

# Introduction to Asian Philosophy

## Week 1: Origins of Indian Philosophy

We begin our Introduction to Asian Philosophy by examining the philosophies that originated in ancient India. As John Koller, the author of our primary textbook explains, what today we call the “Indian subcontinent” includes “a number of nation-states: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Nepal in the north, Bangladesh in the east, Sri Lanka in the south, and India in the center” (Koller, 3). So Koller titles this part of his text “South Asian Philosophies,” but he mentions that it is perhaps more convenient to simply refer to them as “Indian Philosophies” since these later political divisions were not part of the ancient culture from which these philosophies originated.

So what is distinctive about Indian Philosophy? What is the first thing that comes to mind in thinking about Indian Philosophy? As this is a freshman level Introduction course, most of you probably don’t even have much of an idea about what philosophy is, let alone what Indian philosophy is. So let me begin by saying something about the word “philosophy.” This word comes to us from two words in Greek, *philos* (lover) and *sophia* (wisdom). Thus, the word “philosophy” means “the love of wisdom.”

φιλοσοφία  
**philosophia**  
*philosophy*  
the love of wisdom

The classical language of Indian philosophy is Sanskrit. It turns out that Greek and Sanskrit are related languages. They are both part of a huge family of languages called the “Indo-European” family of languages. One might say that Sanskrit and Greek are elder sisters in this great family of languages. English is also part of this family of languages. It turns out that the Sanskrit word, *darshana*, that is used to translate the word “philosophy” actually literally means “the vision.”

दर्शन  
darśana  
*darshana*  
the vision

It is very interesting to think about these words in considering the difference between Indian and Western philosophy. The origins of Western philosophy can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophers, especially Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. From these thinkers we get the idea of philosophy as a kind of conversation or dialogue about important questions. There are several branches or areas of philosophy that cover these questions. The most important areas are *metaphysics*, which involves questions about the nature of reality, *epistemology*, which covers questions about the nature of knowledge, and *ethics*, dealing with questions about the nature of morality. Indian philosophers also asked these sorts of questions, but there is something different about Greek and Indian philosophy that might be hinted at just in considering the difference between these words *philosophia* and *darshana*.

This difference might be illustrated in relating a story that Joseph Campbell once told about what happened when Alexander the Great came to India. Alexander was actually educated in philosophy by Aristotle himself. From Aristotle he had the idea that philosophy involved a conversation or dialogue or argument between two or more individuals about these important questions. This involves listening to what someone is saying and questioning them about why they have that particular view about the nature of reality or knowledge or morality. The dialogue can go back and forth with each side asking the other what they think and why they think what they think. Alexander went on to conquer a vast part of the ancient world, eventually making it to the Indus river and the Indian subcontinent in 326 BCE. When Alexander conquered a part of India one of the first things he wanted to do was meet some of the philosophers and ask them about their philosophy. They took him into the forest and what he found were a group of men sitting in silent meditation. He wanted to have a dialogue with them, but they told him to shut up and sit down and meditate. I find this story not only a bit amusing, but perhaps also illustrative of the difference between Greek and Indian philosophy. The foundation of Western philosophy can be traced to Plato's dialogues, texts in which he presents Socrates engaging in dialogue with friends or opponents. The foundation of Indian philosophy are the texts called *Upanishads*. They were written by various authors whose names have been long forgotten. They were not dialogues but attempts to explain the visions of the philosophers that came through states of deep meditation.

