

Mantra Pushpam



By Swami Shantananda Puri of
Vasishtha Guha, Uttarakhand, India



Mantra Pushpam

This Vedic hymn attaches a deeper meaning to even simple acts, such as the offering of sacred flowers to the Lord.

SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

The sages of the *Vedic* age were so inundated from birth to death with ritualistic purification (*samskaras*) at every stage of their life and exposed to the highest truths through *Vedic* hymns of deepest import and pulsating vibrations handed down from generation to generation that in their normal daily life there was no watertight compartmentalisation between temporal and spiritual or religious activities.

Divinised Living

Every act of the daily life of the *Vedic* man from the time he got up from bed was accompanied by various *mantras* and prayers and was thus divinised. In every commonplace thing that came before his eyes, water, sun, moon, clouds, stars, he was able to penetrate deeper with his intuitive

spiritual insight and go into ecstatic rhapsody at the grandeur and beauty of the one resplendent Reality running through and suffusing them all.

Even in such rituals as performing the daily *Puja* (form of worship), every act, such as bathing the deity (*Abhisheka*), offering of lighted incense sticks (*Dhoopa*), etc., was accompanied by a *Vedic* hymn which elevated the soul of the chanter as also the audience.

One such *Vedic* hymn used at the time of offering of the flowers to the deities at the very end of *Pujas* done in any house or orthodox shrine or Ashram is called *Mantra Pushpam* and starts with *Yopam Pushpam Veda...* It is part of the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* and speaks of the unlimited benefits which will be conferred by the

secret knowledge of the waters, fire, air, the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds and time (in the form of the unit of a year).

When the *Vedic* man encountered the vast universe in the form of rivers, a perennial source of the life giving waters, the moon showering the cool rays of the night, the blazing sun which is another main support for our life, the clouds and the rains which maintain the supply of water to the rivers, he could not resist bursting into a *Vedic* song (hymn) about the marvellous handiwork of the Lord. Let us not be misled into thinking that the *Vedic* man was a primitive worshipper of nature, as some Western scholars and historians would have us believe.

A Single Purpose

All the hymns and passages of *Vedic* revelation have a single purpose, a single doctrinal block, that is, to lead us to the Brahman, the only Reality. So each hymn and passage is in harmony with the others. The language of the *Vedas* being symbolic, many of the hymns look

like riddles. The real meaning is beyond all semantic fields, morphological sense and etymological interpretations.

A disciple enquired of his guru as to how to interpret his teachings and how to understand them. The Guru replied: "Take each one of my sentences and shake it till all the words fall off. Now, what is left is the real essence of the teaching."

As the *Vedas* (all the parts--*Sambitas*, *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas*) deal with the suprasensual reality, which is beyond words and beyond all concepts of the mind, a mere intellectual understanding is of no use. As they are all divine revelations, one has to meditate on



them with humility and reverence in order to understand them properly.

All the *Vedic* hymns have flown out from the deepest recess of the inner most layers of the *Vedic* sage and are the result of the extraordinary direct suprasensual experiences (not through the medium of the senses) and it will be impossible to understand them without the grace of God, a reverence and love for the Reality and a deep commitment. By 'waters' (*Apah*) is not meant the ordinary water, a product of the chemical combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

Knowledge of Vedas

Further, in order to understand the real significance of any passage or hymn, it is necessary that one should have a knowledge of the entire *Rg* and *Yajur Vedas* as various aspects of any one topic--say the moon (*Chandrama*) or the waters (*Apah*) have been dealt with in various places from various angles.

It was the admiration at the amazingly systematic beauty of the universe, a masterpiece of God's creation, that began to turn man's gaze inward to the Spiritual Heart where the Lord resides as the Self

or *Atman*. They stirred his heart and his inner experience came forth in prayerful hymns of the Divinity which was visible to him everywhere--in the waters, air, cloud, sun, moon, etc.

Badarayana's Definition

Sage Badarayana starts the definition (*Tatastha Lakshana*) of God as the one from whom the entire world has arisen, the one by whom it is maintained and in whom it dissolves (*Janmadyasya Yatah*).

Reverting to the specific topic of *Mantra Pushpam*, it refers to the context of offering flowers (*Pushpam*) to the Lord accompanied by this sacred hymn of the *Vedas* (*Mantra*).

