

*Great Epics of India : Veda*

*the*  
*Rig Veda*



Great Epics of India: Vedas

# **The Rig Veda**

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## Introduction

The *Vedas* are ancient texts that are sacred in India and renowned the world over. The word *veda* literally means knowledge. The root is *vid*, 'to know'. The *Vedas* are thus texts that provide knowledge.

There are four *Vedas*, known as the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Many years ago, the *Vedas* were referred to as *trayi* or three. There must have been some point of time when there were only three *Vedas*. These are acknowledged to have been the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda*. The *Atharva Veda* is believed to have been a later addition to the sacred canon.

Each of the *Vedas* has two parts, a *samhita* and the *brahmanas*. The *samhita* part consists of *mantras* or incantations. These were hymns that were used in sacrifices. But these *mantras* are difficult to interpret without commentaries. This is what the *brahmanas* set out to do. They explain the hymns and indicate how these are to be used in sacrifices. The *brahmanas* also have detailed descriptions of sacrifices and how they are to be conducted. The *samhitas* and the *brahmanas* are often known as *karma kanda*, that is, the part of the *Vedas* that deals with rituals.

In addition, Vedic literature also includes *jnana kanda*. This is the part that deals with supreme knowledge. Included in *jnana kanda* are the *aranyakas* and the *upanishads*. These are identified with various *Vedas*.

We can therefore have a narrow definition of a *Veda* as well as a broad one. The narrow definition would take the word *Veda* to mean the *samhita* alone. The broad definition would include, in addition, associated *brahmanas*, *aranyakas* and *upanishads*. By the word *Veda*, here we mean the *samhita* alone. That is, when we are retelling the *Rig Veda*, we are retelling the *Rig Veda Samhita*.

When were the *Vedas* composed and who composed them? Strictly speaking, there is no answer to these questions. The *Vedas* were revealed; they were *shrutis*. They were not written down or composed. They were communicated by the supreme godhead or the divine essence (*brahman*) to the ancient seers (*rishis*). These *rishis* did not compose the *Vedas*; they merely obtained this divine knowledge through their extraordinary powers. In this sense, the *Vedas* are *apourusheya*. Their authorship cannot be ascribed to any human author.

Just as it is impossible to determine *who* composed the *Vedas*, it is also impossible to determine *when* they were composed. Widely different dates have been suggested by scholars. Tilak suggested a date of around 6000 B.C., while Jacobi's date was around 4500 B.C. Most scholars would agree that the *Vedas* were compiled sometime between 4000 B.C. and 1000 B.C. and that it is impossible to narrow down the range further. The earliest of the *Vedas* is clearly the *Rig Veda*. This reached a stage of final compilation between 1000 B.C. and 900 B.C.

## The Rig Veda Samhita

It is first important to understand that there were four classes of priests who were required at any sacrifice, or *yajna*. The first class consisted of the officiating priests or acolytes (*hotri*). They invoked the gods by reciting the *mantras*, prepared the sacrificial ground and the altar, and poured out the libations. The hymns of the *Rig Veda* are for this class of priests. The second class of priests consisted of the choristers (*udgatri*). These were the ones who chanted the sacred hymns and the hymns of the *Sama Veda* are for this class of priests. The third class of priests consisted of the reciters (*adhvaryu*). They carried out sacrificial rites while chanting the sacred texts and the hymns of the *Yajur Veda* are for this class of priests. The fourth class of priests consisted of *brahmana* overseers. They supervised the sacrifice and the hymns of the *Atharva Veda* are for this class of priests.

The *Rig Veda* derives its name from the word *rik*, which means a *mantra*. There are 10,589 verses in the *Rig Veda Samhita*. These are divided into ten *mandalas* or books. Each of the *mandalas* is subdivided into *anuvakas* (lessons) and *suktas* (hymns). The ten *mandalas* have 85 *anuvakas*, 1080 *suktas* and 10,589 verses. There is also a *valakhilya* section or supplement. This seems to have been a later addition.

Let us now see what the *Rig Veda* has to say. Since the *Rig Veda* is fairly long, we will have to be selective. We cannot be exhaustive.



## **Mandala One**

(This *mandala* has 181 *suktas* and 2006 *mantras*. The bulk of the *mantras* are addressed to Indra. Agni comes next in order of importance.)

## **Agni**

(Agni is the fire-god. It is to Agni that oblations in a sacrifice are offered. Agni is regarded as a messenger who summons the other gods to the sacrifice and carries the offerings to them. This particular hymn is ascribed to a sage named Madhuchhanda Vaishvamitra. He was descended from the famous sage Vishvamitra. Various hymns follow various metres and this one is in the *gayatri* metre.)

I pray to Agni. He advances to the front so that he can bring about the welfare of men. It is Agni who makes the sacrifice a success. This is a sacrifice that is being performed according to the rites of the season. Agni is the prosperous one. He will summon the gods to this sacrifice.

Agni has been praised by many sages of earlier times. He is being praised by the sages who are here now. May Agni bring the gods to this sacrifice.

Every day, men will obtain nourishment from Agni. They will certainly obtain fame, valour and riches.

O Agni! This is a non-violent sacrifice that is being performed. Make it successful from every direction. May we be able to attain the proximity of the gods.

You are the one who will summon the gods. You are the one who will ensure that the sacrifice is successfully completed. You are the one who inspires learned men to action. O Agni! Many are your forms and you are always truthful. You are the radiant one who has performed wondrous deeds. Agni has come to the sacrifice with the other gods.

O my beloved Agni! You ensure the welfare of those who give alms. You are the one who is present in every portion of our anatomy. The acts you perform are the ones that are truly righteous.

O Agni! We pray to you always, night and day. May we use our intelligence to come close to you.

You are the radiant one. You are the protector of non-violent sacrifices. You are the one who manifests the immutable truth. We bow in obeisance before Agni and come close to him. He will make our houses prosper.

O Agni! You are the famous one. We are like your sons; be like a father unto us. Grant us happiness and ensure our welfare. Aid us in our endeavours.

## Vayu

(Vayu is the god of the wind. This hymn is also ascribed to the sage Madhuchhanda Vaishvamitra. And this too, is in the *gayatri* metre.)

O Vayu! You are the one who is fit to be seen. Come here. This *soma* juice has been prepared for you. Drink the *soma* juice and listen to our prayers.

O Vayu! The learned priests are well-versed in the knowledge of which days are auspicious and which are not. They have prepared the *soma* juice on an auspicious day. The choristers are singing your praise through their hymns.

O Vayu! These great words are being addressed to you. You are the great one. You are the one who grants boons. We desire that you may drink this *soma* juice.

O Indra! O Vayu! This is *soma* juice that has been prepared. Take great care in coming here. This *soma* juice wishes to be united with you.

O Vayu! You and Indra know well the wonderful properties of the *soma* juice. You are the ones who have an abundance of riches and foodgrains. Come here quickly.

O Vayu! You and Indra are the leaders. You are always in the forefront. Use your wisdom to come here quickly. Accept the *soma* juice that has been extracted.

I call upon the powerful god Mitra. I call upon the god Varuna who is the destroyer of enemies. Through their benevolent wisdom, may they enable our tasks to be completed.

Mitra and Varuna are always connected with truth. They are the ones who enhance the truth. They will use the power of truth to make the sacrifice a success.

Mitra and Varuna are omnipresent. They are learned and powerful. They will provide us the strength that will inspire us to action.

(Although the hymn is basically addressed to Vayu, Indra, Mitra and Varuna also figure in it. Indra is the chief god of the *Vedas*. He rules over the atmosphere (*antariksha*), the intervening region between the earth (*prithivi*) and heaven (*dyuloka*). Indra kills the demons with his weapon *vajra*. In particular, he killed the demon Vritra. Mitra is an aspect of the sun that presided over the day. Correspondingly, Varuna presided over the night. *Soma* juice was extracted from

the *soma* herb, the herbs having been collected by moonlight. The herbs were crushed to extract the juice, which was next purified by straining. The purified juice was mixed with water, milk and flour and offered to the gods).

## Indra

(This hymn is also ascribed to Madhuchhanda Vaishamitra and the metre continues to be *gayatri*.)

O friends! You who are desirous of performing a sacrifice. Come here and be seated. Sing the praise of the great Indra.

When you are seated and have begun to extract the *soma* juice, praise the wonderful qualities of the great Indra. He is the one who has destroyed many enemies. He is the one who is the lord of a lot of riches.

Indra will certainly grant us an abundance of riches. Indra will grant us riches and a lot of wisdom. He will come to us with an abundant supply of food grains.

When there is a battle, enemies are not even able to touch Indra's horses. His chariot cannot be touched. Sing his praise.

This *soma* juice has been extracted and pure curds have been mixed with it. This is the juice that deserves to be drunk. It will be united with Indra.

O Indra! You are the performer of wonderful deeds. You are the great one who drinks the *soma* juice. You become great so as to perform these wonderful deeds.

O Indra! You are the one who deserves to be praised. May the *soma* juice, which is a source of inspiration, be united with you. May it gladden your heart.

O brave one! You are the performer of several wonderful deeds. May these hymns enhance your greatness and increase your fame. May our words increase your fame.

O Indra! You have the unlimited power to protect. Partake of these offerings of food grains. All forms of strength can be found in these offerings.

O Indra! You are the one who deserves to be praised. May the soldiers of the enemy not be able to harm our bodies. You are the lord of all that there is. Please keep the weapons of the enemies at a distance.

## The Ribhus

(The Angirasa formed an important priestly family. In this line was born a sage named Sudhanva. Sudhanva had three sons named Ribhu, Vibhvan and Vaja. These three were collectively referred to as the Ribhus. Their deeds were such that they were elevated to the status of gods. This hymn is ascribed to the sage Medhatithi, son of the sage Kanva. The metre is *gayatri*.)

The learned recited the words of this hymn with their own mouths. So sacred is this hymn that it gives birth to a cluster of jewels. This hymn is addressed to the Ribhus, the ones who had divine births.

The Ribhus were very skilled. They trained two horses so that the horses could follow instructions given by signs. The Ribhus gave Indra these horses. The Ribhus will come to every sacrifice.

The Ribhus constructed a beautiful and swift chariot for the Ashvins. They made the cows yield a lot of milk.

The Ribhus were righteous and straightforward in conduct. They travelled in all the directions and they made their aged parents young again.

O Ribhus! This *soma* juice is being offered for your pleasure. Come and savour it with Indra, the Maruts and the other gods.

Tvashta made only one ladle. But the Ribhus, with their skills, made four sacrificial ladles out of that.

(Tvashta was the architect of the gods. It has been suggested that the Ribhus were Tvashta's disciples.)

May the Ribhus be pleased with our prayers. May they come to our sacrifice and accept the *soma* juice that the priests have offered. May they grant us twenty-one types of riches.

(Twenty-one simply signifies a large number.)

The energy of the Ribhus rivals that of Agni. Through their deeds, the Ribhus came to be accepted as gods. They are entitled to a share of the oblations made at sacrifices.

## Varuna

(This hymn is ascribed to a sage named Shunahshepa. He was the son of the sage Ajigarta. The metre in which this hymn is composed is *gayatri*.)

O Varuna! Other men commit sin. We are no different, we too commit sin. We violate your commandments every day.

Your anger is terrible. You raise your weapon to kill those who sin and those who violate you. But despite the sins we have committed, spare us from your anger.

O Varuna! A charioteer pacifies his horses when they are tired. Like that brave warrior, we use these hymns to pacify your anger. May you look upon us with favour and may you grant us happiness.

A bird flies here and there and finally returns to its nest. Like that, my mind and my heart roam here and there in search of riches. (What is left implicit is that the mind and the heart seek refuge with Varuna after the pursuit of riches is over.)

Varuna is the source of all valour. Varuna is the source of all good fortune. Varuna is the one who sees everything. We desire to ensure our happiness. Who can we pray to but Varuna?

Mitra and Varuna are the gods who wish to elevate those who observe religious rites. They elevate those who give alms. Mitra and Varuna will partake of the oblations we have offered. They will never desert their devotees.

These two gods know the ways of the birds that fly in the atmosphere. They know the ways of the boats that travel in the oceans.

Varuna is the god who follows the proper rites. He is acquainted with the twelve months that bring prosperity to the subjects. He knows well the thirteenth month that comes in between.

(The twelve lunar months add up to 360 days. Therefore, a supplementary and intercalary thirteenth month has to be introduced every sixth year to bring conformity between the solar and the lunar years.)

Varuna knows the ways of the great and fast winds. He knows well the ways of the gods who rule.

Varuna observes the proper rites. He is the performer of excellent deeds. He comes amidst his subjects so that kingdoms may flourish.

He is the one who knows how extraordinary deeds are to be performed. He knows what has been done and what remains to be done. He is the one who sees everything.

Varuna is the son of Aditi. He is the performer of wondrous deeds. May Varuna guide us along the righteous path. May he increase our life expectancy.

Varuna is the one who wears a golden gown. On top of this, he dons clothings that radiate energy. The rays of the sun spread out in the four directions and are his messengers.

The evil ones who are assassins can bring no harm to Varuna. Those who bear hatred in their hearts can bring no harm to Varuna. Enemies can bring no harm to the great god.

He is the one who brings fame to mankind. He is the one who brings fruition to all action. He is the one who created our wonderful digestive systems.

Varuna is a witness to everything. When our intelligence is elevated, we wish to attain his proximity, the way a cow desires closeness to a pasture.

I have brought you offerings of honey. May these offerings be as beloved to you as the officiating priest himself. Accept this honey. And after you have eaten it, you and I will sit together and converse.

I have seen the god whose glory can be seen everywhere in the universe. I have seen his chariot travel on the ground. He has accepted my prayers.

O Varuna! Listen to my prayers. Make us happy today. We seek your protection. Grant it to us.

O god! You are the one who manifests himself through wisdom. You rule over earth, heaven and the rest of the universe. Listen to our prayers and grant us our wishes.

Remove all the bondage that we suffer from. Free us. And grant us long lives.



## The Ashvinis

(The two Ashvinis were gods whose identities are not very clear. They brought light to the morning sky. They were probably two stars, one identified with the morning and the other with the evening. They were subsequently characterised as the physicians of the gods. This hymn is ascribed to a sage named Hiranyastupa, son of the sage Angirasa. The metre is partly *jagati* and partly *trishtupa*.)

O learned Ashvinis! We are performing three sacrifices today. Come and be with us on the occasion. The two of you travel on a chariot that is huge and greatness characterises your generous hearts. You are as intimately connected with us as clothing is connected to the coldness of winter. Those who are learned can easily attain proximity to you.

The chariot of the Ashvinis bears honey and three wheels are attached to the chariot. (This is a reference to the three daily sacrifices that are held). Everyone knows that the two of you desire to partake of the *soma* juice. Three are the pillars that hold up your chariot. And you travel thrice during the day and thrice during the night.

O Ashvinis! You are the ones who forgive all sins. Today we will perform three sacrifices. Come here and make our sacrifices overflow with honey. Morning and evening, grant us three offerings of food grains.

O Ashvinis! Come to our household thrice. Come thrice to your devotees. Come thrice to those who deserve to be protected. Come thrice and increase our learning. The two of you will bring us wonderful objects three times. You will thrice nourish us by bringing food grains and other objects.

O Ashvinis! You will come to the sacrifice thrice. You will bring us riches thrice. Three are the occasions on which you will protect and preserve our sacrifices. You will thrice bring us riches and foodgrains. Your chariot has three wheels. And the daughter of the sun sits in your chariot. (The Ashvinis were married to the sun's daughter.)

O Ashvinis! You are the ones who ensure the performance of righteous deeds. Grant us thrice, medicines from heaven. Grant us thrice, herbs from the earth. Grant us thrice, herbs from the water. Grant protection and happiness to our sons. Grant them a proper balance of the three constituents.

(The three constituents (*dhatu*) of the human body are *vata* (wind), *pitta*

(bile) and *kafa* (phlegm). When these are in perfect balance, a person is well.)

