

Sri Aurobindo and the Veda

Lectures given

by

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Sri Aurobindo and The Veda

Talk given at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium

Thank you very much for being here today so that I can share with you some of the statements of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo's light on these statements and reflections. You have a copy of my text with you and I wanted to ask you whether I should read it or I should speak to you and you can choose between the two... Alright, I will speak. The text, you can read, so I will have the chance also of departing from the text.

There is one very important statement that Sri Aurobindo has made in the *Foundation of Indian Culture* where he speaks of the immediate work of India. And I would like to underline this, because this meeting is being held in Bharat Nivas, which is dedicated to the promotion of Indian culture. And I think this statement of Sri Aurobindo should be somewhere highlighted in Bharat Nivas. Sri Aurobindo has said: There are three tasks that India has to accomplish. The first task is to recover the ancient spiritual knowledge in its fullness, in amplitude — this is the first task. And this means of course, basically, the recovery of the Veda, *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, and the *Puranas* and *Tantras*. This is, you might say, the basic stuff of what can be called the ancient spiritual knowledge of India. I underline the word knowledge because, usually, although this knowledge is contained in what are called scriptures — and scriptures are sometimes regarded as the revelations which are made once for all and have to be accepted unquestioningly, and therefore philosophers do not accept them as bodies of knowledge — whereas here, although these are scriptures, Vedas are scriptures, *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, *Tantra*, *Puranas*, they are still to be considered as books of knowledge, because India does not regard them as revelations made for all time, which cannot be repeated, which cannot be verified. According to the Vedic tradition, the faculty of revelation can be so developed that one can have a constant stream of revelations. And therefore it is not something which comes once for all, but one can have repeated

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revelations, and revelations can be verified by revelations, and they can be experimented upon, they can be enlarged as in scientific knowledge ? you can enlarge upon the knowledge, you can even overpass, you can have a new revelation, a new knowledge. So Sri Aurobindo has deliberately used the word, "Ancient Indian spiritual knowledge." This has to be recovered. It has to be recovered because it has greatly been lost. Mother once wrote down for me one message in which She said: "India has or rather had the knowledge of the Spirit." So She wanted to underline that India should not take the pride of having today a living knowledge of the Spirit. India has deviated a long way from the possession of that knowledge and therefore it has to be recovered. This is the first task.

The second task, Sri Aurobindo has said: India has to pour that knowledge into new modes of philosophical, scientific and critical knowledge. This is a very difficult task. In fact it has been made easy because Sri Aurobindo himself wrote a huge philosophical work called *The Life Divine*, in which he has demonstrated how the ancient knowledge can be poured into the philosophical modes of thinking, and how in modern times it can be presented in the modern fashion and even shown how we can advance from the past towards the new.

The third task, Sri Aurobindo has said, is to deal with the contemporary problems in a new manner, and to realise a spiritualised society. These are the three tasks, of which the last one, He said, is the most difficult task. And the proportion in which India can accomplish these three tasks — to that extent India will have fulfilled her mission. In fact the third task also Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have initiated and where we are sitting now, this great seat called Auroville, is India's effort inviting the whole world to meet together and attempt to create a spiritualised society. So, in fact, the extent to which we can succeed here, in Auroville, to that extent India will have fulfilled her mission.

But these last two tasks will depend very largely upon the recovery ? the first task ? the recovery of the ancient spiritual knowledge. And therefore I have thought, it would be very useful if in Auroville, we can meet together from time to time and enter into the ancient treasure of spiritual knowledge. It is a very difficult terrain, it is so complex, and it is buried under so much of a plethora of interpretations that it is extremely difficult to penetrate like into a jungle. To someone like me who has been brought up in India right from childhood in the real Indian tradition, where the Veda was my constant childhood friend ? I had a home in which Veda was recited every day — and in spite of this kind of upbringing, it is only when I came to Sri Aurobindo that I really entered into the real portals of the Vedic knowledge, and till that time, all that I knew of the Veda and the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* and the *Puranas* was a real dense forest, difficult to penetrate, difficult even to walk, even one mile, into that big terrain. We recited the mantras of the Veda, the hymns of the Veda, understood a little, because sometimes the words are not so difficult and you can make out some meaning out of it, but when you try to penetrate into, what we can call knowledge, there was a constant failure. In fact, many of us who read the western scholars interpreting the Veda, found in their interpretations an echo of our own lack of understanding. You know, the western scholars came across this great body of Vedic knowledge in the early nineteenth century.

Perhaps many of you may not know the vast corpus of the Veda itself. Apart from the interpretations of the Veda, which are also huge, mere text of the Veda itself is very vast. What is called Veda consists of four huge books: the first one is called *Rig Veda*, the second is called *Yajur Veda*, the third is called *Sama Veda*, and the fourth is called *Atharva Veda*. These are four huge volumes. *Rig Veda* is the biggest. It has ten chapters and totally it has ten thousand verses, ten thousand verses. In a recent publication, mere Sanskrit text and English translation has come to twelve volumes of *Rig Veda* alone. *Atharva Veda* is half of the *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda* is the shortest, and *Yajur Veda* is more than one fourth of the *Rig Veda*. Basically, *Rig Veda* is regarded as *the Veda*, and Sri Aurobindo made a study of this *Rig Veda* in depth. But when this study was made by the western scholars in the nineteenth century, after studying them they found that the Veda seemed to be compositions of barbarians, naive in their imagination, superstitious, materialist, seeking for wealth, and progeny and cows and horses. Not understanding the real depth and not understanding the connections of ideas, they really felt that the entire Vedic corpus is simply a bundle of worthless material, which may be studied for historical reason to show to people what barbaric people of ancient times thought and conceived and imagined, but for no other purpose. In fact Max Mueller, after interpreting the whole of the Veda, wrote a letter to his wife: "I have now" ? I don't quote exactly the words but he said: "I have now accomplished the task of translating the whole of the *Rig Veda* and when people, even in India, when they will read my translation and understand what Veda contains, they will find that there is nothing in it, and then they will easily turn to Christianity and embrace it." This was the confidence with which he translated, and many others who came to translate and many of them who interpreted the Veda coincided in their interpretations and many of the Indian scholars

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who read these western scholars, also dared not depart from this interpretation of the western scholars. Even a philosopher like Radhakrishnan, while writing on the Veda in his book called *Indian Philosophy*, says, in one of the paragraphs of his writings, “Sri Aurobindo sees a great light and psychological truth in the Veda,” but he remarks: “But when we see that western scholars do not agree with him, we also cannot agree with Sri Aurobindo.” This is the remark of a man like Radhakrishnan, who is supposed to be one of the foremost philosophers of India. You can see, therefore, how difficult it is for scholars to understand the Veda. Now there is a history of the interpretation of the Veda, and this history has to be understood before we can appreciate how Sri Aurobindo penetrated through this great forest of the Vedic interpretations and brought a great light out of these Vedic verses.

This interpretation starts with the *Upanishads*. *Upanishads* claimed that what they have written in their compositions are nothing but reaffirmations of the Veda. Now, this is a very important point because *Upanishads* are regarded by all scholars all over the world to be of tremendous importance and full of light. On this there is no dispute either in the East or in the West. And the *Upanishads* themselves declare that they are nothing but affirmations of the Veda. Therefore, at least for the Upanishadic seers, Veda are books of knowledge. When we come to the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is regarded to be the quintessence of the Veda, it also mentions that Veda is a book of knowledge. *Puranas* also claimed that Veda is a book of knowledge. *Tantra* also regards Veda as a book of knowledge. Indian schools of philosophy regard Veda as an authority, and it is a tradition in Indian philosophy if your conclusions of philosophical thought do not coincide with what is in the Veda, then your conclusions are wrong, but what is in the Veda is true. Such is the tradition in Indian philosophy. In spite of this great tradition of the authoritativeness of the Veda, there came a school of interpretation, and a long line of interpretation, starting with Yaska, one of the great interpreters of the Veda. And this line ended with a great scholar of the fourteenth century A.D. called Sayana. He was himself a Prime Minister of a state in South India and also a great Vedic scholar, and he had the possibility of employing a whole huge mass of scholars to assist him. And Sayana interpreted all the four Vedas — a huge task he accomplished, and it is itself so big that it requires a long life time to study and therefore to differ from him would require a further time, and therefore Sayana's interpretation ultimately became the standard interpretation of the Veda in India, after a long period. And if you read Sayana's interpretation, then it would seem that Vedic Rishis and the greatness of Vedic Rishis and the claim that Vedic texts contain knowledge is a colossal fiction. If you read Sayana, you would be obliged to conclude that his claim that Veda contains knowledge — that proposition cannot be sustained. Sayana himself is a ritualist, who believes that Vedas were written for ritualistic purposes. He reverses the Veda, not like the Vedic interpreters of the modern scholars of western Scholarship. He reverses, he has a respect for the Veda but he believes that Veda is simply a book of rituals. And if you recite Mantras, they have magical effect and it will give you certain rewards if these mantras are recited properly. In other words they are magical superstitions ? not superstitious according to Sayana ? but magical mantras which can be recited, which can produce results in your life. Results as of materialistic gains, of progeny and wealth and so on, such will be the meaning of the Veda according to Sayana. It was on Sayana's basis that Vedic scholars of the West made their interpretations and they went one step further. Whatever reverence there was in Sayana for the Veda was blotted out, and it was proved that Vedas are important only from the point of view of the primitive history, but of no further use for mankind in the future. It has no message. Now Sri Aurobindo himself, when he came to study the Veda in his early stages of his life, without studying Veda properly, had felt that these modern interpretations may be quite meaningful, may be quite valid. This was the climate of the modern Indians and even now it is largely so. One of the last interpretations of the Veda was by a great scholar of the nineteenth century in India called Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati. He interpreted the Veda. He criticised Sayana very severely and affirmed that Veda is a book of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo himself has written a very illuminating article and essay on Dayananda. When you have time you may like to read it, and you can see what a great tribute Sri Aurobindo has paid to Dayananda.