Eight Types of Flower

In the esoteric sense, it has been explained in the *Visvesvara Sambita* that eight types of flowers are to be offered by the devotees in the form of the following specific vows of austerity or discipline:

The first flower is the vow of non-injury to other beings (*Ahimsa*). The second is the control of all our senses (*Indriya Nigraha*). The third is compassion towards all beings (*Sarvabhuta Daya*). The fourth and fifth are forbearance (*Kshama*) and to remain in peace (*Santi*) unaffected

by any happenings. The sixth is performance of *Tapas* by directing the mind one-pointedly towards the Lord and also by observance of austerities such as *Chandrayana Vrata* (restricting the daily food intake in a specific manner). The seventh and eighth are knowledge (*Jnana*) and Truth (*Satyam*), respectively. Thus the flowers are symbolic of the gradual unfolding (blooming) of the human consciousness leading to the ultimate truth, the Supreme Reality.

An Acronym

In one of the *Tantrik* texts, the word *Pushpam* (flower) has been treated as an acronym and defined as follows: The first syllable *Pu* in that word represents accumulation of merits (*Punya*). The entire first portion of the word i.e., *Push* connotes bestowing of plenty of riches (*Pushkala*). The last syllable *pa* represents eradication of all *papas* (sins).

Brihannaradeeyam extols flowers as an abode of all gods who are highly pleased with them. God is described as *Satyam*, *Sivam*, *Sundaram* (Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty). Flowers are always considered auspicious and are beautiful to look at. No wonder

that gods love flowers and prefer them.

The six subtle Chakras (plexus) in the body, through which the slumbering *Kundalini Sakti* courses along, while the aspirant or Yogi is advancing in his spiritual status, are all conceived in the form of lotuses with varied number of petals. The final destination of the *Kundalini* is the *Sahasrara* at the top of the head where thousands of lotuses bloom--as a symbol of the all-pervading, all-comprising Pure Consciousness.

Potent Vibration

Even if one does not understand the meaning of the *Mantra Pushpa* hymn, the potent sound vibrations emanating from their chanting generate a special energy beneficial to the audience and the entire world. The moment they hear it, an indescribable peace descends on the entire audience who can remain drowned in it for a few minutes.

That is why these hymns are called *Mantras*, sacred syllables which confer protection on the person who chants them, hears them or whose attention is focussed on them (*Mananat trayate*).

The *Mantra Pushpam* consists

them with humility and reverence in order to understand them properly.

All the *Vedic* hymns have flown out from the deepest recess of the inner most layers of the *Vedic* sage and are the result of the extraordinary direct suprasensual experiences (not through the medium of the senses) and it will be impossible to understand them without the grace of God, a reverence and love for the Reality and a deep commitment. By 'waters' (*Apah*) is not meant the ordinary water, a product of the chemical combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

Knowledge of Vedas

Further, in order to understand the real significance of any passage or hymn, it is necessary that one should have a knowledge of the entire *Rg* and *Yajur Vedas* as various aspects of any one topic--say the moon (*Chandrama*) or the waters (*Apah*) have been dealt with in various places from various angles.

It was the admiration at the amazingly systematic beauty of the universe, a masterpiece of God's creation, that began to turn man's gaze inward to the Spiritual Heart where the Lord resides as the Self

or *Atman*. They stirred his heart and his inner experience came forth in prayerful hymns of the Divinity which was visible to him everywhere--in the waters, air, cloud, sun, moon, etc.

Badarayana's Definition

Sage Badarayana starts the definition (*Tatastha Lakshana*) of God as the one from whom the entire world has arisen, the one by whom it is maintained and in whom it dissolves (*Janmadyasya Yatah*).

Reverting to the specific topic of *Mantra Pushpam*, it refers to the context of offering flowers (*Pushpam*) to the Lord accompanied by this sacred hymn of the *Vedas* (*Mantra*).

Eight Types of Flower

In the esoteric sense, it has been explained in the *Visvesvara Sambita* that eight types of flowers are to be offered by the devotees in the form of the following specific vows of austerity or discipline:

The first flower is the vow of non-injury to other beings (*Ahimsa*). The second is the control of all our senses (*Indriya Nigraha*). The third is compassion towards all beings (*Sarvabhuta Daya*). The fourth and fifth are forbearance (*Kshama*) and to remain in peace (*Santi*) unaffected

by any happenings. The sixth is performance of *Tapas* by directing the mind one-pointedly towards the Lord and also by observance of austerities such as *Chandrayana Vrata* (restricting the daily food intake in a specific manner). The seventh and eighth are knowledge (*Jnana*) and Truth (*Satyam*), respectively. Thus the flowers are symbolic of the gradual unfolding (blooming) of the human consciousness leading to the ultimate truth, the Supreme Reality.

