



Chapter One

Vedic Tradition





Vedic Dharma

What is the *Veda*?



The inhabitants of ancient *Bharat* (India) were known as Aryans¹. Their sacred texts, commonly referred to as the *Vedas* are the oldest texts known to mankind.² The Sanskrit word *Veda* literally means knowledge. There are four collections of the hymns: *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*.

These four collections are commonly referred to as the *Veda*.

Rig Veda is the foundation and the most ancient of the *Vedas*. *Atharva Veda* was incorporated at a later stage. The *mantras*³ (hymns) of the *Rig Veda* occur also in the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda* in connection with the various sacrifices. The *mantras* of the *Rig Veda* primarily consist of adoration and invocation to *devas* (gods) such as Agni, Mitra, Indra and Varuna and many others. According to the *Rig Veda* all the gods are manifestations of One ultimate Being or One Reality.⁴

There are four secondary texts known as the *Upvedas* (*up* prefix means subsidiary). These are of a later addition to the primary *Vedas* and are interrelated to each of the primary *Vedas*:



- *Rig Veda: Sthapatya Veda* (architecture and science of sociology)
- *Yajur Veda: Dhanur Veda* (military science)
- *Sama Veda: Gandharva Veda* (music and dance)
- *Atharva Veda: Ayurveda* (medicine)

The content of each of the Vedas comprises three categories:

- *Karmkanda* --Rituals
- *Upasanakanda*--Prayers
- *Jnanakanda*--Metaphysical discourses concerning the nature and realization of *Brahman* (the Ultimate Reality) and *Atman* (Inner Self).

Of these three, the *Jnanakanda* consisting of discourses on spiritual knowledge is regarded as the highest. It contains profound discussions of absolute knowledge and experience. The *Vedas* are saturated with discussions of the knowledge and experience of *Brahman*, The Ultimate reality. The Vedas declare the ubiquitous nature of *Brahman*: “All is *Brahman*”; “There exists nothing but *Brahman*.”

Sage Manu says that “the *Vedas* are the foundation of all *dharmas* (Laws, Knowledge, Sacred Duty, Truth)”⁵ upon which the whole edifice of knowledge and art is built. The *Vedas* are



the storehouse of all knowledge and sciences; it is the infinite repository of learning. The *Vedas* are the source of all fundamental principles of Indian *dharma*, religion, philosophy, music, medicine and science. The knowledge expounded in the *Vedas* is limitless.

Since ancient times Saints, *Mahatmas* (greats souls), *Rishis* (seers), *Munis* (ascetics), and scholars of India have considered the *Vedas* to be eternal and of divine origin (*apaurusheya*, without a human source). It is believed that the origin of the *Vedas* came about in the form of knowledge revealed by God. Therefore, just as God, the *Vedas* are also without beginning, infinite and eternal. The *Upanishads* describe the *Vedas* as the *out-breath* of God.

Western scholars, however, date the *Vedas* at 5000 to 6000 B.C.E.⁶ These scholars argue that the *Vedas* have a beginning in time, they are, therefore, not of divine origin are not are not “timeless.” The main argument of these scholars is that the origin of the *Vedas* is best understood in the same way as the origin of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the ancient epics of India. Just as these epics are believed to be composed by sages, such as Valkmiki and Vyasa, so were the different branches of the *Vedas* composed by *Rishis* (seers) such as Katha



and others. Further, since there are specific composers of the various *Vedas*, therefore, they are not of divine origin. Thus, many scholars suggest that these *Vedas*, the sacred texts of ancient India, are of human origin, they are not eternal, and were composed at a certain point of time.

Jamini Rishi further sheds light on this issue. He states that although different branches of the *Vedas* are associated with the names of particular *rishis*,⁷ the *Vedas* were, in fact, not composed by them. The *rishis* were simply the expounders of this eternal *Wisdom*.

The *Jamini Sutra* 1/1/30 states:

*Those Rishis taught the composed mantra-samhitas (collections of the sacred hymns) which were not created by them.*⁸

Therefore, the *rishis* were actually seers of this knowledge of *mantras*. For this reason they were called the seers (*rishis*) not composers of *mantras*.

In the *Sarvanukarama Sutra*, *Katyayan* says:

*The rishis are the seers, who have memorized the revealed mantras. They are spokespersons of the mantras, not the composers.*⁹

Modern science claims that the sound waves of spoken words are not destroyed, but rather, are dispersed in the atmosphere. In the



future, it may be possible to retrieve all spoken words. Scientists theorize that radio waves which have been transmitted into the universe could possibly reverberate forever. This idea may provide a useful analogy for understanding the nature of spoken words as sound current.¹⁰ If, as modern science contends, sound waves are indestructible, perhaps it is also possible that the words which Lord Krishna spoke to Arjuna during the war chronicled in the *Mahabharata* still exist and it might even be possible to retrieve those words. The pundits of the *Vedas* claim that the sounds of the *Vedas* are always reverberating, are eternal, and therefore, not of human origin. Vedic scholars use this idea about the indestructibility of sound waves to support the idea that *shabad*¹¹ (sound) is indestructible.

It is, therefore, believed that the ancient *rishis* perceived the manifestations of the spiritual, eternal, and divine knowledge¹² through the divine intelligence they attained in the state of *samadhi* (state of union with the Divine). Later these mystical insights were rendered into the written text.