And yet Sri Aurobindo does not coincide his own interpretation with the interpretation of Dayananda. It was when Sri Aurobindo had already had three great realisations of his yoga, and when he came to Pondicherry that he turned to Veda seriously for the first time. By this time he had the realisation of the Brahmic nirvana, of which we have read so greatly, under the guidance of the Maharastrian yogi called Lele. He had a further realisation of the universal Vasudeva Krishna in the Alipore jail and he had already in the Alipore jail also heard the voice of Vivekananda, for fifteen days uninterruptedly, where Sri Aurobindo was given the knowledge of the planes between the mind and the Supermind. It was after this background that Sri Aurobindo had numerous experiences to which he

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had no clue, either in western psychology or modern psychology or ancient psychology or anywhere, but these experiences were rising in his consciousness; as he says himself. Particularly, he had the experiences of what in the Veda are called *Ila*, *Saraswati*, *Sarama*, *Daksha*. These are four female energies described in the Veda and, without knowing this, Sri Aurobindo already had experience of these energies. And he had no clue as to what these energies are? What are these powers which were rising in his own consciousness on their own? And then when he happened to read the Veda, with this background, he directly contacted and understood and found a confirmation of his own experiences in the Veda. This was the way in which the key of the Veda was found by his own personal experiences which preceded his understanding of the Veda. It is not as if these experiences came to him after reading the Veda and then finding them in the Veda he confirmed his own experiences, it is the other way round. He already had the experiences of these highest powers of consciousness and found a clue to them in the *Rig Veda*. It is said in the Veda that only the seer can understand the words of the seer. This is the Vedic expression itself *ninya vachamsi*, that is, secret words, *kavaye nivachanani*, they are revealed only to the kavi, to the poet, to the seer, and it is confirmed in the case of Sri Aurobindo: the secret meaning of the Veda was revealed only to the seer, to Sri Aurobindo. After studying this Veda, Sri Aurobindo has... — I am now going rapidly because this is a vast subject and I am only trying to give you the summary, the essence of the matter ? after studying the Veda in depth ? now this, when I say in depth, to cover within two or three years, such a huge mass of Vedic knowledge, is really something like an Herculean labour which he accomplished within a short time as if he dived into the Veda and collected all the treasures within a short time and brought the jewels and diamonds out of the Veda. Then he began to express and put them before mankind. It was in 1914, that is to say, 1910, he came to Pondicherry, and by 1914, within four years, he had attained to such a mastery of the secret meaning of the Veda that he began to write a series of articles under the title *The Secret of the Veda*, and if you read *The Secret of the Veda*, you can see a masterly interpretation; it is a masterly interpretation because he finds the proof of his own interpretation in the Veda itself. It is by internal evidence that he shows that the interpretation he has given follows clearly and obviously, luminously, from the Vedic verses themselves. It is in the light of this that he says that Upanishads also can be understood properly. In fact, although *Upanishads* are famous for their knowledge, even today if you go to the scholars to ask the interpretation of the *Upanishads*, three fourths of the *Upanishads*, is a closed door, even today. Even those who praise *Upanishads* to the sky, whether in the East or in the West, even they when they read the *Upanishads* and you ask them questions you really find that they are absolutely out of their depth. They cannot explain, and it is quite obvious because unless you understand the Veda, and the secret of the Veda, *Upanishads* cannot truly be understood. Fortunately Sri Aurobindo has written for us also, at least two great commentaries, on two important *Upanishads*: *Isha Upanishad* and the *Kena Upanishad*, and he has translated eight *Upanishads* in totality. That is a tremendous help that we can get to understand the *Upanishads* properly. Similarly if you do not understand the Veda properly, you cannot understand properly the *Bhagavad Gita*, although *Bhagavad Gita* is not a secret book like the Veda, nor like the *Upanishads*, so pregnant with meaning. And yet the *Bhagavad Gita* too cannot be understood properly, if you do not understand the Veda. In other words, the recovery of the ancient knowledge — Vedas, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* ? cannot be achieved except in the light of what Sri Aurobindo has written on the Veda. That is how I consider Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda* to be of the highest importance.

I spoke till now as if the Veda is important for India, and for the recovery of India, but, actually speaking, the Veda may be looked upon as *the* only document of the ancient time available to the whole humanity, that is to say, if you trace the world history, and if you try to find out what was the earliest composition of the earliest stage of humanity, nothing is available to us today ? except the Veda. This is the only... we can call document, the only composition which is available to humanity. There were of course many other traditions in the ancient times, and there was certainly a great tradition of knowledge, there were traditions which you find in ancient Chaldea, in ancient Persia, in Egypt, in Greece, but all these traditions have been lost. There is hardly anything available, in the form of any text. There are ideas, there are mythologies, but as far as the texts are concerned, even the Greek mythology which is available is a later statement of the earlier Eleusinian tradition, and the secret knowledge which is lost.

So if you want to know what was the earliest thought of mankind, and if you want the proof of that earliest document of mankind, we have to turn only to the Veda because it is the only document available for the whole humanity. If you want to reconstruct human history, and the thought of human history, all the nations have to turn to the Veda to seek the description of the earliest thoughts of

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mankind for which you have proof. And what a proof! Because we must remember that this Vedic text was right from the beginning so much revered in India, obviously because it was considered to be a book of knowledge at that time, whatever you might say in modern times about it. It was known to the Vedic seer that they contain supreme secret knowledge, and therefore a tradition had developed in India that this knowledge should never be allowed to be lost. And a system was evolved in India so that one section of people of India had the obligation to memorise either all the four Vedas or at least one Veda, at least one Veda. This has been the tradition. And memorising not in a haphazard manner, but a very special system was evolved of memorising, of singing, of chanting the mantras of the hymns where every syllable was measured, and its place was fixed absolutely. Fortunately, even today, in spite of great losses of many kinds, there are at least two thousand chanters, singers, who can recite the Veda exactly as it was recited five thousand years ago. I have myself, in one of the capacities of my governmental work, made a survey in India, and, in Andhra Pradesh particularly, we have a large number of singers of the Veda, also in different parts of India, and I have tried to record on tape-recording some of the chanting of these Vedic recitations, so that we can one day hear them even here before us. The specialty of this method of singing is that it is sung in seven different ways, and all the seven ways should coincide so there is no mistake occurring anywhere. All the seven different methods, and the last method, which is called the *ganapatha*, the method in which you first pronounce the first syllable, then you pronounce the second syllable, then you go back to the first syllable, and pronounce again the second, and then pronounce the third, then you go back again to the second, and then pronounce the first, and then again you go back to the second, and third, and fourth, and go back to the third, and second, and first, until you come to the end of a verse, which takes nearly from ten to fifteen minutes, even to recite one mantra like *Agni mile purohitam yagnasya devamritvijam hotaram ratnadhatamam*. This is a very simple first verse of the *Rig Veda*. This recitation in this *ganapatha* takes at least fifteen minutes, because of this method. And it is chanted, it is not only recited like prose, it is chanted. In fact even the chanting is so wonderful that when you hear the chanting, you know, these repetitions are so beautiful and so marvelous that you would like to go on hearing, hearing, hearing again and again, marvelous! And then the whole of *Rig Veda*, ten thousand verses, if you have to recite in this way you can imagine what a tremendous feat it would be, and how to memorise! And these memorisers remember both ways, and every word, as you move forward and backward and they have complete memory of it. It is a part of the training, right from the childhood at the age of four or five they start memorising. This is a part of their work. The tradition is so revered that even till today we have at least two thousand people in India who can recite exactly in the way in which they were reciting five thousand years ago. This is the reason why we have today an accurate text, of which there can be no question at all. If anybody doubts that this is not the text, you can just call a singer and ask him to recite in the *ganapatha* and every syllable is caught, even today, so that it is not left to the printer's mistakes. The printing came much later. In fact throughout the history of India, it has been an oral tradition. That is why, as Sri Aurobindo says, today we have almost an accurate text of the Veda, and not only of the Veda, this is true also of the *Brahmanas*, and *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* and many others scriptures, the same method. It is tremendous. What a prodigious memory these Brahmins developed! In any case, there is no dispute about the fact that these Vedic texts are accurate, whether we understand them or not, but on this question there is no doubt that these are the most ancient texts available to mankind. So if human history has to be written correctly, if the thought of human mind has to be written historically, there is no recourse for mankind except to go back to the Veda. So the importance of the Veda is not only for India but for the whole world. It is the world's earliest text available and therefore what the earliest man thought, what he conceived. If you want to find out, we have got to go back to the Veda. Even though they may not be the most ancient, because as Sri Aurobindo says, it is very clear that the Vedas were preceded by a very great civilisation, a very powerful stage of civilisation. And it was only when that age was declining that it was felt that the fragments of the knowledge of these Vedic seers were put together by a Rishi called Vyasa. In any case this is the tradition, that there was a great Rishi called Vyasa, who knew the Vedas in their fullness and he made an anthology, so these four Vedas are not the full text of all that was in that civilisation available as the Veda. But this is only an anthology, only selections, it is a miscellany you may say. What we call Veda is therefore an imperfect statement of what was at that time developed in that ancient time. So what must have been the civilisation at that time can only be imagined when we first understand the light that Sri Aurobindo had shed upon these texts, and secondly when we understand the poetic brilliance — you know, one of the marks whether the poetry is barbaric or naive or primitive or very developed can be seen by the metrical perfection ? metrical perfection ? and, as Sri Aurobindo remarks, if you read the Veda simply, the rhythms of the Veda, as