O Ashvinis! You are the ones who deserve to be worshipped. The earth is the altar on which we perform three sacrifices every day. Come on your chariot and be seated here thrice. You are the protectors of the truth. You may be far away. But like the breath of life that unites with the *atman* (the human soul), come and be united with us.

O Ashvinis! There are seven sacred rivers. The vessels have been filled thrice with water from these sacred rivers. The oblations have been divided into three. The two of you travel in the three worlds (*loka*). You are the ones who protect divine happiness during night and day.

(The seven sacred rivers were Indus (Sindhu), Vitasta, Asikli, Parushni, Vipasha, Shatadru and Sarasvati. The three *lokas* were the earth (*prithivi*), the atmosphere (*antariksha*) and heaven (*dyuloka*.)

O gods who ensure that truth prevails! Where are the three pillars that hold up your chariot? Where are its three wheels? When will powerful donkeys be harnessed to your chariot? When will you climb into your chariot and come here?

O Nasatyas! The oblations have been poured into the fire. Come here. Drink the sweet *soma* juice with your mouths. Wonderful are the decorations on your chariot. Before the onset of dawn, the sun sends your chariot to the sacrifice.

(Nasatyas is another name for the Ashvinis. Literally, the word means one who preserves the truth. Sacrifices were begun at the stroke of dawn.)

O Nasatyas! Come with the thirty-three gods to drink the *soma* juice we have offered. Grant us long lives and purify us of our sins. Stay with us and purge us of all thoughts of enmity.

O Ashvinis! Three are the pillars that hold up your chariot. Bring us riches in that chariot. Bring us valour. We call upon you for protection and happiness. Increase our intelligence at the time of battle.

(The thirty-three gods included eight Vasus, eleven Rudras and twelve Adityas. This adds up to thirty-one. The remaining two are sometimes identified as Prajapati and Vashatkar.)

## The Vishvadevas

(The 'Vishvadevas' was a general expression which signified all the gods collectively. Sometimes the suggestion however is that Vishvadevas were a special group of gods. In the hymn that follows, most verses are addressed to the Vishvadevas, although other gods are also mentioned. This hymn is important as it includes a phrase that is often quoted. *Ekam sad vipra vahudha vadanti* - truth is one, but the learned speak of it in various ways. The hymn is ascribed to the sage Dirghatama, the son of the sage Ouchathya. The metres that figure are *trishtupa*, *jagati*, *prastarapamkti* and *anushtupa*.)

Surya is the beautiful one. He is the one who rules over everything and sucks out the juices from the earth. The brother who is in the middle pervades everything. The younger brother has a radiant back and his back is sprinkled with clarified butter. I have seen the one who rules over the world through his seven sons.

(Surya is the god of the sun. The three brothers are Surya, Vayu and Agni. Surya rules in *dyuloka* and is the eldest. Vayu rules in *antariksha* and is the brother who is in the middle. Agni rules on *prithivi* and is the youngest brother. The seven sons are Surya's seven rays with which Surya governs the world.)

Surya's chariot has only one wheel, but seven horses are harnessed to it. Although there seem to be seven horses, there is actually only one horse with seven names. The immortal and constant wheel has three naves. It is through this wheel that the entire universe is established.

(The seven horses are again the seven rays of the sun, which actually are but one. The three naves have been identified as the seasons autumn, summer and monsoon.)

Seven are the rays that sit astride the sun's chariot. Seven are the wheels and seven the horses that Surya uses to drive through time. Seven are the forms of speech that worship the sun. The seven sisters praise Surya in the four directions.

(The seven wheels refer to different periods into which time is divided. These are *ayana* (six months), *ritu* (season), *masa* (month), *paksha* (fortnight), *dina* (day), *rata* (night) and *muhurta* (roughly equivalent to an hour). The seven forms of speech are the seven major metres. The seven sisters could be these metres. Alternatively, they could be the seven sacred rivers.)

He who has no bones created all living beings that have bones. Did anyone see him being created? Where then were to be found the life, the blood and the soul of the earth? Who is the learned one who knows the answers to these questions?

(This refers to the creation and the one with no bones is Prajapati, the creator. The life of the earth is the wind, the blood is the water, and the soul is the sun. The sense is that these were not present prior to creation.)

I am the one whose learning is incomplete. Yet, with all due humility, I wish to know how the gods were created. The learned ones used seven different types of thread to create the universe that can be seen and lived in.

(The learned ones are the gods. They created the universe with seven threads - mind, life, earth, water, energy, wind and the sky.)

He who created the six regions of the universe is Prajapati. He himself was not born. Who can comprehend the nature of Prajapati? I am the ignorant one, but I wish to learn of this knowledge. I will resort to the learned for wisdom.

(Three *lokas* or regions have already been mentioned. There is a reference here to three additional regions that are above these.)

Surya is handsome and always mobile. Who knows of the origin of the sun? Let that learned one come here and reveal to me the knowledge. The supreme rays of the sun suck up the water from the earth. The water is borne by the sun and is then rained down on earth.

The earth is the mother and heaven is the father. They had united to bring about the cosmic act of creation. The earth bore the food grains in her womb. May those who desire food grains worship the earth.

It is the sun's powers of preservation that bear up the earth. The calf saw the many forms of the cow in the three worlds and began to call. It was then that the seed was implanted in the womb of the earth.

(The cow symbolises the rays of the sun that create clouds and rain, and the clouds are the calf. The calling of the calf indicated thunder and then it began to rain. It is this rain that leads to the seed of food grains being implanted in the womb of the earth.)

Prajapati alone bears aloft the three mothers and the three fathers. He bears them, but is above them all. He is untouched by misery. He knows the universe and rules over it, but himself remains unattached. The gods who populate heaven

debate about the nature of Prajapati.

(The three mothers are heaven, the atmosphere and the earth. The three fathers are Surya, Vayu and Agni.)

Twelve are the spokes (the twelve months) on the sun's wheel. Surya's wheel traverses heaven in the four directions. It never wears thin. O Agni! The seven hundred and twenty twin sons are always present.

(The seven hundred and twenty twin sons are the three hundred and sixty days and three hundred and sixty nights in any year.)

The father has five feet and twelve forms. Some say that he traverses the further half of heaven. Others say that the chariot has seven wheels and six spokes.

(This is difficult to interpret. The father is Surya. He traverses the further half of heaven, that is, the sky as opposed to the earth. The twelve forms are the twelve months and the five feet are the five seasons spring, monsoon, summer, autumn and winter. There are six spokes when autumn is further subdivided into early autumn and late autumn. The seven wheels are the seven rays of the sun.)

All the worlds are gathered together in the movement of the wheel with the five spokes (the five seasons). No matter what the weight may be, the axle of the wheel never gets heated. It travels perpetually through time, but never breaks.

The wheel with the axle is like the universe and moves all the time. It never breaks. When nature was created, the chariot began to be drawn by ten horses. The sun's radiance is shrouded in water and it is the sun who rules over all the worlds.

(The ten horses are intelligence, mind, heart, ego, the earth, water, fire, wind, sky and the soul.)

The seven elements were created at the same time. They have the same origin, that is, Prajapati. Six of these are connected to one another, like twins. They are like the sages who were created by the gods. In six of them, independent sacrifices are held, depending on the occasion. Although the seven elements function independently, they were created at the same time and have the same origin.

(This is difficult to interpret. The six who are connected to one another seem to be the six seasons, of two months each. The seventh element is the thirteenth intercalary month.)

The rays of the sun have both masculine and feminine traits. He who has the eyes of learning can see this. He who is blind and ignorant never realises this. Learned sons know this wisdom and become so learned that they are as revered as fathers.

The cow (the sun) has borne her calf (the clouds) in the region that is below heaven and above the earth. Who knows where the cow travels? And who knows where the calf is born? This much is certain that the calf is not born on earth.

The earth is below heaven and Agni is the ruler of the earth. Heaven is above the earth and Surya is the ruler of heaven. Who knows where divine minds originate? He who knows the answer to this question is learned. Let him come here and tell us the answer.

The universe is in constant movement. That which is near today, is far tomorrow. That which is far today, is near tomorrow. O Soma! You and Indra have created the paths that you traverse. Along these paths, your steeds draw your chariots. Thus it is that all the worlds are pulled.

(Soma is a personification of the *soma* herb, but is also identified with the moon-god. In this context, the sun is being referred to as Indra. That is, the sun and the moon traverse paths across the sky).

The two birds have beautiful wings. They sit on the same tree and are friends. One of the birds eats the sweet fruit that grows on the tree. The other does not eat the fruit, it merely manifests itself.

(The two birds are the divine soul (*paramatman*) and the human soul (*atman*). The tree is the world. The *paramatman* and the *atman* are intimately connected with each other. The *atman* savours the fruit of the world, that is, the rewards of actions. But the *paramatman* does not savour these fruit. It remains a detached and passive spectator.)

The two birds with beautiful wings sit on the tree and pray for immortality with their words. May the learned one who is the lord of the universe impart wisdom to my ignorant heart.

The two birds with beautiful wings sit on the tree that is the world. They create all living beings and drink the honey that the tree provides. Sweet are the fruits that grow in the upper parts of the tree. But he who does not know the nature of the *paramatman*, does not get to eat these fruits.

*Gayatri* is established on *gayatri*, *trishtupa* is established on *trishtupa* and

*jagati* is established on *jagati*. He who knows this, attains the immortality that knowledge confers.

(*Gayatri*, *trishtupa* and *jagati* are metres. But this verse is interpreted as follows. Agni (the first *gayatri*) has been established on earth (the second *gayatri*). Vayu (the first *trishtupa*) has been established in the atmosphere (the second *trishtupa*). Surya (the first *jagati*) has been established in heaven (the second *jagati*.)

*Riks* have been composed in the *gayatri* metre. Many *riks* taken together, constitute *sama* hymns. Hymns have also been composed in the *trishtupa* metre. With different combinations of syllables, the seven major metres can be formed.

Surya is the speedy one. Through the sun, Prajapati ensured that there is always water in heaven. The sun is united with the earth through the medium of rain. It is said that the sun is like a verse that has three components. It is Surya who enhances the strength and greatness of Prajapati.

(The three components of the sun are heaven, the atmosphere and the earth.)

For the sacrifice, I call upon the cow which yields excellent milk. I call upon the person who will milk the cow with his hands. May Savita (the sun) grant me a plentiful supply of milk. May the containers for boiling the milk be heated.

The cow calls to her beloved calf. She yields the milk that will ensure prosperity and nourish the eight Vasus. This cow does not deserve to be killed. Milk will be provided for the Ashvins. May the cow thrive so that prosperity is ensured.

The eyes of the calf are closed. The cow calls and goes near the calf. She licks its head and drags its mouth to her udders. The cow calls. Her udders are warm. She will satiate the calf with her milk.

The clouds have covered the sun's rays from the four directions. The clouds thunder. The lightning that is in the clouds roars. Through their act of showering rain, the clouds ensure that mankind thrives. Once it rains, the clouds shine in their glory.

The *atman* is always mobile. When life is over, the *atman* forsakes the physical body that is dead and enters a new one. The *atman* resides with the physical body, but is itself immortal. Through its powers, the *atman* moves all

the time.

I have seen the sun which never falls down. I have seen the sun which travels far and near. I have seen the sun who is the protector. The sun is the one whose energy blazes forth in the four directions. The sun manifests himself in the world.

So vast is the universe that he who has created it does not know its full expanse. When the *atman* tries to visualise the universe, the universe seems to disappear. The *atman* is born in the mother's womb. It has many offspring. And although the *atman* is itself immortal, the physical body must eventually die.

Heaven has created me and heaven is my preserver. Heaven is like my brother and is the fulcrum of my being. This vast earth is my mother. Heaven and earth are like two vessels that face each other. The sun is between the two. It is the sun who implants the seed of food grains in the womb of the earth.

I ask you about the end of this earth. I ask you about the centre of this universe. I ask you about the origin of horses. I ask you about the origin of speech.

This sacrificial altar is the end of the earth. This sacrifice is the centre of the universe. *Soma* is the origin of all horses. The *brahman* (the divine essence) is the origin of all speech.

(The sacrificial altar is the end of the earth as it is the place that is closest to heaven. It is there that the gods come to meet men. The *brahman* is used synonymously with the *paramatman*.)

The essence of the universe is in seven sons. They follow their own paths according to the instructions received from the supreme godhead. The seven sons encompass the entire universe. There is nothing that is beyond their reach.

(The seven sons are mind, life and the five elements of earth, water, energy, the wind and the sky. Everything in the universe is formed out of these seven constituents.)

I do not know what the *atman* may be compared to. The *atman* is constrained inside the physical body, but the mind is free to wander. When the *atman* is united with the *paramatman* and realises the truth, it is then that I grasp the significance of these words.

The *atman* is immortal. But it remains with the mortal body through its own powers. The *atman* attains higher births and lower ones. The physical body and



the *atman* are together, but their destinations are different. People can easily see the physical body. But it is difficult to visualise the *atman*.

The *paramatman* is as vast as the sky and as constant as the syllables of the *riks*. All the gods are to be found in the *paramatman*. What use are the *mantras* of the *Vedas* to someone who does not understand the nature of the great *brahman*? He who knows the *paramatman* is the one who is the most learned. He gets to sit in the most elevated of places.

O cows! You do not deserve to be killed. Drink the purest of water and eat the best of grass. May you have good fortune. Roam at will. May we also have good fortune.

The cow (here symbolising clouds) which gives water has thundered. Sometimes the cow has one foot, sometimes two, sometimes four, sometimes eight and sometimes nine. It is the voice of heaven itself that thunders in a thousand syllables.

(The clouds have only one foot when they thunder only from the cloud. There are two feet when the thunder is heard both from the cloud and from the sky. Similarly, the four feet refer to the four cardinal points and the eight feet to the four cardinal points plus the four intermediate points. Nine feet include, in addition, the zenith.)

From the cow, the oceans flow. It is because of the cow that the four directions prosper. The rains shower so that the entire universe can live.

From a great distance, I have seen the many forms of powerful smoke. (I therefore know that there must be a fire.) There the brave ones are preparing the *soma* juice that is the source of strength. This is what must always be done before any major task is embarked on.

The objects with three rays can be seen, depending on the season. One of them is lit once every year. The second lights up the entire universe with its rays. The movement of the third can be seen, but its form itself remains invisible.

(The objects with three rays are Agni, Surya and Vayu. The flames of the fire were lit at the beginning of the year and the fire was not put out throughout the year. Surya's rays light up the universe. Vayu is the one who remains invisible, although the movement of the wind can be seen.)

Speech has been measured out in four divisions. Learned *brahmanas* are aware of this division. Three of these divisions remain secret and do not appear.

It is the fourth division that mankind are familiar with.

(This is obscure, but the meaning seems to be as follows. The first division of speech is its origin. The second division of speech is when it reaches the heart. The third division of speech is when it reaches the brain. These three divisions cannot be seen. The fourth and final division of speech is when it reaches the mouth. This is the one that can be seen, or felt.)

Truth is one (the *paramatman*). Learned people refer to it by various names. Some call it Indra, others Mitra, others Varuna and still others Agni. It is referred to as Yama or as Matarishvan. It is also known as the golden-winged Garutman (a celestial bird).

The rays of the sun carry water up into the sky. The water next descends from the atmosphere in the form of rain. It is this water that makes the earth wet.

There is a wheel which has twelve bounds around it. The wheel has three naves and three hundred and sixty spokes. Only the learned ones know of this.

(The bounds are the twelve months. The naves are the three seasons of summer, autumn and monsoon. The spokes are the three hundred and sixty days.)

O Sarasvati! You are the source of happiness. Nurture us with all sorts of riches. You are the possessor of jewels, you are the one who grants jewels. You grant the gifts that ensure our welfare. May you look upon us with favour.

(Sarasvati was a river. It was only later that she came to be identified as the goddess of learning.)

The gods themselves worship the *paramatman*. The worship of the *paramatman* is the righteous path. He who follows this dictum achieves the best of worlds, where there is perpetual happiness. It is there that the gods dwell.

During the space of a day, it is the same water that goes up (into the sky) and comes down. The clouds satisfy the earth and the fires of heaven.

