

49. Sacrificial fire

*One can make scholars study and recite the Vedhas
and Shaasthras, and himself study and recite;
One can get experts to perform yajnas and yaagas
and himself perform them well;
One can persuade pilgrims to visit holy places
and himself journey to every spot;
One can instruct candidates in the eight siddhis
and himself demonstrate them all;
But, one cannot master his senses five
and turn his mind to inward path,
And be in steady Samaadhi Bliss
Steeped in Awareness of Self alone.*

The Vedhas are the foundation of Bhaaratheeya culture. If in modern society, a trace of spiritual illumination is visible, we can ascribe it to this Vedhic basis and the way of life it demarcated. For, all moral codes (dharma) have emanated from the Vedhas. Vedha moolam idham jhagath--- "All the worlds have dharma as their sustenance."

The Yajur Vedha elaborates the importance of yajnas. These promote the peace and prosperity of the world, as that is the primary aim of all the Vedhas. The Yajur Vedha hymns extol the glory of the gods and propitiate the Divine Forces. As a result, gold and grain, wealth and welfare, plenty and progress are secured by mankind.

The yajna is centred on the adoration of Fire. Man is bound intimately with Fire all through his life. Man is a warmblooded creature; warmth promotes intellect and intuition. Calling upon God and placing the offerings in the Fire are acts which bring about rain to provide rich harvests. Fire is thus a valuable medium for gaining safety and security, for preserving morality and goodness. The Ocean too has Agni (Fire) latent in its loins.

Fire is present everywhere

Man has in his stomach the latent Fire that digests food. God resides in man as this Fire. "*Aham Vaishwaanaro Bhoothvaa Praaninaam Deham Aashrithah,*" says Krishna. "Having become the Vaishwaanara Fire, I enter the body of living beings." So, it is God that keeps all the limbs 'trim. and makes keenness and knowledge possible. The latent Fire causes eight functions' It hardens and strengthens the muscles. It develops energy. It ensures healthy progeny. It makes one patient and therefore a better instrument, it increases the duration of life. It sharpens and deepens memory. It confers boldness of thought and action.

In order to light the Fire in the sacrificial enclosure, a churning rod of hardwood is used on a block of similar hardness. The timber has to be banyan or peepul. The block is the mother and the churner is the father. *Agni* or Fire is the child' It consumes the parents---Uurvasi the mother and Puruuravas, the father---when it is born! They are reduced to ashes, that is to say, that child

becomes one with them and they become one with their progeny. All three are inseparably related. The son of God, Jesus, declared, "I and my Father are One." The religion of the Paarsis also considers the highest truth as "I am the Light" and "The Light is in me."

The Yajur Vedha has a name for *Agni*, Tiger! When *Agni* is treated without faith and reverence, it destroys the very person who feeds it, just as the tiger which tears its own cubs with its deadly claws. Another characteristic of *Agni* is its presence everywhere. Scientists and technologists today are proud that they have grasped the secrets of the five elements---sky, wind, fire, water and earth. But, they are still unaware of the intimate kinship each of them has with man and his daily life. The sages of the past have delved into the mystery and revealed it to the world. Notice, for example, that birds do not rest on the ground at night. They prefer tree tops. Why.? The *rishis* of *Vedhic* times explain that they seek to avoid the heat latent in the earth but patent to them. Man is unaware of this fact but the birds know it.

The mystery behind the ritual of Fire

The norms of action and behaviour in this land, of those who are cognisant or not cognisant of the reasons, are all in conformity with the *Vedhas*. They have penetrated the nature of the people so deeply that no one can act in contravention. Every phase of their activity, from dawn to dusk and nightfall, are as dictated by the *Vedhas*. Living is in fact a real *Vedhic* yajna, whether one knows it or not.

In the *yajna* that is being performed here, every formula that is uttered and every offering made has to be suffused with renunciatory feelings and the awareness of the Divine. We have here *Suuryanamaskaar* (salutation to Sun God) on one side, *Rudhrahoma* (Fire offering to God *Rudhra*) on another, *Vedhapaaraayana* in another place, *Sahasra-lingaarchana* (worship of thousand *Shiva Lingas*) nearby, worship of *Shakthi* (Divine Mother) at the end, and *Pandiths* reciting *Devi Bhaagavatham*, *Raamaayana*, etc.

Why are these varied items gone through? Among these priests, the chief is termed *Brahma*. One of them will be reciting the *Rig Vedha*, another will be reciting musically the *Saama Vedha*, and the third person will be reciting the *Yajur Vedha*. *The Atharva Vedha* includes the very essence of the three *Vedhas* and it is recited by the person designated as *Brahma*. *The* deities extolled in the *Vedhas* are here invoked and invited to shower Grace on all mankind. The Chief priest, designated as *Adhwaryu*, watches the activity and sets right any fault or failing. His is the overall supervision of the Sacrificial Fire, its upkeep and worship and his is the responsibility for meticulous performance.

Whatever offered to God can never be lost

Behind this ritual of Fire, there lies a small mystery, which has to be cleared, so that you can understand how the offering, addressed to the deity which is invoked by the *manthra* uttered while placing it in the Fire, can reach that very deity. Well, the *Yajur Vedha* describes the Flames of the Sacred Fire as the Tongues of God. When the offering is dropped into Fire, in the name of the God, the proper name and address have to be uttered at the same time. It is like the post box. When a letter is properly addressed and dropped into the box at Prashaanthi Nilayam, it will reach any place, even as far as Japan or Russia. If the address indicates Prashaanthi Nilayam, it will be delivered to the person at Prashaanthi Nilayam. The address has to be full and correct, that is all. And, the stamp has to be of the correct value.