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Sri Aurobindo says, the rhythms of the Veda are like the chariots of the Gods and they have a perfect symmetrical form, perfect, and this is Sri Aurobindo's remark, one who is one of the greatest poets. It is his tribute to the Vedic rhythms, perfect symmetrical forms, that we find in the Veda. So even if you do not understand the meaning of the Veda, even if they are barbaric, at least the poetical form is not barbaric, that is certain. Barbarians could not have produced that kind of symmetrical perfection of the rhythms throughout the Veda. It is lyrical in its sublimity; both the elements of lyricism, and epic character, both are present. In all the verses of the Veda, as you recite the Vedic verses, — actually one should enjoy reciting the Vedic verses, and then you can see if you know the Sanskrit language, and even if you do not know, but if you simply listen to it, the rhythms, the symmetrical forms, the sounds, the ringings of these Vedic verses are so perfect. As Sri Aurobindo says: That you fly on the wings, as you sing these Vedic verses you feel as if you are flying with your wings. This is the kind of power that the Vedic verses possess.

Sri Aurobindo has said that Vedic poetry is *mantric* poetry. And this is a very important point to be underlined. Vedic poetry is *mantric* poetry. What does it mean? In fact Sri Aurobindo has explained the meaning of mantric poetry in his great book called *The Future Poetry*, and to understand the value of Vedic poetry, we must read this great book *The Future Poetry*. And to say very briefly, Sri Aurobindo has said: To arrive at *mantra* — *mantra* cannot be translated into English, but, let us say, what Sri Aurobindo calls the highest expression, which is poetical in character is, let us say, it is *mantra*. And in India, *mantra* is that rhythmic expression which, when recited, produces a physical effect ? this is called *mantra*. If you say *Tathastu*, in a *mantric* form, let it be so, it will be so, physically. This is the Indian tradition, that if you have attained to *mantric* power in your poetry then any *mantric* expression will produce physical effects. Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is entirely *mantric* in character. This is how Sri Aurobindo has shown what he has written in *The Future of Poetry*, that Future Poetry will be *mantric*, he has said, and to give an example of it the whole of *Savitri* is now available to us which is *mantric* in character and that is why *Savitri* is not merely poetry, it is effective force in action. And that is true of the Vedic mantras and, in very brief, Sri Aurobindo said: The *mantric* poetry must satisfy three criteria: first, it must have the highest intensity of rhythm. In fact Sri Aurobindo has said that the one mark of poetry is rhythmic words. There is no poetry if there are no rhythmic words; prose and poetry differ in this: in prose you may not have rhythmic words, but poetry is marked by rhythmic words. But highest intensity of rhythmic words, that is a mark of *mantra*, not merely rhythmic words. There are so many poems which are in rhythms, but that is not highest poetry, not *mantric*. *Mantric* poetry must have the highest intensity of rhythmic expression. That is the first mark.

Second, highest intensity of style. What is style? It is the perfect correspondence with the mode of expression and the meaning of expression. What you want to say is conveyed exactly by the mode in which that meaning is suitable to it. The higher intensity of style is a second mark of *mantric* poetry.

And the third mark is the highest vision of the highest truth. The intensity of that vision, because all poetry or all art is basically a perception. Where there is no perception, it is not poetry, not art, not sculpture. Perception and the deep perception. Such a perception that you go on, deeply perceiving, until that perception gives out an image. That is called the depth of perception. All art is nothing but this: a perception, perceived so deeply, so deeply, that what you are perceiving begins to take a form, an image. And when you can express that image, you are an artist. In poetry, the highest vision of the truth, not anything, not like experience of a stone, or of sleep, or a beautiful moon or a sun, not that, but the highest vision of the highest truth, the widest truth, the most comprehensive truth, and the deepest experience of it. When that is captured in your poetry that is *mantra*. And Sri Aurobindo has said: The entire corpus of the Veda is *mantric* poetry. So you can imagine, apart of the meaning of the Veda, if the very poetic form has got this much of power, how could it be termed as primitive or barbaric at all. This is the first point that we have to make with regard to what Sri Aurobindo has said about the Veda.

I am sorry, I am taking too long a time in expounding, but the subject itself is too long, and please bear with me, because I want to say what I want to say. So, I only made the first point, that Vedic poetry is *mantric* poetry.

The second point I want to make is that Sri Aurobindo discovered that Vedas have been written in a secret way. That is to say, outwardly it has one meaning, inwardly it has another meaning. Although there is a parallelism. And there was a reason behind it. The reason was that a secret knowledge had to be communicated, and if that communication falls into the hands of an uninitiated, he can misuse it both for himself and the others. Fortunately, in the modern time, some of the secrets

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of knowledge are very difficult, even if you start learning, it takes twenty, thirty years to find out the secret of that knowledge. But we know that once it is known, like atomic energy, or any other, even making telephone, and Internet and so on, you know how misuses can be made of all these instruments and what terrible effects it has already produced in our civilisation. Now this was known to the Vedic seers that knowledge if it is given to an uninitiated can be very harmful to the people — and yet it had to be communicated. So they developed a secret code, and Sri Aurobindo calls it algebraic code; that is, Veda is written in a form of algebra. If you do not know algebra and you read the book of algebra, what meaning can you make out of it? Unless the meaning of the figures and symbols is known to you, you cannot make out anything out of an algebraic book. The Veda is therefore algebraic in character. Now this is a second point I want to make, that Veda is difficult to understand, the meaning of it is secret because of this fact. It is written in algebraic form. You use the word cow, in an ordinary sense we all know what is cow, but in the algebraic form, cow means light. And if you read the Veda throughout, wherever the word cow comes, you put the word light, it will fit in very well. But if you don't put cow for light, it will look very bizarre. The cow stands before a horse, and what is the light, what is the luminous meaning in it? Nothing! A cow stands before the horse. But the same thing, you turn it, and say, The horse is the symbol for Power, Energy, *Shakti*, cow is Light, so *Chit-Shakti*. Cow and horse together is a symbol for *Chit-Shakti*, which makes a tremendous meaning. Now, you put it anywhere in the whole of the Veda, wherever it comes, you put these two words, do not use cow and horse, you simply use the word light and power. It will make a very simple, luminous, obvious meaning. But if you don't know this, then everything look bizarre, and it may look very primitive, and barbaric. This is the reason why many people, not knowing the algebra of Veda, have come to the conclusion that the Veda is barbaric and primitive. Now, it is Sri Aurobindo's tremendous insight, because of his own experiences, that he discovered this algebra of the Veda. And *The Secret of the Veda*, this all-great book, I do not know if you have seen the book, *The Secret of the Veda*. It is volume number 10 in the Centenary Edition. This *Secret of the Veda* gives you the algebraic meanings of various words and terms which have been used in the Veda.

The third point I want to make is that this Veda contains a very deep knowledge of reality, of the world, and of the self. Triple knowledge: god-knowledge, world-knowledge, and soul-knowledge (self-knowledge). Now, what is that knowledge, what is the content of that knowledge? And please allow me at least fifteen minutes to tell you this particular aspect, because it is perhaps the most important aspect that we should like to know.