If there are any associations that come to mind when thinking about Indian philosophy perhaps one might think of words like *karma* and *yoga*. These are Sanskrit words that have become so familiar they can be found in an English dictionary. Most people today think that *yoga* is just some kind of physical exercise, but as we will see later in the course, *yoga* is a rigorous spiritual discipline that includes meditation. In fact, the physical exercises are just preparation in order to help one sit and meditate. It turns out there are some striking similarities between Plato's metaphysics and the metaphysics we find in the *Upanishads*, but there is nothing in Greek philosophy quite like the emphasis on *yoga* and meditation that we see in Indian philosophy. One may well wonder what accounts for this difference. What was so different about the origins of philosophy in India from the origins of philosophy in Greece? In order to understand what is so unique about Indian philosophy it is necessary to understand how Indian culture developed as a result of the merging of two very different cultures, the ancient Indus Valley culture and the Vedic culture. There is now considerable dispute among scholars whether this merging occurred as a result of conquest or a more peaceful migration of peoples, but around 1500 BCE Sanskrit speaking Vedic peoples came into the Indian subcontinent where a very advanced ancient civilization had already developed. This civilization is sometimes called the "Indus civilization" because the major cities were all located along the Indus river. It is sometimes also referred to as Harrapan civilization or Dravidian civilization.

## Indus Valley Culture

What we know about this ancient culture comes mostly from archeological studies. What we know is that it was a quite advanced civilization for the time. The cities were well organized and laid out as if there was some central planning that first set out the grid of streets. There was also an advanced irrigation system that allowed agriculture to develop and which brought water into the cities for large central baths. Archeologists have found lots of ceramic seals with images and some writing, but in contrast to the other great advanced ancient civilizations in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, no one

has yet successfully translated their script. Nevertheless, some of the images in sculptures and on these clay seals are interesting in suggesting the influence of the Indus civilization on later Indian culture. For example, this image of a bull with its horns is a frequent image in later Indian culture:



The most interesting images, however, at least for the development of Indian philosophy, found in Indus culture are these.



A master of yoga is called a yogi, and sometimes the seated figure on the two images on the right, have led people to refer to these as the yogi seals. They seem to show, perhaps, a figure seated in meditation. The image of the trident found on the head of the seated figure shows up later in the imagery of the god Shiva.



## Vedic Culture

As the writings on the Indus culture seals have never been deciphered, the earliest texts in Indian culture are the Sanskrit texts written by people who called themselves Aryans. The oldest texts, written in an early version of Sanskrit are called the *Vedas*. It is for this reason that the earliest period in the history of Indian philosophy is called the Vedic period. This period includes the *Vedas* as well as the later texts called the *Upanishads*. The main ideas of Indian philosophy emerged in the *Upanishads* which we will focus on next week.

### LITERATURE OF THE VEDIC PERIOD

<p>ऋग् वेद Rg veda <i>Rig Veda</i></p>	<p>Mantras or hymns that are the oldest and most philosophical part of the Vedas. Composition of the <i>Rig Veda</i> probably began as early as 1500 B.C.E. and when completed consisted of 1028 separate sections or hymns</p>
<p>साम वेद Sāma veda <i>Sama Veda</i></p>	<p>A collection of <i>Rig Veda</i> verses arranged for liturgical purposes. Basically, certain verses of the <i>Rig Veda</i> are arranged for chanting in the form of a song.</p>
<p>यजुर् वेद Yajur veda <i>Yajur Veda</i></p>	<p>A collection of sacrificial formula, rites and instructions, used in Vedic sacrifice.</p>
<p>अथर्व वेद Atharva veda <i>Atharva Veda</i></p>	<p>A later collection of spells and incantations, white and black magic formulas, for securing all sorts of goals. Composed between 800 to 500 B.C.E. It is widely believed that pre-Aryan Dravidian traditions come through in the <i>Atharva Veda</i>.</p>
<p>ब्राह्मणस् Brāhmaṇas <i>Brahmanas</i></p>	<p>Commentaries on the vedic hymns.</p>
<p>आरण्यकस् Āraṇyakas <i>Aranyakas</i></p>	<p>Literally, the "Forest Treatises," the <i>Aranyakas</i> are recitations to be chanted by the <i>rishis</i> in the forest.</p>
<p>उपनिषद्स् Upaniṣads <i>Upanishads</i></p>	<p>The philosophical commentaries on the <i>Vedas</i>. Composed between 800 - 200 B.C.E. Literally <i>upanishad</i> (from <i>upa</i>, "near," <i>ni</i>, "down," and <i>sad</i>, "to sit") means "to sit down near." These were the teachings one had to sit down near to the teacher and listen closely. The core of the orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy. The "secret teachings" of Hinduism.</p>

The focus of the early Vedic period, as is evident in the *Vedas*, was mostly appealing to the various gods through hymns, chants, and sacrifice. Here is a list of some of the Vedic gods.

