

## VEDIC LIFE AND SCRIPTURES

'Vedas' or 'knowledge' is compiled as a compendium in Vedic scriptures. The beginning of knowledge is the foundation of good thoughts expressed in the four *Vedas*, which are *Rk*, *Sāma*, *Yajur* and *Atharva Vedas*. Without the foundation of good thoughts what is the use of one's knowledge? Knowledge is supposed to bring enlightenment and progression but not degradation and destruction.

For example, the *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.3.28) says:

*om̐ asato mā sad gamayā tamaso mā jyotir gamaya  
mrtyor mā amrtam gamaya om̐ śānti śānti śāntiḥ*

O Lord, keep me not in the Unreality (of the bondage of the Phenomenal World), but lead me towards the reality of self; keep me not in the darkness (of Ignorance), but lead me towards the Light (of Spiritual Knowledge); keep me not in the bondage of the mortal world, but lead me towards immortality; Let there be peace, peace, peace.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.3.14) says, "*uttiṣṭha jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata*"- "O living entity, you are sleeping in this material world. Please get up and take advantage of your human form of life."

And so on, the Vedic literatures lay the foundation of progressive thinking, enquiry, leads and solutions. It is so vast and broad minded that people of all mentality can be accommodated and gradually risen upto higher and higher levels of consciousness.

In other words, the follower of *Vedas* is gradually yet surely bound to progress to the highest perfection of life and everlasting peace and happiness. This actually means to revive the original pure consciousness of each individual.

This is why it is concluded that *Vedas* are *apauruṣeya*, or – not man-made but given by that Super-conscious being which is beyond our understanding. Hence, they are perfect.

Who is that Supreme consciousness? "One should meditate upon the Supreme Person as the one who knows everything, as He who is the oldest, who is the controller, who is smaller than the smallest, who is the maintainer of everything, who is beyond all material conception, who is inconceivable, and who is always a person. He is luminous like the sun, and He is transcendental, beyond this material nature (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 8.9)".

The purpose of *Vedas* is to find out that Supreme person.

*sarvasya cāham hṛdi sanniviṣṭo mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanam̐ ca  
vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham*

I am seated in everyone's heart, and from Me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness. By all the *Vedas*, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of *Vedānta*, and I am the knower of the *Vedas*. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 8.9)

This is also confirmed by the quintessence of all Vedic literatures known as *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 6.3.19:

*dharmam tu sākṣād bhagavat-praṇītam na vai vidur ṛṣayo nāpi devāḥ  
na siddha-mukhyā asurā manuṣyāḥ kuto nu vidyādhara-cāraṇādayaḥ*

Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the mode of goodness, even the great *ṛṣis* who occupy the topmost planets cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of Siddhaloka, to say nothing of the *asuras*, ordinary human beings, Vidyādharas and Cāraṇas.

Because great authorities coming in the disciplic succession understand this root of knowledge and its purpose, they have laid down the religious principles for the human world. This is known as *Smṛti śāstra*.

*dharma-mūlaṁ hi bhagavān sarva-vedamayo hariḥ  
smṛtaṁ ca tad-vidāṁ rājan yena cātmā prasīdati*

The Supreme Being, the Personality of Godhead, is the essence of all Vedic knowledge, the root of all religious principles, and the memory of great authorities. O King Yudhiṣṭhira, this principle of religion is to be understood as evidence. On the basis of this religious principle, everything is satisfied, including one's mind, soul and even one's body.

So, all in all, the whole gamut of Vedic literatures which includes *śruti*, *smṛti*, *purāṇa* and *pañcarātra*, are arranged to know the self, the Supreme Person, the purpose of this material world, the all powerful time and the duties to be performed after knowing all this. These literatures are a special mercy upon us, the conditioned souls (“*māyā-mugdha jīvera nāhi svataḥ kṛṣṇa-jñāna, jīvere kṛpāya kailā kṛṣṇa veda-purāṇa*”, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya līla 20.112*)

The Vedic literatures declare that, just by knowing that Supreme Person, everything else becomes known: “*tasmin vijñāte sarvam evaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati*” "If you can understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Supreme Absolute Truth, then everything can be understood because, everything is display of His energy". And, just by satisfying that Supreme person, everything else becomes satisfied just like watering the root nourishes the entire tree or feeding the stomach nourishes the entire body (“*yathā taror mūla-niṣecanena tṛpyanti tat-skandha-bhujopasākhāḥ, praṇopahārāc ca yathendriyāṇāṁ tathaiva sarvārhaṇam acyutejyā*” *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 4.31.13).

