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Rig Veda 1.154

Let me now sing the heroic deeds of Vishnu, who has measured apart the realms of earth, who propped up the upper dwelling-place, striding far as he stepped forth three times.

They praise for his heroic deeds Vishnu who lurks in the mountains, wandering like a ferocious wild beast, in whose three wide strides all creatures dwell.

Let this song of inspiration go forth to Vishnu, the wide-striding bull who lives in the mountains, who alone with but three steps measured apart this long, far-reaching dwelling-place.

His three footprints, inexhaustibly full of honey, rejoice in the sacrificial drink. Alone, he supports threefold the earth and the sky—all creatures.

Would that I might reach his dear place of refuge, where men who love the gods rejoice. For there one draws close to the wide-striding Vishnu there, in his highest footstep, is the fountain of honey.¹

We wish to go to your dwelling-places, where there are untiring, many-horned cattle.² There the highest footstep of the wide-stepping bull shines brightly down.

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty.

1. The honey in the footprints acts like Soma, intoxicating the creatures who dwell there—the "men who love the gods"—and making them rejoice. Though the honey is in all three of Vishnu's footsteps (v. 4), the highest footstep is the fountain of the nectar of immortality.

2. The cattle may simply stand for cattle (and, by

extension, the riches of life) or for something more. They may be rays of light (coming from Vishnu as the sun); they may be stars. As cattle they are untiring; as rays, unfading; "many-horned" would mean something like "twinkling" (for stars) or "widely diffused" (for sunbeams).

SACRIFICE IN THE BRAHMANAS

800-500 B.C.E.

Where the *Rig Veda* expressed uncertainty and begged the gods for help, the Brahmanas (mythological, philosophical, and ritual glosses on the Vedas) express confidence that the Vedic verses (*mantras*) can deal with all dangers.

What accounts for this dramatic shift in tone, from questions to answers? In part, it was caused by a major change in the living conditions of the authors of these texts. For the Brahmanas were composed during a time of social and intellectual transformation so extreme that it could well be called revolutionary. From about 1100 to 1000 B.C.E., Vedic texts begin to mention the Doab ("Two Waters"), the land between the Ganges and the Yamuna (later called the Jumna). Then, in about 800 B.C.E., we find references to an area farther down in the western and middle Ganges Valley, where people built palaces and kingdoms. The move to the Ganges took place incrementally over several centuries, and the political changes were correspondingly gradual. Among the first cities were Kashi, later known as Varanasi (or Benares, the capital of Koshala/Videha), and, west of Kashi, Kaushambi (in Vatsa, now Uttar Pradesh), probably founded between 1300 and 1000 B.C.E. The Brahmanas must have been composed a few centuries after the founding of these cities, for considerable time must have passed since the composition of the *Rig Veda* (even of the first and last books, which are already noticeably later than the other eight). The language of the Brahmanas is significantly different, somewhat like the shift from *Beowulf* to Chaucer in early English. The Brahmanas cite Vedic verses and explain them, describing the circumstances under which those verses were first created. Not only the language but the nature of the texts changed: between 1000 and 500 B.C.E., Vedic rituals spawned more and more commentaries, and by the sixth century B.C.E. the different schools, or branches, were well established.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

Agni/agni: ug'-nee	oshadhayas: oh'-shuh-dah'-yuhs
Agnihotra: ug'-nee-hoh'-truh	Prajapati: pruh-jah'-puh-tee'
agri: uh'-gree	purusha: poo-roo'-sha
aha: ah'-huh	Pushan: poo'-shun
Bhrigu: bri'-goo	Shatapatha Brahmana: shuh'-tuh-puh'-
charati: chuh'-ruh-tee	tuh brah'-muh-nuh
charu: chuh'-roo	Surya: soor'-yuh
Indra: in'-druh	sva: svuh
Jaiminiya Brahmana: jai'-muh-nee'-yuh	Svaha: svah-hah'
brah'-muh-nuh	Ugradeva Rajani: oo'-gruh-day'-vuh rah'-
jhasha: juh'-shuh	juh-nee
Manu: muh'-noo	Varuna: vuh'-roo-nuh
nishkriti: nish-kri'-tee	Vayu: vah'-yoo

SHATAPATHA BRAHMANA

Each of the Brahmanas developed within a separate school of one of the three Vedas; the *Shatapatha Brahmana* ("The Brahmana of a Hundred Paths") is attached to the *Yajur Veda*, the Veda dealing with sacrificial ritual. Every part of the *Shatapatha* is linked in some way to the ritual, particularly to the sacred fire ("Prajapati Creates Fire"), and although there is little information about actual ritual procedure (which is taken up by the later texts called the *Prayogas*), the text does go into considerable detail about the horse sacrifice ("Killing the Sacrificial Horse" and "Restoring the Horse"). It also contains a number of myths, some of which were reworked in later texts ("The Fish Saves Manu from the Flood").

