

**1. Argument.** This paper presents evidence that man's highest good, the *śreyas*, as taught by the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*, the *ātma-jñāna* 'Self-knowledge', *brahma-jñāna* 'knowledge of the Absolute', *mokṣa* 'liberation' of the Vedānta and related themes, are already present in the *RV* (= *R̥gveda*), not just as spermatic ideas but very fully. Only the terminology differs.

**2. Some approaches.** Let us start with some gross external evidence. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is not only one of the most popular Scriptures it is also, together with Ādiśaṅkara's *Bhāṣya*, a major text within the Advaita canon. This scriptural gem speaks repeatedly of *jñāna* and *vijñāna* 'knowledge' and 'knowledge in experience': VI 8 speaks of *jñāna-vijñāna-trptātṃ*, the yogin who has subdued his senses and is satisfied in himself with *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. It speaks also of those men of old who, obtained knowledge desiring liberation (*mumukṣu-*) and of men who sought liberation *in ancient times*. How far back is this ancient period?

If nothing else, the *Gītā* obviously refers to the sages of the Upanishads who, are many centuries earlier than the *Gītā* since the latter text is linguistically much younger than the Upanishads. In the *BUṡ* (= *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*) there is a phrase *aupaniṣadam puruṣam pṛcchāmi* "I ask about that upanishadic person" (III 9, 26): the adjective *aupaniṣadam* indicates there was a tradition or body of Upanishads teaching about a person or being (ie the Supreme Self) prior to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, which is considered to be (one of) the oldest. Then this same Upanishad mentions (VI 5), more than 50 names in the *guru-śiṣya* tradition (of teachers and pupils). If we take it that every name represents one generation and that one generation is 20 to 25 years, then we cover a period well over 1000 years. The *BUṡ* teaches explicitly that "this personal self is the absolute Self of the universe" *ayam-ātmā-brāhma* (II 5, 19) and that "I am the Absolute Brahman" *aham brahmāsmi* (I 4, 10). So this teaching goes back more than 1000 years before this early Upanishad. Such a stretch could compass the codification of the Brāhmaṇa-texts and take us to the *RV* period. However, the upanishadic formulations are nowhere to be found in the *RV*. The Upanishads contain many passages from the rigvedic hymns: for instance, the *Aitareya Up* II 1, 5 takes the verse *RV* VI 27, 1d which states that some creature is confined with 100 'metal forts' *purs* (=magic strongholds) and suggests it is the spirit of Vāmadeva that is restrained in the womb and breaking free; or the first chapter of the *Kaṭha Up* which takes *RV* X 135 (and *Taittīyā Br* III 11, 8) and gives the dialogue between Naciketas and Yama; and so on. While the upanishadic teachings that the *ātman* is no different from the *brahman* as above, or, as in *Īśā Up* 6-7, that the man who sees all beings in his own Self and his Self in all beings does not hate nor feel sorrow, may have been current in the rigvedic period, they are not found in these terms in the *RV*. But they are found in the *AV* (= *Atharvaveda*). For example, J Gonda examines the *AV* hymn IV 1, 1 *brahma jajñānam* etc; dismissing earlier misinterpretations, he translates: "the seer (Seer) has unveiled the brahman that had, of old, first come into existence from the well-shining boundary; he has revealed its fundamental (and) highest places, the womb of the existent and non-existent". Gonda comments that this may refer to the borderland between the phenomenal and transcendent which is momentarily crossed by the seer when the light of vision suddenly comes to him (1963: 357). Jeanine Miller translates with certainty: the seer has uncovered its loftiest station "as the womb of the manifest and the unmanifest" (1974: 98). *AV* X 2, 28-30 says explicitly that the Absolute Brahman abides in man's stonghold *pur* as the Self *ātman* and is called *puruṣa*. *AV* X 7, 17 says that those who know Brahman in man know the Supreme *parameṣṭhin* and the Lord of creatures *prajāpatiḥ*. *AV* X 8, 43-4 describes the Self *ātman* as desireless *akāma*, wise *dhīra*, immortal *amṛta* and so on: whoever knows him, does not fear death. We find similar ideas in *AV* XI 8. Thus upanishadic teachings expressed in characteristic upanishadic terms are found at least in the *AV*.

Some scholars have read the upanishadic teachings in the rigvedic hymns. It is worthwhile examining some of these efforts.

a) Shri Aurobindo interpreted many hymns in upanishadic terms in several of his papers. Here I should state that I agree fully with Aurobindo's views and sentiments, as when he writes—

“Vayu is the Lord of Life. By the ancient Mystics life was considered to be a great force pervading all material existence and the conditions of all its activities. It is this idea that was formulated later on in the conception of the Prana, the universal breath of life. All the vital and nervous activities of the human being fall within the definition of Prana, and belong to the domain of Vayu” (1982: 297). While I agree, I must also disagree in respect of the *RV*. No rigvedic hymn to Vāyu contains any such ideas. Aurobindo translates hymn IV 48 to Vāyu then comments upon it. The first line *vihí hótrā ávīta vípo ná ráyo áryah* he renders as “Do thou manifest the sacrificial energies that are unmanifested, even as a revealer of felicity and doer of the work.” Here he is taking some liberties with the text since *aryáh* could mean either ‘of-the-foe’ (gen of *arí-*) or ‘kind, true’ (adj *aryá*) but in no way ‘a doer of work’! He then comments: “In the ritualistic interpretation the phrase may be translated ‘Eat of the offerings that have not been eaten’ or, in another sense of the verb *vī*, it may be rendered ‘Arrive at sacrificial energies which have never been approached’; but all these renderings amount, symbolically, to the same psychological sense. Powers and activities that have not yet been called up out of the subconscious have to be liberated from its secret cave by the combined action of Indra and Vayu and devoted to the work. For it is not towards an ordinary action of the nervous mentality that they are called. Vayu is to manifest these energies as would ‘a revealer of the felicity, a doer of the Aryan work’ *vipo na ráya aryah*”. In all these explanations it is obvious that he reads and renders the text through a system of his own (hence ‘symbolically’) and that he confuses *arí* or *aryá* with *árya* ‘a vaiśya’ (not found in the *RV*) and *árya* ‘Aryan, noble’ (not in the particular text). Aurobindo’s comments on the fourth stanza “Let the ninety-nine be yoked and bear thee, those that are yoked by the mind’, are even more extraneous to the text. He writes (p 301): “The constantly recurring numbers ninety-nine, a hundred and a thousand have a symbolic significance in the Veda which is very difficult to disengage with any precision. The secret is perhaps to be found in the multiplication of the mystic number seven by itself and its double repetition with a unit added before and at the end, making altogether  $1+49+49+1=100$ . Seven is the number of essential principles in manifested Nature, the seven forms of divine consciousness at play in the world”. Here again are imported ideas that may be quite right but are extraneous to the simple if not readily comprehensible text. And I would add that while such an approach may be both legitimate and useful, we could examine these themes without repairing to texts and systems outside the *RV* itself.

b) A K Coomaraswamy wrote (1942) an article *Ātmayajña: Self-sacrifice* which is invaluable for every student of the *RV* and to which I am indebted considerably. He takes no liberties in translating the rigvedic quotations nor does he resort to symbolical interpretations. As the title *ātmayajña* indicates, he delineates the theme of *yajña* as an internal process leading to liberation in which process the chief impediment is the dragon Vṛtra which has to be killed or removed. But he also has to have recourse to later texts, the Brāhmaṇas and even more the Upanishads, to explain and complete his presentation since the rigvedic hymns do not use such terms as *ātmayajña* nor deal explicitly with a process of self-sacrifice.

c) Jeanine Miller treads Coomaraswamy’s path in her two lengthy studies, *The Vedas: Harmony, Meditation and Fulfilment* (1974) and *The Vision of the cosmic Order in the Vedas* (1985). In both studies she translates some passages rather too freely and on few occasions is led to definite error: eg X 117, 7 says *vádan brahmā ávadato vānīyān* which she renders as “the brahman that can be expressed in words outweighs the silent brahman” whereas it should be the supervising priest brahmán (masc not neut!) who speaks [and therefore corrects errors] is better than one who doesn’t. But generally she translates closely the original passages without recourse to symbols. However, she also resorts to later texts. Here also I must acknowledge a debt but repeat that recourse to any non-rigvedic framework is unnecessary.

d) Of the many other studies, Willard Johnson’s *Poetry and speculation of the R̥gveda* (1980) also deserves mention since it touches on these themes. But he too brings in later texts and philosophical systems and, as his title indicates, he regards these matters as “speculation” rather than actual experience. There is a note of condescension, which could have been omitted, when

he deals with the questions posed in *RVI* 164 which he calls “the most famous Ṛgvedic speculative symposium”: “Who witnessed Agni, the first born?” (4a); “Who created space and hence all phenomenal manifestation” (6c); “What really is the source of everything, that mysterious one?” (6d); and so on. He writes: “Despite their archaic age, these questions should not be dismissed.” And I ask “Does anybody dismiss them?” Then he adds, “As the first formulations of serious pre-philosophical inquiry, these questions present remarkably sophisticated concepts even while using images and mythological themes, as Plato did, for their articulation” (pp 106-9). Are these really pre-philosophical formulations?

