

Deeper Meaning



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Symbolism in Rigveda

If we read an English translation of the RV such as the one by Wilson or Griffith, we see that, by and large, it consists either of pedestrian sentences such as, "O Indra, drink the *Soma* and kill *Vrtra*" or enigmatic sentences such as, "The sages smashed the hill by their sound", (1.71.2); "They smashed the hill using the cows", (1.7.3). Many epithets associated with Agni, the fire, make no sense at all. There are only a small number of verses which appear to be wisdom-full. Often, there is no consistency between the several phrases within a single verse, let alone the entire hymn. It is claimed that the translation itself is faithful, but only the tradition of Hindus in assigning wisdom to the RV and its poets is mistaken. This is the view of many Indian academics for more than a century.

If we enquire more closely into the faithfulness of the translation, we get quite a different picture. The basis for all the English translations is the detailed Sanskrit commentary by the great fourteenth century scholar Sayana giving word to word meanings for every word in RV. Without this commentary, no English translation would have been possible. In spite of its many virtues, it has serious defects.

First of all, Sayana was only interested in bringing out the ritual meaning of the verses. He has a penchant for assigning multiple meanings for the same word. The word *go* which occurs in more than one thousand verses is given thirty two different meanings ranging from cow, water, ray, sound etc. We can forget any consistent interpretation of any book if so many meanings are assigned arbitrarily to a single word. For many words, he uses the meaning of food because the verse yields a meaning connected with a ritual. A word like *dhi* can sustain its common meaning of intelligence in all its occurrences. Still Sayana assigns the meaning of food to it quite often.

Next, whenever a verse involving a *deva* like Agni is encountered, Sayana relates an obscure story from the *puranas* to explain the verse. This is highly objectionable because *puranic devas* are quite different from the *devas* in the RV. The *puranic devas* have, on the surface, human qualities of pettiness, jealousy, quarrelsomeness and so on, whereas the *Rig vedic devas* are all of one mind, helpful to the humans. Moreover, *puranas* are posterior to Rigveda.

Thirdly, Sayana uses symbolism whenever it suits him. The often quoted event of Indra killing Vrtra to release waters is rendered as the shattering of the rain bearing clouds resulting in rain. The Occidental translators tolerate it as long as the symbolism is restricted to nature powers. We can add many more observations of this sort.

RV is high-class poetry. It is sheer poverty of imagination to read poetry suppressing symbolism. Veda itself says there is a secret in RV. That secret must



be the symbolism. A symbol attempts to describe an experience beyond the realm of the senses. Symbols can be either auditory or visual. For persons who have the gift, hearing a word can create an impression in the inner being which conveys the full power of the symbol. There are four classes of symbols in the RV. Firstly, the *devas*, Agni, Indra and so on and the *devis* Sarasvati, Sarama and Mahi represent distinct types of divine powers and associated functions. In the second class are Vrtra, Vala and Shushna, the powers of falsehood. The third class of symbols consists of the common nouns like *go*, cow, *ashva*, horse, *adri*, hill, *apah*, waters, *nadi*, rivers, *vrka*, wolf etc. Lastly is the class of the names associated with the sages and poets like Kanva and Kutsa.

Each member of these four classes represents a distinct psychological power which is helpful or otherwise. The unravelling of the symbolism behind each word was done by Sri Aurobindo and Sri Kapali Sastry using their intuition. But we do not have to merely believe what they say. We can set up concrete objective tests to determine whether the symbolic meanings suggested by them are correct or not. For instance, take the word *go* which ordinarily means cattle. It and its synonyms like *usra* occur in more than one thousand verses. Of course, many of these verses may involve other members of the four classes like *adri*, hill. Regard all these words in these verses as unknown. Substitute the symbolic meanings for the unknowns and see whether the verse makes sense. For the verses involving *go*, all the verses make excellent sense except those where *go* is used as a simile in which case it is an animal. Then all the phrases which appears enigmatic or senseless become meaningful. "*go*" stands for knowledge, each individual *go* standing for one type of knowledge. *Adri* is the symbol for the force of ignorance and the state of inconscience, i.e., an almost absence of consciousness as can be easily guessed.

The phrase, "they smashed the hill with the *go*", means the forces of ignorance were overcome by the forces of knowledge. The phrase, "they smashed the hill with their sound", means that the forces of ignorance were destroyed by the power of *mantra*, the potent word.

We given below the symbolic meanings of some of the members of the four classes. An extensive discussion on symbolism can be found in the books by M.P. Pandit.

The recovery of the symbolic meanings of individual words is only the first step. The recovery of the deeper meaning of the verses needs much more work. Once this is done, the consistency of the meaning of all the phrases in a verse and consistency of all the verses in a hymn is assured. The wisdom of RV comes upfront.



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Even in classical Sanskrit, the maxims of wisdom *subhashita* are expressed symbolically. We mention one such popular maxim which occurs both in RV (7.104.22) and Atharvaveda samhita (8.4.22). It deals with the well known six psychological foes, namely "delusion, anger, jealousy, lust, arrogance and greed", symbolised by "owl, wolf, dog, Chakravaka bird, eagle and vulture". RV (7.104.22) calls upon these six to be killed and translators like Whitney think these animals/birds represent sorcerers!

Symbolism of some common nouns

<i>go:</i>	cow; each <i>go</i> stands for a particular type of Light or Knowledge.
<i>ashva:</i>	Horse; stands for the vital energy which the <i>devas</i> can bestow.
<i>adri:</i>	Hill; the force or beings of inconscience and ignorance.
<i>apah:</i>	Water; the divine energies flowing from the heights purifying all mankind.
<i>nadi:</i>	River; the flowing current of energies.





Two-Fold Meaning of Mantras

A striking feature of the vedic verse or mantra is that it yields several widely different interpretations. This is possible because both common nouns like *go*, *ashvah*, *adri* and the proper nouns like Agni, Indra, Vrtra, Vala, etc., yield two or more meanings. Thus one can get different interpretations for the same verse by assigning appropriate specific meanings for the common and proper nouns occurring in the verse. This is true for many verses, not just isolated ones. This feature is absent in most languages. The appendix at the end of the book discusses this aspect in some detail.

For the vedic sages, every aspect of the external nature is a symbol of an aspect of the supreme spirit, called as *ekam sat*, That One. For instance *go* in common usage is the quadruped animal cow. But for the vedic sages each *go* represented a distinct ray of Light of the Supreme. Recall that root meaning for *deva* deity is *div*, to shine. Thus even in later literature, the animal cow was supposed to be the home of all the Light or all the deities; so much so that even today in the temples of the supreme deity Vishnu, a cow is the first one every morn to have the vision *darshan* of the deity Vishnu symbolizing that all the other deities want to have the *darshan* of the Supreme One.

Similarly *ashva* is the horse which symbolizes strength and all our vital energies, the energies associated with our life-force *prana*.

Adri is commonly a hill or a mountain. Also it is a synonym of cloud. It is the standard symbol of something that is hard and unchanging, specifically a symbol of the forces of ignorance and falsehood. Again take Surya, also known as *savitr*. Its ordinary meaning is the physical sun in the sky, the solar orb. But for the vedic sages, Surya represents the supreme deity, the source of all Light, spiritual and physical, the deity who supports the entire cosmos.

Again take the word *rava*, which means a sound or a cry. For the vedic sages, it is the symbol of the primordial sound, mantra which destroys all the forces of darkness.

