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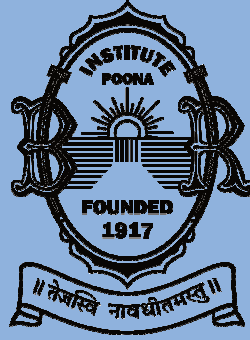
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## PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN THE ṚGVEDA

By

Lauren M. Bausch

*Abstract:*

For both Mīmāṃsā and Bhartṛhari, philosophy of language is understood in terms of *śabda*, a word that curiously never occurs in the Ṛgveda. For example, Mīmāṃsā advocates *śabdapramāṇa* (verbal testimony) and *śabdanityatvavāda*, while Bhartṛhari contends that *brāhman* is *śabdatattva*, the nature of the word. These sophisticated theories both center around the Vedas, but a closer look at language in the Vedas themselves reveals what language means and how it operates in their own terms. This paper philologically and philosophically examines three concepts related to language in the Ṛgveda—*brāhman*, *vāc*, and *akṣāra*—in an effort to understand the ontological use of language in early Vedic. Special attention will be given to Ṛgvedic hymn 6.9 to show, according to the Ṛgveda, how language functions in the process of revelation (śruti) and its relationship to primordial reality.

The Vedas consist of language, and the Ṛgveda in particular of *brāhman*.<sup>1</sup> What Vedic language conveys in terms of meaning is secondary to how it arises, which imbues the words with potent efficacy and sets them apart from pedestrian speech. Tradition holds that the *brāhman* that comprise the entire collection are *apauruṣeya*, which is to say that the human seers who articulated the various hymns are not the authors of them. Rather, the realized sages whose minds, as we will see below, entirely opened up, saw *brāhman* in the mind beyond the intellect, from which language arises, and shared this language with the world. The expansion of the mind gives way to how it was in the beginning, leading to the seers becoming whole. From that integrated wholeness the *brāhman* were seen or heard. Louis Renou (1955: 1) noted that because

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor G.U. Thite for reading with me Sāyana's commentary on ṚV 6.9 and to him and Peter Scharf, *mama sākḥāyau*, for their valuable comments on drafts of this paper. This paper was supported by the International Association of Sanskrit Studies Honorary Research Fellowship.

many terms, like *bráhman* or *akṣára*, which came to designate the absolute, first denoted ‘formulation’ or ‘word’, speech (*vác*) may be considered the prototype of the absolute:

un mot tel que *vác* n’est autre que l’équivalent de logos: c’est le prototype de la notion *d’ātmán-bráhman*, comme le dit G. [Geldner] ad 10.125, hymne adressé précisément à la Parole. Les termes qui plus tard désigneront l’absolu, comme *bráhman* ou *akṣára* ont noté d’abord la “formulation” ou le “mot”, des termes ésotériques chargés de resonance comme *nāda* ou *bindu* sont issues de la “letter” parlée ou écrite.

As Indologists like Renou have shown, words that primarily mean language in early Vedic also signify the ground of being. The source of this idea and the creative dimension of speech, which later Vedic texts developed in much greater detail, is found in the Ṛgveda. Interestingly, the word *śabda*, which is tied to later Indian philosophies of language, is not found in the Ṛgveda, and in fact occurs only a few times in later Vedic.<sup>2</sup> However, words like *bráhman*, *vác*, and *akṣára* not only occur in the Ṛgveda, but also impart an early ontological philosophy of language.

### 1. *bráhman*

A *bráhman* (neuter) emerges from the *brahmán* (masculine) in the context of Vedic ritual. Following Hermann Oldenberg (1917 vol. 2: 65), Paul Thieme (1952: 108, 118, 125) and Joel Brereton (2004: 326) understand *bráhman* (n.) as ‘formulation’, which is to say, according to Thieme (111), “the ability to formulate reality in a magically powerful manner,”<sup>3</sup> and *brahmán* (m.) as the ‘formulator’ of Ṛgvedic hymns that bears creative power, i.e. the ability to formulate reality. Renou (1949: 12) draws attention to the enigmatic quality of *bráhman* (the “forme de pensée à énigme”) and the mystery that carries in itself its revelation. He further described *bráhman* in terms of priestly and religious power (“pouvoir sacerdotal” and “pouvoir religieux”) and as a connective energy that uses words to imply, enigmatically, the inexpressible.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The word *śabda* occurs in *Mādhyandina Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 30.19=*Kāṇva Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 34.19, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.2.7, *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.16, 21, and 26, *Taitirīya Āraṇyaka* 1.12.5, *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* 6.2, and numerous times in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*.

<sup>3</sup> Thieme writes, “weil das *bráhman*, d.h. die Fähigkeit, Wahrheiten in magisch kräftiger Weise zu formulieren.” Oldenberg similarly understood *bráhman* in the sense of a holy word or formula.

<sup>4</sup> In Renou’s (1949: 15-18, 43) words, “une sorte d’énergie qui utilise la parole mais pour laisser entendre, par voie d’énigme, l’inexprimable.”

However, Thieme (1952: 104) criticizes Renou's definition narrowly focused on the enigmatic quality of *bráhman* because for him every hymn is poetry and a *bráhman*—even the non-enigmatic ones.<sup>5</sup> Jan Gonda (1950: 58, 70) considers *bráhman* to be “a more or less definite power...which often, and especially in the most ancient texts, manifests itself as word, as ritual, etc.”<sup>6</sup>

Thieme rejects Gonda's (18) definition and etymology of *bráhman* from the stem  $\sqrt{brh}$  (to grow, increase). Following Maurice Bloomfield's “prose central idea of a word,” Renou's “l'idee première” or “le sens initial,” and Abel Bergaigne's “one single expression,” Thieme (1955-6: 54-5) advocates finding an initial meaning of a word. He (1952: 125-6; cf. Scharf 2007) argues that this initial meaning, formulation, is derived from “the morphological element with a nominal function (‘root’) *brah*” (form, shape) with the suffix *-man*. In his words:

Die grammatische Analyse des Wortes ist klar. Es enthält ein morphologisches Element mit Nennfunktion („Wurzel“): *brah*, das die Vorstellung „formen, gestalten“ benannt haben muß, und ein morphologisches Element mit Bezeichnungsfunktion („Formans“): *-man*, das die -durch die „Wurzel“ benannte Vorstellung als Abstraktion bezeichnet: *brah* „formen“: *bráhman* n. „Formung“ wie *oj* „stark sein“: *ójman* n. „Stärke“...*brahmán* m. dagegen enthält ein Formans, das den Begriff bezeichnet, der als Träger der durch die Wurzel benannten Vorstellung auftritt: ...*brahmán* „der die Formung zustande bringt“ = „Former, Dichter“.

However, many Indologists do not accept Thieme's derivation. And against restricting translations to an original meaning, Gonda maintains that a single word in a modern language is not sufficient to capture an idea in ancient Indian culture.<sup>7</sup> In his words, “The most ancient ‘sense’...of brahman is, as far as we are able to know, the power immanent in the words, verses, and formulas of the Veda” (Gonda 1962: 270).<sup>8</sup> The debate concerning the meaning of *bráhman* reveals the

<sup>5</sup> Thieme (111) does admit, however, that cosmic riddles are an especially powerful form of *bráhman* that induce confirmation by ‘Wunder.’

<sup>6</sup> Later, Gonda (1962: 268-9) clarified that the “more or less definite power” on p. 70 was specified as the “idea of ‘inherent firmness,’ supporting or fundamental principle.”

<sup>7</sup> Gonda (1950: 13) does not think that in pre-Upaniṣadic thought *bráhman* meant “the same thing to all people who used it.”

<sup>8</sup> Brereton maintains that Gonda has it backwards: the verbal utterance is primary to the *bráhman*, and its power, which in his view arises due to its poetic form, is secondary. Private conversation at the 228<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the American Oriental Society in Los Angeles, March 16-19, 2018.

richness of the source material and the varied methodological approaches applied by scholars. In the pages that follow, I hope to reconcile to the extent possible the positions held by Renou, Gonda, and Thieme, and to show that in the Ṛgveda, *bráhmaṇ* can be a verbal utterance, the power manifested in the words, the ability to formulate reality, and the absolute.

Building on the philological studies of *bráhmaṇ* carried out by these Indologists, I will examine ṚV 6.9 as a way to understand how a *bráhmaṇ* emerges in the Ṛgveda. Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton (2014: 782) describe this hymn as “[a] powerfully enigmatic hymn, in which the poet reflects on the craft of poetry, worries about his ability to practice it, and, on having received the revelation of the mysteries from the ritual fire, takes heart and assumes his poetic vocation.” Stanley Insler (1989-90) argues that 6.9 depicts a “novice poet” coached by his father. To these interpretations, along with those of Renou, Willard Johnson, and others, I will add my own. I see this hymn as one of the most lucid firsthand accounts of the mind opening to its fullest potential and merging with the dynamic flow of the give and take of cosmic offerings, personified by Agni Vaiśvānara, an epithet of fire that literally denotes “belonging to all men.” Through a verse by verse examination of the hymn that takes into account the English translation by Jamison and Brereton, scholarly interpretations of the hymn, and Sāyaṇa’s commentary, I hope to shed new light on the early Vedic philosophy of language. In this paper, translations of the Ṛgveda, unless otherwise noted, are by Jamison and Brereton, sometimes with slight modifications.

*áhaś ca kṛṣṇám áhar árjunaṃ ca ví vartete rájasī ved’yábhīḥ |*  
*vaiśvānaró jáyamāno ná rájā ávātiraj jyótiṣāgnís támāṃsi ||*

ṚV 6.9.1

“The black day and the silvery day roll out through the two dusky realms according to their knowing ways.

Agni Vaiśvānara, (even) while being born, like a king [overcame<sup>9</sup>] the dark shades with his light.” (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 783)

Ṛgvedic hymn 6.9 to Agni Vaiśvānara narrates the experience of a brahmin learning to see *bráhmaṇ*. The first verse introduces Agni Vaiśvānara as one who overpowers with his light the darkness in the revolving of day and night. Here the idea is introduced that there is a white day and a black day, which is to say day and night, that turn through the “two dusky realms” by means of what is knowable

<sup>9</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 783) translate *ávātirat* as “suppressed.”