इन्द्र

Indra  
Indra

**The Ruler of Heaven.** “In the Vedas, Indra appears as the deity of the sphere of space, the dispenser of rain who dwells in the clouds. Feared as the ruler of the storm, the thrower of the thunderbolt, he is also the cause of fertility. As the ruler of the sky world he is the companion of Vayu, the wind, which is the life breath of the cosmos. In several hymns of the *Rg Veda* the highest divine functions and attributes are ascribed to him. In the triad of gods, Agni, Vayu, and Surya, who hold preeminence above the others, Indra frequently takes the place of Vayu as the ruler of the sphere of space. Agni, Indra, and Surya then represent the three forms of fire: the fire of the earthly world, the thunderbolt or fire of the sphere of space, and the sun, the fire of the sky. As the king of the gods, Indra is a prominent deity. In the Vedas, more hymns are addressed to Indra than to any other deity” (Daniélou, 106-107).

अग्नि

Agni  
Agni

**Fire.** “The earth is the dwelling place of fire. Fire captured and tamed by man has been the greatest assistant in his progress, the instrument of his power. Every form of fire is worshiped as a deity, but the divinity of fire is more directly experienced in the ritual fire, born of two pieces of wood rubbed together to the accompaniment of ritual utterances and ceremonies. Agni is one of the most important deities of the Vedas. He is the mediator between men and gods, the protector of men and their homes, the witness of their actions, invoked on all solemn occasions. He presides over all sacraments, all the great events of life” (Daniélou, 87-88).

सूर्य

Sūrya  
Surya

**The Sun.** “The Sun (Surya) is one of the three chief deities of the Vedas. It is envisaged under two aspects. As one of the spheres, one of the Vasus, the physical sun is the celestial form of fire, of Agni. As the source of light, of warmth, of life, of knowledge, the solar energy is the source of all life, represented in the twelve sons-of-the-Primordial-Vastness (Ādityas), the twelve sovereign principles. The sun is at the center of creation, at the center of the spheres. Above are the unmanifest spheres, those of the Self-born (*svayambhū*) and the Supreme-Ruler (*paramesthin*). Below are the manifest spheres, those of the moon and the earth. The sun represents the limit, the point, where the manifest and the unmanifest worlds unite” (Daniélou, 92).

पृथिवी

Pṛthivī  
Prithivi

**Earth.** “The first sphere is the earth, the support of all creatures, the ‘nourisher’ of all physical life. The earth is also represented as a goddess, or as a cow that feeds everyone with her milk. She is the mother of life, the substance of all things. Prthu, the “first king” and inventor of agriculture, forced the reluctant earth to yield her treasures and feed men, hence she is called Pṛthivī, the “domain of Prthu.” . . . All the forms of the earth and of life on it are forms, the children, of this goddess, Earth. Mountains, trees, rivers, animals, have in them a common yet multiple life and are guided by conscious beings who are the attendants of the earth goddess” (Daniélou, 87).

द्यौस्

Dyaus  
Dyaus

**Sky.** The sky (Dyaus), the supreme firmament, is one of the oldest divinities of the Indo-Europeans. The Sky is the Father and, with the Earth, the origin of everything. All the gods, Sun, Moon, Wind, Rain, Lightning, Dawn, and the rest, are children of the Sky. Dyaus covers the Earth and fertilizes her with his seed, that is, with rain” (Daniélou, 92).

