

29. Message of the Vedas

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! The Vedas are the recordings of sages to whom the *mantras* were revealed. They proclaim the transcendental Truth which is not changed by time or place. They indicate the means to prosperity and security for the denizens of the three worlds.

Veda is derived from the root "*Vid*", which means "to know". The *Veda* teaches how to achieve purity of heart, getting rid of impurities.

The Vedas have been declared to be infinite and hence beyond the comprehension of common people. In the beginning there was only one *Veda*. To study it considerable time and effort were needed. Vyasa divided it into different parts to enable people to study as well as practise the teachings of the *Veda*. Out of the countless number of hymns, Vyasa gathered some *Rks* and compiled them in the *Rg Veda*, collected some *yajus* to form the *Yajur Veda* and some *Samans* to make up the *Sama Veda*.

The Rg Veda is mainly devoted to hymns in praise of various deities. The *Yajur Veda* consists of *mantras* for worshipping the deities. The *mantras* of the *Yajur Veda* are used in the performance of *yagas* and *yajnas* and in doing acts of charity. Each *Veda* has three sections' *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*.

The purpose of Vedic mantras

The *Vedic mantras* were utilised in *yagas* and *yajnas* (ritual sacrifices) for promoting the well-being of society and the world. They were intended to secure timely rains so that the crops may be good and there may be prosperity all round. The *mantras* which form part of the *Karma Kanda* (the path of rituals), were regarded as conducive to the promotion of general well-being and happiness.

The *Yajur Veda* is devoted entirely to the worship of the deities. It consists of two *divisions*--*Krishna Yajur Veda* and *Sukla Yajur Veda*--which are based on two traditional distinctions. *Sukla Yajur Veda* belongs to the *Brahma sampradaya* (Brahmic tradition) and the *Krishna Yajur Veda* to the *Aditya sampradaya*. Adherents of the *Sukla Yajur Veda* are largely confined to North India, while *Krishna Yajur Veda* has its adherents mainly in South India.

The Vedas developed under nine heads: (1) *Sruti*; (2) *Anuswara*; (3) *Trayee*; (4) *Aamnaayam*; (5) *Samaamnayam*; (6) *Chandas*; (7) *Swaadhyayam*; (8) *Gama*; and (9) *Aagama*.

Sruti refers to the process of learning, the *Vedas* from a preceptor by practising the precise manner of chanting the *mantras* and thereby acquiring proficiency in the recitation of the *Vedas*. The sounds have to be reproduced exactly as taught by the preceptor by listening to him with intense earnestness. The *Vedic mantras* are thus learnt entirely by listening.

Anuswara refers to the practice of repeating the *mantras* learnt from the preceptor, contemplating on them and preserving them in their purity by constant recitation.

Trayee: Originally only three *Vedas*--*Rg*, *Yajur* and *Sama Vedas*--were considered *Apourusheya*, without a human origin (that is, emanating from the Divine). The *Atharvana Veda* comprises hymns taken from the *Yajur Veda*. Because of their Divine origin, the first three *Vedas* were called "*Trayee*" (the Triad).

Aamnaaya refers to constant contemplation of the root syllable "*Na*." Acquiring knowledge of the *Vedas* by this practice has been described as *Aamnaaya* and *Samaamnaaya*.

One meaning of *Chandas* is that it is knowledge which should be guarded in secret and propagated with care. The *Vedas* are also described as *Chandas*. The entire *Sama Veda* consists of *Chandas*.

Swaadhyaayam refers to the process by which the *Vedas* have come down from generation to generation, through father to son, in genealogical succession. Acquisition of *Vedic* knowledge was not through books. It was transmitted from preceptor to disciple over the years. It is because this knowledge was handed down directly from preceptor to pupil, it has been described as *Swaadhyaaya*.

Gama and Aagama are the names given to the inhaling and exhaling of the Lord's breath which were the origin of the *Vedas*. All in all, the *Vedas* represent the emanations from the breath of the Lord.

The great sages who listened to these *mantras* as revelations from the Divine found the key to them in eight basic letters. All the *Vedic mantras* with their musical rendering were remembered by reflecting on the eight letters: "A, Ka, Cha, Ta, Tha, Pa, Ya, Sa." The great seers fostered the *Vedas* by the use of these letters.

