

24. Message of the Vedas

DEAR Students! *There is no disease equal to greed. There is no greater enemy than anger. There is no misery than poverty. There is no happiness greater than wisdom.*

Man is ignoring these sacred truths.

Faith in God has been replaced by disrespect for reverence and righteousness. Atheism is rampant and preceptors are not honoured. Devotion is at a discount and the ancient wisdom is being given up these days. In education character has reached its nadir.

"I am in the Light. I am the Light. The Light is in Me. The Light is Myself." When this awareness arises in the heart, it will lead to oneness with Brahman.

The Vedas are the most ancient among the world's scriptures. They are a vast storehouse of wisdom. They enabled man to have an over-view of the universe. Historically, they are the earliest known book of knowledge. They are the roots of human culture and striving. Manu has declared: "Everything is derived from the Vedas." All knowledge, all the principles of right living, all qualities are derived from the Vedas.

"Anantho Vai Vedaah" (The Vedas are infinite). The Vedas are immeasurable, unrivalled and filled with bliss. *Veda* is derived from the verb *Vid*, to know. Knowledge of the Supreme is *Veda*. It represents *AtmaJnana* (Knowledge of the Spirit), *Brahma Jnana* (Knowledge of the Universal Consciousness) and *Advaita Jnana* (Knowledge of the One that subsumes the many). These different terms are synonymous.

Vedas embody the cosmic sound

It is not easy for laymen to understand the Vedas. But whether they are understood or not, their truth permeates the universe. They embody the *Sabda Brahman* (Cosmic Sound). They are not confined to a particular place, time or person. They pervade the cosmos. Realising that it is not easy for common people to understand the Vedas, Vyasa codified them in four groups. They have been propagated and practised in three sections. The *Karma Kanda* (dealing with rituals), *Upasana Kanda* (dealing with forms of worship) and *Jnana Kanda* (dealing with the path of Knowledge).

"Karmanyeva Adhikaarasthe" (You have the right only for the performance of actions), declares the Gita. These actions have to be in accordance with *Dharma*. It must be realised that the body has been given only for the practice of *Dharma*. When man's actions achieve ripeness, they become *Upasana* (worship). When the worship is offered with full devotion and love for the Divine, it becomes *Jnana* (Pure Knowledge). Thus all three stages are really integral. Just as a flower by stages becomes a ripe fruit, similarly through *Karma*, *Upasana* and *Jnana*, the final stage of Self-realisation is reached. It is to enable the common people to go through these three stages that the *puranas* and epics were produced as aids to spiritual advancement. The Upanishads are the culmination of the Vedas. Hence they are known as *Vedanta*.

Three kinds of Yoga offered by Upanishads

The Upanishads have offered three kinds of *yoga* for mankind. With regard to actions, the dedication of every action to God is commended. As regards *Upasana Yoga*, what is required is wholehearted devotion to God, with purity in thought, word and deed. Love for the sake of

securing some worldly benefit or return is not true love. Love must be for its own sake. The third is *Jnana Yoga*. "*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagath*" (The cosmos is pervaded everywhere by the Lord). Everything is a manifestation of God. The Divine is in every being. This awareness is *Jnana*.

Students may have a doubt. Is it possible to conceive of this sense of oneness when forms, names, thoughts and actions are so varied among beings? You watch the waves on the ocean. Each wave appears to be different from another and unrelated to it. Yet the water in all of them is the same. The waves are not different from the ocean. Likewise, though names and forms and thoughts and actions may be different, all of them are like waves on the ocean of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. This *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Awareness-Bliss) is present in everyone in a subtle form.

The Gita emerged from the Upanishads. It expounds the *Karma*, *Upaasana* and *Jnana* (the three-fold path) in three sections of six cantos each. Thus from the *Vedas* to the Upanishads and then to the Gita the eternal teachings has come to divinise mankind. The Gita does not belong to any one nation or people. It is for all mankind. It is the Voice of God.

God-is one for all people though He may be worshipped under different names and forms. Whether they are Hindus or Muslims, Christians or Parsis, Buddhists or Sikhs, God is one for all. Whatever the form in which worship is done, it reaches the one God. The sun is one and does not vary with the nation on which he sheds his light.

Gurus and sishyas of ancient times

The Vedas are infinite and boundless. Because of their profound meaning, those who studied the *Vedas* went through an arduous exercise. The preceptors were men of severe austerity. It is because of their great discipline and devotion that the *Vedas* could survive to this day. They are not recorded in a book. They have come down through an oral tradition from a succession of *gurus and sishyas* (preceptors and disciples). Great care has to be taken in reciting the *Vedic* hymns, observing the rules regarding accent, pause and rhythm. The *gurus* of those days were utterly selfless, pure-hearted and dedicated to the Divine. They were filled with love for the disciples and dedicated their lives to imparting *Vedic* knowledge to the students.

The students also were highly disciplined and adhered to all prescribed regulations. Those who violated the preceptor's injunctions were placed beyond the pale. No quarter was given to those who exhibited the five defects' indifference, lack of humility, egoism, envy, and bad manners.