I call upon Surya for the sake of my protection. He is the one who was born in heaven and he is the one who is always on the move. He is the fulcrum of the water as he ensures that it rains. He nourishes the herbs and satisfies the earth. I worship Surya.

## **Mandala Two**

(This *mandala* has 43 *suktas* and 429 *mantras*. Almost all the *suktas* are ascribed to a sage named Gritsamada).

## Rudra

(The bulk of the *suktas* in *mandala* two are addressed to Indra. Then follow those addressed to Agni. But since we have already recapitulated *suktas* addressed to Indra and Agni, we now choose one that is addressed to Rudra. The Rudra of the *Vedas* seems to have been a god of storms. It was only later that he came to be identified with Shiva. Rudra is the father of the Maruts, who were gods of the wind. The hymn that follows is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

O father of the Maruts! Confer happiness on us. May we not be parted from the rays of the sun. May our warriors be able to vanquish enemies in battle. O Rudra! May we have many subjects.

O Rudra! You will grant us the herbs that bring happiness. With their aid, we will be able to live for a hundred years. May we be free of all thoughts of hatred. May we never sin. May the diseases that overcome the body maintain their distance.

O Rudra! Your riches make you the best of all objects that have been created. You are the one who holds weapons in your hands. You are the strongest of the strong. Preserve us from sin and ensure our welfare. May we never tread the path of evil.

O Rudra! May we never anger you through worship that is fraudulent. May we not anger you through the utterance of hymns that are improper. May we not anger you through mixed worship. Make our progeny strong through your herbs. I have learnt that you are the best of all physicians.

(Mixed worship signifies worship in which other gods are also invoked together with Rudra.)

Rudra is the one who is summoned through oblations and hymns. May I pacify Rudra through my hymns. He is the one who has a soft heart. He is the one who deserves to be prayed to. He is the nourisher and preserver. He is the one who grants us the best of protection. May we not fall prey to envy and anger Rudra.

Rudra is the strong one. He is the one who is associated with the Maruts. We seek Rudra's favour. May he satisfy us through food grains that provide energy. Those who suffer from the sun seek the refuge of the shade. Like that, we are plagued by sin and seek refuge with Rudra. May we be happy. May we be able to serve Rudra.

O Rudra! Your hands banish disease. Your hands grant happiness. Where are those hands? Lay them on us. Forgive us our sins and remove any impediments that the gods may cast in our paths.

You are the one who nourishes everything. You permeate all objects that are full of strength and energy. I praise you as best as I can. May the radiant Rudra be pleased with our prayers. We chant Rudra's glorious names.

Rudra is the one whose body is firm. Many are his forms. He is the radiant one who nourishes. He is the one who is lit up through his energy. He nurtures all that there is in this universe. He is the supreme ruler. Rudra always has the power to destroy the demons.

O Rudra! You are the deserving one who holds bows and arrows. You are the one who deserves worship. You bear the metal gold, gold of many hues. You are the protector of this vast universe. O Rudra! There is no one to rival your energy.

O man! Rudra is the famous one. He is the one who rides in a chariot. He is as terrible as a young lion. He is the brave one who destroys enemies. Pray to him. O Rudra! Be pleased and confer happiness on your devotees. Let your soldiers not kill us, let them kill others instead.

O Rudra! A son worships his revered father. Like that, we are praying to you. We pray that you may be near us. You are the one who protects those who are righteous. You are the one who grants boons. May Rudra be pleased through our prayers and grant us herbs.

O Maruts! You are the strong ones. You possess pure and sacred herbs. Grant us the herbs that will ensure our welfare and confer happiness on us. These are the herbs that our father Manu accepted. These are the herbs that please Rudra and banish disease. We crave those herbs.

(Manu was the father of the human race, although there were several Manus. One of these Manus built a boat when there was a universal flood, and preserved himself in it. The *Mahabharata* states that Manu took some seeds with him into the boat.)

May we not suffer from Rudra's terrible weapons. May his anger plague others. O Rudra! Grant us happiness. May you not use your bow when you deal with us. Make our sons and grandsons happy.

You are the nourisher and the preserver of the universe. You are the strong

and radiant one. You are the one who is omniscient. Listen to our prayers and do not be angered. Reveal to us the way in which we may please you. May we be blessed with excellent sons and grandsons. May we thus be able to perform sacrifices in your honour.

## The Maruts

(This hymn follows the *jagati* metre.)

The Maruts are supreme in the field of battle. They are as terrible as lions and force enemies to flee. They are as radiant as Agni and their strength deserves worship. The Maruts are swift of feet. They are the ones who drink the *soma* juice. May the powers of the brave Maruts free us from the prisons of our enemies.

As stars adorn the sky, bangles adorn the hands of the brave Maruts. The Maruts are the brave ones who shower strength. They are like lightning in the clouds. O radiant Maruts! You wear golden necklaces on your chests. O brave ones! The great Rudra gave you birth and the earth was your mother.

The Maruts make their steeds as strong as race horses. They are the ones who thunder as they swiftly charge into battle. O brave Maruts! You are the source of inspiration. You are adorned with golden helmets. You are the ones who vanquish your enemies. You obtain food grains from those enemies. Come to us with your spotted deer.

(The relevance of a deer is not at all clear. The horses of the Maruts are probably being compared with deer.)

You are the ones who swiftly accomplish victory. You are the ones who possess spotted steeds. Your riches can never be stolen. You are the ones who follow the straight path to upliftment. You are always at the forefront of every deed. O Maruts! You are seated first at every sacrifice and grant food grains to our friends who are performing the sacrifice. You are the ones who shelter the entire universe.

O brave Maruts! Great is your inspiration. You wield flaming weapons. You are the radiant and energetic ones. You are the possessors of riches. You are the ones who deserve to be worshipped. You are the owners of cows. Come along the immortal paths to the sacrifice at which *soma* juice is being offered. Come here the way a swan returns to its nest.

O Maruts! You are the source of inspiration. You are the bravest of the brave. Our sacrifice is blessed with learning and *soma* juice is being offered on the occasion. Come and bless our cows with an abundant supply of milk. Perform the acts that will ensure to your devotees unlimited food grains and beauty.

O brave Maruts! Grant us courageous sons who may ride on our chariots. May we be blessed with learned sons. May your devotees be blessed with the food grains that they desire. Please grant riches and intelligence to the warriors who are brave in battle. May their powers of endurance be increased.

The Maruts are generous in their gifts. They wear golden necklaces on their breasts. They will harness their horses to their chariots and come here. They will grant us prosperity. They will make our houses full of food grains. They will nourish us the way a cow nourishes her calf with milk.

O brave Maruts! You will establish us. There are men who are cruel as wolves; they are our enemies. Protect us from their violence. Surround them with your chariots, hurl your weapons at them. You are the ones who will make our enemies weep. Our enemies are greedy. They deserve to be killed. Slay them.

O brave Maruts! Everyone is familiar with your prowess in battle. You will bless us with your friendship. You are the ones who drink milk from the udders of cows. You are the invincible ones. May those who criticise your devotees come to grief. It is well known that you will bring destruction to the enemies who are attempting to kill the sage Trita.

O brave Maruts! You are the swift ones. You are the great ones. We call upon you so that you may ensure our welfare. We call upon you so that our wisdom may be increased. We call upon you so that we may be able to perform righteous deeds. You are as radiant as gold. You are the superior ones. We pray to the brave Maruts for riches.

They are the brave ones who performed a sacrifice for ten months. May they inspire us at the time of dawn. The blushing rays of dawn encompass the dark night. May the shining rays of the brave Maruts encompass the entire world.

(The word that is used for the Maruts is Dashavgas. This literally means one who has performed a sacrifice for ten months. The Maruts are believed to have been the first ones to have performed a sacrifice.)

The Maruts are the brave ones who make the enemies weep. They scatter the enemies in all directions. They are adorned in yellow ornaments and yellow clothing. May the Maruts thrive in houses where there is no shortage of water. May they be beautiful and handsome. May they look upon us with favour and impart their strength to us.



The sage Trita called upon the five brave ones for his protection. Those were the ones who performed a sacrifice. (This is clearly a reference to the Maruts. But the number five remains obscure, the Maruts were not five in number.) We call upon those to whom the sage Trita prayed. We praise them for our protection.

O brave Maruts! Your powers preserve your devotees from sin. Your powers preserve those who pray to you from all manner of criticism. We pray to your powers of protection. May your powers of protection preserve us. May wisdom come to us like a lowing cow comes home.

## Mandala Three

(This *mandala* has 62 *suktas* and 617 *mantras*. Most of these are ascribed to the sage Vishvamitra or to his family. The bulk of the *suktas* are addressed to Indra, followed by Agni. But for the sake of variety, we will start with a *sukta* that is primarily addressed to the sacrificial post or *yupa*. The hymn is composed in a mixture of the metres *trishtupa* and *anushtupa*.)

## Yupa

O tree! We wish to become like the gods themselves. On the occasion of the sacrifice, we sprinkle you with divine nectar (clarified butter). Whether you stand straight upright or whether you lie down on the lap of the earth, may you grant us riches on the occasion of the sacrifice.

O sacrificial post! You are the superior one and you stand up before the fire of the sacrifice. You are the one who listens to the hymns that are a source of valour. Banish all evil thoughts from our heads. Stand up straight so that you may bring us good fortune.

O sacrificial post made out of a tree! Stand up straight at an auspicious spot on the earth. The ground of the sacrifice has been measured out. Stand up there and energise the one who is performing the sacrifice.

The youthful sacrificial post has been wrapped up in excellent clothing and brought to the place of the sacrifice. Wonderful is the sight of the sacrificial post ever since it was erected. We are the intelligent and learned ones who, through this sacrifice, wish to become like the gods themselves. We have erected the sacrificial post.

The sacrificial post will increase in glory as the sacrifice proceeds through the day. The learned ones who are performing the sacrifice will sanctify the post through their wisdom. The learned ones who pray to the gods will chant hymns.

O sacrificial post made out of a tree! There are men who, by dint of this sacrifice, wish to become godlike. It is they who have measured you out. An axe has been used to fashion the divine sacrificial post. The *yupa* which stands upright is as radiant as the sun. May the sacrificial post grant the devotee subjects and riches.

An axe was used to cut and trim the sacrificial post. The officiating priests set it up on the ground. The post will purify the sacrifice. May the post grant us the best of riches on the occasion of this sacrifice.

Aditya, Rudra, the Vasus and the other gods traverse the best of paths. They populate the vast heaven, the atmosphere and the earth and increase love in these worlds. May the gods preserve this sacrifice. May they hold aloft the post which is the symbol of the sacrifice.

The sacrificial post is full of energy. It shines like the sun itself. When the post is set up on the ground, chips are lopped off so that a stake may be formed.

When these chips fall to the ground, it seems as if a flock of geese is flying in the sky. The learned ones have set up this post on the occasion of the sacrifice. It rises up into the atmosphere, the place where the gods roam.

The sacrificial post shines like the sun. Its sides have been lined with rings of iron before the pillar was set up in the ground. The *yupa* gleams like the horns of animals. May the sacrificial post listen to the hymns that are being chanted at the time of the sacrifice. May it protect us at the time of battle.

A sharp axe was used to fashion out the sacrificial post, so that our good fortune may be ensured. O tree from which this *yupa* was made! May you flourish with many branches. May we have a thousand branches, and prosper.

## Usha

(Usha is the personification of the dawn. We now have a *sukta* addressed to Usha. The sage to whom this hymn is ascribed continues to be Vishvamitra. The metre is *trishtupa*.)

O Usha! You are the one who grants food grains and riches. Listen attentively to the hymns we are chanting. You are the goddess who deserves to be praised by all of us. You have been around for a long time, but you are always youthful. You are the wise one who permits the observance of religious rites.

O goddess Usha! You ride on a chariot that is as beautiful as the moon. You are the one who inspires sweet speech. You are the manifestation of immortality. May you manifest yourself. There are strong steeds which have the hue of gold. May those steeds bring you here.

O Usha! You are at the forefront of all the worlds. You are in the loftiest of places, like the flag of immortality. You are the one who is always youthful. You keep rotating like a wheel. May you grant us prosperity.

Your radiant rays banish the darkness. You are the wife of the day which brings riches. You are the beautiful one who makes the day manifest. You are the one who grants good fortune. Your light spreads to the furthest extremity of heaven and earth.

O those who are chanting the hymns! The goddess Usha is manifesting herself before you. Bow in obeisance before her and chant hymns to her. She is the one whose energy can be felt in the loftiest parts of heaven. She is the one who is the source of all sweetness. Beautiful is her form. Radiant Usha is becoming manifest.

Usha is the preserver of truth. Her rays percolate through to heaven. Usha is the source of all prosperity. It is she who sustains the myriad hues of heaven and earth. O Agni! You are lit on earth and your flames spread upwards as if to greet Usha.

It is the powerful Surya who sends Usha at the onset of the day. Usha spreads herself in heaven and on earth. The energies of Mitra and Vanina bear Usha's rays in the four directions. Usha is golden.

## **Mandala Four**

(This *mandala* has 58 *suktas* and 589 *mantras*. Most of these are ascribed to the sage Vamadeva, the son of the sage Goutama. The bulk of the *suktas* are addressed to Agni. We however start with one that is addressed to the falcon (*shyena*). This falcon brings down *soma* juice from heaven. Agni, in his form of lightning, rends the clouds and brings down a shower of rain. The lightning is being compared to a falcon and the rain to *soma* juice. The metre in which the hymn is composed is mostly *trishtupa*.)

## Shyena

When I (the falcon) was in the womb, I learnt the account of the birth of the gods. A hundred cities fortified with iron protected me. But I swiftly emerged in the form of a falcon.

(The context is that of the falcon bringing *soma* juice from heaven. The hundred cities of the gods in heaven were protected through iron fortifications. But despite these, the falcon managed to emerge with the *soma* juice.)

Those dries could not surround me well. I overcame the dries with my great powers. The *paramatman*, who is the creator of all that there is, destroyed the enemies. The *paramatman* killed the enemies who were as swift as the wind.

The falcon thundered in heaven when it grasped the *soma*. The learned ones who were the protectors of the *soma*, tried to take it away from the falcon. The swift archer Krishanu strung his bow and let fly an arrow at the falcon.

(Krishanu was one of the guards who protected the *soma*.)

The falcon flew in a straight path. It brought the *soma* from heaven, despite the fact that Indra himself protects heaven. The falcon rescued the *soma* the way the Ashvins rescued Bhujyu. In the fight that ensued, one of the wings of the falcon was cut off with a weapon.

(Bhujyu was a sage who was rescued by the Ashvins from drowning. The fight and the weapon refer to Krishanu's shooting an arrow at the falcon. Krishanu has been interpreted as the demon of drought. He prevents mankind from enjoying the fruits of rainfall. The wing of the falcon fell off and became the *parna* or *palasha* tree.)

It was after all this that the powerful *soma* juice was kept in pots. The energetic *adhvaryu* priests mixed the *soma* juice with the milk of cows. The excellent juice was sweet and brought satiation. It was like food and brought bliss to the prosperous Indra. The brave Indra drank *soma* juice for his happiness. May Indra accept the *soma* juice.

## Dadhikra

(This *sukta* is addressed to Dadhikra. Dadhikra was a mythical being, a bit like a celestial horse. The name is derived from *dadhi* (curds) and *kri* (to scatter). Dadhikra has been identified as a personification of the morning sun. The rising sun seems to spread dew and frost and these are likened to curds. This *sukta* also is ascribed to Vamadeva and the metre is *trishtupa*.)

O heaven and earth! The generous Trasadasyu gave mankind many riches. All of these riches belong to the two of you. You have granted us horses that conquer the land. You have granted us sons who will make the land fertile. You have granted us sharp weapons so that we may triumph over the evil ones.

(Heaven and earth were regarded as the parents of Dadhikra. Trasadasyu was a victorious king. He was favoured by the gods, particularly the Ashvini.)

Heaven and earth bore the strong Dadhikra. He is the destroyer of many enemies. He is the one who brings welfare to all of mankind. The energetic Dadhikra traverses a straight path like the falcon bird. The best of men have praised him. He is as swift and brave as a great king.