वायु

Vāyu  
Vayu

**Wind.** “Between the earth and sky, abode of the sun, is the intermediary sphere or sphere of space, the dwelling place of subtle beings whose king is the lord of wind, Vāyu. Just as fire, the devourer, was the mouth of the gods, wind is their breath. In the Upaniṣads, Vāyu appears as the cosmic life breath. The *Mahābhārata* calls him the life breath of the world, the universal ‘spirit,’ the impeller of life and of the living. Vāyu also the substance and the essence of speech (*vāc*). A few Vedic hymns are addressed to him. . . . Vāyu is the purifier, the first to have drunk the ambrosia, the *soma*” (Daniélou, 90-91).

सोम

Soma  
Soma

**The Moon, the Cup-of-Offerings.** *Soma* was a drug, a medicine, producing powerful states of ecstasy and states of wildly expanded consciousness. There are a number of theories about what the source plant was; some contend the source plant became extinct, others suggest the source plant was a variety of mushroom that produces a compound similar to psilocybin. “In the later hymns of the *Rg Veda*, as well as in the *Atharva Veda* and in the Brahmanas, the Offering (*Soma*) is identified with the moon and with the god of the moon. *Soma* is the most frequently occurring name for the moon in the *Mahābhārata*. The moon is the vessel of divine ambrosia drunk by Ancestors and gods yet ever refilled again” (Daniélou, 98).

उषस्

Uṣas  
Usas

**Dawn.** “In the *Rg Veda* the Dawn (Usas) is shown as a young woman who uncovers her breast for men to admire. Always young, she pushes back the darkness and awakens all beings. She moves about in a splendid chariot. She is the sister of Night, the wife or mistress of the Sun, the daughter of the Sky. According to the Brahmanas, she has incestuous relations with her father, the lord-of-progeny (Prajapati)” (Daniélou, 97).

रुद्र

Rudra  
Rudra

**The Howler, the Red One, the Lord of Tears.** “The name Rudra, which can be translated as the ‘howler’ or the ‘red one,’ is also said to mean the ‘cause of tears.’” (Daniélou, 102). A dark, fierce, stormy tempered god, almost the opposite of Usas. Like Indra, Rudra is associated with the storm clouds that brought the life-giving monsoon rains. Thought to be a Dravidian god of very ancient origin. Rudra represented the unconquered and unpredictable character of raw nature. Rudra will later be connected with Shiva, one of the three main gods of the Hindu pantheon.

वरुण

Varuṇa  
Varuna

**The Mysterious Law of the Gods.** Varuna presides over the relationship of man with the gods. He is the ruler of the ‘other side,’ of the invisible world. The sudden favor of the gods and the elements, their unaccountable cruelty, cannot be understood. The behavior of Varuṇa, who rules over the invisible, cannot be foreseen; hence he appears a dangerous lord, a despot. ‘He is the owner of the magic-power (*māya*)’ (*Rg Veda*) through which forms are created. He represents the inner reality of things, higher truth (*ṛta*), and order in their transcendent aspects, beyond the understanding of man. His absolute power is felt during the night and in all that is mysterious, while man-made laws, represented by Mitra, rule the day” (Daniélou, 118).

मित्र

Mitra  
Mitra

**Friendship.** “Among the sovereign principles of ‘this’ world, the first is human solidarity, the respect for laws and treaties, the sacredness given to all that links man to man. Friendship (Mitra) appears to have been the most important of the divinized virtues of the early Aryans, although, at the time of the *Rg Veda*, its role had already played before the expectation of divine grace represented as Varuṇa. Only one hymn of the *Rg Veda* is addressed to Mitra. . . . The comradeship of men and the favor of gods, Mitra and Varuṇa, are the complements of each other. The clear rules of human association and the mysterious laws of fate govern ‘this’ known world and ‘that’ unknown world, symbolized as the day and the night, between which man’s life is divided” (Daniélou, 115-116).