PRAJAPATI CREATES FIRE

The principal gods in this, as in most Brahmana rituals and myths, are Prajapati, "lord of progeny" or "lord of creatures," the Vedic god of creation, and Speech (*Vach*), a feminine noun in Sanskrit, a goddess in the *Rig Veda*. This passage is typical in its interest in Speech as a creative force; in its concern with food and death, and the relationship between them; and in its use of verbal etymologies, many of them different from what philologists believe to be the derivations of the words. Like most of the Brahmanas, it strives to determine a way not to die. In this episode, the author puns on the idea that Prajapati loses his power of speech (as he will lose other powers in the course of creation) because he becomes literally speechless with terror. The eater versus the noneater (or the eaten) and the appeasing of a dangerous, hungry creature are scenarios that recur in the Brahmanas. Here, Prajapati spills his seed into the fire, and the seed takes the form of milk that is milked out of him or butter that is churned from him, the verb "rubbed" implying either or both of these acts.

Shatapatha Brahmana 2.2.4.1–8

Truly, Prajapati alone existed here in the beginning. He thought, 'How can I bring forth creatures?' He exhausted himself and produced heat. He gave birth to Agni, fire, from his mouth. Since he created him from his mouth, therefore Agni is an eater of food. And whoever knows that Agni is an eater of food in this way, he himself becomes an eater of food. Thus he gave birth to him first of the gods; since 'agni' is the same as 'agri' ('first'), he is called Agni. As soon as he was born, he went in front; and people say of anyone who goes in front, 'He goes first.' This is why Agni is called Agni.

Then Prajapati thought, 'I have given birth to this Agni, this eater of food, from my own self. But there is no food here but me, whom he would surely not eat.' Now, at that time the earth was quite bald; there were no plants or trees. This was what was on his mind.

Then Agni turned toward Prajapati with a wide-open mouth, and as Prajapati became frightened, the female who was his greatness went away from

him. For Speech is his own greatness, and Speech left him. He wished to make an offering into his own self. He rubbed¹ (his hands), and because he rubbed them, they have no hair on them. And there he found the offering of clarified butter or the offering of milk—both of them are essentially milk.

But this offering did not satisfy Prajapati, for it had become mixed with hairs. He poured it out (into the fire, Agni) and said, 'Suck this and burn it' (*osha dhaya*). The plants arose from it, and therefore they are called plants (*oshadhayas*). He rubbed (his hands) a second time, and there he found another offering of clarified butter or of milk—both of them are essentially milk.

This offering satisfied him. But he was in doubt, wondering, 'Shall I offer it or not?' His own greatness (i.e., Speech) said to him, 'Offer it!' Prajapati realized, 'What is my own (*sva*) has spoken (*aha*),' and he made the offering. And therefore one says 'Svaha!'² when making an offering. From that there arose the (sun) who heats and the (wind) who blows.³ And Agni turned away from him.

Thus, by making an offering, Prajapati gave birth to himself and saved himself from Agni, from Death, who was about to eat him. And whoever knows about this and offers the Agnihotra oblation,⁴ he gives birth to himself in his progeny, just as Prajapati gave birth to himself. And in this very same way, he saves himself from Agni, from Death, when he is about to eat him.

For when he dies, and they place him on the fire, then he is born out of the fire, and then the fire consumes only his body. And just as he is born from his father or from his mother, in that very way he is born from the fire. But whoever does not offer the Agnihotra oblation, he *never* comes to life again. And that is why the Agnihotra *must* be offered.

1. By rubbing or churning with his hands he produces sacrificial butter. The Vedic fire was produced using a fire-drill, which consists of a bottom slab with a central depression (often compared to a vagina) on which a long stick (often compared to a penis) is twirled either with the hands or using a string wrapped around it. The friction ignited the tinder, and blowing on it made the fire blaze.

2. "Svaha," the exclamation made when an oblation is offered to the gods, is the name of the oblation and of the wife of Agni.