Agni ordinarily means physical fire or the deity associated with the fire. Psychologically it represents the Divine Will in man. In the *purana* Indra is viewed as a nature-God, the God who gives the rain by breaking the clouds denoted by Vrtra. In the symbolic sense, Indra is the lord of the divine mind who destroys the demon of falsehood Vrtra and releases all the energies or waters, *apah* trapped by the demon. Ordinarily *vajra* means the thunderbolt with its Light and sound occurring on a rainy day. In the spiritual sense, it is the power of divine Light and Sound which destroys falsehood and releases on the earth the trapped divine energies.



Sri Aurobindo recovered the symbolism in Rigveda and published them in the journal *arya* during 1914-1919. Now we will give some specific examples using only phrases of verses.

Verse (1.7.3)

gobhih adrim airayat
go: cow, water (Sayana), ray of knowledge
adri: cloud, force of ignoranc
airayat: destroy

Translation 1: (Indra) destroys the forces of ignorance with the knowledge.
Translation 2: (Indra) charged the clouds with water [Sayana].
Translation 3: (Indra) smashed the hill for getting the cows [Griffith].

Translation 1 is the esoteric interpretation. It is difficult to understand the translation 3. Supposedly the cows are hidden in the caves by robbers. By smashing the hill, even the cows are destroyed along with the hill. Translation 2 is acceptable but where is the wisdom in it?

Verse (1.53.4)

nirundhano amatim gobhir ashvina;
nirundhano: dispel
amatim: ignorance, poverty [Sayana]
gobhir: Light, cows
ashvina: Life-energy, horses

Translation 1: Dispel our ignorance using the Light and Life energies.
Translation 2: Dispel our poverty by (giving us) cows and horses. (Sayana)

Sayana does not tell us how he assigns the meaning poverty for *amati*.

Verse (1.36.4)

O Agni, the Gods Varuna, Mitra and Aryaman fully kindle you. (Sayana) This verse clearly implies that Agni is not a physical fire kindled by the human priests, but is kindled in a human by the cosmic powers Mitra and Varuna, the lords of harmony and vastness.



Deeper Meaning

We have focused here on isolated phrases. The question is: does the spiritual interpretation or the naturalist interpretation give coherence for the entire verse or the entire hymn having several verses. We show in the next section that when we analyze all the alternative interpretations, the coherence of the spiritual interpretation is impressive.

Summing up, the meaning of these *mantras* is twofold. The inner which is psychological or spiritual, is in reality the true meaning. This secret was known to the *rishis* and to their disciples who were initiated by great *rishis* and instructed in the inner *yajna* occurring in the subtle body through disciplines of inner purification etc. Consecrating all of themselves to the Gods and receiving their gifts in return, by their progression into the summits of the spirit they obtained the riches of knowledge that pertain to the worlds and those that relate to the Gods *devah*.

The outer meaning acts as a cloak for preserving the inner meaning from exposure to the persons not prepared for that practice.

It follows that we accept the interpretation of the great commentator Sayana as giving the exoteric side or the externals of the vedic worship and deities; we do feel that in many places the explanation of a phrase, a line or a *rik* given by Sayana is not useful even for his own purposes.

In the appendix we have several essays on the relation between a word and its meaning, the development of the multiple meanings for the same word and related topics.





Spiritual Interpretation of the *Riks*: Some Examples

We illustrate the spiritual interpretation by means of several *riks*. In all of them, if we pay attention to every word in them, the only meaningful explanation is the spiritual one.

Rik (1.22.20) to Vishnu

This verse is part of the subhymn to Vishnu made of six verses, (1.22.16) through (1.22.21), well-known as the *shadvaishnavam*.

tad vishnoh paramam padam sada pashyanti surayah, diviva chakshur atatam.

Literal translation: The wise *always* see the highest station *paramam padam* of Vishnu like an eye extended in heaven.

We have to explain Vishnu and the phrase 'supreme station' *paramam padam*. God Vishnu mentioned in the *rik* is explained to be the sun. So for so good. This Vishnu is Surya, indeed, but not the sun in the physical universe. Why? For otherwise, the *highest step* would be the meridian in the sky reached by the sun in its daily round; and the *rishi* says that the wise see him always. Now how can the solar orb be found always at the meridian in the sky? And that too visible only to the wise? If it were just the physical sun, the meridian reached by him would be visible to the others also who are not wise; why should it be said that it is visible to the *wise*? There can be no doubt whatever that it is something uncommon, beyond the physical senses, a matter pertaining to the direct realization of the Wise. Otherwise, to say that the wise always see the sun in the meridian of the sky would be utterly fanciful and incoherent babble. It is because of its uncommon character that the Supreme Abode is said to be always seen by the Wise like an eye fully extended in the heaven.

The *rik* (1.50.10) to Surya due to seer Praskanva

udvayam tamasaspari jyotish pashyanta uttaram

devam devatra suryamaganma jyotir uttamam.

This verse occurs in several *veda samhitas* and also in Ch. U. (3.17.7)

The literal translation: Beholding the loftier Light that springs up above the Darkness *tamas* we have come to the Sun, the God among Gods, the most excellent (loftiest) Light.



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The indologists explain this hymn as referring to the birth of sun in the morning. This view holds no water in view of the adjectives like loftier Light etc.

Sayana quotes from the *brahmanas* in explaining that the word *tamas* signifies sin. In that case, the Sun cannot be the sun of the physical world. Sayana himself, commenting on the fourth quarter, says that seer Praskanva speaks of conscious union, *sayujyam* with the Sun. In this *rik*, then, there is an unmistakable mention of the supreme Light that transcends the senses and is signified by the word *Surya*, Sun. It is also to be noted that here in this mantra, whatever the interpretation, the Sun referred to is not simply the physical sun of our system, and this is clear.

We have instanced two *riks*-one devoted to Vishnu as *Surya*, the Sun and the other to the Sun-God as the highest Light-to show the theory, that the Sun and the other Gods are really nothing but phenomena of Nature, cannot be sustained.





Symbolism of some proper nouns or names

Agni: Fire; It is the cosmic power of heat and light and the will power united with wisdom. Human will power is a feeble projection of this power. It can be strengthened by the RV chants to *Agni*.

Indra: He is the Lord of the Divine Mind and Action. In Indian tradition, mind is not a source of knowledge, it manipulates the knowledge to aid action. *Indra* battles the evil forces on behalf of the human.

Vayu: Wind; He is the Lord of all the Life-energies, *Prana* which represent the passions, feelings, emotions and abilities.

Ashvins: The Lords of Bliss and Divine Physicians who render the human body free of disease so that it can accept the divine *Prana*, the life-energy.

Mitra: The Lord of Love and Harmony.

Varuna: The Master of Infinities who cannot tolerate restrictive thinking or actions. Only he can cut the three bonds which restrict the three aspects of every human being - physical, vital and mental.

Sarasvati: The Goddess of inspiration

Ila: The Goddess of revelation.

Sarama: The Goddess of intuition.

Surya: The Supreme Deity of Light and Force.

Symbolism of some common nouns

go: Cow; each *go* stands for a particular type of Light or Knowledge.

ashva: Horse; stands for the vital energy which the *devas* can bestow.

adri: Hill; the force or beings of inconstancy and ignorance.

apah: Water; the divine energies flowing from the heights purifying all mankind.

nadi: River; the flowing current of energies.





Yajna rite & Inner yajna

Let us understand *yajna* by studying the epithets ascribed to it in more than one thousand verses. It is a fundamental mistake to regard *yajna* merely as a ritual or rite. Veda describes *yajna* as journey, as climbing a hill, as a battle and also as worship or rite. The worship or rite is not that done by a human being. Agni the *deva* is called upon to perform the rite; Agni is requested to do all the functions associated with the various priests. Agni is called upon to worship on behalf of the *rishi* not only the *devas* but also the human beings who have attained perfection (1.45.1).