विष्णु

Viṣṇu  
Vishnu

**The Pervader.** In Vedic mythology the Pervader is considered an Āditya [sovereign principle] and represents the perception of the cosmic law that pervades the three worlds. This law is revealed to man through the illumination called knowledge and is compared to the light of the sun striding in three steps across the seven regions of the universe. . . . In the Vedas, Viṣṇu is occasionally associated with Indra. Knowledge associates with Power. The priestly Viṣṇu helps the Sovereign, Indra, the embodiment of the Law, to kill the demon Vṛtra. With Indra he drinks the ambrosia. . . . In the *Rg Veda*, Viṣṇu does not appear in the first rank of gods. He does not have all the characteristics of the Viṣṇu of later times but he is already the unconquerable preserver” (Daniélou, 126).

यम

Yama  
Yama

**Death.** “Yama is the god of death, the sovereign of the infernal regions. Sinister and fearful, he judges the dead whom his messengers drag before his throne. He is the embodiment of righteousness (*dharma*) and the king-of-justice (*dharma-rāja*). . . . In the Vedas, Yama is the First Ancestor and the king-of-Ancestors. He rules over the kingdom of the dead where the Ancestors dwell. He is the king-of-ghosts. He has the full rank of a god, for *soma* is pressed for him” (Daniélou, 132).

As Koller explains, some of the hymns in the Vedas are not merely for worship or rituals, but also “go much deeper, presenting profound and subtle visions of reality” (Koller, 13). Koller goes on to say that these gods are not simply anthropomorphic beings but are “also symbols of the fundamental powers of existence” (Koller, 13-14). In reading these texts, see if you can see what Koller means by this. Of particular importance is the last one, the Hymn of Creation, which Koller discusses on pages 15-16.

## Selections from the *Rg Veda*

To Sūrya [the Sun-god]

1. Aloft his beams now bring the god  
Who knows all creatures that are born,  
That all may look upon the Sun.
2. Away like thieves the stars depart,  
By the dark night accompanied,  
At the all-seeing Sun's approach.
3. His beams, his rays, have shone afar  
Athwart the many homes of men,  
Flaming aloft like blazing fires.
4. Swift-moving, visible to all,  
Maker of light thou art, O Sun,  
Illuming all the shining space.
5. Thou rises toward the host of gods  
And toward the race of men: toward all,  
That they may see the heavenly light.
7. The broad air traversing, the sky,  
Thou metest, Sun, the days with nights,  
Seeing all creatures that are born.
8. The seven bay mares that draw thy car,  
Bring thee to us, far-seeing god,  
O Sūrya of the gleaming hair.
9. The Sun has yoked the seven bright mares,  
The shining daughters of his car:  
With that self-yoking team he speeds.
10. Athwart the darkness gazing up,  
To him the higher light, we now  
Have soared to Sūrya, the god  
Among the gods, the highest light.



Sūrya and his attendants

## To Indra

1. I will extol the most heroic Indra who with his might forced earth and sky asunder;  
Who hath filled all with width as man's upholder, surpassing floods and rivers in his greatness.
2. Sūrya is he: throughout the wide expanses shall Indra turn him, swift as car-wheels, hither,  
Like a stream resting not but ever active: he hath destroyed, with light, the black-hued darkness.
3. To him I sing a holy prayer, incessant, new matchless, common to the earth and heaven,  
Who marks, as they were backs, all living creatures: ne'er doth he fail a friend, the noble Indra.
4. I will send forth my songs in flow unceasing, like water from the ocean's depth, to Indra.  
Who to his car on both its sides securely hath fixed the earth and heaven as with an axle.
5. Rousing with draughts, the shaker, rushing onward, impetuous, very strong, armed as with arrows  
Is Soma; forest trees and all the bushes deceive not Indra with their offered likeness.
6. Soma hath flowed to him who naught can equal, the earth, the heavens, the firmament, the mountains,  
When heightened in his ire his indignation shatters the firm and breaks the strong in pieces.

## To Indra

8. Eternal Law [*ṛta*] hath varied food that strengthens; thought of eternal law removes transgressions.  
The praise-hymn of eternal law, arousing, glowing, hath oped the deaf ears of the living.
9. Firm-seated are eternal law's foundations; in its fair form are many splendid beauties.  
By holy law long lasting food they bring us; by holy law have cows come to our worship.
10. Fixing eternal law he [Indra], too, upholds it: swift moves the might of law and wins the booty.  
To law belong the vast deep earth and heaven: milch-kine supreme, to law their milk they render.

