—

Earth is A₁ plus B₈ plus C₈ plus D₈ plus E₈.

Water “ B₁ “ A₈ “ C₈ “ D₈ “ E₈.

Fire “ C₁ “ A₈ “ B₈ “ D₈ “ E₈.

Air “ D₁ “ A₈ “ B₈ “ C₈ “ E₈.

Akas “ E₁ “ A₈ “ B₈ “ C₈ “ D₈.

The first is known as earth, because the primary element, earth, predominates in this combination; the second is called water, because the primary element, water, is predominant here, and so on.

P.—How does the body spring from the parts of those elements?

I.—In this way. What is hard (in the body) is of the essence of the earth; the liquid (portion of the body) is of the water; what moves about (in the body) is of the air; the empty space (of our body) is of the Akas. As these five elements are seen in the body, and as the twenty-five constituents, flesh, bones, etc., are sprung from those five elements, you are not this material body.

P.—What are those twenty-five constituents, and what do they spring from?

I.—Bones, flesh, muscles, skin, and hair, these five spring from the earth. Semen, bile, sweat, saliva, and blood from water. Hunger, thirst, sleep, beauty, and lethargy from fire. (The power of) holding, extending, jumping, moving, and contracting from air. (The empty spaces in) the loins, the belly, the heart, the throat, and the head spring from the Akas.

Thus you are not this body which is made of these material ingredients.

P.—O lord, the body knows [feels] pleasure and pain. How can it be material?

I.—The body never can know pleasure and pain; as everything that is sprung from the elements and is object of perception is material. The five elements, as also those twenty-five constituents strung out of Panchikarana, can never know. A body can never know of a theft committed during a deep sleep. Therefore the body is as gross as an earthen pot.

P.—A pot remains as it is created (no change in the growth is perceived). The body, on the other hand, is subject to growth. You cannot therefore say that the body is similar to a pot.

I.—Do you mean to say that the growth of a body implies its consciousness? Who told you, or where did you see, that growth indicates consciousness? Does a dung-hill attain consciousness by its daily increase in growth? The excavated earth from a tank is being daily thrown on the banks. Does this increasing heap of the excavated earth attain consciousness in consequence of its increase in size? Of course not. Likewise the body, which is but a heap of earth, is grossly material, notwithstanding its increase in growth. Therefore you, who are all consciousness, are not this body which is material.

The impermanency (of the body) is shown. The Akas [Akasic constituent] has a tendency to become vacuum; the air tries to move away; the fire tries to burn the body; the earth tries to crumble to pieces. Thus all the elements try to act according to the nature of each and to fly to its parent element. Thus there is no permanency in the body.

The unclean and faulty nature is shown. At the time of birth it is very filthy. It is also full of the following faults: (1) always unclean, (2) requires constant cleansing, (3) possesses bad smell, (4) inactive, (5) full of filth, (6) partible, (7) apt to be burnt, (8) apt to be loose and affected with various diseases.

P.—Very well. I am not this body. But of what good will this knowledge be to me?

I.—Hear with caution. If you are not this body, then you have no caste, sect, or daily religious rites appertaining to the caste or sect; you have not those six states of change, namely: (1) of being born, (2) of existing, (3) of growing, (4) of being old, (5) of decaying, and (6) of being dead.

When the knowledge that you are not this body is engendered in you, then you become free from egotism.

P.—Oh lord, at the loss of the organs of sight, hearing, and others, I feel myself blind, deaf, lame, etc. Therefore I am these organs.

I.—These organs are the products of the elements; therefore you are not these elements.

P.—Oh lord, tell me the respective products of each of those elements.

I.—From Akas were produced the two organs of speech and hearing; from air the two organs of touch and hand; from fire the two organs of eyesight and feet; from water the two organs of touch and generation; from earth were produced the two organs of smell and anus. The mind was produced from a combination of those five elements. Buddhi is a particular state of the mind.

P.—Please enlarge on this.

