



Leela Kaivalya Vahini

Divine Discourses of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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1. Leela Kaivalya Vahini

Editor's Introduction

When Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba started the Sanathana Sarathi magazine in February 1958, He wrote an article for the magazine every month from the very first issue, and continued writing without any break all the way up to October 1984. All these articles were written in perfect sequence and have been compiled in the form of books called the Vahini series. *Vahini* means Stream or River in Sanskrit and a few other Indian languages.

The 16th and final book of Vahini series was named " **Leela Kaivalya Vahini**" (Stream of cosmic consciousness divine) by Swami.

Stream of Divine Cosmic Play

Spiritual exercises like worship, singing hymns of adoration, and meditation are prompted by devotion to higher powers. Controversy about their efficacy should not be indulged in by those who are unaware of the depths and heights to which they can lead. These depths and heights can be gained and judged only through actual practice. The proof lies only in one's personal experience.

The longing for the supersensory spiritual life is aroused in the seeker either by a quest for fundamental principles or by the feeling of a need for lasting joy. Mere longing will not grant success. Spiritual exercise has to be undertaken. It is important also to examine oneself and assess in detail one's aspirations and attitudes before embarking on the process.

Wisdom through meditation becomes authentic

Contemporary religions, which profess to guide seekers in this task, don't infuse confidence in youth. The youth feel that some of these religions have been shaped by conditions of the era in which they emerged. Many have

become outdated. Some are specifically linked to regions or states. Some have been imposed and moulded by foreign people. And some strike them as indecent and injurious. Young aspirants for higher life feel they will be ridiculed if they practise these religions. So, instead, they indulge in incessant talk and the turning over of pages of thousands of books! They stay away even from the first step of spiritual discipline as prescribed in any of the many religions. Such are the critics and controversialists who relish the confusion they create.

Far more valuable than the scholarship gathered from a million books is the grain of wisdom gained through a session of meditation. That flash of wisdom (jnana), however slight, is a precious acquisition. It is the product of personal spiritual exercise (sadhana) and indisputable authentic experience. As one cultivates and develops this grain of wisdom, controversy and criticism will cease. All arguments will be only with one's lower self, until the truth stands revealed. Self-confidence is essential for a person to enter on this path of spiritual practice.

Joy and peace of a spiritual life

A word to those who are overwhelmed by the burden of worldly responsibilities and anxieties and to those who find themselves unable to pray to the Highest, either because they have condemned themselves as undeserving or because they have no faith in the Highest. Enormous is the number of those who live their days in joy. You too were joyful and are so now. But everyone is destined to disappear one day, as generations have already done. Therefore, everyone must desire and adopt every means to attain not only joy but, what is far more valuable, peace of mind and an ideal exemplary life.

Born as a human being, one should not disown the unique nature of humans. One should not forget even for a moment the genuine characteristics of humans. One should never degrade oneself to the level of beasts - or a level that is far worse and despicable, that of demonic beings (asuras). One must firmly resolve not to allow themselves to fall into these depths. Only the spiritual

path can arouse and sustain that resolution, that alone can awaken and strengthen such yearning.

It is necessary to emphasise that, in order to successfully confront the problems that arise in one's daily living, one has to possess intelligence and skill, in addition to the qualities of justice, virtue, and spiritual excellence. Both intelligence and skill are essential for progress, as essential as two wings for a bird or two wheels for a cart. The importance of the higher path that leads to the Highest can be realised only by experiencing and understanding the world.

The world is a cosmic play

The world is enchanting, because it is a tantalising appearance, though it is fundamentally untrue. It is a phenomenon that is fading out. When this truth is realised, one becomes aware of the cosmic sport of God and the eternal universal Being.

This state of consciousness cannot be won through the piling of wealth or worldly power or the acquisition of knowledge and skill. It can be won through the purification of one's consciousness in all its facets and the earnestness with which the search is pursued.

During that search, there naturally arise various obstacles, like doubts and dogmas, purposeless arguments, and flimsy fancies. From the coming New Year Festival Day (Yugadi), this series, under the name "Divine Cosmic Play (Leela Kaivalya Vahini)" will dissolve all such obstacles and fill you with spiritual bliss (ananda). It will lead you to the path of spiritual progress. Meanwhile, await the message.

Veda is the very breath of God

Spiritual aspirant: All those who are loyal to Bharathiya (Indian) culture accept the Vedas as authoritative sources for every aspect of life. They assert that the Vedas are the roots of their faith. What exactly does Veda mean? Why has

the Veda acquired such importance?

