



FRIENDS OF LORD KRISHNA

FOLK 2

Vedic Literatures

LESSON NOTES

1. What are the Vedic literatures?

1.1. **The Vedic Literatures are the spiritual literature of the ancient Indian culture.** This huge collection of knowledge includes not only religious and spiritual knowledge, but also that of some of the branches of modern science such as avionics, metallurgy, architecture, etc. **The word “Vedic” is derived from the Sanskrit word *Veda*, literally meaning knowledge.** The word *Veda* can also be stated to mean knowledge that leads one to the Lord. **Thus the Vedic Literatures are primarily made just to revive the forgotten consciousness of the conditioned souls.**

1.2. The Vedic Literatures are comprised of the four *Vedas*, the 108 *Upaniṣads*, the 560 condensed aphorisms of the *Vedānta-sūtras* (or *Brahma-sūtras*), the 18 *Purāṇas* (of which the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is the foremost), the 18 *Upa-purāṇas*, the *Itihāsas* like *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* (in which the 700 verses of the *Bhagavad-gītā* also appears), and also the works of great self-realized souls such as the *Saṁhitās* and *Pañcarātras*.

2. Methods of acquiring knowledge

2.1. **Inductive (ascending)-Trying to find the truth by one’s own endeavor or speculation.**

Example: If you want to find out by yourself who your father is, you may have to test every man on earth. Even one’s entire life may not be sufficient to evaluate one’s father by this method.

This is the approach in science and thus the field of science remains a process of trial and error. They cannot confidently say “This is the truth”.

How can an ant living in one corner of this classroom know about, the current affairs, about the wars on the other side of the globe? Logically speaking, an ant can never know these through its own efforts; through the ASCENDING PROCESS of acquiring knowledge. **It is too small & has limited sense perception.** Then how can we go about understanding GOD who is the creator of infinite gigantic UNIVERSES?

2.2. **Deductive (descending)-To learn the truth by accepting an authority & inquiring from him.**

Example: If you want to know who your father is, you have to accept your mother's authority. The version of mother, regarding our father, brothers, sisters etc, has to be accepted as the truth. There is no question of experiment. If you make an experimental endeavor (DNA test), you will come to the same conclusion, but just to save time you should accept.

Similarly, the Vedas are like a mother for all human beings. They point to the Supreme father, Lord Kṛṣṇa, and help us reach Him.

3. Three ways of gaining knowledge

3.1. *Pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*- Direct sense perception

***Pratyakṣa*, the process of receiving knowledge through direct perception, has no value, because our senses are all imperfect.** For example, to us the sun looks like a small disk, but in fact it is many times larger than the earth. So what is the value of our direct perception through our eyes? We have so many senses through which we can experience knowledge—the eyes, the ears, the nose, and so on—but because **these senses are imperfect, whatever knowledge we get by exercising these senses is also imperfect.**

(Chapter 6, The Journey of Self Discovery)

Direct perception is speculation. Dr. Frog. Dr. Frog is speculating what is Atlantic Ocean. He is in the well, three feet well, and some friend inform him, "Oh, I have seen vast water." "What is that vast water?" "Atlantic Ocean." "How big it is?" "Very, very big." So the Dr. Frog is thinking, "Maybe four feet. This well is three feet. It may be four feet. All right, five feet. Come on, ten feet." So in this way, speculating, how the frog, Dr. Frog, will understand Atlantic Ocean or Pacific Ocean? Can you estimate the length and breadth of the Atlantic, Pacific Ocean, by speculation? So by speculation, you cannot have.

(Lecture, Bhagavad-gītā 16.7, 3rd February, 1975, Hawaii)

3.2. *Anumāna-pramāṇa*- Hypothesis on the knowledge acquired by direct perception.

Example- *Story of six blind men and elephant*

A practical example of *anumāna-pramāṇa*, or wild speculation, is Darwin's Theory that proposes the idea that human beings might have evolved from apes. Darwin tried to find out how life came in this universe. With all his researches, when he could not make out, he admitted that he resorted to wild imaginative speculation. This he himself says in the introduction to his book, 'Origin of Species'. His theory was completely based on his own speculation and mental manipulation. Although the origin of man

according to Darwin is 40,000 years, the fossil records have now shown decisively that humans and apes have co-existed for millions of years and that human have not evolved from apes. **Thus *anumāna-pramāṇa* is misleading.**

3.3. *śabda-pramāṇa*- Hearing from bonafide authority.