## 2) Philosophy and the Greek connection.

Here is a good place to turn to Plato and Philosophy. In academic circles and Universities Philosophy is the study of the reflections of many different thinkers through the ages, especially in Europe, from classical Greece to modern times. These thinkers are supposed to have dealt with the nature of reality but more and more these studies tend to indulge in semantics, the meaning of words and definition of terms, as a way of approaching reality. The problem here is that there is no end to this because with every definition given, the words comprising it will need themselves to be defined and so on ad infinitum.

The word “philosophy” has passed into almost all languages. It is an ancient Greek word *philosophia* and means ‘love for wisdom’. The noun and the verb *philosophēin* ‘to philosophise’, appear mainly in the writings of Xenophon and Plato; earlier thinkers were called generally *phusikoi* ie those inquiring into the nature of the creation, (or as Śaṅkara called them, *sr̥ṣṭicintaka*). The verb *philosophēin* was first used by Herodotus, the historian (I, 30), ‘to love, pursue knowledge’; according to Cicero, the Roman orator and philosopher (1st cent BC), Pythagoras called himself *philosophos*, ‘one who loves, seeks wisdom’ and Diogenes Laertius (3rd cent CE) repeats this: see *GEL* under *philosophēin* and *philosophos*. Both Cicero and Laertius are too late to give reliable information about Pythagoras. However, if this late tradition is true and Pythagoras (or his early followers) first used these words, the meaning would have been much the same as in Plato, since the Pythagoreans had similar aims and Plato learnt from them as from the Eleatics of Parmenides in South Italy. (The same applies to the presence of *philosophos* in the Heracleitean fragment 35 ‘Philosophers must be enquirers into very many things’. This fragment is regarded spurious since in others Heracleitos criticizes learned men like Pythagoras, Hekataeus and others.) Socrates broke away from the *physikoi* ‘physicists/naturalists’ (*sr̥ṣṭicintakās*) and the sophists who sold knowledge; he introduced and laid emphasis on what today we call Ethics, making philosophy a daily practical preoccupation so that a man might with the proper way of life achieve the highest good. He is made by Plato to say in the dialogue *Phaidros* (229E) “It seems to me ludicrous to study things external when I don’t know my own Self”. Plato and Xenophon were both students of Socrates. This love and pursuit of wisdom was, then, enunciated in the Socratic circle, perhaps by Socrates himself in the late 5th century BC just as the golden age of Pericles with its wondrous burst of arts, crafts and sciences was about to set.

So in the Socratic-Platonic teaching *philosophia* entailed Self-knowledge. This particular aspect is not entirely new. Some of the pre-Socratic philosophers also refer to self-knowledge. Heracleitos, this enigmatic aristocrat who lived in Ephesus about 100 years before Socrates, says in one of the extant fragments “I sought to know myself” *edizēsámēn emautón*. This quest for self-knowledge is central to Greek thought and is encapsulated in the ancient dictum of the Delphic Oracle “Know thyself” *gnóthi s’ autón*; the origin of this tradition is lost in the mists of Greek prehistory (Betz 1970). The Oracle had declared Socrates to be the wisest man in Greece. He himself said repeatedly that he knew nothing since he knew not himself. Wisdom itself belongs to God alone, Socrates taught; but whoever studies and pursues it may be called a philosopher: so we are told in *Phaidros* 278D. In the same Dialogue the wise soul is said to reach the highest arch of heaven and there see the One True Being which is eternal and unchanging *aei on* or *ontos on* (247E). This knowledge or wisdom is innate in man and Socrates engaged in dialogue with others so as to induce them to look into themselves and at the same time bring to

their awareness their innate true knowledge (*Menon* 80Dff; *Theaitētos* 149Aff). These ideas too are not entirely new and we find them in the fragments of Herakleitos who says that wisdom is single and that knowledge of the self and of measure is within man. The Self (or reason, in some Platonic Dialogues) is the divine element in man, so we should escape from earthly existence to the level of the gods: this ascent is “becoming like a god *homoioōsis theōi* as far as possible” (*Theaitētos* 176A-B).

This ‘divinization’ or realization of one’s divine Self is to be achieved through sound ethical living, that is practising the noble virtues *aretē* of justice *dikaioṣunē*, reverence *eusebeia*, temperance *sofrōsune* etc; through dialectic which was the acquisition of true ideas through discrimination and reason; and through meditation. This last aspect is either played down or totally omitted from learned studies on the Socratic-Platonic teaching.

There is the outward turn of consciousness through senses and body, writes Plato in the *Phaidōn*, when it is in contact with the material world of change. But there is also an inward turn when the soul inquires by itself (withdrawn from body and senses) and reaches the pure, everlasting and changeless Being (*aei on*) where it rests and is in communion with that: “this state of the soul is called wisdom” (79D). A good example of this practice is given in the *Symposium* when Socrates himself is said by Alkibiades to have stood in contemplation for hours (220c). This practice too, or something very similar, goes back a long way to the schools of Parmenides and of Pythagoras and the Orphics. Peter Kingsley, an eminent hellenist, examines this, calling it “incubation”, and writes: “Techniques could be provided for entering other states of consciousness. Otherwise, the emphasis was placed less and less on being given teachings and more and more on finding the inner resources to discover your own answers inside yourself” (1999: 213).

This system of ideas constitute *philosophia*, a system formulated fully in the Socratic circle and, certainly, by Plato. The word “philosophy” today seems to me to be misused when various writers employ it to describe systems, methods and phenomena other than what Plato meant. The maltreatment of the term has become so very common now that people do not realize they are using it to describe quite different activities. Thus one contemporary scientist, A Rosenberg, published *The Philosophy of Science* (2000). Early on in his study Rosenberg writes, “Philosophy of science is a difficult subject to define in large part because philosophy is difficult to define” (p2). The scientist’s difficulty is understandable since philosophy has little to do with science. Philosophy itself is very clearly defined within Plato’s writings: it is the system of knowledge and practices whereby a man comes to know himself, realizes his divine nature and attains immortality; as is said in the *Timaios*, he returns to the region of the gods, to his native star, and lives in immortal felicity (42B). Anything else is not, strictly speaking, “philosophy”. What has happened is that the term has been usurped and given arbitrarily to different sorts of disciplines not concerned with Self-realization. In all such cases, as with Rosenberg, attempts at definition will encounter difficulties. Modern science (the sum total of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and the like) has certain characteristics, its well-defined modes of inquiry, in other words, its own methods and nature; but it can hardly be said to have “philosophy”, except when the term is being misused.

When Johnson describes (above 1d) the rigvedic seers’ reflections as sophisticated concepts of a serious “pre-philosophical inquiry”, he is quite wrong. The concepts are certainly serious but they are also most philosophical. Quite astonishing and unacceptable are to me M Winternitz’s comments on the AV hymns I mentioned earlier: he calls them “a case of pseudo-philosophers... mystically confounded irrelevance... usual mystical swindle” (1981: 144-5). I wonder if he thought that the writings of the German mystics Jacob Boehme and Meister Eckhart were also “usual mystic swindle”. At any rate, the Greek thinkers, Socrates and Plato, who first used the term philosophy and most probably coined the word, refer, by this very term, to the particular system of knowledge and practices, as we saw, whereby a man escapes from his earthly condition and attains the divine immortal state. Most scholars readily acknowledge the close similarity between the Platonic system and the teaching of the Upanishads. The same applies to the neo-

platonist mystic-philosopher Plotinus of the 3rd century CE (Wallis 1972: esp 89-90). I shall show that although, as Johnson wrote, the *RV* hymns use “images and mythological themes”, they are highly philosophical in the true original sense of philosophy: amid bright and abundant praises of deities, they speak of men attaining godhood and immortality.

#### 4) The Date of the *RV*.

The *RV* is a most remarkable document. It is an absolutely primary text in that all Indic texts are subsequent and look back to the *RV* as a primal authority. I maintain (and have argued to this end 1999, 2001, 2002a) that it is older than the Mycenaean Documents and the earliest Hittite texts of the 15th and 17th centuries BC respectively. It is therefore a primary document in the stock of texts of the common but varied IndoEuropean culture. However, this latter aspect will not concern us here. Although it is a uniform text, quite distinct from other Indic texts, including the *Atharvaveda*, and although the same gods are invoked and lauded in all ten Books, nonetheless we find grave changes in the language (in Bk X being undoubtedly much later than say in Bks III and IV), differences in ideas and in the treatment of the same subject and even obvious contradictions. All these features suggest that the hymns in the different Books were composed at different places and periods and, as is well known, by different seers.

