

Veda is a means of knowledge

An Article by Swami Dayananda Saraswati | Version 1.01

The two sections of the Vedas

The whole Veda is looked upon as an independent means of knowledge. This adjective 'independent', is important because it reveals a certain fact about means of knowledge.

The four Vedas, *R̥g*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva*, are each divided into two sections. The first section deals with *dharma*, religious ethics; *karma*, religious actions, various rituals; *artha*, other special actions to achieve security; and *kāma* pleasures. This section, called the *karma-kāṇḍa*, the "action-section", is very bulky, understandably so because it deals with human desires and the actions needed to fulfill these desires.

The last section of the Veda is called *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the "knowledge-section". Its subject matter is a single desire *mokṣa*, the desire for liberation. The fulfillment of that desire is not through actions, which are many, but through knowledge, which is singular with regard to the particular thing to be known.

Both sections of the Veda are sources of knowledge about things for which one has no other means of knowledge. But the role of the knowledge in each section is different. In the first section there is knowledge about a variety of means or actions which are to be done to gain a variety of unrealized ends. The second section contains knowledge about a single, already-achieved but unrecognized end which is gained through the knowledge itself: gain of the knowledge is the gain of the end.

Words of the Veda as a Means of Knowledge

If the words of the Veda are accepted as a means of knowledge, what it reveals can be arrived at only through this means, and not through the others means of knowledge. When we say the words of the Veda is an independent means of knowledge, it means words reveal knowledge that we cannot gather through the other five means of knowledge.

For example, there is a place called Gomukh, where Ganga emerges. This knowledge I

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gained from someone, who in turn gained it from someone else who went to that place. This particular collection of words is not an instance of words acting as a means of knowledge. Still, the words of the Veda is an independent means of knowledge, because the five means that we have looked at are not adequate to know what the Veda has to reveal. And we know of no other way of gathering knowledge apart from these five means of knowledge. If there is a fact, a phenomenon, to be known that is beyond the scope of these five, it has to be to my benefit. That knowledge should be topic of what we call a means of knowledge in the form of words.

The subject matter of Veda has nothing to do with a topic that can be the scope of the other five means of knowledge. The topic made known by the Veda has to be something that cannot be arrived at by any of the other known means of perception or inference (*anadhigatam*).

It can be argued that a fire ritual like *agni-hotra* is a simple *karma* that someone could have conceived of. Even conceding that, still, there is no way of figuring out that it is a means for getting a favorable result or *punya*, or that this *punya* is an unseen result that manifests later. All these are not within the scope of the means of knowledge we have available to us, but they are understandable. This particular means-end connection cannot be known in any other way than by the words of the Veda. Therefore, the subject matter of the Veda is what cannot be arrived at by the five means of knowledge. Only then is the Veda an independent means of knowledge. As an independent means of knowledge, it does not require any corroboration. In order for a means of knowledge to be considered independent, what is arrived at by it cannot be arrived at in any other way.

Inference can be converted into direct knowledge. Whether or not there is fire where the smoke is seen can be verified. But when you are dealing with sub-atomic particles, for instance, it is knowledge that will always be indirect. The Veda also reveals this kind of knowledge; it talks about an always remote heaven, for example. We simply have to accept it, because it is knowledge born of something other than perception or inference. It cannot be refuted, because

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what it talks about is not refutable. If it contradicts something you know, then it is already refuted.

This knowledge was received in the form of words as a means of knowledge by the Rishis through the grace of the Lord. A Rishi is someone who sees, but not through the senses. The knowledge that he receives is revealed to him and revealed knowledge is something that cannot be contradicted, (*abādhitam*). Further, it must have the capacity to reveal something useful, (*phalavat arthabodhakatvam*), and it should not fall with the five means of knowledge (*anadhigata*). This is the general definition for a means of knowledge in the forms of words as the Veda.

If this is the definition of the Veda as a means of knowledge, then is there a way one can contradict this means of knowledge by another means of knowledge? A means of knowledge is something that is to be used and then understood in terms of what it is revealing. If the Veda says something, how am I to contradict it? A means of knowledge is a proof by itself (*svataḥ-pramāṇa*). Perception and inference can be verified, being within the scope of our knowledge and having as their scope things that can be objectified. But what the Veda says is proof in itself. It is taken as an independent means of knowledge.