Sai: My dear fellow! You were born in India, that is, Bharath, and you parade yourself as a Bharathiya, but you aren't aware of what Veda means! Well. Veda is the name for a mass of divine knowledge. Veda teaches the truth that cannot be revised or reversed by the passage of time through the three stages - past, present, and future. The Veda ensures welfare and happiness for the three worlds. It confers peace and security on human society. The Veda is the collation of words that are truth, that were visualised by sages who had attained the capacity to receive them into their enlightened awareness. In reality, the Word is the very breath of God, the Supreme Person. The unique importance of the Veda rests on this fact.

Veda includes all spiritual knowledge

Spiritual aspirant: But in the field of worldly life, on the daily, material stage, what light can one expect from the Vedas?

Sai: Every being that lives in the world strives to possess what it desires and avoid what it dislikes. Know that the Veda instructs how to succeed in both these endeavours. That is to say, it lays down what has to be done and what should not be done. When these prescriptions and prohibitions are followed, one can earn the good and avoid the evil. Veda is concerned with both the material and the spiritual, both this world and the beyond. If the truth must be told, all life is Veda-filled. One cannot but observe its injunctions.

Veda is derived from vid, which means "to know". So Veda means and includes all spiritual knowledge (jnana). People are distinguished from other animals by the spiritual wisdom (jnana) with which they are endowed. Devoid of spiritual wisdom, they are only beasts.

One Veda, divided into five collections

Spiritual aspirant: They say that the Vedas are numberless, without end (ananta). Are they all full repositories of spiritual wisdom (jnana)?

Sai: "The Vedas are infinite (anantho vai Vedah)." But note that, in the beginning, there was just one Veda. Later, it was dealt with as three and subsequently as four.

Spiritual aspirant: Why was the one divided into many? What special need was met thereby?

Sai: Since the Veda was vast and limitless, it was difficult for ordinary men to study it. Moreover, it would take endless time to complete the study. So, those who wished to learn were overwhelmed by fear, and very few showed earnestness to study the Veda. Something had to be done to bring the study within reach of those who sought to learn. Therefore, the hymns of praise in the Veda were separated from the rest and grouped under the titles Rik-samhitha and Yajus-samhitha. The verses capable of musical rendering (sama verses) were collected under the title Sama-samhitha, and the mantras (formulae and spells) were grouped under Atharva-samhitha (fourth collection).

Spiritual aspirant: Who grouped them into these collections?

Sai: It was Vyasa, who was a partial manifestation of Narayana (God, Vishnu) Himself and son of Sage Parasara. He had mastered the scriptures and spiritual treatises. He himself was a great sage. He was a skillful coordinator. In order to promote the welfare of mankind, he compiled the Veda into four parts and facilitated righteous living by all. He divided the Veda into four and prepared five collections (samhithas).

Divisions of Veda correspond to spiritual stages

Spiritual aspirant: The four Vedas are the four collections, as you just explained. How did the extra one arise? What purpose does it serve?

Sai: The Yajus-samhitha has separated itself into two, the Krishna Yajur veda collection and the Sukla Yajur veda collection. So the total became five. The process didn't stop there. Each collection developed three separate

complementary components. These scriptural texts emerged in order to enlighten people in different states of awareness and different levels of consciousness. The purpose was to enable everyone to benefit by the guidance and thus to cross the sea of suffering. Therefore, there is no trace of conflict in any of these texts.

Spiritual aspirant: What are those three elaborations, those three subsidiary texts, called?

Sai : Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads.

Spiritual aspirant: What are the Brahmanas?

Sai: They are explanatory texts that deal with ritual formulae (mantras). They describe clearly the sacrificial rites and ceremonies that have to be observed while performing them. There are many such texts, for example, Aithareya Brahmana, Taithiriya Brahmana, Sathapatha Brahmana, and Gopatha Brahmana.

Spiritual aspirant: And, what are Aranyakas?

Sai: Aranya means "forest". Thus, these texts, in verse and prose, are to be perused and meditated upon silently in lonely hermitages. They are intended mainly for the guidance of those who, after passing through the stages of spiritual studies (brahma-charya) and family life (grihastha), assume life as recluses in forests (vanaprastha). They deal with the duties and responsibilities of the final stage of active life, the stage preliminary to the totally spiritual stage (Brahma-kanda)

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! I have heard the term Brahma-kanda used for some texts. What does it relate to?

Sai : Those texts are concerned with sacrificial rites as well as rules of right conduct. They deal with the special features of ceremonial rituals and special elaborations of moral codes.