In the second half of the 19th century western scholarship decided to assign the composition of the *RV* within a few decades or at most two centuries, c 1200 to 1000 BC. There were dissidents then (Winternitz I, 288) but this view prevailed and became the mainstream doctrine. Most Indian scholars abandoned the view of their own native tradition and adopted that of Western academics. This mainstream doctrine is of course part and parcel of the general Aryan Invasion Theory which has the Indoaryans invading the ancient Saptasindhu (what is today NW India and Pakistan) c 1500; this has now become (waves of) immigration but ignores the obvious fact that no peaceful immigration could possibly produce the complete aryanisation of that vast area in North India. The Indian native tradition holds that the *Rgveda Samhitā* was compiled on the eve of the Mahābhārata War at 3137 BC, which is 35 years before the death of Kṛṣṇa and the advent of the Kaliyuga at 3102. Since this is found fully in the Purāṇas and the astronomers not before 500 CE, it is rejected. However many facts militate against this rejection. First, the Megasthenes report (as found in Pliny, Solinus and Arrian) is from about 300-290BC and speaks of former kings in a succession that covers 6000+ years: this aspect of the tradition therefore is not as young as it seems at first sight but as old as at least the 4th cent BC. The work of Narahari Achar in Archaeoastronomy has confirmed the earlier study of K S Raghavan (1969) and has now shown beyond any doubt that various astronomical references in the *Mahābhārata*, Bks III, V and XIII, are all correct only in the year 3067; thus the core of the epic must be assigned to that year which is only 70 years or three generations after the date given by the tradition which is hereby confirmed. Consequently, apart from prejudice and habitual thinking, there is no reason to doubt the date of the compilation of the *RV* as given by the tradition. This is corroborated by the hard fact that the *RV* knows nothing at all about the Indus-Sarasvati or Harappan Civilization: it has no references to ruined cities, to large buildings, to bricks, to fixed hearths/altars, to cotton and the other elements of that culture which began to rise c 3100 and was collapsing c 1700 and the people were moving eastward even as the invading Aryans were allegedly coming in.

The next question is when were the hymns actually composed? We don't really know and can't put any dates to them. We can only speak of broad and general divisions and relative chronology saying that Bk X is definitely the latest, the family Bks II to VII the earliest and Bks I, VIII and IX somewhere in between, although individual hymns in Bks I, VIII and IX may well belong to a period different from that of the Book in which they are found. In a recent study (2000) S Talageri attempted a more precise dating and declared Bk VI to be the earliest with Bks III and VII immediately after (pp 35-77), but I find his criteria far from impeccable. He also spreads the hymns over a period of 2000 years (which I do not find impossible) but he gives no clear reasons for this (pp 77-8). Some of the hymns undoubtedly imply a long lapse of time. For example Visvāmītra in III 32, 13 mentions ancient hymns, middle and modern. In III 54, 5 he

asks “Who knows and can declare the path that leads to the gods?” This may be a rhetorical question implying that he himself does know (since he is presented as having the supernatural power to stop the river-flow in III 33 and 55); but in the same stanza he states that people in his time see only the lower abodes of the deities (the stars, perhaps?) while in the preceding stanza (III 54, 4) he says that former generations could and did find the gods. Even in mythological terms such a change would involve a very long period. Or take another example, Viśvakarman. He appears as a distinct deity in Bk X and two hymns 81 and 82 are addressed to him. Later he merges into Prajāpati (*Śatapatha* Br VIII 8, 22, 1ff) and fades out. But this name occurs as an epithet of Indra (VIII 87, 2) and later of the Sun (X 170, 4). It seems that this attribute of Indra as “all-maker” became eventually an independent deity. Something similar seems to have happened with the name *prajāpati*. It first occurs as an epithet of Savitṛ in IV 53, 3, then of Soma in IX 59, 9 and then appears as an independent creator-god in the 10th Maṇḍala. Such a process needs a long stretch of time to reach completion. But this matter would require a separate study.

### 5) Multiplicity, triplicity and Unity in the RV.

The Rigvedic Cosmos with all its multifarious phenomena is broadly divided into three: the sky or heaven *dyo/div-* and *svar*; the midspace or atmosphere *antarikṣa* and earth *prthivī*. This triplicity shows itself in all kinds of ways. Thus Agni is said (III 20) to have 3 powers, 3 stations or births, 3 tongues and so on; the ocean on earth appears as vapour and water in the clouds in the *antarikṣa* and as an ocean in heaven; Sarasvatī, again, is a goddess, a river in the sky and a terrestrial river; and so on and so on. The great multiplicity of divine and mundane phenomena in the *RV* are organised within this triple framework. This triplicity was noted and studied in detail by G Dumézil as an aspect common to all early IE (=IndoEuropean) religions – Avestan, Greek, Roman etc (eg 1968-73; overview, Littleton 1973).

Rigvedic religion differs radically from all other early IE ones in several respects. But before examining these differences we should note an important fact. In the hymns we find many allusions to gods and their attributes or exploits, to people and their doings to tales and events, that are all elliptic and to us seem mystifying and incomprehensible. Take the case of Bhujyu whom the Aśvins rescued from the tempestuous ocean (I 116, 5; 117, 14-15; VIII 5, 22; etc): who exactly was he and how did he find himself in that predicament?... There are several other similar stories of rescue but without more information; they must have been old since the post-rigvedic literature knows nothing about them. The confident references and the absence of details in the *RV* indicates that they were well known tales. Or take the case of Indra. Why did his mother have such a difficult birth (IV 18, 1-2)? Was Tvaṣṭṛ his father? Did Indra commit parricide (I 80, 14; III, 48, 4)? We don't know for certain. But all these obscurities obviously were not obscurities for the rigvedic seers and their audience. These elliptic allusions had meaning for them being connected with other strands and details in a very wide network of legendry and history, perhaps, that eventually got lost or broken up. So we must be careful and not draw hasty conclusions about anything.

Another aspect is the joy and optimism with which the Vedic people for the most part regard the divine realm and life after death. Most hymns reveal an intimacy with the deities and the gods seem to visit seers and others frequently. There is none of the pessimism we find in Mesopotamia or the gloom of Hades in Greece. Immortality is not a mere possibility: it is almost taken for granted as if a birthright. Most expressive of this is the hymn to Soma by Kaśyapa Mārīca IX 113, 7-11: “O Soma Pavamāna, place me in that imperishable deathless world where shines light everlasting... Make me immortal in the third sphere of inmost heaven where there is movement according to will ... where there is joy (*moda*) and bliss (*ānanda*)...” It seems no accident that this entreaty is addressed to Purifying Soma since it is through a purifying process, as we shall see in §7 below, that the seers reach this realm and sometimes even while embodied in this life; they reach the luminous realm of the gods.

Rigvedic religion has its own many gods. Some of their names have cognates in the other IE branches: eg Vedic Aśvins, Mycenaean Iqeja and Gallic Epona; Dyaus, Greek Zeus, Roman

Jupiter and Germanic Tiwaz; Parjanya, Slavonic Perenu (and variants), Baltic Perkunas and Scandinavian Fjorgyn; and so on. One important difference is that the rigvedic deities do not have the detailed anthropomorphism (or zoomorphism in some instances) of the Greek or Scandinavian gods. Then, although gods have each their own particular attributes or functions, some deities are identified with several others. Thus Agni the Firegod is identified with the Sungod (III 2,14 : head of heaven), with Varuna when born and with Mitra when enkindled (V 3,1) and with Mātariśvan (III, 5,9); in II 1, he is said to be, or to have the attributes of some 15 gods, including Tvaṣṭṛ and Pūṣan and goddesses Aditi, Bharatī and Iḷā ; in V 3, 1 he is said to comprehend all gods. Indra too is identified with Sūrya (VIII 82, 4) and Manu (IV 26, 1). Then, different deities are said to engender the other gods: generally speaking the Parents *pitarau* are Heaven *Dyans* and Earth *Pr̥thivī*, but in X 63, 2 Aditi produces them, in I 113, 9 the Dawn is called the god's Mother, while in II 26, 3 Brahmaṇaspati is their Father and in IX 87, 2, Soma is their Father.

This phenomenon is not found in any other early or late IE religion nor, indeed, in Mesopotamia or Egypt: in these religions the deities are quite distinct and only in rare cases, over a long period, one deity may take over the functions of another and eventually absorb and replace altogether the older deity. Nor can the rigvedic identification be said to arise due to confusion. In some cases we detect, especially in the later Books, the emergence of a deity like Prajāpati who eventually absorbs the functions of an older god like Varuṇa and even Dyaus and Pr̥thivī (who disappear altogether from the scene in the later texts). Of course, no such process is responsible for the identification of Agni with many deities in II, 1 or for the ascription of superiority to different gods in different hymns. The reason for such cases seems to be the underlying idea that all the deities are manifestations of one Primal Cause which itself remains unmanifest. Consequently any one can have this superiority representing at the time the Primal Cause.