I.—Ear is the instrument for receiving sound, and the organs of speech give expression to the sound. Therefore these two organs are products of Akas, sound being its property. As the skin is the seat of the touch, and as all objects are grasped by the hand through touch, these two organs are evolutions of Váyu, touch being an attribute of Váyu. In consequence of the capability of the eye to cognize the forms of objects, and of the feet to perceive warmth, the two organs of seeing and moving are evolutions of fire (color and warmth being the two properties of fire). In consequence of the tongue and the organ of generation feeling the sensation of pleasure and coolness, they are the products of water. In consequence of the organs of smell and anus having the respective capacity of sensing smell and of discharging stool, these are evolutions of the earth (smell being the chief attribute of earth.) Mind in general, having the capacity to cognize all these five attributes [of sound, touch, smell, etc.], is a product of all those five elements. The five pránas [vital airs, namely, prána, apána, samána, ûdána, and vyána] are evolutions of the air.

These elements are material. Consequently the organs, which are products of parts of the elements, are also material.

P.—Oh lord, the indriyas [organs] cognize objects appertaining to their respective sphere (as eyes cognize the forms of objects, ears sound, etc.) How can these indriyas be material (since they evince consciousness in their aptitude to perform their respective functions)?

I.—Hear how it is. The organ of hearing (for example) does not know the Atman; does not know itself or the other organs; is not capable of cognizing sound or any other object. It is therefore both ways material. But it is an instrument [Karana] for receiving sound. Just as a lamp is an instrument for effecting the knowledge of [manifesting] the forms of objects, just as the forms of objects are cognized through the medium of (the light of) lamp, so the organ of hearing is an instrument for cognizing

sound. In the same way the other organs are but instruments. Thus it is proved that you are not those indriyas, but you are knowledge itself.

P.—Oh lord, the prānas [vital airs] existing, the body, and the organs perform their respective functions; on the prānas ceasing to exist, the body and the indriyas become functionless. (In consequence of the existence of the prānas) I feel hunger and thirst. I am therefore the prānas.

I.—You are not those prānas. During dreams and dreamless sleep we do not cognize objects external and internal, though exhalation and inhalation of breath are present in those two states. If a thief, entering his room, takes away his ornaments, he does not know of it (though he is all along respiring), because, like the body, the prānas are grossly material.

P.—If they are material, how can they act upon other material bodies?

I.—It is seen in this world that one material body acts upon another material body. For instance, a strong wind fells trees. But this wind is not Atma.

This action of the prānas is not independent, but dependent upon the Karmas of our waking state. When the waking state ceases, Buddhi sleeps with all the organs and their impressions; for this reason there is no action during the two states of dream and dreamless sleep. The actions are thus due to the Karmas of our waking state. Therefore these prānas are material. You are not, therefore, the linga sarira [or subtle body] composed of the 17 indriyas [5 organs of action, 5 organs of sense, 5 prānas, Manas, Buddhi].

P.—This may not be. Oh lord, on the mind being at rest, I see, hear; on the mind being disturbed, I do not see or hear. I am therefore the Manas.

I.—You are not thus. At present my mind is elsewhere; now it is at rest: he who cognizes these states of the mind is not the mind. You, the cognizer, are different from the mind (which is cognized). Sruti says that Manas is evolved from and is merged in the Atman. Therefore you, being the Atman, are not the mind. Therefore you are not the linga sarira composed of the 17 indriyas.

P.—Oh lord, it is true that I am not this linga sarira. But what benefit will I derive from this knowledge?

I.—Hear with caution. If you are not this linga sarira, then you have no enjoyment of heaven and hell in your going and coming [incarnation]. Just as one becomes crippled by the breaking of the knees (and cannot come or go), so, on the destruction of

your *linga sarira*, you have no coming and going (incarnation or "descent into generation"). You have no enjoyment of the fruits of your *prárabdha Karmas*.

P.—Oh lord, how is that?

I.—In this way. This body is the vehicle of enjoyment, things are the objects of enjoyment, the organs are the instruments of enjoyment, and *Manas* and *Buddhi* are the enjoyer. But you are not these four [namely, the enjoyer, the enjoyed, the object, and the instrument]. Therefore the enjoyment of the *Karma* does not appertain to you.

P.—In the state of wakefulness or dreams I feel pleasure and pain. How is it that pleasure and pain do not belong to me?