According to the Rig Vedic mystics, a human being performs an action only because of the assistance s/he gets from the *devas* RV (5.4.10). As a matter of fact, the contribution of the human to each action is nominal. Even great poets like the Vedic poets obtained inspiration from superior planes and their main contribution is in transcribing the revealed verses in appropriate metres. *Yajna* is any activity which recognises the collaboration between the *deva* and the human. *Yajna* is not a mere rite or ritual. A *rishi* is conscious of the Divine's Hand in the performance of all activities. The later scripture *Bhagavad Gita* specifically mentions the different *yajnas* by name like *yajna* of obtaining material objects, *yajna* of obtaining knowledge, *yajna* involving self-study and so on. The sages are also conscious of the role of the *deva*, especially of Agni, so that they request him to perform the *yajna* (or the activity) on their behalf.

Let us discuss the various epithets assigned to *yajna* beginning with *adhvara*, journey. *Adhvara* is derived from *adhva* path and *ra* to move. Ritualists regard this word as a synonym for rite since one of the principal priests in the rite is called *adhvaryu*. The function of the priest is to direct the rite and this function is in tune with the meaning assigned to *adhvara*. What is this journey? Every action in our life is a step in our journey towards realising the goal, namely bliss, an all-sided perfection of not only the physical body, but the vital and mental bodies, not only an individual perfection but perfection of the entire society. Veda uses the imagery of voyage for *yajna*. Just as merchants go in their boats to distant countries and bring valuable treasures from these countries, a person who does *yajna* reaches different states of consciousness, gets priceless experiences and brings them back to the ordinary living conditions and thus makes the human life Divine.

The *yajna* is also climbing from one peak to another, from one degree of perfection to another, (1.10.2). It is explicitly stated that we are not consciously aware of the entire journey. We can know only of what can be done at that stage. Whenever help is needed in this climb, the *devas* again manifest and help us along.



Yajna is also a battle. We have mentioned only helpful powers of the nature, the *devas*. There are also the powers that hinder our journey towards perfection. These powers are called *dasyus*, the *thieves* or *destroyers*, *Vrtra* and *Vala* being prominent among them. These *dasyus* impede our progress. They are called *ayajvanah*, people who do not recognise the principle of collaboration or *yajna*. They foster in human beings, who come under their influence, qualities like jealousy, greed etc. The human collaborators call upon the *devas* to battle these adversaries. Hence *yajna* is also a battle.

Yajna is a rite or ritual too, which is a symbolic physical representation of the various steps involved in collaboration. The ritual begins with the invocation of Agni by lighting the physical fire. The dry fuel *samit* is fed to the fire as representing all the qualities which are not necessary or not appropriate. The fire is nourished by the ghee which symbolises mental clarity. The *Soma* herb which stands for the bliss released in all actions is also offered to Agni as well as rice and grains. These are some of the steps in the famous *Soma* rite.

Every rite has four priests namely *hotr*, *adhvaryu*, *udgatr* and *brahma*, whose names indicate their functions. *Hotr* is the *deva* who calls all the other *devas* to come and participate in the divine activity *yajna*. *Adhvaryu* lays down the various steps in the successful performance of the *yajna*. *Udgatr* is the *deva* who chants the prescribed mantras in the appropriate metres at requisite times. In RV there is no mention of the four faced creator-god of that name, *Brahma*. In the Veda *brahma* always stands for the mantra, the potent Word. *Brahma* is the priest who presides over the entire *yajna* and makes sure that everything is performed in the correct manner. In the RV, it is the *deva* Agni who performs all these functions in the psychological *yajna*, the collaborative and co-creative actions of the *devas* and the humans.

The goal of the inner *yajna* is perfection of all our faculties, those of the physical body, those connected with our life energy such as passions, emotions, attitudes, ideals, etc, and those connected with the mental domain such as intelligence, analytical ability, intuition, discrimination between Truth and Falsehood, etc.

Yajna is a collaborative effort between the Gods, the cosmic powers and human being. Each God is associated with a particular psychological faculty, Agni with the power of Divine Will, Indra with the Divine Mind and actions, Soma with Delight, Usha with the initial Dawn of spiritual ideas, etc.

Gods are eager to extend their help to aspiring human beings. If we invoke a particular deity with faith with an appropriate hymn of Rig Veda fully knowing its deeper meaning then that deity is sure to respond to the call. If the aspirant's body is able to bear the power, the deity will plant a seed of his power and this seed will grow continuously. Sometimes the aspirant feels no effect. For



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instance, a student who has no mental aptitude will not feel any effect if he recites with faith the famous *gayatri* mantra invoking intelligence from Savitr. In this case the body of the aspirant, physical or mental, is not able to bear the power that Savitr wants to give, and hence Savitr will keep quiet.

The preparation and maturing of the body can be done by an inner yajna. The Taittiriya Samhita has several inner yajnas like *darshapurnamasau*, *agnishtoma* etc., which are in the first kanda. Once one of these yajnas is done the body can bear the power which the deity can pour down. These inner yajnas involve the use of the *rk* mantras, *yajus* mantras or *sama* mantras.

Another type of yajna is the harmonisation of all the faculties. We will give some details of each of these two type of Yajnas from the Taittiriya Samhita.

In the inner yajna, all the actions are done in the subtle body of the yajamana, i.e., the yajamana is not the outward-acting human being, but the soul. There is no need for any external or material offerings mentioned above. Recall the *brahmana* passage, "*yajno vai vishnu*", i.e., yajna is Vishnu, or, yajna pervades everything. Also yajna is done by yajna,

"yajnena yajnam ayajanta",

[TS (3.5.11), RV (10.90.16)]

The subtle body of the yajamana has the fire-altar *vedi* along with the fire. Yajamana himself is also the *pashu*.

Aitareya Brahmana (11.11) emphasises that yajna is essentially a mental act; all the chants and physical acts that are involved must really be transformed into thoughts and resolves, for all speech and action are founded on thought. "*manasa vai yajnas tayate manasa kriyate*"; *tayatamana* means to extend the range of mind (*vistaryate*) according to Sayana.

TS itself gives details about how the inner yajna should be conducted. The different *prapathakas* of TS give different ways of performing the inner yajna. I will choose the *darshapurnamasau* yajna in the first *prapathaka* of the first kanda, TS (1.1). It has fourteen *anuvakas*. It is done on every full moon and new moon day.

Inner yajna in TS (1.1)

The first *anuvaka* begins with the mantra *ishe-tva-urjetva* (you for impulsion and you for abounding force). It is addressed by the yajamana to the universal *prana*



energy deity, *vayu*. The whole *anuvaka* of eight short mantras, *rk* and *yajus*, is a call for assembling all the knowledge needed for the inner yajna. *pashu* stands for the ray of knowledge derived from the root *pash*, to see.

The inner yajna is performed by the cosmic powers or deities Indra, Agni etc. They begin with the proclamation '*yajnasya ghoshadasi*'. The Gods are prayed to take their seats on the seats fashioned by mantra, *manuna krta* [TS (1.1.2)]. It is crafted by the intrinsic law of each entity, the self-law, *svadha*, 'that which bears it.'

Recall that according to TS (1.7.4), yajna itself is the supreme deity, Vishnu. In the third *anuvaka* there is a prayer for the yajna for the manifestation of delight, one of the chief aims for performing the yajna. The delight coming from Soma is described as (*madhumattama*), supremely honeyed, spread with Truth (*rtavari*).

The next several *anuvakas* deal with preparing the body, both the physical and subtle, for the performance of yajna. Interestingly enough, simple yajnas are called as *paka yajna* in the *brahmana* passages, i.e., yajna which matures (*paka*) the body. Our petty emotions, passions, feelings and adverse forces like *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (arrogance) and *matsarya* (jealousy) prepare a thick veil or covering over our inner soul and prevent its light from reaching the outer body; in ignorance the body does stupid things. This covering is like the husk of the rice grain or paddy (*vr^{ah}i*); which should be removed.