(*vedyābhiḥ*). Sāyaṇa explains the two dusky realms (*rajasī*) either as coloring with their own light the entire world with that which is knowable” (*rajasī svasvabhāsā sarvaṃ jagad rañjayantau vedyābhiḥ*) or as “heaven and earth” (*rajasī dyāvāpṛthivyau*). The rotation of night and day due to knowable cognitions points to a cognitive function of the mind wherein Agni serves as the bearer of offerings between heaven and earth, and the basis of cognition (see Jurewicz 2010). What he brings not only colors how the world is perceived, but also comprises the means by which one can overcome duality, because Agni Vaiśvānara has already destroyed the darkness. Insofar as Agni Vaiśvānara has triumphed over darkness, over the turning of day and night, he is compared to a king (*ná rājā*) who has sovereignty over everything; for this reason, the young brahmin resorts to him in his quest to weave a *brāhman*.

*nāhām tántuṃ ná ví jānāmi ótuṃ ná yām váyanti samaré  
'tamānāḥ |  
kásya svit putrá ihá váktuvāni paró vadāti ávareṇa pitrá ||*

ṚV 6.9.2

“I do not know the thread, nor know how to weave, nor (know) what the wanderers [=fingers? threads? shuttles?] weave at their meeting. Whose son will be able to speak what is to be said here, as someone higher than his father, (who is) below?”

In verse two, the brahmin student honestly admits that he does not know (*ná ví jānāmi*) the vertical and horizontal threads, nor what the “wanderers” (*aṭamānāḥ*) weave when coming together.<sup>10</sup> In their commentary on this verse, Jamison and Brereton (cmt on ṚV VI.9.2: 40) explain: “The 1<sup>st</sup> person speaker, the poet in training, takes over here, with a statement of his ignorance about his own metier. He expresses this ignorance in the metaphor of weaving, a well-known trope for poetic composition that reaches back into Indo-European antiquity.” In his commentary on the second verse, Sāyaṇa remarks that according to the ritualists, the seer is going to explain the greatness of Vaiśvānara,

<sup>10</sup> In their commentary on 6.9.2, Jamison and Brereton (40) interpret *tántuṃ*, *ótuṃ*, and *atamānāḥ* as a noun, an infinitive, and a relative clause (without antecedent): “I do not understand the thread (noun), nor (how) ‘to weave’ (infinitive [from  $\sqrt{ve}$ ]), nor ‘what they weave’ (rel. cl.)” This is a poetic reading, and Insler (1989-90: 111) translates the second verse in a similar way: “I understand neither the thread (= theme) nor how to weave (a verse), nor what the (other poets) weave when they engage in competition. Whose son indeed shall speak what should be said here, shall speak higher (=better), with his inferior (ability), than his father.” According to Sāyaṇa, however, *tántuṃ* and *ótuṃ* refer to the vertical and horizontal threads.

metaphorically describing the *yajña* as a garment (*vastra*) that is difficult to know.<sup>11</sup> But in the eyes of the spiritualists (*ātmavid*), this metaphor explains the creation of the world.<sup>12</sup> It will be shown below that all three interpretations apply when considering the Vedic philosophy of language.

The poet in training admits that he does not know three things, which can be understood as metaphors. Sāyaṇa quotes a verse:

*vaiśvānarasya putro 'sau parastād divi yaḥ sthitaḥ |*  
*chandāṃsy adhvaravastrasya stutaśastrāṇi tantavaḥ ||*  
*yajūṃṣi ceṣṭās cautuḥ syād vastram vātavyam adhvaraḥ<sup>13</sup> |*

The son of Vaiśvānara is situated in heaven beyond. The meters which are the melodies (*stuta=sāman*) and recitations (*śastra=ṛc*) are threads of the garment in the form of sacrifice. And the weft would be the moving *yajus* formulae. The garment to be woven is the sacrifice.

One possibility given by Sāyaṇa is that the warp and weft threads refer to *ṛc*-s, *sāman*-s, and *yajus* formulae. In the spiritualist interpretation, however, the warp threads represent the five subtle elements and the weft threads represent the five gross elements.<sup>14</sup> What the poet does not know is the work of the five elements, represented by the cloth, which is the expansion (*prapañca*) of the elements.<sup>15</sup> He also does not know the capacity (*īśvara*) that creates for the sake of their experience.<sup>16</sup> Sāyaṇa goes on to say, whose son, instructed by a father born after creation, will say what is to be said here, out of reach of the intellect?<sup>17</sup> The problem is clear: to be able to speak what is to be spoken, i.e. a *brāhman*, the

<sup>11</sup> *vaiśvānarasya mahattvam ākhyāsyann ṛṣis tadarthaṃ yajñam vastrātmakatayā rūpayan tasya durjñānatvam anayā pratipādayatīti yajñavādino manyante |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>12</sup> *rūpakatayā jagatsṛṣṭer durjñānatvam anayā pratipādayatīty ātmavido manyante |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>13</sup> The conclusion of the verse does not match the imagery in ṚV 6.9.2, in which Sūrya is the son: “Sūrya situated totally beyond is the father. Agni situated on the earth is the mother”: *paraḥ paraḥ sthitaḥ sūryaḥ pitāgniḥ pāṛthivo mātāḥ iti ||* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>14</sup> *tantum tantūn tantusthānāni sūkṣmāṇi viyadādīny apañcikṛtāni bhūtāni na vijānāmi | otum otūn pañcikṛtāni sthūlāny otusthānīyāny api viyadādīni na vijānāmi |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>15</sup> *na ca tatkāryam pañcsthānīyam prapañcam vijānāmi yaṃ prapañcam |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>16</sup> *teṣāṃ bhogārtham īśvaraḥ sṛjatīti kartṛtvam upacaryate |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>17</sup> *ihāsmiṃ viṣaye paraḥ parastād buddher aviṣaye vartamānāni vaktvāni vaktavyānīmāny avareṇārvācīmena sṛṣṭyuttarakālam utpannena pitrā svajanakenānuśiṣṭaḥ san kasya khalu putro vadāti | vadet |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2



brahmin in training must return to the One before creation, before the *prapañca* of the elements, beyond the intellect with all that it has learned from human interactions. As Sāyaṇa says, “Someone not knowing the story before his own birth could not speak.”<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way, ṚV 10.129 begins by describing the beginning, before creation. Following the translation of Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1608-9), there was no duality of “existent” and “nonexistent” at that time (vs. 1a: *nāsad āsīn nō sād āsīt tadānīm*), “neither the airy space nor heaven beyond” (1b: *nāsīd rājo nō víomā parāḥ*), no death or deathlessness (2a: *nā mṛtyúr āsīd amṛtaṃ nā*), and “no sign of night nor of day” (*nā rátrīyā áhna āsīt praketaḥ*). Joanna Jurewicz (2010: 46) renders 2cd, which speaks of the nondual origin: “That One was breathing breathlessly with its own will. There was nothing else beyond it.” ṚV 6.9.1 describes day and night as well as the two *rājasī*, thus clearly marking a time of duality after creation, whereas the first verses of 10.129 present the nondual beginning, the primordial reality. In his work on ṚV 10.129, Brereton (1999: 249) says that while the hymn describes the origins of the world, it questions whether anyone truly knows how the world arose. Not even the devas know, because “they originated after the creation of the world,” and “even the ‘overseer in the highest heaven’ might not know.” The word *ádhyakṣa* (overseer) is, according to its name, an eye-witness that perceives through the senses. One still relying on ordinary sensory perception does not know the answer. Verses six and seven ask (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1609):

*kó addhá veda ká ihá prá vocat kúta ájātā kúta iyám víśṛṣṭiḥ |*  
*arvág devá asyá visárjanena áthā kó veda yáta ābabhúva ||*  
 ṚV 10.129.6

*iyám víśṛṣṭir yáta ābabhúva yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná |*  
*yó asyáádhyakṣaḥ paramé víoman só aṅgá veda yádi vā ná véda ||*  
 ṚV 10.129.7

6. Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it?—from where was it born, from where this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?

7. This creation—from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not—he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows [*veda*]. Or if he does not know [*véda*] . . . ?

<sup>18</sup> *svotpatteḥ prācīnaṃ vṛttāntam ajānānaḥ kaś cid api na vaded ity arthaḥ ||* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

According to these verses, one cannot use the intellect to know the origin. The repetition of  $\sqrt{vid}$  here has a parallel in R̥V 6.9.1, in which the two dusky realms (*r̥ájasī*) roll out with that which is knowable (*ved'yābhiḥ*). Brereton (1999: 258) states, “Neither human knowledge nor speech, even if they are reflexes of the primal creative power, can capture that origin.” The dualistic mind with its lofty reason and knowledge of things cannot access this.

The reason for this is found in hymn 10.129 itself, which describes how the many arose from the One without duality. As Jurewicz (2010: 44-59) elucidates in her treatment of the “Nāsadiya Sūkta,” originally the state of the absolute was a perfect fullness without manifestation that cognized itself as “That One” (vss. 1-2). A term in verse three that describes this state triggers two possible meanings: (1) *ābhū* as what is about to be and what is not and (2) *ābhú* as what is empty or void: “This expresses the idea that inside the void there is a part of reality which is about to be but which does not exist yet at this creative stage” (49). Then in verse four, I translate:

*kāmas tād āgre sām avartatādhi*  
*mānaso rétaḥ prathamāṃ yād āsīt |*  
R̥V 10.129.4ab

Desire overcame that [One] in the beginning, which was the first  
semen of mind (*mānas*).<sup>19</sup>

With the arising of desire comes the bifurcation and multiplication of That One into many, generating the mind that experiences dualistically.<sup>20</sup> When this happens, the originally nondual whole embarks on a journey as an individual entity relating to itself, which it thereafter experiences in relation to other in an ongoing process of relative cognition. In contrast, Brereton (1999: 253, 259) identifies *mānas* (thought/mind) in verse 4 as the original creative principle, from which developed desire. However, following the syntax of the verse, it seems more likely that the movement of desire led to the emergence of the cognitive mind. For Jurewicz (51) too, *mānaso rétas* expresses the cognitive character of creation—in other words, that the world originates from the Absolute’s thought or mind. In 4cd, the poets who searched their hearts with inspired thought found the

<sup>19</sup> Jurewicz (2010: 51) and Peter Scharf (private conversation) consider it possible that *yāt* and *tāt* refer to ‘That One.’ Compare Jurewicz (50): 4ab. “Desire firstly came upon that which was the first semen of thought/mind.” And Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1609: 4ab. “Then, in the beginning, from thought there evolved desire, which existed as the primal semen.”