Sage Yaskacharya records in a hymn:

The seers saw the mantras and therefore, they are known as rishis. (Nirukta, 2/3/11)



Vedanta

The Sanskrit word *Vedanta* is made up of two words: ‘*Veda*’ which means “knowledge” and *anta* meaning “end.” Thus, *Vedanta* literally means the “end [goal] of knowledge.” But where does knowledge end? The wise have described four types of knowledge: Listening, thinking, intense repeated meditation, and experiencing. Thus the goal of knowledge culminates in experience.

The attainment of knowledge begins with listening (which includes studying). In ancient times, after listening, the students memorized the teachings. Therefore, the earlier name for the *Vedas* is *Shruti*, meaning that “which has been heard.” It is said that in later times people’s minds became feeble.¹³ Knowledge therefore became bound to the written texts, and these came to be known as the *Vedas*.¹⁴

As mentioned above, the *Vedas* are comprised of different sections. The earlier part is known as *Karmakanda* (rituals), which includes hymns for sacrificial rituals. The later sections of the *Vedas* are known as *Upasana* (meditation) and *Jananakanda* (knowledge of the Ultimate Reality). The later part primarily contains discourses on metaphysical issues and Wisdom. The



sections dealing with philosophical thought and wisdom are considered to be superior because they expound the ultimate goal of human life. Over the years, the metaphysical discourses on knowledge were distilled in the form of the *Upanishad*.¹⁵ The Sanskrit term, *Upanishad*, is made up of *upa* (near), *ni* (down) and *s(h)ad* (to sit), thus suggesting an image of sitting near the teacher to learn the subtle doctrines of self-realization. In earlier times these subtle teachings were referred to as the *Vedanta*, meaning the later part of the *Vedas*; and goal of the *Vedas*. As the ideas of the *Upanishads* continued to evolve into various philosophical treatises, they also came to be known as *Vedanta*. The *Upanishads* are, therefore, understood as “the end of the *Vedas*” as well as “the culmination of Knowledge” for several reasons, as follows:

1. The *Upanishads* are the final treatise of the Vedic literature. The first part of the *Vedas* is known as *Samhita*, a collection of Vedic hymns or *mantras*. Next are the *Brāhmanas*, which pertain to sacrificial rituals, and the *Aranyakas*, the Forest treatises. The last section of the *Vedas* is the *Upanishads*.
2. For the sake of a comprehensive knowledge of the *Vedas*, the followers of the Vedic Dharma usually begin with the *Samhita*, the study of *mantras*.



During the *grhastha* stage (householder), and for the purpose of performing sacrifice and ritual worship the *Brāhmanas* are utilized. During the next stages, *vanprastha* (forest dweller) and the *sanyasa* (stage of the renunciation) the study of *Aranyakas* (the forest teachings) is required. *Aranyakas* and *Sanyasis* have made the transition to a quiet life in the forest in order to seek the Ultimate truth through meditation and contemplation. Therefore these texts are known as *Aranayaks* and pertain to this stage of life. The *Aranayakas*—the forest treatises—evolved overtime and became developed into the form of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* are the final treatises and also represent the crystallization of the metaphysical and spiritual thoughts of the *Vedas*. Therefore, the *Upanishads* considered to be the culmination of Vedic knowledge (*Vedanta*).

3. It is said in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (chapter 6 and 7):
Even with the study of the Vedas and its different sections, knowledge is incomplete without the study of the wisdom of the Upanishad.



The *Tettairya Upanishad* (1/1) also declares:

The Upanishads contain the subtle mystery of the Vedas, therefore they are known as Vedopanishads.”

The *Upanishads* contain an extensive analysis into the nature of *Atman* (Universal Soul), *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality) and the world. It is not incorrect to say that the *Upanishads* are certainly a treasure for seekers of spiritual knowledge. The famous German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer was deeply influenced by the *Upanishads*.

He writes:

There is no text other than the Upanishads which is greater in giving peace. The Upanishads are the solace of my life and solace to me in my death.

According to the *rishis* (sages), who are the spokespersons of *Vedanta* Wisdom, there is one Omnipresent Truth. This is the Reality out of which the entire creation is manifested and in which all creation is sustained. Through knowledge of this essential Truth, one can obtain immortality. This Truth is variously referred to as *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality), *Atman* (Self), and *Sat* (Truth).

The *Aitrayiya* (1/1/1) and the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (1/4/1) address this Reality as *Ataman*:

In the beginning there was only one Atman.



The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7/25/2) also says:

Whatever is here (in this creation) is indeed Atman.

The *Bṛhadaranayaka Upanishad* further says:

After knowing this Atman all is known.

The *Bṛhadaranyaka* declares:

This Atman is Brahman (2/5/19). And “*I am Brahman*”¹⁶ (1/4/10).

The *Chandogya* and *Mundaka Upanishads* also declare that to know *Atman* is to know all.¹⁷

The *Upanishads* arrive at the conclusion that the body, senses, mind and intellect, as well as the joys arising from them, are fleeting and ephemeral forms, not the essential experience of the nature of *Atman*. The Pure Conscious element of *Atman* is the foundation of all minor joys. *Atman* is not confined by the boundaries of sense objects. Rather, it is boundless and permeates all, and is omnipresent.