The *anuvaka* 4 is a prayer for the two principal cosmic powers of this yajna, Agni and Soma. Agni is the Divine will and seer (*kavi*), Soma is the lord of the Divine Delight which upholds everything.

Anuvaka 5 deals with the purification of the physical body so that the cosmic powers can enter, grow in the body and manifest their powers as a child grows in the womb. The purifying agency is *dhurva* which is the incense in the ritual. The prayer here "*dhurasi.....*" in TS (1.1.4) is recited even today in all religious festivals when the incense stick is lighted. It offers protection against the hostiles who do not like the humans to enjoy (*aratiyata*). It ends with a prayer to Agni to protect it. The covering has to be removed by force of will invoking Agni and the force of mind invoking Indra.

In the next step, the entire body has to be integrated and firmed up. It is viewed as a support, *skambha*, to the heaven [TS (1.1.6)]. By the force of inward breath (*prana*) and outward breath (*apana*), the primal life-energy *prana* is made to reach all the organs of both the gross and subtle bodies in us. Note that breath or outside air is not *prana*.



Next step (*anuvaka* 9) is the recognition of the fire inside supported by knowledge, the inner fire-altar (*vedi*). It is the power of will and uses the body which has been firmed up for further work. Its first step is to mature the body for further work (*anuvaka* 10).

Next, the role of the Gods as world- builders is recognized (*anuvaka* 12). By world we mean the manifestation of powers and its activities. For example, giving is an important activity. It involves acquisition of the required felicities or resources like knowledge, love, wealth, etc. Then there is the problem of finding the appropriate person to receive the knowledge or felicities or riches. Then there is the mode of transferring of the gift, i.e., teaching, etc. All these different but related activities constitute the world of giving. Obviously it is a vast structure where it takes years, even decades, to make even small progress, let alone perfection. We feel we are praying for the benefit of all, all of whom we may not even know.

Finally there is the consciousness of some progress in our spiritual body. We feel consciously the grace from above which floods the body. We feel the aura of protection (*ava*) which supports us (*bhrta*). For the ritualists, *avabharta* is the concluding shower of water on the *yajamana*. The inner *yajna* ends with the adoration of the deities with the Rig Vedic mantras which always occur in the last *anuvaka*.

Harmonisation of all faculties (TS 4.1)

(*agnichayana* with bird-shaped altar (*shyenachit*))

First of all we should become conscious of each and every part of our body, their functions and the relationship of each part to others. For example, become aware of the outer eye which sees, the associated inner organ of the eye which records the image seen and the part of the mind which interprets the meaning of the image and files it accordingly, and if necessary it activates the other parts of mind like the *manas* to take specific action. Then we firm up the operations by invoking the control of *prana*, *pranayama*, whose outer forms are the breathing exercises. Then the collectivity of the body, subtle and gross, is a vehicle of knowledge *vedi*, which later became known as the fire-altar.

The cosmic power symbolised by the fire carries the collectivity or ensemble to the world of Light, *suvar* or *svar*, offers each part to the appropriate God who perfects it. Agni returns with the perfected ensemble. This is the journey of *yajna* mentioned in hundreds of Rig Vedic verses. *adhvara* is the journey or pilgrim journey. *svar* is not really outside of us. It is within, it is the *sahasradala*, the



thousand-petalled centre of the *tantrics*. Of course one such attempt will not give us the complete perfection. We need several more.

We give the quotation TS (4.1.10). It is also in Shukla Yajur Veda VS (12.4).

TS (4.1.10):

"You are a bird of golden wings (*suparna*) capable of going up (*ut*) (to the higher realms) and modelling it (*mana*). Your head is threefold (*trivrtta*) (worlds of matter, life and mind); your eye is *gayatra* (all the hymns which have the power of saving). Your wings are the *brhat* and *rathantara* Sama hymns; your soul is the *stoma* (*rk* mantras); your organs are the rhythms or metres (*chhandas*); your name is *yajus*; Sama hymns of Vamadeva are your body; your tail is the works done as *yajna* and those which are not *yajna*, i.e., those to be avoided (*yajnayajniyam*), your hooves are the masters of knowledge (*dhishniya*). You, the *suparna* and *garutman*, go to heaven (*divah*) and return (*pata*) from the world of Light (*svar*)."

The next *anuvaka* TS (4.1.11) gives the benefit of harmonisation. It contains several famous mantras including (i) Gayatri mantra and (ii) Sarasvati mantra.

The *gayatri* mantra addressed to Savitr is same as RV (3.62.10).

"On the excellent splendour of the Lord Savitr, we meditate;
May he activate (*prachodayat*) our intelligence."

The mantra [TS (1.4.11)] is same as RV (1.3.10) addressed to Sarasvati, the Goddess of speech and inspiration.

"She, who is the impeller of auspicious truths
And the awakener of all happy thoughts,
May that Sarasvati uphold the *yajna*."

Our body is in a position to accept the powers to be bestowed by Savitr and Sarasvati.





The Outer Ritual, Yajna, and its Inner or Subtle Counter Part

It has been stated that all that is external is symbolic of the internal. Therefore the outer sacrifice *yajna* also becomes the symbol of inner sacrifice *yajna*. We shall first state the symbolic significance of the sacrifice and then enquire into the nature of the many worlds, the character and functions of the Gods etc., according to the established system of symbolism. The main features of the sacrifice *yajna* are four: the *yajamana*, the person who performs the ritual; *ritviks*, the officiating priests; the offering of wealth; and the fruits of the sacrifice. Of these, the *yajamana* is the individual living soul with personality engaged in the sacrifice. The *ritviks* carry out the sacrificial functions in the right place at the right time and help the *yajamana* throughout from the beginning to the end of the sacrifice. The word for the performer of rituals or worshipper, *yashtarah*, gives a clue to the inner meaning of *ritvik* via its constituent parts namely *yaj*, those who worship *rtu*, in due reason.





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Symbolism of priests

- **Hotr Priest**
- **Adhvaryu Priest**
- **Udgata Priest**
- **Brahma Priest**

Hotr Priest: Summoner

There are four orders or groups of these *ritviks* in the *soma yaga* (worship) viz., *hotr*, *adhvaryu*, *udgata*, and *brahma*. Each of these groups has four *ritviks* and hence they all total to sixteen. As there is no use here for this detail regarding them (the officiating priests) we shall proceed to elucidate the function of the main *ritviks* in the inner sense by mentioning the significance of the terms applied to them.

The *hotr* group is the first of the four. The *hota* recites the *riks*. He accomplishes the summoning of the Gods by means of the *riks*. Hence the *hota* is the same as summoner, *ahvata*. By uttering the *riks* which manifest the divine *Word*, he brings to proximity the presence of the Gods. The import is clear in the inner sacrifice. Such a *hota* (summoner) is no human priest, but the Divine (priest). The *brahmana* books consider the divine being himself to be the real priest, *purohita*, placed in front. The *yajnikas* speak of the three worlds, Earth, Sky and Heaven, as the supporters in front, and of Agni, Vayu and Aditya as the *purohitas* (priests) placed in front. So do the followers of *aitareya* school hold: "He who knows the three *purohitas* and three *purodhas* (those who are placed and those who place in front), that *brahmana* is the *purohita*", (*aitareya brahmana* 8.27). The purport being that, only he, who realizes that the function of the *purohita* is really of the Gods, is fit to be a *purohita*. Incidentally this serves also just to illustrate the fact that such profound truths are scattered here and there in ritualistic texts like the *brahmana* books; that is why Agni is lauded as 'the divine *ritvik*, *hota* in the front' in the first *rik* of the Rigveda (1.1.1) of which *madhuchchhandas* is the Seer. And it is this Agni who is sung hundreds of times in the Veda as the messenger of the Gods, the Immortal in the mortals.