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Peter Scharf for discussing this point with me.

connection of being in non-being (4cd: *sató bándhum ásati nír avindan hṛdí pratīṣyā kaváyo manīṣá*). Through the process of formulation, the seer reaches the beginning of speech, the first mental germ (Thieme 1952: 106). This mental engagement of searching the heart through inspired thought leads the poet to the original nondual state of perfect fullness—to what is described as before creation in the first three verses of 10.129.

Brereton observes that by adding two verses to their version of ṚV 10.129, the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (2.8.9.3-7) interprets the hymn in a specific way. My translation of this passage, following Brereton's (1999: 259) states:

Pray, what was the wood and what was the tree from which they carved out heaven and earth? O you of inspired thinking, inquire through the mind about that on which he stood [=depended upon] while supporting the worlds. Brāhman was the wood and brāhman was the tree from which they carved out heaven and earth. O you of inspired thinking, through the mind I tell you: on brāhman he stood while supporting the worlds.

Brereton (259) explains, “Here the text has done what ṚV 10.129 so carefully avoided. It has concluded with an answer to the questions about the origins of things by naming a fundamental principle. That principle is the *brāhman*, which is the verbal formulation of the truth.” It is significant that both verses contain the phrase *mānīṣiṇo mānasā* “O you of inspired thinking, through *mānas*.” Although Brereton's translation of *brāhman* as ‘holy composition’ reflects one level of meaning, in my interpretation, when the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa calls the original impetus *brāhman*, it also refers to *brāhman* as the absolute principle and source of everything.

To tie this back to ṚV 6.9.1-2, the brahmin in training confesses that he employs a dualistic mind and doesn't know how to weave a poem, but implores Agni Vaiśvānara for help. To succeed, he will have to become sovereign like Agni who has destroyed the darkness and returned to nonduality. Returning to the original source, and thereby leaving behind the intellect, is the means to see *brāhman*.

Continuing with the commentaries on ṚV 6.9.2, Jamison and Brereton (cmt on ṚV VI.9.2: 41) describe how the warp threads stretch lengthwise on the loom, so the wandering refers to “the way the weft threads go alternatively under and over the warp threads proceeding horizontally” in their meeting. They question, though, who is wandering, the weft threads, human weavers, etc.? Despite the range of possibilities,

Jamison and Brereton determine, “the subjects of *váyanti* must underlyingly be poets” who weave a poem. In a ritualistic sense, *atamānāḥ* refers to the priests (*ṛtvij*) who “continuously making movements (*ceṣtamānāḥ*) weave (*váyanti*), that is they stretch together the vertical and horizontal threads.”<sup>21</sup> According to Sāyaṇa, “The meaning is they produce [the *yajña*] in the form of a garment.”<sup>22</sup> The spiritualists, however, think that *atamānāḥ* means the moving, transmigrating beings who weave, that is generate, in the coming together of the warp and weft threads that stand for the elements.<sup>23</sup>

The second half of the *ṛc* questions whose son will be able to speak here. On one level, the son refers to the speaker, the brahmin student, who has not yet emerged as an independent formulator. Jamison and Brereton (2014: 782) understand him to be “a poet struggling to find his place as a poet within the bardic tradition.” They also note, “He confesses his lack of knowledge of poetic craft, metaphorically expressed as weaving. The burden is all the greater in that he feels pressure to surpass his father, whose poetic heir he is.” In contrast, Sāyaṇa interprets *kásya svit putrá* to mean a human being existing beyond in that yonder world.<sup>24</sup> The father is below, existing in this world, meaning on this side of his son who is Sūrya.<sup>25</sup> This poetic image suggests that the father on earth generates his son in heaven who can speak. There is a symbiotic relationship between the father and son and a continuity of life through what the father produces in this world via the *yajña* and receives from that yonder world. In other words, through the recitation of language—in the form of *ṛc*-s, *sāman*-s, and *yajus* formulae, all of which were transmitted by formulators who succeeded in seeing *bráhman* directly—the sacrificer produces in the *yajña* his son in the world beyond. The Brāhmaṇa texts interpret offspring (*prajā*) in that yonder world as energetic potentials to be generated mentally and physically in the future, a nascent form of karma theory.

*sá ít tántuṃ sá ví jānāti ótuṃ sá váktuvāni ṛtuthā vadāti |*  
*yá īṃ cíketad amṛtasya gopā avás cáran paró anyéna pásyan ||*  
ṚV 6.9.3

<sup>21</sup> *atamānāḥ* satataṃ ceṣtamānā ṛtvijaḥ *vayanti* tantūnotūṃś ca samtanvanti | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>22</sup> vastrarūpeṇa niṣpādayanti ity arthaḥ | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>23</sup> *samare* tantūnām otūnāṃ ca saṃgamane *ṛtamānāḥ* satataṃ ceṣtamānāḥ saṃsāriṇo *vayanti utpādayanti* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>24</sup> *manuṣyaḥ ... paraḥ* parastād amuṣmin loke vartamāno yaḥ sūryaḥ | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

<sup>25</sup> *yaḥ sūryas tasya pitrā avareṇa* avastāt asmin loke vartamānena | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.2

“Just he (knows) the thread; he knows how to weave; he will be able to speak what is to be said in proper order—(the one) who will rightly perceive him [=Agni]: “(He [=the poet] is) the herdsman of the immortal”—(the son who, though) he moves about below, sees above the other [=his father].”

The third verse expresses confidence that “he” knows what is difficult to know. Sāyaṇa interprets “he” in the first *pāda* to mean Agni Vaiśvānara, but Jamison and Brereton (782) signal that the last *pāda* can refer to both the poet, who is growing in skill, and to Agni. The poetic ambiguity allows for the poet to step into Agni’s place as the “herdsman of the immortal.” Jamison and Brereton convincingly argue:

The poet also “moves about below” not only as a mortal on the earth, but also as a son, who in one sense is “below” his father in the lineage. But he “sees above the other,” who is the father whose skills he is trying to best. Though in this *pāda* both *avāḥ* and *pāra-* refer to the son, whereas in 2cd *pāra-* referred to the son and *āvāra-* to the father, here the ultimate superiority of the son is triumphantly announced, whereas in 2cd this outcome was in question. The cleverness and intricacy of this 2<sup>nd</sup> hemistich, esp. immediately following the near verbatim repetition found in the first, is a clear demonstration that the young poet has come into his skills and his poetic heritage.

This shift marks the poet’s success achieved by knowing what Agni knows, knowing as Agni, since, Sāyaṇa tells us, he alone knows and no one else.<sup>26</sup> As Sāyaṇa shows, there is something of Agni Vaiśvānara in all men: indeed his name means having the form of all men (*vaiśvānaro viśvanarātmakaḥ*). It is to this potential, to see beyond (*paraḥ paśyan*) in an unconditioned manner (*nirupādhikena*), that our young brahmin student aspires in this hymn.<sup>27</sup> More will be said about the importance that this hymn places on ‘seeing’ below, but just to see Agni, the brahmin in training must expand his mind. In ṚV 10.88.14, Agni Vaiśvānara is called the poet who shines everywhere and encompasses the two wide worlds

<sup>26</sup> *sa it sa eva ... vi jānāti nānyaḥ kaścit* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.3

<sup>27</sup> There are many anachronisms in this part of the commentary, but it may still capture something of the spirit of the verse, even if dressed in much later concepts: *yo vaiśvānaro viśvanarātmakaḥ paramātmāmṛtasyāmṛtatvasya vimokṣaṇasya gopā rakṣitāvo 'vasthāt saṃsāradaśāyāṃ caran antaḥkaraṇopetaḥ jīvātmabhāvena saṃcaran paraḥ parastād avidyāyā ūrdhvaṃ vartamānenānyenoktavilakṣaṇena nirupādhikena saccidādilakṣaṇena rūpeṇa paśyan sarvaṃ jagat prakāśayan im imāni ciketat jānāti* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.3

from below and from above.<sup>28</sup> In R̥V 4.5.2-3 the poet declares, “the self-empowered god who gave this bounty to me, a mortal, a simple man—he shrewd, discriminating, the immortal Vaiśvānara...Agni has proclaimed the inspired thought to me” (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 566). The poet does not create the sacred formulation in his cognitive mind, but sees Agni, who not only can see what is above and below, but comprises that reality as well. A great deal happens in the third verse, namely a vast expansion of mind for the emergent formulator.

In Sāyaṇa’s ritualistic interpretation, the warp or vertical threads (*tāntu*) once again represent the meters, which are the melodies (i.e. *sāman*-s) and recitations (i.e. *ṛc*-s). The weft or horizontal threads (*ótu*) represent the *yajus* formulae and the actions belonging to the Adhvaryu.<sup>29</sup> In his spiritualist interpretation, the warp threads again stand for the subtle elements and the weft threads for the gross elements.<sup>30</sup> Sāyaṇa goes on to say that Vaiśvānara, as the herdsman, the protector, of immortality, takes the form of the earthly fire to this side below on earth, but sees beyond in heaven through the form of Sūrya (*sūryātmanā*).<sup>31</sup> He glosses “seeing” with illuminating or manifesting the entire world (*paśyan sarvaṃ jagat prakāśayan*). Here again there is an allusion to perception based on what Agni, who in the work of Jurewicz stands for cognition in Vedic, sees from the yonder world. Verse 6.9.3 says that he alone will perceive *īm*, a Vedic pronoun that could be interpreted in any grammatical number. Jamison and Brereton read it as accusative singular referring to “him,” i.e. Agni, while Sāyaṇa interprets it to be accusative plural, referring to “those things which are being perceived, meaning all beings (*īm imāni paridr̥śyamānāni sarvāni bhūtāni*). In stepping into Agni’s shoes, so to speak, the brahmin student gains a vast perspective about weaving and the way the different parts come together from the two worlds for the creation of a *brāhman*, the ritual offering, and the ongoing creation of material life.