The Knowledge of *Atma* (Supreme Self)

Atma Jnana, the knowledge of *atman* (Self), is considered to be the highest knowledge (*para vidya*). All other forms of knowledge are of a lesser type and therefore are lower



knowledge (*apara vidya*). The way to Self Knowledge begins by restraining lust, anger, egotism, attachment, and other afflictions. The seeker then strives to attain the direct experience of *Atman* through the successive practices of listening (to sacred texts and discourses of sages), contemplating (on what has been studied), and meditating.

According to the *Upanishads*, the highest goal—immortality—cannot be achieved merely through ceremonial and sacrificial rites.

The *Mundako Upanishads* (1/2/7) states:

*Unsafe boats, however, are these rituals
and sacrifices (to go across the world sea of death and
birth) as described by eighteen (shastras) in which
are expressed these lower performances.
The ignorant who consider them better
Go time and again to old age and death.*

One can attain the joys of heaven for a limited time by means of sacrificial rituals (*yajnas*), but when the rewards of the rituals perish, the person must again return to this world of birth and death. By these lesser boats one cannot go beyond the world sea.¹⁸

According to the various *Shastras* (the sacred texts), *havan* (the sacrificial fire ritual), and the chanting of *mantras* are for people



who are ignorant of the essential Truth (*Atma-jnana*). The practice of *self-knowledge* (self-realization) is greater than sacrifices to the gods and goddesses. Only through knowledge of self can one eliminate the cycle of rebirth and the sufferings of taking birth. Only one who realizes unity with the infinite immortal *Brahman* shall attain immortality.

The *Katha Upanishad* (6/14) affirms:

When all the desires that lodge in one's heart are liberated, then a mortal becomes immortal; therein he reaches Brahman.

Direct Experience (Self-Realization)

Vedanta wisdom teaches us to reflect upon the knowledge we gain from listening to the discourses of saints and reading the sacred writings. After careful examination and discernment of the truth, we must incorporate that knowledge into our lives. With repeated practice of the knowledge, the practitioner becomes accustomed to it. When the practice is perfected, the aspirant gains the direct experience of the Divine Self.

We hear that the nature of *Atman* is imperishable, immortal, infinite and pure (without imperfection). We should then examine what we have heard. In order to have the direct experience of *Atman*, the intellectual understanding of the nature



of *Atman* must be followed by a meditation practice. This practice is an inner journey, called *nididhyasana* (meditating upon the essence of what has now been intellectually understood). Diligent spiritual discipline leads the aspirant to the direct experience of his true nature—*Atman*.

The Sanskrit word for experience, *anubhava*, is a compound: *Anu* (latter) and *bhava* (arising). Thus, experience is understood as that which arises after practice. Having attained this knowledge, nothing remains to be known.

Sant Sundar Das Ji Maharaj has elaborated on the four-fold path of knowledge: *listening, contemplating, meditating, and experiencing*.

He uses an illustration of the process of satisfying the appetite for food:

Talking about gourmet foods brings pleasure to the mind (Listening). However, until we have eaten this food there is no true delight. When all the ingredients are gathered for cooking and the food is being prepared, the mind begins to long for the taste (Thinking/Contemplating). Once the food has been prepared, one begins to put one bite in the mouth at a time, and then experiences each course of the meal. (nididhyasana; meditation).¹⁹ Each bite brings a feeling of satisfaction. . As we progress through the meal, we experience the joy of a satiated appetite.



Then as we become full, there is no more appetite (Experience). Says Sundar, the contentment is the experience of direct experience.

Through this illustration Sant Sundar Das Ji demonstrates the process of knowledge through the analogy of food. The feeling of contentment at the end of the meal corresponds to the stage of direct experience—a state of contentment.

If we think through this metaphorical example, we notice that the body is nourished and satisfied by eating food, but mere talk of food neither satisfies the appetite nor produces nourishment for the body. The appetite is satisfied from the labor of food preparation along with the gradual process of eating and digestion, and the resulting nourishment of the body and satisfaction of the mind.

In this same manner, through spiritual discipline, we can make progress toward attaining the experience of true knowledge. The first three stages are stepping stones to the final stage of divine experience. However, it must be kept in mind that the realm of the fourth stage is very extensive and requires a long journey.

As aspirants progress on the inner spiritual journey they experience the celestial scenes. The course of this journey involves contemplation and repeated meditation known *as*



nidhidhyasana. This process culminates in the absolute knowledge of the inner Self. Now there is nothing more to be attained. As long as we remain in the elementary stages of knowledge—listening, studying, contemplating and meditating—the goal is not yet accomplished. It is achieved only when the stages of knowledge culminate in the direct experience—*anubhava*. Thereafter, nothing remains to be accomplished.

Let us look at a simple anecdote that will add clarity: Once there was a gathering of philosophers from various schools of *Vedanta*: *Dvaita*, the dualist school; *Advaita*, the non-dualist school; *Vishishtadvaita*, the qualified dualists; and *Shudhadvaita*, the pure dualists. At this gathering, the representatives of each school presented their views in their discourses. The proponents of both the dualist and the non-dualist philosophies presented extraordinarily compelling arguments in favor of their convictions. Consequently, each was influenced by the convincing arguments of the other. As a result, the dualist philosopher converted to the non-dualist philosophical school, and the non-dualist to the dualist school. What is the essential lesson to be learned from this account? It is this: When the foundation of our knowledge is merely intellectual knowledge, from the early stages of listening and speculating, it is possible to



be swayed by the convincing arguments of another. However, when we have realized the nature of Truth through practice, and have experienced it directly, there is no question of wavering or changing our position since we have seen and experienced the Truth for ourselves. We have reached the stage of experience and the knowledge is beyond argument.

