

## Chapter XI. Values in Vedas

**K**nowing, knowledge, is *Veda* (*Vetthi ithi Vedah*). That is, from the *Vedas*, one can know the code of right activity and the body of right knowledge. The *Vedas* teach one's duties from birth to death. They describe one's rights, duties, obligations, and responsibilities in all stages of life —student, householder, recluse, and monk. In order to make plain the *Vedic* dicta and axioms and enable all to understand the meaning and purpose of the do's and don'ts, the *Vedangas*, *Puranas*, and epic texts appeared, in course of time. So, if one is eager to grasp one's own significance and true reality, one has to understand the importance of these later explanatory compositions also.

This is why the ancients taught the *Vedangas* and other related texts even before the pupils learned the *Vedas*. This was a must in the hermitage schools of the past. In those days, the Indians (*Bharathiyas*) studied the Fourteen Spiritual Subjects (*Vidyas*). The *Vedas* were learned by rote. The master of the *Vedas* who had learned the *Vedas* in this manner was called inert (*jada*)! But the word did not convey the meaning that he had not known anything. It only meant that he had nothing more to learn and was therefore “inactive” and “content”. Through the study of the *Vedas*, he had become master of all knowledge. In order to make this human career worthwhile, the study of the *Vedas* was considered very essential. The stream of Indian culture always emphasized the *Vedas* as the supreme authority for deciding the values of human living.

### The Four Vedas

Of the *Vedas*, the first is the *Rigveda*. It is generally considered to be composed of ten sections. In the first nine sections, hymns in praise of God under the names Agni, Indra, Maruth, etc. are found. Historians and researchers have suggested certain theories to explain how these hymns of praise arose. People in those days realized that fire (*agni*), air (*vayu*), wind (*maruth*), etc. were far more powerful than them, so they described their divine qualities and propitiated them.

The second *Veda*, the *Yajur-veda*, has two recensions (reviews): the *Krishna* (black) *Yajur-veda* and *Sukla* (white) *Yajur-veda*. This *Veda* refers to the river Ganga (Ganges) and its region. It is the source of the later (*uttara*) *Mimamsa* school of thought and interpretation. The people had by then demarcated the forest areas from the cultivable areas around the villages and had taken to habitation in the villages. A prominent reason prompted the separation of certain portions of the *Veda* into the *Yajur-veda*. The *Yajur-veda* had seven sections called forest texts (*aranyakas*), indicating by that very name that they referred more to disciplines and spiritual exercises that can be practised only in the seclusion and silence of the forest.

The third *Veda* is the *Sama-veda*. Many of the hymns (*riks*) of the *Rigveda* are repeated in it, but with additional musical notes so that they may be sung during *Vedic* rituals and ceremonies. So the *Sama-veda* is mainly musical notation. The *Sama-veda* is also referred to as the *Bell Veda* (*Ghana-veda*) in order to highlight its musical nature. All musical schools are derivatives of the styles that are marked out by the *Sama-veda*. All tones and notes are embedded in that *Veda*.

The *Rigveda* Aryans lived on the banks of the Sindhu river, while the *Yajur-veda* came to their awareness when they were on the banks of the Ganga. The *Sama-veda* songs are also visualizations of the same era, but the people seem to have occupied even the middle region of India.

The fourth is the *Athar-vana* or *Atharvaveda*. It has been described in many diverse ways. Some have even denied it the status of a *Veda*. Others say that it is made up of what remained after the collation of the rest. In the other *Vedas*, the might and mystery of the Gods are described. But this *Veda* mentions the possibility of acquiring certain powers and mysteries by one's own effort and exercises. This is its speciality. *Hatha-yoga* (the *yoga* of postures), the skill of rendering oneself invisible by repeating certain mantras, the eight parts of *yoga* or communion (*ashtanga-yoga*)—these are made available for humanity only in this *Veda*. Of course, by winning the grace of God, one can acquire even skills that are otherwise impossible to attain.