An Acronym

In one of the *Tantrik* texts, the word *Pushpam* (flower) has been treated as an acronym and defined as follows: The first syllable *Pu* in that word represents accumulation of merits (*Punya*). The entire first portion of the word i.e., *Push* connotes bestowing of plenty of riches (*Pushkala*). The last syllable *pa* represents eradication of all *papas* (sins).

Brihannaradeeyam extols flowers as an abode of all gods who are highly pleased with them. God is described as *Satyam*, *Sivam*, *Sundaram* (Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty). Flowers are always considered auspicious and are beautiful to look at. No wonder

that gods love flowers and prefer them.

The six subtle Chakras (plexus) in the body, through which the slumbering *Kundalini Sakti* courses along, while the aspirant or Yogi is advancing in his spiritual status, are all conceived in the form of lotuses with varied number of petals. The final destination of the *Kundalini* is the *Sahasrara* at the top of the head where thousands of lotuses bloom--as a symbol of the all-pervading, all-comprising Pure Consciousness.

Potent Vibration

Even if one does not understand the meaning of the *Mantra Pushpa* hymn, the potent sound vibrations emanating from their chanting generate a special energy beneficial to the audience and the entire world. The moment they hear it, an indescribable peace descends on the entire audience who can remain drowned in it for a few minutes.

That is why these hymns are called *Mantras*, sacred syllables which confer protection on the person who chants them, hears them or whose attention is focussed on them (*Mananat trayate*).

The *Mantra Pushpam* consists

of seven *mantras*. Except in elaborate worship, normally the first *mantra* alone is chanted in houses and smaller ashrams while offering flowers. All these seven *mantras* speak of the immense benefits accruing from a knowledge of the substratum, source, nature and the divine potentialities of the various primordial elements and principles, such as the waters, the moon, the fire, the wind, the sun, the stellar constellations, and time, which are all symbols of cosmic principles and the activities which link us with the divine.

The two lines which recur in each *mantra* like the burden of a song are: "The one who knows the source or base of the waters is blessed with the abode of 'No Return', namely, *Mukti* or liberation."

Importance of Water

In our ritualistic tradition of the *Vedas*, water (*Apah*) plays an important part and thus occupies a special place. Water is used for various purposes in all *Pujas*, ceremonies, daily obligatory acts, such as the *Sandhya* worship (*Sandhya Vandana*), sacrifices, while taking food, etc.

Water possesses an integral reality and hence has healing powers. There is a ceremonial sipping of water (without the spoon touching the lips) called *Achamanam*, where on many occasions and daily while doing obligatory rites, water is sipped three times pronouncing the three names of the Lord-- *Achuta*, *Ananta* and *Govinda*.

It has been said that this *Achamana* accompanied by the three sacred names destroy all diseases and ailments, if done regularly.



Water purifies persons both internally and externally.

1. "May the waters, the mothers, purify us."

Taittiriya Samhita: 1-2-1

2. "Hail to you, divine, unfathomable, all-purifying Waters!"

Taittiriya Samhita: 1-2-1

3. "Whatever sin is found in me, whatever wrong I may have done, if I have lied or falsely sworn, Waters, remove it from me."

(The *Rg Veda*: X-9-8)

Foundation of Universe

These waters are the basis and foundation of the Universe. For, "From the Water is this universe produced" (*Satapata Brahmana*). The practice of immersion of the icons of Durga and Ganesa in rivers, especially in Bengal and Maharashtra, is symbolic of the return to the origin or the source.

It is interesting that almost a corresponding reverence for water exists in Christianity (Roman Catholic). It is said – "and Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightaway out of the water, and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a Dove, and lighting upon him; and lo, a voice from



heaven, saying: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Mathew 3-16-17)." It was when Jesus went up and out of the waters of baptism that this Divine Revelation took place. So it is with us. We baptize ourselves in our inmost, divine consciousness through meditation and when we completely merge in it, we become the sons of God at the first instance and later on will come to the stage of proclaiming with Jesus, "I and my father are one".

Primordial Status

Primordial status belongs to water rather than to any of the other elements. According to the *Nasadiya Sukta*, only water existed before the creation. Etymologically,

Apah (Waters) means, "what pervades." (The *Rg Veda* 10-121-7). When we go to the ocean and see the rise and fall of waves or to the various rivers and look at the cascading waters, we stand enraptured by their aggressive beauty and prayers well up from the heart. It evokes a spiritual peace and there is a perceptible elevation of our mood.

