

[An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man](#)

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The Vedic Experience

## An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man

Professor Raimon Panikkar

THE VEDAS ARE MANKIND'S OLDEST SCRIPTURES, REVERED BY HINDUS as direct revelation from God. One of the finest translations to English was done by Professor Raimon Panikkar, a renowned theologian who now lives in a mountain village in Spain. Himalayan Academy has been commissioned to publish his 1,000-page anthology in a special edition in the West. Motilal Banarsidas has produced the Indian edition. This regular monthly column will feature excerpts from the volume.

In the beginning, to be sure, nothing existed, neither the heaven nor the earth nor space in between. So Nonbeing, having decided to be, became spirit

and said: "Let me be!" He warmed himself further and from this heating was born fire. He warmed himself still further and from this heating was born light.

Taittiriya Brahmana II, 2, 9, 1-2

The Hymns of the Origins

The vision of this hymn comes out of a profound insight into the mystery of reality. It is the product of a mystical experience that far transcends the limits of logical thinking; it is a religious chant--for only in music or poetry can such a message be conveyed--invoking in splendid verses the Primal Mystery that transcends all categories, both human and divine. This hymn, while trying to plumb the depths of the mystery, formulates no doctrinal system but expresses itself by means of a rich variety of different symbols related to the one single insight. The hymn, in fact, presents an extraordinary consistency, which is patent only to the contemplative mind; in the absence of this latter, however, it is bound to appear either as syncretistic or as agnostic, as has in fact been sometimes asserted.

## Nasadiya Sukta

At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.  
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.  
What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?  
Was Water there, unfathomable and deep?

There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;  
of night or day there was not any sign.  
The One breathed without breath, by its own impulse.  
Other than that was nothing else at all.

Darkness was there, all wrapped around by darkness,  
and all was Water indiscriminate.  
Then that which was hidden by the Void,

that One, emerging, stirring,  
through power of Ardor(Tapas), came to be.

In the beginning Love arose, which was  
the primal germ cell of the mind.  
The Seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom,  
discovered the connection of Being in Nonbeing.

A crosswise line cut Being from Nonbeing.  
What was described above it, what below?  
Bearers of seed there were and mighty forces,  
thrust from below and forward move above.

Who really knows? Who can presume to tell it?  
Whence was it born? Whence issued this creation?  
Even the Gods came after its emergence.  
Then who can tell from whence it came to be?

That out of which creation has arisen,  
whether it held it firm or it did not,  
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,  
He surely knows or maybe He does not!  
Rig Veda 10.129

Hiranyagarbha

In the beginning arose the Golden Germ:  
he was, as soon as born, the Lord of Being,

sustainer of the Earth and of this Heaven.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

He who bestows life-force and hardy vigor,  
whose ordinances even the Gods obey,  
whose shadow is immortal life--and death--  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

Who by his grandeur has emerged sole sovereign  
of every living thing that breathes and slumbers,  
he who is Lord of man and four-legged creatures.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

To him of right belong, by his own power,  
the snow-clad mountains, the world-stream, and the sea.  
His arms are the four quarters of the sky.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

Who held secure the mighty Heavens and Earth,  
who established light and sky's vast vault above,  
who measured out the ether in mid-spheres--  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

Toward him, trembling, the embattled forces,  
riveted by his glory, direct their gaze.  
Through him the risen sun sheds forth its light.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

When came the mighty Waters, bringing with them  
the universal Germ, whence sprang the Fire,  
thence leapt the God's One Spirit into being.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

This One who in his might surveyed the Waters  
pregnant with vital forces, producing sacrifice,  
he is the God of Gods and none beside him.  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

O Father of the Earth, by fixed laws ruling,  
O Father of the Heavens, pray protect us,  
O Father of the great and shining Waters!  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

O Lord of Creatures, Father of all beings,  
you alone pervade all that has come to birth.  
Grant us our heart's desire for which we pray.  
May we become the lords of many treasures!  
Rig Veda 10.121

In the beginning this was only one, the Self--  
no other thing that blinks whatever.  
He thought: "Let me now create the worlds!"

He created the worlds of water, rays of light, death and the  
waters.

He thought [again] to himself: "Let me now create the  
protectors of the worlds."

He raised a man from the waters and conferred a form upon him.

He brooded over him. Once this was done a mouth broke open, similar to an egg. From the mouth the Word came out and from the Word fire.

Taittiriya Upanishad 2.6-7