The most important difference between the rigvedic religion and other IE traditions is the awareness or knowledge in the *RV* of One Supreme Principle of which all divine and mundane phenomena are manifestations and which inheres in man also. In his 19th century translation of the *RV* Ralf Griffith comments on hymn III 54, 8, *vīsvam ékam* 'one all', citing Wallis's *Cosmology of the Rgveda*: "We find mention in one hymn of a primordial substance or unit out of which the universe was developed" (Griffith 1973 rev ed: 191). Later A B Keith also noted this primal universal power in *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* writing: "If we accept, as we should, the view that individual powers are older in conception than manifestations of a universal power, still it seems natural to suppose that India developed the conception of a power common to the various gods, just as there was admitted the unity of gods by the time of certain Rigvedic hymns" (1925: 446). Keith has my respect as a great vedicist and indologist, but his thinking is not free from the prejudices current in his times. Anthropological investigations were then pursued hotly in many directions among various peoples living in primitive conditions and with non-literate cultures. It was in a way natural to suppose then that these cultures represented the beginnings of man's progress to civilization which included the movement from (primitive) polytheism to (civilized, Christian) monotheism. Recent well documented studies like R Rudgley's *Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age* (1998) show that in fact many primitive peoples had a great deal of knowledge in medicine, mining and metallurgy, agriculture, astronomy etc; they were not at all backward as was formerly thought. In any case, the culture of Indoaryans was quite different from that of the Melanesians or the Hurons to whom Keith refers (ibid). The *RV* is an absolutely primary text and we don't know anything much about pre-rigvedic Indoaryans. In the *RV* itself there are no indications that the idea of Unity is a later development from polytheism.

Mention of the one primal nexus or power is not found only in one or two later hymns but in many, some of which are in the early Books. Certainly hymn X 129, the famous *Nāsadiya Sūkta* or Creation Hymn, is late: here, we read in stanza 2 of *tád ékam* 'That One' which was before existence and non-existence, before death and immortality. Just as late is hymn X 114 where in stanza 5 we read that *vīprāḥ kaváyo vácobhir ékam sántaṃ bahudhā kalpayanti* 'though being

one, wise poets shape it in many forms with their words'. This idea is amplified in I 164, 46 which is not so late: "The poets speak of It, being One, in many ways, naming It Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan". This can be seen as an answer to the question posed earlier in stanza 6 about "The One *ekam*, who in the form of the Unborn *ajásya rūpé* established apart *vi taṣṭambha* these six regions of space". Hymn VIII 58 (one of the Vālahilyas) is probably later: it is addressed to the Viśvedevās, but it is about the One whom the priests invoke in many forms, and after a series of analogies with Agni, Sūrya and Uṣas, the poet concludes *ekam vá idám vi babhūva sarvám* 'being One, it became variously (*vi*) this All [and Everything]'. Then the early III 54, 8 speaks of the separation and diversity of phenomena then tells us "The All which is One *viśvam ekam* governs *patyate* what moves and what is at rest, what walks and what flies, this multifarious manifest creation *viṣuṇam vi jātám*". In the same Maṇḍala III, the early Viśvāmitra family Book, the 22 stanzas of hymn 55 have the refrain *mahád devānám asuratvám ekam* 'great and single is the god-power of the gods', which implies that gods are gods by participating in this single great power existing independently of each one of them.

Thus we have the simultaneous presence of many deities and the One Supreme from which they have all issued and which any individual deity can represent (as indeed Agni, Indra, Varuṇa and others seem to do at times). Karel Werner showed (1989) that the older "evolutionary view of religion" did not apply to Vedism. "In place of a linear notion of evolution of the Vedic religion from lower to higher stages", he wrote (p 13) "we shall then have a structural notion of synchronicity, of simultaneous coexistence of multiple stages and layers", or, in other words, Monism and Polytheism at once. He dismissed the notion that the Vedic deities were deifications of natural phenomena or "abstractions of action", and adopted R Otto's "hidden power of the numinous" (p 21). Here is his view: "From the earliest time there was in the Vedas a dynamic notion of reality as pulsating between the dimensions of the unmanifest and the manifest, the numinous and the phenomenal. This process of pulsation was itself understood as going on on different levels and time scales: on the scale of cosmogonic cycles of ... manifestation and reabsorption ... on the scale of periodic ritual renewals of the existing cosmos ... in the New Year rites; and on the scale of constant momentary flow of support and sustenance to the phenomenal from the depth of the numinous, both on the general and individual level ... Although some notion of this all-embracing oneness must have been present in various degrees in the minds of virtually all Vedic people, the concern for it in the sense of aiming at the full personal vision of this ultimate reality – in other words, the drive towards the ādhyātmiķa understanding and apprehension of reality – was then, as in all other times, limited to a minority. Far more interest was directed towards the diverse lower forces of manifestation issuing from the one power behind the scene" (p 23)

## 6) The Supreme in man.

The Supreme which is the Primal Cause of all creation in the *RV* inheres in man also. I shall call it Supreme hereafter for brevity's sake and I shall not use the term 'Absolute' to avoid associations with the Upanishads. A good point to start in order to demonstrate this inherence of the Supreme in man is the *Nāsadiya Sūkta*. But before considering that hymn, let us look at I 164, 21 which is as explicit as can be in the *RV*. Having mentioned in the previous stanza (20) the two birds sitting on the same tree, one eating and the other watching, the poet says now: "Where ceaselessly the fine-feathered birds sing out in light their share of immortality with knowledge, there the mighty herdsman of the whole universe, *sá mā dhīraḥ pākam ātrā viveśa*, he the wise one has settled/ entered into me, the simple one". We may be uncertain about the exact location where the birds sing, but here the poet of this long, enigmatic hymn states plainly that the Supreme is within him.

The *Nāsadiya Sūkta* presents the same idea in a different way. This hymn X 129 is invariably badly translated from the very first stanza. Here pādas c and d read *kīm āvarivaḥ kīha kāsya śármann ambhaḥ kīm āśīd gáhanam gambhīrám* which roughly means 'What covered (or, was there covering)? Where? (In) whose protection? Was it *ambhas* profound, unfathomable?' All

translations give for *ambhas* “water”, *Wasser* in Geldner (1951-7); even Jeanine Miller, who always approached the hymns with great sensitivity and strove to bring out some spiritual significance, here translated “ocean” (1985) and “water” and connected it with other early mythologies/religions (1972: 68) since they all (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Judaic) speak of water as a primary substance at the early stage of creation. I beg to differ because ‘water’ cannot be justified here. The first stanza of our hymn negates any substance since it says unambiguously “Then there was no existence nor non-existence” etc. If there was no existence of any kind, there could not have been any “water”. Therefore, despite the associations of *ambhas* with *abhra*, *ambara*, *ambu* which denote ‘cloud, sky, rain, water’, here *ambhas* means ‘potency’ (*Gewalt* in Mayrhofer). Be it noted that this is the only incidence of *ambhas* in the *RV*! Water may appear in stanza 3 as *salila*; but I have doubts about this also because here we have *tamas* ‘darkness, inertia’ then *salila* and then *tucchya* ‘the void’, the water being intermediate, in between two wholly non-material entities. Here *salila* (in MSD: flowing, surging, unstable) must denote ‘fluid energy’: so there was darkness and void and fluid unstable energy. Out of this ocean of energy which was nonetheless *tucchya* ‘void’ arose “that-which-is-becoming” *ābhu* and which would evolve as the manifest creation.

The one Supreme mentioned in stanza 2 is before all this, unmanifest, before time and space and obviously not affected by the subsequent stages of manifestation. In stanza 3 then arises *ābhu* ‘that-which-becomes’. To me this sounds very much like the distinction Plato makes in *Timaios* 27D, the *on aei* ‘being eternal’ which has no becoming and no change, and the *gignomenon aei* ‘becoming always’ but never truly being. In the *Nāsadiya* hymn this “becoming” arises, we are told, through (the *mahinā* power of) *tapas*. Now *tapas* is another word that has, I think, suffered much in translation. It does mean ‘heat’, of course, and ‘fervour, penance, austerity, meditation’. There is no doubt about these meanings. The *Dhātupāṭha* gives for the dhātu  $\sqrt{tap}$ -a *santāpe* and so covers the senses of ‘heat’ and the like; but it also gives *aiśvarya* ‘supreme dominion’. There is no reason to assume that *tapas* is *always* connected to the dhātu of heat. It could also be connected to the dhātu of ‘power/dominion’. What would *tapas* mean in this case? Since all activities and changes are governed by laws, *aiśvarya* is the power that frames the laws and can change them: it is the supreme power of transformation which can operate not only through heat but also every other available medium or energy. So that-which-becomes arose with the power of transformation – or energy, heat, light, vibration.

