

# AN EARLY UPANIṢADIC READER

*With notes, glossary, and an appendix of related Vedic texts*

Edited for the use of Sanskrit students  
as a supplement to Lanman's *Sanskrit Reader*

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ब्राह्मणो ऽस्य मुखमासीद् बाहू राजन्यः कृतः ।  
ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥१२॥

The brahmin was his mouth; the rājanya was made his arms;  
His thighs what is the vaiśya, from the feet arose the śūdra.

चन्द्रमा मनसो जातश्चक्षुः सूर्यो अजायत ।  
मुखादिन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत ॥१३॥

The moon arose from (his) mind, from his eye arose the sun;  
From the mouth both Indra and Agni, from the breath arose Vāyu (the wind).

नाभ्यां आसीदन्तरिक्षं शीर्ष्णो द्यौः समवर्तत ।  
पद्भ्यां भूमिर्दिशः श्रोत्रात् तथा लोकाँ अकल्पयन् ॥१४॥

From the navel came the ether, the sky unfolded from the head;  
From the feet, the earth; from the ear, the quarters; in this way they laid out the  
worlds.

सप्तास्यांसन्परिधयस् त्रिः सप्त समिधः कृताः ।  
देवा यद्यज्ञं तन्वाना अबध्नन्पुरुषं पशुम् ॥१५॥

Seven were his surrounding sticks, three times seven were the kindling sticks made,  
When the Gods, stretching out the sacrifice, tied up Puruṣa as the victim.

यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त देवास् तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् ।  
ते ह नाकं महिमानः सचन्त यत्र पूर्वे साध्याः सन्ति देवाः ॥१६॥

Through the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed the sacrifice; these were the first  
laws/ordinances/forms/norms;

These powers went to the highest heaven where the earlier Gods, the Sādhyas, are.

<sup>1</sup> These are the male and female principle, respectively, who engender each other mutually (see note 2 on selection H:2).

## H. Being and non-being

### 1. The nāsadiya-sūkta (RV 10:129)

Like the puruṣa-sūkta, this hymn is a creation account, operating with paradoxes (at least, that is the usual interpretation). The hymn, especially its beginning, is widely cited in upaniṣadic literature, no doubt in part because the hymn mentions तदेकम् 'that One (ultimate entity)' (verse 2 and 4) and thus converges with one of the major interests of the upaniṣads, the question of the transcendental unity behind the diversity of the

phenomenal world. The hymn ends in pessimism, but that pessimism is most powerfully expressed. Because of its significance, the hymn has given rise to a large number of translations and interpretations. The following translation has benefited from many of them, but does not attempt to follow any one of them in detail. — A recent study argues for a very different interpretation of this hymn (Joel Brereton, 'Edifying puzzlement: R̥gveda 10.129 and the uses of enigma', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119: 248-260, 1999). Relying on the relatively late identification in Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 6 and 10 (Selection J below) of the असत् at the beginning of our hymn as referring to the ṛṣis, he questions the traditional 'cosmogonic' interpretation of the hymn and instead proposes to interpret the hymn as identifying 'the original creativity' of the poets. Brereton's proposal is highly interesting, but needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny, taking into consideration the entire range of indigenous Indian interpretations (beyond the ŚB one), ranging from allusions or direct references to our text in the Vedic literature to discussions in the commentatorial literature.

नासंदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं      नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।  
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥ १ ॥

There was not non-being, nor was there being then; there was no air, nor was there heaven above.

What kept on moving? Where? And under whose protection? What was the water, impenetrable, deep?

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि      न रात्र्या अहं आसीत्प्रकेतः ।  
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं      तस्माद्धान्यन्न परः किं चनास ॥ २ ॥

There was no death, nor immortality at that time. There was no sign of night or day. That One breathed windless on its own. Beyond it nothing else existed.

तमं आसीत्तमसा गुह्यमग्रे      ऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम्  
तुच्छयेनाभ्वपिहितं यदासीत्      तपसस्तन्महिनाजायतैकम् ॥ ३ ॥

Darkness there was in the beginning, hidden by darkness. All of this was a signless flood.

The force that was enclosed by emptiness, the One, was born by strength of (mental) heat.

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि      मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत् ।  
सतो बन्धुमसन्ति निरविन्दन्      हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो मनीषा ॥ ४ ॥

In the beginning desire unfolded on it, which was the first seed of the mind.

The sages found the bond of being in non-being, searching in their hearts, by thinking.

तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषाम् अधः स्विदासी३दुपरि' स्विदासी३त् ।

रेतोधा आसन्महिमानं आसन्त्स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात् ॥ ५ ॥

Their measuring chord was spread athwart. Was there below by chance, was there above?

There were seed-pourers, there were powers. Desire was below, beyond was will.

को अद्धा वेदं क इह प्र वौचत् कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः ।

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेनाथा कौ वेदं यत आबभूव ॥ ६ ॥

Who indeed knows? Who will declare here? From where did this creation come about? The Gods are later than this (world's) creation. So, who knows whence it came about?

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न ।

यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्त्सो अङ्ग वेदं यदि वा न वेदं ॥ ७ ॥

This creation, whence it came about, whether it was created, whether not,

Who is the overseer of this (world) in highest heaven, he surely knows, unless he does not know.

## 2. असतः सदजायत (from RV 10:72)

In this hymn, too, the creation of the world is portrayed as something of a paradox, through images and ideas which are mutually contradictory. The hymn is included here because the असतः सदजायत of verses 2 and 3 is no doubt referred to in Selection XI.

देवानां नु वयं जाना प्र वौचाम विपन्ययां ।

उक्थेषु शस्यमानेषु यः पश्यादुत्तरे युगे ॥ १ ॥

Let us now, with rejoicing, proclaim the generations of the Gods  
In (well-)recited hymns, so that someone shall see them in a later age.

ब्रह्मणस्पतिरेता सं कर्मारं इवाधमत् ।

देवानां पूर्व्ये युगे ऽसतः सदजायत ॥ २ ॥

Brahmanaspati forged them together like a blacksmith.

In the earliest age of the Gods, being was born from non-being.

देवानां युगे प्रथमे ऽसतः सदजायत ।

तदाशा अन्वजायन्त तदुत्तानपदस्परि ॥ ३ ॥

In the first age of the Gods, being was born from non-being.

The quarters (of the world) arose thereafter. It (the world) [was born] by one with spread-out legs.<sup>1</sup>