



The Essence of Veda Chanting

Inaugural Address by Dr. Narendranath Reddy
Chairman, Sathya Sai International Organisation

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*Om Sahanavavatu
Sahanau bhunaktu,
Saha viryam karavavahai,
Tejasvi navadhithamastu,
Ma Vidvishavahai
Om. Shanti, Shanti, Shanti*

May the Lord protect us, may He nourish us. May we acquire the capacity to study and understand the scriptures. May our study be brilliant and may we not cavil at each other. Om. Peace, Peace, Peace unto us all.

With love and gratitude, I offer my prayerful *Pranams* at the Divine Lotus Feet of our dearest, loving and omnipresent Lord, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba who is *Veda Mata* (The mother of Vedas), the *Veda Purusha* and *Vedamayaa* (that means He is the Veda Himself) and He is *Veda Vedyaa* (He could be realised and attained through Vedas). Dear Brothers and Sisters, loving Sai Ram to all of you.

First, I would like to congratulate all the YAs for launching this project, to study the Vedas in depth and practise its teachings. I am happy that you have started this at a young age. Swami says, 'Start early, drive slowly, and reach safely'. The Vedas belong to *Sanathana Dharma*. However, people think that Vedas are only for Hindus. The word Hindu was introduced around

500 BC by the Turkish and Persians to refer to the people who were living in the Indus Valley area. People say *Sanathana Dharma* began around 5,000 or 10,000 BC. *Sanathana Dharma* means eternal religion – there is no beginning. That is why our Swami's journal is called *Sanathana Sarathi* – He is the eternal charioteer who is taking us in the right direction. Let us understand that Vedas teach the eternal religion (*Sanathana Dharma*).

Main Message of the Vedas

What is the main message of the Vedas? *Ananto Vai Veda*, Vedas are infinite, but the summary of the message is *Brahma Sathyam* (God alone is true) *Jagath Mithya* (the world is illusory), *Jivo Brahmaiva Naparah* (we the embodied beings, are divine). Swami says that the goal and purpose of human life is to realise and manifest innate divinity. Also, Swami says that the purpose of the Sathya Sai International Organisation, and the divine mission is to help us realise and manifest our innate divinity, and also to see the same divinity in the whole of creation and help others to realise the same truth. The scriptures say that the purpose of human life is *Atmano Mokshartham Jagat Hitayacha* (seeking one's own realisation and the welfare of humanity). The ultimate goal is to realise the truth or Brahman – Self-realisation.

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From Shudra to Brahmana

According to Sanathana Dharma, we are all born as *Shudras* which means we are all born without knowledge of the Atma. No one is a Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vysya by birth. But through the initiation of Gayatri Mantra, we become a *Dwija* (which means twice born). Then, we are born in spirit: beginning of the process of acquiring *Atmic* knowledge. This is the time of performing the sacred thread ceremony or *Upanayana* (*Upa* meaning close and *Nayana* meaning eyes) which is coming closer to the vision of God, by being initiated into the Gayatri.

I am happy that we chanted Akhanda Gayatri for 24-hours recently and thousands of devotees all over the world participated. I want to appreciate your participation in this Akhanda Gayatri Yagna. Once we have been initiated, we become twice born. Then we are eligible to study the Vedas. The four Vedas are the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, and the Atharva Veda. Once we have studied the Vedas, we become a *Vipra*. There are different titles like Dwivedi, somebody who mastered two Vedas; Trivedi, somebody who has mastered three Vedas; Chaturvedi, somebody who has mastered four Vedas. Subsequently, the name remained but these people did not really learn the Vedas.

Swami in one of His discourse, related a humorous story. It is about the great philosopher and scholar from Germany, Max Mueller, who was very fond of Vedas, Upanishads, and Hindu scriptures. Once he happened to have an appointment with an Indian whose name was Trivedi. Max Mueller was very excited to meet a person who knows three Vedas and wanted to have a dialogue with him on Vedas. When he found out that this man did even know what the Vedas were, he was very disappointed. Sometimes, people like this great German person, and other Western philosophers dive deep into these teachings.

We become a *Vipra* once we have studied the Vedas in depth. But that does not make us the ultimate Brahman. The last stage is when we become *Brahmana* (Brahmin). How do we become *Brahmana*? Not just by reading the Vedas. We may be a Vedic Scholar, *Vipra*, but we be-

come *Brahmana* only by practising the teachings and attaining the knowledge of *Brahman*. Then we become a Brahmin. So, this is how, the Vedas help us in this process of progression from Shudra to Brahmana.