The god Dadhikra is as fast as water flowing downhill. He is the brave one who desires to triumph in all battles. He is the one who advances on his feet and is as fleet-footed as Vayu. Dadhikra is the one who inspires our chariots. It is him that all men seek to please.

He is the god who prevents riches from falling into the hands of the enemy at the time of battle. He is the one who travels everywhere and in all the directions with his riches. Dadhikra is the one who uses his weapons and becomes famous in battle. He is the god who will vanquish the enemies of the best of men.

Men shout when they see a thief running off with articles of clothing. Like that, the soldiers of the enemy shout when they see Dadhikra's prowess in battle. Great are his riches and great his animals. Other birds flee when they see a hungry vulture descending. Like that, enemies flee when they catch sight of Dadhikra.

Dadhikra advances in the front. The wheels of his chariot plough through the ranks of the enemy. The handsome Dadhikra adorns his body with garlands, like women do. He bites at the bridle and his hooves raise a cloud of dust. (Remember that the image is that of a horse.)



The strong horse destroys enemies in the course of battle. He licks his body and serves himself. Swiftly does Dadhikra advance on the enemies. Straight is his path as the cloud of dust is raised. The dust is such that it blinds his own eyes.

So great is Dadhikra's prowess that enemies cower before him, the way they shrink before a stroke of lightning. The enemies are scared of his attack, as they know that it brings certain destruction. In the four directions, Dadhikra fights with thousands of enemies. And no one can stand up to the terrible one.

He is the swift one who fulfils the desires of all men. Men pray to his speed and valour. Warriors who advance into battle say that Dadhikra tore through the ranks of a thousand enemies.

Surya spreads his radiance throughout the atmosphere. Like that, Dadhikra's energy spreads through the five types of men. Hundreds and thousands are the riches that this powerful horse grants. May Dadhikra listen to our prayers and grant us sweet boons.

(The five types of men are priests, warriors, traders, artisans and slaves.)

## Ghrita

(*Ghrita* is clarified butter. Although Agni and Surya are mentioned in the hymn that follows, the hymn is essentially addressed to clarified butter. The *sukta* is ascribed to the sage Vamadeva and the metre is a combination of *trishtupa* and *jagati*.)

From the ocean, waves of sweetness surged forth. These mixed with *soma* juice and attained immortality. *Ghrita* has a secret name. It is the tongue of the gods and the navel of *amrita*.

(*Amrita* is a heavenly drink that confers immortality. But that apart, the rest of the passage is exceedingly obscure. The ocean probably represents the sacrificial fire and the waves are the clarified butter that is poured into the fire as libation. The sense of the second part may be that *ghrita* pleases the tongues of the gods and is like a heavenly drink.)

We praise *ghrita*. May we worship it on the occasion of this sacrifice. May the *brahman* listen to the prayers that we are chanting. The buffalo (*goura*) with four horns created this universe.

(The buffalo is the *paramatman* or the *brahman*. The four horns are interpreted as the four *Vedas*.)

The god of the sacrifice (Agni) has four horns (the four *Vedas*) and three legs (morning, afternoon and evening). He has two heads. (The two heads are two ceremonies named *brahmoudana* and *pravargya*. At the *brahmoudana* ceremony, boiled rice was distributed to *brahmanas*. *Pravargya* formed part of the ceremony of offering *soma* juice. At this, fresh milk was poured into a heated vessel.) The god has seven hands (the seven basic metres). He is the strong god who roars at the three places where he is tethered. (The three bonds are the three components of the sacrifice, *mantras*, *brahmanas* and *kalpas*. *Kalpas* refer to ceremonies.) The god of the sacrifice is always to be found among men.

The gods discovered how the *panis* had hidden the three types of clarified butter among cows. The first type was created by Indra, the second by Surya, and the third type by all the gods from the energy of fire.

(The three types of clarified butter signify milk, curds and butter. The creation of milk is ascribed to Indra, that of curds to Surya, and that of butter primarily to Agni. The *panis* were robbers or malignant demons. They stole cows and hid them in caves.)

From the ocean, the sacred flow issues in a hundred streams. The enemies have not been able to see this flow. I have seen the sacred flow of clarified butter. I see the radiant and golden Agni in the midst of this flow.

This flow of energy issues out of the heart. It is purified by the mind and flows like a river that is the source of happiness. The flow of clarified butter is as swift as a deer fleeing from a hunter.

The juice flows as swiftly as the water of a river coursing downhill. It is as strong as Vayu. The waves surge and the juice dashes like a strong horse. Great streams of clarified butter flow.

Wives who are good at heart happily unite with their husbands. Like that, the flows of clarified butter unite with Agni. The flames of the fire are pleased at the offerings of clarified butter. They rise upwards.

A sacrifice is held at the place where *soma* juice is extracted. It is there that flows of clarified butter are to be found. A bride who is about to be married, is adorned with ornaments and looks radiant. Radiant are the flows of clarified butter, as I gaze upon them.

O men! Chant excellent hymns for the gods. O gods! Grant us cows and victory. Grant us riches that will ensure our welfare. May our sacrifice attain the gods. Sweet indeed is the clarified butter that flows.

O *paramatman*! The entire universe seeks refuge in your energy. Your sweet juices flow in the ocean. Your sweet juices flow in our hearts. They are to be found in food grains and in water. They are to be found in the midst of battles. May your sweet juices fulfil us.

## **Mandala Five**

(This *mandala* has 87 *suktas* and 727 *mantras*. These are ascribed to various sages. The *suktas* are addressed mostly to Agni, followed by the Vishvadevas, the Maruts and Indra, in that order. We begin with a *sukta* addressed to the *apris*. *Apris* is a collective name for gods and deified objects. Many such deified objects were forms of Agni. *Apri suktas* were recited prior to animal sacrifices. The *sukta* we reproduce is ascribed to the sage Vasushruta, the son of the sage Atri. The metre is *gayatri*.)

## Apris

O men! Agni is the learned one. His flames are full of energy and flare up well. Offer into the fire oblations of powerful clarified butter.

Agni is the one who is praised by men. May Agni inspire this sacrifice. Agni is the non-violent one. He is the learned one. His rays are full of sweetness.

O Agni! Be praised and offer us protection. Come to us on the chariot that brings happiness. Bring our beloved Indra here. Indra is the one who is strong.

O men! Spread out as seats mats that are soft as wool. The chanting of hymns has begun. O powerful seats! May you grant us riches.

O divine doors! May you open. May you be blessed with excellent qualities and may you grant us protection in the course of the sacrifice. (This refers to the doors of the sacrificial hall.)

O night and dawn! You are beautiful of form. You increase our life expectancies. You enable this great sacrifice to be performed. We pray to you.

O officiating priests! You are divine. May the two of you be praised. May your speed be that of the wind and may you swiftly come to this sacrifice that is being performed by men. (The two divine officiating priests could be Agni and Aditya, or Agni and Varuna.)

May the three goddesses Ila, Sarasvati and Bharati grant us happiness. May they be non-violent. May they come and be seated on the occasion of the sacrifice.

(Ila has been identified as the goddess of sacred speech and action. Sarasvati was a river, and so, a river-deity. Later, she came to be identified with the goddess of speech. Bharati has also been identified as a goddess of speech.)

O Tvashta! You are great and you are the one who grants welfare. Come here and nourish us on the occasion of every sacrifice. Grant us protection.

(Tvashta was a divine artisan and the architect of the gods.)

O *vanaspati*! You are acquainted with the secret places of the gods. Take our oblations to the gods.

(*Vanaspati* means a tree. But here, it seems to signify the sacrificial stake.)

These offerings are being made to Agni. These offerings are being made to Varuna. These offerings are being made to Indra and the Maruts. These offerings

are being made to all the gods.

## Mitravaruna

(Mitra and Varuna are often addressed in unison and referred to as Mitravaruna. Mitra presides over the day and Varuna over the night. This *sukta* is addressed to Mitravaruna and is composed in the *trishtupa* metre. It is ascribed to the sage Shrutavidatreya.)

O Mitravaruna! The two of you have places that are always constant. That is the place where the sun's horses (the rays) are unharnessed and the true nature of the sun is shrouded in water. (This seems to visualise an ocean in heaven. And the sun traverses this ocean.) One thousand horses dwell together. I have seen the beauty of those handsome gods.

O Mitravaruna! Wonderful is your greatness. One of you is always mobile and instils juices in trees and herbs. The second one nourishes the celestial cow with energy. One of you possesses a wheel that always moves.

(Both Mitra and Varuna were probably manifestations of Surya. But in this passage, Mitra seems to be identified with the sun and Varuna with water. The sun is the one who is always mobile and whose wheel moves constantly. The celestial cow is an image for clouds and these are nourished by Varuna's water.)

O powerful Mitravaruna! You are the ones who bear up heaven and earth through your energy. You are the ones who nourish and sustain trees, herbs and cows. You are the ones who grant boons with quickness. You are the ones who make rain flow in torrents.

O Mitravaruna! May steeds that are harnessed well bring you here. May the bridles of the horses bring you here. Your forms mirror clarified butter. You make rivers of clarified butter flow down from heaven.

(The rivers of clarified butter that flow down from heaven must be an image for rain.)

O Mitravaruna! You are the source of strength. You have been famous from time immemorial. You protect the earth in the way that *mantras* protect a sacrifice. You are the source of food grains. You climb into your chariot and come to the place of the sacrifice.

Your hands remove all impediments. You are capable of protecting us even when you are at a distance. You are the ones who do not cause violence to anyone. O Mitravaruna! The two of you combine to preserve righteous deeds through a sacrifice. May you grant us riches. May you grant us houses with a

thousand pillars.

Beautiful is the chariot of these gods. The pillars in the chariot are made of gold. The chariot shines in heaven like lightning. The sacrificial altar has been measured out in an auspicious place. It has been sprinkled with sacred water. May Mitraavaruna come here on their chariot.

O Mitraavaruna! When dawn manifests herself and the sun rises, you climb into your chariot. You climb into the chariot with golden pillars. From your chariot you gaze upon the earth and the beings who dwell here.

O Mitraavaruna! You are the protector of the universe and the granters of excellent boons. You are the ones who cannot be vanquished by the most powerful of enemies. O Mitraavaruna! Pure is your home. Protect us from that home of yours. We desire to obtain riches. We desire to plunder the riches of our enemies. Grant us these boons.



## Savita

(Savita is a manifestation of Surya in his form of the generator. The *sukta* that follows is addressed to Savita and is composed in the metre *jagati*. It is ascribed to the sage Shyavashva, son of the sage Atri.)

The god Savita is great, intelligent and learned. Learned ones devote their minds and their intelligence to the worship of Savita. Savita is the one who knows the best of paths and the best of deeds. It is for that reason that he alone is the source of all fame. May Savita's praise increase.

Savita is the one who can see far into the future. Savita is the god who has many forms. He is the one who grants welfare to all bipeds and quadrupeds. Savita is the superior god who makes heaven manifest. When dawn comes, Savita makes his presence felt.

All the other gods follow the path that is indicated by Savita. It is Savita who energises the other gods. Savita is the one who measures out the dimensions of the earth. Great is Savita's energy.

O Savita! You travel in the three radiant worlds. You are the one who is associated with the rays of the sun. You approach the night from both directions (rising and setting). O god! Such are your qualities that you befriend everyone.

O Savita! You alone are the lord and ruler of all the worlds that were created. You nourish the universe through your care. You are the king of all the worlds. Brave warriors who possess energetic horses chant hymns dedicated to you.

## Parjanya

(We now have a *sukta* that is addressed to Parjanya. Parjanya is the god of thunderstorms and rain. The *sukta* is ascribed to the sage Bhoumotri. It is composed in a mixture of the metres *trishtupa*, *anushtupa* and *jagati*.)

The clouds are strong and swift. They thunder and grant boons. They instil juices into the wombs of trees and herbs. O men! Pray to the powerful clouds. Pray to them well. Pray to them through these words. And chant their praise in all humility.

Clouds lead to lightning and burn down trees. Clouds destroy demons. Such is the terrible fury of clouds that the universe trembles. Those who are evil are destroyed through the thunder of clouds. Clouds shower down rain and preserve those who are righteous.

Parjanya encompasses the sky with rain. Like a charioteer spurring on his horses with a whip, Parjanya spurs on the clouds to shower down rain. Parjanya's roar is like that of a lion. It can be heard from a great distance.

The clouds shower down the life force on earth. It is then that winds begin to blow. Lightning blazes and trees and herbs drink up the water. The sky itself is nourished. The earth and the entire universe is nourished and begins to prosper.

It is the acts of the clouds that make the land fertile. It is the acts of the clouds that make living beings thrive. It is the acts of the clouds that make trees and herbs grow. O Parjanya! May you grant us a lot of happiness.

O Maruts! Grant us rain from heaven. Nourish us through the showers. O clouds! Come towards us with your thunder. Shower down rain and make life flourish. May the clouds nurture us.

O Parjanya! May you thunder and roar. May you instil juices into the wombs of the trees. Travel in the four directions in your watery chariot. Overturn your vessels of water so that we may have showers. May there be such a lot of rain that there remains no difference between mountains and plains.

O Parjanya! Open up your treasure-house of water. May the water flow downwards. May the rivers overflow with water and head towards the east. Fill heaven and earth with water so that the cows may drink their fill.

O Parjanya! When you roar and thunder, the evil ones are killed. Everything that there is on earth is pleased by your action. (The evil ones are the

demons of drought.)

O Parjanya! It has rained for many years. Now withdraw your showers. You have made the deserts fertile. You have provided food for our delight in the form of trees and herbs. All the subjects have sung your praise.

## **Prithivi**

(*Prithivi* is the earth and the next *sukta* is addressed to *prithivi*. This too is ascribed to the sage Bhoumotri. It is in the *anushtupa* metre.)

O *prithivi*! You are the possessor of excellent qualities. You are greatness itself. You satisfy living beings through your greatness. You are indeed the one who bears aloft the mountains.

O land! You are full of energy and you move in all the directions. You roar like a horse when you accept rain from the clouds. Your devotees sing your praise through the hymns that they chant.

O land! There are clouds in heaven and lightning streaks through them. It rains and it is your strength that sustains trees and herbs on the ground.

## **Mandala Six**

(This *mandala* has 75 *suktas* and 765 *mantras*. Almost all the *suktas* are ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and his family. The *suktas* are addressed mostly to Indra, followed by Agni. But we have already reproduced *suktas* addressed to Indra and Agni. Let us therefore start with a *sukta* that is addressed to cows. This is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja, descended from Brihaspati. It is composed in a mixture of the metres *trishtupa*, *jagati* and *anushtupa*.)

## Cows

May cows come to our homes and may they ensure our welfare. May cows reside in the cowsheds and please us. Many are the forms that cows take, many the hues. Some of them have calves. May the cows yield milk in the morning so that offerings can be made to Indra.

Indra is the one who enables sacrifices to be performed. He is the one who grants food grains. He is the one who grants riches. Indra never reduces the riches of one who gives alms; instead, he increases them. Those who wish to become like the gods are thereby protected at their homes.

Cows never perish. Even thieves bear them no hatred. The weapons of the enemies do not pierce cows. He who possesses cows uses their milk to make offerings to the gods. May he always have cows that yield milk.

May those who invade us on horses not be able to rob us of our cows. May they not be able to kill these cows. May the cows remain in the possession of he who performs sacrifices. May the cows be free from fear and roam the vast expanses at will.

Cows are wealth. May Indra grant me cows. The milk obtained from cows should first be mixed with *soma* juice. O men! These cows are nothing but forms of Indra. With great devotion, I pray for the proximity of the Indra who is in these cows.

O cows! Make us strong. Make those who are ill and lean, strong and handsome. O cows! You are the source of blessed speech. Make our households happy. Grant us food. May your fame be chanted in the assemblies.

O cows! May you have calves. Eat soft grass and drink limpid water from the ponds. May you not be stolen by thieves. May you not be possessed by sinners. May Rudra's weapons never pierce you.