Vedanta explains the steps of knowledge metaphorically: the knowledge gained through listening can be compared to a household fire. The knowledge gained through analysis and speculation is analogous to lightning. And the knowledge of diligent meditation practice is like volcanic fire in the depths of the ocean. Just as a common fire can be extinguished by drops of rain, in the same way, a person's theoretical knowledge, gained simply by listening, can easily be confounded by persuasive arguments. But, the knowledge attained through analysis and contemplation becomes like the force of lightning, which cannot simply be extinguished by water. Even so, just as lightning by nature is unstable, so the knowledge gained through thoughtful speculation is still precarious. But the knowledge acquired through repeated meditation can be compared to an underwater volcanic fire which will not even be extinguished by the ocean of water surrounding it. Just so, knowledge gained



through meditation will not be vulnerable to the fluctuations of this world.

But even this knowledge has limitations, just as volcanic fire that is burning under the ocean. It is powerful yet it is not capable of drying up the whole ocean of water. In the same way *nidhidyasana* can not completely destroy the ocean or *maya* (the web of illusion of duality). However, during the course of repeated and dedicated practice, the seeker becomes proficient and attains the experience of an even deeper knowledge. Such knowledge is like an apocalyptic fire which devours the entire illusion of duality (*maya*). This is the reason that *Vedanta* cautions the student to not remain mired in the beginning stages of acquiring knowledge, through listening and intellectualizing, but to keep moving forward, through constant and consistent practice, until direct experience is attained.

Yoga and Dhyāna (Meditation)

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna presents several definitions of Yoga,²⁰ such as “Yoga is skill in one’s own duty” and “Equanimity of mind is yoga.” Lord Krishna gave knowledge to Arjuna in the form of the *Gita*. The *Gita* contains various types



of yoga corresponding to its 18 chapters. In addition to these, several other types of *yogas* are mentioned.

Patanjali, the great Indian sage who lived around 300 B.C.E., systematized the various components of *Yoga*. He defined *yoga* as “uninterrupted thought on a single object.” Patanjali’s system, known as the eightfold path, is comprised of eight limbs: *Yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dhyāna*, *dharana*, and *Samadhi*. *Yama* (restraint, discipline) has these five components: truth, nonviolence, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possession. *Niyama* (observance) also has five components: purity, contentment, austerity of body and mind, self study (study and reflection on the scriptures and discourse of spiritual teachers), and faith in God. The practitioner will not be able to attain perfection in the third limb of *yoga*, *asana* (posture), until he or she has diligently practiced the moral principles of *yama* and *niyama*. The next (fourth) limb in this system is *pranayama* (breath control), which acts to purify the mind from distraction, making it easier for the practitioner to focus his mind. Thus, the path is sequential. If the practitioner first achieves proficiency in *asana*, and then performs *pranayama*, he/she will be able to become proficient in *pranayama*. However, yoga does not end here. [In the West, Yoga is, usually, only thought of as the practice of postures and breathing exercises that are utilized to



enhance physical and mental health. In the Indian traditions, yoga is a holistic spiritual discipline which culminates in divine union.]

The fifth limb of yoga is *pratyahara*, restraining of the mind (withdrawal of the senses). *Pratyahara* is followed by *dharana*—deep focus for short periods of time, which is then followed by *dhyāna*, state of concentration.

When we try to concentrate the mind in meditation and worship, we find it difficult to bring the mind to a focus. The mind wanders away. When we sit for prayer or for meditation, how long does the mind stay concentrated in this task? The mind continually moves. It wanders constantly. No one can even begin to count how many directions it may have gone during the meditation because the unstable mind runs hither and thither. We may lock our body up in a small meditation room but are we able to lock up the mind also? The mind roams from one place to another, from one country to another. Who can really even remember where has it wandered?

Sant Sundar Das Ji says:

*In one moment the mind can think of the immediacy of death, or the longevity of life,
In one moment it considers being sold out in someone's hand.*



In a moment the mind roams into the nine realms of the universe, desiring to look around the seen and unseen places.

This mind's trickery is ever elusive, but we have to deal with it.

No one can measure the speed of the mind.

Whoever attempts to fathom the nature of mind can only be a Mad.

Sant Paltu says:

Our mind is so swift that no other vehicle can compare to its speed: We cannot restrain the mind: it is ever strong and active. It is like a mighty combatant. Its nature is mischievous. Paltu says that the mind is capable of traveling thousands of miles in the blink of an eye.

Even today in our scientific world, no matter how many fast planes have been invented, they are nevertheless still slower than the speed of the mind. This swiftly moving mind is stubborn and difficult to control.

As Sant Kabir has said:

Dear practitioners! The mind is very mischievous and whoever has to deal with this mind knows its obstinate nature.

We consider ourselves well and sound. But when we sit for meditation and when the fire of meditation touches us, we see the blemishes surfacing in the mind. Sant Kabir says that



whosoever has tried to control this mind knows what a daunting task it is.

