

23. Modes Of Worship

The Veda is the most ancient as well as the most lasting knowledge (or Sastra) discovered by man. That is to say, man has not invented it. He has only recollected it in the serene silence of the soul. So, the Veda can lead man into the Vision of the Truth, unreachable by the senses and unrelated to the material world. It is inaccessible to human reason because it is transcendent. So, it is described as *Paramam Vyoma*, the Great Protector, also Indestructible, Thath, Truth. These words denote all the four Vedas, beginning with the Rig Veda.

The term Veda was originally applied to the Supreme Lord, Parameswara, the All-knowing. *Veththi ithi Vedah*—(He who knows is Veda). Then it was applied to the principle of understanding *Vedayathi ithi Veda*, (that which makes known is Veda). The Rig and other Vedas have the all-knowing characteristic. So this meaning too is appropriate.

Later the word was applied to activities in consonance with the Vedas—activities promoting the goals laid down, namely, Righteous, Economic, Volitional and Spiritual.

The Supreme Lord is All-seeing. He is the Person on whom all the hymns of the Vedas converge. The Vedas enable man to get the vision of that Lord and those who have earned that Vision are the Rishis. They were guided by the Vedas. Many psalms, hymns and declarations emerged from them. As a result, the Supreme Lord Himself is referred to as the Great Sage (Maharshi) in the *Brahma Sutra*. Among the 108 Names of Shiva, the Supreme Lord, we find *Maharishi* and *Mukhyarishi* (the Chief Sage, the Foremost Sage). Even the Veda is personified and referred to as Rishi, for the same reason. Brahman (the Vast Expanse) is another word which denotes the Supreme Lord as well as the Veda. Hence, all acts, undertaken with no other desire than the attainment of Brahman, are also known as Brahma activity—a Brahma Yajna. A Rishi Yajna is a sacrificial act—with no desire to earn the fruit ensuing therefrom—designed to gain the Vision of Truth.

While performing such sacrificial acts and Yajnas, the expression, *Swaaha*, is used. Yajnas are pure, auspicious, sacred acts. This exclamation *Swaaha*, used while offering oblations or reciting the Veda, is full of significance, *Kesavaaya Swaaha* (Offer it to Lord Keshava [Krishna]), *Praanaaya Swaaha* (Offer it to the vital airs), *Indraaya Swaaha* (It is offered to Indra): the expression is used in

this manner. The meaning generally given is “Let this be duly consumed. May these materials we are now placing in this holy fire be fully accepted and consumed, so that through this Fire they can reach the Deity for which it is intended—Kesava, Prana, Indra.” Doubts may arise—why pray to Fire for something which is inevitable, because it is the very nature of Fire to burn all that is put into it. But the scriptural meaning is different. Kalidasa in the poem “Kumara Sambhavam” describes the Himalayas as *Deva-thaatma* (Divine Souled), that is to say, the Embodiment of the Divine. The scriptures distinguish the Divine Body and the Material Body, which each entity and being possesses. The Divine Body of everyone cannot be cognised by the senses. When an oblation is given to it, it becomes sanctified. The *Aahuthi* (oblation) is transubstantiated into *Havis* (A special offering of food during Vedic ceremonies).

The oblation or Aahuthi is thus described in the Veda. The offering and offeree become one through the acceptance. (The *Attha* (offerer) and the *Adya* (Offeree). Who in this case is the offeree, and acceptor? It is Agni, the Divine Power inherent in Fire, in the Sun, in the Warmth of the Vital Air that sustains Life. When with the recitation of the appropriate ceremonial formulae, material oblations are placed in Agni with the phrase *Swaaha*, it is not a mere exclamation. It is expiation; it is realisation of the prayer, which the ritual represents.

The Veda is known as Chhandas also. This name means pleasant, joyous. It is also associated with the kindred

meanings—strong, vital, shielded. Since all the attributes and characteristics can be predicated of the Vedas, the name referred to above is very appropriate. The sacred ceremonies and rituals which the Vedas expound confer joy not only on the participants but on the entire world and even on worlds beyond. The Supreme Lord who is the source of Bliss, is known in the scriptural texts as *Yajnaanga* (having the Vedic ritual as His Limbs), *Yajna-vahana* (using the Vedic ritual as His Vehicle). When Godhead assumes Form the first manifestation is *Hiranyagarbha* (the Golden Womb). This too is embodied Bliss, having as vehicle the Bird with wings of Beauty, or Garuda. The Supreme Lord is also known as *Vrsha-ratha*, He whose chariot is the Bull, the symbol of Dharma (Righteousness). This is the reason why in temples we find the bird Garuda carved or kept as an idol before the shrine of Vishnu and the figure of the Bull or its idol placed before shrines of Shiva.

