

THE PENGUIN CLASSICS

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THE RIG VEDA

An Anthology

ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT HYMNS,
SELECTED, TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED
BY WENDY DONIGER O'FLAHERTY

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PENGUIN BOOKS

This short hymn, though linguistically simple (with the exception of one or two troublesome nouns), is conceptually extremely provocative and has, indeed, provoked hundreds of complex commentaries among Indian theologians and Western scholars. In many ways, it is meant to puzzle and challenge, to raise unanswerable questions, to pile up paradoxes.

- 1 There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred?¹ Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?
- 2 There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign² of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.
- 3 Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign,² all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.³
- 4 Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind. Poets⁴ seeking in their heart with wisdom found the bond of existence in non-existence.
- 5 Their cord⁵ was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers; there were powers.⁶ There was impulse beneath; there was giving-forth above.
- 6 Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe.⁷ Who then knows whence it has arisen?
- 7 Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in

the highest heaven, only he knows – or perhaps he does not know.

NOTES

1. The verb is often used to describe the motion of breath. The verse implies that the action precedes the actor.
2. That is, the difference between night and day, light or darkness, or possibly sun and moon.
3. *Tapas* designates heat, in particular the heat generated by ritual activity and by physical mortification of the body.
4. *Kavi* designates a poet or saint.
5. Possibly a reference to the 'bond' mentioned in verse 4, or a kind of measuring cord by which the poets delimit – and hence create – the elements.
6. Through chiasmus, the verse contrasts male seed-placers, giving-forth, above, with female powers, impulse, below.
7. That is, the gods cannot be the source of creation since they came after it.

10.121 *The Unknown God, the Golden Embryo*

This creation hymn poses questions about an unnamed god (whom Max Müller first dubbed *Deus Ignotus*); later tradition (beginning with the subsequent appending of the final verse of this hymn, a verse that ends with a phrase used to conclude many other *Rig Veda* hymns) identified this god with *Prajāpati* and made the question in the refrain (who?) into an answer: 'Who' (*Ka*) is the name of the creator, a name explicitly said, in later texts, to have been given to *Prajāpati* by *Indra* (as agnostics are sometimes accused of praying 'to whom it may concern'). But the original force of the verse is speculative: since the creator preceded all the known gods,¹ creating them, who could he be? In verse 7, he seems to appear after the waters; in verse 9, the waters appear from him. They are born from one another, a common paradox.²

The creator in this hymn is called *Hiraṇyagarbha*, a truly pregnant term. It is a compound noun, whose first element

means 'gold' and whose second element means 'womb, seed, embryo, or child' in the *Rig Veda* and later comes to mean 'egg'; this latter meaning becomes prominent in the cosmogonic myth of the golden egg that separates, the two shells becoming sky and earth, while the yolk is the sun.³ In the present hymn, the compound functions straightforwardly: the god *is* the golden embryo or seed. Later, it is glossed as a possessive compound: he is the god who (more anthropomorphically) *possesses* the golden seed or egg. *Sāyaṇa* suggests that the compound may be interpreted possessively even here, making it possible to include several levels of meaning at once – 'he in whose belly the golden seed or egg exists like an embryo'. This seed of fire is placed in the waters of the womb; it is also the embryo with which the waters become pregnant (v. 7). So, too, *Agni* is the child of the waters but also the god who spills his seed in the waters. These are interlocking rather than contradictory concepts; in the late Vedas, the father is specifically identified with the son. Furthermore, the egg is both a female image (that which is fertilized by seed and which contains the embryo that is like the yolk) and a male image (the testicles containing seed). Thus the range of meanings may be seen as a continuum of androgynous birth images: seed (male egg), womb (female egg), embryo, child.

- 1 In the beginning the Golden Embryo arose. Once he was born, he was the one lord of creation. He held in place the earth and this sky.⁴ Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 2 He who gives life, who gives strength, whose command all the gods, his own, obey; his shadow is immortality – and death.⁵ Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 3 He who by his greatness became the one king of the world that breathes and blinks, who rules over his two-footed and four-footed creatures – who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?