May various objects which give strength be mixed with the milk of cows. O Indra! We have mixed milk with *soma* juice so that your strength is increased.

## Pusha

(Pusha is a manifestation of Surya; that is, he is a solar deity. In particular, Pusha acts as a guide on travels and protects cows and other possessions. The next *sukta* is addressed to Pusha. It is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and is composed in the metres *gayatri* and *anushtupa*.)

O Pusha! You are the protector of all routes. You harness steeds to your chariot so that you may come and grant us food grains. May you come and increase the wisdom of mankind.

O Pusha! Grant us the riches that will bring welfare to mankind. Grant us brave sons who will be generous. Take us to households where the residents are generous of heart.

O radiant Pusha! There are those who are miserly. Change their hearts so that they may become generous. Traders tend to be hard of heart. Make their hearts soft.

Seek out the paths that lead to prosperity. Defeat assassins and enemies. O brave Pusha! May all our acts come to fruition.

O learned and far-sighted one! If traders continue to be hard of heart, destroy them with your weapons. For our welfare, demolish all these evil ones.

O Pusha! The *panis* are robbers. Bring misery to their hearts. May you desire to bring welfare to everyone. But destroy our enemies for us.

O radiant Pusha! You are learned in the usage of weapons. But others also display the same knowledge in the usage of weapons. O god! Bring wisdom to our hearts so that we may look upon everyone as an equal. May our minds be purified and may all thoughts of evil be banished.

O brave warrior! Your power is all pervasive and increases the number of animals we possess. May your wisdom be imparted to us. This is our desire.

O god! Motivate us so that we may serve our cows and horses. May we attain food grains as well as sons and grandsons. May we live in peace with the rest of mankind. May our hearts be directed towards that purpose.

## Sarasvati

(The next *sukta* is addressed to Sarasvati. It is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and is composed in a mixture of the metres *gayatri*, *jagati* and *trishtupa*.)

Vadhryashvaya (a sage) was generous and patient. When he prayed to Sarasvati, the goddess granted him a son named Divodasa. Divodasa cancelled all his father's debts. O Sarasvati! Your wisdom is such that it destroys those who are misers and bring harm to others.

(Every man owes a debt to his ancestors. That debt is repaid only when he gives birth to a son. Once Divodasa was born, his father's ancestral debt was cancelled.)

This Sarasvati (the river) tears down the highest peaks of mountains with her torrents. Such is her strength that the mountains seem to be as delicate as lotus stalks. With sincere devotion, we pray to the goddess Sarasvati for our protection.

O Sarasvati! Destroy those who criticise god. Destroy all the subjects who are fraudulent and evil. For the welfare of mankind, grant us the land masses that are well protected. You are the one who grants food grains. You make the waters flow. You nourish the worlds.

The goddess Sarasvati is the source of all food grains. She is the one who grants food grains. May the one who protects our intelligence grant us protection.

O goddess Sarasvati! Indra prayed to you before he set out to do battle with the demon Vritra. Others too invoke you before a fight.

O goddess Sarasvati! You are the source of strength. May you grant us protection in the course of a battle. Like Pusha, grant us riches.

Sarasvati is the valiant one. She rides in a golden chariot. She is the one who destroys Vritra. She is the one who desires to listen to our prayers.

Sarasvati's waters know no bounds. They are swift and constantly on the move. The waters roar as they course.

Sarasvati will banish all our enemies. She is a lover of the truth. She will take us to her sisters, the other rivers. Sarasvati's radiance is like the sun during the day.



Sarasvati is our beloved one. She is the one who deserves to be worshipped. The seven sisters are the seven rivers. Sarasvati is the one who deserves to be praised.

(The seven rivers have been named earlier.)

Sarasvati is the one who grants material wealth. She is the one who radiates energy in the atmosphere. May Sarasvati preserve us from those who criticise us.

Sarasvati resides in the three worlds (heaven, the atmosphere and the earth). She has seven sisters. She increases the prosperity of the five types of men. (The five types of men have been enumerated earlier.) She is the goddess who should be worshipped before every battle. She is the goddess who should be praised before every action.

Sarasvati is supreme among rivers in her greatness, her energy and her influence. Her stream is swifter than that of other rivers. Her flow is as vast as a chariot. The supreme creator himself gave birth to Sarasvati. Such is her learning that she should be praised.

O Sarasvati! Take us to the riches that we desire. May the flow of your waters not bring us any harm. May we not be denied your proximity. Accept our devotion and our friendship. Please ensure that we do not forsake you and go to others.

## Dyavaprithivi

(Dyavaprithivi is a word that connotes heaven and earth taken together. The next *sukta* is addressed to Dyavaprithivi. It is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and is composed in the *jagati* metre.)

Dyavaprithivi is full of water and is the refuge of all the worlds. Vast is the expanse of Dyavaprithivi and sweet are the juices of food grains that grow there. Beautiful is heaven, and the earth never decays. Both these regions possess wonderful powers. Varuna is the one who decrees the rules that heaven and earth follow.

O Dyavaprithivi! The two of you are actually separate. You are full of water. You are full of milk. You ensure the performance of religious deeds. You are the source of sacred rites and clarified butter. You make this universe manifest. O Dyavaprithivi! Make the waters flow so that the welfare of mankind can be ensured.

O Dyavaprithivi! You are the ones who sustain everything. A man who devotes himself to the pursuit of a simple life is the one who becomes famous. One who lives according to the norms of righteousness is the one who is blessed with sons and grandsons. Many are the codes of conduct that emanate from you and they are all sacred.

O Dyavaprithivi! You are full of water. You have an intimate association with that beautiful water. You are great and you know no bounds. You are at the forefront to receive any oblations that an officiating priest may make. Learned ones pray to you for the sake of happiness.

O Dyavaprithivi! May you unite us with the sweetest of juices. The two of you are the sources of all kinds of sweet juices. The two of you shower down sweet juices. The granting of sweet juices forms part of your nature. You sustain fame, sacrifices and divinity. Grant us strength, energy and great fame.

May heaven and earth increase our strength. They are like our parents. They are the omniscient ones who ensure the performance of the best of deeds. O powerful heaven and earth! You grant welfare to everyone. Grant us fame, strength and riches.

## **Brihaspati**

(Brihaspati is not quite a god. He is divinity personified in the officiating priest. He is also the priest of the gods, and subsequently, their preceptor. The next *sukta* is addressed to Brihaspati. It is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

Brihaspati is the one who destroys the fortresses of the enemies. He is the one who was created first and he is the one who ensures the performance of righteous deeds. He was born in the lineage of Angirasa and he is personified in the oblations made by warriors. Brihaspati is the one who protects the land through his excellent qualities. He is radiant with energy. Brihaspati is the strong one and he is like our father. His roar can be heard in heaven and on earth.

Brihaspati is the one who ensures the preservation of those who are righteous. It is righteousness that Brihaspati preserves in the sacrifices of the gods. He has killed the enemies, demolished their cities and triumphed over them.

Brihaspati wins riches from the enemies. He wins cows and cowsheds from the enemies. It is he who brings down water from heaven. Brihaspati is the invincible one. Through his powers, he destroys the enemies.

## Weapons of War

(The next *sukta* is addressed to various weapons of war. It is ascribed to the sage Bharadvaja and is composed in the metres *trishtupa*, *jagati*, *anushtupa* and *pamkti*.)

*Armour* - The warrior dons this armour and goes forth to do battle. He looks like a cloud in the armour. The warrior will not be killed, he will attain victory. May the glory of the armour protect the soldier.

*Bow* - This bow will be used to win cows in battle. This bow will be used for the sake of victory. Fierce will be the battle, but the bow will triumph. The bow will nullify all the desires of the enemies. The enemies will be defeated and the bow will be victorious in all the directions.

*The string of the bow* - The string of the bow is drawn back upto the ear. It seems to be whispering something into the ear. The string of the bow is extended on the bow. It makes a sound that is like the voice of a woman. The string of the bow will remove all impediments in battle

*The ends of the bow* - Like two co-wives who have similar minds, the two ends of the bow remain united in action. Like a mother carrying her son on her lap, the two ends of the bow cradle the arrow. The two ends of the bow help to pierce enemies in battle and destroy them.

*The quiver* - The quiver is the father of many arrows. It has many sons. The clanging of the quiver can be heard in battle. This father of arrows is slung onto the back. The arrows that come out of the quiver destroy the soldiers of the enemy.

*The charioteer* - An excellent charioteer sits astride a chariot and drives the horses where he wills. Marvel at the power of the reins. They take the chariot where one wants.

*The horses* - The horses are stronger than bulls. They are so powerful that they swiftly run with the chariot. Loud is the noise that the horses make. They attack the enemies with their hooves. Not retreating for a moment, the horses destroy the enemies.

*The chariot* - In the chariot has been kept fodder that will please the horses. In the chariot have been kept weapons for destroying the enemies. Armour too has been kept in the chariot. May I always be able to sit on the superior chariot that brings pleasure to the mind.

*Defenders of the chariot* - These are the ones who bring pleasure and aid. These are the ones who grant refuge in times of danger. These are the firm and strong ones, armed with the power of arrows. These brave warriors fight on the side of righteousness. Enemies can bring them no harm. Many are the enemies who are defeated by these defenders.

*Various gods* - May *brahmanas*, the ancestors, Soma, Pusha and Dyavaprithivi preserve us from sin and ensure our welfare. May those who traverse the righteous paths grant us protection. May the evil ones not be able to enslave us.

(This passage does not quite seem to belong to the *sukta*.)

*The point of the arrow* - The arrow has an excellent trail made of feathers. Sharp indeed is the point of the arrow. The string of the bow is made out of cowhide. And it is with this that the arrow is shot into the ranks of the enemy. There are battles in which warriors fight together and there are battles in which warriors fight singly. Whatever the nature of the battle, may the point of the arrow bring me pleasure.

*The arrow* - O arrow! May you follow a straight path. Protect me from the four directions and make my body as firm as stone. May Soma increase my inspiration and may Aditi grant me happiness.

*The whip* - O whip! You are the one who drives the horses. It is you who inspire the horses in the course of battle. You descend on the horses from above. And you lash at them from below.

*The arm-guard* - It twirls around the arm like a snake. It guards the arm from the lash of the string of the bow. The arm-guard is like a learned person who knows the secret of all action. May the arm-guard protect the warrior from the four directions.

(The arm-guard was worn on the archer's left arm and was fastened on with leather straps.)

*The shaft of the arrow* - The shaft of the arrow has been dipped in snake-venom. It is like the horn of a deer and a bit of iron has been fixed to the mouth. Parjanya himself has increased the strength of the arrow with his showers. I bow in obeisance before the god of arrows.

(The head of the arrow used to be tipped with deer-horn. Later, iron came to be used. The shaft was often made out of reeds and it was the rain that made the

reeds grow.)

*The arrow* - The arrow has been sharpened by our knowledge. When one lets go, the arrow flies into the ranks of the enemy. May not a single one of the enemy lives.

*The battlefield* - Like a boy who does not have a tonsure, let the arrow fly where it will. Let Brahmanaspati and Aditi bring us happiness on the battlefield. May we always be happy.

(This is not dear. Brahmanaspati is the god of prayers and is sometimes used synonymously with Brihaspati. A boy who does not have a tonsure has not had his sacred thread ceremony. There are thus no restrictions on his movements. And like such a boy, the arrow is free to go anywhere.)

*The armour* - I cover the delicate parts of your anatomy with armour. King Soma will bless you with the boon of immortality. Varuna will make you great and grant you the best of riches. May all the gods be pleased when you attain victory and may they work towards this end.

*Gods* - Those who want to kill us may be close to us, or they may be far away. They may be our inferiors. But whatever be their nature, may all the gods destroy them. I will be protected as I am armed with the armour of knowledge.

## **Mandala Seven**

(This *mandala* has 104 *suktas* and 841 *mantras*. Most of the *suktas* are addressed to Indra, followed by those addressed to Agni. All the hymns are ascribed to the sage Vasishtha, although his sons also feature in a few *suktas*. The first *sukta* that we choose glorifies Vasishtha and his family. It is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

## Vasishtha

Those who belong to Vasishtha's family are fair in complexion. They are the intelligent ones who perform righteous action. They wear their tonsures to the right. Great is the joy that Vasishtha and his family have brought me. I arose from my seat and told everyone that I did not wish to be separated from Vasishtha and his family.

(There is an interpretation that the above words are being uttered by Indra.)

The brave Indra drinks the *soma* juice that is offered in vessels. He comes from far away to drink the *soma* juice that is offered. *Soma* juice was also offered by Pashadyumna, the son of Vayat. But Indra preferred the *soma* juice offered by Vasishtha.

(There was a king named Sudas and Vasishtha was his priest. So Vasishtha offered the *soma* juice on behalf of Sudas. Pashadyumna was a rival king.)

Indra crossed the river easily and removed all impediments. Thus did Indra help Sudas in the battle of the ten kings. O Vasishtha! It is because of your prayers that Indra protected Sudas.

(This needs some explanation. The battle of the ten kings (*dasha rajna*) was a fairly important battle to which stray references can be found in the *Rig Veda*. Sudas was the king of the Tritsu tribe. He crossed the river Parushni (Iravati or Ravi) with Indra's aid and put his enemies to flight. Ten kings or tribes were allied against Sudas, but they were defeated.)

O leaders! Your hymns please the ancestors. I have driven the axle of my chariot. I have driven the chariot so that I can go home. (This "I" may be Indra.) O those who belong to the family of Vasishtha! May you be strong and may you not grow infirm. Recite hymns and be blessed with the strength that Indra confers. Increase your strength and chant Indra's praise.

Vasishtha was like a man who was thirsting for water. He sang Indra's praise prior to the battle of the ten kings. Indra heard the hymns that Vasishtha chanted. He made vast expanses free for the Tritsu tribe.

The Bharatas were initially as small and insignificant as a rod that is used to beat cows. But Vasishtha became the priest of the Tritsus and the Bharatas. It is then that the Bharatas began to prosper.

(In this verse, the suggestion is that the Bharatas and the Tritsus were identical. Other parts of the *Rig Veda* indicate that this was not quite the case.



Sudas was originally the king of the Bharatas, not of the Tritsus. At this point, the priest of the Bharatas was Vishvamitra and Vasishtha was the priest of the Tritsus. Sudas made Vasishtha his priest and thus forged an alliance between the Bharatas and the Tritsus. Vishvamitra felt slighted and formed a confederation of ten kings against Sudas. But the ten kings, who were led by Bheda, were defeated.)

There are three gods (Agni, Vayu and Surya) who infuse the worlds with energy. There are three types of subjects who are known as *aryas*. (These are *brahmanas* or priests, *kshatriyas* or warriors and *vaishyas* or traders.) There are three types of sacrifice that are begun at the stroke of dawn. Vasishtha is well-versed in all this knowledge.

O sons of Vasishtha! May your glory spread before the rays of the sun. May your fame be deep as the ocean itself. May your hymns reach the gods as swiftly as Vayu. May no one else be able to duplicate the hymns that you chant. It is only you who possess that special knowledge.

O those who belong to the family of Vasishtha! There are hundreds and thousands who labour hard to attain this knowledge. They strive to light up their hearts with this wisdom. To a person who has attained this knowledge, the entire universe is like a piece of cloth spread out.

O Vasishtha! Your energy flashed out like a streak of lightning. When you appeared from the lightning, that was like a birth and Mitra and Varuna witnessed this birth of yours. The sage Agastya introduced you to mankind.

(Vasishtha is believed to have been Agastya's younger brother. Presumably, Agastya introduced Vasishtha to the Tritsus.)

O Vasishtha! You are the son of Mitra and Varuna. O *brahmona*! You were mothered by the celestial nymph Urvashi. When you were born, divine hymns were chanted and the gods showered down their benediction.

Vasishtha is acquainted with all the knowledge of heaven and earth. He is the one who gives a thousand forms of alms. He is the one who donates everything. Vasishtha is the one who spreads out knowledge like an open piece of cloth. Vasishtha was born of an *apsara* (a celestial nymph).