When we talk about *Vipra*, it is said in Rig Veda, *Ekam Sath, Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* which means that there is only one truth, but the *Vipras* – the wise people perceive and call it by different names – Vishnu, Jesus, Shiva etc. We need to understand how the word Veda came about.

Origin of Vedas and Nomenclature

The etymological meaning of the word Veda comes from the word *Vid* which means *knowing*. We are in the eternal quest for knowledge., *Sath Chit Ananda* (existence, knowledge, and bliss) is our very nature. We always want to know; we think we exist forever, and we want bliss because that is our very nature. So, *Vid* means knowing. The Vedas are a repository of knowledge.

When did the Vedas start? Knowledge has no beginning. Let us remember these important words. It is *Anadi*, which means no beginning. There is no beginning for the Veda. Knowledge is eternal. It is called *Sanathana* or eternal and it is *Anantha* (*Anantho Vai Veda*). Vedas are infinite. That is why no one's life is enough to study the Vedas in depth. We can have glimpses and general knowledge of the Vedas. Swami said that it will take many lifetimes to study all the Vedas in detail. That is why it is called *Anantho Vai Veda*. They have no beginning and are infinite. They are *Apaurusheyas*. They did not come from human beings; they are revelations from the divine. They have come from God. That is an important thing. They are called the breath of God. Swami says, Vedas are the breath of the Lord, and identify them as God.

Vedas are also called *Sruthi*. *Sruthi* means *Shraavana* – hearing. In the old days, the only way they could transmit this knowledge was by telling people verbally. So, people heard and learnt them. They heard the voice of God as it was revealed to them. That is why it is called *Sruthi*. Since God revealed the Vedas to them in deep meditation, they are called *Sruthis*. They were

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transmitted verbally to their disciples, and that is the second reason why it is called *Sruthi*. This *Sruthi* also is classified as *Trayee* or 3-part (another name for Vedas). First, there were only three Vedas which were recognized, namely Rig Veda, Yajur Veda and Sama Veda. Atharva Veda came much later. That is why in most of the scriptures, in the beginning we say 'Trayee' and these three Vedas are called 'Trayee.' These Vedas are also called *Nigama* and *Aamanaya* and many other names. Gayatri is called *Chandhasa Mata* (Mother of the Vedas). Chandha is related to the Vedas. These revelations of truth by the great sages, are called as such by the seers because they see the truth – *Mantradrashatas*. They saw the mantras which were revealed to them. There are thousands of *Mantras*. Because of their sheer volume, one person cannot study all of them because they are like a huge forest. So, it needs to be compiled and codified.

Divine Mission and the Vedas

Sage Veda Vyasa who is considered the embodiment of the Lord himself, codified the Vedas. Today, there are four Vedas:

- *Rig Veda* – hymns on the Lord
- *Yajur Veda* – about the Yagnas
- *Sama Veda* – songs and music
- *Atharva Veda* – knowledge storehouse of Atharvanas

Each of the four Vedas has four parts:

- *Samhitas* – means collection of hymns
- *Brahmanas* – about rituals and yagnas
- *Aaranyakas* – contemplation and dialogue of the highest truth like the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*
- Upanishads – the repository of the highest knowledge (*Jnana*)

Swami has recorded in the Upanishad Vahini that there were originally 1,180 Upanishads. Many were lost in time, and finally 108 Upanishads were left. Of them, ten Upanishads get prominence because Adi Shankara showed their importance, by writing commentaries on them. Swami also included these ten Upanishads in His Upanishad Vahini.

Sections of Vedas

Every Veda is further classified into the following sections:

- *Karma Kanda* (performing rituals): sacrificial rites to God for attaining health, wealth, and progeny.
- *Upasana Kanda* (worship the Lord): the Bhakti path. Hymns of praise to God.
- *Jnana Kanda* (which is Upanishads): *Jnanat eva tu kaivalya* i.e. through Jnana we attain the ultimate goal of life.