*ayāṃ hótā prathamāḥ páśyatemám*  
*idāṃ jyótir amṛtaṃ mártiyeṣu |*

<sup>28</sup> *vaiśvānarāṃ viśvāhā dīdivāṃsaṃ māntrair agnīm kavīm áchā vadāmaḥ | yó mahimná paribabhūva urvī utāvástād utá devāḥ parástāt || R̥V 10.88.14*

<sup>29</sup> *sa it sa eva vaiśvānaro ’gniḥ tantuṃ tantusthānīyāni gāyatryādīni chandāṃsi stutaśastrāni vi jānāti tathā saḥ eva otum otusthānīyāni yajūṃṣy ādhvaryavāni ca karmāni vi jānāti | Sāyaṇa on R̥V 6.9.3*

<sup>30</sup> *tantuṃ tantusthānīyāni sūkṣmabhūtāni...tathautum otusthānīyāni sthūlabhūtāni | Sāyaṇa on R̥V 6.9.3*

<sup>31</sup> *yah̥ ayaṃ vaiśvānaraḥ amṛtasya gopāḥ udakasya gopāyitā rakṣitā avah̥ avastāt bhūloke caran̥ pārthivāgnirūpeṇa saṃcaran̥ parah̥ parastād divi anyena sūryātmanā | Sāyaṇa on R̥V 6.9.3*

*ayám sá jajñe dhruvá á níṣatto*  
*ámartyas tanúvā vārdhamānaḥ* || ṚV 6.9.4

“Here is the foremost Hotar: look at him. Here is the light, immortal among mortals. Here was he born, set steadfast down here, immortal, becoming strong through his own body.”

Verse four, the omphalos verse at the center of the hymn, issues the imperative to look directly at the foremost *hotr*, i.e. Agni Vaiśvānara, the immortal light among the mortals. It is precisely at this moment that the brahmin student becomes a seer, in whom the immortal Agni was born and thrives, of Agni in his most comprehensive sense.<sup>32</sup> Sāyaṇa glosses light (*jyótiḥ*) here as one who exists in the form of fire in the belly, but even in this physical sense, though perhaps less pervasive than when described elsewhere as everything between heaven and earth, he is omnipresent.<sup>33</sup> Sāyaṇa emphasizes Agni’s steadiness, pervasiveness, and deathlessness despite being closely connected with a physical body that will decay and die.<sup>34</sup> In the mortal body, Agni grows or becomes strong.<sup>35</sup>

Returning now to the importance of seeing in hymn 6.9, in verse three, the poet can only weave a hymn when he perceives ( $\sqrt{cit}$ ) Agni, “the light, immortal among mortals,” while seeing (*páśyan*, present participle of  $\sqrt{pas}$ ) “above the other.” Verse four reinforces this act with the second person plural imperative look (*páśyata*). Verse five further emphasizes seeing with the dative infinitive *drśáye*: Agni’s light is “set down to be seen.” Seeing is imperative in articulating formulations because Agni conveys, even comprises, the offerings between heaven

<sup>32</sup> Jamison and Brereton explain (cmt 43), “The immediacy is also conveyed by the abrupt command “look at him” (*páśyatemám*) at the end of the 1st pāda; since the impv. is in the 2nd plural, it cannot be addressed to the poet alone. Instead I suggest that it is the poet speaking, urging his priestly colleagues to behold the revelation that has just come to him. As noted also in the publ. intro., the name Agni does not occur in this verse. In fact, in the whole hymn *agní-* is found only in the first and last vss. (1d and 7b), another reinforcement of the omphalos structure. But every phrase in this vs. is an unmistakable description of Agni, and each could be matched by many similar phrases in Agni hymns. Unlike many omphalos vss., this one is not enigmatic and riddling (save for the omission of the name), but straightforward and obvious, one might say blazingly transparent. In this way it captures the poet’s sudden burst of enlightenment, in which he truly sees for the first time what is (and has always been) in front of him.”

<sup>33</sup> *jyotiḥ jāthararūpeṇa vartata ity arthaḥ* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.4

<sup>34</sup> *api ca saḥ ayam agniḥ dhruvaḥ niścalaḥ ā samantatāt niśattaḥ niṣaṇṇaḥ sarvavyāpī ata eva amartyaḥ maraṇarahito 'pi tanvā śarīreṇa saṃbandhāt jajñe jāyate* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.4

<sup>35</sup> Sāyaṇa declares this a metaphorical description, probably because right before this he describes Agni as unmoving: *vardhamānaḥ ca bhavatīti upacaryate* | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.4

and earth. Clearly this type of seeing is not ordinary, but involves the fastest possible mind rushing toward nonduality.

*dhruvám jyótir níhitam dṛśáye kám  
máno jáviṣṭham patáyatsu antáh |  
víśve devāḥ sámanasaḥ sáketā  
ékaḥ krátum abhí ví yanti sādhuḥ || ṚV 6.9.5*

“The steadfast light, set down to be seen—the mind swiftest among (all) those that fly—all the gods, of one mind and one perception, come separately straight to (him) as their single resolve.”

In Vedic tradition, there are clues that the mind functions in a special capacity when seeing *bráhma*n. Jamison and Brereton (2014: 783) note, “in verse 5 is the characterization of Agni as [*máno jáviṣṭham*] ‘swiftest mind,’ for it is the mental energy of Agni that the poet is absorbing.”<sup>36</sup> The poet, then, no longer operates according to ordinary cognition. Instead, this verse describes the steadfast, unmoving light and the fastest mind among those that fly, which Sāyaṇa glosses as those that move, i.e. sentient beings.<sup>37</sup> Sāyaṇa glosses *dhruvám* as unmoving, without constructs (*dhruvam niścalam nirvikalpam*) and light as *brahman* (*jyotir brahma*).<sup>38</sup> The Viśva Devas, meaning for Sāyaṇa all the devas, all the sense faculties (*viśve sarve devāḥ sarvāñdriyāṇi cakṣurādyaḥ*), then, being of the same mind and the same perception or intention, which according to Sāyaṇa means those who have the same *prajñā* (*samānaprajñāḥ*), approach straightaway that single resolve (*ékaḥ krátum*). The term *krátu* refers to the will, the mental procedure that precedes action, or intellectual power, but in this context Sāyaṇa glosses it as the doer of the actions (*kratum karmanām kartāram*).<sup>39</sup> When the young brahmin becomes aware of the unmoving light set down in order to see, he realizes the mind swiftest among living beings. And all the devas, now sharing the same mind and perception, go to that one *krátu*

<sup>36</sup> In the Ṛgveda, *javá* occurs in association with the mind, waters, a chariot, and falcon. Grassmann (1999: 482) defines it as fast and says that it figuratively designates the hymn (Lied). In addition to *javá*, another term that indicates a special function of the mind is *krátu* in ṚV 10.61, 1.17.5, and 10.104.10. See Renou 1956: 58; Johnson 1980: 7.

<sup>37</sup> *druvam niścalam manaḥ manasaḥ tasmād api javiṣṭham atīśayena vegavat tīṛśam vaiśvānarākhyam jyotiḥ patayatsu gacchatsu jaṅgameṣu prāṇiṣu antaḥ madhye nihitam prajāpatinā sthāpitam | Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.5*

<sup>38</sup> Sāyaṇa quotes VS 40.4 here: *tathā ca vājasaneyakam—‘anejad ekaḥ manaso javīyah’* (VS 40.4) *iti |* And likewise, [it has been said] in the Vājasaneya [Samhitā]: “the one not moving is faster than the mind” (VS 40.4).

<sup>39</sup> On Vedic *krátu*, see Rönnow 1932-3.



because, Sāyana says, they are targeting the one in the form of all men (*viśvanarātmakam*), a nod to the poet's merging into Agni Vaiśvānara, who, in an anachronistic gloss, is said to be none other than the supreme *ātman* (*paramātmānam*). The single resolve draws the devas together and suggests a still, unified mind that paradoxically moves the fastest and encompasses everything. This swift movement renders him a *ṛṣi* and sets him apart from other people.

As ṚV 10.71.7 explains, men with eyes and ears are not equal in *manojavéṣu*, quickness of mind (Staal 1977: 5-8). The terms in this compound are repeated in verse 8, which Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1498) translate: “When, in the mind's quickness (*mānaso javéṣu*) that is fashioned in the heart, brahmins perform the sacrifice together as companions, then they leave behind some by their knowing ways and others range widely with their lauds and formulations [*óhabrahmāṇaḥ*].” It is this swift mind that sets real poets apart from those who have not yet become formulators. Compare this to ṚV 4.5, which describes how the cow, i.e. dawn, found the great melody, the word hidden, “shining hidden in the track of truth, going quickly, quick streaming” (vv. 3, 9, p. 566). The image of a streaming melody or *padá* seems also to relate to the rushing streams of ṚV 4.58.5-6 (644):

*etā arṣanti hṛḍyāt samudrāc*  
*chatāvrajā ripúnā nāvacákṣe |*  
*ghṛtāsya dhārā abhí cākaśīmi*  
*hiranyāyo vetasó mádhya āsām || ṚV 4.58.5*  
*samyák sravanti saríto ná dhénā*  
*antár hṛḍá mánasā pūyámānāḥ |*  
*eté arṣanti ūrmáyo ghṛtāsya*  
*mṛgá iva kṣīpaṇór íṣamānāḥ || ṚV 4.58.6*

These (streams) rush [ $\sqrt{rṣ}$ ] from the sea found in the heart.<sup>40</sup> Having a hundred barriers, they are not to be spotted by the cheat, but I keep gazing upon the streams of ghee. A golden reed is in their midst.