Mitra and Vanina were initiated as priests at the time of a sacrifice. They put their energy into a pot. From this energy, first Agastya was born. Vasishtha was born after that.

O Bharatas! Vasishtha is coming to you. Welcome him with due respect. Vasishtha will be your leader in the chanting of sacred hymns. He will be the chief of the *adhvaryus*.

## Water

(The next *sukta* is addressed to water and is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

O water! You will enable us to obtain divinity. *Soma* herbs have been obtained from the ground, thanks to the generosity of water. Water has been mixed with the extracted *soma* juice and is being offered to Indra. The water that comes from rain is pure and free of sin. May this sweet water be mixed with *soma* juice. May we obtain this juice today. May we drink it today.

O water! Your sweet flow has been mixed with the *soma* juice. May Agni protect the water and the *soma* juice. Indra and the Vasus are pleased when they drink this *soma* juice. We wish to become like the gods themselves. May we too obtain the *soma* juice today. May we get to drink it.

Divine water performs purification in a hundred, ways. It grants pleasure through the provision of

Food grains. Divine water is used in the sacrifices of the gods. This is the water that preserves all of Indra's actions. Offer oblations of clarified butter to the water of the rivers.

With its rays, the sun spreads the water in all directions. Indra himself dug the routes along which water could travel. O water of the rivers! May your flow grant us the best of food grains and riches. May water always protect us and ensure our welfare.

## **Vastoshpati**

(The next *sukta* is addressed to Vastoshpati. The word *vastu* means house and Vastoshpati is the god of the household. In the course of the hymn, he is also referred to as Indu. Indu is another name for Soma. The *sukta* is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

O Vastoshpati! May you look upon us as your own. Make sure that disease does not frequent our houses. Grant us the riches that we ask of you. Ensure the welfare of all bipeds and quadrupeds.

O Vastoshpati! You are the one who delivers us. You are the one who increases our prosperity. O Indu! May we be blessed with cows and horses. May we not suffer from old age. May you look upon us as friends. A father takes care of his son. Like that, you will take care of us.

O Vastoshpati! May we attain happiness and beauty through your blessings. May we get to attend your assembly. May we be counted as members of your assembly. You will grant us the riches that we deserve. You will also grant us the riches that we do not deserve. You will protect all our riches and ensure our welfare.

## Vishnu

(Vishnu was a minor god in the *Vedas*. He became prominent in post-Vedic times. In the *Vedas*, Vishnu seems to have been a manifestation of Surya. The next *sukta* is addressed to Vishnu and is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

O Vishnu! Your superior form is one that expands. No one is capable of fathoming your greatness. I know of the two worlds, heaven and earth, that you inhabit. But O god! There is also a world above all these that you inhabit.

O Vishnu! The furthest extremities of your greatness remain unknown. He who has been born does not know this. Nor will he who will be born, ever know this. It is you who have established heaven above. That is a beautiful sight, fit to behold. It is you who hold up the eastern frontiers of the earth.

O Dyavaprihithi! You wish to ensure the welfare of all of mankind. It is for that reason that you produce food grains and cows. O Vishnu! You have held aloft heaven and earth. With mountain ranges, you have made the earth firm.

O Vishnu! You have created vast expanses so that sacrifices may be held. O Vishnu and Indra! The two of you are the leaders. You have given birth to Surya, Usha and Agni. The enemies were strong and well-protected. But you invaded and vanquished them in your clever way.

O Indra and Vishnu! The demon Shambara possessed ninety-nine invincible fortresses. But you demolished them. You killed the hundreds and thousands of soldiers that the demon Varchasvi sent.

This hymn of praise is indeed lofty. It is a hymn that has been composed in praise of the strong and valiant Indra and Vishnu. O Indra and Vishnu! I have submitted these hymns so that they may be chanted on the occasion of the sacrifice. May you provide us food at the time the battle.

O Vishnu! I have offered these oblations of food grains to you. O Vishnu! You are the energetic one. Accept the offerings that I have made. May these excellent hymns that I have composed add to your fame. Grant us protection and ensure our welfare.

## The Frog Song

(Our final *sukta* from *mandala* seven is the frog song. This is composed in the *trishtupa* and *anushtupa* metres. What is remarkable about this *sukta* is the element of satire in the comparison of the priests to the frogs.)

The *brahmanas* who have been observing religious rites have been quiet for a year while the rites were going on. Now that the rites are over, they have begun to recite hymns. They are like the frogs which have remained quiet for a year, as long as it was hot. Now that the monsoon has started, the frogs have started to croak.

The frogs lay there, in ponds that were dry. They seemed to be wrinkled bags made of skin. As soon as water descended from the monsoon clouds, the frogs began to croak. Their sound was like the lowing of cows that have calved.

One whose throat is parched thirsts for water. The frogs were like thirsty people. When the clouds gave rise to monsoon showers, the frogs started to croak. The sound of the croaking was like the sound of a father talking to his son. One frog went to another, and they gathered together.

One frog welcomed another, as the monsoon showers made them all happy. Once it rained, the frogs began to leap. A spotty frog leaped to a green frog and the two seemed to talk.

One frog seemed to talk to another. It was almost as if a disciple was conversing with his teacher. The frogs leaped on the water and croaked, and their bodies glistened and shone.

One frog croaked like a cow, another croaked like a goat. One frog was spotty, another was green. All of them were frogs, as commonly referred to. And yet they were all different. Distinct from one another. Many were their forms and different were the voices in which they croaked.

At the sacrifice named *atiratra*, *brahmanas* gather together. The frogs were like *brahmanas* assembled for such a sacrifice. As soon as the monsoon made the pond full, the frogs gathered together. The first day of monsoon showers is earmarked for such an assembly.

*Brahmanas* observe sacrifices for a year. *Soma* juice is offered at these sacrifices and hymns are recited at the end of the year. The *adhvaryu* priests sweat as they chant the *mantras*. No one leaves the place of the sacrifice. No one stays hidden. The frogs were like these priests.

The leaders are the ones who follow the divine codes of conduct. They observe the religious rites in each of the twelve months. As soon as it rains, the frogs which have suffered from the heat, emerge.

The frog which croaks like a cow will grant us riches. The frog which croaks like a goat will grant us riches. The frog that is spotty will grant us riches, the one that is green will grant us riches. The monsoon indicates the advent of a thousand herbs. The frogs will grant us a hundred cows. They will increase our life expectancies.

(The frogs grant all these objects as they proclaim the onset of the monsoon. The rains revive the earth, and in this sense, grant all these riches.)

## Mandala Eight

(This *mandala* has 103 *suktas* and 1716 *mantras*. The *suktas* are ascribed to various sages. Most of the *mantras* are addressed to Indra, followed by those to Agni and the Ashvins. The *valakhilya* section that was mentioned in the introduction forms part of this *mandala*. In order to learn about gods other than those who have figured earlier, we start with a *sukta* addressed to the Adityas. Aditi is the mother of the gods and Aditya signifies 'son of Aditi'. Thus, Aditya is a general expression for all gods. But the word Aditya is also used in a more specific sense. There are twelve manifestations of Surya, one for each of the twelve solar months. These are the twelve Adityas. The *sukta* that we reproduce is ascribed to the sage Kanva and is composed in the *ushnika* metre.)

It is certain that a man who worships the Adityas and follows the rules indicated by them, will obtain riches and happiness such as have never been obtained before.

The path followed by the Adityas is a straight one and is free of all violence. The path indicated by the Adityas is the path that should be followed by mankind. It is the path that leads to happiness.

May Savita, Bhaga, Varuna, Mitra and Aryama (five Adityas) grant us the great happiness that we have been desiring.

O goddess! You nourish us along the path that is blessed with the best of qualities. That path is free of all violence and is full of love. You are the immortal goddess. Come to us with learning and come to us with happiness. Come to us with all the gods.

(The goddess in question is Aditi.)

O mother Aditi! Your great sons are free from evil and perform the best of deeds. They know well how to banish the enemies who hate them. They know well the means of destroying sinners.

Aditi is the goddess who is never destroyed. May the pure Aditi protect our animals during the day. May she protect them during the night. May mother Aditi ensure the prosperity of our sons and our animals. May she preserve us from sin.

Aditi is the source of all intelligence. She will come to us with her powers of protection. Aditi will grant us peace and happiness. She will banish all our enemies.



The two Ashvins are the physicians of the gods. May they grant us happiness and may they protect us from sin. May they banish our enemies.

Agni's flames and energies will ensure our welfare. Surya will radiate just the right amount of heat, so that we are warmed, but not burnt up. May the pure Vayu blow and grant us happiness. May all the gods banish our enemies.

O Adityas! May disease not come close to us. Banish our enemies. May we not fall prey to evil thoughts. Preserve us from all manner of sin.

O Adityas! Banish all our enemies and banish all our evil thoughts. You are the ones who possess all the wisdom that there is. Please make sure that those who hate us do not get to come near us.

O Adityas! You are the generous ones. Grant us the happiness that makes even sinners forsake the path of sin.

There are men who have become like demons and wish to kill us. May such men be destroyed through their own deeds. May such men not be able to come near us.

There are those who hate us and are treacherous towards us. These violent and evil ones are our enemies. May their sins devour them up.

O Adityas! You are the gods who establish everything. You know who are fraudulent and who are not. May you only reside with men who are pure of heart.

We desire to obtain the happiness that there is in mountains and in water. May heaven and earth protect us from sin.

O gods! You are the ones who establish everything. Grant us happiness and ensure our welfare. The chanting of your names will protect us from all sin.

O great Adityas! The sacrifice to which you wish to come is being performed. We are the ones who desire to be like your friends. May you look upon us with favour.

We call upon the Indra who protects the Maruts. We call upon the Ashvins, Mitra and Varuna. We call upon Vastoshpati, the lord of households. May all these gods ensure our welfare.

O Mitra, Aryama and Varuna! O Maruts! Make us non-violent and grant us fame. Grant us three-storeyed houses.

O Adityas! All of us men will eventually die. But grant us long lives. May

we live for many years.

### **Praskanva's Gift**

(We next have a *sukta* from the *valakhilya* section. The *valakhilyas* were sages who were physically small in stature. In *mandala* eight, there are eleven *suktas* which constitute the *valakhilya* section. These eleven hymns are not included in *mandala* eight, but are placed after it, as a sort of supplement. Commentators on the *Rig Veda* have tended to ignore them.)

The *sukta* we reproduce from the *valakhilya* section is called Praskanva's gift and is composed in the *gayatri* and *anushtupa* metres. It is ascribed to the sage Kanva. But there seems to have been a sage named Praskanva, who belonged to the Kanva family. He invoked Indra to aid a king in a fight against the enemies.)

It is Indra's great valour which becomes manifest the four directions. O Indra! You are the one who slices up all the demons. May we receive your bounty.

O Indra! There are a hundred white bulls in heaven. They shine like the stars in the sky. Indra has granted us these bulls, he has granted us a hundred bamboos. He has granted us a hundred dogs and as many soft hides. Indra gave us a hundred bundles of sacrificial grass and four hundred red horses.

O son of Kanva! (This is a reference to Praskanva.) May you become like a god and roam like the birds. May you roam like a horse.

O men! Pray to the Indra who is the lord of the seven regions that there are. Indra is the complete one and his fame is widespread. There are paths that are dark with the shadow of sin. One who has managed to cross these paths gets to see Indra.

## **Mandala Nine**

(There are 114 *suktas* and 1108 *mantras* in *mandala* nine. Barring a single exception, all the *suktas* are addressed to Pavamana Soma. Soma is the personification of the *soma* juice, and is also identified with the moon-god. Pavamana signifies 'that which is being purified. This refers to the purification of the extracted *soma* juice, to its being strained through strainers. To avoid repetition, we reproduce only one *sukta* from *mandala* nine. This is composed in the *gayatri* metre and is ascribed to the sage Vishvamitra.)

## **Pavamana Soma**

The *soma* juice has been extracted so that Indra may drink it. O Soma! May you be pleasing to the palate. Flow in streams that will be a source of happiness.

Soma is the one who destroys all the demons. Soma is the one who sees everything. The place where pots of *soma* juice have been placed has been made firm with iron stakes.

O Soma! You are the one who grants riches. You are the one who destroys powerful enemies. Rob the enemies of their riches and grant those riches to us.

Sacrifices are being performed for the great gods. May *soma* juice be offered at these sacrifices, together with food grains. May *soma* juice grant us food grains and riches.

O Soma! We serve you well. That is our desire every day. O Soma! It is to you that we express all our wishes.

*Soma* juice is extracted from *soma* herbs. It is then purified. It is poured through a piece of doth that is spread out. It is Surya's daughter who performs the act of straining, an act of purification.

(Surya's daughter is *shraddha*, or respect. The implication is that *soma* juice is strained most respectfully, with faith and devotion in one's heart.)

On the day of the sacrifice, ten fingers grasp the *soma* herbs. The ten fingers of the hand are like ten women who are sisters.

The fingers bring the *soma* herbs. They extract the powerful *soma* juice from the herbs. Sweet is the juice and there are three types of power in it. *Soma* juice prevents all sorts of misery.

(The three types of power in *soma* juice are the powers to purify the body, the mind and intelligence.)

Cows should never be killed. They look upon Soma as their son. The milk from cows is mixed with *soma* juice and an offering is then made to Indra.

It is the pleasure that is derived from drinking the *soma* juice which provides Indra energy to demolish the enemies who surround him. It is the valiant Indra who grants riches.

## **Mandala Ten**

(*Mandala ten is the richest mandala of the Rig Veda Samhita. Most of the references that one finds to the Rig Veda are from this mandala. As a whole, the mandala has 181 suktas and 1754 mantras.*

We start with a dialogue between Yama and Yami. Yama and Yami were, respectively, the son and daughter of Vivasvana or Surya. They were thus, brother and sister. The *sukta* is ascribed to no particular sage. Yama and Yami are themselves referred to as the sages. The hymn is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.)

## Yama and Yami

Yami tells Yama - In the secret places that are near the vast ocean, I would like to become your friend. I welcome you with an open heart. Prajapati, the creator, has made us and is like our father. He has desired that we may unite and have an excellent son. Otherwise, the human race will not multiply.

Yama replies - I am indeed your friend and your companion. But I do not desire to become your husband. You are my sister and a brother cannot marry a sister. Besides, this is not a secret place at all. There are the sons of the demons, who are mighty and strong. They are everywhere and see all that happens on heaven and earth.

Yami says - You may be right. Such a union between a brother and a sister may be forbidden among men. But such a union is not frowned upon or discouraged by the gods. I wish to become your wife, do not refuse me. Become my husband and grant me a son that I may bear in my womb.

Yama replies -I have never done anything like this before, I always follow the path of truth. I have never lied. Our parents are the *gandharvas* (a semi-divine species) in heaven, the Adityas who rule over the water, and the great Pusha. They are our best friends. What you propose is not proper, as our parents would disapprove of such a union.

Yami says - The great god Tvashta is the creator of all that there is. He is everywhere and bears up everything. It is Tvashta himself who decreed that we should be man and wife; for, there is no one else. How can one go against the wishes of that great creator? Heaven and earth will approve of our marriage.

Yama replies - Who knows the secrets of the first day of creation? Who knows how the universe was created? Who knows what relationships are sanctioned? But what you propose is a sin. It will lead to a downfall of the world that Mitra and Varuna preside over.

Yami says - All that I know is that I want you to become my husband. We will be like the two wheels of a chariot, united in action. Let us be man and wife.

Yama replies - The spies of the gods roam throughout the world, night and day. They never rest in one place, their eyes are never closed. If we commit a sin, it will not escape them. You will bring unhappiness to both of us. Go to some other man. You and he can be like the two wheels of a chariot. Establish a relationship with him.

Yami says - Let night and day grant us what we desire. Let the energy of the sun grant Yama what he wants. Heaven and earth know that there is no one but the pair of us. May Yami become Yama's wife. There is no sin in this.

Yama replies - Perhaps there will be some era in the future, when a brother may become his sister's husband. But that day has not come. O beautiful one! Wish for someone else as your husband. Seek refuge with another.