However, that Supreme Person is only known and satisfied by exchange of unalloyed and unflinching love for Him:

*nālam dvijatvaṁ devatvaṁ ṛṣitvaṁ vāsurātmajāḥ  
prīṇanāya mukundasya na vṛttaṁ na bahu-jñatā  
na dānaṁ na tapo nejyā na śaucaṁ na vratāni ca  
prīyate 'malayā bhaktyā harir anyad viḍambanam*

My dear friends, O sons of the demons, you cannot please the Supreme Personality of Godhead by becoming perfect *brāhmaṇas*, demigods or great saints or by becoming perfectly good in etiquette or vast learning. None of these qualifications can awaken the pleasure of the Lord. Nor by charity, austerity, sacrifice, cleanliness or vows can one satisfy the Lord. The Lord is pleased only if one has unflinching, unalloyed devotion to Him. Without sincere devotional service, everything is simply a show. (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 7.7.51-52)

In other words, the whole *śruti-sāstra* (Vedic revelations) as the *smṛti-sāstra* (religious codes) is arranged in such a way that an individual is taken on a journey where one's heart gradually becomes softer and softer to fully revive the dormant love for the Supreme Lord. ("*suddha-sattva-viśeṣātmā prema-sūryāṁśu-sāmya-bhāk, rucibhiś citta-masṛṇya-kṛd asau bhāva ucyate*", *Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-Sindhu*, 1.3.1). This is the highest goal of one's life as declared by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu "*premā pumartho mahān*".

For us who is a conditioned soul wandering and suffering in this inferior and illusory yet dangerous material world by having accepted it's association, have no real shelter other than the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord. While taking shelter of the Supreme Lord's lotus feet and awaiting for the mercy of the Supreme Lord, one should tolerate all sufferings of this material world obtained as a result of actions and reactions while continuing to surrender and serve more and more with mind, body and words ("*tat te 'nukampāṁ susamīkṣamāṇo bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam, hṛd-vāg-vaṇurbhir vidadhan namas te jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*", *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 10.14.8). For such devotees, all dangers that exist at every step in this material world are very easy to cross over (*samāśritā ye pada-pallava-plavaṁ mahat-padaṁ puṇya-yaśo murāreḥ, bhavāmbudhir vatsa-padaṁ paraṁ padaṁ padaṁ padaṁ yad vipadāṁ na teṣāṁ, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 10.14.58). Devotees also see the benefit of these uncalled for miseries in life because they are favorable to surrender and serve the Lord. This we see in the example of Queen Kunti who prayed that let more and more miseries come so that she can always remember the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord ("*vipadaḥ santu tāḥ śaśvat tatra tatra jagad-guro, bhavato darśanaṁ yat syād apunar bhava-darśanam*" *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 1.8.25)

So, the next question is, in what way should one surrender and serve the Supreme Lord?

There is only one way in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy (*Kali-yuga*). And that is by constant and offenseless chanting of the holy names of the Lord as introduced by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. There is no other way other than this. (“*harer nāma harer nāma harer nāmaiva kevalam, kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva nāsty eva gatir anyathā*”, *Bṛhan-Nāradya Purāṇa*, 38. 126). If we just follow the path of chanting as introduced by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, then we are in a safe position from the confusions offered by countless interpretations and presentations (“*tarko ‘pratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā nāsāv ṛṣir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam, dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām mahājano yena gataḥ sa paṁthāḥ*”, *Mahābhārata, Vana-ṣarva*, 313.117).

