International Young Adults Veda Programme 20 June 2020
Inaugural address by Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Chairman Sathya Sai International Organisation, on The Essence of Veda Chanting
Summary of the Webinar

Opening message – Excerpt from Discourse of Sathya Sai Baba

According to Sathya Sai Baba, the Vedas are neglected today because nobody would want to chant Veda. Veda is richest of all and, there is nothing beyond. Man’s position, plight and condition are very well contained in Vedic texts. God has gifted Veda such that all can chant. The Veda chanting has no differences like caste, creed and community. Sathya Sai Baba invites two international students to chant the Sri Suktam and declares that it is His decision that there should be Veda chanting in every country, by everybody, by every caste, by every community, and by every individual. [Divine Discourse, Sai Kulwant Hall, 9 August 2006].

Welcome address by Br. Deviesh Tankaria, International YA Coordinator - SSIO

Br. Deviesh Tankaria welcomed everyone and also highlighted that Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Chairman of Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) will be inaugurating the Sathya Sai International Young Adults (YA) Veda programme. Everything happens as part of Sathya Sai Baba’s will and two years ago, He planted a seed in their minds to have an International YAs Veda programme with an aspiration where all YAs will unite, to learn and practise the Vedas. The programme was launched on the 24th April 2020 to commemorate the auspicious day of Sathya Sai Aradhana Mahotsavam. Br. Deviesh reflected that in light of the current climate, there’s never been a more important period for humanity to come together and pray for the welfare of the world.

Br. Deviesh reiterated that our task to uphold Bhagawan’s teachings and strive to be beacons of His Love is quite clear. The challenges that we face today are no lesser or greater than those the world has faced through the ages. When humanity has been under threat of disintegration, leaders from the past like Rama, Krishna and Buddha have inspired, guided, and transformed great sections of humanity to re-establish righteousness. Likewise our beloved Sathya Sai Baba, has come for us to realise our innate divinity and experience the same divinity in everything at all times. To help us on this path, Sathya Sai Baba has given us this unique organisation (SSIO) for our own spiritual transformation and it is important that we do not forget this. We all have the responsibility to exemplify and share Sathya Sai Baba’s message and this was the motivation behind this most sacred programme, the International YAs Veda Programme.

Br. Deviesh informed everyone that within 24 hours of launching the application process, 400 YAs had already signed up and to date there are over 1300 YAs, from 54 countries participating with the vast majority aged between 18-25 years old. Our beloved Sathya Sai Baba, who is the Veda Purusha, has educated us time and time again on the supreme benefits of chanting the Vedas. The Vedas are for the entire humanity, they are essential for the wellbeing for each and every one of us. As a result, the International YAs Veda programme will also be hosting special webinars every two months so that we all can come together as one family in a quest to collectively pray for the welfare of the world.

He thanked all the coordinators who have committed for the year-long sadhana to train the YAs and also to the beloved seniors for all their wisdom, guidance and support. It is Vedas that taught us unity, so let us all come together and stay united. Br. Deviesh made a special mention of Dr. Narendranath Reddy for all his love and support for all the YA initiatives including this programme. He introduced Dr. Narendranath Reddy and highlighted that Dr. Reddy started learning the Vedas from his early childhood.
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Dr. Reddy began with invocation of the mantra, “Om Sahana Vavatu sahanau bhunaktu, Saha viryam karavavahai, Tejasvi navadhithamastu, Ma Vidvishavahai” Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi. – May the Lord protect us, may He nourish us. May we acquire the capacity to study and understand the scriptures. May our study be brilliant and may we not cavil at each other. Om, Peace, peace, peace.

Sathya Sai Baba is the Veda Maata (Mother of Vedas), the Veda Purusha and Vedamaya (which means He is the Veda Himself) and the Veda Vedya (He who can be realised and attained through Vedas).