Vaisampayana and Yajnavalkya

Vyasa had many disciples who were learning the *Vedas* from the sage. Chief among them was Vaisampayana. He was an ideal disciple, who implicitly carried out the *guru's* injunctions and studied the *Vedas* diligently. After completing his studies under Vyasa, Vaisampayana established a *gurukula* (Preceptor's *ashram*) for imparting *Vedic* knowledge. *Gurukula* is regarded as some kind of special educational establishment. It is not so. *Gurukula* was the dwelling place of the *guru* and it was also the abode of the *sishyas* (the students). The *guru*, after taking his meal, would distribute the food as *prasadam* to the students who used to spend their entire time with the *guru*. The *guru* and the disciples enjoyed everything in common and had the same ideals. The preceptor initiated the students in the spiritual quest.

One day, the sage Yajnavalkya came to Vaisampayana's *gurukula*. Yajnavalkya was a brilliant intellectual with keen intelligence. Yajnavalkya was proud about his intellectual attainments and

this was responsible for his downfall. Pride always goeth before a fall. Yajnavalkya developed indifference to his studies and started behaving in an unbecoming manner. Vaisampayana was noticing all this. The preceptors of those times would give even their lives for deserving disciples, but would give no quarter to those who were proud and ill-behaved. Displeased with Yajnavalkya's conduct, Vaisampayana called him to his presence one day and told him: "Yajnavalkya! You have no right any longer to study in this *gurukula*. You must leave it at once. And before leaving, you give back all that you learnt here." Yajnavalkya, who realised his mistakes, disgorged all that he had learnt. The vomit was eaten by the Thithiri birds. Then the birds began to recite the *Vedic* hymns, which came to be known as *Taithriya Samhita*.

The birth of *Sukla Yajur-Veda*

There are two traditions relating to the *Vedas*. One is known as the *Brahmasampradayam* (the Brahmic tradition). The other is *Aditya-sampradayam* (the Sun tradition). What Yajnavalkya gave back is known as the *Brahma-sampradaya*. It is also known as Krishna Yajur-Veda. Subsequently, feeling penitent about his misconduct, Yajnavalkya did penance in the form of *Suryopaasana* (worship of the Sun), giving up food and drink. In this manner he was atoning for his misconduct.

The Sun-God appeared before him in the form of *Vaaji* (a sacred horse) and told him: "Child! What has happened, is past. Remember it is a grievous crime to be disloyal to your preceptor or ungrateful to the Divine. You should not indulge in this kind of behaviour. Be careful in the future." Saying this, the Sun-God himself taught the *Vedas* to Yajnavalkya. Why did Surya appear before him in the form of *Vaaji*? Yajnavalkya's ancestors were noted for their *vaajasnam* (offerings of food) to the hungry, Hence they got the name *Vaajasam*. For this reason, the Sun-God assumed the form of *Vaaji* and taught the *Vedas* to Yajnavalkya. This *Veda* is known as *Sukla Yajur-Veda*. It is also called *Vaajanaskanda*. The *Yajur-Veda* thus got divided into two parts: *Krishna Yajur-Veda* and *Sukla Yajur-Veda*.

Greatness of gift of food to the hungry

It should be noted that it was because of the gift of food made by Yajnavalkya's ancestors that the Sun-God himself came down to teach the *Veda* to Yajnavalkya. This shows the supreme efficacy of the *anna-daana* (gift of food) to the hungry and the starving.

There is no greater gift than the gift of food

There is no God higher than one's parents

There is no japa or tapa higher than righteousness.

There is no Dharma greater than compassion

Nothing is more profitable than the company of the good.

There is no worse enemy than hatred.

No disease is worse than indebtedness,

Death is preferable on earth to infamy.

No wealth is more precious than a good name

There is no ornament superior to the Lord's name.

Realising these truths, Yajnavalkya taught his disciples the value of service to parents, reverence for the *guru*, and efficacy of the gift of food.

Dear students! The summer course began on an *Ekadasi* day, is concluding on an *Ekadasi*. Regard these classes as a sacred *Ekadasi* observance. In this holy exercise, many veterans and experienced scholars have spoken on many vital subjects. It is not easy to get such eminent persons to address you. You have greater access to Swami than to these lecturers. It is not enough to listen to them. You must try to put into practice at least some of the things they have taught you.

What you have been taught during these fifteen days is the essence of the *Vedas*. You have received also the nectar churned out of the *sastras*, the *puranas* and the epics. You will be the future leaders of Bharat. You have to practise *Dharma* and lead ideal lives. Never give up Truth and Righteousness. The *Vedas* have indicated what are to be followed and what are to be avoided. Unfortunately today people follow what is prohibited and have given up what should be followed.

You students should consider yourselves extremely fortunate in having an opportunity like this. Whatever enterprise you may engage in, do not forget your duty and your faith in the Divine. Perform good actions. Thereby you will purify your mind. When you worship God with a pure mind you will achieve Self-realisation. The Lord does not seek from you material offerings. When you love Him with all your heart He will shower His grace on you. This is evident from the examples of Valmiki, Kuchela and many other devotees. Whatever you do, do it as a dedicated offering to God. Bear in mind the example of Sabari, whose devotion to Rama beggars description.

Keep in mind the sacred things you have heard, act upto the teachings, purify your hearts and be exemplary citizens of Bharat. This is my benediction for all of you.

Valedictory Discourse at the Summer Course in the Brindavan Campus on 3-6-1990.