The same pattern was used by Lord Krishna in the Gita. There are 18 chapters in the Bhagavad Gita. The first six chapters are called *Karma Anushtanam* that means *Karma Shatkam*. They emphasise Karma (Selfless service). The next six chapters are called *Bhakti Shatkam*, with emphasis on devotion; and the last six chapters are *Jnana Shatkam*, which emphasise the path of Jnana. Similarly, in all our Sathya Sai Centres, there is the same pattern. We have the Service Wing (*Karma Kanda*; selfless service), then we have Spiritual or Devotion Wing (*Upasana Kanda*) and then we have Education Wing with emphasis on study circles, teachings of the scriptures, Vedas, and Swami's teachings (*Jnana Kanda*).

Divine Mission of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Swami's teachings are the real Vedas of the present time. He declared that His mission is four-fold:

Veda Poshana: He will support and nurture the Vedas

Vidwat Poshana: He will support and nurture the Vedic Scholars, the people who propagate the Vedas. He supported them and nurtured them. The greatest example is when Swami started the Veda Purusha Saptaha Yagna in 1961 October. Since then, many Vedic scholars came to Prasanthi Nilayam and obtained blessings and grace from Swami. There are two great Vedic scholars in Sai History – one is Brahma Sri Kamavadhani who lived till the age of 100 (once he came to Prasanthi, he never left Swami's divine lotus feet). He was a great Vedic scholar.

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The second one is Brahma Sri Ghandikota Subramanya Sastri. He was the one who gave us the Sai Gayatri. They stayed with Swami till the end and Swami loved and honoured them very much. This is *Vidwat Poshana*.

Dharma Sthapana means whenever there is a decline in the practice of *Dharma*, God comes to establish *Dharma*. That is *Dharma Sthapana*.

Bhakta Samrakshana: He protects the devotees. We have all experienced how Swami takes care of us, protects us and guards us like the eyelids protect the eye.

Thus, Swami declared His mission. In 1961 October, He started the *Veda Purusha Saptaha Yagna*. During Dussera time. Swami used to conduct this Yagna and had Vedic Scholars come and chant the Vedas and perform sacrificial rites. Following that in 1962, Swami started a *Veda Pathashala*, a school to teach the Vedas. Later on, Veda learning was introduced to the students in His schools and colleges.

In September 2003, Swami introduced Veda chanting during regular Darshan time in Prasanthi Nilayam. Prior to that, in the 70s and 80s, before Swami came for Darshan, they used to have Darshan music, like Sitar, flute or other music. In 2003, Swami introduced Vedic chanting before He came for Darshan and now they have the chanting every day in the morning and the evening. In August 2006, Swami did the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagna*. when we chant the *Sri Rudram* or *Rudropanishad* or *Rudraprashna*. *Rudram* is composed of *Namakam* and *Chamakam*. If we do, 11 *Namakam* and 1 *Chamakam*, it is called *Ekadasha Rudram*. We do 11 times that, it becomes *Laghu Rudram*. Eleven times that, it becomes *Maha Rudram*. Eleven times that, it becomes *Ati Rudram* in which they chant the *Rudram* 1,331 times. Swami conducted the *Ati Rudram* in 2006 which was subsequently replicated in Chennai, Mumbai, and other places. This shows the importance Swami gave to the Vedas.

Swami's residence in Kodaikanal was named '*Sai Sruthi*'. *Sruthi* means the Vedas; in Brindavan, His residence is named *Trayee Brindavan*' and *Trayee* is the Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama Vedas).

In Prasanthi Nilayam, His residence is named *Yajur Mandir*. This shows how much importance Swami gave to the Vedas and especially, to *Yajur Veda* and *Krishna Yajur Veda*. You might have heard Swami singing the beautiful bhajan '*Satyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma*' which has its roots in *Taittiriya Upanishad*, part of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. When I started my talk, I chanted *Om Sahanavavatu...* Swami gave a lot of importance to this *Sloka* which comes from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* of Krishna Yajur Veda.

Everything is embedded in various Vedic chants and Swami came to revive the Vedas. Prior to Swami, other Avatars also protected the Vedas. The first Avatar of Vishnu called *Matsya* Avatar came in the form of a fish and rescued the Vedas when one of the demons stole the Vedas and hid it in the ocean. Even in the Rama Avatar, He protected the Yagnas, which are part of the Vedas. During Krishna Avatar, He taught the Gita which is the essence of the Upanishads. He says in the Vibuthi yoga, the 10th Chapter of the Gita, *vedanam samavedosmi* which means of all the Vedas, I am the Sama Veda. He loved Sama Veda. *Omithyekaksharam Brahma* (The letter Om itself is Brahman). He gave importance to Aum and the Gayatri. *Gayatri Chandas* is the meter with which the Gayatri is chanted.