## To Varuṇa

1. To make this Varuṇa come forth, sing thou a song unto the band of Maruts wiser than thyself,—  
This Varuṇa who guardeth well the thoughts of men like herds of kine.  
Let all the others die away.
3. The night he hath encompassed, and stablished the morns with magic art: visible over all is he.  
His dear ones,<sup>1</sup> following his law, have prospered the three dawns<sup>2</sup> for him.
4. He, visible, o'er all the earth, stablished the quarters of the sky:



- He measured out the eastern place, that is the fold of Varuṇa: like a strong herdsman is the god.
5. He who supports the worlds of life, he who well knows the hidden names and mysterious of the morning beams,  
He cherishes much wisdom, sage, as heaven brings forth each varied form.
  6. In whome all wisdom centres, as the nave is set within the wheel.  
Haste ye to honour Trita,<sup>1</sup> as kine haste to gather in the fold, even as they muster steeds to yoke.
  7. He wraps these regions as a robe; he contemplates the tribes of gods and all the works of mortal men.  
Before the home of Varuṇa all the gods follow his decree.
  8. He is an ocean far-removed, yet through the heaven to him ascends the worship which these realms possess.  
With his bright foot he overthrew their magic, and went up to heaven.
  9. Ruler, whose bright far-seeing rays, pervading all three earths, have filled the three superior realms of heaven.  
Firm is the seat of Varuṇa: over the Seven [rivers] he rules as king.
  10. Who, after his decree, o'erspread the dark ones<sup>2</sup> with a robe of light;  
Who measured out the ancient seat, who pillared both the worlds apart as the unborn supported heaven. Let all the others die away.

To Viśvakarman [the "all-worker, creator of the universe]

1. The father of the eye, the wise in spirit, created both these worlds submerged in fatness.  
Then when the eastern ends were firmly fastened, the heavens and the earth were far extended.
2. Mighty in mind and power is Viśvakarman, maker, disposer, and most lofty presence.  
Their offerings joy in rich juice where they value One, only One, beyond the seven *ṛṣis*.
3. Father who made us, he who, as disposer, knoweth all races and all things existing,  
Even he alone, the deities' name-giver, —him other beings seek for information.
4. To him in sacrifice they offered treasures, —*ṛṣis* of old, in numerous troops, as singers,  
Who, in the distant, near, and lower regions, made ready all these things that have existence.
5. That which is earlier than this earth and heaven, before the Asuras,<sup>3</sup> and gods had being, —  
What was the germ primeval which the waters received where all the gods were seen together?

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<sup>1</sup> Varuṇa.

<sup>2</sup> Nights which Varuṇa turns into days.

<sup>3</sup> High gods.

6. The waters, they received that germ primeval wherein the gods were gathered all together. It rested set upon the unborn's navel, that One wherein abide all things existing.
7. Ye will not find him who produced these creatures: another thing hath risen up among you. Enwrapt in misty cloud, with lips that stammer, hymn-chanters wander and are discontented.

To Puruṣa [person or man personified]