These nourishing liquids flow [ $\sqrt{sru}$ ] together like streams, being purified within by heart and mind [*antár hṛḍá mánasā*]. These waves of ghee rush, like wild beasts retreating from a javelin.

For Geldner, the streams of ghee also refer to Soma and poetic speech (Elizarenkova 1995: 18). These three hymns describe the fastest mind or a rushing flow in the mind and heart of a worthy person whose mind is pure,

<sup>40</sup> Alternatively, one could read “from the sea that is the heart.”

but not in a charlatan. Related to this point, Elizarenkova has shown that the word *ṛṣi* derives from the root  $\sqrt{arṣ}$  [=  $\sqrt{rṣ}$ ] “to gush forth, flow swiftly, rush forth” (17). The successful formulator finds access to the swift mind of Agni, a quick flowing stream in the heart that purifies.

R̥gvedic hymns distinguish formulators from non-formulators in other ways besides speed of mind. The distinction between real poets, to whom Agni Jātavedas announces the highest track in secret, and others who “fail to satisfy with their insipid, meager, stunted speech” is also found in R̥V 4.5.14 (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 567). Frits Staal (1977: 5-8; cf. Johnson 1980: 12-17) draws attention in R̥V 10.71.4 to the fact that although many hear and see, not everyone hears and sees Vác because Vác reveals herself. Like in R̥V 6.9, a man cannot will the revelation, but only become himself the one resolve to which the devas respond. In 6.9, the poet becomes Agni, who, as is known from his general activities, serves all living beings indiscriminately according to their offerings. In 10.71, Speech reveals herself to one who is fully committed, like a wife to her husband. Many scholars have noted the contrast in R̥V 10.71.8-9 between brahmins who have “the mind’s quickness that is fashioned in the heart,” who leave others behind when they “range widely with their lauds and formulations,” and those who are not brahmins because they use speech in the wrong way, producing nothing.<sup>41</sup> Both the mind and speech of a formulator differ from that of a non-formulator. When the mind and senses of the formulator expand to return to the original, nondual, all-encompassing source, the speech that emerges is one and the same as that source itself.

*ví me kárṇā patayato ví cákṣur  
vidám̐ jyótir hṛdaya áhitaṃ yát |  
ví me mánaś carati dūráādhīḥ  
kím svid vakṣyāmi kím u nú maniṣye || R̥V 6.9.6*

“6. My two ears fly widely, widely my sight, widely this light that was deposited in my heart. Widely goes my mind, my intentions at a distance. What shall I say, and what now shall I think?”

Verse six describes a kind of expansion of the ordinary mind and senses as the light in the heart pours forth. Whereas up to now this light was channeled through the six senses of the brahmin, the light, no longer constrained by these physically oriented containers, goes everywhere.

<sup>41</sup> Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1498. See also Brereton 1999: 256; Staal 1977: 8; Kuiper 1960: 280.

Renou's (1955: 4, §3) translation captures the eyes and gaze flying open along with the light in the heart. Thieme (1957: 52) renders this, "his ears fly asunder," 'asunder his eye, and the light that is placed in his heart.'" Insler (1989-90: 112), who interprets ṚV 6.9 to be a conversation between a father and son, translates, "Away fly my ears, away my eye, away this light that has lain in my heart. My mind wanders off, its concerns are far away. What indeed shall I say and what shall I think about now?" The father again says that Agni will help. Against Renou's reading that the novice poet opens a new vista from which words will spontaneously appear, Insler (114) says that he is distracted and has lost his head, i.e. lost face, in front of his father. For this reason, he lacks the understanding to compose a hymn and is having a hard time concentrating on Agni for inspiration. In contrast, Jamison and Brereton's (2014: 784) translation aptly emphasizes how the mind expands when crafting poetry: "My two ears fly widely, widely my sight, widely this light that was deposited in my heart. Widely goes my mind, my intentions at a distance. What shall I say, and what now shall I think?" They comment, "In verse 6 the 1st-person poet returns, and with clear excitement testifies to the new flights of his poetic perception and imagination, matching the swift-flying mind of Agni's inspiration. He ends the verse with questions about what he will now say and think—no longer out of a feeling of powerlessness (as in vs. 2), but a sense of future possibilities" (783).

In their commentary, Jamison and Brereton (cmt. VI.9.5–6: 44) compare and contrast verses five and six. In terms of parallels, they assert:

The transference of the properties and powers of Agni to our poet is explicit in these two vss. In 5a Agni is light set down or deposited (*jyótir níhitam*); in 5b he is "swiftest mind" (*máno jáviṣṭham*). In 6b the poet comments on "this light that has been deposited in (my) heart" (*idám jyótir hṛdaya áhitaṃ yát*; note the neardeictic *idám* again), and in 6c "my mind goes widely" (*ví me mánaś carati*).

They go on to say how the two verses contrast:

In 5 all the gods sharing the same mind and the same perception (*sámanasaḥ sáketāḥ*) converge on Agni as the single focus of their intention or resolve (*ékaṃ krátum abhí ví yanti sādhu*), whereas in 6 the poet vividly describes the dis-integration of his senses, emphasized by the repetition of *ví* 'widely, apart). But rather than expressing a worrisome loss of physical and mental control, the vs. seems rather to dramatize the exciting expansion of his sensory

horizons, the limitless potentials for thought and speech that he now experiences. His ears flying apart (*vī me kārṇā patayataḥ*), his mind moving widely (*vī me mānaḥ carati*) are anticipated by Agni's mind "swiftest among those flying" (*jāviṣṭham patáyatsu*), and the insistent *vī* in this vs. is given a positive spin by the pattern of *vi*-s leading to *vaiśvānarā*-.

As the senses and light in his heart fly widely, the poet expands the ability of his mind to match that of Agni's.

Like Johnson (1980: 7, 12, 17ff, 21) and Jamison and Brereton (2014: 566, 782), who connect this hymn and 4.5 with the poet receiving inspiration from Agni,<sup>42</sup> Sāyaṇa says the ears and eyes go apart in a desire to hear and see Vaiśvānara, whose qualities and forms are manifold.<sup>43</sup> For Sāyaṇa, the light set down in the heart is the intellect (*buddhi*) itself, which flies widely to know Vaiśvānara, who is present in all things:

*tathā jyotiḥ prakāśakam hṛdaye hṛdayapundarīke āhitam nihitam  
yat buddhyākhyam tattvam idam api vi patayati vividham  
gacchati vaiśvānarātmānaṃ jñātum |*

Just so, the light, meaning light/manifestation, is placed, meaning set down, in the heart, that is in the lotus of the heart, which, meaning the principle called the intellect (*buddhi*). This too flies widely, that is goes apart, to know the form of Vaiśvānara.

Just as that light goes widely, so too his thoughts and mind.<sup>44</sup> All other intentions and concerns are far away. There is no gloss for mind (*mānas*) here and no clarification for how Sāyaṇa distinguishes the light that is the intellect from the mind. The only clue given is that "my" mind goes widely, suggesting that the hold loosens on any mind limited by a subjective drive. Is it possible that the mind of a formulator, like Agni who is within all beings, permeates all things?

Renou (1949: 12) translates the terms "*acittam bráhma*" in ṚV 1.152.5 as "la formulation inaccessible à l'intelligence (commune)" ("the formulation inaccessible to (common) intelligence").<sup>45</sup> This signals that a *bráhman* arises from a place beyond thought, where there is no

<sup>42</sup> Here one may add ṚV 10.88.

<sup>43</sup> *vaiśvānaram śrotukāmasya me mama kārṇā kārṇau vi patayataḥ vividham gacchataḥ | śrotavyānām tadīyaguṇānām bahuvāt | tathā vaiśvānaram didṛkṣamāṇasya mama cakṣuḥ indriyaṃ vi patayati vividham gacchati | draṣṭavyānām tadīyarūpānām bahuvāt |* Sāyaṇa on ṚV 6.9.6.

<sup>44</sup> Sāyaṇa understands *dūrāādhiḥ* to mean thought (*ādhyāna*) at a distance.

<sup>45</sup> See also Johnson 1980: 6-7.

thought—a unified state of perfect creative possibility. And yet, it is as if the two, the original source and the bifurcated mind that is thought, are one and the same. But only by going back to the unified source does one see *bráhma*. From this, one may attain, as in ṚV 8.6.9, to “*bráhma* for the first thought/mind” (*bráhma pūrvácittaye*),”<sup>46</sup> which Sāyaṇa glosses: “May we reach *bráhma* for knowledge before the others (*bráhma ... pūrvácittaye anyebhyaḥ pūrvam eva jñānāya prāpnavāma*).”<sup>47</sup> Another poet prays for the same thing in ṚV 8.3.9, which Sāyaṇa glosses:

*bráhma...pūrvácittaye pūrvaprajñānāyānyebhyaḥ pūrvam eva  
lābhāya tvāṃ yācāmi |*

I beg you for *bráhma* for the first thought, that is for the earlier understanding (*prajñāna*), for the obtainment before the others.

Since the ‘others’ in Sāyaṇa’s gloss may signal multiplicity, “first thought” may signal something akin to the first semen of the mind in ṚV 10.129.4. The poet wants to know what was before there were manifold things. Seen in this way, a *bráhma* emerges from the field of pure potential that is nondual.

In ṚV 6.9.6, *vī+√pat* relates to the senses and light in the heart expanding, and ultimately to the mind opening up and making possible the emergence of a new *bráhma*. This interpretation agrees with Renou, who says that this verse depicts “the frenzy of the poetic act,” and with Johnson, who describes the hymn as a rare personal account of a poet’s experience. The poet wonders, in Renou’s (1955: 4) translation, “what shall I say, what shall I imagine?”<sup>48</sup> Thieme (1957: 52) interprets this to mean, “his mind roams far away and he does not know what he is going to say, what he is about to recognize.” As Sāyaṇa remarks, what will “I” say or think means I will hasten toward with the mind (*manīṣye manasā prapatsye*) given that because of infinitude of qualities of Vaiśvānara it is not possible to know by me whose *prajñā* is dull (*vaiśvānarasya guṇānām anantatvāt mandaprajñena mayā jñātuṃ na śakyata ity arthaḥ*). For a new *bráhma* to emerge, the poet must lose himself in the One that

<sup>46</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1038) translate, “to a sacred formulation to be the first in your thought.” According to Jamison and Brereton, in many passages the poet prays to devas that he might be the first in their thoughts (ṚV 1.84.12, 1.112.1, 1.159.3, 8.12.33, 8.25.12, 9.99.5).