The next stage in this development is the appearance of desire *kāma* which evolved or turned wholly upon that-which-is-becoming and that was the first seed of mind. Now this is both the universal and the human mind. And here, in their heart *hṛdi* the sages discover the bond of being *sat* in the *asat* ‘non-being’, or, more loosely, “the bond between the existent and non-existent”. Here the well-known philologist F B J Kuiper took liberties with the word *bandhu* translating it as ‘origin’: he wrote, “the sages ... found the origin of *sāt* in *āsāt*” and thus turned the meaning exactly upside down (1975: 116). The *sat*, ‘that-which-is’ would be connected with the Supreme and the *asat* ‘the non-existent’ with the *ābhu*, ie the evolving element. The important point here for our inquiry is that this “bond” is within the mind or heart of man. Then come (in st 5) impregnators *retodhāḥ* and great forces *mahimānaḥ*, energy *svadhā* and propulsion *prayati* and somewhere here the gods (in st 6), after the initial emanation *arvāg...asyā visārjanena*. So all these powers or substances are within the mind or heart of man and a sage can discover them with *maniṣā* ‘intelligence, discrimination, wisdom’.

The figure of Agni provides another pertinent and secure aspect. In V 13, 6 is said to surround the gods (*paribhūr as-*) as a felly the spokes. In him, says V 3, 1 all the gods are encompassed and this same hymn identifies Agni with Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra, Aryaman, the Maruts and Rudra. Then, II 1 identifies him, as was mentioned above in §4, with 12 major gods and five goddesses. Stanza 12 of this hymn calls him *uttamām vāyas* ‘highest vital energy/power’ and I 31, 9 “wakeful god among gods”. He knows all areas of wisdom (*viśvāni kāvyāni* III 1, 17) and is called *viśvavid* and *viśvavedas* ‘all-knower’ as well as *jātavedas*, which is explained in VI 15, 13 as *viśvā veda jānimā* ‘he who knows all generations’. We can therefore take it that

Agni here represents the Supreme. All the gods are, according to X 129, 5, within the mind of man and presumably personify psychological and organic functions. Agni too is included. It may be argued that this is a late hymn and what it says does not apply to the earlier bulk of the hymns. S Kak's study (2000), which shows that the gods do represent forces and functions within man (also Kazanas 2002), contains later material from the Atharvaveda and Brāhmaṇas and so must be discarded for our purposes. Nonetheless, some early hymns in the *RV* present Agni as a force within man. In hymn VI 9, 6 Agni is the light and source of inspiration *kratu* within man's heart *hr̥daya āhita-*, and is in III 26, 1 perceived through mind *manasā nicāy-* (cf also I 67, 2; IV 1, 20). W O' Flaherty, without adducing any evidence from the hymns, sees Agni as "the sun within your umbilicus" (1980: 46); but Gonda (1963), J Miller (1974) and Johnson (1980) regard Agni as representing the unitary force of consciousness that vivifies and watches over all the functions in man leading finally to immortality (something to be examined below in §7).

Another fruitful approach is through the incidence of *brāhman* in the hymns. This *brahma* too has an aspect that can be identified with the Supreme and is in man. The term *brāhman* (as distinct from *brahmān*) denotes the force inherent in prayer and ritual. But as Keith noted long before Gonda's illuminating study on this (1950), "in many passages [in the *RV*] it seems as if Brahman must be taken rather as a holy power than as prayer or holy rite" (1925: 446). Keith refers of course to the *ācittam brāhma* 'the inconceivable brahman' (I 152, 5) or, as VIII 3, 9 puts it, *tād brāhma pūrvācittaye* 'that brahman which is for primary consideration'. It is through this brahma-power that the great ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha helped Sudās defeat the confederation of the 10 hostile kings (VII 33, 3). Like Vāk, Speech, the brahman has four levels and that other great ṛṣi Atri rehabilitated the sun through the fourth level (V 40, 6) which J Puhvel called "silent meditation, as opposed to varieties of articulated speech" (1989: 153) – the most silent and most potent. This, says hymn I 164, 35, *brahmāyām vācāḥ paramām vyòma* 'this brahma-power is Vāk's highest heaven'. This probably refers to the most silent state of That One Supreme, the source of all, which is alone and all One before anything else exists, before the desire moves to generate the creation. This Vāk or brahman is obviously innate in man, otherwise man would be unable to sing or speak or pray. As another seer puts it after he has lauded the various weapons of war, *brāhma vārma mamāntaram* 'my inmost armour is the brahma-power' (vi 75, 19). The adjective *antara* can in no way refer to the gross external sounds of a prayer.

In this section I have aimed to show that the One Supreme in the *RV* which corresponds to the upanishadic Absolute is **indeed** presented in several hymns, in one form or another, as being within man. Many passages in the *AV* confirm the rigvedic evidence we have examined. Some of them we mentioned in §2 earlier (X 2, 7 and 8 and XI 8). The *AV* hymn VII 1, 1 says that with truth-speaking, by means of manas and reflection or inner vision *dhīti-* men can realize the fourth level of brahman. Hymn XI, 2, 32 says that the wise man (*vidvan*) regards as Man himself (*puruṣa*) the brahman and that all other functions in him are *devatāḥ* 'deities' – like cows in their pen. But the rigvedic evidence has proved quite adequate on its own. It remains now to see how in the *RV* hymns a man may realize the Supreme within himself.

## 6) *Yajña A.*

Stanza I 86 of the *Manusmṛiti* gives the chief quality for each yuga: *tapah param kṛtayuge tretāyām jñānam ucyate; dvāpare yajñam evāhur dānam ekam kalau yuge*. Thus we have *tapas* for Kṛta, *jñāna* for Tretā, *yajña* for Dvāpara and *dāna* for Kali. A stanza with the same import is *Vāyu Purāṇa* I 8, 64.

Although all four qualities are present in the *RV*, yet the preponderant one is *yajña*. The word *yajña* is not so entirely simple as one might think. The term 'sacrifice' which normally translates it is equally ambivalent having today three principal meanings. One denotes the religious act or ritual whereby something (a liquid, grains, an animal immolated for the purpose, often placed in fire) is offered to a deity. The second meaning denotes the thing or animal offered. The third is a figurative extension whereby something is stopped or surrendered for something else, usually for the benefit of someone else – as when parents "sacrifice" their own holidays or some other

enjoyment to save money for their child's further education. The etymology of the word takes us back to Latin *sacri-ficus* 'making sacred' where the *-ficus* is a weakened form of *facere* 'to make'. Now *yajña* has the first two meanings and the etymological one, but not the third one.

Many valuable studies on *yajña* have been done in the past from F Kittel (1872) and E W Hopkins (1896) to K R Potdar (1953) and Biardeau & Malamoud (1976) to the more recent publications of H W Bodewitz (1990) and J C Heesterman (1993) or specifically on the horse-sacrifice by S Kak (2002). Quite rightly, for example, Kak mentions the view of some scholars that "sacrifice provides a means to the community to redirect feelings of violence and aggression, saving it from collapse," then gives his own view of the Vedic sacrifice: "(i) Its ambiguities are much deeper than sacrifice elsewhere, and it operates at several levels, including the spiritual... ii) it posits an identity of the Sacrificer and the universe. The latter idea is perhaps why the "knowledge" central to the sacrifice becomes, in the end, the purpose of the sacrifice. This knowledge becomes the vehicle of the transformation of the participants." Keith had noted this idea of the sacrificer's transformation when, after a lengthy analysis of many different aspects, he stated that the performer "is filled with a sacred spirit as is the victim which he offers" (1925: 276). R N Dandekar gave a fine summary linking sacrifice to cosmic order: "A sacrifice, it was believed, was not a mere propitiatory rite but it possessed a profound cosmic significance. A cultic act established a magical rapport with the entire cosmos. A sacrifice was not merely a representation in miniature of the cosmic order, *rta*, but it was also a necessary condition for the proper working of the cosmic order. The performance of specific cultic rites was made to correspond with the rhythmic course of nature" (1967: 70). Here sacrifice is mainly the ritual itself. Then, there is J C Heesterman who sees Vedic sacrifice as "a 'play' [=game, not drama] that makes the tensions and uncertainties visible ... [and] turns tension into conflict, ambivalence into paradox, uncertainty into impending disaster, and disaster into triumph" (1993: 215). All this sounds rather melodramatic. But then he says that, unlike the Iranians who made the fire "enthroned in its temple... transcend self and community", the Vedic ritualists made the fire and its cult enter "into man's individual self, the *ātman*"; he adds, "Not the ambivalent and unpredictable fire but the *ātman* was to encompass and control life and death" (ibid). What Heesterman says is true, of course, but I doubt very much that the fire-cult came before the knowledge of the Self in its personal and supra-personal aspect. After all, both the Iranians and the Indians worshipped other divine beings apart from Fire, so religion could not have started from the Fire-cult. Besides, any being, certainly man, is aware first of all of his own existence (i.e. his own Self) before having awareness of other things and thinking about them. Jeanine Miller, again, wrote with much truth: "The key to the basic significance of the Vedic sacrifice may be found in the words *tapas*, *apas*, *karma* and *yajña*. The Vedic sacrifice is a work (*apas*); an action (*karman*); a participation, communication-in-worship, communion, these being expressed in the one word *yajña*. These three basic concepts can be examined in relation to *tapas*" (1985: 208). Thus she distinguished between 'sacrifice' (=a ritual?) and *yajña* (=participation, worship, communion) while *tapas* "is sacrifice in its deepest sense of making sacred, an action that is both self-limiting and self-expanding, an offering of self to receive or contact a greater Self" (ibid 210).