Water conveys the divine energy just as blood is the conveyor of human life. In the *Satapata Brahmana* (VI-1-1-9) it is said that the waters were produced out of the Word (*Vak*)—the first element to come out of the first "principle". "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (St. John 1-1). Thus, the ultimate source of the Waters is the Supreme Reality itself and the one who realises that source in his Heart is verily a liberated one.

To sum up, water, the abiding principle on which the entire universe rests, has the following beneficial and divine aspects:

1. Helps in growth and prosperity of mankind.
2. Has creative powers.
3. It washes off our sins and purifies men and objects both internally and externally.

4. It is an effective medium to absorb the power of *Mantras* as a result of which it is used for warding off evil spirits and ghosts.

The *Rg Veda* categorises the waters under various kinds depending on the source from which they are obtained. Water that collects on the cremation ground is recommended for *Abhichara* rites (killing an enemy, etc.), while the use of standing water is prohibited for sacrifices.

In the *Rajasuya* sacrifice, 17 different kinds of waters are used in order to conduct the hidden powers contained in them according to their sources. In the Soma sacrifice, two types of waters are enjoined, those drawn before sun set from a mountain river and those collected early in the morning from a flowing stream. Thus there is difference between water and water itself.

Water, fire, air, etc., are all manifestations of one and the same Conscious Energy. The one who meditates on them will come to know of their ultimate source and thus be enabled to reach the highest abode, namely, *Mukti* or liberation (*Ayatanavan Bhavati*). Let us now go into the meaning of each *Mantra* of this hymn.

Mantra 1

Meaning: "The one who knows the flower which has arisen from the waters, he blooms like a flower, becomes prosperous all around, endowed with good progeny and wealthy too. The moon is the flower, which has arisen from the waters. The one who understands this blooms like a flower, becomes prosperous, endowed with good progeny and wealthy too. The one who knows the source or base of the waters is blessed with the abode of "No Return," namely, *Mukti* or Liberation.

Or, the fire can be considered as the immediate base (*Ayatana*) of

the waters. The one who knows the source or substratum of the fire is blessed with the permanent abode, namely, *Mukti* (Liberation)."

Symbol of Mind

As it is the water, which has become all the universe (*Satapata Brahmana*), the water could be considered as flowering into the moon who is considered as a vehicle of immortality (S.B. IX – 5-1-8). Just as the waters are the symbol of life, the moon, being a symbol of the mind, elevates the worshipper to a higher plane of consciousness, enhances his daily living and helps him to live with the awareness of deeper dimensions while carrying out his normal worldly activities.

The moon tends to activate human potentialities, which bestow prosperity on the man. The *Vedas* speak of the moon as King Soma. The hymns in the *Rg Veda* (*Rg Veda* VIII, 48) describe him as guarding our bodies having made his abode in each of our limbs. He is called as man's constant overseer who protects him.

The moon is supposed

**Mantra Pushpam**

to be full of nectar or *Amṛta*, which is the food of all the gods as well as the Manes (*Pitṛs*). The nectar, being in liquid form, has a watery base.

When the nectar in the moon is exhausted, for a day and a night he dwells first in the Waters, then in the plants (*Rg Veda* I-91-3) and then enters the disc of the Sun who fills the moon day by day for 14 days every month with nectar so that on the night of the full moon one sees him shining brightly with a full disc.

In the *Rg Veda*, both the sun and the moon are considered as two forms of the fire (*Agni*). The moon is also considered as the protector and head of all trees and plants (*Veerudham Patih*). A worship of the moon grants fertility and as he also rules over the rain, he confers all the riches of heaven and earth, nourishment, food, cattle, etc. (*Rg Veda* IX, 69-8, etc.).

Flower of Water

In *Vajasaneya Samhita* (VIII-26) it is said of the moon, "Divine waters, this is your offspring." The moon thus being the son, the offspring of the waters can be rightly called as the flower of the water. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* it is said that "The Flower is Brahman", the

highest all-encompassing Reality being called the Brahman. Thus, ultimately, all the gods and all the objects of the Universe are linked to the Absolute Reality, which is the substratum or source of all. The scriptures, being the deep expressions of the personal suprasensual experiences of the sages of the *Vedic* age, are still valid and capable of taking the modern man to the divine realms of absolute peace and *Ananda* (happiness).

