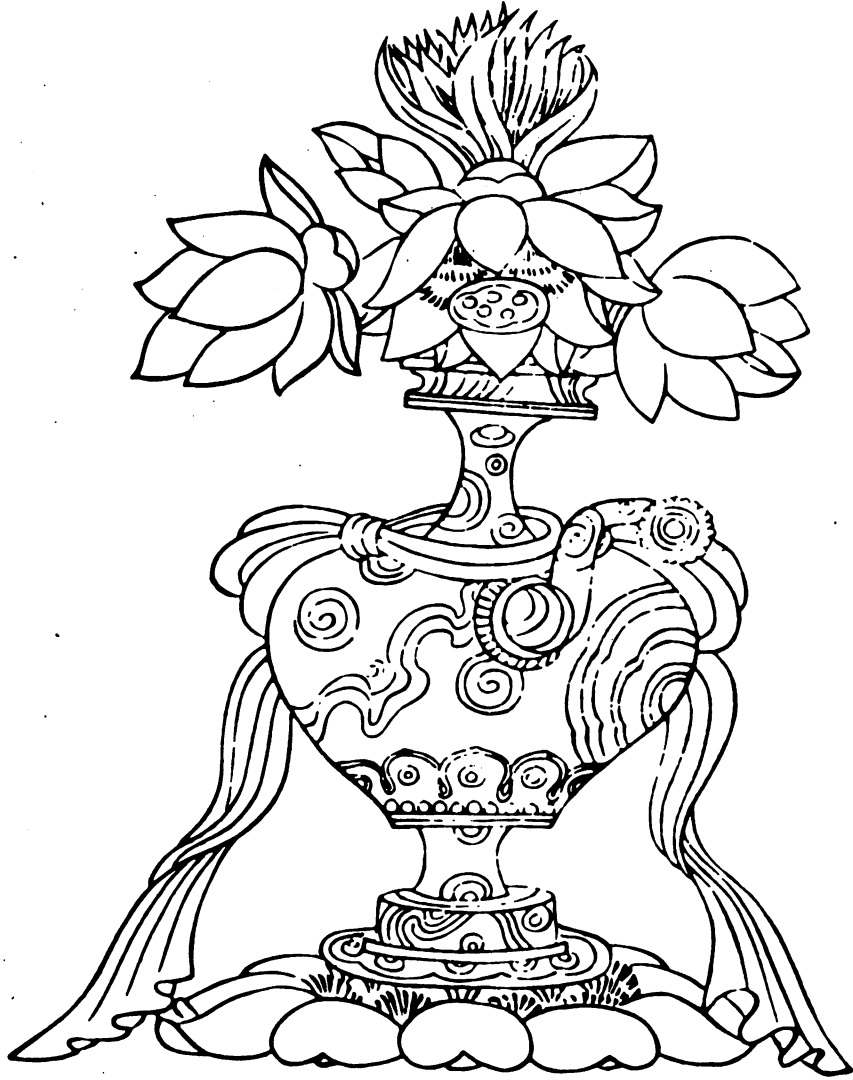


मन्त्रमञ्जरी



Pūrṇa kumbha

The Vedic Experience

Mantramamañjarī

An
Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man
and Contemporary Celebration

edited and translated with introductions and notes
by

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we know that we do not know, which would then be mere pretending, 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 interrogation which allows the universe to emerge and to exist.

Nāsadiya Sūkta

RV X, 129

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 of 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!

1. SB X, 5, 3, 1-2 (§1 13) considers that *manas*, the mind, or rather the spirit, is the one and only thing that fulfills the condition of being neither existent nor nonexistent. The spirit is existent only in things, and things without the spirit are nonexistent.

Cf. §1 14.

Indian tradition has interpreted these first two mantras as voicing all the different perspectives under which the ultimate metaphysical problem can be envisaged. Cf. SU IV, 18 (§ 1 7); BG XIII, 12.

2. Own impulse: *svadhā*, the active principle, has been translated as "by its own energy" (Zaehner), "power" (Mascaró, Macdonell, Edgerton), "impulse" (Bose), "of itself" (Misch), "strength" (Raghavan), "will power" (Telang-Chaubey), "élan," "initiative" (Renou), "Eigengesetz" (Geldner), just to give an idea of different readings. Cf. the later idea of *śakti* or the divine power of the Godhead, always represented as the Goddess, spouse of the corresponding God.

The One: *tad ekam*. Cf. §VI 1, and also RV I, 164, 10; X, 82, 2; 6 (§VII 12); AV VIII, 9, 25-26; IX, 9, 7; IsU 4 (§VII 11).

Cf. other texts in §1 7.

3. For the primordial Waters, cf. §1 15 for further references.

Indiscriminate: *apṛketā*, without a recognizable sign, undifferentiated, indistinguishable, unrecognizable, referring to the amorphous chaos, the unformed primordial Waters.

Water: *salila*, flood, surge, waves, the ocean, waters. The Greek word *pelagos* would perhaps render the idea of *salila*, the open sea without shores or boundaries, amorphous water, a kind of chaotic magma.

The Void: *ābhu*, or *ābhū*, the primordial potency, capable of becoming everything.

Ardor: *tapas*, cf. §1 2.

4. Cf. AV XIX, 52, 1 (§II 13), where it is translated somewhat differently.

5. "Bearers of seed" are considered to be the male forces and "mighty forces" the female principle. Cf. *dakṣa* and *aditi* as the masculine and feminine principles, respectively, in RV X, 72, 4 (§VII 2).

6. Cf. KenU I, 1 (§VI 3).

Creative Fervor

Tapas

2 *Tapas* or cosmic ardor, ascetic fire, arduous penance, concentration, which here amounts to an ontic condensation, is said in this last but one hymn of the Ṛg 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 protocosmic energy is said to be the double principle underlying the whole of reality: on the one hand, order (the structure, the formal principle, 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-

12. Cf. RV X, 129, 4 (§1 1).