



Selections from the *Rig Veda*

Agni [RG 1.1]

I magnify Agni the domestic priest, the divine ministrant of the sacrifice, the invoker, best bestower of treasure.

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Through Agni may one obtain wealth day by day and prosperity, glorious and most abounding in heroes.

O Agni, the worship and sacrifice that you encompass on every side, that same goes to the gods.

May Agni the invoker, of wise intelligence, the true, of most brilliant fame, the god come with the gods.

Just what good you, O Agni, wilt do for the worshipper, that purpose of you comes true, O Aṅgiras.

To you, O Agni, day by day, O illuminer of gloom, we come with you bringing homage; to you ruling over sacrifices, the shining guardian of order, growing in thine own house.

So, O Agni, be easy of access to us, as a father to his son; abide with us for our well-being.

Indra [RV 1.32]

The chief wise god who as soon as born surpassed the gods in power; before whose vehemence the two worlds trembled by reason of the greatness of his valour: he, O men, is Indra.

Who made firm the quaking earth, who set at rest the agitated mountains; who measures out the air more widely, who supported heaven: he, O men, is Indra.

Who having slain the serpent released the seven streams, who drove out the cows by the unclosing of Vala, who between two rocks has produced fire, victor in battles: he, O men, is Indra.

By whom all things here have been made unstable, who has made subject the Dāsa colour and has made it disappear; who, like a winning gambler the stake, has taken the possessions of the foe: he, O men, is Indra.

The terrible one of whom they ask 'where is he', of whom they also say 'he is not'; he diminishes the possessions of the niggard like the (player's) stake. Believe in him: he, O men, is Indra.

Who is furtherer of the rich, of the poor, of the suppliant Brahmin singer; who, fair-lipped, is the helper of him that has pressed Soma and has set to work the stones: he, O men, is Indra.

In whose control are horses, kine, clans, all chariots; who creates the sun, the dawn; who is the guide of the waters: he, O men, is Indra.

Whom the two battle-arrays, coming together, call upon divergently, both foes, the farther

and the nearer; two having mounted the self-same chariot invoke him separately: he, O men, is Indra.

Without whom men do not conquer, whom they when fighting call on for help; who has been a match for every one, who moves the immovable: he, O men, is Indra.

Who slays with his arrow the unexpected many that commit great sin; who forgives not the arrogant man his arrogance, who slays the Dasyu: he, O men, is Indra.

Who in the fortieth autumn found out Śambara dwelling in the mountains; who has slain the serpent as he showed his strength, the son of Dānu, as he lay: he, O men, is Indra.

Who in the fortieth autumn found out Śambara dwelling in the mountains; who has slain the serpent as he showed his strength, the son of Dānu, as he lay: he, O men, is Indra.

Even Heaven and Earth bow down before him; before his vehemence even the mountains are afraid. Who is known as the Somadrinker, holding the bolt in his arm, who holds the bolt in his hand: he, O men, is Indra.

Who with his aid helps him that presses Soma, him that bakes, him that offers praise, him that has prepared the sacrifice; whom prayer, whom Soma, whom this gift strengthens: he, O men, is Indra.

As he who, most fierce, enforces booty for him that presses and him that bakes, you indeed art true. We ever dear to you, O Indra, with strong sons, would utter divine worship.

Vishnu [1.154]

I will now proclaim the heroic powers of Viṣṇu, who has measured out the terrestrial regions; who established the upper gathering-place, having, wide-paced, strode out triply.

By reason of his heroic power, like a dread beast that wanders at will, that haunts the mountains, Viṣṇu is praised aloud for that: he in whose three wide strides all beings dwell.

Let my inspiring hymn go forth for Viṣṇu, the mountain-dwelling wide-pacing bull, who alone with but three steps has measured out this long far-extended gathering-place;

Whose three steps filled with mead, unfailing, rejoice in bliss; and who in threefold wise alone has supported earth and heaven, and all beings.

I would attain to that dear domain of his, where men devoted to the gods rejoice: for that, truly akin to the wide-strider, is a well of mead in the highest step of Viṣṇu.

We desire to go to those abodes of you two, where are the many-horned nimble kine: there indeed that highest step of the wide-pacing bull shines brightly down.

Varuna [5.86]

Wise indeed are the generations by the might of him who has propped apart even the two wide worlds. He has pushed away the high, lofty firmament and the day-star as well; and he spread out the earth.

And I converse thus with myself: ‘when, I ask, shall I be in communion with Varuṇa? What offering of mine would he, free from wrath, enjoy? When shall I, of good cheer, perceive his mercy?’

I ask about that sin, O Varuṇa, with a desire to find out; I approach the wise in order to ask; the sages say one and the same thing to me: ‘this Varuṇa is angry with you.’

What has been that chief sin, O Varuṇa, that you desire to slay your praiser, a friend?

Proclaim that to me, you who are hard to deceive, self-dependent one: free from sin, I would eagerly appease you with adoration.

Set us free from the misdeeds of our fathers, from those that we have committed by ourselves. Release Vasiṣṣha, O King, like a cattle-stealing thief, like a calf from a rope.

It was not my own intent, O Varuṇa, it was seduction: liquor, anger, dice, thoughtlessness; the elder is in the offence of the younger; not even sleep is the warder off of wrong.