- 4 He who through his power owns these snowy mountains, and the ocean together with the river Rasā,⁶ they say; who has the quarters of the sky as his two arms⁷ – who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 5 He by whom the awesome sky and the earth were made firm, by whom the dome of the sky was propped up, and the sun, who measured out the middle realm of space⁸ – who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 6 He to whom the two opposed masses looked with trembling in their hearts, supported by his help,⁹ on whom the rising sun shines down – who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 7 When the high waters came, pregnant with the embryo that is everything, bringing forth fire, he arose from that as the one life's breath of the gods. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 8 He who in his greatness looked over the waters, which were pregnant with Dakṣa,¹⁰ bringing forth the sacrifice, he who was the one god among all the gods – who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 9 Let him not harm us, he¹¹ who fathered the earth and created the sky, whose laws are true, who created the high, shining waters. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
- 10 O Prajāpati, lord of progeny, no one but you embraces all these creatures. Grant us the desires for which we offer you oblation. Let us be lords of riches.

NOTES

1. Cf. 10.129.6. Here and throughout these notes, numbers without a designated text refer to Rig Vedic hymns translated in this volume.
2. Cf. the birth of Dakṣa and Aditi from one another in 10.72.4.
3. Cf. 10.82.5-6.
4. This traditional cosmogonic act is often credited to Viṣṇu, Varuṇa, Indra, and other gods.

5. This may refer to the world of gods and the world of humans, or it may have some subtler and darker metaphysical significance.
6. The river Rasā surrounds heaven and earth, separating the dwelling-place of men and gods from the non-space in which the demonic powers dwell. Cf. 10.108.2.
7. A reference to the cosmic giant, Puruṣa (cf. 10.90), whose arms are in that part of space which the four cardinal directions span.
8. This act of measuring out space, closely connected with the propping apart of sky and earth (cf. v. 1), is also attributed to Viṣṇu and Varuṇa, who are said to set up the sun and then to measure out a space for him to move through, a space which (unlike sky and earth) has no finite boundaries. The sun itself also functions both as a prop to keep sky and earth apart and as an instrument with which to measure space. Cf. 1.154.1 and 1.154.3.
9. This verse presents an image on two levels. The two opposed masses are armies, the polarized forces of gods and demons (Asuras) who turn to the creator for help (as in 2.12.8). But they also represent the parted sky and earth, who seek literal 'support' (the pillar to keep them apart). The images combine in a metaphor suggesting that sky and earth themselves form a phalanx in the fight between gods and demons.
10. Dakṣa represents the male principle of creation and is later identified with Prajāpati. As the embryo of the waters, he is identified with the seed or fire (v. 7), the latter then explicitly defined in this verse as the sacrifice, or sacrificial fire. Sacrifice is often an element in primeval creation (cf. 10.90.6-9).
11. In this verse, the abstract tone vanishes and the poet lapses back into a more typical Vedic fear (and particularly typical of book 10), the fear of a personified, malevolent god.

10.90 *Puruṣa-Sūkta, or The Hymn of Man*

In this famous hymn, the gods create the world by dismembering the cosmic giant, Puruṣa, the primeval male who is the victim in a Vedic sacrifice.¹ Though the theme of the cosmic sacrifice is a widespread mythological motif, this hymn is part of a particularly Indo-European corpus of myths of dismemberment.² The underlying concept is, therefore, quite ancient; yet the fact that this is one of the

latest hymns in the *Rig Veda* is evident from its reference to the three Vedas (v. 9) and to the four social classes or *varṇas* (v. 12, the first time that this concept appears in Indian civilization), as well as from its generally monistic world-view.

- 1 The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers.
- 2 It is the Man who is all this, whatever has been and whatever is to be. He is the ruler of immortality, when he grows beyond everything through food.³
- 3 Such is his greatness, and the Man is yet more than this. All creatures are a quarter of him; three quarters are what is immortal in heaven.
- 4 With three quarters the Man rose upwards, and one quarter of him still remains here. From this⁴ he spread out in all directions, into that which eats and that which does not eat.
- 5 From him Virāj⁵ was born, and from Virāj came the Man. When he was born, he ranged beyond the earth behind and before.
- 6 When the gods spread⁶ the sacrifice with the Man as the offering, spring was the clarified butter, summer the fuel, autumn the oblation.
- 7 They anointed⁷ the Man, the sacrifice⁸ born at the beginning, upon the sacred grass.⁹ With him the gods, Sādhyas,¹⁰ and sages sacrificed.
- 8 From that sacrifice⁸ in which everything was offered, the melted fat¹¹ was collected, and he¹² made it into those beasts who live in the air, in the forest, and in villages.
- 9 From that sacrifice in which everything was offered, the verses and chants were born, the metres were born from it, and from it the formulas were born.¹³
- 10 Horses were born from it, and those other animals that have two rows of teeth;¹⁴ cows were born from it, and from it goats and sheep were born.

