Apprehending the Auspicious
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FROM THE VEDAS

Apprehending the Auspicious

The Hindu prayer to hear and see that which is divinely uplifting

Every upanishad begins with an invocation for blessings followed by the famed triple repetition of "shanti " or peace, called the Shanti Pada. Swami Chinmayananda expounds here on the significance of the first verse of the Mundaka Upanishad and the eternal values inherent in our holy Vedas.

No Upanishad study ever started without the guru and the disciple chanting together the Peace Invocation, a common prayer. They prayed for the cultural evolution of the entire kingdom of beings. This national character of the Vedic period is stamped so faithfully in the words of the Shanti Stanza in each of the Upanishads. In this great prayer of the Vedic seers that they should hear and see nothing but goodness and purity, we have the Das Kapital of the Hindus. If each one in a society or a community is to ardently and sincerely pray so as to meet with only auspiciousness and act for the same, in such a country, at such an era of culture, jails will be redundant, slum areas will be unknown, poverty unimaginable, disease a mere exception. From the state of affairs available today, we may despair and fail even to visualize that such a perfect spiritual communism would ever be possible in the world, but this seems to be the pattern aimed at by the rishis of old, and their prayers clearly indicate to what perfections they brought their visions, in their own times, as facts realized. They also never complained of life, but prayed the Lord of the Universe bless them to live their entire allotted span of life in all health and perfect vitality. No Peace Invocation concludes without thrice invoking Shanti. The three repetitions are, it is explained by the acharyas, addressed to the three groups of probable obstacles in scriptural study. They are the Godsent (adi daivika), such as lightning, thunder; or phenomenal (adi-bhautikta), such as fire, floods, landslides, etc; or purely subjective (adhyatmika), such as inertia, lack of faith, insincerity, etc., arising from our own negativities.

Unlike the philosophy and the philosophical textbooks in Europe, in India the Upanishads were not commodities for growing rich or for earning applauses. To the West, philosophy is one of the avenues for self-gratification and self-satisfaction; in the East, to the rishis and their true children, the Hindus, philosophy is for Self-adoration and Self-attainment. The rishis only heard the mantras from within themselves as though spoken by someone else. The term shruti itself means "that which is heard." Every disciple, when established in his own subjective experience of the Truth indicated by his own master, became himself a master. When he, in turn, explained and expressed that state of experience to seekers, he did not claim the discovery but only quoted his own guru. Thus, our scriptural textbooks preserved their purity and chastity until today and have come down to us in the hierarchy of teacher-disciple generations.

We are not to accept any declarations of the intellect and the mind as part and parcel of our eternal Vedas. If we do so, we too would have a philosophy that is changing every fifteen years as in the West, where, with every changing vicissitude of national life, with every war, with every revolution, there is a thorough rearrangement of material values lived. Consequently, there is a change in the attitude of the mind and intellect toward life. With every disturbance in the brain cells in kaleidoscopic variety, we get a library of philosophies, from Plato to date. But in India, the eternal Vedas and the Upanishadic truths are as true today as they were when they were taught in the valleys of the sacred Ganges. We may have progressed and thoroughly changed the external setup in the world and the consequent inner psychological and intellectual assessments of things, but the experience of sleep is not different at any time; so too, the external experience of Godhood. This is the goal preached in the Upanishads. It is not changing or changeable, whatever be the outside change in our gross life.

Commentary by Swami Chinmayananda

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The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism,

likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.