I.—Hear it. The pain in the stomach or in the eyes is not felt in you while you are without *Buddhi* during the enjoyment of the state of *Sûshûpti* or dreamless sleep. Therefore those states (feeling pleasure, pain) do not belong to you but to *Ksheltra* [the material body]. The fool thinks that the [reflected] moon is in the waters.

When from the instructions of a *Guru* the knowledge that you are not this body is generated in you, then your journey in several *yonis* ceases, and you become void of the nine *gunas* [attributes].

P.—What are those attributes?

I.—They are:—(1) *Buddhi*, (2) love, (3) endeavor, (4) hatred, (5) memory, (6) virtue, (7) iniquity, (8) pain, (9) pleasure.

P.—Oh lord, from a search into the external and internal organs, I find that I am not this body; neither am I the organs, the *pránas*, *Manas*, nor *Buddhi*. It is wonderful that in spite of a search of all these, I do not know what or who I am. Therefore dispel this ignorance from me and tell me who it is that is inhabiting this body.

I.—Do you not know that you have an unmanifested causal body [*Kárana sarira*, the sixth principle] made of ignorance?

P.—How is that?

I.—In this way. You do not know all the forms of the objects of perception; you also say that you do not know yourself. This is the ignorance of your *Atman*. This is your causal body. You yourself are the support of this.

P.—How is that?

I.—In this way. You say that you do not know yourself. You yourself are therefore the support of this ignorance, and you know this ignorance perfectly well. As you know this ignorance that is in you, you are yourself *jñana* [knowledge]. Therefore you, who are a witness of this ignorance, are different from this ignorance which is the object of your perception. You are thus different from your casual body made of ignorance; *jñána* is your nature.

You know the indriyas, Manas, and Bûddhi; but these do neither know themselves, know each other, nor do they know the functions appertaining to each of them. They are therefore material, and you are jnana itself.

As you are knowledge itself, you have no ignorance. Hence Bandha [enchainment] and Moksha [salvation], the products of ignorance, do not appertain to you. Therefore you are eternally free.

Srûti says:

“Enchainment takes place by regarding the body (gross and subtile) to be Atman.

“The annihilation of this enchainment is Moksha.

“But these two, Bandha and Moksha, do not exist for the eternally-free Atman.”

(1) You are therefore Chit [intelligence].

That it is Sat or beness is being shown. You are the witness of the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. You therefore exist in these three periods of time. You know the existence and non-existence of others. You also know that you exist.

(2) You are thus Sat.

Its next aspect, Ananda, is shown. The organs, being tired, turn away from their respective objects, and after resting in you get up with renewed vigor and pleasure, and become capable of performing their respective functions. What does it mean?

N. B.—The argument involved is this, that because you are Ananda yourself, therefore the organs, by resting in you, partake of your Ananda and get up refreshed.

(3) Therefore you are Ananda.

The aspect of Adwaitam or Secondlessness is next shown. You know and you are a witness of all from Brahmá and others down to the veritable ant.

Srûti says:

“One God lies concealed in all the elements.

(Is) all-pervading and innermost heart of all the elements.

(Is) the governor of Karmas, the refuge of all the elements.

Witness, pure, stimulating cause, and void of attributes.”

Hear how this witness is not dual in this creation. Like the illusion of serpent in a rope, that of silver in tinsel, the illusion of Chit appears as earth in all the transformations [modifications] of earth; as gold in those of gold, as thread in those of thread.

N. B.—Earth, gold, and all other phenomenal objects are in their essence Chit. On account of our ignorance, this one substance appears to us as many and distinct.

(4) Therefore you are Adwaitam or Secondless.

Indivisibility is thus shown. You are void of the (three) distinctions relating to different class, same class, and to the constituent parts [vigatīya-swajatīya-swagatabheda-rahitam].

N. B.—Distinction relating to different classes is the distinction between a tree and a bird; distinction relating to same class is that between a tree and a tree; distinction relating to its own parts is that between a tree and its leaves, branches, and other parts.

(5) You are therefore indivisible.