Significance of Aumkar

When we chant the Vedas, first we should know the meaning of the Vedas. I will touch briefly upon some of them. First is the *Aumkar* which is most important. It is also called *Pranava Upasana*. *Pranava Upasana* is emphasised in the Upanishads and the Vedas, particularly in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, where that section is called *Pranava Upasana*. There is an Upanishad called *Mandukya Upanishad*, the shortest of all the Upanishads with only twelve verses which talks about the Aumkar. This Aumkar is so important that Gaudapada who is a great teacher, wrote *Mandukya Karika*, which is a great commentary on the importance of the Aumkar. Gaudapada is the Guru of the Guru of Adi Sankara (Adi Sankara is considered an Avatar of Shiva). Adi Sankara's Guru was Govindapada and his Guru was Gaudapada.

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He wrote a commentary in which he said AUM represents the four stages: Waking Stage (*Jagrath*), Dream Stage (*Swapna*), Deep Sleep Stage (*Shushupti*) and transcendental Stage (*Turiya*). It is also called in the waking stage as *Vishvudu* and then in the dream stage as *Thejas*, and in the Turiya stage it is called *Pragnya*. They are also called *Sthula*, *Sukshma*, *Karana*, and *Mahakarana*, respectively. *Pranava Upasana* is very important and unique. It represents the sound symbol of the formless God. We may belong to any faith, a worshipper of Vishnu, *Vaishnavaita*, or a *Shaivaite*, or a worshipper of the Mother, or an Advaitin (believe in the Formless), everybody chants Aum. This Aum is a universally potent mantra. That is why Lord Krishna says in the Gita that, the people who breathe their last with the word Aum on their lips, will be one with the Lord. They will have no more cycle of birth and death; they will become completely liberated.

That is the power of Aum and that is why Swami introduced the chanting of Aumkar 21 times first thing early in the morning before *Suprabhatam*. The day's spiritual programme starts with 21 *Aumkar*. We should know why 21 times – to clean up the five *karmendriyas* (organs of action), the five *jnanendriyas* (organs of perception), the five *pranas* (vital airs), the five *koshas* (sheaths) and finally to attain the Atma (5+5+5+5+1=21).

Significance of Gayatri Mantra

The second is *Gayatri Mantra* as this is the most powerful mantra. It is called *Gayatri Chandasomata*, which means the Mother of Vedas. It has 5 parts.

Aum

Bhur Bhuvah Swaha

Tat Savitur Varenyam (Adoration)

Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi (Meditation)

Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat (Prayer)

More information on this can be found on <https://sathyasai.org/gayatri>

What is the power of Gayatri? Swami said *Gāyantaṃ trāyate iti Gayatri*, meaning by chanting which it protects one from everything. What

does it protect us from? *Gayatri Sarva Dhuka Pariharini*: it takes care of all our miseries and sorrows. *Sarva Roga Nivarini*: it removes all our diseases and *Sarva Vaancha Phala Siddhi*: it fulfils all our desires. So, it removes all our miseries, removes all our diseases, and fulfils our desires. That is the power of Gayatri. *Mantradrashtha* (seer of Mantra) for Gayatri is Sage Visvamitra.

There is a beautiful story about the revelation of this Mantra. Visvamitra was a King called Kaushika. King Kaushika, along with his army went to the ashram of a sage called Vasishta. to pay his respects and get his blessings., Vasishta was generous, and told the King “I will feed you and your entire army”. King Kaushika was surprised, and said “How can you feed my army? You just have a little ashram and a little hut”. To his surprise, everyone was fed a sumptuous feast. Then he asked Vasishta, “How did you do that?” Vasishta replied that he had a cow called Kamadhenu, which had the power to give whatever one asks. Then King Kaushika in his selfishness wanted to take away the cow. Vasishta said, “That is not good. That cow belongs here, to serve the people”. But King Kaushika being egoistic tried to take the cow and in the process was defeated by the yogic power of Sage Vasishta. Then he made a vow, “I’ll become greater than Vasishta” in power. So, he did a lot of *tapas* (penance) and initially had many failures. He was first tempted by power and then by celestial beauties like Menaka.