What is God? What is ultimate reality? It is not the kind of god sitting in the seventh heaven with a long beard. In one of the first statements in the first chapter of the Rig Veda, I will only recite one couplet of this particular mantra which is very very curious: *Na nunamasti no shvah kastadveda yadadbhutam anyasya chittamabhi samcharenyamutadhitam vinashyati*. This is the Sanskrit couplet, which says: The ultimate reality is neither today nor tomorrow. Who knows that reality, which is wonderful? Why is it wonderful? It has motion, it is alone, there is no other, but it has motion in another. Therefore it is *adbhutam*, wonderful. It has motion in another, and when you try to approach it through your intellectual thought, where you always distinguish between one and another, and divide the two, and don't understand the mystery of one itself being another, if you apply that intellect on it, it vanishes. In other words, if you try to understand it intellectually, you will never grasp it, because it is wonderful. It does not follow the logic of the finite, it follows the logic of the infinite. The one that is many. As Sri Aurobindo says in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, ultimate reality is simple-complex. It is simple-complex, at the same time. It is one that is many, it is static that is dynamic. It is the same thing which is said in the Upanishad. In the Isha Upanishad the same idea is expressed. *Etad ejati, etad na ejati, tadejati tannajati*. It moves, it moves not. It is far, it is near. It is wonderful. Now this is the first starting point of the Vedic knowledge of reality, of God. And there are so many other verses to which I do not make reference here for the sake of brevity. Then comes the world-knowledge. What is the world-knowledge of the Veda? They say the physical world that we see is only the outer fringe of the whole world. But even this world consists of three earths. There are three earths, not one earth. Even the earth that we see is not one earth. Then there is intermediate between earth and heaven. Heaven is a word used in the algebraic language of the Veda as mind. Wherever the word heaven comes in the Veda you have to say, it is mind. Wherever the word *prithivi*, earth, comes, you have to understand it to be the physical. Wherever the word *antariksha* comes, it is algebraic term for the intermediate world. So there are three worlds, first of all: the world of the physical, the world of the vital and the world of the mental. These are the first three, to which we have a normal access. But then it says: The Vedic seers took a long time in their search to find out *turiyam svid*, this is another word which is very important in Sanskrit, *turiyam svid*, that fourth one. *Turiyam svid* is again an algebraic terms, That

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fourth one. That fourth one. There is a short story in the Rig Veda given of a Rishi call Ayasya. Ayasya is a name of a Rishi. The story is that there were nine Angirasa Rishis. Angirasa is a name of the clan. Nine Rishis were in search of the highest that is possible. There were searching, and searching, and searching in their quest. At last they came across a great man called Ayasya and they got his help in this search, and, with his help, these nine Angirasa seers, when they became ten with Ayasya, then they found *turiyam svid*, they found the fourth one. The fourth reality. The three are: earth, the intermediate, and heaven: body, life and mind. But the fourth one, they discovered; with what? *Saptadhi*. There is another word in the Veda, again another algebraic term, *saptadhi*, seven-headed-thought. A thought which has seven heads. With seven heads of thought, that is mind has to be so wide as to become seven-headed. With the help of the seven-headed thought, Ayasya broke open the fourth world and with the opening of the fourth world he became universal. *Vishvam ajanayat*. He manifested the whole universality. This fourth is regarded as the most important discovery of the Vedic seers. And Sri Aurobindo afterwards tells us that this fourth is the Supermind. *Turiyam svid* is the Supermind. So the Vedic seers had discovered the Supermind. And beyond the Supermind, they discovered the triple reality which, in later times, came to be recognised as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: the Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. These are also the name of three gardens of Matrimandir that Mother has given. Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. So, if you now see that the world, as we saw in the Vedic times, consisted of these planes, three highest ? Existence, Consciousness, Bliss. Then comes the Supermind, and then come mind, life and matter. This is their world-knowledge ? I must tell you that I am making a great injustice to the Veda by summarising so primitively and so very briefly, so naively, but this is the basic formula, you might say, of the world-knowledge of the *Rig Veda*, of the Veda.

What is the soul-knowledge? According to the *Rig Veda*, this is one of the most secret knowledge. Now let us give a little time to this most secret knowledge of the Veda. This has very much to do with our own yoga. Therefore I am taking little more time on this. This soul is given an algebraic term in the Veda, called *Agni*. *Agni* is the mystic fire. Fire is that which you see outside very easily but, inside, it is our inner self, inner soul, what we call in Sri Aurobindo's psychology, "psychic being". This psychic being is our real inner inmost soul. And this was discovered after a long, long search. If you read the Vedic verses you will find what a tremendous search they were making and there is so much of knowledge of *Agni* given, and so important that Sri Aurobindo himself ? he has written one full book. I don't know if you are aware of that book. This is volume n° 11 of the Centenary Edition. All the hymns addressed to Fire, Mystic Fire, in the Rig-Veda, Sri Aurobindo has collected and translated each one of them. And this is the most precious knowledge that we have now. Because *Agni* is the most profound secret of the Vedic knowledge, according to Veda. In fact, the very first verse of the Veda starts with *Agni*. Without *Agni*, you cannot have ? without fire, without the knowledge of mystic fire, you cannot enter into the portals of Vedic knowledge. You must know yourself very deeply, profoundly, to understand the world, and it is by rising from plane to plane that you rise to the Supreme and discover that wonderful reality that has motion in the another. Now this mystic fire has been described variously in the Veda. As I told you ? such a huge book ? it is only of the *Rig-Veda*, then there are many *Agni* mantras in many other Vedas also, but this knowledge which is available about Fire, mystic Fire, it is to that that Sri Aurobindo makes a reference when he describes in *The Life Divine* about the psychic being. And he says: It is the flame that burns in the heart, which is inextinguishable; it is the conscience deeper than the conscience of the moralist. It is the Daemon of Socrates, it is that which turns always towards the truth and beauty and goodness, which detects the truth from falsehood, unmistakably. *That* is our true soul which is within ourselves and the Veda makes out that without illumining this Fire, you cannot enter into the deeper knowledge that is in the Veda. That is why the importance of Mystic Fire. What you are internally is this Fire. And this Fire itself has an origin. And Sri Aurobindo speaks of the origin of the psychic being also. But in the Veda there is a very tremendous story which Mother has sometimes told, she said: I talk about it very childishly, and says that a time came in the history of the world when the four emanations which had originated from the ultimate reality separated from the origin and there came about a complete darkness. And when that darkness came, then the supreme Divine Mother went back to the Supreme Lord and said: An accident has occurred and there has come about a complete darkness. And what is to be done? And then the Lord said: You create some other beings who will not separate themselves from the origin. And that was the origin of Gods. Gods were created, but even the gods when they saw darkness and they were asked to go down into the darkness so that then the light can come out of it, they refused, they said: It is so dark, we shall not enter into it. It was then that the Gods saw in the

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Divine Mother, in the *Aditi* ? *Aditi* is the Sanskrit name for Divine Mother ? they saw in *Aditi* a special Light, something special, and they said: *That*, if it can be brought down, then it can bring back light into this darkness. That Light is Mystic Fire. That who is called *Agni*, that is the origin of *Agni*, is in the Supreme Divine Mother. And it was put forth — in one of the talks Mother has said that the Supreme Divine Mother, when she saw the darkness, a tremendous Love oozed out of Her and that Love crystallized and fell upon the darkness, this is the psychic element which entered into the darkness. And all the psychic beings are nothing but evolutionary developments of this original psychic element which is nothing but Love of the Divine Mother. And that is why the psychic being automatically turns to the Divine Mother in an experience of Love. That is why in our own yoga, that is the importance given to it. But this is the Vedic truth told in a very algebraic term.