Yami says - What sort of a brother do I have? He cannot even satisfy his sister's wishes. What sort of a sister am I? I am forced to be unhappy, even though I have a brother to succour me. Many are the words I have uttered. I love you. Marry me.

Yama replies - Unfortunately, it is also true that I do not wish to marry you. A brother who marries a sister commits a sin. Leave me alone. Go to some other man and find your pleasure with him. O beautiful one! Your brother does not wish to become your husband.

Yami says - O Yama! You are indeed weak. I have not been able to fathom what goes on in your mind. Do you have some other wife? Has some other woman tied you up, the way a horse is tied up with a noose? Like a creeper entwines itself around a tree, has some other woman embraced you?

Yama replies - O Yami! Go and embrace some other man like a creeper embracing a tree. May some other man embrace you. May you be able to charm his mind. May he be able to charm you. May you be happy with him.

## Havirdhanas

(The next *sukta* is addressed to the Havirdhanas. Two *shakatas* or carts were used at sacrifices to carry offerings, for example, *soma* herbs. These carts were known as the *Havirdhanas*. The *sukta* is composed in the *trishtupa* and *jagati* metres. It is not clear to which sage the *sukta* is ascribed, but he seems to have belonged to the Angirasa family.)

O carts! These *mantras* originated many years ago. I utter the *mantras* and place food grains and other sacrificial offerings on you. I take you to the place of the sacrifice. My hymns are like the oblations. May they attain the gods. The gods are the sons of the great creator. They live in divine places. May the gods listen to my prayers.

The two carts are taken to the place of sacrifice together. Men who are devoted to the gods place oblations on the carts. You (the carts) know the place where you are supposed to stand. You are the excellent stands on which *soma* juice is placed.

There are five steps that lead to the sacrifice. May I climb each of the steps. Four of these are *trishtupa* and other metres in which hymns are composed. The fifth step is the sacred syllable *om*, to whose chanting I perform the sacrifice. On the altar of the sacrifice is placed the purified *soma* juice.

For the sake of the gods, may death be banished. May the immortal life that all living beings are entitled to, not be destroyed. The officiating priests are performing the sacrifice to the chanting of sacred hymns. May the nooses of death not be able to encompass our physical bodies.

*Soma* juice is like our father. It deserves to be praised. It is from *soma* juice that the seven basic metres emanate. The choristers are chanting the hymns. The two carts shine in heaven and on earth. The two carts try to nourish men and gods.



## Manasa

(*Manasa* means spirit. This hymn is addressed to the spirit of a man who is about to die. It attempts to call the spirit back. The *sukta* is composed in the *anushtupa* metre. It is ascribed to sages named Shrutabandhu, Viprabandhu and Gopayana.)

Your spirit has gone far away. Yama is the son of Vivasvana. Your spirit has gone to Yama. May your spirit come back. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has gone near heaven and the earth. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the earth which is heated from the four directions. (This suggests the desert.) May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away in the four directions. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the water of the ocean. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the rays that radiate out in the four directions. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the water, the trees and the herbs. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the sun and the dawn. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the lofty mountains. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away, beyond the portals of this world. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away, as far away as is possible to imagine. May your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

Your spirit has gone far away. It has reached the past and the future. May

your spirit return. You have been born so that you may live in this world.

## Rivers

(The next *sukta* is addressed to rivers. It is composed in the *jagati* metre and is ascribed to the sage Preyamedha.)

O waters! I sing hymns in praise of your greatness. I chant them at the house of the one who is performing the sacrifice. Twenty-one are the rivers that flow, seven for each of the three worlds. The most famous of all these rivers is the Sindhu (Indus). It is the greatest.

O Sindhu! When you headed for the fertile plains, Varuna himself charted out a path for you. Excellent is the course that you follow. You are the source of life for all living beings.

The thunder of your roar is heard in the sky, above the earth. Your waters shine as they speed past. The river Sindhu thunders like a bull. The sound it makes is like the clouds thundering before the onset of showers. It has been said that the Sindhu roars in the sky before descending on earth.

O Sindhu! A mother goes to her son with love in her heart. A cow goes to a calf that has just been born, to offer it milk. Like that, other rivers head towards a confluence with the Sindhu. You are the leader of the rivers, like a king is the leader of his army. You are foremost among all the rivers.

O Ganga! O Yamuna! O Sarasvati! O Shutudri! (The Shutudri is the Sutlej.) O Parushni! O Asikli! (The Asikli is the Chandrabhaga or the Chenab.) O Marudvridha! (This river has not been identified.) O Vitasta! (The Vitasta is the Jhelum.) O Sushoma! (The Sushoma is said to be another name for the Sindhu.) O Arjikiya! (The Arjikiya has been identified as the Vipasha or the Beas.) O Sindhu! May you and the other seven rivers listen to our prayers.

(Originally, there were seven rivers including the Sindhu. Moreover, in addition to the Sindhu, nine rivers are mentioned in the above passage.)

O Sindhu! You wish to unite with the fast-flowing Gomati river. But first you unite with the river named Tushtama. Then you unite with the rivers Susartu, Shveti, Kubha and Mehatnu. You unite with them, as if you are riding on the same chariot with them.

White are the waters of the Sindhu and they flow straight ahead. Fast is the Sindhu and its speed cannot be stemmed. The river is like a fleet-footed stallion. It is as handsome as a beautiful woman.

Sindhu possesses excellent horses, beautiful chariots, handsome clothing

and golden ornaments. Its water is pure and it abounds in aquatic plants. Flowering trees line its banks.

Sindhu possesses a chariot that brings happiness. To this chariot, steeds are harnessed. Sindhu will bring us food grains in that chariot. The praise of the river is chanted at the time of a battle or a sacrifice. Great and famous is Sindhu's chariot. It performs no violent deeds.

## Vishvakarma

(The next *sukta* is addressed to Vishvakarma. Vishvakarma is regarded as the creator of the universe. Later, he came to be regarded as the architect of the gods. The *sukta* is composed in the *trishtupa* metre and is ascribed to the sage Bhouvana.)

Vishvakarma was the first priest. He performed a sacrifice so that all the worlds and all the riches could be created. He offered oblations to Agni and to himself. He is our father. Vishvakarma recited hymns so that the riches that are typified in heaven might be created. First, he created the universe. Next, he merged into Agni.

Where was Vishvakarma at the time of creation? What did he look like then? Where did he start his act of creation? How did he go about the task? Who knows why Vishvakarma created the land masses of the earth? Why did he create the vast expanse of the sky? Who knows the answers to these questions?

Vishvakarma is the *paramatman*. He is omniscient. His mouths, his arms, and his feet are everywhere. It is this *paramatman* who created the three worlds. With his own hands and feet, he created heaven and earth at the same time. He is the single and supreme godhead who oversees the functioning of the universe.

What was the forest and what the trees with which heaven and earth were fashioned? O learned one! Search in your mind to see if you know the answer to this question. Think of the place where the supreme godhead resides. It is there that he bears up the entire universe.

O Vishvakarma! You are the supreme creator. You have a superior body, you have a medium body, and you have an inferior body. May all these bodies make the elements our friends. May water be mixed with your body to generate food grains. May we obtain these food grains.

O Vishvakarma! The oblations increase your strength. Through your power and wisdom, you bear up heaven and earth. May oblations be offered to heaven and earth at the time of sacrifices. Those who do not perform sacrifices according to the proper rites, may, they be deluded. Vishvakarma is the lord of all riches at all sacrifices. May he grant us heaven and earth.

Vishvakarma is the lord of all speech. He is as swift as the speed of thought. We call upon Vishvakarma so that he may offer us protection at the time of this sacrifice. May he accept our oblations and grant us protection. He is

the one who is the source of all happiness and the source of all righteous action.

## Purusha

(The next *sukta* is the famous *Purusha sukta*. *Purusha* is the embodiment of the universal soul and is thus regarded as the origin of the universe. The *sukta* is composed in the *anushtupa* and *trishtupa* metres and is ascribed to the sage Narayana.)

*Purusha* is the supreme godhead who has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. He surrounds the earth from the four directions. One of his forms is merely ten fingers tall. But it pervades creation.

(One interpretation is that, *purusha* or the *paramatman* also has a manifestation in terms of the individual soul or *atman*. It is the *atman* which is ten fingers in length.)

It is the *purusha* who is the past and the future. It is the *purusha* who is the present. The *purusha* flourishes through food grains. He is the lord of immortality and of divine bliss.

Immense is the greatness of the *purusha*. But there is a *purusha* who is superior to him as well. All the elements that constitute the universe are merely like one foot of the *purusha*. Three of his footsteps provide immortality in heaven.

Three of the *purusha's* footsteps can be traced in heaven. His form is divided into four quarters. One fourth of his form is born again and again in the universe in the shape of living beings. He created in the four directions beings that live on food grains and beings that do not.

(Beings that live on food grains are the sentient ones. The others are insentient.)

It is from the *purusha* that *virat* was created. Above *virat*, there is the greater *purusha*. *Virat* was divided into various parts. First, the land and the worlds were created. Physical bodies emerged later.

(*Virat* is regarded as the female counterpart of the primeval *purusha*.)

The gods offered oblations to *purusha* and *virat*. They performed a sacrifice. The spring season was the clarified butter that was offered on the occasion of the sacrifice. The summer season was the kindling and the autumn season was the oblation.

*Virat* was the first to be created and deserved to be worshipped. The gods

and the sages saw *virat* and *purusha* and performed a sacrifice in their honour.

From that sacrifice were obtained curds and clarified butter. The birds that fly in the sky were created. The animals that live in the forests where Vayu rules, also emerged. Domesticated animals were created.

From the sacrifice emerged the *mantras* of the *Rig veda*, *Sama hymns*, Various metres and the *mantras* of the *Atharva Veda* and the *mantras* of the *Yajur Veda* as well.

From that sacrifice were created horses and animals that have two tusks. Cows, goats and sheep emerged.

The *purusha* who has been mentioned was described in all sorts of ways. What was his mouth like? Where were his two arms? Where were his thighs and where were his feet? Such are the questions that are asked.

From the mouth of the *purusha* were born the learned *brahmanas*. From his arms were born the brave *kshatriyas*. From his thighs were born *vaishyas* and from his feet were born the *shudras* (a servant or slave class).

The moon was created from the mind of the *paramatman*. His eyes became the sun. Indra and Agni were born from the mouth and Vayu was created from the breath of life.

The atmosphere was made from the *paramatman's* navel. His head became heaven and his feet the earth. The directions were created from his ears. In this fashion, other worlds can be thought to have been created from other parts of the *paramatman's* anatomy.

Seven were the fencings (the metres) that encircled the place where the sacrifice was held. Twenty-one bundles of kindling were used. The gods performed the sacrifice and the *paramatman* himself was the sacrificial beast.

The gods began to perform the sacrifice with the aid of the *purusha*. This was one of the most righteous acts ever performed. The individuals who performed this righteous act reside in the most sacred of places. It is certainly the case that learned men go to that most happy of places.



## Urvashi and Pururava

(In this *sukta*, Urvashi and Pururava are described as the divinities to whom the hymn is addressed. They are also described as the sages to whom the hymn is ascribed. The entire hymn is in the form of a dialogue between Urvashi and Pururava. The *sukta* is composed in the *trishtupa* metre.

In a naturalistic sense, Pururava has been interpreted as the morning sun and Urvashi as the dawn. The *sukta* in question is however based on a more earthy legend. Urvashi was an *apsara* from heaven who was banished to the earth. There she encountered King Pururava and Pururava wished to marry Urvashi. Urvashi agreed, subject to two conditions being met. The first was that Pururava should always take care of two rams that Urvashi possessed. The second condition was that Urvashi should never see Pururava naked. The couple married and lived together for four years. But the *gandharvas* plotted to take Urvashi back to heaven. One night, they stole one of the rams. In an attempt to catch the thief, Pururava rose from his bed, without having the time to put his clothes on. At that moment, there was a flash of lightning and Urvashi caught a glimpse of her husband naked. Since the conditions were violated, Urvashi vanished and returned to heaven. Pururava met her subsequently and begged her to return to him. Urvashi consented to do this, but only until a son was born to them.)

Pururava - O cruel wife! Stay here for a short while with your loving words. May the two of us remain together for some time and converse. The memory of the conversation that we have together will be a source of happiness in the days to come.

Urvashi - What purpose will these dry words serve? What happiness can be gleaned from them? I will disappear from your presence like the dawn. O Pururava! Return to your home. I am as elusive as the wind.

Pururava - Your separation has caused me much pain. I can no longer lift an arrow from my quiver in pursuit of victory. I am strong. Yet, I find myself unable to rob my enemies of their cattle and riches. I no longer find the power to carry on with my kingly duties. I used to be like a lion whose roars struck terror into enemies on the field of battle. Alas, all that is a thing of the past.

Urvashi - O dawn! This Urvashi wishes to cook food for her father-in-law. I think of my husband often, and I wish to go to his house. Night and day, I think of my happy life with him. O Pururava! I think of the joy we have had together. I

never had any feelings of jealousy for my co-wives. O brave warrior! You were my lord.

Pururava - O Urvashi! You came to me with four of your friends. Their names were Sujurni, Shreni, Sumnapi and Hridechakshu. But after you left, they no longer come to visit me, dressed in their gorgeous clothing. I no longer hear the sounds of their voices, like the voices of cows that have just calved.

Urvashi - O Pururava! When you were born, the wives of the gods came to witness the birth. The rivers that flow bowed down in salutation before the baby. The gods gave you the strength to vanquish and kill enemies in battle. When Pururava came before the *apsaras*, they fled before his energy. It was as if deer were fleeing from a hunter. Yet Pururava married this *apsara* and loved her. Urvashi had a fleeting presence like the lightning that flashes through the clouds. My wishes will be fulfilled if I bear your son. Urvashi prays that the boy may have a long life. O Pururava! The son that I bear you will rule over the whole world. I warned you that my conditions would have to be met, but you paid no heed. You broke the conditions. What is the point of sorrowing now?

Pururava - When will you give birth to a son who will address me as father? He will come to me and ay. Who will wipe his tears then? How can a son be born who will lead to his parents being separated? When will your son frolic in the house of your father-in-law?

Urvashi - I will answer your questions. When your son cries, I will pray for his welfare. I will make sure that he has no reason to cry. I will send your son to you when he is bom. It is time for you to return home now. Do not be ignorant. It is impossible for me to be with you now.

Pururava -I was your beloved husband, but I have fallen from that pedestal. How does it matter if I die unprotected in distant lands? How does it matter if I sleep on the ground or die in grief? How does it matter if wolves devour me in the forests?

Urvashi - O Pururava! May you not die. Do not fall from your pedestal. May you come to no harm and may wolves not bring you grief. May you be preserved. The love of women is but fickle. Their hearts are as cruel as those of wolves. I adopted the form of a woman and lived among men. I lived with you for the space of four years. I loved you. Those memories will serve me well once I take leave of you.

Pururava - You are the joy of the atmosphere. I am the generous Pururava, I

am the performer of great deeds. I love you. May I be united with you. My heart is suffering at the thought of the impending separation. Do not go away. Please return to me.

Urvashi - O Pururava! You are the son of Ila. The gods are telling you that you are mortal. But you will worship the best of gods. And after your death, you will go to heaven and be happy.

## Herbs

(The next *sukta* is a praise to herbs. It is ascribed to a sage named Bhishag, bom in the line of the sage Atharvan. The hymn is composed in the *anushtupa* metre.)

Many are the forms that herbs take. They are full of juices. The gods themselves gave birth to herbs in three different periods of time. (The three periods of time are the seasons spring, monsoon and autumn.) I know that the brown herbs are to be found in a hundred and seven different places. (Hundred and seven is probably simply a large number.)

O herbs! You are like our mothers. You are to be found in a hundred different places. You have a thousand saplings. Many are the acts that you are capable of performing. May you cure us of all ailments.

O herbs! May you thrive and may you have flowers. May you look upon patients with favour. The diseases are like enemies, may you invade them like horses attacking foes. You free us from illnesses. You deliver us from disease.

O herbs! You are the possessors of divine qualities. You are like mothers in the way that you take care of us. That is what I feel about you. O physician! I grant you my horses, cows and clothing for the sake of these herbs.

