The Vedic Experience
Mantramāṇjari
An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration
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we know that we do not know, which would then be mere pre- 
tending, but that we really do not know even if it is at all knowable 
by any possible knowledge. The hymn concludes with this query, 
this constitutive uncertainty which is of infinite magnitude, 
because we are all involved in it. To answer the query would amount to 
killing the very unfolding of reality. It is the openness of this inter-
rogation which allows the universe to emerge and to exist.

Nāsadiya Sūkta

1. At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.
   There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
   What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?
   Was Water there, unfathomable and deep?

2. There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;
   of night or day there was not any sign.
   The One breathed without breath, by its own impulse.
   Other than that was nothing else at all.

3. Darkness was there, all wrapped around by darkness,
   and all was Water indiscriminate. Then
   that which was hidden by the Void, that One, emerging,
   stirring, through power of Ardor, came to be.

4. In the beginning Love arose,
   which was the primal germ cell of the mind.
   The Seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom,
   discovered the connection in Being in Nonbeing.

5. A crosswise line cut Being from Nonbeing.
   What was described above it, what below?
   Bearers of seed there were and mighty forces,
   thrust from below and forward move above.

6. Who really knows? Who can presume to tell it?
   Whence was it born? Whence issued this creation?
   Even the Gods came after its emergence.
   Then who can tell from whence it came to be?

7. That out of which creation has arisen,
   whether it held it firm or it did not,
   He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
   He surely knows—or maybe He does not!

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Creative Fervor

Tapas

2 Tapas or cosmic ardent, ascetic fire, arduous penance, concentra-
tion, which here amounts to an ontic condensation, is said in this 
last but one hymn of the Rg Veda to be the energy giving birth to 
cosmic order and to truth. The three major concepts of Indian 
wisdom and of Man's awareness are tapas, ṛta, and satya, ardor, 
order, and truth.

In the preceding hymn the universe is said to emerge out of or 
through ardor. 12 In this hymn (v. 1) the first result of the protocos-
mic energy is said to be the double principle underlying the whole 
of reality: on the one hand, order (the structure, the formal prin-
ciple, the contexture of reality) and on the other, truth (the contents, 
the substance, the material principle, the concrete and crystallized 
reality itself). Owing to ṛta, this world is not a chaos, but a cosmos, 
not an anarchic mass, but an ordered and harmonious whole. Owing to satya, 
the world is not a haphazard place, an irresponsible 
game, or an inconsistent and purely fluid appearance. Satya is not 
primarily an epistemic truth but an ontic truthfulness, an 
ontological fullness, with content, weight, and reality, namely, being.

The eka, the One of the Hymn of the Origins, is still void 
and devoid of reality. No reality can emerge without these two princi-