Neglect of *Vedas* is cause for spiritual decline

Each of the *Vedas* had several *saakhas* (branches) and *upasaakhas* (sub-branches). Out of the 20 branches and 21 sub-branches of the *Rg Veda*, only three have survived today. Likewise out of 96 branches of *Yajur Veda* only two have survived the ravages of time. *Sama Veda*, which had 1000 branches, retains today only three branches. If so much of spiritual treasure is contained in the few branches of the *Vedas* that have survived, how much greater would have been the spiritual heritage of the *Bharatiyas* if the *Vedas* had survived in their entirety! It is because of the neglect of the *Vedas* that the spiritual and scientific knowledge of *Bharatiyas* experienced a steady decline. As a consequence they developed a narrow outlook. Broadness of vision suffered an eclipse. Today the numbers of those who have no love or respect for the *Vedas* are on the increase. Even among the Brahmins interest and concern for the *Vedas* have declined.

Who are Brahmins? *Brahman* means the embodiment of *mantra*. Only those who constantly recited the *mantras* embodying the *Brahman* were called Brahmins. Today Brahmins have forgotten these *mantras*. Owing to the impact of modern education, the greed for money and the growth of narrow-minded interests, they have forgotten their inherent divinity. As a consequence, peace and security have become casualties.

What is meant by *Veda*? One meaning is *eruka* (awareness). Another is *thelivi* (intelligence). A third meaning is *viveka* (discrimination). All those who wish to develop discrimination should be deeply interested in the *Vedas*.

Today intelligence is being developed and used only for acquiring positions and possessions, for securing comforts and conveniences and not for developing good qualities and becoming good men engaged in Godly pursuits. All their intellectual abilities are being misused for trivial purposes.

The universal outlook of the *Vedas*

The *Vedas* have emphasised that man will be truly human only when he lives upto human values and practises the good life. Many who chant the *Vedas* these days have difficulty in understanding their purport. When they fully understand the meaning and chant the *mantras*,

they will derive greater joy. Only then they will experience the full sacredness and potency of the *Vedas*.

The Vedas have a universal outlook, embracing all that is noble and sacred. They have taught the principle of *samatwa* (equality) in respect of everything. They have proclaimed the concept of oneness. They taught men to face joy and sorrow with equal serenity.

Those who utter the *mantras* today do not grasp their inner meaning. Even if the full meaning of a single *mantra* is understood, it will be sufficient. Every day, the *santhi mantra* is recited: "*Om Sahanavavathu; sahanau bhunaktu; sahaviryam karavaavahai.*" What does this signify? "Let us move together in unison. Let us live in harmony in communion with each other." What a wide vision is present in this *mantra*!

Even such broad-minded *mantras* have been interpreted in a narrow sense in later years. Hence you do not find today even a thousandth of the sense of equality and amity which prevailed in those times. It is because men's attitudes and feelings have declined below the human level that so many divisive forces have cropped up.

Significance of Yajnas

Thirty-three deities are mentioned in the *Rg Veda*. Of them, the Sun-God is the most important deity. His power is felt all over the world. In this *Yajna*, the Sun is called *Ritwik*. His other names are: *Hota and Brahma*. It is the Sun God who carries to the deities concerned the offerings made in the *yajna*. *Agni*, the God of fire, is an image of the Sun. *Agni* has a form of his own. *Agni* has parents. This morning, before the *yajna* began, two priests churned two *aranis* (sticks) to produce fire for the *yajna*. The Fire-God is said to have consumed his parents immediately after his birth. The lower *Arani* is the mother and the stick on the top is father. The fire produced by churning them burns away the sticks. The flames arising from the fire are the tongues of the Fire-God. The rays coming from the fire are so many heads of the deity. The *Agni-Principle* is immanent in every person. The inner significance of this is that every person is inherently divine.

When the *mantras* are chanted and offerings are made in the fire to the Lord, the grace of the Lord is showered on the people in the form of peace and plenty. There is a saying: "As is the fire, so is the smoke." As is the smoke, so are the clouds. As are the clouds, so is the rain. As is the rain, so are the crops. As are the crops, so is the food. As is the food, so is the intellect. As the clouds these days are not formed by the smoke coming from *yajnas*, the food consumed by the people is not conducive to the growth of intelligence. When the smoke going up from the *yajna-kunda* enters the clouds, you have sacred rain, which helps to purify the crops and sanctify the food that is consumed. As a result, the people are sanctified.

The Bliss derived from sacrifice

But today if people are filled with bad thoughts and evil intentions it is because these sacred *yajnas* and *yagas* are not performed. Many persons ask in a carping spirit "*Of what use is the expending of so much ghee and other materials as offerings in the fire of the yajnas and yagas?*" The purpose will be clear only to those in the know of the inner truth. A farmer tills his field and scatters over it a bag of paddy seeds. To the ignorant observer this may appear a waste of precious grain. But the farmer knows that in due course he will reap a harvest of hundred bags of paddy. Likewise the offering of ghee and other precious things in the *yajna* with *mantras* will result in countless benefits in good time. People may notice only what is being offered. But they have no idea of the benefits that will follow.