Let us now look at the word *yajña* itself.

The meaning of *yajña* in the Vedic texts is fairly complex. In fact in the *RV* the word means 'worship, offer-of-praise' and also 'offer of material things'.

Mayrhofer gives for *yajati*, *-te* the senses *verhert*, *huldigt*, *opfert*, *weiht* 'worships, does-homage, offers, hallows'. These meanings reflect in large part the definition in the *Dhātupāṭha*: *yaj-a deva-pūjā-saṅgati-karaṇa-dāneṣu* where *pūjā* is 'worship, reverence, homage' to the gods and *dāna* 'offering, giving'; *saṅgati* is 'meeting/uniting with' and *karaṇa* 'making, instrument'. All meanings are readily comprehensible except the last one *karaṇa* 'making, instrument': it could mean 'being an instrument for the gods' or doing something for them, or 'making (oneself) something else?) a god'. I shall take the last option: *deva-karaṇa* 'making oneself a god'.

Let us look more closely at *saṅgati* and *karaṇa*. In the *RV* we find many instances of gods

and men meeting together. First, the seers repeatedly call on Agni, or see him, to be present at a meeting or sacrifice (with other gods), as in the very first hymn “may the god [ie Agni] come here with the [other] gods” (I 1, 5) and “[Agni,] be for us easy to reach, as a father to his son” (st 9). Here it will be argued (and with good reason) that it is the physical fire deified because of the benefits it gives to men. But another hymn describes Agni as *idāṃ jyótir amṛtaṃ mārtyeṣu* ‘this light immortal within mortals’ (VI 9, 4). Here the locative plural could be rendered as ‘among mortals’ (O’ Flaherty 1981: 116; Geldner 2, 101, *unter den Sterblichen*) but this must be rejected because of stanzas 5 and 6. St 6 calls Agni *jyótir hṛdaya āhitam* ‘light placed in the heart’ and this can allow no doubt about Agni being a force within man. St 5 calls him ‘swiftest thought’ and ‘mental-energy’ *krātu* (so also O’Flaherty and Geldner). Thus Agni is not just the fire on the physical altar of the sacrifice or whatever religious rite. Then, there is the famous meeting of seer Vasiṣṭha with god Varuṇa and their sojourn in the god’s boat (VII 88). Hymn VII 76, 4 states explicitly that the ancient seers, adherents of *ṛta* ‘truth, cosmic order’, were the gods’ companions in enjoyment: *devānāṃ sadhamāda āsann ṛtāvānaḥ kavāyaḥ pūrvyāsaḥ*. Just as explicit is hymn VIII 48, 1 where gods and mortals come all together *saṃcaranti* for the Soma rite. However, the seer Viśvāmitra says (III 54, 4-5) that while former truth-speakers reached (or knew well: *āvividra*) the gods (Heaven and Earth, here) now people see the gods’ lowest abodes (= *avamā sādāṃsi*: here, the stars probably), the gods being in remote, hidden regions: who now can declare the path leading to them?... The sage’s words imply a change in conditions and perhaps a new Yuga: it is not easy now to reach the gods.

It should be noted that it is not only mortals who (seek to) approach the gods. The gods themselves approach mortals and rescue, cure and help them in diverse ways. The Aśvins rejuvenate and befriend the aged Kali (I 112, 15; X 39, 8) and so similarly Cyavana (I 116, 10 etc; also *Śatapatha Br* IV 1, 5, 1ff). Indra is frequently called a compassionate helper (I, 84, 19; etc), a deliverer, a friend, a brother and father (III 53, 5; IV 17, 17; X 48, 1; X 152, 1; etc), who comes and bestows goods as *maghavan* ‘the bountiful one’; he helps not only Turvaśa and Yadu cross floods or rivers (I 174, 9; etc) and king Sudās against the 10 kings (VII, 33; etc) but also the young girl Apālā (VIII 80). This god also is internalized when he identifies himself with various seers like Kakṣivān and Uśanās (VI 26, 1). In hymn VIII 70, 3 it is, furthermore, suggested that Indra or his state may be attained by men. And the same is said of other gods and their attributes, as in the well-known Gāyatrī prayer of Savitṛ (III 62, 10).

We have now come to *karāṇa* ‘making (oneself? or another?) a god’. This is Mayrhofer’s ‘hallow’ which is “to sanctify” or “divinize”. The artisans Ṛbhus become gods in the Mansion of the Sungod by serving there after their miraculous works of rejuvenating the Parents, the creation of a cow, the production of 4 chalices out of one, etc (I 20, 2-4; I 110, 2-4; IV 36, 4): these miracles are performed through *dhī/dhīti* ‘vision which realizes itself in the material world’ (Gonda 1963: 101, 195), through *manas* ‘power-of-mind’ (III 60, 2; IV 33, 9) and *brahma* ‘mystic power’ manifesting also in prayer and ritual (IV 36). All this of course implies knowledge and power out of the ordinary. Indra himself is said to win heaven through *tapas* (X 167, 1) and become glorious and supreme through an oblation (*havis*: X 159, 4). In fact, all gods are said to acquire immortality (X 53, 10) by the grace of Savitṛ the Sungod (IV 54, 2) or through Agni’s mind-forces *kratubhiḥ* (VI 7, 4) or by drinking Soma (IX 106, 8).

## 7) Yajña B

*Vāyu Purāṇa* I 57, 86-125 presents two views of *yajña*. One, supposedly instituted by Indra (st 91ff), entails animal-slaughter. The other “consists of piety and Mantras” (st 117). It is also said that godhood is attained by *yajña* (st 117) and *karmanyāsa* ‘renunciation of (the fruit of) action’ (st 118). *RV* VIII 70, 3 agrees and disagrees with this stating “None attains Indra by means of action or sacrifices” *na... karmanā... na yajñaiḥ*. This is unequivocal. *Yajña* is definitely and frequently practised in the hymns with praises and oblations bringing or requesting benefits; but, we are told, godhood (represented here by the state of Indra who was the most popular of the gods) or a higher level of being, of consciousness and power, cannot be attained

only by yajñas or by action. What then?... As was mentioned earlier, Indra gained heaven *svar* through *tapas* (X 167, 1). All the gods acquired immortality with the ministrations of Savitr (IV 54, 2) or Agni (VI 7, 4) or Soma (IX 106, 8) but we are not told how exactly. AV XI 5, 19 says that ‘through spiritual living (*brahmacaryeṇa*) and *tapas* the gods drove death away from themselves’. RV X 154, 2 may also refer to this in saying *tāpasā yé svár yayúḥ* ‘those who went to heaven through *tapas*’: other verses in this hymn mention separately heroes who gave their lives in battle, those who practised generosity, those who follow *ṛta*, the Fathers (also through *tapas*), the poets (*kavi-*) and ṛṣis, the last two at least practising knowledge, presumably: so “those who went to heaven through *tapas*” may be the gods.

Another aspect of yajña is an inner transcendent action. This is traced by Coomaraswamy (in his 1942 paper) and by Jeanine Miler (in her 1985 study, ch 13). The one rite repeatedly and extensively mentioned in the RV is that of Soma – the pressing, the pouring, the filtering, the drinking. All this has its esoteric side. Thus Soma flows forth “pressed/effused/urged (*sutá-*) with *ṛtavākéna* ‘right word’, *satyéna* ‘truth’, *śraddháyā* ‘faith’ and *tāpasā* ‘transforming power’ “ (IX 113, 2). RV X 85, 3-4 says, “The Soma the brahmins know, of that nobody tastes... As you stand listening to the singers, Soma, no earthly person tastes of you.” People at the ordinary level (=earthly) presumably do not experience the higher state of brahmins. Soma as a drink will of course act internally both at the physical and the mental level. But even the purifying filter (which is normally outside) for the juice pressed out of the plant is said to be within the heart: “three filters has he set within the heart *hr̥dy-antár ádadhe*” (IX 73, 8). This internal purification is done by means of insight, inner vision or knowledge *dhī*: hymn IX 67, 27 prays to the gods to purify the poet through *dhīyā*.

Obviously related to this inner visionary processes is the sacrifice mentioned in the hymn to Viśvakarman, the Allmaker (X 81, 5): *svayám yajasva tanvám vṛdhānaḥ* ‘You yourself sacrifice augmenting your *tanu*’ where, since the god does not have a gross material body and in any case such a body cannot grow very much larger, *tanu* must refer to a subtle, spiritual body of knowledge or consciousness which can expand. Coomaraswamy traces (ibid) this theme not only in post-rigvedic texts to the Upanishads (as Miller also does to a degree) but also in Greek and Christian texts.