O herbs! It is certain that you grow on trees. You are to be found on the *palasha* tree. You are praised by mankind and you are the ones who nourish cows.

Like kings coming together to do battle, various herbs come together and mingle. The physician is a learned person. He is well-versed in the treatment of diseases and ailments.

I know the names of the herbs Ashvavati, Somavati, Udojasa and Urjayanti. These and other herbs heal the body.

Like cows emerging from cowsheds, all sorts of powerful juices emerge from herbs. O man! These herbs will serve your body and grant you the wealth of good health.

O herbs! Your mother is named Ishkriti (relief). You cure ailments and banish all disease. May you quickly fall down (presumably, from the trees). May he who is a patient, be quickly cured.

Like a thief invading a cowshed, the herbs invade all sorts of disease. Herbs

banish all the ailments that cause trouble to the body.

I grasp with my hands herbs that are a source of strength. Like animals fleeing before a hunter, the symptoms of the disease run away.

O herbs! The disease has entered the limbs and the bones of the patient. May the herbs enter his body and purge all disease.

O disease! Fly away like birds. Run quickly away. May you have the speed of the wind.

O herbs! The juice of one herb is mixed with that of a second. The juice of the second herb is mixed with that of a third. May all the herbs of the world be united in listening to my prayers. May I be protected.

There are herbs that have fruit, and there are those that do not. There are herbs that have flowers, and there are those that do not. All these herbs were created by Brihaspati. May all herbs free us from illness.

May herbs protect me from all curses. May herbs protect me from the weapons of Varuna, Yama and the other gods. May herbs make me free.

The herbs descended from heaven. If the herbs look upon a person with favour, he never suffers from ill health.

Soma is the king of herbs. Soma is blessed with many qualities. O Soma! You are the best of the herbs. May you fulfil my desires and may you bring happiness into my life.

The herbs are to be found on earth and Soma is their chief. Brihaspati created the herbs so that they may cure patients.

O herbs! The one who digs you out of the ground, may he not be destroyed. I dig you out from the ground for the sake of the patient. May the patient not be destroyed. May all bipeds and quadrupeds be free from disease. May our sons and our animals be free from disease.

The herbs which are far away will listen to these prayers. The herbs which are near will also listen to these prayers. All the herbs will combine to make the diseased body healthy again.

The physician uses the herbs for treatment. Soma is the king of the herbs. The other herbs propose to Soma that the patient may be cured. May the danger of disease be removed.

O herbs! You are the best of all the herbs. You are superior to all other

trees. There are those who wish to destroy us. (This means ailments.) May such foes become our slaves.

## Sarama and the Panis

(The next *sukta* is in the form of a dialogue between Sarama and the *panis*. Sarama is a messenger of the gods. Later, she became the divine dog. As mentioned earlier, the *panis* were robbers. This *sukta* is composed in the *trishtupa* metre. It is not ascribed to any particular sage. Sarama and the *panis* are named as the sages.)

The *panis* - O Sarama! Why have you come here to visit us? The path that comes here is long and difficult. How did you come here? How did you pass the night? How did you manage to cross the waters of the river?

(The *panis* have stolen some cows and have hidden them in a mountain cavern. This place is surrounded by a river.)

Sarama - O *panis*! I am Indra's messenger. It is he who has sent me to you. You have stolen a lot of cows and it is my desire to retrieve them. The waters of the river could do me no harm as I was protected by the gods. It is true that, at first, I was scared of the crossing. But I managed to cross and come over to the other bank.

The *panis* - O Sarama! What is your master Indra like? How strong is he? What does he look like? How many soldiers does he have? You have come a long way at the behest of your master. We would like Indra to be our friend. We would like him to be our master. We would like Indra to look after our cattle as well.

Sarama - I know that my master can never be destroyed. He is the one who destroys everything. Such is the master at whose behest I have travelled such a long distance. The deep waters of the river could not run counter to the wishes of my master. O *panis*! Listen to what I have to say. It is certain that Indra will slaughter you all.

The *panis* - O Sarama! You are the fortunate one. You may be able to reach the furthest points of the sky. You expressed a desire to obtain the cows. But who is going to let go of the cows without a fight? We have many sharp weapons that we can fight with.

Sarama - O *panis*! Your words are not those that should be used by warriors. You are sinners. And therefore you will not have the strength to use your arrows. You will not be able to tread properly. Brihaspati will never grant you happiness.

The *panis* - O Sarama! We have hidden the treasure in a place that is surrounded by mountains. There are cows, horses and many other riches. We *panis* are well-versed in the art of defence. We will be able to protect our treasure. Our cows and riches are safe. You have wasted a trip.

Sarama - The sages Angirasa and Ayasya will be fortified after drinking the *soma* juice. They will come here straight. They will free all the cows. O *panis*! Then you will have to retract your proud words.

The *panis* - O Sarama! We know that you have been frightened by the gods and forced to come here. We look upon as our own sister. Do not return to Indra. O beautiful one! Stay here. We will give you a share of the cows.

Sarama - O *panis*! I cannot be your sister and you are not my brothers. I do not know these relationships. I only know Indra and the powerful Angirasa. When I return and tell Indra what has happened, he will come and invade you. He will deliver the cows. You will run far away if you know what is good for you. O *panis*! Flee far away. Free the cows and let them go up to heaven. Brihaspati will receive the cows that you have secreted so well. You have tried to keep it a secret. But Soma, Indra and the sages have found out where the cows are hidden.



## Prajapati

(The next *sukta* is addressed to Hiranyagarbha or Prajapati, the creator. It is composed in the *trishtupa* metre and is ascribed to no particular sage.)

Prior to the act of creation, only Hiranyagarbha was there. Hiranyagarbha is the *paramatman*. He is the one and only one who created the universe. He is the one who bears aloft the earth and the atmosphere. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

He is the one who provides the knowledge of the *atman*. He is the source of all strength. All the worlds and all the gods follow his instructions. It is his decree that is followed everywhere. In the shadow of his refuge there is the seed of immortality. To forsake the *paramatman* is to get to know death. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

His greatness makes him the lord of all things, sentient and insentient. He alone is the king of all things, mobile and immobile. He is the master of all bipeds and quadrupeds. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

The snow-clad mountains have been created by his power. The rivers that flow and the earth that moves have been created by him. It is he who created the oceans and the sky. The four directions owe their origin to his strength. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

It is he who instilled energy in the sky and the atmosphere. It is through his grace that the earth has been made firm. He created heaven and he established the sun in the atmosphere. It is he who placed water in the sky. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

Heaven and earth are full of sound. But they are firm so that living beings may be protected. It is his will that has achieved all this. It is through his powers that the sun rises and shines in the sky. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

The great fire and the entire universe was created by him. It is he who bore the golden (*hiranya*) egg (*anda*) from which the universe was created. He is Hiranyagarbha. He is the one who made water course in the universe. He is the supreme Prajapati. He is the one who provided water so that gods and other

living beings could thrive. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

He is the creator of sacrifices and of the water that pervades the universe at the time of destruction. It is through his grace that the waters rise up into the sky. He is the lord of all the gods. He alone is supreme. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

May the creator of the earth preserve us from all harm. He is the origin of righteousness and he is the creator of heaven. He is the source of the waters that bring bliss. The *paramatman* is the source of all happiness. It is him that we worship through our oblations.

O Prajapati! There is no one else but you. You alone are the one who permeates the past, the present and the future. You are the vastness itself. We offer oblations to you so that our desires may be fulfilled. Grant us our wishes. May we be the possessors of riches.

## Creation

(Let us next have a *sukta* on creation. It is addressed to Prajapati and is composed in the *trishtupa* metre. The *sukta* is not ascribed to any particular sage.)

After the destruction, there was no truth. Nor was there any untruth. This was prior to the creation and there were no worlds then. The objects that can be seen in the sky were not present. Who was it that covered up everything then? Where were all objects then? Where were the deep and silent waters?

At that time, there was no death. But nor was there immortality. The sun and the moon were not there. Therefore, there was no sense of night or day. Winds did not blow. The *brahman* alone was there. And it was the *brahman* alone who breathed through his powers. Apart from the *brahman*, there was no other object.

This was the scene of destruction and chaos that prevailed before creation began. Everything was shrouded in darkness. There was water all around. All that could be seen around was the power of the *brahman*.

The time of creation came. The idea of creation entered the *paramatman's* mind. From the powers of his mind, he first created the origin of seeds. Through the intelligence of his heart, he next created the elements that constitute the universe.

It was the *purusha* who bore the seeds. The power of greatness was created. The rays that emanated from the *paramatman* spread out in all the directions, above and below.

No man knows and no man can tell how creation began. Men are ignorant of who performed the act of creation. Even the learned ones were born only after creation started. How can one oneself say how one was created?

No one is learned enough to know about the creation. How does one know who bore all that was created? The learned ones only know that the *paramatman*, the creator, resides above. And even that knowledge is probably suspect.

## The Forests

(We now have a *sukta* addressed to the goddess of the forests. This is composed in the *anushtupa* metre and is ascribed to the sage Devamuni.)

O goddess of the forests! You can be seen in the forests and in the wilderness. But you vanish before our eyes. Why are you not seen in towns and villages? Why do you go to the deserted forests? Do you not feel sacred there?

There are animals that roar in a loud voice. There are animals that call in a soft voice. When these two types of voices mingle, the sound is that of a musical instrument (*veena*) being played. It is as if the animals are chanting the praise of the goddess of the forest.

Animals like cows also graze in the forest. The trees and creepers that grow in the forest seem to set up a canopy above one's head. When it is evening, carts emerge from the forest. They are laden with saplings and firewood. It is almost as if the goddess of the forests is sending the carts home.

O goddess of the forest! There a man is calling to his cows. There is another chopping down firewood. Men who spend the night in the forests hear all sorts of sounds and are frightened. So it is said.

The forests do not perform violent acts towards anyone. In fact, no one brings any harm to the forests. The forest is the place where sweet fruits can be found. One can eat those and live happily.

All sorts of fragrances can be found in the forest. There is food in the form of fruits and roots. The forest is a fertile region. It is the mother of the deer. Is it not natural that I should sing the praise of the goddess of the forests?

## Shraddha

(*Shraddha* connotes respect, faith and devotion, and in the *sukta* which follows, *shraddha* is itself described as the sage to whom the *sukta* is ascribed. The hymn is composed in the *anushtupa* metre.)

It is through devotion that a fire is kindled in every household. It is through devotion that oblations are offered at a sacrifice. We praise *shraddha*. It is the best of all riches.

O *shraddha*! May the desires of one who gives alms be fulfilled. O *shraddha*! Ensure the welfare of one who is generous. Listen to these words of mine. And grant the desired fruit to those who are performing the sacrifice.

Indra and the other gods decided to destroy the powerful demons. You ensured that their desires were fulfilled. Like that, may the wishes of those who are performing the sacrifice be granted.

Gods and men pray to devotion so that they may be protected from strong winds. They make up their minds that they will worship *shraddha*. May *shraddha* grant them riches.

We pray to devotion in the morning. We pray to devotion in the middle of the day. We pray to devotion in the evening. O *shraddha*! Grant devotion to those of us who live in this world.

## Shachi

(Shachi is Indra's wife. In the *sukta* that follows, she exults at her triumph over her co-wives. She is the sage to whom the hymn is ascribed and the hymn is composed in the *anushtupa* metre.)

The sun which is established in heaven has risen. It is Indra himself who adopts the form of Surya. May my good fortune also dawn like the sun. I know my husband and I know that he will be devoted to me. I have the power to triumph over my co-wives. I will be victorious over them.

I am the chief of the wives, like the head is the chief of the body. I am learned and rise above, like a flag. Even when I am angry, I can persuade my husband to utter sweet words to me. I am the one who triumphs over my co-wives. They will listen to me and obey my wishes.

It is my son who will defeat the enemies. It is my daughter who will be adorned. I will triumph over everyone. I am the one who, with my husband, will be famous.

My husband Indra gains his strength from the oblations that are offered. He is supreme in the universe. O gods! It is I who offered those oblations. It is thanks to this that my co-wives have been subdued.

I do not have enemies. I triumph over my enemies. I am the victorious one who triumphs over all. Just as the power and the energy of enemies gets destroyed, the power and energy of my co-wives have been neutralised by me.

I am the one who defeats others. I have defeated my co-wives. I will lord over Indra and his relations. Such is my wish.

## **A Charm against Nightmares**

(We now have a charm against nightmares. This is ascribed to the sage Angirasa, descended from the sage Prachetas. The hymn is composed in a mixture of the metres *anushtupa*, *trishtupa* and *pamkti*.)

O lord of the mind! Do not cause me distraction while I sleep. May you be banished. Go far away. Go and dwell in distant regions. Tell Nirriti, the goddess of sin, to keep her distance. I am still alive and my mind is preoccupied with thoughts of the material world. Let her not bring me grief.

(Nirriti is the goddess of destruction.)

Everyone desires to have the best of rewards. And they do attain what they want. I ask the favour of Yama, the son of Vivasvana. May he not cause me unhappiness. May my mind be able to think of various subjects.

When I am awake, I think of the various misfortunes that may descend on me. When I go to sleep, I try to be free from fear and think of the good things that may happen to me. But the various misfortunes plague me in my sleep. O Agni! Please ensure that such nightmares keep their distance.

O Indra! O Brihaspati! If I have committed sins against you, please forgive me. May those sins not give rise to nightmares. May Angirasa and the learned Varuna preserve me from all manner of sin.

Today is the day when I will be victorious. Today is the day when I will attain my desires. I have been cleansed of all sin. I have been forgiven all the sins that I, asleep or awake, may have committed. I have even been forgiven the sins that I may have thought of committing. May sin plague only those who hate me.

## **The Destruction of Rivals**

(The next *sukta* is a prayer for the destruction of rivals. It is ascribed to the sage Rishabha and is composed in the *anushtupa* and *mahapamkti* metres.)

O Indra! Make me the best among all my peers. May I have special powers so that I can defeat my enemies. May I defeat my enemies and become radiant. May I become the possessor of cows.

I am the one who destroys enemies. I will be like Indra. No one will be able to hate or hurt me. All my enemies will have to cower down before my feet.

The two ends of a bow are tied down with the string of the bow. O lord of speech! I tie you down like the two ends of a bow. Influence the words that my enemies utter; make them speak humbly to me.

I will be the one who will vanquish everyone. I will be the powerful and strong one. O my enemies! I conquer your minds. I conquer your deeds. I conquer you in battle.

O my enemies! I will rob you of all your good qualities and become superior to you in every respect. I will be acknowledged as your leader and adorn you like a crown. You will be gathered together at my feet and croak like frogs do from a pond.



## The King

(Our next *sukta* is a hymn that was recited when a new king was crowned. It is ascribed to the sage Dhruva Angirasa and is composed in the *anushtupa* metre.)

O king! You have been crowned the lord of this kingdom. You are our king. May you always be constant and firm. May all the subjects love you. We pray that you may not bring any harm to the kingdom.

O king! May you be firm and constant in this kingdom. May you never be dislodged from your throne. May you be as firm as a mountain. May you rule on earth the way Indra rules in heaven. May you sustain the kingdom.

Many are the oblations that have been offered to Indra. May Indra be pleased and bless this king. May Soma look upon this king with favour. May Brahmanaspati look upon this king with favour.

Let the sky be firm. Let the earth be firm. Let the mountains also be firm. May the entire universe be firm. This king is the lord of his subjects. May he be firm.

O king! The powerful Varuna will preserve your kingdom. Brihaspati is the generous one. He will preserve your kingdom. Indra and Agni will preserve your kingdom. You have made offerings of cakes. These oblations will please Soma. They will please Indra. Indra will ensure that your subjects, pay their taxes.

*There are many other hymns in the Rig Veda Samhita. We cannot hope to reproduce them all. But the sample that we have given you should have stimulated your interest. The Rig Veda is like a vast storehouse. If your interest has been stimulated, why don't you read the original text? And if you cannot read all of it, you should certainly read the tenth mandala.*