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50. Significance of Yajnas

Thought, word and deed, when man keeps as one,

He is-acclaimed on earth as truly great.

Wedded to Truth, the presence of God is gained,

Liars, like pebbles, abound, true men, like

diamonds, are rare.

Embodiments of Love! The presence of God, the vision of the Absolute, is not a state to be attained or newly achieved. God or the Absolute is the very nature of the Self. The individual is the indivisible God. Even when enmeshed in this world of conflict and confrontation, the Self is God, in reality. Deluding himself as the body in which he lives and attaching himself to the charm and challenge of Nature, he imposes self-hood on himself and suffers from that limitation. The raindrops clear and pure from the clouds, but on earth the water is rendered turbid and polluted by its contact with the ground. That does not affect its real nature. The water that rose as cloud and fell as rain is clear and pure. The salt of the sea is discarded in the sea itself. All the rivers of all the continents end in the sea; they lose, on merging with the sea from which they started their long journey, their forms and their taste or characteristic qualities.

Similarly, the selves that have assumed human forms and that are designated by separate names, emerge from the same source and merge in the Universal form which they particularised. In the Bhagavad Geetha, Krishna declares, *Mamaiva amsho jeevaloke, Jeevabhuthaah sanaathanah'* 'The multiplicity of individual selves has happened from a part of Me." They may appear different but their reality is the ONE. The *Vedhas* therefore accost all selves as "children of Immortality," *"amruthasya puthraah."* They remind every living being of its being the undying Divine.

Every role and action has a method

A millionaire may take on the role of a down-and-out in a play and act the part remarkably well on the stage, but that impersonation does not make him a down-and-out. Even while on the stage, he knows that he is a millionaire, pretending to be poor. He will indeed be a fool if he forgets his reality. The individual self is the role; the reality is God.

Every role and action has a method, a mode, a way. The engineer, for example, works according to certain norms, certain principles and processes. These have to be decided upon with reference to the nature of the sub-soil, the type of foundation, the height of the structure, etc. A painter has to calculate the area, the base, the background, the culture, etc. If they do not pay attention to these, the structure won't be strong, the picture won't be liked. The same holds good for the *yajna* (sacrificial rite) that was inaugurated this morning. First, the fire-altar, where offerings are poured into the sacred fire. It has to be made to measure, as laid down in the ancient past. If the prescribed rules are broken or by-passed, the result promised cannot be secured. The fire that is lit in the altar has, according to the texts which recommended the *yajna,* to be churned out of the hard wood which was used this morning. After it is lit, tongues of flame have to be raised in order to receive the articles that are offered to the deities that are invoked by the sacred incantations.

Ritual fire *of yajna* is venerated as Vishnu

There are three fires, lit in correctly prepared sacrificial pits---the *Dakshina Agni, Gaarhapathya Agni* and the *Aahavaniya Agni.* The question may arise, what need is there to distinguish three types of fire, when fire is only one in reality. But, consider this illustration. We light a fire to cook the meal. The fire softens and makes the food palatable and digestible. The fire that reduces the human corpse on the pyre into ashes is another. Though it is as much fire as the fire in the kitchen, no one bakes a roti over it in order to make it eatable. It is treated as profane and unholy. As distinct from these two, consider this ritual fire. This fire is venerated as the central deity of the *Vedhic Yajna,* as Vishnu Himself, the sustenance and support of the worlds. We prostrate before this fire, an act of adoration which we refuse to the fire that cooks or the fire that consumes the body; neither do we offer oblations in the kitchen fire nor do we utter invocatory hymns and formulae. We do that only for this ritual Fire.

This fire is like the post box of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. When you drop your letter, duly stamped and addressed, into that box, the department ensures that it will be carried over to the person whose address it bears. You cannot accomplish the same assignment---communicating with the addressee---if you drop the letter into an identical box hung on your own wall, on your own initiative, to fulfil your will.

That box cannot serve the purpose. The purpose of contacting the Supreme Consciousness in its various manifestations named deities, can be realised only when the altar is laid down as prescribed, when the fire is evoked as recommended and when oblations are offered with the correct recitation of propitiatory formulae.

Offerings made to Gods in the sacred fire

The *Gaarhapathya fire* is the fire in the household---lit in the oven for cooking or boiling, in the fire-place for warming or in lamps for providing light or on sticks of incense. *Aahavaniya* fire is the ritual fire kept alive in the household of the higher castes wherein is invoked the guardian deities of health, harmony and prosperity, with preliminary recitals of *Pranava (OM).* Then, there is the *Dakshina Agni,* the Southern Fire, lit ceremonially on occasions of need for use in rites for the dead. Since the God of Death, Yama, is the Deity of the Southern Region, this fire is called *Dakshina* or Southern. This is the reason why people are warned not to sleep with their heads towards the South, the direction of decay and disintegration. Of these three, the *Aahavaniya* is, as can be seen, holy and adorable.

