

# *Ārṣa-vidyā*

## The Vision of the *Ṛṣis*

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The Sanskrit word *ārṣa* means that which comes from a *ṛṣi*. A *ṛṣi* is one who knows, or sees, so a *ṛṣi* is a seer. Seer of what? He is a seer of what is, of things that others don't see. *Vidyā* means knowledge, that which is opposed to error and ignorance. Thus, *ārṣa-vidyā* means knowledge of the *ṛṣis*. We have a body of knowledge coming down from generation to generation through the lineage of teacher and student (*guru-śiṣya-paramparā*). This body of knowledge is called the Veda. It consists of two main topics. One is the topic dealing with values, right and wrong, various forms of prayer and rituals for different ends.

### Two Topics in the Veda

A human being has a number of desires. And the desires of a given person need not be the desires of another person. Further, a person who has a desire now may not have the same desire later even though it was not fulfilled. He may grow out of it. Thus, these desires (*kāmāḥ*) are many and varied (*binnāḥ*). In order to fulfill these desires, a person makes attempts according to his skill and knowledge, but still, there are many hidden variables. To control the hidden variables one resorts to prayer. This kind of prayer, a specific prayer to get a given result is mentioned in the first part of the Veda. There are many such prayers for the many different ends.

Finally, at the end, the Veda has a topic called Vedānta. This topic deals with the desirer. It is important to understand the difference between these two topics. One deals with your desires; it tries to help you to fulfill your desires. The other deals with the very desirer. Why am I a desirer? Even if I fulfill a few desires, I am not going to say that I have fulfilled all my desires. There were desires that I could not fulfill when I was young. Even now there are desires that I cannot fulfill—desires like those for an ideal society, an ideal disposition of a friend or spouse that you always dream of. These desires are never met with and perhaps will never be met with. One can never relax saying, “I have fulfilled all my desires.”

### When Being a Desirer is a Problem

The desire that I have is only the privilege of a happy, free, and complete person. Being a human being endowed with this freedom of choice, unlike an animal, I have this privilege of

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desiring. It is one of the three capacities given to a human being, the power, the freedom to desire, to know, and to act (*icchā-śakti, jñāna-śakti, kriyā-śakti*). These three *śaktis* are given to me. It is a privilege for me to entertain a desire and then fulfill it. If it is fulfilled I am happy; if it is not fulfilled I am happy. But one doesn't generally feel like this. A desirer in the beginning is a desirer in the middle and continues to be a desirer at the end. As a child I am a desirer, and when I reach ninety I am still a desirer. That I am a desirer is a reality. If this reality is true, then I have no chance of finding fulfillment in my life. So I continue struggling all my life. You cross oceans, reach distant places and accomplish a lot. Still, that person who is wanting, that person who has a sense of inadequacy, never goes. He is always present. So it looks as though all your efforts are futile, because you don't see any difference in yourself in spite of all your accomplishments. That is a really tragic situation; I wanted to become somebody and in that somebody I don't see a person who has made it. I see only another 'becoming' person, in fact, the same 'becoming' person. I reach a point where I cannot 'become' anymore because of my old age. This is something peculiar to a human being.

The human being is self-conscious, and because of that, has complexes. I want to be 'somebody', because there is the conclusion that I obtain within the confines of my own body-mind-sense complex. I am only this much and I want to be 'somebody'. The attempt stems from my own conclusion, a conclusion that is universal. That conclusion is that I am incomplete and have to become complete. In this, each one has certain peculiar wants according to his background, but that one wants is a universal phenomenon. This wanting person continues to exist without any sense of fulfillment and consequently, there is always a search. If one recognizes this and wants to solve this problem of searching, the search becomes a spiritual search.

A search is a search, whether you search for money, power, or position and work for it, or you search for a solution to this basic problem. We call this basic search spiritual, in as much as there is no particular desire that is met with. That I am a desirer, that I am a wanting person, that I am someone confined to this body-mind-sense complex, that I am different from everything else, and therefore am an inadequate, incomplete person, that I must become adequate and complete—this search doesn't have any particular object in the world. It is centered on myself. When your desire is centered on an object, you call it a material desire. If it is centered on yourself, on the problem of being a wanting person, that person has to change. Can that person change? If that person has to change then there should be a different reality about that person. Otherwise no change is possible. If I am an incomplete person in essence, then in reality I am

incomplete. There is no way of fixing up that problem. But I am constantly striving to fix up that problem. This is not something unique to a given person. Everybody has this spiritual urge, if we can call this spiritual.

### **Solving the Problem of Being a Desirer**

Vedānta is so called because it is at the end of the Veda. It has no other meaning; it is just a positional name. This body of knowledge that we call the Veda has at its end a second topic which deals with this problem of my being a desirer. I can be a desirer without it being a problem, if I see it as a privilege given to me. Then I am free enough to have some desires and fulfill them. I am also free enough to be happy even if they are not fulfilled. Then alone does it become a privilege. Otherwise, every desire is a binding desire because it has to be met with. This problem is addressed in Vedānta which is also called Upaniṣad. Upaniṣad is a dialogue between a teacher and a student. It is given in the form of a dialogue, because here something has to be understood. The topic it deals with is meant for understanding, not simple believing. It is a matter of knowledge and one has to know it through a teacher. That also is revealed in the dialogue.

