



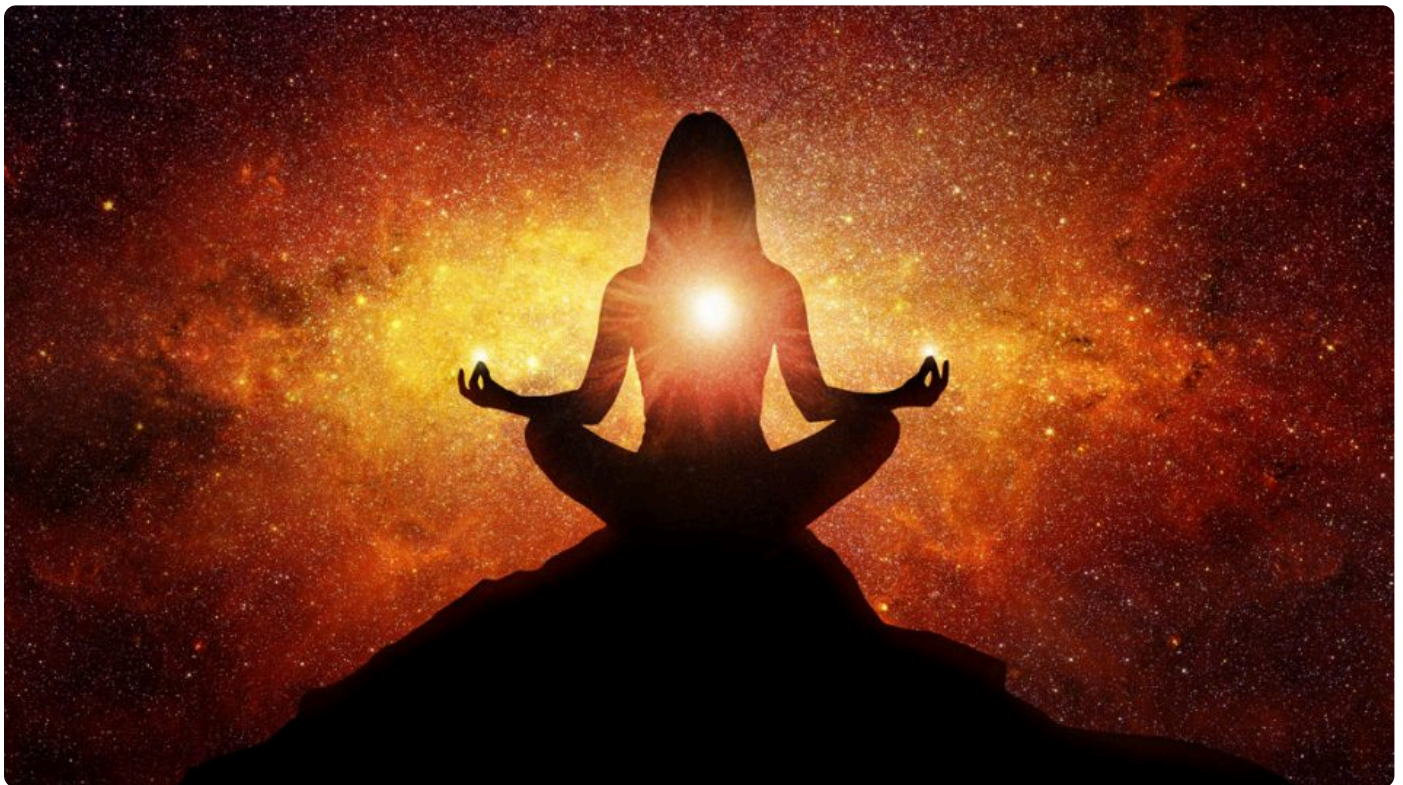
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Shruti Philosophy: The Hinduism That Stands Forgotten

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By Acharya Prashant



The morning begins in a house where everything is already decided by the past. The daughter is told to speak softly, dress “modestly”, and remember that a woman’s honour lies in obedience. The son is served first because “that’s how it has always been.” The maid uses the back door because the front is “not for her kind.” A neighbour’s illness is dismissed as fate, a child’s curiosity as an omen. If
 es, an elder will quote a verse from a scripture they have ne
 s is the culture and tradition.

Discrimination turns into discipline, casteism becomes order, superstition becomes faith, and fatalism becomes wisdom, mandated by texts they neither understand nor care to.

The Upanishads are sitting in the same city, unread. Yajnavalkya's debates on the self, Nachiketa's meeting with Death, and Ashtavakra's unyielding advice to Janaka: these works that used to define a civilisation's understanding of reality are now collecting dust, as astro downloads grow. Ask a devotee about the Kena Upanishad, which asks "By whom is the mind directed?", and you get a blank stare. Ask about a ritual fast, and every detail is offered with aplomb.

This is not a harmless shift. It is a civilisational forgetting.

We call ourselves followers of Sanatan Dharma, yet few can explain the words. Vedanta is not one school among many; it is the philosophical culmination of the Vedic corpus, the summit toward which the Vedas move. To claim the Vedas as supreme while ignoring Vedanta is to possess a treasure and never open it.

The Bridge That Collapsed

To understand how we arrived here, one neglected distinction must be seen clearly: Shruti and Smriti.

Shruti means "that which was heard." It refers only to the Vedas and the Upanishads. The philosopher-sages did not call themselves authors but seers. They claimed no originality; they said, "We heard." Hence, Shruti is described as *apaurusheya*, not authored by human intention, making it timeless and authoritative.

Smriti means "that which is remembered." It includes the epics, the Puranas, and the Dharmashastras. While useful for ethical guidance, Smriti is human-written and carries the colours, proclivities, and weaknesses of the human mind. These works reflect not the eternal truth but an author's perspective influenced by the conditions of his era.