The Yajur Vedha deals with *Yajna* or Ritual Adoration of fire, as the medium of communication with the Gods. It has two *recensions: Shukla* (Bright) and *Krishna (Dark),* associated *with Aditya* (Sun) and *Brahma* (the Creator). *Yajur Vedha* has as subsidiary many complementary bodies of lessons on special skills. Archery *(Dhanur Vidhya)* is one such, with its four compartments' Release, Retraction, Replacement and Ritualistic Potency *(Mukthaka, Amukthaka, Muktha-Amukthaka and Manthra Mukthaka).* Arrows on which Brahma, Agni, Vishnu and other Gods with their Divine Energies were invoked, were used against the foes. These subsidiary sections of the *Vedhas* have mostly been lost and so knowledge of such skills has become inaccessible.

The Vedha mentions many specific items that are to be used as offerings to Gods, conveyable through the emissary, fire. They are milk, curds, ghee, grains, the juice of the plant named *Soma* and what is designated as *'Vapa',* a term wrongly taken as meaning the diaphragm of a lamb or other sacrificial animal. It is necessary to clarify the real meaning and significance of offering the

Vapa. The Vapa of a young lamb is preferable, it is said. The mind, the heart of the human child, is pure, tender, unsoiled by greed or pride. And the lamb is much more so. The *Vedhic* texts describe such a heart *as nirgunam* (serene), *niranjanam* (unattached), *niketanam* (abode of good), *sanaathanam* (eternal), *nithya* (stable), *suddha* (unblemished), *buddha* (alert), *mukta* (free), *nischala* (unaffected), *nirmala* (pure). Offering the *'vapa'* of the lamb means, therefore, dedicating one's heart, after rendering it soft and sweet, and not casting into the flames the *diaphragm* of a slaughtered kid!

Yajnas help to cleanse consciousness

For the *Vedhas* invite us to realise that everything---living and non-living-,-every quality and characteristic of everything, is only an aspect of the one *Aathma,* the Source and Substance of all. *The Aham* or the Ego is an appearance on the *Aathma* as the foam on the edge of the wave, which is but the ocean itself. The *Aathma* can well be devoid of Ego, but the Ego cannot exist without the *Aathma* as the reality underneath. However, man validates the Ego *(Aham),* giving it a form *(aakaaram)* full of attributes and so, it gets polluted as Egoism *(Aham-kaaram).* When the Ego is free from the status of 'ism,' it is a facet or factor of the *Aathma.* Attributes, modes, *gunas* drag it into the tangle of dualities and so, it gets malefic and sheds its positive, purifying role. The oblation that is done here in the sacred fire is symbolic of the evil adhering to the Ego, the animal urges that still animate it.

The 'ism' or mould in which the Ego has hardened tantalises man and blinds him to the Truth. Shankaraachaarya has described the harm it inflicts and prescribes the recitation of the name of God to defuse the consequence. The pure ego will then merge and lose its identity in the *Aathma,* which has no birth and no death. These *Yajnas* serve one purpose more than all else---the cleansing of all levels of consciousness *(chittha-shuddhi),* for they involve renunciation, invocation of Divinity and ascetic practices. This achievement alone cannot ensure liberation *(moksha).* That can he won only by the awareness of the reality leading to discarding *(kshaya)* the attachment *(moha)* to the unreal. But, this ultimate objective is seldom kept in view. *Vedhic* rites were gone through in order to win the boon of sorrow-free wordly life and blissful heavenly sojourn, and only as a stage in realising the freedom from birth and death, and merging in the Truth.

Man has to give up the animalist ego

With a cleansed mind, one has to pursue the inquiry into the Reality, until no trace of fascination for the unreal persists. *Yajna* involves renunciation. It means 'giving up.' What is it that we have to give up? Riches? That is quite easy. The home? That too is not difficult. Giving up one's wife and children, one's lands and houses and removing oneself into the forest? That too has been done by many. But though one's body and mind are in the recesses of the jungle, the wife and children, the lands and houses might still occupy the thoughts and emotions of the person who has come away. What have to be given up, therefore, are one's evil tendencies, harmful thoughts, selfish feelings and longing for sensual pleasures. One has to get rid of envy, of the love for parading oneself. When these have been renounced, hearth and home cannot harm us.

The Vedhas desire man to give up the animalist ego, and its complement, anger. The evils of envy, pride and spite belong to the same brood. These are all 'bestial' though human in appearance. They declare that love, tolerance, compassion, non-attachment, and adherence to truth are the genuine human traits.

Jesus Christ said, "Ask, it shall be given; Call, it will be answered; Knock, it shall be opened." But, are we asking, calling and knocking? Yes. We are asking, we are calling, we are knocking at the door. But, whom are we asking? Whom are we calling? At whose door are we knocking?

You do not ask God for the indispensable

We are not asking for everlasting bliss; we ask only for short-lived material pleasures. So, we do not get all that we ask for. What is the reason? Has He no compassion? The child is sick but it asks for many varieties of sweets which the mother refuses to give. Does it mean that she hates the child? Or, is she hard-hearted? Has she lost her affection? The refusal is itself a sign of compassion. For, each person is an invalid, suffering from recurrent birth and death. Granting whatever is asked can only lengthen the suffering. Hence arises the withholding and the denial. And, you too do not ask for the indispensable! You do not pray for the peace that knows no break. If you do, the boon will be granted.