Upanishads form Vedanta, highest spirituality

Spiritual aspirant: And, Swami, what are Upanishads?

Sai: They can be mastered only by intelligent discrimination (viveka). They deserve to be so mastered. Four goals are laid down for humans in the scriptures: righteousness (dharma), prosperity (artha), moral desire (kama), and liberation (moksha). Learning (vidya) can be classified under two heads: The lower and the higher. While the four Vedas, the earlier portion of ancient scriptures, deal with the first three, lower, goals, the later portion of the ancient scriptures, the Upanishads, deal with the last, the higher, goal.

Spiritual aspirant: But how did the word Vedanta (meaning the doctrine of the identity of Brahman and the Atma) arise?

Sai: These Upanishads themselves form the Vedanta. Memorising the Vedas is of no avail; Vedanta has to be understood and assimilated. Knowledge can never reach consummation until Vedanta is mastered

Vedas bear nine names, or features

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! Why are the Vedas often referred to as that which was heard (sruthi)?

Sai: The Vedas are denoted by nine names, and Sruthi is only one of the nine.

Spiritual aspirant: What are the nine names?

Sai: Sruthi, Anusrava, Thrayee, Amnaya, Namamnaya, Chandas, Swadhyaya, Agama, Nigamagama.

Spiritual aspirant: Each of these names must indicate some distinct feature. I would like to know how they arose and what those features are. Please

instruct me.

Sai: Of course, those names have inner meanings. sruthi means "That which was heard". The guru chants the Vedic hymn, and the pupil listens with one-pointed attention and reproduces it with the same voice modulations. This process is repeated until the pupil masters the hymn. Hence, the name sruthi is relevant.

The name Anusrava means the same, "That which was heard serially."

Now, the word Thrayee. It means "the Three". In the beginning there were only three collations in the Vedic scriptures - the Rig, Yajur, and Sama vedas. These three alone were considered important. So this word was used, and it has stayed.

The word "amnaya" is derived from the root "mna" which means "learn". Since the Vedas had to be learned continuously and in a steadfast manner, they were collectively known as Amnaya and also as Namamnaya.

"Chandas" means a poetic metre, which can be set to music, as in Sama veda. So the Vedas themselves were indicated by that name.

The name Swadhyaya was applied to the Vedas because they were handed down from father to son and generation to generation by the process of teaching and learning (swadhyaya).

Agama means "that which has come, originated". "Nigamagama" is an elaboration of the same word. The Vedas originated from the breath of God, and each syllable is sacred. Each word is a mantra. The Vedas are all mantras.

Vedic mantras are powerful aids to liberation

Spiritual aspirant: mantra? What does that mean?

Sai: Mantra is the exposition of the goal that is set. That is to say, mantra is that which prompts and promotes probing through the mind (manana). The syllable "man" indicates the process of probing, and the syllable "thra" means "the capacity to take across, to liberate, to save". In short, mantra is that which saves when the mind dwells upon it.

While rites and ritual sacrifices are performed, people have to remind themselves constantly of their nature and significance. To achieve this end, they have to repeat certain formulae, called mantras. But, today, those who perform the rites either recite the mantras mechanically or allow them to roll on the tongue. They pay no attention to the meaning of the mantra. When mantras are uttered as rigmarole, they yield no fruit! People can reap the full reward only when they recite the mantras with knowledge of the meaning and significance. Each Veda has many branches, and the total direction and purpose of each branch has also to be known by the Vedic scholar.

Spiritual aspirant: What are branches (sakhas)?

Sai: Sakha means "limb" a text that arises out of the main Veda. A tree has branches, and each branch has twigs and bunches of leaves. When all these are conceived together, the tree emerges. Each Veda has a large number of main branches and subsidiary branches. Not all have come to light. Only a few have been identified and studied. The number of branches lost from memory and practice adds up to thousands and even lakhs (hundred thousands). Even their names have disappeared, and no one can recall them. This is why the scriptures declare, "The Vedas are endless (Anantho Vai Vedah)." As a result, each of the great saints and sages took up for study and practice only a few branches from one Veda or other.

Agni (Fire God) is most adored in the Rig veda

Spiritual aspirant: What is the Rig veda? How was that name applied to it?

Sai: Rig veda is the collection of mantras or hymns in praise of Gods. The term Rig veda can also apply to the Gods who are praised.

Spiritual aspirant: Which God is most adored and glorified in this Veda?

Sai: Many Gods are praised in it. The Rig veda deals with thirty-three of them as important.

Spiritual aspirant: Do these Gods have specially distinct forms, or are they of the human form?

Sai: They have forms akin to the human.