Adhvaryu Priest: Adhvara Means Journey

The second is the *adhvaryu*, taking his stand on the Yajurveda. He sees to the performance of the *yajna* by means of the *yajus*, leads the other *ritviks* in accordance with the manual of *yajna* and it is on him, the active and chief functionary, that the entire performance of sacrifice rests. He too is God, *matarishvan-vayu*, who as the life-breath of the world makes all activities



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possible. The inner significance is easy to follow. It bears on the deity of all of our vital or *pranic* energy, Life-God, Vayu, the *adhvaryu*, who executes in the inner sacrifice all actions favourable to the activity of the Gods. Though the word *adhvara* has come to mean sacrifice, *yajna*, yet in the veda it is described as journey or pilgrimage based on the meaning of its component parts - *adhvanam rati*, gives the path. And the diligent *adhvaryu* is he who desires or takes to such an *adhvara*, journey. Among all the Gods in the form of *ritviks*, it is he who carries out all the actions in the journey signified by the term *adhvara*.

Udgata Priest

The *udgata* delights the Gods by chanting the *saman mantras*, *mantras* from the Samaveda samhita. In the inner sense, he is God Aditya who reverberates with his chant of music, the lofty song, *udgita* pleasing to all the Gods. He averts the many dangers, harms and lapses from the *yajamana*, makes him self-restored and leads him on to Immortality, Truth, *ananda*.

Brahma Priest

The last is *brahma*. He is the witness of the entire sacrificial ceremony, gives his sanction for the commencement of the ritual, gives the word of assent, OM (O yes) at the appropriate moment and place, moves not from his seat; always silent, he guards the sacrifice to its very end, against every sin of omission or commission, of deficiency or excess of mantra and action in the ritual. Such in brief is the function of the *ritvik brahma*. The inner sense is obvious; He is the God of the mantras and in the Veda the mantra is known as *brahma*. Hence *brahmanaspati* is the deity presiding over the mantra. The casual material of all metrical mantra is *pranava*, known by the syllable OM, the word of assent. That manifests the original Word, which is the source of all mantra. So it is *brahmanaspati* the deity who presides over the mantras of all Deities which depend upon the aforesaid *pranava*: It is this deity that sanctions in supreme silence the inner *yajna* of the *yajamana* by a single syllable, at the beginning, at the end, all throughout. This deity, known as Ganapati in RV itself, is identified in the *purana* with the elephant-faced God, the tusk of the elephant representing the word Om. He is said to remove all the obstacles in the path.





Symbolism of offerings

Now the substances or offerings also are to be understood as symbolic. Just as the derivation of the names of *ritviks* gives us their symbolic meaning of Gods etc., in the inner *yajna*, so also substances that are offered to the Gods in the ritual, even things like ghee belonging to the *yajamana* are symbolic and they are to be so grasped following the meaning of the component parts of the terms. The term *go* means both cow and ray of Light. Hence *gavya*, yield of the cow, stands for the brilliant Light indicating knowledge. *Gavya*, *ghrta*, clarified butter, *havis*, offering and the like are thus to be taken as offerings to the Gods which intimately belong to the *yajamana*. *Ghrta*, clarified butter, *gharma*, heat, *ghrni* ray - all these terms are derived from common roots meaning heat, brilliance. *Ghrta* is the brilliance of an inner grace. The verb *juhoti* signifies both giving and eating. What is given by the *yajamana* to the Gods and eaten by Agni, the mouth of the Gods, the first-born, Immortal among the mortals, that is *havis*, offering, that is *havah*, invocation. The other substances offered to the Gods are also outwardly symbolic of knowledge, action, happiness and enjoyment along with their means acquired by the *yajamana*.

This is to be noted: all that is - macrocosmic or microcosmic - is under the control of the Gods, belongs to the Gods. All that exists in us, separately and intermingled - mind, life, matter (body) including any combination of their elements with their causal material provided by the cosmos and included in it - are under the control of the Gods who are the Cosmic Powers, the functionaries. Hence all that is offered by the *yajamana* namely knowledge, skill in works, means of enjoyments etc., is really offered to the Gods, as belonging to them, for no part whatever belongs in fact to the *yajamana*, the whole universe itself being the property of the Gods. Thus in the end the *yajamana* offers his own self. The *brahmana* books also speak of the *yajamana*, at times, as the *yupa*, sacrificial post. Even the animal to be sacrificed is referred to as substitute for the *yajamana*. There are passages to be found in the *brahmana* books which state that the *yajamana* redeems his own self by the sacrifice to all the Gods. Thus reads the *aitareya brahmana* (2.6.3). "The *yajamana* is the *yupa* or altar. He is the stone or rock. *Agni* is the womb of the Gods. Born of the offerings made through *agni*, the womb of the Gods, the *yajamana* with the body of gold rises upwards to the world of Heaven". The *kaushitaki brahmana* (10.3) states: "He, who sacrifices, attains the mouth of Agni and Soma; sacrificing, on the fasting day, the animal for Agni and Soma, he redeems his self. Thus redeeming himself, free from obligation, he carries on the sacrifice". Similarly reads the *aitareya brahmana*: "He, who sacrifices, offers himself to all the Gods; Agni is all the Gods" (2.6.3).





Symbolism of Worlds

We shall proceed to symbolism behind the system of the worlds. First there are the worlds denoted by the three *vyahrtis*, *bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *svah*. *Bhuh* also known as *prthvi* is the earth, *bhuvah* is the mid-region *antariksha* and *svah*, otherwise called *dyauh*, is the heaven. Beyond that is the fourth *vyahrti*-the vast world of Light, *mahas*. And still higher there are three *vyahrtis*, *jana*, *tapas*, and *satya* signifying the three uncreated or *tyal* worlds. Though the *veda* refers to the seven principles of Existence, the seven principles of Cosmic order, the sevenfold Existence, Consciousness, Force or Consciousness-Force, the seven worlds or guardians of the worlds, the seven hills, seven rivers, seven sisters, seven rays and seven *rishis*, still it constantly speaks of the first three worlds denoted by the triple *bhuh* etc., and their Gods. And that is so because the three worlds, earth etc., are what concern us primarily, nearer to us relatively speaking, than the higher worlds. And this triple world is termed as the *aparardha*, lower half. That is why more *riks* are devoted to Agni who is the nearest to us and who presides over the Earth. And most *riks* laud Indra the Lord of this triple world. Beyond these worlds and their Gods, effulgent in the supreme *parardha*, upper half, is Surya, Sun - celebrated in the *vedas* as the One God of all the Gods and of all the worlds; to attain him is all *tapas* austerity undertaken, all sacrifice offered. Yet *riks* devoted to this God, Lord *Savitri*, are but few in number. It is only the Gods of our triple world that are the main hosts in the *yajna* sacrifice.

This division of the triple world, *bhuh* the Earth, *bhuvah* the Mid-region and *dyauh* or *svah* or *suvah* the Heaven, comes down from the perception of the *rishis*. And this outer triple world, it must be noted, is symbolic of its corresponding inner triple in the subtle bodies of the human beings. This world-*bhuh* earth of the physical senses-is the symbol of the plane of the gross physical consciousness in the waking state known as *annamaya*. *dyauh*, Heaven, is the symbol of the consciousness where is dominant the Pure Mind with an existence of its own, independent of the outer world. In between the Heaven and Earth, the mid-region *antariksha* or *bhuvah* symbolises *prana*, the principle of Life-force pregnant with consciousness linking the physical with the mental consciousness i.e., Matter and Mind, Earth and Heaven. Thus the three worlds, denoted by the triple *vyahrti* of *bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *suvah*, are the manifestations of the principles of matter, life and mind in the macrocosm and the microcosm. Such in brief is the statement in essence of the symbolism of the world-order.