Finally, he stood firm and did so much *tapas* that he got darshan of Brahma. He prayed to Brahma, who made him a Maharishi. The King said, “No, I want to become a Brahmarishi, not just a Maharishi”. Brahma said, “I cannot do this, only Vasishta can do this”. Visvamitra then proceeded to meet Sage Vasishta. When he went to his Ashram, he overheard Sage Vasishta telling his wife, Arundhati that he was helping Visvamitra in his spiritual quest. Kaushika realised his mistake and prostrated at the feet of Vasishta. Then, Kaushika instantly got the revelation of the Gayatri Mantra. That is how King Kaushika became Visvamitra, meaning friend of the whole universe; Visva (Universe), Mitra (Friend).

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Power of Sri Rudram

Third is the *Sri Rudram or Rudraprashna or Rudropanishad* which is a very important part of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. The Vedas are important, and of them, the heart of the Vedas is the Yajur Veda and the heart of the Yajur Veda is Krishna Yajur Veda. The heart of the Krishna Yajur Veda is Sri Rudram, and the heart of Sri Rudram is the 8th Anuvaka and finally the heart of the 8th Anuvaka is the *Panchakshari Mantra* (Five syllables) “Om Namah Shivaya”. This is the power of the Rudram. Swami has emphasised that just chanting “Om Namah Shivaya” is equivalent to chanting the Rudram.

Sri Rudram has 11 Anuvakas in Namakam and 11 Anuvakas in Chamakam. The number 11 is of significance in Sri Rudram. In our lives, there are five *Jnanendriyas* (organs of perception) five *Karmendriyas* (organs of action) and the eleventh is the mind. If we turn them towards the world, they cause agitation and grief and when we turn them towards God, doing good deeds, they give us bliss and joy. That is the significance of Sri Rudram and Chamakam.

We know that there are more than 347 mantras in Chamakam. All of them say “Lord give me this” which is good because we are asking only God. We pray “give me good grains, give me wheat, give me green gram, give me good milk, give me honey, give me cows”, and we go on asking for different things. We say, “*Cha me, Cha me*”, which means give me this, give me that, give me the power to chant the Vedas, do the yagnas, all good things and everything of daily necessity.

But Namakam is where we adore Lord Rudra (Shiva). The real significance of Rudram is that it is an Advaitic treatise. In everything around us, we see God: *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma, Sarvam Shivamayam*. That means, everything is permeated by God. He gives beautiful examples so that we understand the all-pervading divinity, whether it is a stone, a hill, a mountain, they are all Lord Shiva. Whether it is a leaf, whether it is a branch, whether it is a plant, whether it is a tree, it is all Lord Shiva. Whether it is a pool, or it is a lake, a river, or an ocean, it is all Lord Shiva. Whether it is a little insect, a little microbe,

or a dog, or a horse, or an elephant, it is all Lord Shiva. Among human beings, whether a thief, a hunter, a butcher, a carpenter, a jeweler, or a Saint, all are nothing but Lord Shiva.

We try to see Lord Shiva in all animate and inanimate objects, whether they are stones, plants, animals, or human beings. When we see that everything is a form of Shiva, *Shivamayam*, then we have the highest Jnana. This means *ishavasyam idam sarvam* – all is God; So that is why we need to know the inner meaning of these great Mantras.

The Suktams from Vedas

We chant many Suktams from the Vedas, such as *Medha Suktam* and *Sri Suktam*, where we are praying to the Mother to give us knowledge and wealth.

I want to explain the *Purusha Suktam*. There are three parts (Kandas), namely Karma Kanda, Upasana Kanda and Jnana Kanda. The *Purusha Suktam* is unique because it combines all three. The first part is the *Samhita*, where it says, “Lord, you are everything, your eyes are everywhere, your ears are everywhere”. Here we talk about the glory of God. The second part is the *Yagna*, where they sacrifice the Purusha and from there creation starts. The last part is the *Jnana Kanda* (*vedāhametaṁ puruṣamahāntam ādityavarṇam tamasahparastāt*) which means Lord I know You are beyond all darkness and are the light of lights. That is the stage we reach at the end of the *Purusha Suktam* and then we say, *twameva viditva'timṛtyumeti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate'yanāya* which means only by this we attain the *Amritatva* state, that is immortality, not by any other means.

We need to know the inner significance of the *Suktams*. *Narayana Suktam* teaches us meditation. Whatever *Suktams* we chant, we must dive deep into them and understand their meaning; whether it is *AUM*, *Gayatri*, *Sri Rudram*, *Purusha Suktam*, *Sri Suktam* or *Medha Suktam*. We need to know their inner significance.