There is one very important word in the *Rig-Veda* which says that, if you recite this mantra, you will be free from all sins. And this is the promise given in the Veda. It is called *Agha marshana mantra*. *Agha* means “sin”, *marshana* means “wiping out”. A mantra which can wipe out all the sins. And that mantra is very simple: *Ritam cha satyam chabhiddhat tapaso dhyajayata tato ratryajayata tatah samudro aravah*. It simply says ? why is it called the mantra that can wipe out the sins? Because if you know the origin of all this, what is all this darkness and how darkness can be removed by the power of the Divine Love and by Mystic Fire, if you know this, all sins can be wiped out. So that is why it is called the mantra of wiping out the sins ? which simply says: In the beginning there was *Tapas*. *Tapas* is nothing else than Power of concentration, power of concentration of the Supreme. There is first the Supreme which I have described already earlier, that which is neither here nor there, that Supreme has a power of concentration. That is *Tapas*. From the *Tapas* comes out first *Ritam ca Satyam*, that which is Truth and the Right. This is the first. In other words, out of the *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, by the power of *Tapas* comes out Supermind. *Satyam*, *Ritam*, *Brihat* is the formula of the Supermind. This is what Sri Aurobindo has revealed in *The Life Divine*. And also in His *Secret of the Veda*. So *Ritam cha Satyam*, from the *Tapas*, power of *Tapas*, comes out this great Supermind. Then, having brought out the Supermind, suddenly something happens: *tato ratryajayata*, from there arose the Night. A sudden jump ? Supermind is the supreme Light and suddenly there happens a right. Night still has got some light because of stars and moon, then it says: After the night, *tato samudro aravah*, then came a complete ocean of darkness. Not only night ? complete darkness. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Inconscience. From the Supermind there was a descent by the separation from the origin, the night came out and then came out the complete darkness. And then it says, after this, *samudradarnavadadhim samvatsaro ajayata*, out of this great darkness came *samvatsara*; *samvatsara* is the algebraic term for the Mystic Fire. The *Agni* was put there. And once *Agni* was put, all the evolution comes out. Then the description of *Surya*, *Chandra*, there is sun, moon, everything that came out. It gives a description of the whole world thereafter. Now, this is the fundamental psychic knowledge, the knowledge of the soul which is given. Again I am doing a great injustice to the Veda because I'm speaking as if it is so simple and so brief as that, but it is not so. There are so many hundreds and thousands of verses on this knowledge in the Veda. It is this psychic being which is presided over by *hamsa*; *hamsa* is another algebraic term. *Hamsa* means swan. Over this Mystic Fire is a *swan* which is tied up, according to the Veda, in hundred nets, and cannot flutter its wings. It is in bondage. But, in this bondage, there is a tremendous battle going on. Now, what is the battle? In fact the world-knowledge and soul-knowledge, when put together in the Veda, is the great story of the forces of Light and the forces of Darkness. The forces of light are called the Gods and forces of Darkness are called *Dasyus*, *Panis*, *Pishachas*, *Rakshasas*, *Asuras*. These are the words which are used in the Vedas to describe the forces of darkness, and there is a great battle between the two. If you want to fight the battle ? I am now coming to the end of my exposition, you just give me ten minutes more, because I have taken a lot of your time ? this battle can be fought, and can be fought systematically, and this is the yoga of the Veda. The mystical discipline, by which the psychic being and the soul, which are caught in this great battle, can be liberated. So the first step is the discovery of the Mystic Fire within you. This is the first step in the mystic discipline of the Veda. Veda, Sri Aurobindo discovered, is a great book of Yoga. It is not any superstition or magic or any kind of barbaric mantras, to get some gains here and there. It is a knowledge of the battle of Life. It is a revelation of the real nature of Life. Suddenly, in harmony, disharmony comes about.

Suddenly, when Rama is to be crowned, Kaikeyi happens to demand certain things overnight, and Rama is thrown out and the great tragedy occurs thereafter, until a battle takes place and only after the battle the victory comes. So, in the human life, there are forces of darkness and forces of light which are described in detail in the Veda — what are the Gods; and the whole knowledge of the Gods,

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and how they can help. And the Vedic seers found out the existence of the Gods, not as imaginations, or formations, or premonitions, but real, objective, existence of the Gods, and they found out the names of these Gods ? names, meaning, the secret of each God. And the function of each God. It is like you are going to a Ministry, and finding out who is the minister and who is the secretary and who is the clerk and who is the cashier, what is the function of each one and then, unless you know this, you can never succeed in the Ministry. Similarly in the Ministry of the world, you cannot succeed unless you know who are the Gods, and what are their functions. So to say very briefly, once again, and very primitively, I'll give only a few clues, just to bear in mind, that the first, as you rise up and kindle your Mystic Fire, the first one that comes in answer is *Indra*. *Indra* is a name of a God who Sri Aurobindo describes algebraically as the God of illumined mind. So you first of all come into contact with the illumined mind. He descends, that is the nature ? *Agni* always ascends, fire always rises up in aspiration. In answer there is a descent of the illumined mind. Only of the illumined mind, first, this is the first God that comes to your help. But he is very powerful and he is able to fight with the demons tremendously. So there is a whole story as to how *Indra* comes to our help, (into which I do not go now) but then, that is not enough. You gain a lot, but that is not the end of the story, you still have to rise higher and higher than *Indra* is *swaha*: this is a very special word in the Veda. In fact all the people who know Sanskrit and *Gayatri* mantra, we start with

*Om bhur bhuvah swah
tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

So *swah* is constantly used in the Vedic lore. This *swah* is a light which has condensed itself by a constant rising of the mystic fire and the constant descent of *Indra*. And it is a very beautiful world of Light. You come across this world of Light, but even that is not the Supreme Light. It is only the medium Light. There is a very famous proposition made in the Veda to distinguish between the darkness, then the intermediate light and the Supreme Light. It is said in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* that Krishna was given through one word the Supreme Knowledge by his teacher, Ghora. Ghora speaks one word to Krishna and gives him the Supreme Knowledge. And what is that mantra he gives?

*Udvayam tamasaspari svah pashanta uttaram
devam devatra suryamaganma jyotiruttamam*

This is the mantra. That we went beyond the darkness and saw the intermediate Light which is *Swaha*, but then we did not stop there, we went further, we went to the Gods, and we went to *Surya*, *Suryam*, we went to the Supreme Light, *Jyotiruttamam*, it is *Jyoti*, which is *uttamam*, the Supreme Light. The Supreme Light is not *Swah* — *Swah* is an intermediate Light ? but *uttamam* is *Surya*, is the sun. The sun is the symbol of the Supermind in the Veda. Wherever the word sun comes, Sri Aurobindo says: It is the symbol of the Supermind. But before you enter into the Supermind, there are four Gods who stand as sentries. They will not allow you to enter into sun, into the Supreme realm. You have to be qualified. Who are these four Gods? *Varuna* — *Varuna* is the God of Vastness. Unless you become very vast, you cannot enter into it. Narrow-minded can never enter into it. That is why Sri Aurobindo constantly says: Widen yourself. And there is a Vedic knowledge: Unless you widen yourself fully, you cannot enter into the Supreme Supermind.

The second is — *Varuna* is always accompanied by *Mitra*, *Mitra* is God of harmony. So as long as you quarrel, you can never enter into that Light. That is certain. There must be harmony, a tapasya of harmony. Vastness and harmony.

Then comes *Aryaman*. *Aryaman* is the Lord of austerity. Great tapasya, the fullness of tapasya you must do, greatest effort, you must master the effort itself.

And then *Bhaga*. *Bhaga* is the God of enjoyment. Unless you know how to enjoy truly, you cannot enter into the Supermind. But enjoy truly, that is to say ? usually even a small joy makes us dance and flutter and throw away all the energies — when you are able to contain the highest joy in yourself without shaking. In the Veda it is said that when you are unbaked and if the great *soma*, the great nectar, falls into it, the unbaked jar breaks down. It is only when you are so purified, so purified thoroughly, that your jar becomes baked, in which, if the joy falls into it, you can hold it. This capacity to hold the joy allows you to enter into Supermind. This is also called the attainment of Immortality. *Amritam*, the great achievement of the vedic Rishis, was that the soul which is tied into hundred nets, the swan which wants to fly, cannot fly and has to battle, when it attains to this state, going beyond *Indra* into *Swah*, and going beyond *Swah* to *Varuna*, *Mitra*, *Aryaman* and *Bhaga* and

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entering into *Surya*, then comes Soma. The highest is Soma, the great delight. When that delight can be held in the body, that is Immortality. This was the greatest achievement of the Vedic Rishis. Sri Aurobindo has written in one chapter called, "The Victory of the Fathers": the Vedic Rishis, what was their victory? Their victory was this.

And one last word. To hold the Supermind in the body was the highest achievement of the Vedic Rishis. Sri Aurobindo found that that is not enough. If there is a distinction between the Veda and his achievement on the one hand and Sri Aurobindo's discovery, the one step farther ? not one step farther. Mother told me that Sri Aurobindo is not a logical continuity of the past, it is not as if you continue what they were doing and then you get Sri Aurobindo's path. No. It is something newly discovered. That is why Mother said: Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past or to history. He is constantly fabricating the future. It is because of this reason that it was not known that apart from holding the Supreme Light in the body, there is also a possibility of the permeation of Light in the body. Now, this was the new knowledge that Sri Aurobindo gives in his yoga. Permeation, it is penetration, only when there is a permeation of this light that the human species can be turned into the supramental species. But now you can see that if you want to understand Sri Aurobindo's yoga, how much you need to know the Vedic yoga and how much certainty and confirmation you get by reading the Vedic yoga. Because many clues you will get in the Veda, in large amplitude; and if Auroville is to be the cradle of this Superman, in which the light of the Supermind has to permeate and penetrate into the cells of the body, then Vedic knowledge is indispensable. Thank you.