<sup>47</sup> Macdonell 1916: 454.

<sup>48</sup> Renou (1955: 4, §3) writes, “formule que commente la str. 6.9.6 où se trouve dépeinte la frénésie de l’acte poétique, “mes orilles ouvrent leur vol, mon regard s’ouvre, elle s’ouvre aussi cette lumière sise au Coeur [notion de lumière, §6; le coeur comme siège de l’ inspiration, §§ 20, 21]. Mon spirit se meut ave la pensée (qui vise) au loin; que vais-je donc dire, que vais-je imaginer?”

encompasses all life. Following the translation of Jamison and Brereton, I suggest that in the context of seeing *bráhman*, *ví+√pat* may refer to one's mind flying widely, in the sense of opening up.<sup>49</sup> It is not that the head would shatter (Witzel 1987: 378-9), but rather that going beyond the limits of one's own knowledge requires relinquishing the cognitive mind, through which one "knows" in an ordinary sense and on which an individual subject relies, and becoming open to seeing the shining goods that Agni conveys that inspire one's vision.

*vísve devá anamasyan bhīyānás  
tuvám agne támasi tashivám̐sam |  
vaiśvānaró avatu ūtáye no  
ámartiyo avatu ūtáye naḥ || ṚV 6.9.7*

"7. All the gods, in fear, offered homage to you, Agni, while you were (still) standing in the darkness. Let Vaiśvānara give help to aid us; let the immortal one give help to aid us."

The final verse of hymn 6.9 describes how all the devas, being afraid, paid homage to Agni while he was still in the darkness. Verse five already described how all the devas, being of one mind, rushed to Agni as the single resolve. That Agni stands in the darkness here could be an allusion to the nondual state of the world before creation, much as in ṚV 10.129.3, where darkness was hidden by darkness. In 6.9.7, the devas are afraid, but still pay their respects. Perhaps they are in awe of that reality but terrified to lose themselves in it when they come to their senses. A parallel account may be found in ṚV 1.32.14, when Indra defeats Vṛtra, but then flees in terror from the nondual state he encounters. Jamison and Brereton (2014: 136) translate: "Whom did you see, Indra, as the avenger of the serpent when fear came into your heart after you smashed him, and when you crossed over the ninety-nine flowing rivers, like a frightened falcon through the airy realms?" The question is asked like a great *koan*, whom did Indra see? Was it *bráhman* or the fear of losing himself? Another example taken from later tradition features a starstruck Arjuna on the battlefield, begging Kṛṣṇa in his divine form to assume his ordinary human body.<sup>50</sup> He is not able to endure, even with the divine eye, the sight of his friend in his *viśvarūpa*.

<sup>49</sup> See also *ví+√pat* in BĀU 3.6 as discussed by Witzel and Insler. I have more to say about this regarding the philosophy of language in middle and late Vedic texts.

<sup>50</sup> Kathleen Irby wrote an excellent paper on the topic of fear using these two examples in my Indian Classics class at DRBU.

Hymn 6.9 concludes with appeals to Agni Vaiśvānara, the immortal, to help “us.” Just as Vaiśvānara evokes oneness, the word “us” (*naḥ*), repeated twice at the end of *pāda*-s *cd*, reinstates the multiplicity of the world and humanity’s connection with the divine. The brahmin, now true to his name, let go of knowing through the intellect to become one with Agni, the *devas*, and all the universe, and, now a witness to the full potential of the mind, returns to his view of multiplicity with the wish for the wellbeing of others. It is as if the nondual state described as a oneness and sameness of mind in verse five includes at the same time the myriad things. They are one and the same, but with a radically different orientation to the other in the mind of the realized.

ṚV 6.9 offers a firsthand look into the experience of someone who started off in duality, expressed by the experience of day and night (verse 1), who did not know the threads or how to weave or whom he would become (verse 2), who looks to Agni Vaiśvānara and learns the art of formulating. In my reading, the hymn describes seeing *brāhman* as a return to the beginning, an expansion of the intellectual functions of the mind leading to the direct experience of primordial reality. The language that emerges from the nondual source differs from language that comes from the ordinary mind of duality. When all the divine energies in the universe converge in a single resolve, the sense of individual concern completely falls away and a wider concern for living beings is generated. The language that comes from ‘That One’ is rendered *brāhman* and is one and the same as the nondual whole itself. When a verbal formulation enters the world, it is a metonymy for ‘That One’, and hence, *brāhman* signifies both a sacred word and the absolute.

## 2. *Vāc*

In addition to scattered references, two hymns in the Ṛgveda (10.71 and 10.125) center on the goddess *Vāc*. Her name means speech, which is how I think of her, but Staal (1977: 6), who considers ‘speech’ to be ambiguous, translates *vāc* as ‘language.’ Before addressing these two hymns directly, I will summarize some general but salient points about *Vāc* in the Ṛgveda, in particular the depiction of *Vāc* as the source of creation and as an expression of reality.

Extensive work on *Vāc* has been done by scholars like Brown, Staal, Dange, Renou, Patton, Jurewicz, Elizarenkova, Ludvik, Padoux, and Thompson, following Toporov.<sup>51</sup> In his work on ṚV 1.164, Brown (1968: 203, 305, 207) identifies *Vāc* as the “One Real (*ékam śát*),” the

<sup>51</sup> Not to mention Kuiper, Johnson, Brereton, Dalai, Kinsley, and Pintchman.

Absolute, and the *devas* themselves (vs. 45-6). Vāc fashions the floods that were present before the created universe. The buffalo-cow, i.e. speech, bellowed, fashioning the oceans (vs. 41). Brown (207, 217) translates, “From her (Vāc) flow forth the oceans, in consequence of which the four directions exist; from her flows the *akṣára*; on it this entire universe has its existence” (ṚV 1.164.42: *táśyāḥ samudrá ádhi ví kṣaranti téna jīvanti pradísas cátasrah | tátaḥ kṣaraty akṣáram tád víśvam úpa jīvati*).<sup>52</sup> Uttering sounds, Vāc produced the material universe, organizing creation through the *akṣára* (Brown 1971: 20). In ṚV 1.164, Dīrghatamas presents Vāc, Brown argues, as “the mistress of the *akṣara* and of the *ṛc*,” and as the supreme authority in the universe [ṚV 1.164.39], self-existent, dependent on nothing outside herself. In certain Vedic accounts, Vāc represents the origin of all things and plays the role of demiurge (Elizarenkova 1995: 107; Patton 1990: 192).

In addition to seeing Vāc as a genitrix, Jurewicz (2016: 62-4) observes that the Ṛgveda conceptualizes reality in terms of speech. She notes how the relationship between the *devas* and Vāc is ambiguous because, on one hand, the *devas* begat Vāc (ṚV 8.100.11: *devīm vācam ajanayanta devāḥ*) and distributed her in many places (ṚV 10.125.3c: *tām mā devā ví adadhuḥ purutrā*). On the other hand, she carries the *devas* (ṚV 10.125.1cd-2ab) and rules them (ṚV 8.100.10b: *rāṣṭrī devānām*).<sup>53</sup> The *devas* depend on speech and rest on her syllable (ṚV 1.164.39).<sup>54</sup> Perhaps because she is both the one who rules the *devas* and the one distributed by them, she is said to have multiple parts.

In the ṚV, Vāc constitutes four parts (ṚV 1.164.45: *catvāri vāk párimitā padāni*).<sup>55</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 359) translate:

*catvāri vāk párimitā padāni táni vidur brāhmaṇá yé manīṣiṇaḥ |  
gúhā trīṇi níhitā néngayanti turīyaṃ vācá manuṣyà vadanti ||*

ṚV 1.164.45

Speech is measured in four feet [/quarters]. Brahmins of inspired thinking know these. They do not set in motion the three that are imprinted in secret; the sons of Manu speak the fourth (foot/quarter) of speech.

<sup>52</sup> Brown (1971: 20) notes that the Jaiminīya Upanisad Brāhmaṇa 1.1 identifies *ékapadi* with the syllable *om*. Cf. the translation by Jamison and Brereton (2014: 358): “Seas flow everywhere from her: by that the four directions live, from that the syllable flows, upon that does everything live.”

<sup>53</sup> See also Elizarenkova 1995: 108.

<sup>54</sup> Jurewicz 2016: 62; Brown 1971: 20; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 358.

<sup>55</sup> According to Padoux (1990: 22), ṚV 4.40.6 mentions a fourth *brahman*, implying three others.



Brown (1968: 217) considers the fourth part of Vác to be “the same as that which is below the transverse line of RV 10.129.5.” Patton (1990: 192) mentions that the three parts of Vác hidden in secret “must be brought to light,” though they are “revealed in fullness only to a select few.” *Púruṣa* is also said to have four parts in ṚV 10.90.3: “a quarter of him [*púruṣa*] is all living beings; three quarters are the immortal (*amṛta*) in heaven.”<sup>56</sup> ṚV 8.100.10 asks where the highest of hers go? George Thompson (1995: 2) notes that speech is milked out in four streams (ṚV 8.100.10-11).<sup>57</sup> Tatyana Elizarenkova (1995: 108) remarks that Speech is almost impenetrable to men, the average among which “cannot even imagine the limits of its power.” Vác has three parts in heaven, beyond normal cognition, along with a thousand syllables in the highest heaven (ṚV 1.164.41).<sup>58</sup> One thousand indicates totality, what is highest and includes everything. In short, Vác, like Agni, is omnipresent with a vast portion hidden from ordinary cognition.