How to chant the Vedas

There are three important points to be observed when chanting the Vedas. They are intonation, rhythm, and accuracy. Otherwise, it could give

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the wrong meaning. For example, in *Sri Suktam*, there is a saying, *Kssut-Pipaasaa-Malaam Jyestthaam-Alakshmiim Naashayaamy-Aham*. So instead of *Alakshmi*, you say, *Lakshmi* it would mean “Lord, I don’t want prosperity”. We should be careful, as by chanting wrongly it can convey the exact opposite meaning. So, how we chant and what we chant is extremely important.

There are different kinds of chanting like, *Krama* and *Ghana*. Different Vedic schools chant differently. We should learn to chant the right way, from the right teacher. That is why it is called *Sruthi*. It is not just reading. We should listen and try to learn the right intonation and right way to chant. That is important.

The second aspect of chanting is that it should be done with sincerity and devotion. We should feel this is an especially important part of knowledge. The third thing to remember is that we should know the meaning. When we understand the meaning, we enjoy the chanting. So, in addition to correct intonation, we should chant with devotion and try to understand the meaning.

Some people ask when should we chant these Mantras? Swami said that we should chant *Gayatri* in the morning and in the evening, at sunrise and sunset, dawn, and dusk, and also during midday. We can chant the *Rudram* anytime, but it is preferable to chant the *Rudram* in *Pradosha* (around sunset) time. These are specified times, which are supposed to be good. Swami was clear that 4 am to 8 am is *Satvic* time (*Brahmamuhurtam*); and 4 pm to 8 pm is another *Satvic* time; but 8 am to 4 pm is *Rajasic* time and 8 pm to 4 am is *Tamasic* time. It is good to do spiritual practices, during *Satvic* time 4 am to 8 am, and 4 pm to 8pm., But we can sing God’s name and glory anytime. The scriptures advise: *Sarvada sarvakaleshu sarvatra Hari chintanam*: Think about Hari (God) at all times and in all places because God is *Kalaatheethaya*, beyond time. We can chant all the time (24 hours), but if we want to choose, *Satvic* times are good.

Why do we do study the Vedas?

The Vedas contain *Karma Kanda*, *Upasana Kanda*, and *Jnana Kanda*. The knowledge of Atman

and Brahman is taught only in the Upanishads. The *Karma Kanda* and *Upasana Kanda* fulfils our daily desires. *Purusharthas* are four, namely *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, which means Right Living, Acquisition of Wealth, Good Desires, and Liberation.

From Aparā Vidya to Para Vidya

The main part of the Vedas dwell on three aspects – *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* and they do not talk much about *Moksha*. Only the Upanishads talk about *Moksha*. That is why, Lord Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, *Sankhya Yoga*, Slokas (verses) 45-46, *trai-guṇya-viṣhayā vedā nistrai-guṇyo bhavāṛjuna*: Oh Arjuna, Vedas are in the realm of the three Gunas, but one should go beyond the Gunas. Vedas are helpful as guideposts in the beginning, but we should go beyond the Gunas. Swami, in His discourse in 1987, talked about the Vedas. He said, all Vedas are called *Apara Vidya*.

We should study *Para Vidya*. This is again referred to in the Upanishads. In the *Mundaka Upanishad*, a person by name Shaunaka, asked the Sage Angiras, “I want to know that, knowing which everything is known.” (*yaṁ labdhvā chāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ*) Then he said there are two *Vidyas* – *Apara Vidya*, *Para Vidya*. *Apara Vidya* is all these things, namely Vedas, Smritis, Puranas, Sastras. They are guideposts and help us to purify our heart (*Chittashuddi*) and take us to *Ekagrata*, one pointedness. However, *Para Vidya* is where our sadhana, our intense practice will take us to self-realisation. Upanishads are the repositories of *Atmic* knowledge. There are 108 Upanishads but of them 10 Upanishads have beautiful commentaries by Adi Shankara.

The four Mahavakyas come from the Upanishads. *Tatvamasi*: “That Thou Art” is from the *Chandogya Upanishad* from *Sama Veda*. This is repeated nine times in this Upanishad (*Tatvamasi*). Then we realise *Aham Brahmasmi* which is in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in the *Yajur Veda*. *Aham Brahmasmi* means ‘I am Brahman’. Another *Mahavakya* is *Ayam Atma Brahma* which means, ‘I am Atma and Brahman’. This is in the *Mandukya Upanishad* which is

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from *Atharva Veda*. Then finally, *Pragnanam Brahma* is from *Aitreya Upanishad* of *Rig Veda*.