- 11 When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet?
- 12 His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born.¹⁵
- 13 The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and from his vital breath the Wind was born.
- 14 From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they¹⁶ set the worlds in order.
- 15 There were seven enclosing-sticks¹⁷ for him, and thrice seven fuel-sticks, when the gods, spreading the sacrifice, bound the Man as the sacrificial beast.
- 16 With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice.¹⁸ These were the first ritual laws.¹⁹ These very powers reached the dome of the sky where dwell the Sādhyas,¹⁰ the ancient gods.

NOTES

1. Cf. the horse as the primeval sacrificial victim in 1.162 and 1.163.
2. The dismemberment of the Norse giant Ymir is the most striking parallel, but there are many others.
3. This rather obscure phrase seems to imply that through food (perhaps the sacrificial offering) Puruṣa grows beyond the world of the immortals, even as he grows beyond the earth (v. 1 and v. 5). He himself also transcends both what grows by food and what does not (v. 4), i.e. the world of animate and inanimate creatures, or Agni (eater) and Soma (eaten).
4. That is, from the quarter still remaining on earth, or perhaps from the condition in which he had already spread out from earth with three quarters of his form.
5. The active female creative principle, Virāj is later replaced by Prakṛti or material nature, the mate of Puruṣa in Sāṅkhya philosophy.

6. This is the word used to indicate the performance of a Vedic sacrifice, spread or stretched out (like the earth spread upon the cosmic waters) or woven (like a fabric upon a loom). Cf. 10.130.1-2.

7. The word actually means 'to sprinkle' with consecrated water, but indicates the consecration of an initiate or a king.

8. Here 'the sacrifice' indicates the sacrificial victim; they are explicitly identified with one another (and with the divinity to whom the sacrifice is dedicated) in verse 16.

9. A mixture of special grasses that was strewn on the ground for the gods to sit upon.

10. A class of demi-gods or saints, whose name literally means 'those who are yet to be fulfilled'.

11. Literally, a mixture of butter and sour milk used in the sacrifice; figuratively, the fat that drained from the sacrificial victim.

12. Probably the Creator, though possibly Puruṣa himself.

13. The verses are the elements of the *Rig Veda*, the chants of the *Sāma Veda*, and the formulas of the *Yajur Veda*. The metres often appear as elements in primeval creation; cf. 10.130.3-5 and 1.164.23-5.

14. That is, incisors above and below, such as dogs and cats have.

15. The four classes or *varṇas* of classical Indian society.

16. The gods.

17. The enclosing-sticks are green twigs that keep the fire from spreading; the fuel sticks are seasoned wood used for kindling.

18. The meaning is that Puruṣa was both the victim that the gods sacrificed and the divinity to whom the sacrifice was dedicated; that is, he was both the subject and the object of the sacrifice. Through a typical Vedic paradox, the sacrifice itself creates the sacrifice.

19. Literally, the *dharmas*, a protean word that here designates the archetypal patterns of behaviour established during this first sacrifice to serve as the model for all future sacrifices.

The Creation of the Sacrifice

The image of weaving the sacrifice (cf. 10.90.15) is here joined with explicit identifications of ritual and divine, ancient and present, elements of the sacrifice.