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu specifically proposed the chanting of *Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra*. “*hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare, hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*”. In *Kali-santarāṇa Upaniṣad*, it is said as: “*iti ṣoḍaśakaṁ nāmnām kali-kalmaṣa-nāśanam, nātaḥ parataropāyaḥ sarva-vedeṣu dṛśyate*”, meaning – After searching through all the Vedic literature, one cannot find a method of religion more sublime for this age than the chanting of *Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā mantra*. This *Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā mantra*, is also the essence of all Vedic knowledge (“*trayo vedāḥ ṣaḍ-āṅgāni chandāmsi vividhāḥ s`urāḥ, sarvam aṣṭākṣarāntaḥ-sthaṁ yac cānyad api vān-mayam, sarva-vedānta-sārārthaḥ samsārārṇava-tāraṇaḥ*” - “The essence of all Vedic knowledge—comprehending the three kinds of Vedic activity [*karma-kāṇḍa, jñāna-kāṇḍa and upāsanā-kāṇḍa*], the *chandas*, or Vedic hymns, and the processes for satisfying the demigods—is included in the eight syllables *Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa*. This is the reality of all *Vedānta*. The chanting of the holy name is the only means to cross the ocean of nescience.”).

When the cleansing of the heart from the dust accumulated from time immemorial thus beings with chanting of the holy names, then, the merciful Supreme Lord shall reveal Himself (“*ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ, sevonmukhe hi jihvādau svayam eva sphuraty adaḥ*”, *Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.234). Thus, one can understand that Kṛṣṇa’s holy name, transcendental qualities and transcendental pastimes are all equal to Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. They are all spiritual and full of bliss (“*kṛṣṇa-nāma, kṛṣṇa-guṇa, kṛṣṇa-līlā-vṛnda kṛṣṇera svarūpa-sama—saba cid-ānanda*”, Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, *Madhya līla*, 17.135)

Beginning with chanting the other eight process of devotional service (*śravaṇam*-hearing; *kīrtanam*-chanting; *viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam*-remembering; *pāda-sevanam*- seeing and touching the Deity of the Lord, circumambulating the Lord, visiting the temple of the Lord, and going on pilgrimage to holy places like the Ganga, Jagannātha Puri, Dvāraka, and Mathura; *arcanam*-Deity worship; *vandanam*-offering obeisances; *dāsyam*- performing all activities as service to the Lord; *sakhyam*-to act as the well-wisher of the Lord; *ātma-nivedanam*- surrendering everything to the Lord) gets initiated as the devotional service in practice. An apprenticeship under the feet of a bonafide Guru and hearing from him face to face, is recommended in Vedic scriptures (“*tad vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum*

*evābhigacchet*”, *Mundaka Upanisad*, 1.2.12). Without mercy of Guru and fellow Vaiṣṇavas, one cannot be freed from material contamination (“*naiṣāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghriṁ spṛṣaty anarthāpagamo yad-arthaḥ, mahīyasāṁ pāda-rajo-'bhiṣekaṁ niṣkiñcanānām na vṛṇīta yāvat*”, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 7.5.32).

As far as the conclusions of the scriptures are concerned, one should not be lazy enough to understand the purport of the scriptures (“*siddhānta baliyā citte nā kara alasa, ihā ha-ite kṛṣṇe lāge sudṛḍha mānasa*”, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi līlā* 2.117). One should be careful not to offend by neglecting or the Vedic scriptures (which amounts to the offense against holy name known as “*śruti-śāstra-nindanam*”). Rather, one should aspire to become servant of the servant of devotees and that position as the only true identity of oneself just as the path shown by Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu who said, “*nāhaṁ vipro na ca nara-patir nāpi vaiśyo na sūdro, nāhaṁ varṇī na ca gṛha-patir no vanastho yatir vā, kintu prodyan-nikhila-paramānanda-pūrnāmṛtābdher, goṇī-bhartuḥ pada-kamalayor dāsa-dāsānudāsaḥ*”, - “I am not a *brāhmaṇa*, I am not a *kṣatriya*, I am not a *vaiśya* or a *sūdra*. Nor am I a *brahmacārī*, a householder, a *vānaprastha* or a *sannyāsī*. I identify Myself only as the servant of the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the maintainer of the *goṇīs*. He is like an ocean of nectar, and He is the cause of universal transcendental bliss. He always exists with brilliance.”

