

The Four Languages of the Rig Veda

In the prologue to Antonio de Nicolas' *Meditations Through the Rig Veda*, the reader is provided with a tangible example of the struggle characterized between the western and eastern mind, the left and the right brain. After de Nicolas stepped off the boat that carried him to Bombay, his western senses and preconceptions were arrested by the "language" of India. It was not words spoken in Hindi, Arabic, or imperial English that comprised this language he experienced; it was a dissonant ocean of voices, colors, images, sounds, smells, and environment – all moving as an indistinguishable oneness. As he describes it, "[t]he world, as I knew it, disappeared...[t]he thing that fell away was myself: the expectations of a linear world. Without limbs, without head, the body just a gasp for breath, India...was a world in slow motion. There was not even a world; just motion" (xv). De Nicolas would come to learn that this language, this movement, found its origin in the hymns chanted 7000 years ago through what we call the Rig Veda.

Embodied within the oneness-language of the Vedic hymns are four distinguishable but not separable languages known as Asat, Sat, Yajna, and Rita. The first, Asat – or non-existence, is what the "Rg Veda calls the whole undifferentiated primordial chaos." The source of Asat is attributed to Brahman and "from the Asat...are born all the gods" (89). All of the creation that arises, and becomes the gods, the universe, the earth, the body, finds its origin in the Asat. An example of Asat in the Rig Veda is RV 1.113.16: "Arise! The breath, the life has reached us, darkness has passed away, light is coming. She has left a path for the sun to travel, and we have come where

men extend their lives.” Within the chaos and darkness of Asat, light is born becoming Sat.

Sat is described as the language of existence. Because of creation, conflict is born. The Rig Veda describes conflict occurring between beings called asuras. One type of asura is the Danavas, who “bind, restrain, hold back, cover over, and enclose.” Another type of asura is the Adityas, who “unbind, give freedom, and liberate” (111). The Danavas’ exist in the realm of Asat and the Adityas live in Sat. The two asuras engage in battle in the Vedic hymns. At first, the Adityas are thrown back on the defensive as the Danavas send them to retreat. However, a new champion and leader, is born to the Adityas: the god Indra. In RV 1.11 is found a *Hymn to Indra* marking the acknowledgement that the Adityas have a god worthy of battle with the Danavas: “Indra, assured of friendship, O Lord of Might, we have no fear.” Yet, he is not only a god of war, he is also a god that sustains sacrifice, as verse 4 says. As de Nicolas says, “the hymns give rise to sacrifice” (53), and sacrifice is the language of Yajna.

“[I]t is through the Sacrifice that the chant become human flesh,” de Nicolas reminds us (139). In the sacrifice, all preconceived notions about man, existence, etc. must be put to death in order for man to live (15). In RV 10.2.3, the chanters call to Agni to show them how to sacrifice: “We have also entered the path of the gods to prolong our lives as long as we are capable. Let Agni, who knows, show us the way to offer the Sacrifice. He is the Sacrificer: the doer of sacrifices, the builder of the sacrificial moments.” Once the sacrifice is accomplished, in living, humans can continue along the path of the Rig Veda which is “the power to still what moves and set in motion what is still” (155). This is the fourth language of Rita.

Rita is the language of embodied vision. The chanter has been created from Asat and arrives in Sat in order to become the sacrifice. Then, she is ready to let her body, “for so long historically silent, break open, release the earth, the sky, the gods; let it become music again” (156). Here, the human finds true movement and true freedom. As RV 8.25.8 expresses: “Let those possessed by Rta let down the Norm for universal ruling. Let those who follow with the Rta, who uphold the Norm, the leaders, overcome all opposing force.”

De Nicolas shows the reader of *Meditations Through the Rig Veda* the path to freedom, to moksha, that has been available to humans for over seven millennia. For the western reader, the first step is to be willing to understand in a way that is incomprehensible to a left-brain mind. It is not impossible. It simply requires that we return to the power of the Vedic hymns and resurrect the beauty that the original chanters expressed in a technology lost to those who, through their own technological advances, have sacrificed their being human.

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