Therefore, Sant Kabir says:

The mind is like the monkey of the magician. If the monkey obeys the magician, then the two succeed in their entertainment feat, otherwise they cannot make a living (because their customers will flee).

The mind is like a monkey. When the magician and the monkey perform in unison, they entertain the spectators and the magician earns money to sustain their livelihood. If the monkey acts mischievously, begins biting or is rough with patrons, the monkey is beaten with a staff, and the magician will lose money in his magic show. In the same way our mind is likened to that monkey. Then how are we to control this mind? Until we can bring the mind to a focus and train it to follow the prescribed techniques, we cannot control and subjugate the mind.

During meditation we should not be defeated in the exercise of *pratyahara*, literally, “bringing back”—bringing the wandering mind back to a focus. What is the other meaning of *pratyahara*? *Prati* (every) and *ahara* (consume) are the two components of this word thus it means “consume everything.” Whatever thought arises consume that thought. If you don’t consume that thought, you will be consumed by it. Thus, the practice involves



consuming, or actively controlling, the rising tide of thought. During meditation the mind creates air castles beyond description. While sitting in one place the mind wanders everywhere, and we cannot even keep track of its ever swirling nature. Therefore, the saints instruct that first we must practice *pratyahara*. Just as we would sit down to eat and consume food, in the same way we should sit in meditation to consume the thoughts as they arise. We should consume such thoughts that very moment. No matter what images and fanciful ideas infest the mind during meditation, the saints insist we should consume them without any delay or hesitation.

If you are unable to practice constant vigilance of mind then when you sit down to do *japa* (recitation of a holy name) your mind will be involved in unnecessary gossip, solving problems, creating imaginary castles, and making long term plans. In this manner, your meditation time will be wasted with the roaming mind and remaining unfocused. Therefore, do not get defeated in the constant practice of *pratyahara*. If you give up in *pratyahara* you will not succeed in subduing the mind.

Keep this in mind and reflect upon it: The mind is unconscious [the mind-machine is powered by consciousness; it is considered



to be a sensory organ]. Yet we are immortal and eternal and the repository of joy.²¹

Gosvami Tulsidas says:

The individual soul is part of the eternal God and is the storehouse of consciousness and joy. But, it has been under the control of maya and is tied and bound to it as domesticated parrots and monkeys.

Now listen to Sant Kabir:

Oh brothers, I cannot understand this mystery. The tiger cub has been taken by the cat.

Who would believe that a tiger cub has been stolen by a cat and that cat is running with it? The individual soul (*jivatman*) like the tiger cub is inseparable from God and is beyond old age and death. It has come into the grip of *maya*, just like the cat.

Oh mind, you dance in all directions owing to the effects of maya. As the magician makes his monkey dance with the noose of his rope, so the noose of desires rules the mind. The monkey bows to everyone and forgets about his own nature. O humans! You do the same when you dance night and day for the desires of the flesh rather than for the divine name. Why do you dance perpetually, deluded by this maya (illusion which deludes the mind to run after desires)?

We must remember this: We are conscious and the mind is unconscious. The battle between consciousness and



unconsciousness continues [even when we try to meditate]. But eventually the unconscious mind will lose and consciousness will win. This is certain.

The Main Obstacles in the Practice of *Dhyāna*

The two main hindrances to success in the practice of meditation are as follows:

1. Procrastination and Laziness
2. The train of thoughts during meditation, such as day dreaming, fanciful imagination, and planning.

In addition, silence during meditation lulls many practitioners to sleep. During meditation we need to be vigilant and awake. Whatever the point of our focus is, we should diligently fix our mind on that goal. Then we will not be bothered by sleep. We can only reach our Noble (*arya*) destination within, the state of unity with God, if we overcome the enormous challenge of procrastination and also restrain the ever-rising tide of mental activity during meditation.²² Not so vigilant practitioners usually become engrossed in extraneous thoughts or fall asleep. These formidable passes must be crossed for success.



What is the glorious destination that we are striving for? When we close our eyes we see darkness within, it is the realm of ignorance. When the light dawns within you, then you see that you reside in noble regions. In darkness resides ignorance and in light resides knowledge. For example, as we are now sitting in light, we are able to see one another. However, if the electric power goes out, the ensuing total darkness would make us unable to see others. We would not even be aware of other people coming and going.

In this analogy, light signifies knowledge and darkness signifies ignorance. When we see darkness with our eyes closed we are in the realm of death and re-birth because we are not aware of our true nature. When we come out of the realm of darkness and enter into the realm of light, we will at the same time escape the web of death. If we remain in darkness it is not possible to be free from the cycle of birth and death. Only when we achieve the inner light—the divine light which represents the glory of the Divine—can we be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

Sant Kabir says:

In each house (heart) the light shines. But we are blind [ignorant of that divine light of knowledge] so we cannot see it. If we keep looking we will find the light and will destroy the shackles of death.



Various Forms of *Dhyāna* (Concentration)

Without formless or subtle meditation, it is impossible to attain the inner light. You must first get yourself out of darkness. How can this be possible? *Pratyahara*—bringing the mind back—is followed by *dharana*, sustaining the focus of the mind for small periods. At first this will only be for a very short time. *Pratyahara* involves the repeated practice of bringing the wandering mind to a focus. Through diligent practice of *pratyahara* we become able to focus on the object of meditation for little stretches of time. This is *dharana*.

