

AS AN OASIS IN THE DESERT

- For the soul...toward the Source, “free of *disputations* and *contradictions*” -

«Jñānenākāśakalpena dharmān yo gaganopamān |
Jñeyābhinnena sambuddhas taṁ vande dvipadām varam ||¹

Ākāśakalpa, literally, means ‘resembling *ākāśa*²’. Similarly, *jñānena ākāśakalpena* means ‘by means of knowledge comparable to *ākāśa*’. What could be the purpose of knowledge which resembles *ākāśa*? That of enabling one to discover the nature of *dharmān*. What is the nature of *dharmān*? They are *gagana upamān*, that is their nature is of the infinite sky; ... it is *jñeyābhinna*, not differing from the objects of knowledge, that is *dharmān* do not differ from the *ātman*...

[What is meant by nature?]³

By the word nature it must be intend that which is permanently acquired or intrinsic, inherent; that which is not produced, that which is immutable in its essential characteristic.

The intrinsic characteristics of a thing, for example heat and light of fire, etc., do not change in time and space. Similarly what is connatural, for example the bird’s ability to fly in the air, is called nature.

Whatever is not produced by some extraneous factor alien (to the thing itself), for example the tendency of water to run downwards, is also called nature. And, finally, whatever remains identical to itself must be known as such, that is as nature. The idea of the *kārikā* is this: if the nature of empirical, imagined things does not change, even more so there cannot be any change in the immortal nature of the ultimate reality, intrinsically without birth»⁴.

«*The immortal cannot become mortal, nor can the mortal become immortal*”.

From this standpoint it can be affirmed that the One ...can never “be transformed” into the many nor can Being “be transformed” into becoming, nor the Absolute into relative. Then, one might ask (and starting from the proper premises) what is it that we perceive as birth, growth and death (becoming)? Here is the crucial point of the question.

Often one starts from wrong philosophical premises and, obviously, the consequences are neither logical nor reasonable.

Thus, for example, by considering becoming and the mortal as *real*, one is then unable to grasp how Being or God, call it as you will, conceived as infinite, could have

¹ *I bow to that One who is the best among human beings, who through his knowledge, similar to the ether, that does not differ from the object of knowledge, has realized the dharma (jīva) comparable to (infinite) heaven. Ch. IV, kārikā 1.*

² The quintessence of the Elements: fire, water etc.

³ Square parentheses are ours.

⁴ Gauḍapāda, *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* with Śaṅkara commentary. Edizioni Āśram Vidyā, 1976. Rome. [Italian Edition].

fallen into the mortal and finite condition; or, again, how the imperishable and “perfect” *ātman* could have fallen into a perishable and imperfect state.

The problem set out in these terms can never be solved; it cannot because the premises, being wrongly postulated, offer no way out.

The right premises were given above, that is: considering that Being, if it is immortal, cannot suddenly become (be transformed into) mortal, nor can timelessness find Itself within time, nor the uncaused in the caused, then what is the nature of those things we perceive as finite, imperfect, caused, mortal, etc.?

Considering that *Brahman-ātman* is without birth, without death, therefore beyond time-space-cause, what can all that we perceive as time-space-cause represent?

Given that the rope, in Gauḍapāda’s classical example, is of the same nature of *sat-cit-ānanda*, of infinity, of timelessness, etc., that which we see as snake, garland, the trickle of water etc. (that is, what becomes and changes), what is it?»⁵

«What is the absolutely real datum that is substratum to all non-real ideas, such as that of creation, etc.?

Here is the answer:

It is consciousness, without birth or motion, not gross and at the same time tranquil and non-dual, that seems to be born, move and possess qualities.

Jarāmarāṇanirmuktāḥ sarve dharmāḥ svabhāvataḥ |
Jarāmarāṇam icchantāś cyavante tanmanīṣayā ||⁶

The words *jarā marāṇa nirmuktaḥ* mean freed from all physical changes inherent to *jāra*, aging, and to *marāṇa*, death.

Who is (freed from such changes)? *Sarve dharmāḥ*, all *dharma* (*jīva*). Although in their own nature, all *jīva* are intrinsically free (from such changes), *icchantaḥ jarāmarāṇam*, imagining death and aging affecting the *ātman*, as a snake can be projected onto a rope, they *cyavante*, fall, that is they move away from their own nature. In other words, *tanmanīṣayā*, by projecting and thinking senility and death and becoming absorbed in these ideas (they end up considering themselves as changing).

[Therefore:]

prakṛtyākāśavaj jñeyāḥ sarve dharmā anādayaḥ |
vidyate na hi nānātvaṁ teṣāṁ kvacana kiñcana ||⁷

⁵.Raphael (Āśram Vidyā Order), commentary to the *kārikā* 9. Gauḍapāda, *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, with Raphael commentary. Aurea Vidyā, New York, NY. 2002.

⁶ All *jīva* are intrinsically free from old age and death, but, by imagining (these qualifications) and by identifying with such ideas, they are reborn through the strength of their thought, straying far from their nature. Ch. IV, *kārikā* 10.

⁷ All *dharmāḥ* must be known as belonging to the nature of *ākāśa* and as eternal. They must not, therefore, ever be considered as in the least multiples in any place. Ch. IV, *kārikā* 91.

Sarve dharmāḥ, all souls *jñeyāḥ*, must be considered, by those who aspire to liberation, *ākāśavat prakṛtyā*, having the same nature of *ākāśa*, that is without form, devoid of contaminations, all pervading and eternal. To prevent from forming erroneous ideas of multiplicity by using the term *sarve dharmāḥ*, all *dharmāḥ*, the second verse of the *kārikā* aims at clarifying any possible doubt in this regard: plurality *na vidyate*, doesn't exist, *kvacana kim cana*, anywhere.

All souls are, for their own nature, resplendent from their origin and eternally immutable. One who has realized this vision has freed himself from the need of further knowledge and has unveiled immortality.

Similarly there is no need to bring tranquility to the *ātman* as evidenced by the following *kārikā*:

Souls are, from their very origin, tranquil, non-born and, by their very nature, totally detached and non-different, just as reality Itself is without birth, uniform and pure.

Let us quench our thirst with this drink of eternity before resuming the hard but *sure journey*.

Let us hail, thus, by exalting the supreme Light that flows in the cavity of the heart, the nature of *Brahman*:

asparśayogo vai nāma sarvasattvasukho hitaḥ |
avivādo 'viruddhaś ca deśitas taṁ namāmy aham ||⁸

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⁸ *I salute that yoga, taught by the very Scriptures, well known as Asparśa, free of relations, beneficial, generator of bliss for all beings, free of oppositions and contradictions. Ch. IV, kārikā 2.*