Dr. Narendranath Reddy congratulated all the YAs for embarking on this journey to study the Vedas in depth and its teachings in accordance with Sathya Sai Baba’s dictum of ‘Start early, drive slowly, reach safely’. These Vedas belong to Sanathana Dharma which dates back to 5,000 to 10,000 BC. Sanathana Dharma means eternal religion – there is no beginning. Likewise, Sathya Sai Baba’s journal is called Sanathana Sarathi –He is the eternal charioteer who is taking us in the right direction. Vedas teach the eternal religion.

Dr. Reddy mentioned that the Vedas are infinite but it can be summarised as Brahma Satyam (God alone is true) Jagat Mithya (the world is illusionary), Jivo Brahmaiva Naraṇah (we the embodied beings, we are nothing but divine). The goal and purpose of human life is to realise and manifest our innate divinity, see the same divinity in the whole of the creation and also help others to realise the same truth. That is why it is beautifully said, the purpose is Atmano Mokshartham Jagat Hitaya cha (seeking one’s own realisation and welfare of humanity). The ultimate goal is to realise the truth or Brahman. We are all born in accordance to Sanathana Dharma as Shudra as we are all born without the knowledge of the Atma. However, through the initiation of Gayatri Mantra, we become a Dwija (which means twice born) where you begin to acquire the Atmic knowledge and are eligible to study the Vedas. That is the time sacred thread ceremony or Upayneya is conducted (Upa meaning close and Nayana meaning Eyes) which is coming closer to the vision of God when one is initiated to chant Gayatri Mantra. Dr. Reddy appreciated the overwhelming participation in the Akhanda Gayatri Chanting the past weekend. The four main Vedas are Rig-Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda. Once you have studied the Vedas in depth, you become a Vipra. The last stage is you become a Brahmana (Brahmin). You become a Brahmana not just by reading Vedas but only by practising the teachings and attaining the knowledge of Brahman. In Rig Veda, it is said Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vedanti which means that there is only one truth, the wise people perceive and call it by different names.

The etymological meaning of the word Veda comes from the word Vid which means knowing. We all are in the eternal quest for knowledge, Sat Chit Ananda (knowledge, existence and bliss) which is our very own nature. So Vedas are repository of knowledge. Vedas have no beginning (Anadi), they are infinite (Ananto Vai Vedaha), they are revelations from the divine (Apaurusheya) and are called breath of the Lord.

Vedas are also called as Sruti which means to ‘hear’ as it was revealed to the Sages through hearing the voice of the Lord in deep meditation and it was verbally transmitted to disciples thereafter. Sruti is also classified as Trayee (Three vedas – Rig, Yajur and Sama veda which were recognised at the beginning). These Vedas are also called Nigama and Chandhas. Therefore, Mother Gayatri is called Chandhassam Maata – Mother of the Vedas. The Vedas are revelations of truth by the sages or seers.
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The four types of Vedas were compiled (Samhita) and codified by the great sage Veda Vyasa who is considered the embodiment of the Lord himself.

Rig Veda – hymns of the Lord

Yajur Veda – worship of the Yagnas

Sama Veda- songs and music

Atharva Veda- knowledge storehouse of atharvas

The four Vedas have four parts as following:

Samhitas - which is about hymns

Brahmanas – which is about rituals and yagnas

Aaranyakas – contemplation and dialogue of highest truth

Upanishads - the repository of the highest knowledge (Jnana).

Sathya Sai Baba in the Upanishad Vahini recorded that originally 1180 Upanishads existed. Over time, many were lost and 108 Upanishads were left. Of them, Adi Shankara wrote commentaries on ten Upanishads. These ten Upanishads are also mentioned in Upanishad Vahini and can be accessed in the link here.

(http://www.sathyasai.org/teachings/vahini/upanishad-vahini)

They are then again further classified as the following:

Karma Kanda (performing rituals)

Upasana Kanda (worship the Lord)

Jnana Kanda (which is Upanishads)

In Bhagavad Gita, out of the 18 chapters, the first six emphasises on Karma, the next six emphasises on Bhakthi and the last six emphasises on Jnana. The same demarcations are seen in the Sathya Sai Centres and its different wings.