Benefits of Yajna

A common question posed by the moderns is whether the outer yajna yields the benefits mentioned by Sayana. We have to recognize that the final result of any action is really the outcome of a variety of forces with various intensities. One can cite specific instances like the result in a written or oral examination, result of a plan for doubling the sales, recovery from an illness or surgery etc. In each case a variety of forces are involved. For instance, in the case of healing, the faith of the patient, physical condition of the patient, the psychological and technical competence of the physician, the physical facilities and medicines etc., release their own forces which combine in an unknown way to yield the final result.

This applies to yajna also. The result of the yajna is the result of the play of forces introduced by the performer yajamana, the priests, the power of the mantras and the power of the rite involving various steps, and finally the faith of the persons who are witnessing the rite. Even then the successful performance of a rite yields only one type of force, even though it may be potent. No yajna even if done correctly can cure a person if he/she persists in the mode of life which lead to the disease. In the same way, Vijayanagar empire in which Sayana was a minister did not achieve much success in battles during the latter part of its life, inspite of the performance of rites which supposedly guarantee victory.

There are several books in English, Kannada, Sanskrit and other languages which recount the instances of healing and other helpful actions performed by spiritually advanced persons i.e., persons who have done *tapas* by means of blessings alone or by the use of mantras. Bhavabhuti the famous playwright and Bhartrhari, the famous grammarian have written extensively on the power of the potent word mantra. Interested persons can refer to the essay entitled, "the Vak of the Veda and the throb of the tantra" by Sri Kapali Sastry in his Collected Works [Vol. 1]. The biography of the famous poet, freedom-fighter and spiritual personality, Vasishtha Ganapati Muni who lived in the twentieth century gives many instances of the help rendered to both individuals and communities placed in difficult circumstances by using mantras from Rig Veda. Consider for example the releasing of rain. It is accepted in the Hindu tradition that *yajna* causes rain; see for instance *Bhagavad Gita* (3.14). Kanda 2 has several *brahmana* passages dealing with the release of rain. The book by Arya recounts the experiments in releasing the rain and also stopping the rain by performance of yajna under specific circumstances; in, the revered H.H. Kanchi Swami explains why the performance of Varuna *japa* does not yield the desired result of rain in the neighbourhood. The book details a simple version of a rite *agnihotra* to purify the environment used in parts of USA. The purification was also achieved in areas of Eastern Europe which were intensely contaminated by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. In other words faith and sincerity of the persons chanting the



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mantra and performing the rite are more important than the mechanically "correct" performance of the yajna, i.e., the rite and chant should be done in a meditative mood. But the books detailing the rites like the Brahmana books or *shruta sutra* books never mention the necessity of faith and sincerity.

Summing up, the mantra chant can be effective if the following five steps are observed scrupulously:

1. correct chanting: committing errors in chanting implies that the chanter is not serious about his goals or the efficacy of mantra;
2. meaning of mantra, i.e., not only the meanings of the words in the mantra, but the meaning of overall appropriateness of the mantra for the occasion;
3. faith in the mantra and in the directions given by the teacher,
4. sincerity or transparency, i.e., you feel that you are talking to the cosmic power;
5. unselfishness: the performer should pray that all should benefit from the yajna.





Sin, Evil, Hostile Forces and Purification

The sophistication of the *Vedic* thinkers can be seen in their handling of this topic. As Sri Aurobindo states, “the crude conception of sin as a result of natural wickedness of man found no place in the thought of these deep thinkers”. RV has no concept like hell into which all the evil doers are cast. The RV has several words for sin like *agha*, *enam* and so on, but does not rigidly divide actions into the two categories of good and evil. The only actions it condemns are, non-giving and the non-recognition of the role of *devas* or nature in all actions, *ayajvanah*; “He is in a state of sin who eats alone (10.117.6)”.

The RV recognises the existence of evil forces and the existence of persons who come under their sway. The evil forces are intimately connected with ignorance or unconsciousness *achitti* (3.18.2, 4.12.4, 4.2.11 and 10.87.11). In Veda, *satyam* stands for the Truth and *ritam* stands for the cosmic law of manifestation in accordance with the Truth or Truth to be manifested in an ideal environment. Evil or falsehood is opposed to this cosmic law *ritam* and opposed to the progress of the human beings towards all-round perfection. Some of the phrases associated with these evil persons are: causing stumbling or calamities, *durita*, ill-lit house, *duroka*, those with evil movements, *durevah*, doers of wickedness, *dushkrt*, evil-minded, *durmanma*, evil in speech, *aghashamsa*, untrue, *asatah*, full of falsehood, *asatyah*, unreal, *asata*, those with no faith, *ashraddhan*, or bringer of evil, *aghayata*, crookedness, *vrjina* or *hvara* as distinguished from the straightness of the followers of the good etc.

Veda states in many places that the influences of evil can be overcome by the force of goodness *bhadra*, a power bestowed by the *devas*. Usually the deities Agni or Varuna are appealed for purification.

According to RV, all sin arises from an attachment to narrowness. It is the non-perception of Right and Truth in mind and in the will or it is the inability in the life of energies to follow the path of Truth or sheer inefficiency of the physical being to rise to the greatness of the Divine Law. Varuna is the master of all oceans, the *deva* of vastness, vastness in the physical. The pressure exerted by Varuna to release us from our narrowness can be often painful. There are many verses in which the *rishi* pleads with Varuna not to give him pain. “From poverty of will, we have gone contrary to thee. By ignorance, we have put away thy laws, smite us not (7.89.3,5)”. Varuna is called upon “to remove Nirriti, the demon of sin and death, liberate us from the sin *enah* we have committed (1.24.9)”. The same verse suggests that purification is done not by ritual, but prayer and the power of mantra, “May thy gracious thought *sumati* flow wide and deep, liberate us from the sin we may have committed”. The *rishi* prays to Varuna in (1.24.15) to release him from the three psychological bonds, the bond above (the limitations of mind), the bond middle (the limitations of life-energy



and emotion) and the bond below (the limitations posed by the physical body). Rigveda prefers the concrete phrase falsehood to the abstract phrase ignorance in describing evil. It is only by removing the mental and moral infirmities that we secure a foundation in Varuna's wide and deep thought-mindedness. Hence Varuna is described as directing many physicians (1.24.9).

Varuna of hallowed understanding,
Holds aloft a mass of life-giving radiance, which streams down;
May these rays sink deep and set within us. (1.24.7)

Similarly purification, *pavaka*, occurs more than a hundred times in RV. Again there is no mention of the so-called ritual purification either by means of a bath or by avoiding foods of certain type or other customary actions. Purification is basically psychological.

There is an entire hymn (1.97) of 8 verses dedicated to Agni, the purifier. Each verse here ends with the refrain, "May our sin *agham* wither in lament". It is given in several different ways. The first verse states "Agni, by shining your felicities may the sin wither". Second verse states "we worship thee for obtaining the safe path of progress, for happy field and for felicities. When these powers come to us, sin leaves us automatically".

Again in (1.23.22), Waters, the Universal Divine energies of Truth and Light, are called to take away whatever sin, betrayal *abhidudroha*, falsehood *anrtam duritam* is present. The next verse declares that "I have become one with the essence of these energies, *rasena*."