Vedic knowledge is *śabda-pramāṇa*. This is particularly applicable to transcendental subject matter, which cannot be understood by the empirical and theorizing methods. Even in ordinary affairs, there are many things we have to accept on authority. We can learn the identity of our father from our mother, the only foolproof authority. Aside from the mother there is no way to know for sure who our father is. When the source of information is perfect, as in Vedic knowledge, then *śabda-pramāṇa*, or *śabda-brahma*, becomes the ultimate proof.

(Chapter 59, *Nārada - bhakti – sutra*)

4. Four Defects of the Conditioned Soul

4.1. The four defects of the conditioned soul, namely the tendency to commit mistakes (*bhrama*), illusion (*pramāda*), imperfect senses (*karaṇāpātava*) and the tendency to cheat (*vipralipsā*).

4.2. **Imperfect senses:** Our senses have a very limited range of perception. Our ears are deaf outside the range of 20 Hz to 20 kHz; our eyes are blind outside the range of 4000Armstrong to 7000Armstrong. Our eyes can neither see distant objects, nor the objects closest to them- our own eyelids. Actually there are so many things that are there which we cannot see. We cannot see air, radio waves, or sound, nor can we perceive minute bacteria with our blunt senses, but this does not mean they are not there. By the aid of the microscope and other instruments, many things can be perceived which had previously been denied by the imperfect senses.

4.3. **Tendency to be illusioned:** Illusion means to accept something which is not. For example, one may see a rope in the dark and think it to be a serpent, or one may see a glittering oyster shell and think it to be gold.

4.4. **Tendency to commit mistakes:** Science, with all its dramatic successes, has from its beginning generated wildly incorrect accounts

Example: Brain was thought of as an organ to cool the blood; electricity & heat were considered fluids.

Once Sir Isaac Newton had made a hole in the wall of his room for his cat to go in and out of his room. When the cat begot a kitten, Newton made another small hole for the kitten. Then he observed that both the cat and kitten were using only the bigger hole and there was no need for the smaller hole for the kitten. He laughed at his own folly.

- 4.5. **Tendency to cheat:** Everyone has the propensity to cheat others. Although a person is fool number one, he poses himself as very intelligent. Scientists are not immune to this shortcoming. For many years, textbooks on evolution cited the Piltdown man as evidence that human beings have descended from an ape-like ancestor.

1912 - Connecting Link “MADE-UP”- archaeologists excavated a humanlike skull and an apelike jaw.

1953 - Fraud Revealed: Human Skull & Filed Jaw- the jawbone of the Piltdown man was actually of very recent origin and had simply been filed to look like a fossil.

Knowledge attained through *śabda-pramāṇa* is free from all four defects.

With all these deficiencies, in conditioned life we cannot give perfect knowledge to anyone. Nor are we ourselves perfect. Therefore we accept the Vedas as they are.

(Introduction, Śrī Īśopaniṣad)

5. Origin of the Vedic Literatures

- 5.1. The Vedic knowledge, which is known as *śruti*, or that which is received by hearing, is also called *apauruṣa*. ***Apauruṣa* means “not spoken by any person materially created.”** It is stated in the beginning of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, ***tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ***. The sound of Brahman, or Veda, was first impregnated into the heart of Brahmā, the original learned man (*ādi-kavaye*) by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord Brahma passed the Vedas to his son Narada. In succession, the great sage Narada instructed the vedic knowledge to Vyāsadeva who is the literary incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

(Purport, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 3.26.33)

- 5.2. In *Satya-yuga* there was only one *Veda*, not four and it was passed down from master to disciple in an oral tradition. There were no written literatures and they were known as *Śruti*. Later, before the beginning of *Kali-yuga*, this one *Veda*, was divided into four—*Sāma*, *Yajur*, *R̥g* and *Atharva*—for the facility of human society. **Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa is the original compiler of all the Vedic Literatures, who gave them the present written form.** Around 5000 years ago, he saw that the people of *Kali-yuga* would not be qualified enough to remember Vedic wisdom through aural reception; ***kalāv asmin yuge janāḥmandāḥ sumanda-matayo manda-bhāgyā hy upadrutāḥ***- in this iron age of Kali men have but short lives. They are quarrelsome, lazy, misguided, unlucky and, above all, always disturbed.