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Written text

The Veda or at least the *Samhita* of the *Rigveda* appears to be the earliest literary composition of humanity. There might have been earlier or contemporaneous compositions but they seem to have been lost in the tides and ebbs of time and we do not know what thoughts and aspirations they might have expressed. Considering however that there was, in the earlier stages, a remarkable tradition of mysteries, Orphic and Eleusinian in Greece, of occult lore and magic in Egypt and Chaldea, of Magi in Persia, and of the Rishis in India, there might have been in them something common but what could have been their contents, can probably be imagined only with the aid of the Veda, which is the only remnant of its kind of those early times.

How old is the Veda is not known and there are speculations and considerations, which suppose for it an almost enormous antiquity. However, the text of the Veda that we possess today seems to have remained uncorrupted for over two thousand years because an accurate text, accurate in every syllable, accurate in every accent, was a matter of supreme importance to the Vedic ritualists. The sanctity of the text prevented such interpolations, alterations and modernising versions as have replaced the ancient form of the Mahabharata.

There does not seem to be much doubt that the Samhita has substantially remained unaltered, after it was arranged by the great sage and compiler Vyasa. Thanks to the fidelity of the ancient memorisers and their successors, who continue their tradition to the present day, we have a text, which does not call for the licentious labour of emendation. In the fixed tradition of the Veda, which extends in India over five thousand years, it has been held as authoritative and true in the Brahmanas and the Upanishads, Tantra and Puranas, in the doctrines of great orthodox philosophical schools and in the teachings of famous saints and sages.

The very term Veda means *knowledge* and by knowledge, the tradition means the knowledge of the highest spiritual truth of which the human mind is capable. In contrast, the current interpretations of the Veda and those of Sayana and modern western scholars lead us to the conclusion that the sublime sacred tradition of the Veda as the book of knowledge is a colossal fiction. According to them, the Vedic text contains nothing more than the naive, superstitious fancies of the untaught and materialistic barbarians, concerned only with the most external gains and enjoyments and ignorant of all but the most elementary moral notions or religious aspirations. They acknowledge,

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of course, occasional passages of some profound meaning but they are viewed as quite out of harmony with the general drift of the entire corpus. They want us to believe that the true foundation or starting-point of the later religions and philosophies is the Upanishad; and the Upanishad, in turn, is required to be conceived by us as a revolt of philosophical and speculative minds against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas.

How are we to understand this contradiction? How can we escape, or resolve this contradiction? As we turn the pages of the Vedic literature, we fall into various kinds of confusions, and although we might gain some insights here and there, it is only in Sri Aurobindo that we find a clear statement of the problem and its solution. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo himself had, to begin with, accepted without examination, before himself reading the Veda, the conclusions of European scholarship both as to religious and to the historical and ethical sense of the Vedic hymns.

It was only after his arrival in Pondicherry in 1910 that in the course of his yogic experiences, his thoughts seriously turned to the Veda. We must remember that by the time he had arrived in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo had already firmly been established in two basic realisations of yoga, and had already made a discovery as a basis of his third great realisation of the transition between the mind and the Supermind and to the Supermind itself.

The first realisation was that of the transcendental silent Brahman. He had attained to this realisation within three days of his concentration at Baroda, in 1907, when under the instruction of an adept, Lele, he could bring about utter silence of the mind.

His second major realisation had come to him when he was detained in Alipore jail in 1908 during the course of his trial under the charge of sedition. It was in the jail that the earlier realisation of the silent Brahman expanded into the realisation of the universal dynamic Divine, and he realised the dynamic presence and action of Sri Krishna Vasudeva everywhere. It was again in the same jail that Sri Aurobindo heard the voice of Swami Vivekananda for a fortnight and received the knowledge of planes of consciousness between the mind and the Supermind.

After his acquittal from the jail, Sri Aurobindo continued the inner yogic development which led him to leave Calcutta under the direct command of the Divine, and arrived at Pondicherry, after a short sojourn at Chandernagore. At Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo lived in deep meditation, where while in his descending process of Yoga, he had reached the last level of physical subconscient. In his ascending process of Yoga, he had reached the extreme Overmind border. At a certain stage of intensity, Sri Aurobindo found himself precipitated into the Supreme light. He had touched the Supermind.

After coming to Pondicherry, when he began to study the Veda, Sri Aurobindo discovered that the Supermind was a lost secret of the Veda. Sri Aurobindo found in the *Rigveda* many clues upon his own experiences, and he found that the Vedic Rishis had opened the great passage, *mahas panthah*. Sri Aurobindo himself has given brief indications of his discovery of the secret of the Veda, and they are so interesting that we may refer to some of them here:

My first contact with Vedic thought came indirectly while pursuing certain lines of self-development in the way of Indian yoga, which, without my knowing it, were spontaneously converging towards the ancient and now unfrequented paths followed by our forefathers. At this time there began to arise in my mind an arrangement of symbolic names attached to certain psychological experiences which had begun to regularise themselves; and among them there came the figures of three female energies, Ila, Saraswati, Sarama, representing severally three out of the four faculties of the intuitive reason, — revelation, inspiration and intuition...

... It did not take long to see that the Vedic indications of a racial division between Aryans and Dasyus and the identification of the latter with the indigenous Indians were of a far flimsier character than I had supposed. But far more interesting to me was the discovery of a considerable body of profound psychological thought and experience lying neglected in these ancient hymns. And the importance of this element increased in my eyes when I found, first, that the mantras of the Veda illuminated with a clear and exact light, psychological experiences of my own for which I had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teachings of Yoga or of Vedanta, so far as I was acquainted with them, and, secondly, that they shed light on obscure passages and ideas of the Upanishads to which, previously, I could attach no exact meaning and gave at the same time a new sense to much in the Puranas.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, pp.34-7

There is a profound statement in one of the hymns of Vamadeva, where the poet speaks of secret words of seer-knowledge that expressed their meaning only to the seer: *ninya vacamsi*

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nivacana kavaye kavyani. This statement appears to be illustrated strikingly when we see that the secret words of the Veda that were ignored by the priest, the ritualist, grammarian, pundit, historian and mythologist, revealed their secret to the seer-poet, Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's experiences confirm the belief of the Vedic Rishis that their mantras were inspired from a higher hidden plane of consciousness and contained a secret knowledge and that the words of the Veda could only be known in their true meaning by one who is himself a seer or a mystic.

In one of the hymns of the *Rigveda*, the Vedic word is described (X.71) as that which is supreme and the topmost height of speech, the best and the most faultless. It has been said that it is something that is hidden in secrecy and from there comes out and is manifested. It enters, we are told, into the truth-seers or Rishis and it is found by following their track of the speech. We are told that all cannot enter into its secret meaning. It is declared that those who do not know the inner sense are as men who seeing see not, hearing hear not, only to one here and there, the Word desiring him, like a beautifully robed wife to a husband lays open her body. We are further told that others unable to drink steadily of the milk of the Word, the Vedic cow, move with it as one that gives no milk, to him the Word is a tree without flowers or fruits. All this seems to be confirmed in Sri Aurobindo's experience of the Vedic hymns. It seems, as though, as soon as Sri Aurobindo touched the Vedic Word, the inner and secret vibrations of that Word began to reveal its resonances with Sri Aurobindo's inner spiritual experiences and that Word began to reveal its secret.

The hymns of the Veda possess, according to Sri Aurobindo, a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in the technique, great variations of style and poetical personality. They are not, he asserts, the works of rude, barbarous, and primitive craftsmen, but they are the living breath of a supreme and conscious art, forming its creations in the puissant but well governed movement of a self-observing inspiration.

Vedic poetry is *mantric* poetry, and as Sri Aurobindo points out in his *Future Poetry*, the *mantra* is only possible when three highest intensities of speech meet and become indissolubly one, — a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. The Vedic poets are, in Sri Aurobindo's view, masters of a consummate technique and their rhythms are carved like chariots of the gods and borne on divine and ample wings of sound and are at once concentrated and wide-waved, great in movement and subtle in modulation, their speech lyric by intensity and epic by elevation, an utterance of great power, pure and bold and grand in outline, a speech direct and brief in impact, full to overflowing in sense and suggestion so that each verse exists at once as a strong and sufficient thing in itself and takes its place as a large step between what came before and what comes after.

Sri Aurobindo discovered in the utterances of the greatest seers Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others, the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry. Sri Aurobindo concluded that the mind of ancient India did not err when it traced back all its philosophy, religion and essential things of its culture to these seer poets; for he found that all the future spirituality of India people was contained there in seed or in first expression.

