



The Primeval Sacrifice (Purusha Sakta) Rig Veda 10.90

Thousand-headed was Purusha, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. Having covered the earth on all sides, he extended beyond it by the length of ten fingers.

Purusha alone is ALL this—that which has been and that which will be. And he is the lord of immortality, and grows beyond everything by consuming food.

Such is his greatness. And greater indeed is this Purusha. All creatures constitute a fourth of him; three-fourths of him are the immortal in heaven.

With three quarters Purusha rose upward; one quarter of him here came into being again. Then he spread out in all directions into animate and inanimate objects.

From him Viraj (the Shining One) was born; from Virāj Purusha was born again. Being born, he reached behind the earth and also before it.

The gods performed a sacrifice with Purusha as an oblation. The spring was its clarified butter, the summer its fuel, the autumn its oblation.

The sacrificial victim—Purusha—born in the beginning, they sprinkled with sacred water upon the sacrificial grass. With him the gods, the heavenly beings, and the seers [*rishis*] performed the sacrifice.

From that sacrifice completely offered was collected the clotted butter. Then came that the beasts of the air, of the forest, and those of the village.

From that wholly offered sacrifice were born the hymns and the sacred chants; the meters were born from it; the sacrificial formula was born from it.

From that the horses were born and those animals that have two rows of teeth. Cattle were born from that; from that were born goats and sheep.

When they divided Purusha, into how many different portions did they arrange him? What did his mouth become? His two arms? What are his two legs called? His two feet?

His mouth became the Brahmin (priest), his two arms became the Rajanya (warrior), his two legs the Vaishya (merchant); from his two feet the Sudra (peasant) was born.

The moon was born from his mind; the sun was born from his eye; from his mouth came Indra and Agni; from his breath (*prāna*) the wind was born.

From his navel the air was produced; from his head the sky was evolved; from his two feet the earth, from his ear the four directions. In this way have the worlds been formed.

Seven were the enclosing sticks in this sacrifice, three times seven were the fire-sticks made, when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound Purusha as the victim.

With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice. these were the first norms (*dharma*) of sacrifice. These powers reached the heaven where the ancient gods and other beings dwell.

Arthur Anthony Macdonell. *A Vedic Reader for Students*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919. Translation updated by M. Russo

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