Sruti
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At the dawn of human history our forefathers heard and committed to memory the words of God. Thousands of years later these scriptures remain our guide on the path.

What Are Hindu Revealed Scriptures?

The Vedas and Agamas, revealed by God, are Hinduism's sovereign scriptures, called shruti, "that which is heard." Their timeless truths are expressed in the most extraordinarily profound mystical poetry known to man. Aum.

Veda, from vid, "to know," means "supreme wisdom or science." Similarly, Agama, which names the sacred sectarian revelations, means "descent of knowledge." The Vedas and Agamas are eternal truths transmitted by God through great clairaudient and clairvoyant rishis. They are Hinduism's primary and most authoritative scriptures, expounding life's sacredness and man's purpose on the planet. These psalms of wisdom were disclosed over many centuries, memorized and orally conveyed from generation to generation within priestly families, then finally written down in Sanskrit in the last few millennia. The subtly symbolic language of shruti, the cherished word of God, is lyrical and lofty. In imparting religious practice, rules and doctrine, the Vedas are general and the Agamas specific. The Vedas extol and invoke a multiplicity of Gods through elaborate fire rituals called yajna. The Agamas center around a single Deity and His worship with water, flowers and lights in sanctified temples and shrines. The Tirumantiram lauds, "Two are the scriptures that Lord Siva revealed-the primal Vedas and the perfect Agamas."

What Is the Nature of the Veda Texts?

The holy Vedas, man's oldest scripture, dating back 6,000 to 8,000 years, are a collection of four books: the Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva. Each has four sections: hymns, rites, interpretation and philosophical instruction. Aum.

The oldest and core portions of the Vedas are the four Samhitas, "hymn collections." They consist of invocations to the One Divine and the divinities of nature, such as the Sun, the Rain, the Wind, the Fire and the Dawn-as well as prayers for matrimony, progeny, prosperity, concord, domestic rites, formulas for magic, and more. They are composed in beautiful metrical verses, generally of three or four lines. The heart of the entire Veda is the 10,552-verse Rig Samhita. The Sama and Yajur Samhitas, each with about 2,000 verses, are mainly liturgical selections from the Rig; whereas most of the Atharva Samhita's nearly 6,000 verses of prayers, charms and rites are unique. The Sama is arranged for melodious chanting, the Yajur for cadenced intonation. Besides its Samhita, each Veda includes one or two Brahmanas, ceremonial handbooks, and aranyakas, ritual interpretations, plus many inestimable Upanishads, metaphysical dialogs. In all there are over 100,000 Vedic verses, and some prose, in dozens of texts. The Tirumantiram confirms, "There is no dharma other than what the Vedas say. Dharma's central core the Vedas proclaim."

How Are the Vedas Significant Today?

The Vedas, the ultimate scriptural authority, permeate Hinduism's thought, ritual and meditation. They open a rare window into ancient Bharata society, proclaiming life's sacredness and the way to oneness with God. Aum.

Like the Taoist Tao te Ching, the Buddhist Dhammapada, the Sikh Adi Granth, the Jewish Torah, the Christian Bible and the Muslim Koran-the Veda is the Hindu holy book. For untold centuries unto today, it has remained the sustaining force and authoritative doctrine, guiding followers in ways of worship, duty and enlightenment-upasana, dharma and jnana. The Vedas are the meditative and philosophical focus for millions of monks and a billion seekers. Their stanzas are chanted from memory by priests and laymen daily as liturgy in temple worship and domestic ritual. All Hindus wholeheartedly accept the Vedas, yet each draws selectively, interprets freely and amplifies abundantly. Over time, this tolerant allegiance has woven the varied tapestry of Bharata Dharma. Today the Vedas are published in Sanskrit, English, French, German and other languages. But it is the metaphysical and popular Upanishads which have been most amply and ably

translated. The Vedas say, "Just as the spokes are affixed to the hub of a wheel, so are all things established in life, the Rig and Yajur and Sama Veda, sacrifice, the nobility and also the priesthood."

What Is the Nature of the Holy Agamas?

The Agamas, Sanatana Dharma's second authority, are revelations on sacred living, worship, yoga and philosophy. Saivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism each exalts its own array of Agamas, many over 2,000 years old. Aum.

In the vast Agamic literature, tradition counts 92 main Saiva Agamas-10 Siva, 18 Rudra and 64 Bhairava-77 Shakta Agamas and 108 Vaishnava Pancharatra Agamas. Most Agamas are of four parts, called padas, and possess thousands of metered Sanskrit verses, usually of two lines. The charya pada details daily religious observance, right conduct, the guru-shishya relationship, community life, house design and town planning. The kriya pada, commonly the longest, extols worship and temples in meticulous detail-from site selection, architectural design and iconography, to rules for priests and the intricacies of daily puja, annual festivals and home-shrine devotionals. The yoga pada discloses the interior way of meditation, of raja yoga, mantra and tantra which stimulates the awakening of the slumbering serpent, kundalini. The jnana pada narrates the nature of God, soul and world, and the means for liberation. The Tirumantiram declares, "Veda and Agama are Iraivan's scriptures. Both are truth: one is general, the other specific. While some say these words of God reach two different conclusions, the wise see no difference."

How Are the Agamas Significant Today?

While the Vedas, with myriad Deities, bind all Hindus together, the Agamas, with a single supreme God, unify each sect in a oneness of thought, instilling in adherents the joyful arts of divine adoration. Aum

God is love, and to love God is the pure path prescribed in the Agamas. Veritably, these texts are God's own voice admonishing the samsari, reincarnation's

wanderer, to give up love of the transient and adore instead the Immortal. How to love the Divine, when and where, with what mantras and visualizations and at what auspicious times, all this is preserved in the Agamas. The specific doctrines and practices of day-to-day Hinduism are nowhere more fully expounded than in these revelation hymns, delineating everything from daily work routines to astrology and cosmology. So overwhelming is Agamic influence in the lives of most Hindus, particularly in temple liturgy and culture, that it is impossible to ponder modern Sanatana Dharma without these discourses. While many Agamas have been published, most remain inaccessible, protected by families and guilds who are stewards of an intimate hereditary knowledge. The Tirumantiram says, "Nine are the Agamas of yore, in time expanded into twenty-eight, they then took divisions three, into one truth of Vedanta-Siddhanta to

accord. That is Shuddha Saiva, rare and precious."