It would seem then that yajña in the RV has two aspects: one is the external ritual and its mechanics, the other an inner process of purification and illumination (like that of *tapas* and *jñāna*). The first is *karma* ‘action’ and seeks to propitiate the deities through prayer, praise and oblations on the material plane and thus obtain various benefits like sons, cows and horses but not godhood or a higher state of being, consciousness and power. The second employs, and participates in, the ritual but is an inner action with which prayer or praise itself is refined through concentration and the intercession of a higher faculty within man called a “deity” – Agni, Indra, Soma or whoever. After all, the hymns tell us that *ékam vā idám ví babhuva sárvaṃ* ‘It being One has become variously (*vi*) this all [and everything]’ (VIII 58, 2) and that the wise seers speak of It, being One, in many ways/forms naming It Agni, Indra, Mitra, etc (I 164, 46 and X 114, 5). Thus any deity can represent the Supreme One and elevate to a higher state. And so in a hymn to Indra (III 31, 9) Viśvāmitra says: “They [=the sages] rested seeking with their mind (*manasā*), making (*kr̥ṇvāna-*) with hymns, a way to immortality (*amṛtatva-*)”. In VII 13, 3, Agni (who as we saw earlier is a light within the heart) is invoked to find a path for the holy power of prayer *bráhmaṇe*. On his part, Indra is not only the mighty warrior but also *viśváyū-* ‘life in all [creatures]’ (VI 17, 1; 33, 4; etc): he not only leads to victory in battle but also makes for the invoker his prayer (*bráhman*) ‘all-spirit’ (*viśvápsu-* ‘consisting of living breath’ Mayrhofer under *psu*) and through this *brahman* enlivens the devotee (VI 35, 3 and 5). *Brahmaṇaspati*, ‘the Lord of Prayer’ himself also can, if properly invoked, give easy access to the gods’ feast (*devavīti-*) but will not let the impious (*dureva-*) attain *úttaram sumnám* ‘the higher joy’ (II 23, 7-8). In IX 96, 10 even while being purified (*pūyámāna*) Soma is to find the pathway. Then in a hymn to Soma, IX 67, 23, Agni is entreated to purify (*punīhi*) “our prayer (*brahman*)” with his cleansing glow. This inner, purificatory process, the second aspect of yajña, is, I should think, closely

related to the four *padāni* ‘stages, levels’ of Vāk ‘Speech’ (I 164, 45) known to brahmins who have comprehension: of these four, ordinary men use only one, that with which they speak; the other three are kept in concealment and cause no motion. The purification would be an inner refinement bringing one’s consciousness to the final level (the most silent and immobilise) which elsewhere is called “the fourth holy-power-of-prayer (*bráhma*:- V 40, 6)” or the *ácittam bráhma* ‘the brahman beyond thought/conception’ (I 152, 5): it is from this state and with this power that the great seers like Atri or Vasiṣṭha perform deeds that to us seem miracles (V 40, 6; VII 33, 3). Through this purification the seers transcend the limits of the ordinary world and its time and enter the realm of divine bliss and immortality. “We have become immortal *amṛtāḥ*; we have gone to the light and found the gods” (VIII 48, 3).

Of course there is no actual description of the technique involved in this process. This is understandable since the *RV* is no encyclopedia of myths, a theological treatise, a handbook of ritual or a manual on Self-realisation. But there are hints and clues. The four stages or levels of Speech Vāk provide a good example. The gross spoken word with which we ordinarily communicate can be taken as the first stage: this indeed usually causes movement to the listeners, always internal and often external as well. Then we have the second stage, the unvoiced thoughts in the mind which may or may not be externalized. This distinction is clear enough. Then, in the *RV* the mind *manas* is often juxtaposed with the heart *hṛd* and the latter, as some scholars noted (Miller 1974: 82; Keith 1925: 404), became a technical term denoting the wider or finer space in which “the mind has its abode” (Keith, *ibid*). At any rate, in several passages it is said that the conception of a hymn, prayer or mantra arises in the heart, then passes into the mind and finally gets expressed with the voice outwardly. In I 105, 15 it is Varuṇa who makes the prayer *bráhma* and discloses the thought through the heart *ví urnoti hṛdā matím*. The idea of this process is found in many other passages like X 71, 8: *hṛdā taṣṭeṣu mánaso jáveṣu* ‘impulses of mind are fashioned through the heart’. Thus inspiration, flashes of insight or concepts appear in the heart, get formulated in mind and stream out in expressions of gross speech: “given to inner vision (*dhiyamdhāḥ*) men sang out mantras conceived by the heart and mind” (IV 58, 6) and so on. Heart *hṛd*, then, is the third stage where manifest speech, or indeed any other manifest action, has its inception. We should not ignore also that in V 85, 2 Varuṇa is said to place *kratu* ‘intellectual power’ within the hearts of men. Nor must we forget that as the *Nāsadiya* hymn X 129 puts it, “Sages seeking with discrimination (*manīṣā*) found within their heart (*hṛdi*) the bond of *sat* in *asat*”. Now both *sat* ‘the real/existent’ and *asat* ‘unreal/non-existent’ are attributes of *ābhu* that-which-is becoming. Beyond it all is, of course, the Supreme, that One primal Power, the source of all and everything. The bond of *sat* is the connection with that One and this is the fourth and finest level, if one may use such terms to describe It – unborn *aja* and unchanging/ indestructible *akṣara*.

The question naturally arises “How does purification or transformation come about?” Obviously, as I mentioned § 6 above, help from a higher power within man seen and spoken of as a deity, (any one of several deities representing the Supreme) is necessary. So entreaty/prayer/supplication is a prerequisite. Most hymns are such prayers. But what makes the deity respond? Or in other words, how does this force help or what can make its help effective? The answer is very simple: sincerity of purpose, humility and attention. The first two need not detain us long. The adjective *pāka* ‘simple, naive, honest’ covers both qualities and occurs many times in contexts precisely related to our discussion: in I 164, 21 the wise keeper of the world has entered the *pāka* ‘simple’ seer; in III 9, 7 Agni’s wonders are clear to the *pāka*- ‘simple one’. Attention is the focusing of the mind on any object, internal or external. This is not discussed much any more than *pāka* because, presumably, it is taken for granted among the seers. Obviously when they met in their assemblies or synods (could we say ‘conferences’?) they paid attention to what each one recited or sang – their own as well as the others’ inspirations. They would not need to comment much on this. Just as I don’t mention the technicalities of the system of English grammar whereby I use words in certain sequences and with the endings they have. Even so there are several clues. A very clear statement is in V 81, 1 *juñjáte mána utá juñjate*

*dhīyo viprāḥ* ‘the wise poets harness their mind and reflections’. Surely *yuj-* ‘harnessing’ implies a higher will or purpose which commands and directs the mental energies and this must involve much attention. Another verb the seers use is *dhī-* ‘reflect/ponder/envision’ as in III 38, 1 where Viśvāmitra reflects to obtain inspiration. ‘Reflect/-ing/ion’ are good words for *dhī-* and its derivatives because, as J Gonda has shown (1963), these have also the sense of shining, reflecting and transmitting light. When we think and ponder purposefully we reach a new or deeper understanding, which may be transmitted to others too. It is an inner vision and a realization in light. Thus we have some revealing lines in the hymn to Pūṣan, VII 90, 4-5: *urú jyótir vividur dīdhyanāḥ* ‘they found the spacious light even as they were reflecting; then *té satyéna manasā dīdhyanāḥ svéna yuktāsaḥ krátunā vahanti* ‘reflecting with truthful mind they carry onward being harnessed [again the verb *yuj* > *yukta-*] to their own power-of-intelligence (*kratu-*). In X 67, 2 the Angirases are said to hold the rank of sages because they ‘reflect aright’ *rjú dīdhyanāḥ*.

The first stage, as was said, is the gross external utterance. The second is the mental action which implies being harnessed to a higher power. These are mentioned summarily in AV VII 1, 1 with the words *dhīti*, derivative of *dhī*, and *manas*. This verse then gives the third stage as ‘being enhanced/expanded’ *vāṛdhāna-* while with the fourth is perceived “the name of the cow”. Of enhancement or expansion there is no direct evidence in the RV. Many hymns do mention that various gods like Indra and Agni are magnified through the songs and lauds of the seers or by their own power, but there is no direct reference to the seers themselves or other human beings (except perhaps in I 167, 8). One could argue, of course, that since the deities are also forces within man like the functions of the senses, of action, of intelligence, etc, the enhancement of the gods is also enhancement of these functions. This I leave aside, because there is ample evidence of enhancement and refinement with indirect references which imply very clearly expansion of some kind. One such clear example is found in III 33, 9: here it is said *niṇyám hṛdayasya praketaiḥ sahasraśam abhí sám caranti* ‘With impulses of the heart [the Vasiṣṭhas] fully penetrate the thousand-branched secret’ which may be a reference to the cosmic Tree of Life (or knowledge), possibly also mentioned in relation to Varuṇa in I 24, 7. Whatever else this 1000-branched thing is, it is very big and implies expansion of perception, confirmed by the second part of the stanza which has the seers enter into the divine/celestial realm of the Apsarases and Yama. Another instance of enhancement we meet in VIII 6, 10 where the seer Kaṇva says: “Having received from my father the essential knowledge (*medhā-*) of the Cosmic Order (*ṛta-*) I was born even like the sungod Sūrya.” A similar expansion which is full liberation is recorded in Vāmadeva’s famous hymns IV 26 and 27 when he identified with Sūrya, Manu, Kakṣivant and Uśanas and, by implication, Indra; while still in the womb, moreover, he knew all the generations of gods and like the wondrous bird śyena broke through the hundred metal-hard encirclements. Yes, I know this is supposed to be a legend about the eagle/hawk that was imprisoned (how in 100 metal forts?) but I prefer the interpretation in *Aitareya Up* II 1, 5. All these examples suggest the second birth in the spiritual world and this brings us to the fourth stage *turiya*. This is the *akṣara* the unchanging indestructible sound in highest heaven wherein all the gods abide. Reaching this state the seers became themselves *akṣara*.