Smriti arose for a reason: The Upanishads are strict in their demand. They declare that the self one assumes is an illusion, that only Brahm is, and that one is 'That.' This is unbearable to the ego. Stories, rituals, and symbols were meant as a bridge toward this truth. A bridge is valid only if it leads somewhere; when it becomes the destination, preparation turns into postponement. The bridge collapsed.

Vedanta dissolves the ego. The *Upanishads* reshaped religion in its own image: gods to be pleased or angered, heavens to be earned, rituals promising reward. What

was to lead toward Shruti was made a substitute for it.

Shruti remains the final authority. Whatever in tradition aligns with it is valid dharma. Whatever contradicts it, however old or popular, stands disqualified.

What Popular Religion Teaches

Look honestly at today's Hindu practice. Much of it arises from genuine longing: the desire for meaning, protection, transcendence. That longing is not the problem. The question is whether these practices honour it or go against it. Do they align with Shruti or contradict it?

Worship as transaction: People make offerings, place requests, and wait for results. The lord is approached as a higher power who can be swayed through devotion, gifts, or persistence. Worship runs smoothly on this logic, and not many find anything wrong.

Psychologically, this breeds dependence. Instead of asking what is false within, the mind asks what must be offered to secure protection or advantage. Fear dresses as faith, obedience as devotion. The ego survives because it is never examined, only bargained with.

Vedanta dismantles this structure completely. The Mundaka Upanishad distinguishes between higher knowledge and lower, placing ritualistic action in the lower category. In the Katha Upanishad, Yama tells Nachiketa that the Self is not attained through instruction, intellect, or accumulated acts. Ashtavakra goes even further, declaring that he solely worships the Self. Once this is realized, petitionary worship collapses. One realises one was never intended to beseech the Absolute.

Physical locations as sacred: Pilgrimage is an important part of religious life. Sacred sites promise faster spiritual progress through physical closeness. The journey is hard, the effort visible, the seriousness unquestioned.

Yet pilgrimage often becomes movement without inner movement. Distance is mistaken for depth, fatigue for transformation. The body travels far, so the mind may avoid travelling inward. One returns with memories and souvenirs, but the same unexamined self resumes its routine.

Shruti leaves no ambiguity. The 'Self' is not found in the heart, not in geography or desire. It is only that the Self is found in the heart, not in geography or desire. It is not found in hundreds of kilometres outward and

still remain untouched within.

Fasting and vows: These are widely practised as spiritual bargaining. They may build discipline, but often reduce to “Suffer now, receive later.” Endure deprivation so that destiny might soften.

Psychologically, this preserves the ego while disciplining the body. The mind stays unquestioned while the stomach is trained. One feels serious without facing the far greater discomfort of self-inquiry. Austerity becomes a substitute for understanding.

Vedanta does not endorse this trade. In the Katha Upanishad, Yama tells Nachiketa that austerity without right knowledge does not lead to the Self. Ashtavakra is blunt: bondage arises from identification with the body, and only knowledge cuts that bond. If the problem is identification, starving the body does not address it. One can starve for years and remain as stuck as before.

Astrology and planetary fear: People fear Saturn, blame Rahu, wear gemstones and prescribe rituals. They project personal confusion onto the sky, and the adult mind goes back into infancy, seeking reassurance rather than clarity.

Vedanta does not contest astrology; it simply renders it superfluous. It doesn't ask, “Which force governs me?” but, “Why am I so eager to believe something else does?” Astrology gives answers without understanding and predicts without responsibility. It survives only where there is reluctance to face one's own fear, desire, and indecision. Once this question is faced honestly, planetary anxiety loses its grip.

The domesticated deity: Perhaps the most revealing distortion is what has been done to Krishna. This sentimental figure inspires devotion in millions, yet the voice of the Gita's Krishna, revealing the structure of reality, has been softened into something manageable and harmless.

This choice is psychological. A god who demands transformation threatens comfort; a god who demands transformation threatens identity. A domesticated deity asks for nothing.

When Arjuna breaks down on the battlefield, Krishna does not soothe him or offer emotional shelter. He calls out the confusion directly, telling Arjuna that what appears as compassion is ignorance, and that grief born of attachment is not wisdom. This is not a god who comforts a trembling mind; this is clarity speaking to delusion. One image of Krishna demands inner change, the other lets us remain as we are. We have chosen the latter, and we live with what that choice produces.

These practices differ in appearance, but they arise from the same refusal: to look directly at oneself. Ritual replaces inquiry, movement replaces insight, suffering replaces understanding, fate replaces responsibility, comfort replaces transformation. The forms are many; the avoidance is one.

The Lamp in Darkness


The irony is painful. Vedanta has awakened seekers across the world, yet remains unread in the civilisation that birthed it. The lamp was lit here, but the darkness remains here.

We recite stories with passion but often cannot explain a single Mahavakya: 'You are That.' We elevate Smriti above Shruti and then complain that our culture feels confused. We turn Krishna into sentiment and then wonder why courage does not appear. A civilisation does not collapse by losing rituals; it collapses by losing truth.

The test is straightforward. Whatever aligns with Shruti is dharma. Whatever defies Shruti, however old or beloved, is not. Shruti demands only one thing: self-knowledge. Everything else is ornament. Without Vedanta, Hindu identity risks becoming ritual without philosophy, sound without meaning. Offering flowers may express devotion, but it is not Sanatan Dharma. Seeing the Self is.

The Upanishads stand where they have always stood: patient, piercing, waiting for the reader willing to be transformed. The question is not whether they are available: they are, freely and abundantly. The question is whether we will stop postponing our own clarity and embrace the self-knowledge they offer.

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