According to Sri Aurobindo the Vedic Rishis had discovered secrets and powers of Nature, which were not those of the physical world but which could bring occult mastery over the physical world and physical things and to transmit and systematise that occult knowledge and power was also one of their serious occupations. Elaborating this point, Sri Aurobindo says:

But all this could only safely done by a difficult and careful training, discipline, purification of the nature; it could not be done by the ordinary man. If men entered into these things without a severe test and training it would be dangerous to themselves and others; this knowledge, these powers could be misused, misinterpreted, turned from truth to falsehood, from good to evil. A strict secrecy was there fore maintained, the knowledge handed down behind a veil from master to disciple. A veil of symbols was created behind which these mysteries could shelter, formulas of speech also which could be understood by the initiated but were either not known by others or were taken by them in an outward sense which carefully covered their true meaning and secret

Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Centenary Edition, p. 4

Sri Aurobindo proceeded, in due course, to study *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*, and various other interpretations of the Veda. He examined Vedic scholars, beginning with Yaska ending with Sayana, studied the mythological, legendary and historical elements, tested the modern theories and other reliance on comparative philology, studied Tilak's contributions, Swami Dayananda's

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interpretation as also the thesis put forward by Mr. Ayer. He finally came to frame a hypothesis on which he conducted his own inquiry. According to this hypothesis:

The Veda has a double aspect and that the two, though closely related, must be kept apart. The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and coherent than the physical. The Veda is primarily intended to serve for spiritual enlightenment and self-culture.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, p. 30

The task that Sri Aurobindo undertook was to restore the primary intention of the Veda, and in this task he welcomed each of the ancient and modern systems of interpretations and found in each of them an indispensable assistance. He found that Yaska and Sayana supplied the ritualistic framework of outward symbols and the large store of traditional significances and explanations. In the Upanishads, he found various clues to the psychological and philosophical ideas of the Vedic Rishis, and he underlined their method of spiritual experience and intuition. In European scholarship, he appreciated the critical method of comparative research, which when perfected, would be found capable of immensely increasing the materials available and, therefore, eventually, of giving a scientific certainty and firm intellectual basis. From Swami Dayananda, he received the clue to the linguistic secrets of the Rishis and the idea of the One Being with the *Devas*, expressing in numerous names and forms the many-sidedness of His unity.

According to the psychological theory, which Sri Aurobindo has presented in his *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Veda recognises an Unknowable, Timeless, Unnameable behind and above all things, and not sizeable by the studious pursuits of the mind. A clear enunciation of this view is to be found in the *Rigveda*, in the first Mandala, in the 170th Sukta, where *Indra* declares:

It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth That which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes.

Impersonally, it is That, — the one existence, — *tad ekam*, but to the pursuit of our personality it reveals itself out of the secrecy of things as God or *deva*, the nameless that has many names.

The Supreme Reality is divine existence, builder of the worlds, lord and begetter of all beings, Male and Female, Being and Consciousness, Father and Mother of the Worlds and their inhabitants. He is also their son, and ours; for he is the Divine Child born into the worlds, who manifests himself in the growth of the creature.

The Supreme Reality is a triple divine principle and the source of the Beatitude. That Reality, the *deva*, is the Friend and Lover of man, the pastoral Master of the Herds, who gives us the sweet milk and the clarified butter from the udder of the shining cow of the infinitude, *Aditi*. This *deva* is to be found by the soul of man who soars as the Bird, — the Hamsa, passes the shining firmaments of physical and mental consciousness, *climbs* as a traveller and fighter beyond earth of body, and heaven of mind and ascends on the path of the Truth. When the soul discovers the Truth, it attains to the ambrosial wine of divine delight. By drinking that delight, *Soma*, which is drawn from the sevenfold waters of existence, or pressed out from the luminous plant of the hill of being and uplifted by its raptures, it attains to immortality.

The path to the truth and immortality has been build by the fathers, *pitarah* and they too like the gods, help us in our journey. There are *Ribhus*, those ancient human beings, who had attained to the condition of godhead by power of knowledge and perfection in their works and they are invited to participate in our human journey to fashion for us the things of immortality even as they had fashioned it for themselves.

Our life here is a battle in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest. This battle is fought by the human fathers, *pitara manushyah*, the divine Angirasas, and they had attained a great victory, which can come to us also by following the path that they have hewn for us. The Angirasas are the hill-breakers, the givers of the oblation, dwellers in the heat and light, slayers of the Vritra, conquerors of the foe. Angirasas seek the conquest of the world of *swar*, — the fourth world of the Vedic knowledge.

The thought by which the *swar* is conquered is the seven-headed thought born from the Truth.

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It was discovered by Ayasya, the companion of the *navagvas*. The seven-headed thought of Ayasya enabled him to become universal, possessor of all the worlds of the soul, and by becoming universal, he manifested a certain fourth world, *turiyam svid janayat vishwajanya*. The conquest of the fourth world was the aim of the great work accomplished by the Angirasa Rishis. We, too, are called upon to make that conquest and like the Angirasas, we, too, can attain to the secret well of honey and pour out the bellowing fountains of sweetness in manifold streams. These streams are, indeed, those seven rivers poured down the hill by Indra after slaying Vritra, — the streams of truth, the seven principles of consciousness in their divine fulfilment in the truth and bliss.

These seven principles explain the complex systems of the world, which we find both within and without, subjectively cognised and objectively sensed. It is a rising tier of earths and heavens. The seers often image them in a series of trios. There are three earths and three heavens. There is a triple world below consisting of heaven, earth, and intervening mid-region, — *dyau*, *prithwi* and *antariksha*. There is a triple world between, the shining heavens of the sun; and there is a triple world above, — the supreme and rapturous abodes of the godheads.

In other words, there are seven worlds in principle, five in practice, three in their general groupings:

1. The Supreme <i>Sat-Chit-Ananda</i>	The triple divine worlds
2. The Link-world Supermind	The Truth, Right, Vast, manifested in <i>var</i> with its three luminous heavens.
3. The triple lower world	Heaven — (<i>Dyaus</i> , the three heavens); Pure mind; Life force The Mid-Region (<i>Antariksha</i>); Matter. Earth (the Three Earths)

We draw from the life-world, our vital being. We draw from the mind-world, our mentality; we are ever in secret communication with them. We can consciously dwell in them. We can also rise in solar worlds of the Truth and enter into the portals of the Superconscient, cross the threshold of the Supreme. The divine doors can swing open to our ascending soul.

The human ascension provides significance to the life of man. Man can rise beyond mind and live in the home of the gods, Cosmic Powers who unyoke their horses in the world of the Supermind, the world of the Truth-Consciousness. Man, who ascends to that Truth-Consciousness, strives no longer as a thinker but is victoriously the seer. He is no more *manishi*; he is a *rishi*. His will, life, thought, emotions, sense, act are all transformed into values of peace and truth and remain no longer an embarrassed or a helpless vehicle of mixed truth and falsehood. He follows a swift and conquering straightness. He feeds no longer on broken fragments but is suckled by the teats of Infinity. He has to break through and pass out beyond our normal firmaments of earth and heaven and conquering firm possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Heights, he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of Immortality.

The secret of ascension is sacrifice. The Vedic sacrifice is symbolic in character. Just as we find in the Gita the word *yajna* used in symbolic sense for all actions, whether internal or external, even so, the Vedic *yajna* is psychological in character to indicate all action that is consecrated to the gods or to the Supreme. If *yajna* is the action consecrated to the gods, or to the Supreme, the giver of the sacrifice, is the doer of the action. The offerings of *yajna* are principally *ghrita* and *soma*. *Ghrita*, which means clarified butter, indicates in its esoteric sense, rich or warm brightness representing clarity of thought. *Soma* is the delight that is born from the purification of all the members of the being, widely spread out of the sieve of purification. [See the first Sukta of the ninth Mandala of the Rig Veda, which speaks of the widespread sieve of purification. It states further: "He tastes not that delight who is unripe and whose body has not suffered in the heat of the fire; they alone are able to bear that and enjoy it who have been prepared by the flame."

The fruits of offering are also symbolical, namely, cows, horses, gold, offspring, men, physical strength, victory in battle. Physical light is psychologically a symbol of divine knowledge. Cow and horse symbolise two companion ideas of light and energy — consciousness and force, — *chit shakti*. Offsprings are symbolically flowers of new consciousness, and men and physical strength are symbolised by spiritual valour and courage.

The gods to whom sacrifice is to be offered have psychological functions. To the Vedic seers they are living realities. They are not simply poetic personifications of abstract ideas; they are beings of the Supreme Being.

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The first god to be invited into our human journey in our sacrifice is *Agni*, which symbolises the seven-tongued power of the soul, a force of God instinct with knowledge. *Agni* opens the way for the action of *Indra*, who symbolises the power of pure existence, self-manifested as the divine mind. As *Agni* rises upward from earth to heaven, so *Indra* is the light instinct with force, which descends from heaven to earth. *Indra* comes down into our world as the hero with the shining horses and slays darkness and division with his lightning, poured down in the life-giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, *Sarama*, symbolising intuition, the lost or hidden illuminations. He makes that Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality.