Sathya Sai Baba gave a lot of importance to Vedas because His mission is four fold: - Veda Poshana (He is there to support and nurture the Vedas), Vidhwat Poshana (to nurture the scholars who are interested in learning the Vedas), Dharma Sthapana (the Lord supports the act of Dharma when there is a decline) and Bhakta Samrakshana (protect the devotees).

To fulfil the above, Veda Purusha Saptaha Yagna was initiated by Sathya Sai Baba during Dussera in October 1961 wherein many scholars were blessed by Him. Following that in 1962, He started Veda Pathashala to teach Vedas and later on, Veda learning was introduced in schools and colleges. In September 2003, Veda chanting was introduced during Darshan. In 2006, Ati Rudra Maha Yagna was initiated by Sathya Sai Baba with chanting of Sri Rudram 1331 times. Sathya Sai Baba’s house name in Kodaikanal is ‘Sai Sruthi’, in Brindavan - ‘Trayee Brindavan’ and in Prasanthi Nilayam - ‘Yajur Mandir’ thereby giving importance to Vedas. ‘Satyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma’ is a bhajan which has its roots in Taittiriya Upanishad, part of the Krishna Yajur Veda. Everything is embedded with Vedic chants. Dr. Reddy highlighted that many Avatars incarnated for reviving the Vedas and mentioned
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some of them. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says *vedanam sama-vedo 'smi* which means of all the Vedas, I am the Sama-veda. He gave importance to Aum and Gayatri.

Additionally, when chanting the Vedas we should know the meaning of the Vedas. The most important one is the Aumkaar (Pranava Upasana) emphasised in Taittiriya Upanishad and is the central theme of the Mandukya Upanishad. AUM represents four stages: Waking Stage (Jagrath), Dream Stage (Swapna), Deep Sleep Stage (Shushupti) and Ultimate Stage (Turiya). Aumkaar represents the sound symbol of the formless God. It is universal mantra. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says anyone leaving their last breath with the word Aum on the lips will be liberated. Hence, Sathya Sai Baba advises the chanting of Aumkaar 21 times in the early morning to clean up five karmendriyas (organs of action), five jnanendriyas (organs of perception), five pranaas (vital airs), five koshas (sheaths) and finally to attain the Atma.

More details can be found in https://www.sathyasai.org/devotion/omkar.html

The second one is Gayatri mantra as this is the most powerful mantra. This is the mother of Vedas and we should know the meaning of the five parts or faces of the mantra emphasising adoration, meditation and prayer. Sathya Sai Baba said referring to the power of Gayatri, गायांतमः त्रायाते इति Gayatri means chanting it protects one from everything.

More details can be found in http://www.sathyasai.org/gayatri

Third is the Sri Rudram or Rudraprashna or Rudropanishad which is a very important part of the Krishna Yajur Veda. The heart of the Vedas is the Yajur Veda and heart of the Yajur Veda is Krishna Yajur Veda, the heart of which is Sri Rudram, the heart of which is the 8th Anuvaka and the heart of the 8th Anuvaka is the Panchakshari Mantra (Five syllables) “Om Namah Shivaya”, which is equivalent to chanting the Sri Rudram as emphasised by Sathya Sai Baba. Sri Rudram has 11 Anuvakas in Namakam and 11 Anuvakas in Chamakam.

More details can be found in http://sathyasai.org/festival/mahasivarathri (Message of Sri Rudram)

Dr. Reddy also delved into the meaning of the Purusha Suktam and the three Kandas mentioned within it. It is important to understand the inner significance.