Veda recognises the cosmic forces of evil and sin typified by the demons and dasyus, the chief of whom are Vrtra and Vala, with associates like *Shambara* and *Shushna*. Vrtra is the demon who holds up the benevolent cosmic energies and prevents them from reaching the humans. The character of Vrtra is described in (4.19.3).

Indra the lord of Divine Mind wages a battle along with the other *devas*, kills Vrtra and allows the cosmic energies denoted as Waters *apah* to reach the human. The demon *Vala* hides the spiritual knowledge signified by *go*, the Vedic cow, in the inner regions of our being indicated by the cave *guha*. *Brhaspati*, the Lord of the potent Word and Indra destroy *Vala* and allow the hidden spiritual knowledge to be accessible to the humans. *Sushna* is the demon who dries up all our subtle energies. The fight with Vrtra and *Vala* are mentioned in numerous verses. The battle takes place in the mid-world *antariksha* which governs our life energies and emotions, the place where the demons get access to us. Just as Indra fights with Vrtra and *Vala* at the cosmic level, the power of Indra, manifested in us, fights the forces of ignorance and evil within our subtle body.



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A careful inspection of the verses dealing with these foes reveals that the foe cannot be the cloud or human beings. In (4.19.3), the psychological nature of the foes is clear by the phrases, "that cannot be known or waked", *abudhyam* and "which waketh not to knowledge", *abudhyamanam*.

RV has some verses regarding the origin or identity of these demons. (5.12.4) poses the question "O Agni, who are the binders who keep the foundation of falsehood, guardians of the untrue words?" The reply is in the next verse (5.12.5). "They are thy (Agni's) comrades who have turned away from thee, they who were benignant *shivasah* have become *ashiva*. They speak crooked things to the seer of straightness".

According to the RV sages, there is no such thing as primordial evil. These demons have a purpose in the vast scheme of this manifestation and when that purpose is over, they are absorbed back into the infinite. RV reiterates again and again that the world is pervaded by the Supreme One implying that even in the evil, there is a core of goodness. The supreme consciousness present in the core of the evil is termed by the phrase "the Sun lying in darkness" in many verses such as (1.117.5), (3.39.5). (3.39.5) states that "Indra with his friends the ten *dashagvas* found the Truth, even the Sun dwelling in darkness".

The knowledge so hidden in the darkness can be released as indicated in the poetic phrase "Indra milked the cows from out of the darkness (1.33.10)" or "release the honey covered by rock" (2.24.4).





Concept of Freedom

Freedom is a key idea in RV; all persons whatever their external condition—men, women, married couples, householders, wandering mendicants and so on have a right to tread the paths of immortality. RV does not impose any rigid external prerequisites. RV itself does not debar anyone from reading or following RV. RV even allows the voice of the skeptic who does not believe in the existence of devas. In RV (8.100.3), a skeptic declares “who is Indra, who has ever seen him”. The *rishi* gives a reasonable reply in the next verse RV (8.100.4) without invoking any threat of punishment in this world or the punishment in the life after death.

RV has no conception of a hell into which all its critics are cast. There is no great divide between the so called spiritual life and wordly life as in later times. According to RV, every being, not just the human being, develops according to his/her own self-law *svadha*. RV does not speak of a Cosmic Controller who controls all beings, himself staying outside of them. Every human being has to become aware of this self-law and follow the path of immortality unique to him/her. In this learning process, the help of the *devas* is ever there.

Knowledge constitutes the bulk of RV. The range of knowledge contained in it is so vast and so different from more traditional types of knowledge found in the books like *puranas* making it very hard to get a comprehensive view of the RV. It reminds one of the proverbial blind person trying to generalise the physical form of an elephant touching only one particular part of the animal like its rope-like trunk, the iron-like tusk, leaf-like ear etc. As a first step, we can group the verses under several categories like cosmology and cosmogony, human beings and psychology, the role of *devas* like Agni, evil, suffering and conflicts, everyday life, the paths of immortality and so on.

The knowledge in RV is integral. It is not divided into several rigid compartments. The knowledge is like a vast net in which each topic is intimately connected to every other topic. Take any verse dealing with one of the topics mentioned above. This verse brings in many other topics also. Similarly every dominant aspect of human personality is intimately connected to the corresponding one in the cosmos. All the realms of mental operations in a man like thinking, intellect, meditation, concentration and so on, are associated with the cosmic world *dyu*, Heaven. Therefore when a person is thinking, he is in touch with the cosmic world of Heaven. Since all human beings are in touch with the same world, we see here a neat explanation of the phenomenon of simultaneous discoveries by persons in different continents. Again every human action also has a cosmic dimension. In every action we see the dominant contribution of the *devas*. Thus both *devas* and humans are collaborators or



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creators in all activities. Eventually every human being can achieve the perfection natural to a cosmic power *deva*. This comprehensiveness of knowledge distinguishes RV from all other spiritual books.

Verses like RV (1.10.2) clearly state that the knowledge is infinite like a vast mountain with many peaks and valleys. The acquisition of knowledge by each individual is unique. No two paths are same. As (1.10.2) describes elegantly, we cannot envision all the details in one step. From one peak only certain details are available. We have to go to a higher peak to get more details.

The analogy of knowledge acquisition to mountain climbing appears for the first time in modern times, in books dealing with the theoretical Physics only at the beginning of twentieth century.

Such comprehensiveness of knowledge is possible because the Supreme Divine or God, the One without a Second, pervades all existence, both living and non-living. There are many verses describing the spiritual presence of the transcendent God as well as of the God immanent in all existence. Both RV and the Upanishads use the same word *Vaishvanara*, the Universal Divine Forces, to describe the immanence of God in all aspects of creation ranging from stone to herbs to man. Again the idea of *devas*, the distinct powers and personalities of the One, conscious of Truth is described both at an individual level such as Agni, Indra and also at the collective level as All-Gods *Vishvedevah*.





Human Psychology

Rigveda has a wealth of knowledge about human psychology. But like everything else in the Veda, this knowledge is intimately related to the knowledge of cosmology, *devas* etc. The seers of RV viewed a human being as a symbol of the Supreme Divine. This is the natural meaning of the famous *Purusha* hymn (10.90) in RV. It is a grotesque interpretation to claim that this hymn portrays the Supreme Person as having a physical form of the human being, the so called anthropomorphic conception of God. The word *purusha* is used in the Veda both for the Supreme Divine as well as for the human. This word literally means a dweller in the city *puri* or one who pervades everything. Every human being has a complex inner structure of which the physical body is only one aspect, the other aspects being those beyond the pale of the senses. In modern language used by the *tantriks*, every human being is endowed with several bodies which are termed as subtle to distinguish them from the gross physical body. The subtle body is indicated by the word *sadana*, *sadma*, *yonis*, etc., in many verses. Each body is associated with a distinct psychological principle. There is an intimate connection between the subtle bodies associated with a human being and the various worlds of the cosmos of Rigveda. Thus a key idea of the RV is that every human being's structure mirrors that of the cosmos. This connection between the individual human and the cosmos also affirms the connection between the corresponding bodies of all the different human beings. For instance, the individual mind of each human being is derived from the cosmic mind and thus all the individual human minds are in touch with one another. This feature explains many of the well known facts such as thought-reading, i.e., the reading of one person's thought by another, the possibility of simultaneous discoveries in the scientific arena and so on.

As mentioned earlier, the structure of human being replicates that of the macrocosm. Each person has several different sheaths or bodies, one corresponding to each principle of consciousness mentioned above. The same names are used for the sheaths also. However, in most humans only the outer three sheaths associated with the worlds of earth, *antariksha* and *dyau* have developed; the fourth sheath termed as *mahas* in Upanishads is not developed in most humans.