Surya is the sun, the master of the Supreme Truth, truth of being, truth of knowledge, truth of possession and act and movement and functioning. *Surya* is also *Savitri*, the creator or manifester of all things, and illuminations we seek are the herds of this Sun, who come to us in the track of *Usha*, who symbolises the divine dawn. These illuminations lead us up to the highest beatitude, which is symbolised by *Soma*.

But if the truth of *Surya* is to be established firmly in our mortal nature, there are four conditions that are indispensable: first, we have to establish *Varuna* who symbolises vast purity and clear wideness, destructive of all sins and crooked falsehood. *Varuna* is always accompanied by *Mitra*, who symbolises a luminous power of love and comprehension, leading and forming into harmony our thoughts, acts and impulses. But this is not enough; we have to establish in us an immortal puissance of clear discerning aspiration symbolised by *Aryaman*. The last condition is that of happy spontaneity of the right enjoyment of all things dispelling the evil dream of sin and error and suffering. This condition is fulfilled by *Bhaga*.

There are many other gods as *Vayu*, the master of life-energy, *Brihaspati*, the power of the soul; *Ashwins*, the lords of bliss; *Vishnu*, the all-pervading godhead; and *Shiva* and *Rudra*, the mighty, who breaks down all defective formations and who is also the supreme healer.

There are also female energies, among whom *Aditi*, infinite mother of the gods, comes first, and there are five powers of truth-consciousness: *mahi* or *bharati* — the vast world; *Ila* symbolises the power of revelation; *Saraswati* who symbolises the power of inspiration; *Sarama* who symbolises the power of intuition, the hound of heaven, who descends into the cavern of the subconscious and finds from there hidden illuminations; the last is *dakshina*, who symbolises the power to discern rightly, to dispose the action and the offering and to distribute in the sacrifice to each godhead its portion. Each god, too, has his female energy.

In our ascension, we need the development of all the powers, symbolised by various godheads, so that we may attain to perfection. Perfection must be attained at all our levels, in the wideness of earth, our physical being and consciousness; in the full force of vital speed and action and enjoyment and nervous vibrations typified as the horse; in the perfect gladness of heart of emotion and a brilliant heat and clarity of mind throughout our intellectual and psychical being, in the coming of supramental light, which would transform all our existence; so comes the possession of truth, and by the truth admirable surge of the bliss; in the bliss infinite consciousness and absolute being.

Thus in the psychological theory, the Veda emerges as a great record of wisdom, already equipped with a profound psychological discipline. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

[Veda is] a *Scripture not confused in thought or primitive in its substance, not a medley of heterogeneous or barbarous elements, but one, complete and self-conscious in its purpose and in its purport, veiled indeed by the cover, sometimes thick, sometimes transparent, of another and material sense but never losing sight even for a single moment of its high spiritual aim and tendency.*

Sri Aurobindo. *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, p.44

The psychological theory was put forward by Sri Aurobindo as a hypothesis and the evidence that he adduced in his great book *The Secret of the Veda* establishes very clearly a prima facie case for the idea that the Vedic hymns are the symbolic gospel of the ancient Indian mystics and that their sense is spiritual and psychological. The soundness of the hypothesis comes out of the fact that the spiritual and psychological sense of the Veda clearly emerges from the language of the Veda itself. Sri Aurobindo showed that there are clear indications in the explicit language of the hymns which guide us to that sense. This was further supported by the interpretation of each important symbol and image and the right psychological functions of the gods. This was based on the internal evidence of the Vedic Suktas themselves. The sense discovered for each of the fixed terms of the Vedas is a firm and not a fluctuating sense founded on good philological foundation and fitting naturally into the context whenever it occurs. The reason for this firmness lies in the fact that the language of the hymns is fixed and invariable. The Vedic language is like an algebraic language, and it has been scrupulously

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respected. Diction consistently expresses either a formal creed and ritual or a traditional doctrine and constant experience. Indeed, if the hypothesis had to be thoroughly established, it would have been necessary to translate all the hymns of the Vedas and to show that the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo fits in naturally and easily in every context.

Sri Aurobindo had a plan to undertake this huge task but it could not be undertaken for want of time. In *The Secret of the Veda*, the object that Sri Aurobindo had put forward was only to indicate the clue that he himself had received, the path and its principal turnings, the results that he had arrived at and the main indications by which the Veda itself helps us to arrive at them. But after completing *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo undertook the translation of all the *Agni Suktas* of the Rig Veda and these translations establish Sri Aurobindo's hypothesis on a very secure foundation.

More than foundational work has been accomplished and any researcher, who wants to undertake any further task, will find ample aid in Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.

It may be further mentioned that Sri Aurobindo wrote long commentaries on *Ishopanishad* and *Kenopanishad*. He translated also several other important Upanishads. These commentaries and translations show us the continuity between the Veda as Sri Aurobindo interpreted it and the Upanishads and suggests that the body of ideas and doctrines, which are found in the Upanishads, bore a more antique form of subsequent Indian thought and spiritual experience. This suggestion is further strengthened by what Sri Aurobindo has written in his *Foundations of Indian Culture*, on Indian religion and spirituality as also on the Veda, Upanishads and subsequent Indian literature.

Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* helps us also in coming closer to the original sense of the Veda and, in that light, to a profounder sense of the Gita itself.

Sri Aurobindo looks upon the Veda as a record of Yogic experiences of our leading forefathers. He considers these experiences to be the seeds of the later developments of the Indian Yoga, including his own Integral Yoga. And when we study profundities of Integral Yoga and its relevance to our contemporary times, we cannot fail to appreciate the decisive presence and influence in it of the lofty and rich experiences of the Vedic Rishis. And we feel grateful that by uncovering the inner sense of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo has made the Vedic fund of knowledge available to our present day humanity and has also shown how that fund of knowledge must be made alive if we are to solve the most critical problems of our times.

In its scientific tradition, Yoga is an ever-progressive open book where ancient Rishis had handed over their riches of experiences to the new Rishis for further enlargement and exploration. In the light of this, although Veda is regarded as authoritative, since spiritual experiences carry their own authority of veracity, the Veda is not the last word. The Vedic Rishis had themselves declared in the first Mandala itself:

The priest of the Word climb Thee like a ladder, O hundred powered; as one ascends from peak to peak, there is made clear the much that has still to be done. (Rig Veda I.10.1, 2)

In the Indian tradition, therefore, the experiences of past seers and sages have not only been verified and repeated but even intensified, enlarged, modified, even surpassed by the new seers and sages. It is recognised that the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth allows room for new discoveries, new statements and even new achievements. Sri Chaitanya and others, for example, developed an intensity of bhakti, which was absent in the Veda, and examples of this kind can be multiplied. Sri Aurobindo's own Integral Yoga marks a new development. Although in its integrality and synthesis, it absorbs all essential elements to be found in the Vedas and Upanishads and in the rest of the Yogic traditions, which can contribute to the attainment of the new aim that has been envisaged, the central idea in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is to lead spiritual evolution to the next stage of the mutation of human species by bringing down the Supermind as the means of complete transformation of Nature. The idea of the Supermind, the Truth-consciousness, is there in the Rigveda, according to Sri Aurobindo's psychological theory of the Veda. For the Veda speaks of the discovery of the world of truth, right and the vast, *satyam*, *ritam* and *brihat*, which defines the nature of the Supermind. The idea of the Supermind is also present in the Upanishads when we see it in the conception of Being of Knowledge, — *vijnanmaya Purusha*, exceeding the mental, vital and physical being. But going beyond all this, Sri Aurobindo envisages the working of the supramental power not only as an influence on the physical being, giving it abnormal faculties, but an entrance and permeation, changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical.

Sri Aurobindo did not learn the idea of the Supermind from the Veda and the Upanishads. What he received about the Supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge. It was only afterwards

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that he found certain confirmatory revelations in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Nonetheless, to learn that the Supermental was discovered by the Vedic Rishis and that they had developed profound psychological discipline of the ascent of human consciousness and of the descent of the divine consciousness so as to facilitate the discovery for the Supermind must be considered to be of incalculable value.

In the development of knowledge, past gains give surer basis for the future development. The Vedic knowledge of the Supermind must, therefore, be regarded by the progressive humanity of today as a great boon and heritage which we must recover as a living aid in our forward march of evolution. This is, in any case, what we learn from what Sri Aurobindo has done in regard to the Veda, its psychological discipline, its discovery of the Supermind and many other important details of the Vedic Yoga.

Let me conclude by quoting from Sri Aurobindo what he wrote in his earliest manuscripts on the Veda:

I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda, the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world... I believe that the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life and the world and among men.... The Veda was the beginning of our spiritual knowledge; the Veda will remain its end. These compositions of an unknown antiquity are as the many breasts of eternal Mother of knowledge from which our succeeding ages have all been fed. The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race. For I believe firmly that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return.

Sri Aurobindo, *India's Rebirth*, pp. 90, 94-5