One of two hymns that focus on speech, ṚV 10.71 explicitly mentions Vác seven times (Staal 1977: 7). For Staal (9), the hymn speaks of the origin of language: “The main idea of this hymn is that language originated when hidden knowledge became manifest, i.e. when meaning was attached to sound...The hymn deals with the origin of language, which may be called sacred language, but not with the origin of ‘sacred language’ as part of language (like ‘academic language’ or ‘vulgar language’).” The hymn begins by talking about the “first beginning of Speech” (*prathamám vácó ágram*), when an unnamed plural subject came forth, which I understand to mean that unspecified subjects emerged from nonduality, giving names. They did not emerge with an established identity, but set out to create one for themselves through the language they expressed. The second stanza says that the wise created Speech with their *mánas* (*dhīrā mánasā vácam ákrata*), “purifying her like coarse grain by a sieve.”<sup>59</sup> These two verses describe a reciprocal relationship between Vác and humanity after creation. The simile of a sieve alludes to purifying the mind so that the wise might be able to see *bráhma*n. This process of filtering is described in verse three as following the “track of Speech” through the ritual offering (vs. 3a: *yajñéna vácáḥ padavīyam āyan*). Through giving what is sacred, they find Vác within the *ṣṣi*-s (vs. 3b), in other words, within themselves. As a result they can bring and distribute

<sup>56</sup> Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1539; Brown 1968: 217.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1210.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Thompson 1995: 5; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 358.

<sup>59</sup> See also Brereton 1999: 255.

her in many places (vs. 3c),<sup>60</sup> meaning they now wield the power of Vác, the source of their existence, who is manifested everywhere.

This kind of purifying enables companions to understand companionship. Verse 2c says that “in this friends understand friendship” (vs. 2c: *átrā sákhāyaḥ sakh'yāni jānate*).<sup>61</sup> The word *sákhāyaḥ* is the nominative plural of *sákhi* (friend, companion). Stanza eight addresses the inequality of the speed of mind among companions and verse nine mentions how brahmins performing the *yajña* as friends (*sákhāyaḥ*) leave others in the dust and range widely in their lauds and formulations. In verse ten, all the companions (*sákhāyaḥ*) “rejoice with a companion who has come in glory,” celebrating how he will contribute to the ritual practice of the community. The final stanza speaks of the contribution of each of the four priests acting together. The repetition of *sákhi* in hymn 10.71 emphasizes that as the wise progress closer to the origin, to the first beginning of Vác, they understand friendship and act as a community of friends. Their relationships with others transform and they transform in tandem. It is as if companionship is essential in the path of purification: seeing the spark of Vác in others and relating to them from that place of sincere friendship is a marker that one has found the way. Successful companionship enables one to see and hear Vác everywhere, which can only occur through her own self-revelation that entails an infinite expansion of mind and a transformation of the subjective drive in the seer.

In contrast, many stanzas beginning with the fourth rebuke the ignorant (Sāyaṇa: *avidvān*) as one who sees and hears, but cannot see or hear Speech as she really is (vs. 4), who is “stiff and swollen in his companionship” (vs. 5). Sāyaṇa glosses companionship (*sakhyé*) here as the assembly of the wise (*viduṣāṃ saṃsadi*). Verse six describes him as not having any share in Speech because he abandoned the “companion joined (to him) in knowledge” (*sacivídaṃ*). Sāyaṇa explains *sacivídaṃ* as a student, a friend of knowledge/the Veda (*vedasya*), because of helping what concerns knowledge/the Veda by preventing a break in tradition.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See also Brown 1968: 217.

<sup>61</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1497) translate, “recognize their companionship as companions.” Cf. R̥V 10.88.17cd in which it is asked whether the companions have achieved comradeship and realized the *yajña*. “Who can proclaim it here?” *á śekur it sadhamádaṃ sákhāyo nákṣanta yajñāṃ ká idāṃ ví vocat* ||

<sup>62</sup> *sacivídaṃ | saciśabdaḥ sakhivācī | sakhivídaṃ yo 'dhyetā sa vedasya sakhā saṃpradāyocchedanivāratvena vedam̐ pratyupakāritvāt | tādr̥śam̐ upakāriṇam̐ adhyetāram̐ vettīti sacivit | tam̐ abhijñam̐ sakhāyam̐ adhyet̥ṛṇām̐ puruṣānām̐ svārthabodhanenopakāritvāt sakhībhūtam̐ vedam̐ yaḥ pumān̐ tityāja tatyāja parāthaviniyogena parityajati | Sāyaṇa on R̥V 10.71.6*

One who knows such a student who is helping is a *sacivít*. But one who abandons those who help “by teaching its own (=the exact) meaning (*svārthabodhanena*),” by applying another meaning, is left without a share in Vāc. He hears her in vain and “does not know the path of the rightly performed (ritual).” Staal (1977: 13) translates *sukṛtāsya pānthām* as “the path of good action” and glosses it with language. Such men are not real brahmins and produce nothing when they weave, i.e. try to compose a *bráhman*. For Staal (13), verse nine expresses those who fall short as ones who futilely weave water, or in his modern equivalent, “[write] in sand.” Full access to Vāc is not available for those who are not good friends, who abandon their companions and pursue their own agenda. Their speech differs from those who act in community with others and thereby truly see and hear Vāc.

The second hymn, ṚV 10.125, never mentions Vāc explicitly, but tradition interprets the repeated first person pronoun in the hymn to be her voice. Thompson (1997: 151) asserts, “This ‘unexpressed’ is in fact the name of the goddess herself, Vāc, which, in conjunction with the dominance of the *ahám*-forms, operates forcefully, even if silently and indirectly, on the entire hymn.” The voice of Vāc comes through the poet, who, articulating this *bráhman* in the form of an *ātmastuti*, takes on her “attributes of a divinity,” including the *ahám* statements about her omnipresence in all places and things (153). Thompson (153) observes that hymn 10.125 “shows us a moment in Vedic, wherein the gods manifest themselves here on earth, for all to hear, if not to see.” When this occurs, the companionship with others, which is emphasized in hymn 10.71, is enlivened by the direct realization that all seemingly separate forms are just an aspect of oneself spread throughout the worlds.

Elizarenkova (1995: 180) notes that all eight stanzas begin with the pronoun *ahám* or one of its case forms. Speaking in first person, she calls herself a ruler (*rāṣṭrī*) who roams with various devas, bears the devas, is distributed by the devas, embodies everything manifest on which people (unconsciously) live, and makes formulators and seers (vss. 1-5; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1603). As the personification of Speech, Vāc is identified with “the basic principle of cosmic existence” and “combines in herself both subject and object, being at once speech (Vedic text) and poet (creator of the text)” (Elizarenkova 1995: 20). Elizarenkova (107) goes on to say that Vāc is “forever identical with herself, despite the countless multitude of her temporary forms.” The hymn is a powerful declaration of the greatness of being realized by a *īṣi* who, being favored by the goddess, directly experiences Vāc in the first person and assumes her divine voice.

In articulating a *bráhmaṇ*, the poet no longer speaks as himself, a subjective perspective that must be relinquished to become Vác, the nondual origin, manifestation, and sustainer of all things everywhere.

That Vác extends across the worlds (*vítisṭhe bhúvanānu víśvā*) is stated in verse seven, which also describes her giving birth to the father (*ahám suve pitáram*). Jurewicz (2016: 65) notes the sequence Father—Speech—Father—Speech, where the concept of the father refers to the unmanifest aspect of reality. She asserts, “If speech is presented as the mother of the father, it implies that it is seen as the primordial reality.” Similarly, Brereton (1999: 257, n. 53) says, “The details of this half-verse are unclear to me, but the implication is that Speech is really the mother and father of the world.” Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1603) comment that this verse could be “implying that speech produced on the ritual ground beside the sacrificial fire in a sense creates and sustains the cosmos. From this restricted space, namely the locus of the sacrifice, speech spreads across all realms and up to heaven.” In this way, Vác is the primordial reality from which arise the unmanifest and manifest world (and everything therein). In other words, speech is the origin and substance of everything known to exist, though her greatness extends beyond even that (vs. 8). Ontologically speaking, through the exchange of language, manifest reality is created and sustained.

To sum up, in the Ṛgveda, Vác is a creative force connected with the origins of the world. Her voice serves as the expression of the manifest world and the means of connecting the all-encompassing manifest parts with each other. Through comradery and cooperation, human beings who have shared knowledge of the absolute can transform the communicative exchange between heaven and earth in the *yajña* until they realize themselves, and each other, as Vác herself, awakening the mind to its fullest potential as the absolute “I” behind all life. In such a realization, Vác is known in all her four parts, including the three quarters that lie beyond ordinary cognition, and seeing *bráhmaṇ* becomes possible in the incredible speed and wide ranging of the still mind.

### 3. *akṣára*

The third and final term for language taken up in this paper, *akṣára*, comes from root  $\sqrt{kṣar}$ , meaning to flow, to stream, or to perish (van Buitenen 1959: 187; Elizarenkova 1995: 110). The word literally means imperishable and, simultaneously, a syllable. When considered to be something flowing, the syllable evokes the rushing streams experienced by the *ṛṣi* from his mind open to the primordial reality. This seems to suggest that in the most basic sense language is what organically flows

from the source.<sup>63</sup> In a comprehensive philological paper dedicated to the term *akṣára*, J.A.B. van Buitenen (177) maintains that already in the *Ṛgveda*, *akṣára* “claims a position of supreme principle, without however [sic] for a moment ceasing to mean ‘syllable.’” He goes on to describe *akṣára* as “the principle of continuity to which everything can be reduced and from which everything can be derived” (179). He emphasizes its creativity and power to bring things about as a supreme creative principle or first cause and its size as “the smallest pronounceable unit to which all formulae can be reduced” (186). Not content with experiencing *akṣára* as merely the manifestation of reality, Vedic formulators used language to go back to the original state of being.

