



The Psychological Insights in the Veda[†]

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The ideal of all-sided perfection and its achievement by a person has been mentioned in several so-called 'New Age' books. Achieving perfection in a particular activity, which is mostly under one's control, is straight forward. If someone is serious about learning music, then they may approach the best music teacher in the neighbourhood for learning. Even in such a case, the interest, in pursuing the particular activity such as music, goes down with time for many people. Further, harmonizing many different activities is a major issue for many people. The idea of achieving perfection in an activity involving several people is also often formidable. We have heard slogans like, 'quality time', 'budgeting time' etc. in response to such problems. Many of us accept that the solution is often about assigning priorities, which is basically a form of compromise. The idea of achieving harmony and beauty in one's own activities, and those involving others is rarely mentioned in this scenario.

A closely related idea is, 'to spiritualise our everyday life,' i.e. recognizing the existence of the Supreme Spirit which pervades and energises every aspect of existence and invoking this Supreme Spirit in every activity.

In the Indian tradition, the meaning of the word 'spiritual' is quite different from religion as commonly understood. Spirituality is free of any dogma or creed. Spiritual experience is an experience of the spirit or spiritual consciousness or the consciousness which pervades the entire cosmos including all human activities. For instance, from the point of view of our ordinary consciousness, each human being is different from every other being, human or non-human. But from the point of view of spiritual consciousness, each one of us is a point in the ocean of consciousness; the thoughts, the desires, the emotions, etc., of each being appear to be waves in the ocean of the spirit, each wave waxing and waning through each point of the cosmos, each point corresponding to each being. The movement of a particular wave of desire through a particular point gives the impression that the associated person has that particular wave of desire which she/he thinks originated in her/him. Further, the power of a person depends on the cosmic forces of which she/he has conscious or unconscious control. Consequently, there is no hard barrier between individual human beings and the cosmic powers called as devās, including the Supreme One.

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Once we understand the unity of the universe, we can more easily answer the question, 'How to imbibe beauty and harmony in every aspect of our life, i.e., harmony and beauty in the thoughts and feelings, harmony and beauty in every outward action and movement, harmony and beauty in the surroundings?' Some proponents of different religions believe that, 'the faith itself will show the way'.

In both the approaches, we recognize that everyone works throughout every waking moment in some way or the other. The work may be cooking, reading, music, athletics and others. However, do we understand what work is? Some people claim that they do work for getting enjoyment. What is the source of enjoyment? Some others complain that the work that they have undertaken, does not give joy. They seek their enjoyment by some other means utilising the monetary resources obtained through their work.

It appears that the Rig Veda Samhitā has answers to all the above questions relating to:

- 1) Life as a unique journey
- 2) The nature of work
- 3) The forces behind any activity
- 4) Relationship between work and enjoyment
- 5) Work and progress

What is our Journey?

Vedic seers envisioned our existence as a vast mountain with numerous peaks and plateaus. Each stage of human perfection is

considered a peak. Thus the spiritual journey means going from one peak to another. This process is stated in the two mantrās of Rig Veda quoted below.

"The Priests of the word (brāhmaṇa) climb you like a ladder, O hundred powered," (1.10.1).*

"When one ascends from peak to peak, he realises the progress that is yet to be achieved," [first half, (1.10.2)].

Only when an aspirant reaches one peak of perfection, in the physical level or any other level, he or she gets a glimpse of the work that is yet to be done.

"Then the (Divine-Mind) Indra awakens in the seeker the purpose of the journey; he (Indra) manifests with his associates to aid (the devotee)," [second half of (1.10.2)].

Thus Indra, the Cosmic Force symbolising the Perfect Mind or Divine Mind, awakens in the devotee the purpose of his journey, and indicates the choice among the alternatives or the path that was never considered; he also gives the necessary help along with the associated cosmic powers.

But once the foundation has been secured, further development takes place by a progressive self-unfolding, and the soul becomes sure of its way. As phrased by the vedic seer in (5.19.1), "State is born upon state; covering after covering becomes conscious of knowledge; in the lap of the Mother, the soul sees."

* The triplet (1.10.2) refers to the mantra 2, śukta 10, Maṇḍala 1 of the Rig Veda Samhitā.



In other words, as our journey progresses, the states of inconscience and darkness unroll themselves displaying the powers underneath; the areas of awareness grow and spread displacing those held by ignorance.

Rig Veda never mentions any distinction between the so-called worldly work and spiritual work. Every work consists of combining several entities or substances, each with a different form into a new substance or entity with a new form.

The characteristics or the benefits of the final outcome or product, is due to the involvement of several cosmic powers; the contribution of the human effort is miniscule, but crucial. For example, take the example of cooking. Cooking is the conversion of several raw foods into new forms, which are both tasty and strengthening, using a source of heat energy and other accessories. Their taste and their digestibility are not created by the cook. It is already inherent in the raw foods. His/her contribution is in mixing the ingredients in an appropriate quantity and manner. Obviously the work has to be done with consciousness, otherwise, the result will be shoddy. The example of the growth of plants, yielding fruits and flowers, etc., is similar. Still, the human being takes complete credit for the final product. Such persons are enmeshed in their ego and they stagnate. People who realise this lesson are progressing to higher levels.