Fire, the Base

As per the genesis context in *Purusha Sukta*, the immediate base of the waters is the Fire (*Agni*). In the sequential creation, waters came out of the fire and thus fire is considered the abode or the substratum of water. In the very next *mantra*, the exact opposite, i.e. the reverse of this statement, will be seen-- that water is the substratum of the fire. All the *mantras* in the *Vedas* have a two-fold purpose:

- (i) To manifest the divine power as sound vibrations having the power to purify and sanctify the entire atmosphere and all the audience, and
- (ii) To convey the knowledge of the ultimate Reality in a symbolic manner.

Mantra 2

Meaning: "He who knows the source of water becomes the possessor of the Permanent abode (*Mukti*). Water is the substratum of the fire. The one who knows this and also the source of the water is endowed with a permanent abode. The immediate substratum of water can be considered as Air (*Vayu*--the god of winds) also. The one who knows this as also the ultimate substratum of water gets endowed with a permanent abode."

Waters signify the manifested energy of the Supreme Lord. "Water is the outpouring of the luminous movements and impulse of the Divine Existence." (Ref:

Vedic Physics by Rajaram Mohan Roy). *Agni* (fire), it is said, had run away and hidden himself in waters and was born of the waters again.

Three Places of Origin

According to the Western *Vedic* scholars whose views are supported by the Indian commentaries too, *Agni* born out of the waters is the lightning. The lightning is considered as a form

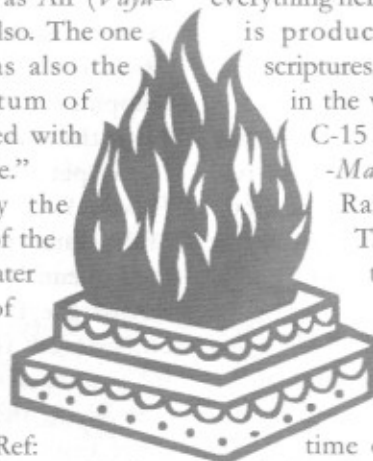
of *Agni*. (Chapter III *Vedic Mythology*, Alfred Hillebrandt). As per the *Rg Veda*, (X-45), *Agni* has three places of origin--"in heavens," "in the waters" and "among us." The *Satapata Brahmana* (SB VII - 4-1-6) states "Of this universe, it is in truth the waters that were made first. Hence, when the waters flow, then everything here, whatsoever exists, is produced." As per the

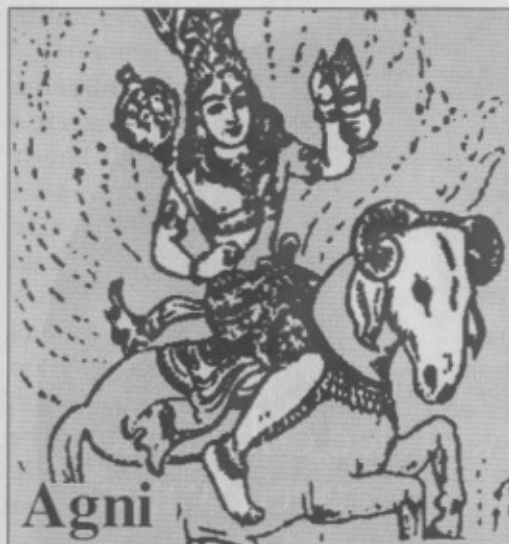
scriptures, the Fire is contained in the womb of water. (I-C-15 *The Vedic Experience--Mantra Manjari*, by Raimundo Panikhar).

The ocean is supposed to contain a fire called *Vadavagni*, which rises up to consume the world during the time of final dissolution (*Pralaya*). *Agni* is also an energy.

Energy Conversion

(Among the various types of energies, such as heat, sound, mechanical, electro-magnetic, and so on, an energy cannot be destroyed but one type of energy can be converted into another--Law of Thermo-dynamics. Hence it is that the energies contained in the fire and the waters are inter-





Gautama Dharma Sutra prohibits one who has given up *Agnihotra* (the daily worship of the Fires) from being invited to the feast in honour of the dead (*Sraddha*). "The manifestations of *Agni* are many; he lives not only in the sun, in the moon and in the fire of the hearth; he dwells also in all that shines and lives, in men as in animals, trees, waters and even in stones (flint stones)."

Most Appropriate Symbol

The most appropriate *Vedic* symbol for the suzerainty of the Supreme Lord in the form of Pure Consciousness is the figure of the Fire Deity (*Agni*), the friend of Man, the mediator, the sacred and sacrificial fire as also the common fire of the hearth and at the same time the fire that is in the sun, in burning things, and in the Heart of Man manifesting different aspects in different places.