Chha or Chhaadana has as its root meaning another important aspect of the Vedas—shielding, fostering or promoting, promoting the welfare, the ultimate liberation of humans engaged in the unceasing round of worldly affairs. Humans are ever caught up in activities pursued with the profit available as the purpose. They have to be moulded as righteous men and women at the same time. The Tree of Life has to be guarded to offer them fruits and shade. The Veda has to shield from destruction the activist “doers” (Karma lovers) from the evil temptation to court unrighteousness, and the inquiry-fond thinkers (Jnana

seekers) from the evil temptation to pursue the pleasure-bound senses. Since the Veda both guides and shields, these verses are called, in totality, Chhandas. Through their role as armour or shield, they shower Bliss on all who rely on them. “*Chhaadanaath chhandaasi.*” By shielding they become “chhandas.”

There is a myth about the Vedic rituals, collectively known as Yajna. Once, Yajna fled from the gods taking the form of a black antelope. The gods went in pursuit, but they succeeded only in retrieving its skin. That skin became the Yajna, the symbol of the rite. The white, dark and tawny colours on that skin represent the Vedas, Rig, Yajur and Sama, and it was adored as sacred for this very reason. It was honoured as symbolising the Triple Knowledge, that is to say, Mastery of the three Vedas. The skin is used by the officiating priests and other participants in all Vedic ceremonials in order to invoke the protecting hymns, called Chhandas. The three colours are believed to represent the three worlds too, and therefore, he who is seated on the skin or wears it benefits the three worlds by his Vedic recitations and oblations.

The master of the ceremonials at the Vedic Yajna is described in the Vedic scripture as the “Foetus in the Womb.” As the foetus is safe and secure, with its fingers clasped and body prostrate enveloped in the mother, the priest-initiate must be enveloped in the antelope skin symbolising Mother Veda. To human eyes, it is just a skin but during Vedic rites, it becomes a shield. This is the reason why, before wearing

it, the initiate prays, addressing it, “You are the shield, Charma, shield me as Charma.” Charma since it shields man from grief, injury, and wrong has come to mean happiness and bliss. Vishnu, the second of the Trinity, is the embodiment of Bliss. And Vedic sacrifices confer bliss. Vishnu is praised as Yajna itself (*Yajno vai Vishnuh*). The Lord Vishnu is the embodiment of the Triple Veda.

Upasana means the acquisition of the Presence of the Divine, the achievement of the Bliss of adoration. Vedic tradition sanctions four paths as legitimate and fruitful to win this achievement. They are called *Sathyavathi*, *Angavathi*, *Anyavathi* and *Nidaanavathi*. We shall consider these in some detail.

Sathyavathi: The scripture defines the Divine thus: “*Sarva Vyaapinam Aatmaanam, Ksheere sarpith iva arpitham*”—The Atma is immanent everywhere, just as ghee interpenetrates every drop of milk. When the seeker pursues the Truth with this conviction urging his endeavour, his sadhana is called *Sathyavathi* (Truth-based). “*Maaya thitham idam sarvam, jagada-vyaktha moorthinaa,*” the Lord declares. “In My latent form, I am in entire Creation, operating the mystery. See in Me all this, see all this as Me.” When one succeeds in this effort the Sathyavathi path will lead to success. “I shall be visible to you as all this and in all this,” the Lord assures. The Lord promises this Vision of Immanence and Transcendence to whomsoever that persists with sincerity on this Sathyavathi path.

Angavathi: The Universal being is the Fire, the Wind, the Sun, the Moon and all else. He is the Breath that sustains life in all beings. He is the Fire that illumines all. He is the Rain that feeds the plants that provide sustenance. So, He can be adored either as Fire (Agni) or as Wind (Vayu) or as Rain (Varuna), as having graciously assumed all those beneficent forms. This approach through the benign manifestations of Angas, is the Angavathi path. Anga means a “limb,” a “fact,” a “feature.”