Spiritual aspirant: Please instruct me on their form (swarupa) - at least, about one or two of them.

Sai: Surya, the Sun God, has "rays" as His arms. The flames of Agni, the Fire God, are His tongues. This is how they are pictured.

Agni, the Fire God, is born when hardwood (arani) is churned. Agni has parents, but as soon as He is born, He eats up His father and mother, that is to say, the pieces of wood whose friction produced the spark. Agni is described as having ten maids. They are the ten fingers that hold the hardwood and operate it.

Since Agni is born every time the stick of hardwood is ritually operated, He is called the Multiborn. The column of smoke (dhuma) indicates His presence; it is His flag (kethu), so to say. Therefore, He has another name by which He is invited: Dhuma Kethu.

Agni is also named Yajna-Sarathi (the charioteer for the sacrifice), for He brings to the place of sacrifice, in a chariot, the Gods to whom offerings are made in the ceremonial flames. He conveys the offerings to the Gods to whom they are dedicated. In every sacrificial rite (yajna), Agni is the most important participant. So, He is praised as of ciating in all four roles: priest, reciter of prayers, performer of rites, and Brahma (supervisor of ritual).

Agni is the closest friend of humanity, for without fire a person can scarcely

hold on to life. The principle of fire is at the basis of human activity - both inside the body and outside. So, Agni is addressed as Master of the home (Grihapathi). Agni has no preferences and no prejudices. Agni treats all living beings, all races and castes equally, with no distinction. Therefore, He is addressed as Equal Friend (Samamithra).

Rig veda proclaims universal unity

Spiritual aspirant: What is the main lesson taught by the Rig veda?

Sai: The Rig veda teaches unity. It exhorts all people to pursue the same holy desires. All hearts must be charged with the same good urge; all thoughts must be directed by good motives toward good ends. All must tread the one Path of Truth, for all are but manifestations of the One. Today, people believe that the lesson of the unity of mankind is quite new and that the idea of progressing toward it is very praiseworthy. But the concept of human unity is not at all new. In Rig-vedic times, the concept was proclaimed much more clearly and emphatically than now. It is the preeminent ideal of the Rig veda.

All are parts of God, His power, His energy. The Atma that is the Reality in everyone is, in truth, the One manifesting as the many. The Veda demands that difference and distinction should not be imposed. This universal inclusive outlook is absent among men today. People have multiplied differences and conflicts, and their lives have become narrow and restricted. In the ancient past, the Rig veda pulled down restrictive barriers and narrow feelings and proclaimed unity.

Yajur veda describes methods of sacrifices

Spiritual aspirant: What is the Yajur veda? Why is it known by that name?

Sai: The name is derived from the root "yaj". It has a large number of derivatives, each with a particular meaning. But the meanings most current are "worship of God" and "charity, granting gifts". The Yajur veda describes the modes and methods of performing sacrifices and rites (yajnas and yagas)

to propitiate the Gods. Adhwara also means "a sacrifice", so the Yajur veda is sometimes referred to as Adhwara Veda.

Spiritual aspirant: What lesson does the Yajur veda convey?

Sai: The Yajur veda has two recensions (editorial revisions), one centering around the tradition of Sun (Aditya) and the other around the tradition of Brahma. The latter is called Krishna (Dark) Yajur veda; the former, Sukla (White) Yajur veda. The Krishna Yajur veda is widely current in South India, while the Sukla Yajur veda prevails in North India. The Krishna recension is closer to the hymns of the Rig veda collection. The mantras or formulae contained in it are used in the worship of Gods and while placing offerings to the Gods in the sacrificial fire.

The Krishna Yajur veda contains eighty-six branches (sakhas), each with its special explanatory texts. But they have mostly disappeared from memory for want of people to study and practise them. Only four have survived. Eighty-two have been drowned in the whirlpool of time.

Sukla Yajur veda had seventeen noteworthy branches, but they too have succumbed to the ravages of time. Only two of them are now available. When we consider how momentous and meaningful these two are, one has to conclude that the unique value of this Veda is well-nigh indescribable.

No one can fulfil the task of estimating the glory and grandeur of the Vedas. The Vedas are unreachable by means of either language or imagination - "that from which words recoil, inaccessible even to the mind (yatho vachonivarthanthe, aprapya manasa sah)." Know that this is the truth and exult that you could know that this is the truth and exult that you could know it thus. Those who have become aware of this are really blessed; diving into the depth, they have gained the precious gem; they have won the goal of life, the purusha-artha.

Veda contains pure or untainted wisdom

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! You said the Veda is known by nine other names. Does it have more?