The outermost sheath is the sheath of matter, derived from the world of matter. Next s/he has the sheath of life-energy which deals with ambitions, emotions, higher levels, feelings, both noble and petty, goals, urge to dominate, drives, desires to possess, anger, urge for progression, the power of love, faith, sincerity, humility, aspirations, equality, peace, generosity, goodness, emotion, passion and love. The mental sheath deals with our thoughts, understanding, control of senses, intelligence, reason, intuition, ability to make decisions and implement them, control of the organs of actions like speech, hands, legs etc.,



and the powers of meditation, contemplation and concentration. Typically in an advanced person the sheath of *prana* or the vital should be under the control of the mind. Often it is the reverse, the vital overpowers the mental and orders the power of reasoning to come up with reasons for doing the action, which may have no support of our secret inner being.

So, when a human is reasoning, he is communing with the mental world. When s/he is involved with emotions like love and the powers of the higher vital s/he is communing with the vital world, *antariksha*. Those who are deemed intellectual, commune mainly with the vital and mental worlds.

In an ordinary human being, *martya* or *marta*, these different bodies are still in a nascent state. All the associated energies are blocked as it were and the symbolic doors of the respective rooms are closed or almost closed. When the doors are at least slightly open, a person, while thinking, will be in touch with the world of *dyau*; while dealing with life energies is in touch with the mid-world etc.

The key difference between the human being and the Divine is that the cosmic worlds associated with the Divine are perfect. There is a sheath in human being corresponding to every world. But these are in a process of evolution in different stages of development. This is the reason for the distinctness of each human being. Each human being is at a different stage of development. The *rishis* of RV reached a sufficiently high stage of development in all the four sheaths. In most human beings even the third or mental sheath is not well developed, leave alone the fourth sheath. All the psychological problems faced by the humans are derived from the fact that these sheaths are not fully developed.

The Veda distinguishes between the ordinary mortal *marta* or *martya* and the wise person, *vipra*, *rishi* or *kavi*, one who has the vision of entities beyond the range of senses. It tells how one can attain these states of consciousness and other states of mind.

Recall that the goal stated in the Rigveda is the attainment of immortality or perfection in all aspects. This aim is stated in various places such as (9.113). Immortality is not mere freedom from death and living in the aging body for ever. The decay of our physical and mental powers is the characteristic of mortality. The *devas* help the eager aspirants in attaining the many sided perfection. When the human beings express their aspiration by means of practices like meditation and chanting, the *devas* reveal themselves and manifest their powers in that human being. They are said to be literally born in the *rishi*. Hence the *devas* are said to be *rshikrt*, makers of *rishis* (1.31.16). Agni is the god hymned first because he represents the power of aspiration. Even when the outer human being is completely ignorant, Agni puts pressure and makes the human being become aware of the inner body. When the aspirant realises the



Deeper Meaning

necessity for understanding the world inside, he intensifies his practices of meditation and chanting. Then the Agni power becomes firmly established. Then Agni himself carries them further. He calls all other *devas* to come and manifest in the aspirant. In the symbolic language of the *deva*, Agni himself is called upon to perform the *yajna*.

The progress achieved in the humans is indicated in several verses. For illustration, consider the action of *rbhus*, the divine artisans who prepare the subtle bodies of the human beings. One of their actions is indicated by the enigmatic phrase, "They make four bowls out of the One", (1.20.6). Sri Aurobindo explains the symbolism. In an ordinary human being, our physical, vital and mental aspects are all mixed up. Each aspect wants to act independent of the other. The physical body has its needs. The vital body forces its desires and ambitions on both the physical body and mental body to the harm of the latter. The *rbhus* isolate the warring factions and restore order. Thus they form the physical body, vital body, mental body and the body of light from the amorphous single one, the single bowl.





Cosmology and Consciousness

In the RV, there are seven distinct principles which are referred to by various epithets such as *sapta vani*, seven voices, *sapta nadyah*, seven rivers, seven *rishis* etc. They are the different levels of consciousness. It is worth emphasising that RV has more than forty distinct words occurring in several hundred verses dealing with consciousness. The different grades of consciousness in the ascending order are: matter, life-energy, mind, light and the highest triple of existence-knowledge and bliss. At the level of matter, the "density" of consciousness is least whereas it is highest at the highest triple level. There is a world associated with each principle of consciousness displaying its manifestation. These are: The earth, *bhu*, *bhumi* or *prthvi*, the world governed by material principle, the heaven *dyau*, the realm of the Divine Mind dealing with all aspects of the mental world. The two together, heaven and earth, are called as *rodasi*. Between these two worlds is the *antariksha* or *rajas* which is the world of all the life-energy, which is the basis of all the plants, animals and the vital aspect of mankind, the realm of emotions, feelings, passions, hopes, fears and love. These three worlds constitute the lower three. The fourth world beyond these three is called *svar*, the world of Light, the native home of all the *devas*. It is also referred to as the *uru loka* or *u loka*. Beyond this realm is the supreme triple worlds *tridhatu* in RV, *sat-chit-ananda* or existence, consciousness and bliss in Upanishads. Thus the cosmology consists of five worlds or seven worlds depending on whether we treat the supreme triplet as one or three. The RV has so many different concepts connected with the seven (or five) such as seven *rishis*, seven potent words, seven rivers or waters etc. It is a mistake to regard these seven rivers as referring exclusively to the seven physical rivers in the north-western Indian sub continent.

There are also subdivisions of these worlds such as the three earths and three heavens etc.

Clearly there is a hierarchy of the worlds in terms of consciousness. The consciousness is at its height in the triple world *tridhatu* and least in the world of matter. In the highest triplet the Supreme Being, the ONE is in the state of oneness and there is no manifestation. The one becomes the many in the fourth world *svar*, the beings in this world being the *devas*. But each *deva* is conscious of the unity with the ONE. There is no conflict. The multiplicity is intimately tied to the One. In the three lower worlds there is only partial remembrance of their origin from the ONE. It is worth stating that the heaven *dyau* is not merely a world one goes to after one's death.





Perfection and Education

The *vedic* sages posed the question of perfection in each activity. What is the source of ability of the human being to perform certain activities? Can s/he develop capacities to do actions like singing, painting or composing which s/he may not currently possess?

The *vedic* sages declare that each *deva* is a conscious being associated with a particular type of cosmic power. By following certain psychological practices such as aspiration, faith and by chanting the verses, each human being can enter into a conscious relationship with these cosmic forces or *devas*. The relationship can be very intimate like father, son, friend, spouse and so on. Then the particular *deva* is pleased to manifest his power in that human being. These powers continue to increase or grow in the human as the corresponding degree of aspiration increases. This idea of the *deva* manifesting his power in a human is called as the birth of the *deva* referred to in the RV in hundreds of verses by words like *janayan* or *jagnana* etc. These powers increase in man indicated by the words like *vardhayan, uti*. Hence each *deva* has two births *dvijanma* in Veda, one at the cosmic level, the other in each human being.

The first to take birth in man is Agni, the leader. There are many verses such as (1.68.4) which declare that he sits inside us and guides us. We should remember that man is primarily a thinker, secondarily a doer. Agni infuses the energy and makes the will strong and makes him/her do the work. All the work is done by Gods. Agni worships on behalf of man. He is prayed to perform yajna (2.9.4). Agni is the leader of yajna, the collaborative effort.

Becoming acquainted with these psychological powers may take a long time. Once some degree of mastery is established, then the person embarks onto the second stage. In this stage, s/he enquires whether each psychological power that has come to his attention has a universal fount or source from which the corresponding power in all other humans is derived.

According to the *vedic* sages, education means getting the knowledge or power directly from the main source. The book is only an instrument.

