

A Word about the Authority of Scripture

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Vedic scripture is not a collection of dogmatic mandates, cooked up by an individual or culled from the ideas of a group of individuals and cohered into an ethical code or belief system to which one is supposed to unquestioningly adhere.

Scripture is revealed truth. In fact, scripture is referred to as *shruti*, “that which is heard.” Scripture is the recorded revelations of the *rishis*, the ancient seers, those who in deep states of meditation or through careful analysis of experience “saw” or “heard” the truth and so came to understand the nature of reality. These *rishis* did not conjure the wisdom contained in the scriptures from their minds. That is, they did not dream up this wisdom. The wisdom of the scriptures is simply an expression of the truth that stood revealed after all the erroneous notions about life and oneself had been stripped away by means of the careful analysis and contemplation of one’s own experience.

So when we refer to scripture, we are not referring simply to the written material that constitutes the physical scriptures themselves, but rather to the revealed truth to which the written scriptures give testimony. In other words, when we say, “Scripture tells us...” we are not giving blind allegiance to the writings themselves, but are instead acknowledging the revealed truth contained within them. Because we are conditioned by ignorance of our true nature, we are unable to “see” the truth, and, thus, we must initially rely on the insights offered by the scripture to guide our inquiry. But we should not merely accept what the scriptures say without contemplating its wisdom in terms of our own experience. Simply put, the scriptures contain verifiable revelations, not arbitrary rules.

Because countless seekers have verified this truth over the course of thousands of years, the *sampradaya*, the teaching tradition of Vedanta, does say it is wise to place provisional faith in the words of the scriptures. But ultimately one should accept only what one has verified through a careful and thoughtful analysis of one’s own experience. Only when one has verified a teaching for oneself does faith or belief become knowledge.