In short, it must be realized that the *Vedas* are very important and that they cover the entire range of knowledge. They are the source and spring of Indian (*Bharathiya*) culture. They are the recordings of visions and divine experiences; their source is not some one definite person. They were revealed by God Himself, of His own innate mercy. The *Vedic* inheritance has been preserved pure and unsullied even to this day, because it was handed down from master to disciple in regular succession. Since it is timeless and authorless, it is worthy of acceptance. No one can afford to neglect or deny its value.

### **The four goals of human life**

Whatever may be the diversities in contents, commentators agree that the essential teaching of all four *Vedas* is the same. The sections dealing with rites, modes of worship, and conclusions of inquiry help to achieve the four goals of life: *dharma*, wealth (*artha*), desire (*kama*), and liberation (*moksha*). Since it is very hard to master the *Vedas*, we have developed a vast literature on traditional laws (*smriti*) to expound these texts that were “heard” and passed down orally (*sruthi* texts)—the epics and historical legends (*puranas* and *ithihasas*). Farsighted seers composed these out of historical and legendary incidents and events.

Activity (*karma*) and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) are related as cause and effect, so the sections of the texts and laws that emphasized activity led to the discovery of new facets of truth and rendered the ideas of a transcendent God clearer and nearer. So too, the discovery of clearer concepts of God through spiritual inquiry along the path of wisdom fed “activity” with better meaning and higher purpose. The benefit of activity was proportionate to the faith, and the faith in activity was proportionate to the awareness of God won through wisdom. For involving oneself in good activities, spiritual wisdom is an essential prerequisite. That wisdom has ultimately to be derived from the *Vedas*; it is based on the teachings of the *Vedas*.

### **Dharma: the cornerstone of spiritual life**

Activity (*karma*) is, really speaking, the practice of *dharma*. The *Upanishads* give us guidance on what has to be done and what has to be avoided on the spiritual journey. They direct us to revere the mother as God, revere the father as God, revere the preceptor as God, and revere the guest as God. They also warn us that truth and *dharma* should not be neglected. So, there are both positive and negative instructions—follow these counsels, not others. Whatever conduces to your progress in goodness, accept; avoid other counsels. Thus do the *Upanishads* instruct.

In these centuries, the King himself studied in hermitages at the feet of *Upanishadic* sages and helped others to study by granting economic aid profusely to the centres of learning that shone as repositories of *Vedic* lore. As the king, so the subjects. Fostering the *Vedas* meant fostering the *Vedic* scholars and practitioners. At the present time, encouragement is afforded and scholarship is honoured in other branches of learning. *Vedic* scholars are not

given similar encouragement and emoluments. This important aspect has to be attended to.

*Dharma* protects those who protect it (*Dharmo rakshati rakshitah*), says the scripture. If people come forward to foster the sources of *dharma*, that good act, by itself, will help foster those who do it.

### **Save the ageless Vedic culture!**

The study of the *Vedas* has become today the task of the economically weak. People have reconciled themselves to this situation. They associate the study with such a sad and pitiable picture. *Vedic* studies have come down to this deplorable pass. The very pundits who have attained scholarship in the *Vedas* are using it as a commercial item that can be sold. They do not demonstrate the value of *Vedic* study in the peace and harmony of their lives and thus win reverence for the *Vedas* by personal example. The *Vedas* are being misused by them for earning a pittance, rather than for liberation and peace. This is why *dharma* is receiving a setback and anxiety and fear are spreading among people. The world can win back peace and harmony only when such people are persuaded to practise the ideals laid down in the *Vedas* and thereby serve as beacon-lights to guide mankind aright. Otherwise, downfall is inevitable.

The Indian (*Bharathiya*) spiritual stream has, until the present times, fertilized *Vedic* learning and practice. Its message has always been, “Journey forward along the *Vedic* path.” One may dilate on *Vedanta* and *Vedas*, but unless one holds forth the value of these ideals on the basis of one’s own experience and practice, it is a waste. This truth has been forgotten by these people. Let them awake in time and save the traditions and values of the ageless *Vedic* culture.