3. Another possible translation would be: "Then Agni arose and grew hot and became mighty and purified."

4. The offering, usually butter, made into the sacrificial fire.

THE FISH SAVES MANU FROM THE FLOOD

The myth of the fish and the flood is ancient and widespread in the Indo-European and Semitic worlds. In this, its earliest extant Indian manifestation, it is Manu, the ancestor of humankind (p. 202), who saves the fish; in later Hinduism, the fish becomes an avatar of the god Vishnu. "Fish swallows fish" was the basis of the Indian term for anarchy (*matsya-nyaya*), the equivalent of our "dog eat dog."

Shatapatha Brahmana 1.8.1.1–6

In the morning they brought Manu water for ablutions, just as they bring it for washing the hands. As he was washing, a fish came into his hands and said, 'Care for me and I will save you.' 'From what will you save me?' 'A flood will carry away all these creatures; I will save you from it.' 'How should you be cared for?' 'As long as we are tiny,' said the fish, 'our destruction is great, for fish swallows fish. Care for me at first in a pot, and when I outgrow it, dig a trench and care for me in it. And when I outgrow that, then take me down to the ocean, for then I will be beyond destruction.'

The fish grew steadily into a *jhasha*,¹ for that grows largest. It said, 'In a certain year, the flood will come. Then you will build a ship and come to me, and when the flood has risen you will enter the ship and I will save you from the flood.' Manu cared for it in this way and carried it down to the ocean. And in the very year which the fish had indicated, he built a ship and came to him, and when the flood had risen he entered the ship. The fish swam up to him, and he fastened the rope of the ship to the horn of the fish, and with it he sailed through to the northern mountain. 'I have saved you,' said the fish. 'Fasten the ship to a tree, but do not let the water cut you off when you are on the mountain; as the water subsides, keep following it down.' And he kept following it down, in this way, and so that slope of the northern mountain is known as Manu's Descent. The flood swept away all other creatures, and Manu alone remained here.

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty.

1. The *jhasha*, a large fish of indefinite species, is the constellation Pisces.

KILLING THE SACRIFICIAL HORSE

One of the few great public ceremonies alluded to in the Vedas is the sacrifice of a horse, by suffocation rather than beheading but followed by dismemberment. There are inscriptional records of (as well as literary satires on) horse sacrifices throughout Indian history. The original political symbolism of the Vedic horse sacrifice is blatant: the consecrated white stallion was "set free" to wander for a year before he was brought back home and killed, a ritual enactment of the actual equine wandering typical of Vedic culture. During that year, the horse was guarded by an army that followed him and claimed for the king any land on which he grazed. By the late Vedic period, when the Vedic people had begun to grow fodder crops, the stallion would have been stabled, and a stabled stallion behaves quite differently from one in the wild; he tends to return to the stable where he has been fed. The idea that he will wander away in the Ganges Valley, as he used to do up in the Punjab, was by this time an anachronism, a conscious archaism. The king's army therefore drove the horse onward and guided him into the neighboring lands that the king intended to take over. Thus the ritual that presented itself as a casual equine stroll over the king's lands was in fact an orchestrated annexation of the lands on a king's border; a ritual about grazing became a ritual about increasing political power. No wonder the Sanskrit texts insist that a king had to be very powerful indeed before he could undertake a horse sacrifice, and very few kings did in fact perform this ritual.

One Vedic poem (1.162) describes the horse sacrifice in strikingly concrete, rather gruesome detail, beginning with the ceremonial procession of the horse accompanied by a dappled goat, who was killed with the horse but offered to a different, less important god. The poet in that hymn intermittently consoles the horse (and himself) with the assertion that all will be restored in heaven, words in which we may see the stirrings of ambivalence about the killing of an animal, even in a religious ceremony, an ambivalence that will become much more explicit in the next few centuries. We may see even here a kind of ritual nonviolence that is expressed in a concern that the victim should not bleed or suffer or cry out (one reason the animal was strangled). The euphemism for the killing of the horse, "pacifying" or "quieting," further muted the growing uneasiness associated with killing an animal. Moreover, unlike cows, goats, and other animals that were sacrificed, some in the horse sacrifice, the horse was not actually eaten (though it was cooked and served to the gods). Certain parts of the horse's carcass (such as the marrow, or the fat from the chest, the caul, pericardium, or omentum containing the internal organs) were offered to Agni, the god of the fire, and the consecrated king and the priests would inhale the cooking fumes (regarded as "half-eating-by-smelling"). The gods and priests, as well as guests at the sacrificial feast, ate the male livestock (rams, billy goats, and steers); only the gods and priests drank the Soma; no one ate the horse. Perhaps the horse was not eaten because of the close relationship between the Vedic people and their horses.