Sai: Ah! Can it be designated by only nine? It has many more names. For example, it is known as Prusni, also as Prathamaja. The names reveal the various facets of the Veda, the context and character of the teachings.

Spiritual aspirant: Prusni? What does it mean?

Sai: The Almighty (Parameswara) is Prusnigarbha (He who contains all clarity and wisdom). Prusni connotes purity, clarity, and sanctity. So the word indicates that the Almighty has intelligence that is devoid of taint of any kind. The Veda is the concretisation in words of that wisdom. Sages who possess purified consciousness and clarified intellect win the grace of the all-pervasive Brahman (Cosmic Self). Brahman prompts them and blesses them to visualise the hymns and sacred formulae (mantras). While adoring the Almighty, they became aware of the truth, they too recognised and described Brahman as Prusnigarbha.

The sages who visualised the mantras were not bound by the consequent coils of works (karma); they merge in Brahman and emerge from Brahman when the cycle of manifestation starts again. So, they are hailed as unborn. The Veda acclaims them thus. Their very nature is immaculate purity. Therefore, they too are called Prusni. They yearned so agonisingly for grace that, in the state of superconsciousness (samadhi), Brahman manifested out of self-will and awarded them the vision of Brahma Yajna.

Mantras are revealed to holy sages

Spiritual aspirant: What is Brahma Yajna?

Sai: Brahma Yajna is intense study and observance of the Veda (i.e. swadhyaya). The sages who are "unborn" and therefore authorised by Brahman to transmit the truth formulated (according to the vision they earned) sacrificial rites designed to promote peace and prosperity in the

world. The Vedas acknowledge as sages only those who treasure in their hearts awareness of mantras, of the supreme truth, and of the meaning and significance of Brahman (the Cosmic Self) and dharma (the laws of social harmony and individual rights and duties). The ritual sacrifices authorised and accepted by such sages are called yajnas.

Yearning for truth is asceticism (tapas). Since Brahman is won through asceticism, Brahman is referred to as "attained by asceticism" (thapojā). Brahman's response to the asceticism is described as the Word of God (Devavak) and the Voice of God (Deva-vani).

Thapojā literally means "born of asceticism", but this does not imply that the Cosmic Self (Brahman) was non-existent until asceticism brought It forth! Brahman is ever-existent; It has no beginning; time does not affect It. "Born of asceticism" means that "It revealed Itself to the person who underwent the asceticism." It ever IS; It has willed to be so. It projected Itself as the Word (Vak).

The Word is the mantra of the Veda. So, the Almighty is described in the Veda as the Designer of Mantra and the Creator of Rishis, besides the names that occur at some place or other, like Self-emergent, born of asceticism, etc.

I mentioned the name Prusnigarbha. That is a very meaningful name for the Almighty. It signifies food, water, immortalising nectar, and the wisdom of the Veda. Since the Almighty Brahman has all these in Him, in the womb (garbha), so to say, He is named Prusnigarbha. Brahman is thus declaring His own Reality as the form of Veda.

The "first born" in the Vedas

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! You also mentioned the name Prathamaja. What does it mean?

Sai: The Three (Thrayee), that is to say, the Veda, is extolled as "primal-born (Prathamaja)" in the Veda. The statement "Study the Three (Upasthaya

Prathamajam)" reveals the belief that higher learning could be attained by the revered study of the Primal-born. Unless one studies the sacred Word of the Veda (Veda-vak) with humility, one cannot master knowledge of Brahman. This requires not the verbal recitation of the Veda but constant "service", conscious worship of the Veda with full awareness of what the word means and commands. This has been made plain in that statement.

Spiritual aspirant: Swami, in which Veda does the name Prathamaja occur?

Sai: In the Rig veda. Understand that Prathamaja and another similar expression, Purvaja (primeval), indicate the impossibility of discovering when the Veda was first revealed. It is beginningless. It is for this reason that Sage Valmiki has praised this word, as the first imperceptible mysterious word. The first concretisation of the Cosmic Will was the person with the cosmic womb (Hiranyagarbha), who is called primal-born (Prathamaja). Knowledge of the Impersonal and its projection as Personal (Brahma-vidya) is also Primal Awareness, according to the Veda. Both Brahman and the cosmic wombed Hiranyagarbha are sometimes referred to as Primal-born (Prathamaja).

Spiritual aspirant: Of these two - Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman) and the cosmic womb Hiranyagarbha - which is really the first (prathama)?