Agni is near to man, kindly disposed, intimately bound up both with his mundane as well as religious life, the guest of his dwelling, the wise god who knows all things, the eternally

convertible, thus being mutual sources to each other.)

According to Sri Aurobindo's *Vedic Symbolism*, *Agni* is the most universal God who prepares, purifies and perfects. He is also the devourer and enjoyer. He is also the Dynamic Life energy. He leads our thoughts towards effective power and our active energies towards light. He is the vehicle of the Superconscious energy, which flows from the higher plane of existence. The fire overpowers the workings of knowledge that are undivine and evil in their impulses (*Rg Veda* V-2:9).

The fire was given such a predominant status that the

young, the strong and powerful to whom one offers sacrifice and who is able to shower the worshipper with blessings.

(Even a common man living in a cold climate like the Himalayan one in winter can gratefully appreciate the comforting proximity, the soporific peace and the companionship of the fire in the fire place.)

Modern man has become so stone-hearted and drowned in the artificial excitements offered by the mundane world that he has become blind and insensitive to the loving beckoning of the Supreme Lord from the slumbering innermost layers of consciousness of the so called objects of nature--fire, waters, sun, etc--dubbing them as inert or insentient.

"He is a being of flood and forest who passes aloft. Knowing the law, he inspires to right action, the wise and true Lord."

(*The Rg Veda* I -145)

"The lordship of the *Agni* is not seen as the imposition of the Divine Will, but as expression of the normal and beautiful order of reality," a token of love to mankind from the Supreme Lord, a thermostat to awaken the ignorant man to the highest truth in the form

of *Jnanagni* (the fire of knowledge) attained by being exposed to the fire of *Tapas* (austerities and penance).

The following are some of the selected hymns from the *Rg Veda* describing the benefits capable of being bestowed by *Agni*, if propitiated through prayers:

(1) *The Rg Veda* VII - 15

May the Agni keep watch on every side of our homes and all they control.

*May he keep distress at bay,
Remover of sorrows.*

(2) *The Rg Veda* VII - 10

*To Agni are directed our songs
and aspirations,
seeking the God and petitioning
bounteous favours--
to the pleasant to behold, the
handsome one, the mighty,
the mediator, conveyor of
Man's oblations.*

At the highest level of worship, three types of fire used to be built up by certain householders who were termed as *Ahitagni*.

(1) The first fire, the *Abhavanija* is associated with the celestial world and is seen as the representative of the Sun. It receives the sacrificial offering for Gods (*Abhavanija*).

(2) The second one, the *Garhapatya*, mostly serves the

purpose of cooking the food offering meant for sacrifices.

(3) The third fire, the *Dakshinagni*, belongs to the Manes (*Pitru Devatas*) and is meant for offering of oblations to them.

These three fires represent the three worlds, the heavens (*Svab* or *Svab*), the earth (*Bhobh*) and the interim region, the abode of the Manes (*Bhuvab*).

Like the Sun, *Agni* is a living symbol to remind us of the brilliance of its ultimate source, the Absolute Reality. It is a very effective medium for *upasana* (worship) and meditation, which will lead us to the Inner Reality.

Separate, but Related

Now the same *mantra* takes us to another element, the *Vayu* (wind god), which is equally important for the survival of man (*Vayu*).

Wind, breath and life constitute a triumvirate, which the *Vedic* Man viewed, though separate, as deeply related and belonging together as integral parts of one and the same Reality. Movement is the common

factor of all the three and is also the chief life-principle.

Wind is "air in movement. Breath is the same movement of the air within living beings. Life is intrinsically movement." The hymn is but a record of the primordial experience of the *Vedic* Man who, with his meditation and prayers, could transcend the dichotomy of matter and spirit nearly 5000 years ago when no concept of Particle Physics existed and gain an undifferentiated and integrating insight into the ultimate Reality where no amount of intellectual perspicacity or merely poetical imaginations could ever take us.



Life is the symbol of Existence. Anything without life is dead. "The wind reveals to us how alive the earth is," and "breath discloses to us the intimate connection between life and matter."

Symbol of Life

A hymn in the *Attharvana Veda* (XI-4) deals beautifully about *Prana* (vital breath) linking it with all connected aspects of *Vayu*, the wind god. It is the wind which gives life even to plants and animals, and plants perform an ecologically purifying function by breathing in and out. The breath of life is the symbol of life as it manifests in living beings.

'Life', being an energy, can never die. Life is 'Being' and is an inherent feature of the Supreme Reality. A realisation of this can take one to immortality.