The section about action: various means and ends

The *karma-kāṇḍa* is the source of the special religious actions - rituals, prayers, meditations needed for gaining of security and pleasure in this world and hereafter.

The Veda reveals a number of means and ends. For example, “The one who desires heaven should perform the *jyotiṣṭoma* ritual, *svarga-kāmaḥ jyotiṣṭomeṇa yajeta*. The means and end are for a person with a desire to go to heaven. How does he come to desire heaven? It is like a commercial. A commercial introduces a new product that you have not heard of, and then makes you desire that product and sells it to you. Similarly, the Veda itself tells you about the existence of heaven, its desirability, and the advantages of being there. A desire is created in you

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for it, since you are looking for a place that offers happiness that is not inhibited by pain. The Veda itself does the tourism promotion for going to heaven. It also gives an option—heaven can also be gained by doing daily and occasional duties (*nitya-naimittika-karma*). It connects you with a certain means or discipline promising heaven later. The means of the *jyotiṣṭoma* ritual is unknown to me, and so is the end, heaven. There are two unknowns. Neither can be arrived at by perception or inference. I cannot prove that it is not true, nor that it is useful. The section dealing with the *jyotiṣṭoma* in the Veda tells who can do this, what are the results, etc. Here, both the end and the means are unknown.

The Veda also gives us unknown means for known ends. For instance, in the ritual prescribed for the birth of a child, (*putra-kāmeṣṭi*), the desire for the end, a child (*putra*), is known. Because it is something known, there can be a desire for it. Through the ritual, *putra-kāmeṣṭi*, an unseen result is produced to meet with any undesirable unseen result that is obstructing the fulfillment of the desire, thus neutralizing the obstacles.

We have seen that the subject matter of the Veda has *anadhigatatvam*—a subject matter that cannot be revealed by any other means of knowledge—and cannot be negated (*abādhita*). It also must reveal something useful (*phalavat arthabodhakatvam*). This has to be understood.

The words of the Veda are deliberate. They have results and a subject matter useful for one thing or the other. If progeny is not what we want, then we turn the page to one that has something for us. Desires and people are many. Likes and dislikes are varied. Means and ends are also different. A known means, like charity has an unknown end, like heaven. Unknown means can have known or unknown ends. This is the Veda's subject matter. It is not scientific because it is beyond our means of knowledge. Nor does it talk about what is beyond us. The entire collection of words in the Veda is looked upon as a means of knowledge. As such, it cannot be negated (*abādhita*), is not known by another means of knowledge (*anadhigata*), and reveals

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something useful (*phalavat arthabodhakatvam*).

The section about knowledge: accomplishing the already accomplished

The Veda tells us that heavens exist, but they tell us that heaven is not our goal. Heaven, as well as any place of pain, is only temporary, because they are within the fold of time. You go there and you come back. According to the Veda, since heaven is not a final destination, the very effort to get there is meaningless. So although the Veda provides methods for going to heaven, they also point out its limitations and ask you to consider why you want to go there.

You may say you want to go to heaven because you want to be free from suffering. Yet you won't be free, because even there you will have a boss—Indra, the ruler of heaven. You may say that as a denizen in heaven, you will have a better standard of living than you now have. But there, too, you will only be an employee. Moreover, another denizen may have a more prestigious job. So in heaven, too, there will be a lot of comparison. The Veda says that in heaven there are different classes of celestial denizens, enjoying varying degrees of happiness. There is a *karma-deva*, a *deva*, an Indra, a *Bṛhaspati*, a *Prajāpati*, in ascending order of rank and degree of happiness. Therefore, even in heaven there is comparative degrees of happiness. Thus, the Veda does not present heaven as the ultimate end.