Motionlessness is thus shown. On account of your being without birth and death,

(6) You are motionless [*i. e.*, you have no coming and going; you are not subject to migrations or incarnations].

Birthlessness is thus shown. On account of your being infinite and causeless,

(7) You are birthless.

Actionlessness is thus shown. As on account of the proximity of a magnet material iron acts, so on account of the proximity of your existence actions are generated in body, organs, vital airs, mind, and Buddhi.

(8) You are therefore actionless.

Srūti says on this: "These five [body, organs of sense and action, vital air, mind, and Buddhi] are the causes of all good or bad actions which men do by the body, speech, or mind [*i. e.*, thought, word, and deed.]

The changeless nature is thus shown. Like the mould, you exist unchanged.

(9) You are therefore changeless.

N. B.—A mould transforms everything to its own shape, itself remaining unchanged.

Endlessness is thus shown. Chaitangam [intelligence] pervades, and existed before the evolution of, all phenomena from undifferentiated matter to the earth.

(10) You are therefore without an end (infinite).

The nature of your shining by your own lustre [swayam prakāsatvam] is thus shown. You perceive that you are not all these, the objects of your perception. You know that you are Sat, Chit, and Ananda in nature.

(11) You are therefore light in nature.

N. B.—A lamp discovers objects by its own light, but does not depend upon other light for its own illumination, because it is itself light. Likewise, you know yourself and all the phenomenal objects, but are not dependent for this perception upon any other

light. You are therefore all light; you are all-pervading and large.

(12) You are therefore Brahma.

N. B.—Brahma is derived from (*a*) brih [to be large] and (*b*) brinh [to pervade].

You are also spoken of as the pratyag-atma [pratyag=subsequent].

Srúti has in various ways described you to be Brahma-like. As:

(*a*) That Atma is Brahma.

(*b*) Know me (Brahma) to be Kshetragna residing in the body with nine doors. [The nine doors are: two eyes, two ears, two nasal holes, mouth, hole in the anus, hole in the organ of generation.]

(*c*) That [Brahma] you [Atma] are. [Tattwamasi.]

(*d*) I [Atma] am Brahma [Brahmáhamashmí].

(*e*) Know all to be Vāsúdeva.

(*f*) All this jagat is Atma.

You are therefore Brahma.

You therefore are (1) Chit [intelligence], (2) Sat [existence or being], (3) Ánandam [bliss], (4) Adwaitam [secondless], (5) Akhandam [indivisible], (6) Achalam [motionless or without incarnation], (7) Ajam [birthless], (8) Akriyam [actionless], (9) Kútastham [changeless], (10) Anantasvarúpam [infinite], (11) Svaprokásam [shining by your own lustre], (12) Brahma [large and all-pervading].

P.—It is thus proved that I am the Parabrahma having these twelve attributes.

In continuation of this is appended a translation of—

SIDDHANTA-VINDUSARA, OR THE PHILOSOPHY OF AHAM.

By Mandusudan Sarasvati, a Famous Commentator
of the Bhagavat-Gita.



AM] neither prithvi, water, fire, air, Akas, the organs, nor their aggregate (the body).

From [on account of] its [the body's] many states (as) Sûshûpti (and others), I am always the same, one, the residuum, pure, and Siva.

N. B.—Prithvi, fire, etc., all of them possess the respective attributes of smell, touch, etc.; whereas I am free from all attributes, but am a cognizer thereof. I am, therefore, different from prithvi and others. I am different from the organs, because they

are many, whereas I am one. I am not the body, because the body is subject to different states and is changeful, whereas I am unique and changeless. I am the residuum, that is, what remains after an elimination of the phenomenal objects. I am the one substratum. [Siva does not here mean the Śiva of the trinity; it means, full of welfare, happiness, and prosperity.]

(2) (I am) not the varnas; (I have) no religious practices and rites pertaining to the varnas and āsrams.

No dhāraṇa, dhyāna, or other yogic practices.

From being free of the mistaken knowledge of "Aham and Mim" which adheres in all non-Atmic objects.

I am, etc.