When *dharana* is continuous for extended periods, the state of *dhyāna* (complete focus) becomes possible. However, merely focusing on a physical form or name is not the only type of *dhyāna*. *Dhyana* is also emptiness of mind.

As it is said in the *Jnana Sankalni Tantra*:

Dhyāna, focus on only the physical forms, is not the only dhyāna. The focus of the empty mind is known (focus in empty mind) as dhyāna. By the grace of this [focus] meditation, one undoubtedly attains Moksha.

In essence, the mind when becomes empty of all thoughts is the state of *dhyāna*.



Once someone asked Sant Mira Bai, a female *bhakta* poet: “Our mind wanders far away during meditation, what kind of practice did you do that you were able to control your mind?”

Mira Bai replied:

Through my consciousness I traveled the skies and then my mind came under control and agreed to be still.

Let us ponder this subject. What vehicle did Mira Bai use to travel the skies? Was it an airplane, a helicopter or a rocket? Mira Bai’s journey was not in the outer world, but rather, it was within, in the inner realms. Her vehicles were divine light (*bindu*), and divine sound.

Sant Maharishi Mehi comments on the inner journey:

Bindu and sound will come and receive you as you meditate. Yes, they will take you on the ride to observe the celestial realms of divine light and sound.

Sound is the quality of the void²³ and through sound the mind comes under control.

Sant Kabir speaks about the meditation:

*Until we accomplish the meditation of complete thoughtlessness (*shunya*, which means emptiness or void), the mind cannot be controlled completely.*



It is essential to practice formless meditation (emptiness) in order to fully restrain the mind. Without this practice it will not be possible to stay in the realm of Pure Consciousness (*Atman*).

There are various sequential stages of *dhyāna* (meditation). First, there is the meditation of physical form, either of *Sat Guru* or any representation of the Divine. Next, there is meditation on the formless subtle form (*bindu*). The focus on *bindu* (infinitesimally small point) is followed by the meditation on sound. Finally there is meditation beyond any sound or form, the subtlest unqualified form of the Divine. These are the increasingly subtler stages of meditation. In this way we undertake sequential steps to accomplish complete focus leading to the Ultimate realization (*samadhi*).

When we sit and begin meditation we meditate on the physical form. Why? Just as a child begins writing with big letters and then gradually smaller and finer letters, we also accomplish the preliminary stages of mediation on the physical or material forms and sounds before we are able to proceed to the more subtle forms of meditation. Persistent practice brings success in the objective.



Some wise person has said:

By practicing intense focus diligently, even the dull mind shines and becomes sharp. Just as a rope when rubbed against a stone will eventually leave a mark even on the stone; so is the mind brought under control through repeated effort.

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Oh Arjuna, this mind is controlled through constant practice and detachment to worldly desires (dispassion to worldly enjoyments).

More on the Essentials of *Dhyāna*

One should practice *dhyāna* and strive for maintaining the state of detachment as well. What is *dhyāna*? It is a state of ridding the mind of its constant mental deliberations and thereby attaining of tranquility.” *Dhyāna* is complete focus of the mind, allowing no other thoughts. The untrained mind desires the delights of sense objects, so it persuades the senses, and then the sense organs become active in pursuing those desires. Whatever the mind desires the sense organs follow the lead of the mind. Picture a smorgasbord of delicious dishes presented in a lavish manner. We see the various choices and then the mind observing all the various choices decides which of these dishes to eat. Next, the hand extends to take the food. The mind directs the body, telling it which of these delicacies to eat first. It does not direct the body or hand to take all of the twenty five treats at



once, but only the specific ones chosen by the mind. In this way the desires of the mind are satiated by the activity of the five sense organs and the physical organs.

In the *Katha Upanishad* Yama tells Nachiketa:
The master of the senses is the mind.

How can this mind be controlled? For this purpose *shama* (calmness; control of desires) and *dama* (control of senses; restraining the organs of perception) are employed. To control the senses, the practice of *dama* is required; and to control the mind *shama* is required.²⁴ Until one practices *shama* and *dama*, one cannot control the senses or the mind. The senses feed the information to the mind, and then, the mind becomes active. For example: Where our eyes are focused, so there will be our mind. As our eyes act, so the mind follows. When our eyes are not active, for example looking at an object or person, then our mind also stops. When we are reading a book we focus on what is written. But if we fall asleep while reading, then we no longer have a focus for the mind. Thus, when the eyes are open, the mind is active, but when the eyes are closed, we are no longer aware of what we were reading. After some time, when we awaken, our mind becomes active and we can return to reading again.



The Method of Meditation

In the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna describes a technique for meditation. Lord Krishna says:

Keeping your body, head, and neck erect, unmoving and still; stare over the front of your nose, without allowing the mind to look in any direction.