As per the Genesis in the *Purusbasukta*, the Fire came out of the *Vayu* and water came out of the Fire. Thus, *Vayu* can be considered as the source of the water too (*Vayoragnih, Agnerapab*). Further, the *Vedas* address *Vayu* as the visible *Brahman* (a manifestation of the ultimate Reality who is the source of all): *Namaste Vayo; Tvameva Pratyaksham Brahmasi, Tvameva Pratyaksham Brahma Vadishyami*

(*Taittiriya Upanishad*--First *Shanti Mantra*). Further, water, when heated, reaches the gaseous state as vapour and in this way, too, water can be considered as a base for the wind (air).

Mantra 3

Meaning: "Water is indeed the abode or base of *Vayu*. The one who knows this and the ultimate abode or source of water is bestowed with a permanent abode (liberation).

"The sun is indeed the substratum or source of water. The one who knows this as also the substratum (abode) of the sun is blessed with the permanent abode. Water indeed is the abode, and source of the sun."

It was just mentioned in the previous *mantra* that the immediate base or the abode of the water can be considered as *Vayu* (the Wind God) and this *mantra* says exactly the opposite of it--that the abode or base of *Vayu* is the water. Here, the idea is that food is produced out of the waters and the *Vayu* in the form of the breath of life (*Prana*) rests on food. In this aspect, the abode or base of *Vayu* is the Water (*Apab*).

In the *Antaryami* Section of *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (III-7-4 to

5 & 7), it is beautifully summed up that whether it is water or fire or wind, the inner controller who functions in and activates them all is the one immortal Self.

III-7 – “He who dwells in the wind, yet is other than the wind, whom the wind does not know, whose body is the wind, who controls the wind from within—he is the *Ātman* within you, the Inner Controller, the Immortal.”

These same wordings have been used again only by substituting the word “the wind” by “the waters” and “the fire,” respectively.

How can any one dare say (as some Western scholars of earlier days did) after going through these soul-elevating hymns that the *Vedas* were the folk songs of the imagination of the primitive cowherds of the Aryan tribe who were overawed by the beauty and the miraculous functioning of the forces of Nature? (When the author was studying in the high school in 1939-42, he had the misfortune of reading these immature ideas of Western scholars repeated in our history text-books.)

Sun, the Source

In this *mantra* (Hymn 3), the substratum or source of the

Waters is now stated as the Sun (*Tapaṇ*) who is also known as *Surya*. The main source of water is the rivers. The water in the rivers, which go and mix up with the salty ocean is replenished by the rainwater. It is the sun who is responsible for absorbing the water from the rivers and giving it out as rain through the rain clouds. In this way, the sun can be considered the source of the water.

The sun and the fire together constitute the “light of the gods and also in the less personified theology of Light as the inner self and Power of *Brahman*.” The Sun as light shining in this world and dispelling the darkness and also as the symbol of the Supreme Light of the Reality forms a link between the cosmos and the trans-cosmic Reality.

It is also a link between the material and the spiritual and the hymns in the *Rg Veda* express “both the dimensions at the same time so that we discover their radical unity. The *Gayatri Mantra*, the most renowned mantra of the *Vedas*, is “addressed to the divine life giver as Supreme God, symbolised in *Savita*, the Sun.”

The *Mantra* goes on to say that

the immediate source of the sun is water. As the entire universe including the sun has come out of the Primordial Water which is proclaimed as the foundation of the entire universe, waters is indeed the substratum of the sun. Further, as *Kausitaki Brāhmaṇa* (XXV-1), says, the Waters performed *Tapas* (penance) and out of it was born the sun.

Mantra 4

Meaning: "He who understands this relationship as also the ultimate source of the water is blessed with a permanent abode."

"The immediate source of the waters can be considered as the moon. The one who knows the abode or source of the moon is blessed with a permanent abode (of immortality). Water indeed is the substratum of the moon. The one who knows this is blessed with an abode."

As regards the moon, it has been exhaustively dealt with in the earlier pages. The moon is called the presiding deity and nourisher of all trees and plants. It is these trees and plants which attract rains in their regions, thus supplying the Earth with water. Further, the moon is filled with *Amṛta* (nectar), which is watery in its main contents.

For these reasons, the moon could be considered the base for waters. As the moon rises up from the ocean, he is described in the *Vedas* as having been born out of the waters. "The Moon is inside the Water," says the *Rg Veda* (I-105-1). *Chandramah apsu antarah*. Thus the waters also may be considered as the base for the moon.

Mantra 5

Meaning: "The one who knows the ultimate source or substratum of waters is blessed with an abode."