The Brahmanas tell us more about the way in which the horse sacrifice, which began as a relatively simple ritual at the time of the *Rig Veda*, developed into a far more complex and expensive ceremony in this later period, 800 to 500 B.C.E. The horse was identified both with the king and with Indra, the Vedic king of the gods and god of fertility, the divine alter ego of the king. The ceremony was intended, in part, to assure the fertility of both the king and the land, and obscene terminology alternates with fairly blatant sexual euphemisms. Polite words for "mother" or "lady" are also used to designate the various queens who participate in the ritual, in which the king's wives pantomime copulation with the dead horse, to the accompaniment of obscene verses. Euphemisms also obscure the speech made by one queen to another, perhaps complaining that she is not being brought to the stallion. These verses were already a source of embarrassment to the author of this text, who prescribes a restoration of clean, "perfumed" speech at the end, to purify the vital breath that may have been driven out by the dirty talk that has gone before.

Shatapatha Brahmana 13.2.8.1–4

When the gods went upwards, they did not know the world of heaven, but the horse knew it; they go upwards with a horse in order to know the world of heaven. A cloth, an upper cloth, and gold is what they spread out for the horse, as they do for no other sacrificial animal, and on that they 'quiet' him. Thus they set him apart from all other sacrificial animals.

They kill this sacrificial animal when they 'quiet' him. As the priest 'quiets' him he says, 'Svaha to the breath! Svaha to the outward breath! Svaha to the inward breath!' and he offers the oblations. Thus he places the vital breaths within him, and thus the sacrifice is made with him as if he were a living sacrificial beast.

He leads up the (king's) wives, saying, 'Mother, Little Mother, Dear Little Mother!' 'No one is leading me!' (says one woman). Thus he summons them, and thus he makes them fit for the sacrifice. Saying, 'We call on you, (Indra), leader of the hosts of the hosts,' the wives walk around (the horse) and thus make amends to him; and they also make amends to him by fanning him.

They walk around him three times, for there are three worlds; and they fan him with these worlds. They walk around him three times more, which makes six; for there are six seasons; and they fan him with the seasons.

But the vital breaths go out of those who perform the fanning in the sacrifice. Nine times they walk about him, for there are nine vital breaths; thus they place the vital breaths in themselves, and the vital breaths do not go out of them. (They say,) 'I will urge the one who places the embryo'; 'You urge the one who places the embryo.' Now, the embryo means progeny and animals; thus she places progeny and animals in herself.

RESTORING THE HORSE

In addition to its political purposes, the horse sacrifice, like most, was designed to restore things that had gone wrong, in this case to restore the king who had been sullied by the bloodshed necessitated by his office. But new things could go wrong during the period when the horse was said to wander freely. So restorations were prescribed if the horse met with any of an imagined series of possible disasters, and at the end of the ceremony there is even a restoration for the obscene language that is a part of the ritual. The text invokes Vayu, god of the wind, the god who transforms the seed within the womb and who breathes life into the embryo. It also invokes Agni as the digestive fire within the bellies of all creatures; Pushan ("the nourisher"), a solar deity, keeper of herds and bringer of prosperity; Surya, the sun; and Varuna, god of the waters. The penultimate part of this ritual may also be performed not as part of the horse sacrifice but merely by itself, to find lost objects.

Shatapatha Brahmana 13.3.8.1–6

Now for the restorations. If the horse should mount a mare, (the priest) should make an oblation of milk to the wind (Vayu); for the wind is the one who transforms the seed; the wind is the vital breath, and the vital breath is what transforms the seed. Thus he puts seed (back) into (the horse) by means of seed.

And if the horse should become lame, he should make an offering of rice and milk to Pushan, for Pushan rules over domestic animals; thus he satisfies the one who owns domestic animals, who rules over domestic animals, and so the horse becomes healthy.

And if the horse should be sick but not lame, he should make an offering to the fire within-all-men, the offering of a cake on twelve bricks, on earth-bricks; for this (earth) is the fire within-all-men; thus he satisfies this earth, and so the horse becomes healthy.

And if the horse's eye should become injured or diseased, he should make an offering of rice and milk to the sun, Surya; for the sun is the eye of creatures; when he rises, everything here moves; thus he puts an eye (back) into (the horse) by means of an eye. And he uses an offering of rice and milk (*charu*) because it is by means of the eye that the self moves (*charati*).