I will, like a slave, do service sinless to the bounteous angry god. The noble god made the thoughtless think; he, the wiser, speeds the experienced man to wealth.

Let this praise be well impressed on thy heart, O self-dependent Varuṇa. Let us have prosperity in possession, prosperity also in acquisition. Do ye protect us evermore with blessings.

Creation Hymn [10.129]

There was not the non-existent nor the existent then; there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond. What did it contain? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, unfathomable, profound?

There was not death nor immortality then. There was not the beacon of night, nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own power. Other than that there was not anything beyond.

Darkness was in the beginning hidden by darkness; indistinguishable, this all was water. That which, coming into being, was covered with the void, that One arose through the power of heat.

Desire in the beginning came upon that, (desire) that was the first seed of mind. Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the non-existent.

Their cord was extended across: was there below or was there above? There were impregnators, there were powers; there was energy below, there was impulse above.

Who knows truly? Who shall here declare, whence it has been produced, whence is this creation? By the creation of this (universe) the gods (come) afterwards: who then knows whence it has arisen?

Whence this creation has arisen; whether he founded it or did not: he who in the highest heaven is its surveyor, he only knows, or else he knows not.

The Primeval Sacrifice [10.90]

Thousand-headed was Puruṣa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He having covered the earth on all sides, extended beyond it the length of ten fingers.

Puruṣa is this all, that has been and that will be. And he is the lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through food.

Such is his greatness, and more than that is Puruṣa. A fourth of him is all beings, three-fourths of him are what is immortal in heaven.

With three quarters Puruṣa rose upward; one quarter of him here came into being again. Thence he spread asunder in all directions to what eats and does not eat.

From him Virāj was born, from Virāj Puruṣa. When born he reached beyond the earth behind and also before.

When the gods performed a sacrifice with Puruṣa as an oblation, the spring was its melted butter, the summer its fuel, the autumn its oblation.

That Puruṣa, born in the beginning, they besprinkled as a sacrifice on the strew: with him the gods, the Sādhyas, and the seers sacrificed.

From that sacrifice completely offered was collected the clotted butter: he made that the beasts of the air, of the forest, and those of the village.

From that sacrifice completely offered were born the hymns and the chants; the metres were born from it; the sacrificial formula was born from it.

From that arose horses and all such as have two rows of teeth. Cattle were born from that; from that were born goats and sheep.

When they divided Puruṣa, into how many parts did they dispose him? What (did) his mouth (become)? What are his two arms, his two thighs, his two feet called?

His mouth was the Brāhman, his two arms were made the warrior, his two thighs the Vaiśya; from his two feet the Śūdra was born.

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born; from his mouth Indra and Agni, from his breath Vāyu was born.

From his navel was produced the air; from his head the sky was evolved; from his two feet the earth, from his ear the quarters: thus they fashioned the worlds.

Seven were his enclosing sticks; thrice seven were the faggots made, when the gods performing the sacrifice bound Puruṣa as the victim.

With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice: these were the first ordinances. These powers reached the firmament where are the ancient Sādhyas, the gods.

Soma [8.48]

Wisely I have partaken of the sweet food that stirs good thoughts, best banisher of care, to which all gods and mortals, calling it honey, come together.

If you have entered within, thou shalt be Aditi, appeaser of divine wrath. May you, O Indu, enjoying the friendship of Indra, like an obedient mare the pole, advance us to wealth.

We have drunk Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods. What can hostility now do to us, and what the malice of mortal man, O immortal one?

Do good to our heart when drunk, O Indu; kindly like a father, O Soma, to his son, thoughtful like a friend to his friend, O far-famed one, prolong our years that we may live, O Soma.

These glorious, freedom-giving *drops*, ye have knit me together in my joints like straps a car; let those drops protect me from breaking a leg and save me from disease.

Like fire kindled by friction inflame me; illumine us; make us wealthier. For then, in thy intoxication, O Soma, I regard myself as rich. Enter (*into us*) for prosperity.

Of thee pressed with devoted mind we would partake as of paternal wealth. King Soma, prolong our years as the sun the days of spring.

King Soma, be gracious to us for welfare; we are thy devotees: know that. There arise might and wrath, O Indu: abandon us not according to the desire of our foe.

Since thou art the protector of our body, O Soma, thou as surveyor of men hast settled in every limb. If we infringe thine ordinances, then be gracious to us as our good friend, O god, for higher welfare.

I would associate with the wholesome friend who having been drunk would not injure me, O lord of the bays. For the enjoyment of that Soma which has been deposited in us, I approach Indra to prolong our years.

Those ailments have started off, diseases have sped away, the powers of darkness have been

affrighted. Soma has mounted in us with might: we have gone to where men prolong their years.

The drop drunk in our hearts, O Fathers, that immortal has entered us mortals, to that Soma we would pay worship with oblation; we would abide in his mercy and good graces.

You, O Soma, uniting with the Fathers, have extended yourself over Heaven and Earth. To you as such, O Indu, we would pay worship with offerings: we would be lords of riches.

You protecting gods, speak for us. Let not sleep overpower us, nor idle talk. We always dear to Soma, rich in strong sons, would utter divine worship.

You are, O Soma, a giver of strength to us on all sides. You are a finder of light. As surveyor of men, enter us. Do you, O Indu, protect us behind and before with your aids accordant.

Arthur Anthony Macdonell. *A Vedic Reader for Students*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917.

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