When one takes part in such devotional service, all the good qualities shall automatically reside in him (“*yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ, harāv abhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā mano-rathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ*”, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 5.18.12). A human being who has thus begun the process of *sādhana bhakti* is said to have developed 21 favorable qualities (which are *satyam*—truthfulness; *dayā*—mercy; *tapah*—austerity; *śaucam*—cleanliness; *titikṣā*—tolerance; *īkṣā*—distinguishing from good and bad; *śamaḥ*—control of mind; *damaḥ*—control of senses; *ahiṁsā*—non-violence; *brahmacaryam*—continence; *tyāgaḥ*—charity; *svādhyāyaḥ*—studying scriptures; *ārjavam*—simplicity; *santoṣaḥ*—being satisfied with that which is available without severe endeavor; *samadṛk-sevā*—servicing saintly; *grāmya-īha-uparamaḥ*—gradually taking leave of engagements antanagostic to devotional service; *viparyaya-īhā-īkṣā*—observing the futility of the unnecessary activities of human society; *maunam*—being grave and silent and not taking part in unnecessary talk; *ātma vimarśanam*—research into the self; *anna-ādya-ādeḥ bhūtebhyaḥ samvibhāgaḥ*—equal distribution of food and drink, to different living entities; *ātma-devatā-buddhiḥ*— seeing every soul as a part of the Supreme Lord.

Simply by acquiring these qualifications, one can satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead (“*trimśal-lakṣaṇavān rājan sarvātmā yena tuṣyati*”, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.11.12). Since they are supposed to automatically develop in one who is practicing the 9 processes of devotional service described previously, these other 21 qualities remain as a checklist. If one is not able to develop these

21 divine qualities, then it simply means that one has to intensify performing the 9 primary processes of devotional service.

It is then that one can take part in the divine system of serving the Lord. Everyone must have an livelihood and it should be itself a devotional service. This is known as Daiva Varnasrama dharma. His Divine Grace A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada writes as follows:

“Even though one's body or one's superficial religion may change, every living entity is always engaged in the service of someone. Therefore, the mentality of service is called the eternal occupational duty. This eternal occupational duty can be organized through the institution of *varṇāśrama*, in which there are four *varṇas* (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*) and four *āśramas* (*brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*).” (Śrīla Prabhupāda, purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.11.2)

Everyone including the most sinful should be given the chance. Sri Prahlada Maharaja prays as follows (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 5.18.9):

*svasty astu viśvasya khalañ prasīdatām dhyāyantu bhūtāni śivaṁ mitho dhiyā  
manaś ca bhadraṁ bhajatād adhokṣaje āveśyatām no matir apy ahaitukī*

May there be good fortune throughout the universe, and may all envious persons be pacified. May all living entities become calm by practicing bhakti-yoga, for by accepting devotional service they will think of each other's welfare. Therefore let us all engage in the service of the supreme transcendence, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and always remain absorbed in thought of Him.

Ultimately, the goal is to always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Kṛṣṇa. “*smartavyaḥ satatam viṣṇur vismartavyo na jātucit, sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*”, “Kṛṣṇa is the origin of Lord Viṣṇu. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the *śāstras* should be the servants of these two principles.”

This is the conclusion of Vedic literatures and the ideal Vedic life as expressed by Śrīla Veda Vyāsa Himself:

*āloḍya sarva-śāstrāni vicārya ca punaḥ punaḥ  
idam ekaṁ suniṣpannam dhyeyo nārāyaṇaḥ sadā*

"By scrutinizingly reviewing all the revealed scriptures and judging them again and again, it is now concluded that Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Absolute Truth, and thus He alone should be worshiped."