Anyavathi: Picturing the many-faceted Divine and symbolising, in perceivable ways, the attributes that are evidenced in each facet, the seeker endeavours to acquire the Presence of the Divine. One form of the Divine, the Omnipresent Vishnu is pictured as having the Conch (symbol of the Primeval word or Sound), the Wheel (symbol of Time) and the Mace (symbol of Might and Majesty). With the facet to which is ascribed the power and willingness to overcome obstacles (*Vighneswara*), the single tusk symbolising sharpness and concentration is associated. Easwara or Shiva (the facet of disintegration and dissolution) has the *Soola* or Trident (symbolising in its three prongs, the Past, the Present and the Future). Rama, the form of righteousness or Dharma is always pictured with the *Kodanda*, the bow which can send the arrow (will) straight to the target. Krishna, the manifestation of Universal love, has on His Crown a peacock feather, symbolising the thousand-eyed glance of Grace. He bears a flute on which He plays enthralling tunes. The flute is the symbol of the

egoless, desireless seeker. The facet of Wisdom pictured as the Goddess Saraswathi, has a Veena in Her hand. The Veena is a stringed musical instrument, symbolic of heartstrings responding, with harmony and melody, to the gentle touch of the True, the Good and the Beautiful. Seekers meditate on these pleasing Personifications and the significance of the symbols of their attributes and adore the Divine in the delight that wells up in their hearts. This is named the Anyavathi Path—the path through symbolised Divinity. *Anyavathi* meaning the other, the adjunctory, the appurtenance.

Nidaanavathi: This path is slow but progress is always achieved when each step is successfully negotiated. *Sravanam* (listening to the Glory of God), *Kirtanam* (singing joyously His unique graciousness), *Vishnoh smaranam* (keeping in memory and recapitulating always the Majesty and Mercy of the Lord), *Paada sevanam* (aspiring to fall at the Feet of the Lord), *Archanam* (offering prayers to the image or idol of the Lord), *Vandanam* (offering gratitude for blessings received), *Dasyam* (surrendering to the Will of the Lord), *Sakhyam* (confiding completely in Him), *Atma Nivedanam* (dedicating thought, word and deed to Him), *Thanmaya aasakthi* (longing to merge in Him) and *Paramaviraha-aasakthi* (agony at the slightest separation from Him)—these are the eleven stages which the seeker has to pass through to win the final consummation in Bliss. Hence, the name for this path is “slow and sure” (*Nidaana*).

These four paths (Sathyavathi, Angavathi, Anyavathi and Nidaanavathi) are each one progressively more commendable than the previous ones, as far as simplicity and practicability are concerned. They award, in the end, Oneness with the Universal Will. Of the various other Upasanas or sadhanas which are mentioned in the sacred texts and practised by seekers, *Pratheekopasana* (Idol Adoration) or *Prathiroopopasana* (Image Adoration) is included under Angavathi Upasana “*Sarvathah paani paadam thath, sarvathokshi Siro mukham*”—(Everywhere His Hands and Feet, everywhere Head and Face). The Lord (Madhava) has His Hands everywhere, for He is in all. He sees through all the eyes. He thinks, plans and resolves in all heads. He eats through all mouths, hears through every ear. Through one Form, you can adore Him as all Forms. This is the highest ideal—He is latent in all beings. He operates unseen in and through all. This is the Prathiroopa-upasana, worshipping Him as present in each. There are sundry other Upasanas (steady worship) too mentioned in the texts:

Bhanopasana: Ascribing to the Lord the highest splendour, the deepest compassion, the most potent power, etc. and worshipping Him as such.

Geethopasana: Adoring Him as the Master and Preceptor who teaches the Gita and reveals the Way. The epic *Mahabharatha* is revered as a Veda, the fifth one. It sets out the code of morality that man must adhere to for

realising his goal, both here and hereafter. It is an inexhaustible treasure chest of guidelines for righteous living and spiritual uplift. Here, the Lord can be seen on the theatrical stage of *Dharmakshetra* (Field of Dharma), with all the equipments and roles, the plots and counter-plots, the denouements and devices, for the Cosmic Play He is enacting in His own marvellous way. That play is the epic, the *Mahabharatha*. In this play, the actors and actresses, the dialogues and texts, the cues and songs, have been assembled by Him. He is the cast, the director, the audience—all. It is Madhava who manifests Himself and manipulates in every thing and being. On one side, boundless material strength urged on by unrighteous greed, and on the other, the apparently limited strength of the Atman, the ever-righteous. In the Cosmic Confrontation and conflict between these two forces, the Lord stands forth as the arbiter, the supreme embodiment of the victory of Right over Might. This is the ultimate ambrosia available in the *Mahabharatha*—the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Song of Divine Triumph. The core lesson which the epic is bent on teaching is contained in the Gita—the seeker surrendering, with the words, “*Karishye vachanam thava*” (Your word shall be obeyed) and the Lord admonishing the seeker, “*Swadharme nidhanam sreyaah*” (In fulfilling the duty assigned to you lies your safety and prosperity.) All work should be tested on this criterion.