To chant the Vedas, intonation, rhythm and accuracy is very important. Second part of chanting is, it should be done with sincerity and devotion. Third is, to know the meaning of the Vedas. Chanting can be done at any time as God is beyond time. However, if one wants to choose a particular time, Sathya Sai Baba has given importance to the timing from 4 am to 8 am and 4 pm to 8 pm.

Knowledge of the Brahman is in the Upanishads. Main part of the Vedas mention about Dharma, Artha and Kama (3 Purusharthas). Upanishads mention about the fourth Purushartha – Moksha. Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Shlokas 45-46, त्रै-गुंयम्-विशययाः वेदान्निस्त्राई-गुन्यो भवार्जुना – Vedas are in the realm of the three gunas but one should go beyond the gunas. Vedas are helpful as guideposts. Sathya Sai Baba referred to Vedas as Apara Vidya in His discourse in 1987, which is aimed at Chittashuddi (purification of the mind) and one pointedness. We should endeavour to go towards Para Vidya which refers to sadhana and intense practice, which will lead one to self-realisation as mentioned in the Upanishads.

In summary, Sathya Sai Baba has summarised the Veda in one sentence- *Realise the same Atma who is residing in you is same in all beings, everywhere same Atma pervades.*
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In conclusion, it is essential to practise the essence of the Vedas in our daily lives as advised by Sathya Sai Baba. He often used to quote from Kaivalya Upanishad: ‘Na karmana na prajaya dhanena, tyagenaike amritatvamanasuh’ which means ‘neither by actions, nor by progeny or wealth, but by renunciation alone is immortality attained’. It is attained only by sacrifice. Sathya Sai Baba has emphasised that ego should be sacrificed for realising Atmic immortality. Removal of immorality is the way to immortality. Sathya Sai Baba mentions the purpose of spiritual life is to get rid of grief and attain unending bliss which is what He refers to when He sings ‘Love is my form, Bliss is my Food.’

Dr. Reddy ends the address with chanting of ‘Asato Ma Sadgamaya, Tamasoma Jyothir Gamaya, Mrityorma Amritam Gamaya’ - Lord lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and death to immortality.

The International YA Veda team thanked Dr. Reddy for the inspiring address reflecting the purpose, goal and deeper meaning of Vedas. The following questions contributed by YAs were answered by Dr. Reddy on the topic.

Q&A session

1) Q: There is a common belief that the Vedas belong to Hinduism, how can we break this belief and make people aware of the oneness explained in the Vedas?

   A: Sanathana Dharma is an eternal religion with no beginning, and no end. The Vedas are known as Anadi because they are revelations from the Lord Himself-Aapurusheya. They are the breath of God. They are associated with Hinduism because the people who were living in the area were chanting the Vedas and they were called Hindus around 500 BC in the Indus Valley. Vedic culture existed much before that. It is applicable to everyone; it is a way of life and transcends all barriers. It has been adopted by foreign philosophers as well.

2) Q: Has Sathya Sai Baba emphasised on any other Vedas apart from Rudram and Gayathri chanting?

   A: Other than Sri Rudram, Gayatri Chanting, Omkar, He used to often mention in His discourses excerpts from Upanishads (Kaivalya Upanishad) and Taitytirya Upanishad. It is important to know the basic knowledge of Sanskrit to learn the Vedas. He was very fond of Sri Suktam as was evident in the video of the divine discourse played at the start of the session. Sathya Sai Baba has emphasised Bhagavad Gita as it is the essence of all the Upanishads. His teachings are the Vedas.

3) Q: How can we ensure that Veda chanting benefits us the most?

   A: Firstly, one must have conviction. If you chant it with devotion, correct intonation and sincerity it will benefit you. Vedas are time tested and proven as people have chanted these scared mantras for thousands of years. By contemplating, we will get results. Secondly, one must know the meaning of the mantras in order for it to sink into one’s heart for added benefit. Finally, one must endeavour to practise it in daily life for optimum benefit and eventually it will become a part of you.

The session ended with closing remarks by the International YA Veda team.