1. Thousand-headed was the Puruṣa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He embraced the earth on all sides, and stood beyond the breadth of ten fingers.
2. The Puruṣa is this all, that which was and which shall be. He is Lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through (sacrificial) food.
3. Such is his greatness, and still greater than that is the Puruṣa. One fourth of him is all beings. Three fourths of him is the immortal in Heaven.
4. Three fourths on high rose the Puruṣa. One fourth of him arose again here (on the earth). Thence in all directions he spread abroad, as that which eats and that which eats not.
5. From him Virāj was born, from Virāj the Puruṣa.<sup>4</sup> He when born reached beyond the earth behind as well as before.
6. When the Gods spread out the sacrifice with the Puruṣa as oblation, spring was its ghee [clarified butter], summer the fuel, autumn the oblation.
7. As the sacrifice on the strewn grass they besprinkled the Puruṣa, born in the beginning. With him the Gods sacrificed, the Sādhyas<sup>5</sup> and the sages.
8. From that sacrifice completely offered was the sprinkled ghee collected. He made it the beasts of air, of the forest, and those of the village.
9. From that sacrifice completely offered were born the Verses (*R̥g Veda*) and the *Sāman*-melodies (*Sāma Veda*). The metres were born from it. From it was born the Sacrificial formula (*Yajur Veda*).
10. From it were born horses, and they that have two rows of teeth. Cattle were born from it. From it were born goats and sheep.
11. When they divided the Puruṣa, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What his two arms? What are his thighs and feet called?
12. The *brāhmin* was his mouth, his two arms were made the *rājanya* (*kṣatriya*), his two thighs the *vaiśya*, from his feet the *śūdra* was born.<sup>6</sup>
13. The moon was born from his spirit (*manas*), from his eyes was born the sun, from his mouth

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<sup>4</sup> Virāj has been interpreted as the female principle, which with the primal Puruṣa produces the concrete universe.

<sup>5</sup> A Class of gods or celestial beings.

<sup>6</sup> This is the famous passage describing the origin of the castes.

- Indra and Agni, from his breath Vāyu (wind) was born.
14. From his navel arose the middle sky, from his head the heaven originated, from his feet the earth, the quarters from his ear. Thus did they fashion the worlds.
  15. Seven were his sticks that enclose (the fire), thrice seven were made the faggots. When the Gods spread out the sacrifice, they bound the Puruṣa as a victim.
  16. With the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed the sacrifice. These were the first ordinances. These great powers reached to the firmament, where are the ancient Sādhyas, the Gods.

#### To the Gods

1. Let us with tuneful skill proclaim these generations of the gods,  
That one may see them when these hymns are chanted in a future age.
2. These Brahmaṇaspati<sup>7</sup> produced with blast and smelting, like a smith.  
Existence, in an earlier age of gods, from non-existence sprang.
3. Existence, in the earliest age of gods, from non-existence sprang.  
Thereafter, were the regions born. This sprang from the productive power.
4. Earth sprang from the productive power; the regions from the earth were born.  
Dakṣa was born of Aditi, and Aditi was Dakṣa's child.<sup>8</sup>
5. For Aditi, O Dakṣa, she who is they daughter, was brought forth.  
After her were the blessed gods born sharers of immortal life.
6. When ye, O gods, in yonder seep close-clasping one another stood.  
Thence, as of dancers, from your feet a thickening cloud of dust arose.
7. When, O ye gods, like *yatis*,<sup>9</sup> ye caused all existing things to grow,  
Then ye brought Sūrya forward who was lying hidden in the sea.
8. Eight are the sons of Aditi who from her body sprang to life.  
With seven she went to meet the gods: she cast Mārtāṇḍa far away.<sup>10</sup>
9. So with her seven sons Aditi went forth to meet the earlier age.  
She brought Mārtāṇḍa thitherward to spring to life and die again.

#### To Viśvedevas [All gods—the pantheon as a whole]

1. Of this benignant priest, with eld grey coloured, the brother midmost of the three is lightning.  
The third is he whose back with oil is sprinkled. Here I behold the chief with seven made children.

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<sup>7</sup> Lord of prayer.

<sup>8</sup> Aditi is infinity or the infinite; Dakṣa is force or power personified.

<sup>9</sup> Devotees.

<sup>10</sup> Sūrya, the sun.

2. Seven to the one-wheeled chariot yoke the courser; bearing seven names the single courser draws it.  
Three-naved the wheel is, sound and undecaying, whereon are resting all these worlds of being.
3. The seven who on the seven-wheeled car are mounted have horses, seven in tale, who draw them onward.  
Seven sisters utter songs of praise together, in whom the names of the seven cows are treasured.
4. Who hath beheld him as he sprang to being, seen how the boneless One supports the bony? Where is the blood of earth, the life, the spirit? Who may approach the man who knows, to ask it?
5. Unripe in mind, the spirit undiscerning, I ask of these gods' established places;  
From up above the yearling calf the sages, to form a web, their own seven threads have woven.
6. I ask, unknowing, those who know, the sages, as one all ignorant for the sake of knowledge,  
What was that One who in the unborn's image hath stablished and fixed firm these worlds' six religions [regions]?
46. They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutmān.<sup>11</sup>  
To what is one, sage give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.