Sai: Supreme Brahman is the very first. It always is and has been. Hiranyagarbha was born from It, and the Veda also emanated from it. The appellation "First-born (Prathamaja) is very apt for the Vedas. Since the sages heard and pronounced the Veda, it is also named "Related to the Sages (Arsha)".

Veda is the source of dharma, or moral life, righteous behaviour. Those who observe the norms relating to duties and taboos as laid down in the Veda and as interpreted by the Mimamsa rule deserve the name "dharma adherents". Those who interpret them according to their own desires are anti-dharma-adherents.

Vedas are highly potent revelations

Spiritual aspirant: Arsha? What does that mean?

Sai: Veda is itself called Rishi (Sage), and since it is revealed by the seers, it is also called "Arsha". The Vedas are the expression of the highly spiritualised vision of sages. The Vedic mantras are the precious treasure garnered by sages for liberating people. Thus sayeth the Rig veda.

The Brahman concept of the Vedas is also denoted by a word that has sa as the end syllable. For this reason, Veda means wealth (dhana), wisdom (jnana), and the highest potence (param-aiswarya). The wealth indicated here is distinct from worldly gains and possessions. It is the means by which the supreme goal can be attained. In other words, the wealth acquired through the grace of Mother Veda (Veda-matha) is the most potent wisdom itself. For this reason, the Vedic sages prayed thus:

God! You are the very embodiment of the Veda. Fill me, not with the burden of cattle and children but with the wisdom that is the source of the highest potence (param-aiswarya). I shall be fully content with that wealth (dhana). And since such wealth is capable of being utilised for your service, you too will be glad when I have it.

Recite Vedas with full awareness of meaning

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! Today, we don't find feelings that produce such prayers anywhere among men. People repeat these Vedic prayers as gramophone records do, without any knowledge of their meanings, out of sheer habit. Don't they? Do they get the wisdom that is the most precious treasure of God?

Sai: My dear fellow! You yourself said now that they recite the Veda as gramophone records do, didn't you? So they gain as much wisdom and power as those records get - how could they acquire the treasure of full potence? Planting a branch that has been severed, can one claim that a tree is growing there? Those who recite the Vedas with the awareness of their meaning,

experiencing at the same time the feelings embedded in the hymns - they alone can earn the grace of Brahman, the knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), the highest wisdom, the supreme treasure.

Veda is intuitive wisdom through adherence to moral codes

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! Generally speaking, everyone craves wealth. But what form of wealth is to be craved? What form is approved by the Veda? What has the Veda said about this? Instruct me.

Sai: "Veda is the highest treasure (Vedam paramaiswaryam)" "That which gives instruction is known as Veda (Vedayathithi Vedah)." "Get instructed by that Veda (Sah Vedasthwam)." Wealth (dhana) is desired and sought out as a means for prosperity and progress. So, God is also known as Wealth (Artha). The Veda announces that intuitive wisdom (jnana) constitutes the riches (dhana), the means by which the Almighty is attained; this alone deserves the name "Vedas" or Vedic truth. Vedic scripture asserts that such wealth alone can confer the joy of satisfaction to both the worshiper and worshiped. The Rig veda extols this form of wealth and refers to it as Sruthyam, for it is the type described and recommended in the Vedic scripture (sruthi). The Veda approves as Vedic only the wealth that is earned through adherence to the moral codes laid down clearly for human guidance.

Spiritual aspirant: Sruthyam? What does that mean, Swami?

Veda is the source of all moral codes

Sai: A prosperous person (srimantha) is one who is happily endowed with children and grandchildren and who is successful in worldly ambitions beyond even surprising heights. But moral excellence is a more valuable possession. This wealth is the concrete result of Vedic injunctions. It is called dharma or righteous action.

The Ramayana extols Rama as dharma personified (Vigrahavan Dharma). "Dharma sustains all beings (sarva-bhuthanam dharanath, dharmah)."

Dharma is the support (dharana) for all beings. Hence, Veda is named dharma. The Almighty is that support and sustenance; the most effective mode of worship is the offering of dharma. So, the Almighty Itself is identified with the word dharma. That name is therefore meaningful.

The entire cosmos projected by the Almighty is established on dharma (dharmo viswasya jagathah prathista).

Dharma, imbued with profound sanctity, is being interpreted by people in accordance with their whims and fancies, their selfish interests. Hence, it has been severely distorted. The words Veda and God (Deva) take on new meanings and implications. The process can be clearly recognised in Vedic literature.

Itself It Knows All
Swayam Sarvam Vetthi-ithi Vedah

This statement reveals that Veda is the omniscient Brahman Itself. Vedic scripture is Its embodiment.