- 1 The sacrifice that is spread out with threads on all sides, drawn tight with a hundred and one divine acts, is woven by these fathers as they come near: 'Weave forward, weave backward,' they say as they sit by the loom that is stretched tight.
- 2 The Man¹ stretches the warp and draws the weft; the Man has spread it out upon this dome of the sky. These are the pegs, that are fastened in place; they² made the melodies into the shuttles for weaving.
- 3 What was the original model, and what was the copy, and what was the connection between them? What was the butter, and what the enclosing wood?³ What was the metre, what was the invocation, and the chant, when all the gods sacrificed the god?⁴
- 4 The Gāyatrī metre⁵ was the yoke-mate of Agni; Savitṛ joined with the Uṣṇi metre, and with the Anuṣṭubh metre was Soma that reverberates with the chants. The Bṛhatī metre resonated in the voice of Bṛhaspati.
- 5 The Virāj⁶ metre was the privilege of Mitra and Varuṇa; the Triṣṭubh metre was part of the day of Indra. The Jagatī entered into all the gods. That was the model for the human sages.⁷
- 6 That was the model for the human sages, our fathers, when the primeval sacrifice was born. With the eye that is mind, in thought I see those who were the first to offer this sacrifice.
- 7 The ritual repetitions harmonized with the chants and with the metres; the seven divine sages harmonized with the original models. When the wise men looked back along the path of those who went before, they took up the reins like charioteers.

NOTES

1. Puruṣa, as in 10.90.
2. The gods who first performed the sacrifice. Cf. 10.90.14.
3. Cf. 10.90.15.
4. The circular sacrifice of the god to the god, as in 10.90.6, 10.81.5-6.
5. The metres alluded to in 10.90.9 are here enumerated and associated with particular gods.
6. Virāj, a female cosmic principle in 10.90.5, is here merely a metre.
7. Sages (*ṛṣi*) are seers as well as poets.

10.190

*Cosmic Heat*¹

- 1 Order² and truth were born from heat as it blazed up. From that was born night; from that heat was born the billowy ocean.
- 2 From the billowy ocean was born the year, that arranges days and nights, ruling over all that blinks its eyes.³
- 3 The Arranger has set in their proper place the sun and moon, the sky and the earth, the middle realm of space, and finally the sunlight.

NOTES

1. *Tapas*, the heat produced by the ritual activity of the priest, is equated with the primeval erotic or ascetic heat of the Creator.
2. *Ṛta*, cosmic order. Truth (*satya*) is, like *ṛta*, also a term for reality.
3. For blinking as a sign of a living creature, cf. 10.121.3.

10.81-2

The All-Maker (Viśvakarman)

These two hymns to the artisan of the gods speculate on the mysterious period of the ancient past, now veiled from the priests of the present (10.81.1 and 10.82.7). The Creator is imagined concretely as a sculptor (10.81.2), a smith (10.81.3), or

as a woodcutter or carpenter (10.81.4), but also as the primeval sacrificer and victim of the sacrifice (10.81.1, 10.81.5-6, 10.82.1), assisted by the seven sages (10.81.4, 10.82.2 and 10.82.4). Finally, he is identified with the one who propped apart sky and earth (10.81.2-4, 10.82), the one who inspires thought (10.81.7) and answers questions (10.82) but is himself beyond understanding (10.82.5 and 7).

10.81

- 1 The sage, our father, who took his place as priest of the oblation and offered all these worlds as oblation, seeking riches through prayer, he entered those who were to come later, concealing those who went before.¹
- 2 What was the base,² what sort of raw matter was there, and precisely how was it done, when the All-Maker, casting his eye on all, created the earth and revealed the sky in its glory?
- 3 With eyes on all sides and mouths on all sides, with arms on all sides and feet on all sides, the One God created the sky and the earth, fanning them with his arms.³
- 4 What was the wood and what was the tree from which they⁴ carved the sky and the earth? You deep thinkers, ask yourselves in your own hearts, what base did he stand on when he set up the worlds?
- 5 Those forms of yours that are highest, those that are lowest, and those that are in the middle, O All-Maker, help your friends to recognize them in the oblation. You who follow your own laws, sacrifice your body yourself, making it grow great.⁵
- 6 All-Maker, grown great through the oblation, sacrifice the earth and sky yourself. Let other men go astray all around;⁶ let us here have a rich and generous patron.
- 7 The All-Maker, the lord of sacred speech, swift as thought - we will call to him today to help us in the contest. Let him who is the maker of good things and is gentle to everyone rejoice in all our invocations and help us.