Lord Krishna is here explaining to Arjuna the art and technique of focused gazing. The meditation of focused seeing that is taught in the *Gita*, is called *samprekshya dhyāna*. It is known in Jainism as *preksha dhyāna*, the meditation of seeing (or *Dristi yoga*). The *Jabaladarshanopanishad* says: “Gaze by making your eyes focused, thereby fixing yourself in *samadhi*”. In the *Upanishads* this is described as *pashyen dhyāna*, focused gazing meditation, and in Buddhism it is called *vipashyana* (literally, “clear seeing,” or “see deeply”). These different traditions speak of this art of ‘focused gazing’ in various ways. But they all agree:

...this mysterious art of seeing is impossible to learn through reading of sacred texts only. Therefore, learn the technique of unlocking this mystery from an accomplished (saint) teacher.

If you attempt to practice this technique without the guidance of an accomplished guide there is a risk of incurring a detrimental result. Instead of benefit one could even be harmed. [Sometimes



incorrect techniques of focusing may even cause damage to the eyeballs].

Saints and sages have unveiled all the mysteries of the spiritual journey and of self-realization in their discourses. All these techniques have been documented in different books. But without an accomplished teacher, we will not be able to grasp the correct technique of true knowledge.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna advises that for learning spiritual knowledge we must seek help from an accomplished seer [either male or female]:

For learning spiritual knowledge you should go to the one who is a seer. Pay your respect to him, serve him and question him and express your desire for learning. Then he will fulfill your desire and answer your questions.

Consider for a moment the nature of the knowledge you wish to learn. After high school, students think about the direction and choose a field of study: liberal arts, commerce, or science. If, for example, students want to learn liberal arts but go to a professor of science instead, will this teacher have much to offer? The students must choose a professor proficient in the knowledge they wish to learn. In the same manner, if you want to acquire



spiritual knowledge, you must go to a spiritually competent teacher.

The appropriate spiritual teacher should be a person who has considered and discovered the realities of *atma* and *anatma*; bondage and liberation, and who practices a spiritual path. Such a teacher must have attained direct experience of Truth through spiritual disciplines. This is the only kind of teacher you should take instruction from. The grace of the teacher is also necessary for success in the spiritual pursuit. When you have learned the methods for inner meditation, you should practice diligently. Moral rectitude is also quite essential in this spiritual pursuit.

This is the seventh limb of yoga, *dhyāna* (meditation; focus). When one has become completely established in *dhyāna* then one attains *Samadhi* (union).

Samadhi: (The State of Divine Union)

*Samadhi*²⁵ is the eighth limb of Yoga. *Samadhi* is of two kinds: One type of *Samadhi* is *samprajanata*—a joyful state in which higher consciousness working through the mind in all stages. The second type is *asamprajanata*. In this type of *samadhi* the mind is completely absorbed in a state of pure awareness and all of one's desires vanish. Generally speaking, the state of *Samadhi*



is achieved when the subject (soul) and the object (God) unite. Duality disappears, and oneness is established. According to the Sant tradition, this state is possible through the practice of the yoga of Divine Sound. Without the practice of Sound yoga, the practitioner will not be able to achieve complete control of the mind.

Sant Kabir speaks about the Divine Sound:

Search the Divine Sound, control your mind. This yoga is accomplished through the means of sound. The true sound is the essence of creation. The physical body and world are not real (i.e., not permanent).

Through the practice of the yoga of light, complete control of the senses is attained (*dama*), and through the yoga of sound the complete control of the mind (*shama*) is accomplished.

Today various types of techniques are taught in the name of the Yoga of Sound. It is uncertain if all of these systems are valid. Some systems instruct the practitioner to close the ears and press them with the hands to hear the murmur of the ears, while others recommend lying down on the ground to listen to the sounds under the earth. Each of these systems calls itself *nadanusandhana*—the yoga of sound. Still some other teachers play beautiful music and recommend becoming absorbed in that music signifying it as the practice of sound. However, none of



these techniques represent the authentic path of the Divine yoga of sound.

With regard to Sound yoga the *Yogshikhopanishad* says:

When one focuses on a finest point and becomes established in this focus, then the divine sound automatically becomes manifest and one is able to perform sound yoga.

At that point of focus our ten senses (cognitive senses and active expressions) are left behind, and we enter in a state of total absorption. When our eleventh sense, the mind, enters into the *ajna- charka* (the third eye) the practitioner is hears the celestial sounds. Vedic seers refer to this *ajna-chakra* as *sushumna* and fakirs of Sufi tradition call it *shahrag*.

Sant Tuls Sahib says:

The path to reach our Beloved lies in shahrag. Why are you wandering in the outer world to find your beloved (God)?

The path leading to God is within your heart. Enter into *ajna-chakra* and you will find your beloved. God is not found not in a manmade *Ka'ba* (Muslim pilgrimage place), but in natural *Ka'ba* (holy place), within your own heart or self. Turn your attention within. You should listen attentively to the reverberating divine sound. The celestial sound is coming to take you back to the source. Remember you cannot hear this



with the physical ears. When you focus your gaze within *ajna chakra* and the consciousness is inverted inward your physical ears automatically will close and the inner ears will open. By that power with inner ears you can hear the celestial sounds. The original sound of the creation comes from the abode of God and it will take you to God.

The *Nadabindu Upanishad* sings the praise of Sound yoga and offers this image:

When a mad (in rut) elephant goes to a banana orchard and destroys and eats the orchard, and the elephant keeper comes and pierces the elephant with a prong, the elephant is brought under control. In the same manner, our mind is like the mad elephant that is wandering in the garden of sense objects and is disciplined by the practice of sound yoga.