Swaha is invocation for offering oblations to Divinity

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! In the mantras in the Vedas, the word swaha occurs frequently. What does it mean?

Sai : Good! That word is generally taken to indicate only an expression used while offering oblations in ceremonially lit fire. People imagine that it is not a Vedic word. They argue that it is a technical expression applicable to rituals only.

But a deity named Swaha Devi is invoked by that word. Since the word is full of potency, it is revered as the manifestation of the Deity presiding over

speech. And it also connotes "the offering of sacramental food to the Gods." So the word has two meanings.

When sacramental food or other offerings are made to Divinity under its various forms and in its various names, this word, swaha, is used. However, when one invokes one's ancestors and invites them to accept ritual offerings, the expression used is swadha, not swaha.

The rites prescribed as unavoidable for daily life, as well as those that are laid down as optional for the observance of certain holy days, all have to begin with swaha pronounced along with the sips of sanctified water. Generally speaking, there are no ritual offerings in the sacred fire without the accompaniment of the mantras swaha or swadha.

Spiritual aspirant: What benefit accrues when these two mantras - swaha and swadha - are additionally pronounced at the end of Vedic mantras?

Sai: When offerings are given while swaha or swadha is uttered, the Gods or ancestors to whom they are directed will be pleased. Moreover, when those who are well versed in Vedic practices perform the worship of fire in order to offer oblations and do not utter the prescribed swaha, the offerings cannot reach the Gods. The words swaha and swadha invoke the respective deities. They are mantras, which awake and alert the Divine. The Rig veda declares, Swaha is the foundation of this hymn of praise (Swaha sthomasya varchasa).

Swaha has two meanings: (1) the offering made with the utterance of that mantra, and (2) the Vedic statement that conveys praise or glorification. Whether one of the meanings is preferred or both are adopted, the Gods are pleased and confer progress on the person who pronounces the mantras (swaha or swadha).

Spiritual aspirant: Confer progress on the adorer! What does that mean?

Sai: As a consequence of the praise conveyed through words bearing the impress of the Vedas, the person is blessed with various progressive qualities

and opportunities to achieve excellence.

Spiritual aspirant: I would like to know some examples where the mantra "swaha" is used in the Vedas to convey its traditional meaning.

Sai: These are some examples:

Kesavaya swaha (for Vishnu)
Pranaya swaha (for the vital energy)
Indraya swaha (for Indra)

Here, the meaning of the mantra is:

Swahutham Asthu, Suhrutham asthu.
May it be swahutham. May it be suhurtham.

Spiritual aspirant: What do those two words swahutham and suhurtham mean?

Sai: They mean, "May the offering made be well burnt," that is to say, well digested.

Fire has both a material and a divine form

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! That raises a doubt in me. Whatever is dropped into fire gets burnt totally, even when no mantra is uttered by us. This is the general experience. So, what special process takes place when swaha is uttered?

Sai: "Swahutham" doesn't indicate the mere burning out or the total

consumption of the offering placed in the fire. From the worldly point of view, only this much is observed. But the Vedas (Sruthi) concede that fire has a divine form and function besides the commonly known material form and function. The Divine Forms (Gods) are beyond the reach of the senses. So the Vedas recommend that the Gods be worshiped through rites and rituals. And, Agni, the deity Fire, has in It the source and sustenance of the Gods.

Agnir vai deva yonih
Agni is the Divine Principle

He who offers oblations to the Gods through Agni becomes blessed with divine qualities. Only those who are able to understand this fact can achieve that principle.

The person who enjoys (bhoktha) and the object that provides joy (bhogya) - these two compose the world (jagath). When these two become one, they mix and are then known as the offering, that is to say, the enjoyer. This is the natural conclusion. It does not stand to reason that the One be known as the object to be enjoyed. Well then, who is the enjoyer? It is Agni, the Fire, who accepts the oblation.

The very first divine entity is Aditya (Sun). Its spiritual counterpart is the vital warmth in living beings, the fire of breath (prana-agni). Agni has in it clarified butter (ghee) and soma (the juice of the soma plant). The oblations placed in fire are called ahithaya, meaning "deposited, or placed". The Gods prefer to be beyond the range of sight, so the oblations are also referred to as ahuthis.

Deities respond to prayerful oblations in fire

Spiritual aspirant: When Agni is within the range of sight, what is its name?

Sai: Then, it is named Agri. Agri means first. It was created earliest. Hence

the name. When it is beyond the range of sight (paroksha), it is called Agni.

Spiritual aspirant: What does ahuthi mean?