6. Essence of the Vedas

Case Study:

The astrologer and the poor man:

Once a learned astrologer named Sarvajñā came to the house of a poor man and, seeing his distressed condition, questioned him. “Why are you unhappy? Your father was very wealthy, but he did not disclose his wealth to you because he died elsewhere.” By the words of the astrologer, the poor man’s connection with the treasure was established.

Although being assured of his father’s treasure, the poor man could not acquire this treasure by such knowledge alone. Therefore the astrologer had to inform him of the means whereby he could actually find the treasure.

The astrologer said, “The treasure is in this place, but if you dig toward the southern side, the wasps and drones will rise, and you will not get your treasure. If you dig on the western side, there is a ghost who will create such a disturbance that your hands will not even touch the treasure. If you dig on the northern side, there is a big black snake that will devour you if you attempt to dig up the treasure. However, if you dig up a small quantity of dirt on the eastern side, your hands will immediately touch the pot of treasure.

(Śrī Caitanya – *caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 20.129)

6.1. The story of the astrologer Sarvajñā and the poor man is very instructive. By the words of the astrologer, the poor man’s connection with the treasure was established. Similarly, the Vedic literature advises us that our real connection is with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Vedic literatures, including the *Purāṇas*, state that according to the position of the conditioned soul, there are different processes—*karma-kāṇḍa*, *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the yogic process and the *bhakti-yoga* process. *Karma-kāṇḍa* is compared to wasps and drones that will simply bite if one takes shelter of them. *Jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the speculative process, is simply like a ghost who creates mental disturbances. Yoga, the mystic process, is compared to a black snake that devours people by the impersonal cultivation of *kaivalya*. However, if one takes to *bhakti-yoga*, he becomes quickly successful. In other words, through *bhakti-yoga*, one’s hands touch the hidden treasure without difficulty.

(Śrī Caitanya – *caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 20.129)

6.2. ***vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo***- By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of *Vedānta*, and I am the knower of the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* give the right direction to people so that they can properly mold their lives and come back to Godhead, back to home. Through the study of *Vedānta*, one may become fully aware of his relationship with the Supreme Lord and act accordingly.

(Śrī Caitanya – caritāmṛta, Madhya 20.125)

6.3. **To summarize all these Vedic literatures, the *Bhagavad-gītā* is accepted as the essence of all Upaniṣads and the preliminary explanation of the *Vedānta-sūtras*. One may then conclude that from the *Bhagavad-gītā* alone one can have the essence of the Vedas, for it is spoken by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.**
(Chapter 1, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*)

6.4. In Kali-yuga most people do not have the time, energy, or interest to go through all the *Vedas*, nor is it advisable to try. **The essence, selected by Sūta Gosvāmī, is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which teaches *bhakti-yoga* as the supreme *dharma* and rejects all “cheating religion.”** To bring transcendental light into the age of darkness, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the compiler of all the *Vedas*, gave the world the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as his mature contribution.
(Chapter 76, *Nārada - bhakti – sutra*)

7. Parallels in the Vedas and Modern Science

7.1. Using a variety of complicated instruments, gynecologists have gradually come to know how the embryo grows during the period of pregnancy. But ***Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3rd Canto, 31st Chapter, gives a vivid description of the growth of the embryo in the mother’s womb.**

7.2. The *Vedas* state that cow dung, in spite of being the stool of an animal, is pure. It was **only in 1940 that the antiseptic qualities of cow dung were discovered.**

7.3. The *Vedas* have stated since time immemorial that plants have life. But till Jagadish Chandra Bose proved that plants have feelings, **scientists believed that they were inanimate.**

7.4. The Kurukshetra war involved many subtle celestial weapons like *shabdabhedī*, *vayavya*, *parthavya*, etc, **which are far more sophisticated than the gross weapons known to scientists today.**

If the *Vedas* are of mundane origin, then how it is possible for them to state profound truths which modern science has only recently started discovering?

The conclusion is unmistakably obvious: the *Vedas* are coming from a person who is all knowing, who knows the past, the present, and the future. **In other words, the *Vedas* are the word of God.**