The path of dedication to the Will of God (Bhakthi) should not be discarded, for it can lead you to all-round

delight and bliss. Instead, if one closes his eyes and instils into himself the conceit that He is Brahman, he will miss the joy and become a victim of anxiety. When you pound husk you cannot expect rice grains to result, can you? And Krishna is no other than the very Brahman!

Adwaitopasana: “The body of the cow has milk in it. The milk has ghee in it. But the ghee cannot be a source of strength to one. The milk has to be drawn, yeast added to curdle it, butter has to be churned out and clarified to produce the ghee which, when consumed by one can give one strength. So too, though God is omnipresent and omnimotivating, He has to be discovered and cognised in order to realise Bliss, Awareness. Like oil in mustard, butter in yoghurt, like water inside the earth, like fire in timber, God is present but not patent in everything. God is in the human body and in the human mind. To become aware of Him there, spiritual effort is necessary. When that is undertaken, the unity of both can be realised. One will not thereafter experience “two” or “difference.” The awareness of the one without a second is “Liberation,” release from bondage.

Visishtadwaita: (qualified Monism) Ramanuja considered the problem whether the God whom one seeks to worship and realise as real must be conceived as being apart from oneself, or whether God can be conceived as in oneself. His answer is: Life is the soul of the body. God is the soul of Life. God is the grantor, the force, the sustainer.

Seek Him in that spirit. The Supreme Sovereign Purusha in whom all the elements reside and who is the indweller and inner motivator of all Creation, can be known and experienced only by winning Grace through surrender. Understand well His transcendence and immanence, and realising one’s deficiencies, surrender the ego in order to partake of His Glory. The mental attitude of the seeker should be “*Thwam eva sarvam, mama deva deva.*” (Thou alone art all, Oh my God of Gods. You are the urge, you are the path, you are the goal.) The spiritual effort must be one-pointed, unwavering, untiring.

Dwaitopasana: (Dualism) The dualistic outlook on the relationship between God and the individual is that of husband and wife. Vishnu, the Lord, the ever-free ever-full, has to be adored as the wife adores the husband. Among such sadhakas, Chaitanya is most noteworthy. He established a distinct *Chaitanyopasana* itself. Without the anguished yearning for the Feet of Lord Krishna liberation cannot be gained. Why? Even purification of one’s intelligence is not possible without that yearning. This is the assertion of Chaitanya. He declares that sages and others capable of being immersed in inner bliss can enjoy the ecstasy of the supreme consciousness through the contemplation of the auspicious, restorative and cleansing attributes of the Lord, Sri Hari. No text or scripture is needed for one to realise this bliss. Sunk in the waves of that Divine ecstasy, the person ignores all the norms of social behaviour and escapes from all conventions. He sings aloud the names of

Hari, sheds streams of joy, dances in divine delight and experiences unadulterated genuine bliss. He feels that the Lord's Feet have made every inch of ground holy. Thus they sing the glory of the Lord fully attuned to Him. This sadhana was emphasised, as the easiest and most fruitful, by Chaithanya. His foremost goal was to attain the absence of body consciousness in the flood of ecstasy that surges from melodious group-singing of the majesty and mercy of the Lord.

There are a few other forms of worship which merit mention. The *Gowdeyopaasana* is one such. Sri Krishna, formulated and incorporated in the unmanifest Immanence, as Purushottama and Radha, formulated and incorporated as unmanifest Universal Energy, are both visualised, and known as Krishna-Radha or more commonly, Radha-Krishna. Madhava is another name of Krishna, signifying that He is the master of Cosmos or Prakriti. So, the name used in this Upasana or worship is Radha-Madhava. The recitation of this Name is held by the adherents of this path of worship to be capable of leading to the ecstasy that can confer liberation from all forms of bondage. The *acharyas* or founders of this Upasana declare this to be the attainable goal. The Lord is the very embodiment of the nectar of delight. Living beings can get immersed in spiritual delight only when they imbibe that nectar. The Sruthi texts proclaim that those born in Ananda can live only in and through Ananda. The sacred name Radha-Madhava is the key, it is said, to the treasure-house of that precious nectar.

Radha-Madhava is Prakriti-Purusha and this dual category is assumed to represent the duality of Jivatma and Paramatma, the Individual Soul and the Universal Soul, the Wave and the Ocean. Worship is offered to both through that Name. Vallabhacharya proclaimed "*Krishnasthu Bhagawan Swayam*" (Krishna is the Lord Himself). Attaining Him was explained to be equal to merging in the Universal, the goal of genuine monists.

Saivopaasana is also a notable path. This emphasises the worship of Shiva as formulated in the Lingam or Symbol. "*Lingam Sarva Kaalam.*" The Infinite Lingam is the symbol of the primal energy which forms the basic cause of the origin, condition and progress of the "elements" that compose the Cosmos. The Lingam is the Form of Shiva Himself and realising it as such is asserted as the ultimate goal, liberation.