There are people who observe only the outer acts of the *yajna* and blame *Brahmins* for "wastefully pouring ghee into the fire, while men are underfed and starving," and accuse that "they are foolishly spending money over profitless pursuits." Even educated persons join in this ignorant condemnation.

The ryot ploughs the field, prepares the plots, lets water into them, and makes them fit to receive the seeds. Then, he scatters four bags of paddy on the land. An ignoramus who does not know agriculture laughs at him. "You have gone mad. When people are starving, 'you throw the paddy they would gladly eat into the soil!'" But, in return for the four bags lost, the 'mad man' will bring home forty bags after harvest. When two tins of ghee are poured ritually into the sanctified Fire the world will gain two hundred tins of ghee.

Whatever is dedicated and offered to God can never be lost. People can gain enormous benefit by offering even a little to God. "A leaf or a flower, a fruit or a little water"---that is enough, if offered with devotion. Dhroupadhi gave Shri Krishna the fraction of a leaf sticking to the side of a vessel and God granted her endless good fortune. Kuchela gave a handful of parched rice and received from the Lord awareness of His endless Glory. The *yajna* bears witness to this inner significance.

Utterance of *manthras* must emerge from the heart

Offer love and receive love. Give and take. But, the educational system today lays stress only on taking, a one-way traffic! Giving is taboo, totally absent. As a result, when you do not look at God, God too does not look at you. When you look towards Me, your form appears in My eye and My form appears in your eye at the same time. If you do not look towards Me, your form cannot appear in Mine. One-way traffic will not help.

The Rig Vedha that is recited here by the Hotha priest is fully hymnal, adoration of the Divine; the *Udgatha* sets the same hymns to music and recites them musically. The *Adhwaryu* repeats the *Yajur Vedha*. All three are propitiating the only One. Governor Govind Narain quoted in his speech the *Vedhic* declaration, "*Ekam Sath; vipraah bahudhaa vadhanthi*"--"Only ONE is; the wise describe it in different ways."

It is like the head of the family, being addressed as Father by the son, Father-in-law by the daughter-in-law, Grandpa by the grandson, and Lord by the wife. Though four persons use four different names, he remains the same. Similarly, *Yogis*, *Bhogis*, and *Thyaagis*, the *Aartha*, the *Artharthi*, the *Jijnaasu* and the *Jnaani* (The ascetics, materialists, renouncers, the suffering, the wealth-seeker, the spiritual seeker and the realised) use different names for the ONE, without a second. Whether you offer to Agni (Fire God) or *Aadhithya* (Sun God), it reaches the same ONE.

Sacrifice the wayward mind, dedicating it to God

Theists, atheists, agnostics, polytheists, henotheists, all accost God by various names but they all refer only to the ONE. In this *yajna* (sacrificial rite), offerings are addressed as *Rudhraaya namah*, *Varunaaya namah*, *Indhraaya namah*, *Vaayave Namah* and placed in the Fire for *Rudhra*, *Varuna*, *Indra* and *Vaayu* (Cosmic destroyer, Rain God, God of senses and Wind God). The sages visualised God in those forms and with those forms. After the fields are ploughed and the seeds are sown, we want rains to help in getting a rich harvest. So, prayer is directed to *Varuna*, to the address of *Varuna*. When you desire Kasturi to come but call 'Kutumba Rao', how

can you succeed? For rains, you have to call on *Varuna*, and not on *Agni*! That is to say, the proper *manthras* have to be uttered and the utterance must emerge from the heart.

The sages of the past were not ignorant fools and the *manthras* and rites they framed and prescribed were not born of amateur enthusiasm. They are the results of wisdom and actual experience. Reciters who are not aware of this truth will mouth the hymns and *manthras* in a casual manner. Others who ruminate over the meaning and feel the emotions of exaltation and supplication are able to derive delight. Recitation without understanding the meaning might grant a little superficial satisfaction but the hymn can pour from the heart only when the meaning is sensed.

The inner meaning of *yajna* is 'renunciation,' "sacrifice or giving up." For whom? For the Divine. "Lord! The heart that you gave me, I am offering it in return," is the spirit of that renunciation. The heart He has given, the feelings He evokes, the wealth He has conferred, the fame He has awarded---these have to be gladly offered back. As part of these *yajnas*, it is laid down that an animal, a goat, or a horse has to be 'sacrificed' that is to say, 'given up.' People ask whether it is not a cruel act.

Scriptures dealing with rituals are comparable, it is said, to *Aranya*, the jungle. They are called *Aaranyakas*. The terms used in the scriptures have many meanings and it is hard to trace the straight meaning and prefer it to the crooked and deceptive one. For example, the *Ashwamedha* or Horse Sacrifice, does not mean the ritual killing of horse. The name *Ashwa* given to the horse describes it as an animal which is restless all the time-- symboling the mind which is agitated, both while awake and while dreaming. The horse can never be calm and quiet. Its legs, tail, or ears will be quivering or shaking always. The banyan tree is called *Ashwattha*, since its leaves will ever be shaking, wind or no wind.

What is recommended is 'sacrifice' of the wayward mind, dedicating it to God so that it becomes stable and calm and not bringing a living animal and killing it. That is adherence to the outer literal meaning of the injunction, not to the inner and valid import. Listen to the significances of *Vedhic* aphorisms and rituals and scriptural injunctions with selfless, pure and joyful concentration. Treasure them in the heart for practice in daily life and for sharing with other earnest souls.

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