The term *akṣára* occurs numerous times in enigmatic ṚV 1.164 (vss. 24, 39, 41-2). In verse 38, “the immortal one of the same womb as the mortal one” goes in and out freely.<sup>64</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 358) translate:

*ápāṅ prāṅ eti svadháyā gṛbhītó*  
*ámartīyo mártīyenā sáyoniḥ |*  
*tá śásvantā viśūcīnā viyántā*  
*ní anyám cikyúr ná ní cikyur anyám || ṚV 1.164.38*

38. He goes inward and outward, controlled by his own will—he, the immortal one of the same womb as the mortal one. Those two are ever going apart in different directions. They observe the one; they do not observe the other.


In verse 39, all of the *devas* rest on the *akṣára*, which is situated in the highest heaven (*akṣáre paramé víoman*). Only those who know the *akṣára* sit together and succeed in formulating. Jan Houben’s (2000: 511, 535) translation captures both meanings of *akṣára* (as syllable and imperishable) and renders *ṛc* “verse of praise”:

*ṛcó akṣáre paramé víoman*  
*yásmīn devá ádhi víśve niśedúḥ |*  
*yás tán ná véda kím ṛcá kariṣyati*  
*yá ít tád vidús tá imé sám āsate || ṚV 1.164.39*

<sup>63</sup> As a feminine noun, *ákṣarā* in the *Ṛgveda* means both “speech” and “cow,” a connection, much like that of cow and speech (*Vác*), played upon in Vedic poetry. Sāyaṇa glosses *ákṣarā* as speech in ṚV 8.15.9; 36.7 and as cow in 3.31.6. See Elizarenkova 1995: 111.

<sup>64</sup> Sāyaṇa glosses *amartyaḥ amaraṇadharmā ayam ātmā* | Geldner (1951: 234, n 38) interprets this to be the in and out breath. Oldenberg’s (1909: 160) idea is that this could refer to the morning and evening star. While these are possible, I interpret the immortal who shares a mortal womb and goes in and out to refer to Agni.

39. The imperishable syllable of the verse of praise, the final abode where all the gods are residing—he who does not know it, what will he do with the verse of praise? Only those who know it are sitting here together.<sup>65</sup>

Again, the *devas* converge on a single point, the *akṣára*, much like they rushed to Agni as their “single resolve” in R̥V 6.9.5. Similarly, those who know the *akṣára* in the highest heaven, sit together. Knowing the *akṣára*, then, entails knowing the farthest reaches of the triple world, the full expanse of the mind in a state of wholeness. Elsewhere (R̥V 10.13.3), a poet claims to have mounted five steps and traversed the four quarters, presumably of Vác, and by means of the *akṣára* to have made a counterpart to her, probably referring to Vác.<sup>66</sup> Taking that last step he goes beyond the known limits of the manifest and unmanifest world demarcated by Speech,  then the syllable is used to create anew.

Van Buitenen (1959: 178) observes about *akṣára*: “the smallest bit of speech that can be spoken and the first that must be spoken, it is conceived as the matrix and embryo of speech and all that can be effected by it.” In verse 41, the buffalo-cow (*gaurí*), i.e. Speech, who has a thousand syllables in the highest heaven (*sahásrākṣarā paramé víoman*), bellowed forth in a creative act.<sup>67</sup> Jamison and Brereton (2014: 358; cf. Houben 2000: 536) translate verse 42: “Seas flow everywhere from her: by that the four directions live, from that the syllable flows, upon that does everything live.” The number one thousand represents totality, completion, in the Brāhmaṇa texts, so the *devas* converge on the one, but that one is simultaneously *sarvam*. Everything flows from the *akṣára* when Vác speaks. Not convinced of Geldner’s refusal to conceive of the source of creation as a syllable, van Buitenen (177-9) examines the first commentaries (TS 5.1.9.1 and JUB 1.10.1) on this passage, which clearly conceived of *akṣára* as syllable. In this way, R̥V 1.164 ontologically equates the source of all being with language, expressed in

<sup>65</sup> Compare Jamison and Brereton’s (2014: 358) translation of R̥V 1.164.39ab: “The syllable of the verse, upon which all the gods have settled, is in the highest heaven.” And Brown (1971: 20): “the (creative) syllable, on which the gods in the highest heaven have all taken their seat.”

<sup>66</sup> *pāñca padāni rupó ánv arohaṃ | cátuṣpadīm ánu emi vraténa | akṣáreṇa práti mima etām | ṛtásya nábhāv ádhi sám punāmi* || R̥V 10.13.3

<sup>67</sup> The connection between the syllable/imperishable and the cow is also seen in R̥V 7.1.14 and 7.36.7, in which *akṣarā* is a feminine adjective modifying, most likely but unexpressed in the verses, a cow.

terms of *akṣára* and *Vác*. The *akṣára*, the smallest seed of all language, sweeps across the entire universe and contains the potential for all life.

In two other places, *akṣára* is connected with Agni and birth imagery closely tied to spiritual awakening. In ṚV 3.55.1, the *akṣára* was born (*ví jajñe*) in the track of a cow when the dawns dawned forth. Sāyaṇa interprets *akṣára* in this context as that which does not perish: *na kṣaratīty akṣaram*. The refrain “great is the one and only lordship of the gods” repeats at the end of every verse (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 544). Instead of as “lordship,” the term *asuratvám* could be translated as powerfulness. In verse three, the desires of the poet, who speaks in first person, fly apart (*ví patayanti*) and he illuminates ancient things. In verse four, “[t]he common king has been dispersed in many places” (*samānó rájā víbhṛtaḥ purutrā*), a description that sounds much like the *ātmastuti* of *Vác* in ṚV 10.125. Verse 4cd states, “Another bears the calf; the mother rests peacefully [=the two fire-churning sticks].” In ṚV 6.16.35, Agni is described as having flashed forth in “the womb of his mother, as the father of his father...at the imperishable (syllable?) [*akṣáre*], sitting on the birthplace [*yónim*] of truth” (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 793). Knowing Agni to be in that place, Agni is asked to bring a *bráhman* (ṚV 6.16.36ab: *bráhma...ā bhara jātavedaḥ*). Van Buitenen (1959: 178) translates: “As Jātavedas, most excellent Fire, sparkling in the Syllable which is thy mother’s womb, as thy father’s father, seated in the womb of the true order, deliver the child-bearing *bráhman* which radiates in heaven.” Jamison and Brereton (793) translate verse 36: “Bring here a sacred formulation bestowing offspring, o unbounded Jātavedas, o Agni, (a formulation) that will shine in heaven.” The *akṣára* is closely connected with dawn, the herald of light, and the seat of cosmic order. For this reason, *akṣára* represents yet another term for language in Vedic that stands for the primordial reality and is creative.

To summarize, the term *akṣára* in the Ṛgveda is a oneness that is located in the highest heaven because it includes the farthest limits of the triple world and all things manifest; it is also the creative potential to manifest further. Agni can access this place and from it brings the *bráhman*. The birth or realization of the *akṣára* is likened to the dawn, the awakening of the day or of the mind. When the sacrificer knows the *akṣára*, his desires fly apart and ancient things become illuminated. He sits together with other sacrificers and sees *bráhman*. In this way, the term *akṣára* is an ontological principle in Vedic that describes language as the nature of being.

The above passages show that language, much like Agni, traverses worlds as a medium between heaven and earth. Forming the mainstays of the *yajña*, both fire and language serve as a means to return to primordial reality. Elizarenkova (1995: 109-10) asserts, “The mediating function of Speech is closely linked with that of *Agni*, the god of sacrificial fire” as in ṚV 1.173.3, in which Sāyaṇa says the *hotṛ* is none other than Agni and the cow is Vāc. In Brown’s (1968: 205-6) reconstruction, Vāc taught Agni to use the *akṣára*, which is Vāc’s principal tool. Similarly, van Buitenen (178) comments on the “interdependence, the biunity, of Word and Fire,” saying, “But for speech, that is the ritually powerful utterance, to be effective at all, it must be spoken in conjunction with the ritually powerful fire of the sacrifice. But this fire, too, is effective only in conjunction with the appropriate formulae.” In his view, what happened primordially at the beginning of creation is reproduced in the *yajñabhūmi*, rendering the sacrificial area the matrix of cosmic order and the source from which the *bráhman* is born. The Brāhmaṇa texts further explicate the soteriological relationship between Agni and Vāc, but it is significant to note that this idea is found already in the Ṛgveda.

To conclude, philologically tracing the terms *bráhman*, *vāc*, and *akṣára* in the Ṛgveda reveals that early Vedic terms for language were used philosophically as ontological principles. Renou (1955: 1) argues that the terms for language came to refer to the absolute and van Buitenen (1959: 187) asserts that *bráhman* as a “‘ritually effective utterance’ rose to the name of first cause.” But a closer look at these terms in early Vedic shows that they are polysemic: *bráhman* denotes both powerful words and the absolute; *vāc* refers to speech and at the same time the self-existent genitrix of life; and *akṣára* means syllable and the imperishable. To see a *bráhman* is to return to ‘That One’ (*tád ékam*), the ‘One Real’ (*ékaṃ sāt*), from which emerges the *bráhman*, in a state beyond individual subjectivity, in which all things are embraced as one. Hymn 6.9 describes how a *bráhman* arises: when the poet turns to Agni, with whom he is absorbed, his mind and senses expand, giving way to their nondual origins. In this way, formulation may be seen as a return to the beginning—before ordinary language articulated in view of an individual subject further divided the manifest world into discrete entities, and thereby identities—from which a powerful expression, the *bráhman*, arises. Formulation also entails an expansion of the mind to include all of reality, the seen and the unseen, radically transforming relationships with others. When language is spoken from its source, as expressed in the voice of the “absolute I” in ṚV 10.125, it is imbued with



great creative and healing power. Like the capacity to formulate itself, such language, metonymically the primordial reality because the words are directly seen as the One, is imperishable. In contrast, language spoken in view of the ego further divides the speaker from others. While this second use of language produces a reality all its own, it is not the same as primordial reality. These, then, are two kinds of language and being that are distinguished in Vedic. At the same time, speech is an important tool used in the *yajña* to reach the ground of being, which, as shown above, is sometimes referred to in terms of language. Vedic terms for language went hand in hand with ontological descriptions of what exists, forging an implicit theory about the nature of being that later Vedic explicated in an effort to liberate human beings.

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