

History of Hindu Dharma

Lecture 4*

Lecture 4 Title: Content of Vedas

- *All 12 lectures are listed in Appendix*

Content of Vedas

Topics and Presenters:

1. Samhita

– Kishin Kripalani

2. Brahmana and Aranyaka

- Satish Talekar

3. Upanishads

- K.J. Sharma

Vedas

- The word Veda means “knowledge”, from the Sanskrit root Vid meaning “to know”
- The Vedic knowledge is termed *shruti* meaning that which is “heard”
- Four Vedas
 - Rig Veda
 - Yajur Veda
 - Sama Veda
 - Atharva Veda

Origin of Vedic Knowledge

- Timeless
- Revealed to enlightened rishis
 - Divinely inspired
 - Beyond the grasp of human intellect

Four Sections of The Vedas

1. Samhita Hymns
2. Brahmana Rituals
3. Aranyaka* Meditations and
 Interpretations
4. Upanishad Philosophical Discourses
 (Vedanta)

**No separate aranyaka section in Yajur Veda (only as part of Brhadaranyaka Upanishad)*

Samhita

Samhita means: A collection

Well-arranged collection

Systematized collection

- Samhita section of Vedas is a collection of Sukta(s) or hymns
- Each sukta is a group of rks
- Rk is a stotra, mantra, or a verse
3 or 4 lines each

Rig Veda Samhita

Rig Veda Samhita comprises

- 1028 Suktas (hymns)
 - Each with varying number of stotras or mantras (rks)
- Total rks in Rig Veda: 10,552

Samhita Section of Vedas

Number of Rks

- Rig Veda: ~10,000 rks
- Yajur Veda: ~2000 rks
- Sama Veda: ~2000 rks
- Atharva Veda: ~6000 rks

Vedic Samhita No Ordinary Hymns!

Lofty and mystical poetry

- Inspire awe and wonder
- Rich symbolism through images and metaphors
- Lyrical meditations

Vedic Samhita

- Glorification of the Lord
and lots more:
- Revelation of nature of God
 - Essential
Formless
 - Manifest
All known and unknown forms of formless God
- Poetic expression
 - Transcends the limitation of words

First Sukta of Rig Veda

9 Rks

Prayer to Agni Devata as a priest that carries the offerings to other devatas

- Rk 1. I adore Agni, placed in front, the *deva* of the *yajña*, the invoker or the summoner in the *yajña* and carrier of felicities.
- Rk 9. O Agni, cling to us like a father to the son, be easy of access to us.

Last Sukta of Rig Veda 4 Rks

Also prayer to Agni Devata

Last of the rks: Applicable in all ages

“May mankind be of one mind, May it have a common goal. May all hearts be united in love. And with the mind and the goal being one, may all of us live in happiness. ”

Purusha Suktam

- Purusha refers to “Cosmic Person”
- One of the most popular sukta
- Appears in all four Vedas
 - Rig Veda (16 rks)
 - Tenth Mandala
 - 90th Sukta
 - 16 rks
 - Yajur Veda (25 rks)
 - Chanted in Vedic rituals and temple worship
 - Quoted by great teachers like Adi Shankara

Purusha Suktam

Illustrates Rishis' concept of God

Through beautiful symbolism of a creation story :

- God is everything
- Creation comes from God
 - He is the maker; He is the intelligence (nimita)
 - He is the material cause (upadana)
- God is Immanent
 - all pervasive
- God is transcendent
 - Transcends the creation

Purusha Suktam

Rks 1-5

Entire universe is God's physical body

“Om! Sahasra-shirsha purushah-----

“A thousand heads the Lord does have,
A thousand eyes, a thousand feet.
Completely, He pervades the world,
And yet, beyond it, He extends.”

Metrical translation by Swami Tadatmananda

A thousand signifies infinite, meaning all heads, eyes and feet (i.e., all creatures) are Lord's own

Purusha Suktam

Rks: 6-18

Story of Creation: Sacrifice of the Lord

- A yjna is performed by devas, with the sages and saints, and Lord's grace is invoked to create the Universe
- Lord Himself is symbolically sacrificed by the devas

Purusha Suktam

Rks 6-18

Story of Creation: Sacrifice of the Lord

What comes out of fire after the offering is consumed:

- Butter, curds, animals, sky, forest and farm, Vedic mantras and the Vedas
- Horses, cows, goats, and lambs
- Brahmins, kings, merchants and laborers
- Sun, moon, wind, fire, earth, heaven and all the worlds

Purusha Suktam

Rks 6-18

- “The wise discerned his countless forms, which they invoked with many names”
- “All those who gain this highest truth
- Attain the realm of gods and saints”

Purusha Suktam

Section 2

Rks 1-7

- Ecstatic reiteration of Section 1
- Beautiful petition for Lord's blessings:
“Please grant me all that desire
Bestow your peace upon all of us”

Om, Shanti shanti, shanti



Appendix

List of Lectures

List of 12 Lectures-Segment 1

History of Hindu Religion

1. Ancient Civilization
2. Origin of Aryans
3. Vedic Period
4. Vedas (Content)

List of 12 Lectures-Segment 1

History of Hindu Religion

5. Period of Epics and Puranas
6. Buddhism and Jainism
7. Shankara and his Vedantic teachings
8. Ramanuja, Madhva, and their teachings

List of 12 Lectures-Segment 1

History of Hindu Religion

9. Bhakti Movement
10. Saints of India
15-16th Century
11. Influential religious leaders
17-18th Century
12. Contemporary religious leaders
19th C to present