“When men toil as a service to the divine, they ascend to wide levels,” (*bhūma prṣṭa*, 5.7.5).

Thus, action done with awareness becomes a lever for wider upliftment to the higher levels of the unbound spirit. Work itself becomes a force for liberation.

Agni is portrayed “as an axe which enters deeper and deeper like an eater. He is the achiever in man and wins the enjoyment of bliss for the seeker.” (5.7.8)

There are many references in the Rig Veda highlighting journey and work, in addition to the two verses quoted above. They describe our collaborative activities (*yajña*) as galloping, (5.6.2) leading to a perfect world (5.6.8).

The mantra (5.21.1) states, “O Agni, we set you within us as a human”. The God Agni descending into man assumes the veil of humanity. Agni, born in man, manifests his powers and utilises the forms of thought and life to assist the development of the mortal into immortality.

How does one begin the Journey?

Agni is the beginning and the end. Agni is the Divine Will. He is the will in the mind and he gives the necessary aspiration for the upward journey. He is also the will in the *Prāṇa*, the dynamic life-energy. He devours, enjoys, and purifies the nervous being. The proverbial psychological foes such as greed, delusion, jealousy etc. are transformed into the corresponding divine powers of sharing, clarity and taking joy in other's achievements respectively. He transforms our reactions like anger in an encounter into helping aids.



“Agni, the cosmic power who leads us on the journey creates the light of intuition in us,” (*ketum kṛnoti*, (5.7.4), *prathama ketum*, (5.11.2)).

“Agni tears down the desert of our dwelling (5.7.7), (i.e., breaks down all the wrong ideas about the world as a unhappy place or place without aim) and builds a happy home for man,” (*astatātim*, (5.7.6)).

He shows us the path to the plenitude (*vājasya pantham*, (5.10.2) or the path of right, *ṛtasya pantham*).

He makes us climb to greatness (*asuryam aruhat*, 5.10.2). Agni helps in the journey to the desirable goal (*vāryam yāti*, 5.6.3), leads to the perfect world, (5.6.8). The aspirant is described as the achiever of work (*dasma*) in many verses.

The force of Agni drives the aspirants in their impulse without a break (5.6.6). Agni awakens the glory in us (*sukīrti bodhati tmana*) (5.10.4).

Agni helps us by putting on the veil of humanity (5.21.2).

The progress is possible only because of the absence of duality in the human seeker (*na dvayena*, 5.12.2) as the human seeker identifies himself with the cosmic powers.

Any task undertaken by human beings is really an act of collaboration between them and the Gods; it is called as a sacrifice or *yajña* which marches forward (*yajña ānushak adya*, 5.26.8).

Indra is the Lord of the Divine Mind and action. In all our work, he is the guide. In the Veda, every activity is a transformation of matter

or thoughts from one form to another form. For instance, cooking is the conversion of raw vegetables, grains etc., into an edible and tasty form. Even though this task appears to be very simple from the outer view, it involves a variety of cosmic forces to which we do not pay attention. Indra is the power which gives perfect form, (1.4.1; 6.47.18). He converts our obscure mentality into a tremendous intelligence.

Every action done consciously as an offering to the God-Mind Indra automatically results in the release of delight or joy, called as Soma. The work gives not only its intended result but also Soma. Rig Veda regards Indra as a cow, who can be milked, i.e., only effort results in the milk of Soma. If we offer the Soma back to the gods, then the Indra-power increases in us to render our work more and more perfect. Consequently more Soma or joy is released. This is the relation between work and enjoyment.

The main associates of Indra are the Maruts. They act on our animal consciousness made up of the impulses of nervous mentality and transform them into brilliant Rays of the Sun.

Ashwins are the Lords of Bliss and healing. Their name ‘Nasatya’ is derived from the root ‘nas,’ to move. They offer their guidance and help in the journey.

There is also the collective of all the Cosmic Powers, Gods and Goddesses, who help us in many ways.

Our work is made up of the contributions of a variety of forces. It is Mitra, the Lord of Love who co-ordinates all these powers in us by his



Power of Love. Both the goddess Sarasvati and Mitra symbolise the accuracy of the intuitive mind, and the conscious hand and the discerning eye of the perfect work. The action of Mitra is possible because of the energy of the all-powerful king Varuṇa. Varuṇa never tolerates narrowness in our thinking or actions. Hence, these two deities work together and their names Mitra and Varuṇa appear together.

We will conclude this overview with a quote from the last part of the Chapter, 'The Doctrine of the Mystics' in the 'Hymns to the Mystic Fire', by Sri Aurobindo.

"Our life is a horse that neighing and galloping bears us onward and upward; its forces

are swift-hooved steeds; the liberated powers of the mind are wide-winged birds; this mental being or this soul is the upsoaring Swan or the Falcon that breaks out from a hundred iron walls and wrests the wine of the Soma from the jealous guardians of felicity. Every shining godward Thought that arises from the secret abysses of heart is a priest and a creator and chants a divine hymn of luminous realisation and puissant fulfilment. We seek for the shining gold of the Truth; we lust after a heavenly treasure."

"So understood Rig Veda becomes the high-aspiring Song of Humanity; its chants are episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in its immortal ascension."