10.82

- 1 The Father of the Eye,⁷ who is wise in his heart, created as butter⁸ these two worlds that bent low. As soon as their ends had been made fast in the east, at that moment sky and earth moved far apart.
- 2 The All-Maker is vast in mind and vast in strength. He is the one who forms, who sets in order, and who is the highest image. Their⁹ prayers together with the drink they have offered give them joy there where, they say, the One dwells beyond the seven sages.
- 3 Our father, who created and set in order and knows all forms, all worlds, who all alone gave names to the gods, he is the one to whom all other creatures come to ask questions.
- 4 To him the ancient sages together sacrificed riches, like the throngs of singers who together made these things that have been created, when the realm of light was still immersed in the realm without light.¹⁰
- 5 That which is beyond the sky and beyond this earth, beyond the gods and the Asuras¹¹ – what was that first embryo that the waters received, where all the gods together saw it?¹²
- 6 He was the one whom the waters received as the first embryo, when all the gods came together. On the navel of the Unborn was set the One on whom all creatures rest.¹³
- 7 You cannot find him who created these creatures; another¹⁴ has come between you. Those who recite the hymns are gluttoned with the pleasures of life;¹⁵ they wander about wrapped up in mist and stammering nonsense.

NOTES

1. The early stages of creation remain in shadow, perhaps because the All-Maker destroyed them by sacrificing them and then prayed anew for the materials of creation.
2. The question, to which verse 4 returns, is the problem of

what the primeval sculptor stood on before there was anything created.

3. Though he has arms on all sides, here the anthropomorphic smith has two arms and 'wings', probably the feathers used to fan the forge. Cf. 9.112.2.

4. The assistants of the Creator, perhaps the seven sages (cf. 10.82.2 and 10.82.4).

5. Here and in the next verse, the Creator is both the sacrificer and the sacrificial victim, as Puruṣa is in 10.90.16.

6. Here, and in 10.82.7, the enemies of the poet in the contest are mocked.

7. That is, creator of the sun.

8. Butter is symbolic of primeval chaotic matter, the seed of the creator, and the sacrificial oblation. The creator churns chaos. Cf. 4.58 for butter.

9. The wishes and sacrifices of the first sacrificers, the pious dead, are fulfilled in heaven.

10. Day and night separated, like sky and earth.

11. The Asuras are the ancient dark divinities, at first the elder brothers and then the enemies of the gods (Devas).

12. For the embryo, cf. 10.121.1 and 10.121.7.

13. The navel is the centre of the wheel; cf. 1.164.13, 1.164.48.

14. Another creator has come between you, or, more likely (for the noun is neuter), another thing – ignorance – has come inside you as an obstacle; or a bad priest (such as are mentioned in the second half of the verse) has obscured the way to the gods.

15. A double meaning here: the priests are gluttoned with the life they have stolen from the sacrificial beast and with the high life of luxury they have bought with their undeserved fees. Here the poet speaks of his priestly enemies, who do not understand the meaning of the sacrifice. The mist is both the miasma of their clouded minds and the smoke from the useless sacrifice.

10.72

Aditi and the Birth of the Gods

This creation hymn poses several different and paradoxical answers to the riddle of origins. It is evident from the tone of the very first verse that the poet regards creation as a mysterious subject, and a desperate series of eclectic hypotheses (perhaps quoted from various sources) tumbles out right

away: the 'craftsman' image (the priest, Brahmanaspati or Bṛhaspati, lord of inspired speech); the philosophical paradox of non-existence;¹ or the paradox of mutual creation (Aditi and Dakṣa, the female principle of creation or infinity and the male principle of virile efficacy, creating one another)² or contradiction (the earth born from the crouching divinity and then said to be born from the quarters of the sky).

At this point, the speculations give way to a more anthropomorphic creation myth centring upon the image of the goddess who crouches with legs spread (Uttānapad); this term, often taken as a proper name, designates a position associated both with yoga and with a woman giving birth, as the mother goddess is often depicted in early sculptures: literally, with feet stretched forward, more particularly with knees drawn up and legs spread wide. Since she is identified with Aditi, the hymn moves quickly to the myth of Aditi and Dakṣa (in which the paradox of mutual creation is given incestuous overtones) and the creation of gods and men.

The creation of the universe out of water (vv. 6-7) and the rescuing of the sun from the ocean (v. 7) are well-known Vedic images that move the hymn back to the cosmic level, from which it then returns to anthropomorphism and to the myth of Aditi, when the sun reappears as Mārtāṇḍa, whose birth from Aditi is the subject of the final two verses.