This teaches us that when the mind withdraws from the sense objects and goes towards a state that is beyond worldly desires, the mind automatically turns toward God.

Sant Maharishi Mehi says:

Ascending from one sound center to another sound center we reach the OM sound (original sound of the universe). Through this practice we go beyond the cycle of death and birth. When one practices listening to the original sound (OM) then the soul and God become one and unity is established.



Sant Tulsidas also explains with an analogy:

The water of a river that has reached the ocean becomes one with the ocean and no longer has an identity of a river. The river has become part of the ocean.

Just as the water of the river find peace in union with the ocean, in the same manner when the soul unites with God, duality disappears, and the soul becomes tranquil. River is no longer a river it becomes ocean. When the soul (*atman*) is united with the One or God (*Brahman*) it is no longer an individual soul (*Jivatma*), but it is the Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*). This is the highest state of achievement and bliss: the state of complete unity of the Soul and God.

¹ The word *Aryans* is translated as “Noble Ones.”

² This is also the opinion of Shri Maharishi Mehi as expressed by him in the introduction to his book, the *Veda Darśan Yoga*.

³ *Mantra* is a hymn or sacred formula which is used to invoke the presence of various gods in the course of Vedic sacrifices and rituals. The hymns seek contentment, courage, devotion, energy, fearlessness, forgiveness, mercy, good life, happiness, health, intellect, long life, peace, progeny, purification, righteousness, success, victory, wealth, and wisdom.

⁴ “Truth (Reality) is one; the sages speak of it in various ways” is the famous axiom of the *Rig Veda*.

⁵ The Laws of Manu, 2/3

⁶ It is an earliest date assigned to the origins of the Vedas. However, a commonly found consensus dates the Vedas ca. 1500BCE.

⁷ The word *rishi* means a Seer, from *dris*, to see. He is the *Mantra-Drashta*, seer of Mantra or thought. The Rishis experienced the Truth and heard it. Therefore the Vedas are what are heard (*Sruti*). The *Rishis* did not compose them. They were the seers of thought which existed already. The *Rishis* are the discoverers not the inventors of the Vedas.



⁸ “*Akhyā Pravchanat*” (The Jamini Sutra, 1/1/30)

⁹ “*Drishtar rishaya smratarh*,” from the *Sarvanukrama Sutra*

¹⁰ Certainly on the subtle level the thought behind the expressed word can be considered as continuing to reverberate indefinitely.

¹¹ *Shabad* means gross sound as well as subtle sound. The subtle form of sound is considered the basis of creation.

¹² Swami Sivanada elaborates, “The Vedas form the sound-manifestation of Ishvara. That sound has four divisions,— *Para* which finds manifestation only in *Prana*, *Pasyanti* which finds manifestation in the mind, *Madhyama* which finds manifestation in the *Indriyas*, and *Vaikhari* which finds manifestation in articulate expression..” From *Kundalini Yoga*

¹³ Tin Indian thought, time is composed of cycles, called *Yugas*. In each successive *Yuga* the people decline intellectually, morally and spiritually. Hence it is thought that people of later cycles have less mental capacity.

¹⁴ The word *Veda* is derived from the root verb *vid* meaning to know.

¹⁵ *Upanishad* means the inner or mystic teaching. Groups of pupils sat near the teacher to learn the subtle doctrine of self-realization.

¹⁶ “*Ayam Atma Brahma*” and “*Ahambrhamasmi*” are the celebrated sayings of the *Upanishads*

¹⁷ The knowledge of Atman brings the understanding of the unity of *Atman* and *Brahman: Taittvamasi*.

¹⁸ Gosvami Tulsi Das says in the *Ramachariatmanasa*: “The pleasures of heaven are short lived. Having exhausted the results of meritorious acts one is bound to fall below in lower worlds.”

¹⁹ In this analogy, before the complete satisfaction of the final experience, the process is known as *nidhidhyasana*.

²⁰ The Sanskrit word yoga is derived from the root verb ‘yuj’ meaning to ‘yoke’ or to ‘unite’. The goal of Yogic practices is to lead the human soul toward Divine Union.

²¹ The mind in the *Vedanta* texts is considered to be a sense organ which is powered by consciousness.

²² As *Aryans* (literally, noble ones) crossed many steep mountains such as Khybar and Bolan to enter the Spiritual land of India in the same manner we must cross the steep mountains of procrastination and restless mind to enter the inner spiritual states.

²³ The Five Elements: The five gross elements (*bhutas*) constitute the material world as well as the five senses. Earth possesses the property of smell and constitutes the corresponding sense, the nose. Water possesses the property of taste and constitutes the sense of taste. Fire possesses colors and constitutes the



sense of vision. To Air are due the qualities and sense of touch and the qualities of touch. To Ether are due the sense of hearing, the ear and sounds.

In physics, Ether is defined as an all-pervasive, infinitely elastic, massless medium formerly postulated as the medium of propagation of electromagnetic waves.

²⁴ The practices of *shama* and *dama* are not meant for self-affliction, but rather, for cultivating a discriminative intellect. The mind does not control our life as a master—drifting from one desire to another. But we take control our life and lead it to the ultimate realization.

²⁵ Mircea Eliade explains the terminology: "The meanings of the term *Samadhi* are union, totality; absorption in, complete concentration of mind; conjunction." (*Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*)