The topic is you; your thinking of yourself as a desirer, and the fact that this is an error. You have the privilege of desiring, no doubt, but you are not a desirer. While the desirer is you, you are not the desirer. Desire is something that you enjoy as a privilege. Vedānta accepts that. In fact, if you are free, you can have some more desires, because the desire does not involve a desire to become free from incompleteness. Behind every desire there is a desire to be secure. The desire to have more money is not for the sake of money itself, but for security. That I am insecure is a conclusion. This conclusion makes me search for security, and in money I see security. Behind the object of every desire there is something else that we are searching for. This is what is identified by Vedānta as a spiritual urge. The pursuit in your life is spiritual whether you like it or not, because you seek security. You cannot accept that you are insecure because your nature is security. There is nothing more secure than yourself. That is what Vedānta says.

Vedānta asks us to see what it has to say. On what basis do you conclude that you are insecure? Did you make an inquiry (*vicāra*) into yourself? It is not after *vicāra* that you have come to the conclusion that you are insecure. It is without any inquiry. Everybody is born with ignorance, and this ignorance is two-fold. One is ignorance of yourself and the other, ignorance

of the world. My mind, senses, and capacity to infer can be improved upon as I grow. Perception and inference, our two primary means of knowledge, are meant for understanding things that we can objectify. But the original ignorance about myself, with which I started my life, doesn't go away. Without knowing what the self is, the conclusion that I am a desirer, that I am incomplete, insecure, and unhappy is taken for granted. It is regarded as real because everybody has similar conclusions. But in determining the truth, the majority doesn't play any role.

Everybody believed that the sun rose in the eastern sky and traveled across the heavens every day. One fellow said that this was not true. The whole of humanity was against one person. Everyone thought the earth was flat but one person said that it is a globe. That is how the truth is. It is not determined by the consensus of the majority. It is determined by whether it is true or not true.

In the vision of Vedānta you are the security that you are seeking through money, power, etc. You are the very happiness that you are seeking in various forms of pleasure and so on. Happiness here means the fullness that is opposite to the sense of incompleteness. You want to be a whole person because that is exactly what you are. You don't really want to be a mortal; that is why there is always an attempt to be free from this mortality. You want to prolong your longevity, knowing full well, of course, that one day you will succumb. Still, it is very difficult to accept death. I want to live a day more. But what about people who commit suicide? It is not that they want to put an end to their lives; it is because there is another equally powerful urge to be happy and secure. If there is a danger to that security or happiness, in that person's perception, he may commit suicide. The search for security and happiness is as real as the love for longevity.

In the vision of Vedānta the conclusions that you are time-bound, incomplete, insecure are wrong. In its vision you are the truth of everything. You cannot become more than fullness, because fullness is your nature. You are the very essence of time, and thus, you are timeless. In other words you are *sat-cit-ānanda*. In its vision you are all of this, and this is what you are searching for in life. Vedānta deals with the reality of living. It gives meaning to your life, as opposed to the groping that everybody goes about doing in life, searching for one thing or another. It gives freedom from this constant struggle. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you can find yourself free enough to be what you are. That particular freedom is innate to you, and that is what is unfolded in the statement that you are *sat-cit-ānanda*. It is not a mystic statement, but is unfolded methodically by Vedānta, through a very sophisticated method of teaching.

## Self-Growth

As a part of this program of teaching which makes you see that you are free, this *ārṣa-vidyā*, or Vedānta, has a program for your own self-growth. This is what we call *yoga*. As unfolded in the *Gītā* and also in the *Upaniṣads*, *yoga* is a way of living which helps you to grow to your potential. As a human being there is room for further growth. A tiger cub needs to eventually lead a tiger's life—independent and strong. To do this, the cub has to grow to become an adult. When it becomes an adult it has no other program to follow. It lives a tiger's life without complexes. The human child also grows to become an adult, but with that, the growth is not over. There is constant conflict, and every conflict is for growth. One has to deal with each conflict and grow to be a person who is free from conflict. Everybody has to grow into that person. Let it take the whole life; it is still a program that one can afford to accomplish, that one cannot afford not to accomplish. Everything has to become meaningful to me. And if that me is always subject to conflict, there is a real problem of growth. One has to take the initiative to grow into that complete human being.

Thus we have two programs in Vedānta – one is to help the person grow, to become objective, dispassionate, free from conflict and live a life of richness. That kind of life, one that is enriched by your own self-growth is what is aimed at by the program of *yoga*. Vedānta teaches you how to go about it. Then it has the final say that you are the whole. In fact, you have to prove that you are not. The whole process of rubbing against what Vedānta says is what we call the learning process. You try to prove that Vedānta is wrong and Vedānta always has an answer. Finally you have to say, “I am the whole.” Once you say that, and see that you are the whole, nobody can take it away from you. That is the beauty of it. There is no promise held out here. Vedānta doesn't say that you will become the whole. It says that you are the whole. What is it that inhibits this understanding? Vedānta removes all the inhibiting factors methodically, cognitively. This is what you are interested in in life. Your entire life can be converted into *yoga*, so that everything becomes meaningful. That is because of the attitude you discover in yourself in the wake of understanding certain realities. Vedānta is a body of knowledge dealing with the reality of living, of intelligent living and finally, of finding ones own fulfillment.