You may say, “I want to go to heaven because as I am now, I am not okay.” Then I would ask why you don't become okay. You have so much time available here to work on being okay. “I don't think I will ever be okay.” So you have made two conclusions: “I am not okay” and “I don't think I will ever be okay.” What is the basis of your conclusions? “I am over forty years old now.” What does it mean to be over forty? You come to realize that your attempts to make happiness last have not worked. You still feel incomplete. If you are an Indian, perhaps you came to America. Then you got the green card, thinking that once you obtained the green card, everything would work out, but even after getting it, you haven't changed much. Then you thought that if you got married, you'd be okay—you'd find that elusive everlasting happiness. But even marriage didn't make you feel totally okay. You thought that if you had a child, you

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would be okay. After having the child, you find that, well, you're okay but also not okay. Then you say, "Swamiji, now that I have a child, I don't want to be here—I want to go to India." Well, all right, go to India. "I can't go to India yet, Swamiji. I think I should have some more money before I go." When will you get that extra money so that you can freely go to India and educate your children there? Year after year, you go on postponing the trip. Your child has become a teenager by now. He comes home at eleven, twelve o'clock at night, and is not available even to talk to. So how will you take him to India? When are you going to talk to that teenager?

Naturally, having gone through these experiences, you now have a middle-age crisis. It is not that there were no crises before middle age, but before this time, you always thought you would solve them. By the time you reach middle age, you find that what you have been doing doesn't work. And your psychological system also doesn't wait for you to straighten out your life to your liking. All kinds of psychological problems start at this time; unresolved issues from your childhood surface. And thus, not only do you feel that you are not okay, you conclude that there is no possibility of being okay. Then, when somebody promises that in heaven you will be okay, you are eager to believe it. You hold onto that belief for dear life. You hope to go to heaven in order to be happy, and until then, you live like a zombie, because that belief system has given you no hope for this life. It only instructs you to about what you need to do so that you will be allowed into heaven. Even after following all the instructions, you will have to wait for judgment day.

The two-fold conclusion that I am not well, and that I can never be well, is a belief that people somehow live with. Vedanta challenges this belief and asks whether you have really inquired into yourself before arriving at this conclusion. You may say, "Yes, I think about myself all the time. Not a day goes by that I don't think about myself. Every morning when I wake up, I think about the kind of life I live and wonder why I should get up." This erroneous belief you hold about yourself is *avicāra-siddha*, established without inquiry. Because it is arrived at without *vicāra*, inquiry, it is merely a notion. And it is a commonly held notion. What you are immediately aware of—a physical body, mind, and sense complex—seems to be you. You feel

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limited by it and therefore feel like an insignificant person. Naturally, then, nothing is okay with you.

What Vedanta has to say about you completely negates your notion about yourself. And what it says about you is verifiable. While other traditions may also say that you are limitless, only Vedanta is a teaching tradition, a means of knowledge, which will allow you to clearly see yourself as limitless. The words of Vedanta handled by the teacher point out that what you think about yourself is not true and that you are, in fact, the whole. As you listen to the words, you verify the fact for yourself. Since it is yourself that is talked about, it is verifiable. Vedanta doesn't talk about heaven; it talks about you, the one who wants to go to heaven. It shows how, in your pursuit of all pleasurable things, you are really seeking only yourself.

So the first section of the Veda contains the knowledge of how to do a variety of actions which can produce given results now or later. This scriptural "how to" knowledge is a knowledge not found elsewhere. The knowledge itself does not produce the desired result, but tells us how to do the actions that will produce the results. The mere knowledge of action is not an end in itself. Anything to be achieved in time depends upon effort. Knowledge of the special efforts that achieve a chosen end is necessary to gain that end; but that knowledge is not the end itself. Knowledge does not gain the end. Action gains the end. Knowledge tells what actions to perform.

On the other hand, if what is desired to be achieved is already an accomplished but unrecognized fact, then knowledge is an end in itself. This is the kind of knowledge that is the subject matter of *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the second section of the Veda, called Vedanta. This section deals with the adequate, limitless self that everyone wants to be. If the adequate, limitless self is my nature, unrecognized by me, then knowledge of that fact makes me the gainer of what I seek. Knowledge and the end are identical when what one wants to gain is already a gained fact.