Sai: Oblations offered in the fire, lit and fed as prescribed. The word denotes that God is invited (aahvaana) to accept the oblations. This is the special meaning conveyed by the word. The exclamation uttered at the end of the sacrifice (vashatkara) only complements the effect of the swaha mantra. The Gods receive only offerings for which they have been invited (ahuthis).

Swaha is a name applied to Saraswathi, the deity of the word (Vak Devi), the Deity of the Vedic word. Since the word expresses the Atma, the name is also swaha. The Devi Bhagavatham declares that the Supreme Deity is both Gayatri and Swaha. The Lalitha Sahasranama (the 1008 names of Lalitha, the Supreme Deity) declares Swaha and Swadha to be Her Names. Swaha also means "the close", "the going under", "the end".

One God worshipped by different names

Spiritual aspirant: Which Veda is named Atharva? Is it also known by many other names?

Sai: Yes. That Veda has various popular names - Brahma Veda, Angiro Veda, Atharvangiro Veda, Bhaishajya Veda. Kalidasa has praised sage Vasishtha as the Treasure Chest of Atharva knowledge. As a result of his earning such high renown, Vasishtha was installed as Royal Preceptor and could claim mastery over all four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva) and the authority to supervise ritual sacrifices and perform scriptural rites and ceremonies.

Spiritual aspirant: Swami! Do the mantras contained in the Atharva veda have any special names?

Sai: They are celebrated as siddha mantras, that is to say, mantras that guarantee the promised effects. The presiding deity of the Gayatri Mantra, known as Gayatri Devi, is adored as having the Rig, Yajur, and Sama vedas as

feet, the Mimamsa Sastra (Science of Interpretation and Inquiry) as the passive, steady aspect, and the Atharva veda as activity.

Spiritual aspirant: This is rather complicated for me. Is there no other way to explain the importance of this Veda, perhaps by some worldly metaphor that is more easily comprehended?

Sai: Well. Listen. The Atharva veda is a huge tree; the Rig, Yajur, and Sama vedas are the trunk and branches, and the codes of law (Smrithis) and Puranas are the leaves. One Sun (Aditya) is worshiped in the Yajur veda as Yaju, in the Sama veda as Sama, in the Rig veda as Oordhwa, and in the Atharva veda as Yathu.

The triple meanings of Atharva

Spiritual aspirant: What does Atharva mean?

Sai: It means a steady, unmoved person, who is of stable nature. Atharva is also widely identified in the Veda as the superconsciousness that activates the vital airs (Prana-atma) and also as ruler of the breath (Prana-pati). Atharva is also called the ruler of all beings born (Prajapathi). This Prajapathi is credited with the achievement of first churning sparks of fire and making fire manifest.

Each of the other Vedas is at some time or other recognised as the first, but the Atharva is always called the last.

Beneficent and maleficent aspects of God and creation

Spiritual aspirant: How many forms are ascribed to the Supreme God (Parameswara) in this Veda?

Sai: It is said that God is described as having two distinguishable forms: the serene and the terrible (Yatho Rudrassivathanooraghora papa nasi-nee).

Spiritual aspirant: I crave illustration by examples.

Sai: The Narasimha (man-lion) form of God that emerged from the pillar was mild and serene, beautiful and beneficent for Prahlada, the staunch devotee. At the same time, the form was terrible for Hiranyakasipu, the father, who hated God to the utmost. Even nature, the concretisation of the will power of God, has these two mild and the fearful aspects. And water, an essential ingredient for sustaining life in beings, is vital and health-giving as well as fatal and death-dealing.

Spiritual aspirant: Pardon me for asking again for some examples.

Sai: All living beings exist because of food. According to the scriptures, food is of three kinds: sathwic (promoting peace and harmony), rajasic (promoting passions and emotions, activities and adventures), and thamasic (promoting sloth and dullness). If one chooses food with discrimination and control and limits its intake, food will be health-giving medicine. On the other hand, if food is consumed indiscriminately and beyond limit, it produces illness and causes grief and pain. It assumes a fearful role.

This fact is made clear in the Vedas by the probe into the word "anna (food)". The word anna has ad as its root, which means "eating". That which is eaten by living beings and at the same time eats the person who eats it, that food is both beneficent and maleficent.

The sages (rishis) Atharvan and Angiras, who visualised the mantras of this Veda, recognised this twin nature of both God and creation. The mantras appear mild or terrible in accordance with the credentials of the experiencer. But in total effect, and in a deeper sense, these mantras are intended to reveal the Atma and to promote the peace and prosperity of humanity.