To Viśvedevas

5. What pathway leadeth to the gods? Who knoweth this of a truth, and who will now declare it?  
Seen are their lowest dwelling-places only, but they are in remote and secret regions.
8. All living things they part and keep asunder: though bearing up the mighty gods they reel not.  
One All is lord of what is fixed and moving, that walks, that flies, this multiform creation.

To Viśvedevas

1. May power auspicious come to us from every side, never deceived, unhindered, and victorious,  
That the gods ever may be with us for our grain, our guardians day by day unceasing in their care.
2. May the auspicious favour of the gods be ours, on us descend the bounty of the righteous gods.  
The friendship of the gods we have devoutly sought; so may the gods extend our life that we may live.

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<sup>11</sup> The "Celestial Bird," the sun.

3. We call them higher with a hymn of olden time, Bhaga, the friendly Dakṣa, Mitra, Aditi, Aryaman, Varuṇa, Soma, the Aśvins. May Sarasvatī,<sup>12</sup> auspicious, grant felicity.
4. May the Wind waft to us that pleasant medicine, may Earth our Mother give it, and our Father Heaven,  
And the joy-giving stones that press the *soma*'s juice.  
Aśvins, may ye, for whom our spirits long, hear this.
5. Him we invoke for aid who reigns supreme, the Lord of all that stands or moves, inspirer of the soul,  
That Pūṣan may promote the increase of our wealth, our keeper and our guard infallible for our good.
6. Illustrious far and wide, may Indra prosper us; may Pūṣan prosper us, the Master of all wealth.  
May Tārṣya<sup>13</sup> with unijured fellows prosper us; Bṛhaspati vouchsafe us to prosperity.
7. The Maruts, Sons of Pṛṣṇi, born of spotted steeds, moving in glory, oft visiting holy rites, Sages whose tongue is Agni, brilliant as the sun, —hither let all the gods for our protection come.
8. Gods, may we with our ears listen to what is good, and with our eyes see what is good, ye Holy Ones.  
With limbs and bodies firm may we extolling you attain the term of life appointed by the gods.
9. A hundred autumns stand before us, O ye gods, within whose space ye bring our bodies to decay'  
Within whose space our sons become fathers in turn. Break ye not in the midst our course of fleeting life.
10. Aditi is the heaven, Aditi is mid-air, Aditi is the mother and the sire and son,  
Aditi is all gods, Aditi five-classed men, Aditi all that hath been born and shall be born.

### Hymn of Creation

1. Non-being then existed not nor being:  
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it.  
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose protection?  
And was there deep unfathomable water?

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<sup>12</sup> River-goddess; goddess of eloquence and sacred poetry.

<sup>13</sup> Probably a form of the sun.

2. Death then existed not nor life immortal;  
Of neither night nor day was any token.  
By its inherent force the One breathed windless:  
No other thing than that beyond existed.
3. Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden;  
Without distinctive marks, this all was water.  
That which, becoming, by the void was covered,  
That One by force of heat came into being.
4. Desire entered the One in the beginning:  
It was the earliest seed, of thought the product.  
The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom,  
Found out the bond of being in non-being.
5. Their ray extended light across the darkness:  
But was the One above or was it under?  
Creative force was there, and fertile power:  
Below was energy, above was impulse.
6. Who knows for certain? Who shall declare it?  
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?  
The gods were born after this world's creation:  
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?
7. None knoweth whence creation has arisen;  
And whether he has or has not produced it:  
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,  
He only knows, or happily he may know not.

*A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore. Princeton University Press, 1957.