- 1 Let us now speak with wonder of the births of the gods - so that some one may see them when the hymns are chanted in this later age.³
- 2 The lord of sacred speech, like a smith, fanned them together.⁴ In the earliest age of the gods, existence was born from non-existence.⁵
- 3 In the first age of the gods, existence was born from non-existence. After this the quarters of the sky were born from her who crouched with legs spread.
- 4 The earth was born from her who crouched with legs spread, and from the earth the quarters of the sky were

born. From Aditi, Dakṣa was born, and from Dakṣa Aditi was born.⁶

- 5 For Aditi was born as your daughter, O Dakṣa, and after her were born the blessed gods, the kinsmen of immortality.
- 6 When you gods took your places there in the water with your hands joined together, a thick cloud of mist⁷ arose from you like dust from dancers.
- 7 When you gods like magicians⁸ caused the worlds to swell,⁹ you drew forth the sun that was hidden in the ocean.
- 8 Eight sons are there of Aditi, who were born of her body. With seven she went forth among the gods, but she threw Mārtāṇḍa,¹⁰ the sun, aside.
- 9 With seven sons Aditi went forth into the earliest age. But she bore Mārtāṇḍa so that he would in turn beget offspring and then soon die.

NOTES

1. Cf. 10.129.1.
2. Cf. Puruṣa and Virāj in 10.90.5.
3. The idea of 'seeing' the births of the gods may refer not to being actually present at that early time but rather to the poet's gift of 'seeing' mythic events by means of his inspired vision.
4. 'Them' must refer to the two worlds, heaven and earth, rather than to the gods; the lord of sacred speech is here regarded as responsible for manual rather than spiritual creation.
5. Cf. 10.129.1.
6. Sāyaṇa remarks that Yāska's *Nirukta* 11.23 states that by the *dharma* of the gods, two births can be mutually productive of one another.
7. 'Mist' or 'dust' refers to the atomic particles of water, a mist that plays an important part in creation by virtue of its ambivalence, half water and half air, mediating between matter and spirit. Thus the steam rising from the asceticism of the Brahmacārin in the water (cf. 10.129.3-4) or the foam that appears when Prajāpati heats the waters is the source of matter for creation.
8. These are Yatis, who may be a class of sages or ascetics; more

likely, however, they are magicians, among whose traditional bag of tricks in ancient India was the ability to make plants suddenly grow. They may be linked with the dancers in verse 6, another aspect of creative shamanism.

9. The verb (*pinv*) implies swelling up as with milk from the breast.

10. Mārtāṇḍa's name originally meant 'born of an egg', i.e. a bird, and is an epithet of the sun-bird or fire-bird of Indo-European mythology. The verb describing what his mother did to him may mean either to throw aside or to miscarry, and a later etymology of Mārtāṇḍa is 'dead in the egg', i.e. a miscarriage. The story of Mārtāṇḍa's still-birth is well known in Hindu mythology: Aditi bore eight sons, but only seven were the Ādityas; the eighth was unformed, unshaped; the Ādityas shaped him and made him into the sun. On another level, Mārtāṇḍa is an epithet of man, born from the 'dead egg' that is the embryo; he is thus the ancestor of man, like Yama or Manu (both regarded as his sons), born to die.

DEATH

EVEN as the *Rig Veda* speculates in various contrasting, even conflicting ways about the process of creation, so too there is much variation in the speculations about death, and in the questions asked about death. There is evidence of different rituals – cremation (10.16) or burial (10.18), the latter also underlying the image of the 'house of clay' in a hymn to Varuṇa (see 7.89). Several fates are suggested for the dead man: heaven (10.14), a new body (10.16), revival (10.58), reincarnation (10.16), and dispersal among various elements (10.16.3, 10.58). It is also evident that there is a wide range of people that the dead man may hope to join, wherever he goes (10.154), and so it is not surprising that different groups of people are addressed, even within a single hymn: the fathers or dead ancestors in heaven (10.14), the gods (10.16), particularly Yama (10.14, 10.135), the dead man (10.14, 10.135), the mourners (10.14.12 and 10.14.14, 10.18), mother earth and Death himself (10.18). Together, these hymns reveal a world in which death is regarded with great sadness but without terror, and life on earth is preciously clung to, but heaven is regarded as a gentle place, rich in friends and ritual nourishment, a world of light and renewal.