N. B.—Varnas refer to the four caste divisions, viz: Brāhmana, Kṣhetriya, Vaisya, and Sūdra.

Āsrams refer to the four orders, viz: the Brahmacharya, Gārhaṣṭya, Vānaprastha, and Sanyāsa. Brahmacharya is the passing of the boyhood in the study of *Vedas* and other kindred books. Gārhaṣṭya: to marry and lead a domestic life. Vānaprastha: after the performance of the domestic duties, to betake oneself to seclusion in the jungles for the contemplation of the Brahma. Sanyāsa is the last order in which actions are performed unselfishly for the good of humanity.

Yoga practices refer to niyama, āsana, prānāyama, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, samādhi. (*Vide* aphorism 28 of Sādhanapada, in chap. II of *Patanjali*.)

Mistaken knowledge of "Aham and Mim" refer to the illusive knowledge of regarding the Atman as being the actor and enjoyer, and the phenomenal objects as belong to the Atman for its enjoyment. In a word, it means egoism.

(3) I have no father, no mother, no devas, no lokas, no *Vedas*, no jajnas, no tirthas. In Sūsūpti when Buddhi (with the impressions) is utterly extinct,

I remain the residuum, etc.

N. B.—I have no father, mother, because I am aja or birthless. I have no devas to worship, because there is none other higher than I to deserve worship or respect from me. I have no lokas, *i. e.*, no higher sphere or locality, as Vishnūloka, dhruvaloka, etc., to enjoy as a reward for meritorious actions, because (1) I am actionless; (2) I am omnipresent and cannot therefore have any special limitation. No *Vedas*—I do not require the *Vedas* for the acquirement of knowledge, because I am all knowledge. No jajnas or sacrificial ceremonies, because I am actionless, and I do not require to propitiate any gods therewith, as there is no one transcending me in powers. No tirthas [holy places]. I do not re-

quire to travel unto holy places to acquire sanctity, as I am all holiness.

(4) Neither Sankhyam, Saivam, Pácharátram, Jainam, Mimán-sakam, nor any other system of philosophy can tell of me.

From pure intuition I can only be known
As one, the residuum, etc.

(5) I have no top, bottom, inside, outside, middle, or any other side, nor have I any directions, east or west. But like the Akas, all-pervading and unique, I am one, the residuum, etc.

N. B.—I cannot be said to be in any particular place, because, being free and all-pervading. I cannot be confined in any particular place.

(I am) not white, black, red, or yellow (in complexion). Not crooked, fat, lean, or tall (in form). (I have) no shape, but from my form being of light, I am, etc.

(7) I have no governor, no code (laying down rules governing me), no pupil, no teaching.

I am not you, not I, and not the creation.

Without any duality in my nature, which is all intelligence, I am, etc.

N. B.—Duality implies distinction. There being no duality, there can be no such distinction as is involved in the conception of I, you, and it.

(8) I am not the (three) states of waking, sleeping, and dreamless sleep.

(I have) not the (three upádhis) Viswa, Taijas, and Pragnaka [which upádhis pertain to a Jiva].

(I am) the fourth [turíya] of the three inherent in Avidyá.
I am, etc.

N. B.—The three upadhis of Visya, Taijas, and Pragnaka. For explanation *vide Mándukya Upanishad*, slokas 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Sloka 2 says that this universe is Brahma, that the Atma is Brahma, and that the Atma has four pádhas, or parts. The three parts referred to in slokas 3, 4, and 5 as Viswa, or Vaiswánara, Taijas, and Pragnana, correspond to the three principles of man, namely, Sthûlopadhi, (first, second, and third of the theosophical classification) Sukshmopádhi (fourth and fifth), and Karanopádhi (the sixth principle).

These three principles have respectively their periods of activity during the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

The three inherent in Avidyá are (1) the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, (2) the three qualities, Satwa, Rajas, and Tamas, (3) the three upadhis, Visva, Taijas, and Pragna.

Atma is the tûriya, or the fourth, and is therefore void of the three upadhis, and consequently has not those three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

From my being all-pervading; from my being self-manifest, and not dependent on anything for support (I am real), and all this jagat [universe] is unreal. I am different from it [the jagat] and am Siva, etc.

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