"The stars or constellations may be also considered as the abode of water. The one who knows this and the abode of the stars gets an abode."

"Water indeed can be considered as the base or source of the *nakshatras* (stars). The one who knows this becomes endowed with an abode."

The word "abode" (*Āyatana*) is interpreted as any one of the celestial regions by some. If the worshipper is only after the temporary evanescent pleasures of the heavens, he will only get such an abode. It all depends on the motive of the worshipper.

As regards the constellations, they go with the moon and have not

been given any separate prominence in the *Vedas*.

The terrestrial benefits of *nakshatras* (stars) are astrological in nature as the position of the moon the various stars in the natal and horoscope of a person is supposed to influence the events in his life. Consequently, there are separate hymns or *Rk̥s* to propitiate the particular birth star of a person through a *nakshatra* Homam. In the *Antaryami* section of the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣad* also where the Supreme Reality is spoken of, as the in-dweller and controller of all forces of Nature the stars have been clubbed with the moon.

Mantra 6

Meaning: "The immediate source or base of water is the rain-cloud (*Parjanya*). The one who knows this as also the source of the rain-cloud is blessed with an abode. Water indeed is the substratum of the rain cloud. The one who knows this relationship and the source of water is bestowed with an abode."

The *Parjanya* (cloud) is the personification of rain, the God of the waters from the Heaven. Prayers are addressed to *Parjanya* for good harvest and corn in plenty

as also for security and prosperity as all the harvested corn may be damaged by a violent storm (The *Atharvāna Veda* VI-79). It is this divinity who fertilises the earth and its plants.

As the waters pour from the clouds as rain, the *Parjanya* can be considered as the immediate source or base of water. From another point of view, as it is the waters of the river and ocean absorbed by the sun and let into the atmosphere which lead to the formation of clouds, the Waters of the earth can be considered as the substratum of the rains (*Parjanya*).

The relationship of man with the deities in charge of the forces of nature, all of whom derive their power and ability from the final source of all, viz, the ultimate reality, is one of partnership and collaboration as stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3-11).

Mantra 7

Meaning: "The year (which forms the major unit for the eternal cycle of Time) is the base on which water rests (for its interaction with various elements of nature and functioning). The one who knows this relationship and the substratum of time gets endowed with an abode."

Conversely, it may be said that the time (year) has water as its substratum. The one who knows this relationship and also knows the Universe as a boat floating in the all-pervading water, remains firmly established (in an abode)."

The rhythm of life lies in conception, birth, growth, decay and death and it is all governed by Time.

*From Time flow forth created things,
From Time, too, they advance*

to growth

In Time too, they do disappear.

Time is a form, and formless too.

(Maitri Upanishad 6-14)

Time, the Regulator

Time is a great regulator and controller to ensure the regularity of functioning of the various operations and natural laws in the world (*Rtam*). For practical purposes, the Infinite Time is broken into ordinary time of sensuous perception with a year (*Samvatsara*) as the main unit.

The sun's cycle of movement consists of one year or 360 days, which is divided in the *Rg Veda* into the months of 30 days each, the month being based on the Moon's lunation period (*Rg Veda* I-25-8). So the year (*Samvatsara*) in the mantra is a symbol of Time.

All creations including the Waters and the Universe come out of Time and dissolve in Time.

"I am the Time (Death) who has come out to dissolve the entire world".

The Bhagavad Gita - XI -

In this sense it can be said that time is the base or the substratum on which all universe and all elements like Waters rest. In another sense, as the entire universe came out of the Waters, including the Sun who is the basis for the concept of year as a unit of Time, Waters is indeed the source or substratum for the year (*Samvatsara*).

If one could intone these prayers of the *Vedas* daily in the original *Sanskrit* pronouncing the syllables in their prescribed pitch and accent and also meditate on the profound truths contained in them, these would serve as the most effective means for turning one's heart to God, the Supreme Reality, so that one would be able to hear the God talking through every element of nature and nature's manifestations--the rivers, the rains, the moon, the Sun and in short through every blade of grass, in the language of the Heart. □

Reproduced with editor's permission from the monthly, Tattvaloka, The Splendour of Truth, published at 76 Eldams Road, Chennai 600 0018. Tel: 2432 8124. Email: info@tattvaloka.com Website: www.tattvaloka.com. Published for over 30 years under the aegis of an education trust with the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Sharada Peetham as the chief patron, Tattvaloka, a family magazine, seeks to spread the values of India's rich Vedic knowledge and wisdom, with a special appeal to the modern corporate executives and the younger generation.