Of course, you do call. But, do you call on God, or on some one ungodly? God will respond when the call arises from the heart. Your call is fouled by greed, by hatred against others, by the desire for vengeance, by the hiss of envy and intolerance. I know you knock at the door. But, at which door? Keeping the door of your own heart closed, how can your clamour succeed in getting other door opened? Knock at the door of your own heart. God, the resident, will come into view. Prahlaadha had the faith that God resides in every heart and everywhere. So, when a pillar in the palace was knocked at, the Lord manifested therefrom. Believe that He resides in you and turn your eyes inward.

You complain that God is merciless, hard to please, etc., only because you do not wish to give Him what ought to or ask from Him what He would gladly give. Tender hearts, holy thoughts, loving speech---these can invoke the Divine *Aathma* to manifest into awareness. For, these personify *Sathya,* embody God as *Sathya* or the Truth of Truths. *Sath-th-ya* are the three syllables of *Sathya. Sath* means, the Sun, *Surya. Thya* means the glory, the splendour. The *Sathya---the* glory of the Sun---nourishes and ripens the grain, which is man's food. Food sustains the vitality, the vital breath. Therefore, *Sathya* has to be adored and propitiated. The *Homa* or offering of oblations in this ceremonially lit and ceremonially fed fire is the symbolic adoration of the Truth of Truths, the *Sathya.*

The present socialist ideal is a *Vedhic* concept

Philosophy is interpreted as the search for Truth. But, Truth is not something to be sought for. You have only to be aware of it, to experience it, to be it. Without it, Philosophy is but full-loss-ophy! These *Yajnas* which encourage you to sublimate your emotions are all designed to direct you towards the goal.

Truth is totality, the One which integrates and includes the many. The sages of yore were not satisfied with one facet of the Truth or one view, not of one God but of That where all streams merge. As Bairagi Shastry told you now that it is Kesava, to whom adoration addressed to all Gods reaches: *"Sarva deva namaskaarah Kesavam pratigachchathi".* One house cannot become a village, nor one individual, a society, nor one tree, a forest! To be conscious of the totality, one has to fill oneself with the sublime grandeur of the forest, not squat under a single tree. This is the inner purpose which led aspirants and seekers after Truth to the core the Himaalyan forests.

Keeping away from the din of the populace was only an excuse. In the sylvan hermitage, the prayer resonant with *Yajur Vedha,* "Let all be of one mind, of one heart, towards one goal, sustained by one strength" rose more meaningful and more effectively. The present socialist ideal of the unity of mankind is a *Vedhic* concept; in fact, the *Vedhic* ideal was even wider and more comprehensive. "Let all the worlds be happy and prosperous," "The world is one family," the *Vedhas* proclaimed.

Vedhic rituals are for the welfare of the world

It is wrongly assumed that the *Vedhas* had only the one section of the population, one caste, one race, one community in view. This is the result of misreading and mistaken inference. They are concerned, it was said, only with Brahmins and with the Pandiths among them. This too is a wrong conclusion Every *Vedhic* ritual had as its goal the prosperity and peace of the world. The *Vedhas* yearn to establish the welfare of the three worlds---the nether regions, the earth and heaven. It is a pity that a narrow outlook is foisted by short-sighted people on such profound texts. The *Vedhas* do not allow scope for distinctions on the basis of caste or creed. They assert, "I shall save who-ever keeps me in memory." "I shall be beside whoever is beside me." "Whoever adores me in whatever form and through whichever name, I shall manifest myself before them with that form, bearing that name."

Every *manthra* in the *Vedhas* connotes only the One

Oblations are offered in this sacred fire to the One, but the One is invoked through many names: *"OM!* Prostrations to *Rudhra! OM!* Prostrations *to Adithya! OM!* Prostrations to Varuna" etc. The *Rishis* or sages had each a favourite form and name and, as a result, the one Lord acquired may names. Many among you perform the worship, named "The hundred *thousand" (Lakshahaarchana) or "The Week-long" (Saptaaham).* What is done then is repeating the names a hundred thousand times, or for full seven days and nights. A flower is placed before the picture or idol, with the pronunciation of a name---Maadhava, Kesava, Naaraayana, etc. The idol is the same throughtout. When we name Him, Maadhava, we are conscious that He is also Kesava and Naaraayana, and we derive delight from that knowledge.

Each hymn of the *Vedhas* is called a *Rig* which means 'praise'. And the word *Vedha* is derived from the root, *Vidh,* 'to know'. And what exactly should we strive to know? We must know the One, which has no second, no another, no other. So, every word, every statement in the *Vedhas,* every *manthra* or *Rig* in them, connotes only the One, though out of insufficient or wrong understanding people mistake the lesson and ascribe the words to indicate the Many.

It is essential that the true import be grasped by all. Since the opportunities to learn it have declined, mistaken interpretations gain currency. In the course of this week-long *Vedhic Yajna,* we shall delve into the deeper significance of the *Vedhic* teachings.

Bhagavaan's discourse on the first day of the Vedhapurusha Saptaaha Yajna, 21-10-1982.