



Introduction to Vedic Knowledge

Mata Parama Karuna Devi

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The word "Veda" literally means "knowledge" and applies to a certain number of sacred scriptures compiled in Sanskrit language (according to the information contained in the texts themselves) about 5000 years ago, at the beginning of the age of cultural and moral degradation in which we presently live. However, the material from which the present collection has been compiled is much more ancient, and constitutes the accumulated results of many generations of Rishis (realized sages) that engaged with full dedication in a life of research, meditation, introspection and revelation based on direct personal experience. The Vedic scriptures elaborate on all the branches of knowledge, both at theoretical and at practical levels, and include physics, medicine, surgery and pharmacology, agriculture, management of animals, sociology, politics, psychology, economy, mechanics, mineralogy, astronautics, astronomy, astrology, grammar, logic, mathematics, geometry, military science, music, dance and figurative arts, handicrafts, architecture, and so on. The science that is considered most important in the Vedic cultural system studies the very subject of the learning process: it examines the living being, that is the origin of awareness, intelligence and ability to interact with the universe. This science can be only roughly compared to the concept of "religion" that is current in western culture, because it includes teachings on theology, philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and spirituality that are in perfect accordance to the other sciences and integrate them, and allow the individual to directly attain a level of personal awareness and perfection that is not different from the Godhead itself. The Vedic scriptures are numerous and voluminous, and although they are organized in a logical and practical way, it is not easy to study them without expert guidance. The teachers of Vedic tradition recommend that one begins the study of the Vedas by reading the three basic systems, called prasthanas, respectively: 1. Bhagavad gita (included in the Mahabharata) 2. Upanishads 3. Vedanta sutras These three sources are particularly important because they "summarize" the essence of Vedic knowledge in daily practice, in philosophical thought and in logical understanding respectively. After a careful study and a good understanding of these texts, both in theory and in practice, the Vedic student can proceed to read the collections of highly symbolic hymns known as Samhitas, divided into the four categories called Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva Veda. After that, the student will be better equipped to understand their commentaries called Brahmanas and Aranyakas, that apply their symbolic meanings to the practice of connecting the human microcosm with the universal macrocosm, both for the external ritual activities and the inner meditation. The epic and historic texts known as Itihasas and Puranas support this process with a great wealth of examples from the lives and experiences of great personalities in history. The "secondary Vedas" called Upangas and Vedangas contain purely technical information in the form of manuals for practical consultation.

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