It should be realised that only today's *Thyaga* (sacrifice) can lead to tomorrow's *bhoga* (enjoyment). When the sacrifice is made with a full heart, the returns will also be equally abundant.

Unfortunately, man today does not even dream of making any sacrifice. When a presence of sacrifice is made, it is only a concession to fashion. Very few have any idea of what real sacrifice is. As a consequence, the wealthy, in spite of their riches, have neither peace nor security. The affluent do not care even to give a little food to the destitute at their gate. But these misers drop bagful of money in the hundi in a temple. These foolish persons fail to see the divinity in fellow-human beings and make offerings to an inanimate object.

Do not bargain with the Lord

Does God, who is the source of all wealth, need your petty offerings? You must use your wealth for righteous purposes. Help the indigent and the needy. There is selfish motive even in making offerings to the deity. Something small is offered expectation of a big return from the deity. A man prays to the Lord: "Oh Lord! If I win ten lakhs of rupees in a lottery I shall offer ten thousand rupees to you." What kind of bargain is this? It is a pity that such silly ideas are rampant today.

The reason is the people have forgotten the secret of the *Vedas*. They offer a molehill and crave for a mountain. This is a complete caricature of devotion. It is such pseudo-devotees who are on the increase today. They are all the time seeking to enter into petty deals with the Divine. Every prayer, every *sadhana* is replete with selfishness and self-interest.

Everyone seeks benefits, but is not prepared to make any sacrifice. What is the sacrifice that is to be made to God? First of all, your bad qualities. Acquire good qualities. Shed your narrow outlook. Cultivate a broad vision. Today the foremost need is to develop the spirit of sacrifice. You are not expected to give away all your wealth and possessions. What is required is a sense of compassion at the sight of a suffering being. When the heart melts, that itself becomes sacrifice. What we witness today is not the melting of hearts but their hardening.

You will not carry your wealth with you when you leave the world. Even while life remains, render help to those who need as much as you can. The quintessence of the *Vedas* is the glorification of sacrifice as the supreme virtue.

Of what avail is all your study or listening if there is no change in the way you live and you have not understood your true nature? The highest knowledge is understanding the value of sacrifice. It is a source of limitless joy. It leads to immortality.

The greatest means to realise the Divine

The lesson to be learnt from the performance of *yajnas* is that sacrifice is the greatest means to realise the Divine. The essential meaning of the *Veda* is that to secure enduring bliss, the spirit of sacrifice has to be cultivated, the significance of *yaga* has to be understood and we must lead a Godly life.

The Vedas have been mainly concerned with the *Pravritti Marga* (the Path of Action). All the different branches of knowledge--physics, chemistry, botany, economics, music, etc.--are covered by the *Vedas*. These are concerned with the external world. Hence the *Vedas* have been considered dualistic. Only the *Upanishads* have taught the *Nirvritti Marga* (the Path of Knowledge) by going within oneself. This means that, of the four *Purusharthas*, the four main

goals of man. *Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha*--the *Vedas* have been concerned with only the first three.

The Upanishads declared that the nature of the Supreme can be grasped only by the Path of Knowledge. Knowledge is of two kinds: *Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya* (the Higher Knowledge and the Lower Knowledge). All that is learnt by the educational process today falls in the category of *Aparā Vidya* (Lower Knowledge). Knowledge relating to *Dharma, Artha and Kama* also comes in this category. Only knowledge relating to *Moksha* (Liberation) constitutes *Para Vidya* (the Supreme Knowledge). We have to acquire that *Para Vidya*. That knowledge is found in *Vedānta*. *The Upanishads* come at the end of the *Vedas*. The essence of all the *Vedas* is to be found in them.

While *Veda* is dualistic, *Vedānta* is *Advaita* (non-dualistic). Non-dualism is the means to experience *Ananda* (Bliss). The ego ("I") principle is predominant in the *Vedas*. *Vedānta* has declared that the elimination of the ego ("I" and "Mine") alone can lead to Realisation. The "I" has to be rooted out. As long as you adhere to the "I", you are bound to the phenomenal world. You cannot attain the Higher Knowledge. You have, therefore, to understand the distinction between the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

It is only when you understand the essence of the *Vedas* as expounded in the *Upanishads* and put into practice the message of the *Vedānta*, you will realise the true meaning of *Advaita* (Non-dualism).

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