Swami made these *Mahavakyas* remarkably simple and summarised them in just one sentence in Telugu:

“Sarva Vedanta Granthala Saramella Okka Vakyana Cheppudu Okka Sari. Akhila Bhutamulandunna Atmaneevu Okkate Ani Manasuna Teleyavalyau”

I will tell you in one sentence the summary of all Vedanta and Vedas. *“Realise that the same Atma which is residing in us is in all beings. The same Atma pervades everything, everywhere”*. This is the main message of the Upanishads and the Vedas.

We may know the Upanishads, we may know the Vedas, we may know the Puranas, and we may know the Sastras, but it is more important to practise them. Swami said, *Ravana* knew all the Vedas (10 heads represents 4 Vedas and 6 Sastras that he knew) and was an expert in these areas. He was great in all the arts, sciences, and the Vedas but he did not practise them. He had the weakness of bad desires. Swami says, it is more important to practise His teachings. Vedas say:

Bhadram Karnnebhih Shrnnuyaama Devaah, Bhadam Pashyema-Akssabhir-Yajatraah

See good, hear good, think good. Swami has made it amazingly simple – *“think good, think no evil; hear good, hear no evil; speak good, speak no evil; do good, do no evil; this is the way to God.”*

He made it very simple. *Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*, which means Speak the Truth; Practise Dharma. This is the motto in Swami’s school and is from *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

Practice of Vedic Teachings in Daily Life

Swami sings *Sathyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma* (which is in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*) He emphasised the practice of human values in the Bhajan He composed and sang:

“Sathya Dharmamu Shanthi Premalatho, Nee Nithya Jeevana (lead your life based on

the values of truth, dharma, peace, and love.)”

He made everything much simpler and easier so that we can practise it in our daily lives. Another important thing that Swami often used to quote is, *“Na karmana, na prajaya, dhanena, tyagenaike amritatvamanasuh.”* This is an important mantra from *Kaivalya Upanishad* which means “neither by works, nor by wealth, nor by progeny we can attain immortality. We will attain immortality only by sacrifice.” We need to sacrifice our time, energy, and talents to serve selflessly. But Swami gave a higher meaning to sacrifice, saying that what we need to sacrifice is our ego. Then we attain *Amritatva* which means immortality.

We all want to be immortal, not in the physical sense but in the *Atmic* sense. How do we do that? Swami gave a quite simple formula: removal of immorality is the way to immortality. Swami thus made the complicated Vedic injunction practical. Just remove the immorality and automatically we get immortality.

Swami says, the purpose of spiritual life is *Atyantika Dukha Nivritti, Niravadhika Ananda Prapthi* – to get rid of grief and misery, and attainment of unending bliss is the purpose of life. Buddha searched for truth and attained Nirvana, which is unending bliss. This Divine Bliss is described in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* in the



The Essence of Veda Chanting

Anandavalli chapter. How great is this Ananda? We glibly talk about *Brahmananda* (bliss of Brahman). We all have *Manusyananda* (human pleasures), which are little pleasures of life and they are the intervals between two pains. But this Brahmananda is many, many, times more than that. There are so many stages of *Ananda* (each stage gives 1000 times Ananda of the previous stage): *Manusyananda to Gandharvananda, then Devagandharvananda, then Pitruananda, then Brihaspathiananda, then Devananda, then Prajapathiananda, then Brahmananda.*

We can neither imagine nor even comprehend that Ananda. The scriptures say *Yato Vacho Nivartante, Aprapya Manasa Saha*, which means “this bliss cannot be expressed in words and neither can be comprehended by the mind.” That is why Swami sang the bhajan, “*Love is my form; Bliss is my Food*”.

We should be *Ananda Swaroopa* (embodiments of Bliss) because that is what we are. Swami made all the Vedic Sutras, injunctions, and teachings simple, so that it is possible for us to learn and chant the Vedas and practice them.

Finally, I want to end with the Mantra from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It is a part of the *Shukla Yajur Veda*.

*‘Asato Ma Sadgamaya,
Tamasoma Jyothir Gamaya
Mrityorma Amritam Gamaya’*

Which means “Lord lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.”

I thank Swami and all of you for this opportunity to share these thoughts about the Vedas. ■