This process of divinization or union with the Supreme is depicted in the RV also in terms of Soma, who, like Savitṛ or Agni is said to have conferred immortality to the gods (IX 106, 8: see above). Soma too is said to have four states in IX 96. In stanza 18 he is said to be *ṛṣimanās* ‘one who has the visionary mind of a seer’, *ṛṣikṛt* ‘one who makes the seer’, *svarśāḥ* ‘one who discloses the heavenly light’ and leader of wise poets, a mighty god about to disclose his third state *ṛtīyam dhāma...śiśānan*; in st 19 this mighty one declares his fourth state. These four states are, of course, four stages in the preparation of the soma-drink, but the adjectives that describe this deity *ṛṣimanās*, *ṛṣikṛt* and many others (eg *ṛtāsya jihvā* ‘tongue of Cosmic Order’ and *pátir dhiyāḥ* ‘lord of insight/intuition’ IX 75, 2; *viśvasya rājā* ‘king of all’, *ásamaṣṭakāvyaḥ* ‘of infinite wisdom’ IX 76, 4; etc) place him onto a plane much beyond the mechanics of the ritual. Moreover, as was indicated earlier, the filtering and purification of Soma was an internal process of mind and heart.

Through this purification the seers transcended the limits of the ordinary world, its space and time, and entered the realm of divine bliss and immortality. As X 181 states, “They found what lay secretly high above, the supreme domain of yajña... They found through mind while reflecting (*mānasā dīdhyānāḥ*) the first path to the gods (sts 2, 3). Thus the seers themselves assure us: “We have drunk soma: we have become immortal; we have gone to the light and found the gods’ (VIII 48, 3).

But some at least went, it seems, beyond the domain of the deities. For they had a power now that could command the gods; and the gods obeyed their wishes bringing rain and prosperity, stopping rivers or defeating superior hostile armies. At any rate, this is the picture painted in the hymns.

## 8) Conclusions.

In this study I set out to show that the main teachings of the Upanishads and particularly the unity of atman-brahman, the individual and universal Self, and its realization, are found in the *RV* couched in “images and mythological themes” rather than systematic expositions and definitions.

One basic aspect of the Upanishads is the guru-śiṣya tradition whereby the teachings are transmitted – orally as far as is known – from teacher to student or father to son. This is repeatedly found stated in *Chāndogya Up* IV 9, 3, VI 14, 2 and VIII 15, 1, in *Taittirīya Up* I 9, 1 etc: it is best summed up in “study and teach”. The teacher-disciple and inter-family relationship is exemplified in *Ch Up* III 11, 5: “A father may declare this [teaching about] brahman to the eldest son or to a worthy pupil”. Later on in the same Upanishad (VI 8ff) Uddalaka is shown instructing his son Śvetaketu. In the *RV* we read of the families of the ṛṣis Aṅgirasas, Bhṛguṣ, Vasiṣṭhas et al, who preserved and transmitted the sacred lore. The seer Kaṇva was also mentioned as having received from his father the essential knowledge of the Cosmic Order which resulted in his second birth (*RV* VIII 6, 10).

The main teaching of the Upanishads on the unity of ātman-brahman does not need further exemplification – other than *ayam-ātmā brahma B Up* II 5, 19. In the *RV* the Herdsman of the universe is within man, as we saw stated in I 164, 21. In the Nāsadiya hymn X 129 the *bandhu* of eternal and immutable Being *sat* is within man’s heart. The fourth and finest level of Vāk or of the holy-power *brahman* is also within man’s heart (*RV* I 164, 44; V 40, 6) and so is lord Agni as the light and source of all inspiration (VI 9, 5-6).

In the Upanishads the realisation of this Unity, the realisation that one is indeed the Absolute Brahman is achieved through knowledge: so *BUp* 15, 9 states *ya evaṃ veda ahaṃ brahmāsmīti sa idam sarvaṃ bhavati* ‘whoever knows this “I am brahman” he becomes this whole universe’; *Muṇḍaka Up* III 2, 9 says *sa yo ha vai tat paramaṃ brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati* ‘whoever verily knows the supreme Brahman, he becomes brahman himself’. But, on the other hand, this knowledge does not come with mere instruction or theoretical knowledge, nor by ascetic austerity or ritual and action (*Muṇḍaka Up* III 1, 8 and 2, 3; *Kaṭha Up* I 2, 23; *BUp* III 8, 10). All these are necessary preliminaries, of course, but in the end as *Muṇḍaka* (III 2, 3) and *Kaṭha* (I 2, 23) say, it comes by grace: The Self is attained by the person He chooses and to that person He reveals Himself. In the *RV* too the hymns speak of harnessing the mind and its energies (V 81, 1; VII 90, 4-5) and of practising virtues like truth-speaking and liberality, but VIII 70, 3 states unequivocally “None attains Indra by means of action or sacrifices” *na...karmaṇā ... na yajñaiḥ*. X 71, 4cd states that goddess Vāk reveals herself to someone as a loving wife to her husband. So, in the end, as at all stages, the seer entreats the higher powers to bring him to illumination: this is grace, the *anuḡrāha* or *kṛpā* that will be met in later writings. *RV* IX 113, 7-11 characteristically prays: “O Soma Pavamāna, place me in that imperishable deathless world...” etc. True, here we have duality, but, as we said, in the *RV* the upanishadic ideas are expressed in images, symbols and myth, and they are not abstract thoughts or speculations but experiences and realizations.

As for knowledge, this stares at us from almost every hymn. In the very first hymn of Bk I (st 5) Agni is *kavīkratu* ‘endowed with the mental power of the sage’; in the second hymn (st 2)

the praising priests are *aharvídaḥ* ‘knowers of the appropriate days’; in hymn three (st 12) goddess Sarasvatī brightens all inspiration; in I 4, 4 men are to learn from Indra who is wise *vipaścīt*; and so on. Clearly there are wise men who have knowledge and others, the multitude, who have not. In the enigmatic hymn I 164, the poet says (st 6): “As one who has no realization *acikitvān*, I ask those sages here who have realization *cikituśaḥ*... *kavīn*, I who know not for the sake of wisdom *vidmane*: what is the One who in the form of the Unborn *aja* has established apart these six regions/dimensions *rajāmsi*?” Now the rest of this long hymn shows that its author, Dīrghatamas Ancathya, knows more about Reality than most, yet he is honest and humble enough to call himself *pāka*, a simpleton, and to admit that he is *acikitvān* or *ná vidvān*, ie lacking full realization with regard to the Unborn one which having no prior cause is Itself the First Cause. He knows that the mighty Herdsman of the universe abides within him (st 22) and that Vāk has four divisions (st 45) yet says “What I am really I don’t know being all tied up in my mind... I have obtained only a portion of Vāk” (st 37). This aspect of knowing yet not having full realization is also stressed in the Upanishads, especially in *Kena* II: “If you think you know well the Brahman then you know only its small form in yourself or in the gods.”

There are, then, the wise who have realized and the learned but unwise who do not really know but go through the mechanical motions as if they know. This distinction is made very clearly in X 71 the hymn dedicated to *jñāna*: those who look but do not see and listen but do not hear (st 4) are not real brahmins and are left far behind by the others who have realized (st 8). No doubt there are gradations of attainment but another clear distinction is made in X 85, 3-4: the Soma true brahmins know is not tasted by others who are enmeshed in earthly concerns. The Soma here must be the wisdom and power that comes with the full realization of that unborn and immutable Supreme.

The upanishadic teaching is present in the *RV* but not as overtly as polytheism. Then as now few people would turn to that teaching; for it is easier to worship a deity, or many deities, with defined form and attributes than an Absolute beyond all concepts. It is from out of the rigvedic myths, images and symbols that the *AV* and the other *Samhitās* developed the diction that paved the way to the terminology used in the upanishadic discussions. The unitary *yajña* in the *RV* combining the outer and the inner aspect was divided. The *Samhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas* stressed and developed the outer aspect of ritual; the Upanishads stressed and developed the inner aspect of Selfrealization. This is a simplification because the Vedic Tradition as a whole never lost its unitary character.

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