Virasaivopaasana advocates the worship of Shiva, the Lord or Easwara, as the one and only, everywhere and always. The merging of the individual in the splendour of the Linga or Easwara is the acme of all sadhana, the achievement of Liberation.

Paasupathopaasana: The individual entity (Jiva) is tied by the bond (*paasa*) of the qualities or modalities arising from nature. Pasupathi (Shiva) is worshipped in order to earn freedom from bondage.

Saakthopaasana: "*Sarva Deva mayee Devee*" (Devee is all Gods). The Primeval Universal Energy, *Aadi*

Paraa Sakthi, is conceived as the matrix of all forms of Divinity. The Cosmic Urge, the Prakriti, is the cause of the variety and multiplicity of expression, the manifold forms. The Maheswara (Supreme Divinity) has this capacity to manifest and is therefore so named. Maheswara and Parasakthi are two aspects of the same force. This dual-faceted force motivates the Universe, from the vast expanse of the sky to the entire earth. The unmanifest Supreme Person manifests as the Feminine Universal, the Maya, the Paraa Sakthi. In each individual, it is experienced as knowledge, strength and activity.

Jainopaasana: (The Marwari [money lenders] community, in worshipping the Lord, adopt a Vaishnavite slant. Idols of Vishnu, with the traditional equipment of the conch, the wheel, the mace and the lotus, are found in Jain temples). The Jains have as their manthra:

Namo arihanthaanaam
 Namō Siddhanaam
 Namō ayiriyaanaam
 Namō uvajjhayaanaam
 Namō Loye sabba saahoonāam,

meaning:

Salutations to the great heroes (Mahavira) who have conquered desire, etc.

Salutations to the Siddhas (those equipped with super natural powers)

Salutations to the great Masters of Spiritual Wisdom

Salutations to the great Teachers who transmit the wisdom

Salutations to the good persons of all lands.

This fivefold adoration helps remove the evil effects of all sinful acts. Experiencing the meaning of this manthra gives one the sum of prosperity. The Jains declare that when one merges in this universal adoration, one is liberated and attains Moksha.

Sikh-upasana: The Preceptor (Guru) who reveals the Atma and makes one conscious of Its existence as one's reality, has the highest place in this system of worship. The collection of the teachings of the Gurus—referred to as *Granth Saheb*—is extolled and revered by the Sikhs. It is derived from the spring of Bharathiya spiritual traditions. Its ideas form the very core of Bharathiya cultural traits.

Christ Upasana: Lord Jesus is the Saviour. Man is by nature prone to fall into sin, knowingly or unknowingly. Jesus shed his heart-blood on the Cross to free man from sin and cleanse his soul. Follow this Lord and his teachings contained in the Bible and worship him—this is Christ Upasana. Sing his glory and adore him through hymns—this is the mode of worship which this Upasana envisages.

Muhammadan-Upasana: “*Imaamdaaree khaidaa mey ho, Pygambar mey bharosa.*” Acquire self-confidence

and place all burdens on God. Have implicit faith in the Power of God every moment of living, recognise it at every step—these are the rules for meaningful life. One has to evidence one’s rectitude in the *Durbar* (palace) of the Lord, when one lays down his body. So, one has to follow the straight path laid down by the Lord until the very end. For this, the Holy Koran is the guide. It has to be revered and observed down to the very letter. This is the spiritual instruction to be observed in this Upasana.

“*Allaho Akbar; La Illah Ill Allah.*” This is the sacred formula of Islam. It signifies that God is the supermost sovereign, Allah is the undisputed unexcelled Ruler of Creation. He alone is worthy of worship. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says, “There is nothing higher than Me.” The Koran formula says the same. The Muhammadan Upasana too is a Form of the same spiritual practice, based on the same Truth.

All these Upasanas reveal that, since man initiated his age-long inquiry into his own truth, he has accumulated, especially in Bharath, a vast spiritual treasure which can save him from sorrow and bondage. The treasure is so vast and so deep that it has survived the passage of centuries as vast and as deep as ever it was, unaffected by the emergence of different modes or the influx of other forms of worship.

Besides, the spiritual wisdom of India is today a triumphant beacon, shining in One resplendent flame in the

thickening darkness, illumining all lands, encompassing all races and enchanting all mankind.

There is no fortune more splendid than being born on this sacred land, Bharath, repository of this magnificent and beneficent culture, which can save the world. Becoming aware of this blessing is, indeed, a spring of immeasurable Ananda.