And if the horse should die in water, he should make an offering of rice and milk with barley to Varuna, for Varuna seizes the one who dies in water; thus he satisfies the god who seizes (the horse). And when that god is satisfied with him, he allows him to slaughter another (horse), and so he slaughters one that has been approved by that god. And he uses an offering made of barley because barley is of the nature of Varuna.

And if the horse should get lost, he should make a sacrificial offering of three oblations: an offering of a cake on one brick for heaven and earth, an offering of milk for the wind, and an offering of rice and milk for the sun. For whatever is lost is lost between heaven and earth; and the wind blows upon it, and the sun warms it; nothing is ever lost beyond the realm of these gods. And even by itself, this ritual finds what has been lost; whatever other thing of his is lost, let him sacrifice with this ritual, and he will surely find it.

And if enemies should get the horse, or if the horse should die other than in water, they should bring another horse and consecrate it by sprinkling it with water; this is the restoration for that.

JAIMINIYA BRAHMANA

The *Jaiminiya Brahmana* is (along with the *Panchavimsha* and the *Sadvimsha Brahmanas*) attached to the *Sama Veda*, the “Veda of Chants.” Everything in the *Sama Veda* is longer than its counterparts in the two other Vedas, drawn out, repeated, sung with variations. And the stories in the *Jaiminiya* are longer (as well as livelier and funnier) than those in any other Brahmanas. The *Jaiminiya* is famous for its stories; the first parts of it that were published in Europe (in 1878) were the stories.

Like all Brahmanas, the *Jaiminiya* tells us how someone “saw” a particular chant and thereby got what he wanted, which other people who know the story can also do (as in “Bhrigu’s Journey in the Other World”). Many of the stories were told to restore details omitted in the version of a story in the *Rig Veda* or to explain an allusion. The old gory, chaotic, heroic world of Vedic sacrifice bred these stories in its violent, passionate way; but then they had to be simultaneously fleshed out and flattened to bring them into the ordered world of the sacrifice in the Brahmanas. Often the stories break out of the rigid priestly mold and sprout new images of great emotional power before lapsing back into the cooler tone of the genre. Ultimately, however, the *Jaiminiya* tends to turn Vedic tragedies into stories with happy endings; this is particularly apparent in the usual formulaic punch line: “He saw this chant and praised with it and found success.”

Some of the stories are myths, dealing with cosmic problems, in a sacred context and with supernatural actors (“The Gods Make Men Evil”); but others are folktales, dealing with human problems (“How Men Changed Skins with Animals”). We can see in the folktales patterns that are shared by folktales in other cultures, even while we place them in their own specific cultural and sacrificial context. These folktales are stories about families and about the problems that the human body often poses for us, stories closely tied to folk traditions. When the *Jaiminiya* supplies a long folktale, self-contained and consistent in its details, to gloss a short phrase, it is almost certainly telling a story that had been in the air in India for a long time. Often the Brahmins who retold the folktale had to tamper with it in order to fit it into the sacrificial world. Yet they did not filter out the psychological profundity of these stories, their insights into the fears that underlie dreams, myths, and rituals (such as the sacrifice). The stories retain their power to trigger the full emotional range that is built into the ritual.

HOW MEN CHANGED SKINS WITH ANIMALS

This passage is best read as a reply to a widespread assumption in the Brahmanas that animals take revenge on those who have eaten them. Thus other Brahmanas say: "Just as in this world men eat cattle and devour them, so in the other world cattle eat men and devour them," or, "Whatever food a man eats in this world, that [food] eats him in the other world" (*Kaushitaki Brahmana* 11.3; *Shatapatha Brahmana* 12.9.1.1). According to the *Jaiminiya Brahmana*, this consequence may be avoided if one performs the appropriate offerings (as in "Bhrigu's Journey in the Other World") or sacrifice, but apparently this reassurance did not fully satisfy later Hindus; the *Lawbook of Manu* (5.55) offers a pun on this subject: flesh is called *mamsa* because he (*sa*) eats me (*mam*) in the other world if I eat him now, or, "He whose *meat* in this world I eat, will in the other world *me eat*" ("To Eat or Not to Eat Meat," p. 203). The *Jaiminiya* takes a narrative tack, in a passage explaining why the sacrificer should wear a red cowhide.

The transaction in the other world is here interpreted as the reversal of a reversal: men and cattle traded places long ago, and, as a result, cattle *willingly* supplied men with food and clothing but also, apparently, won the boon of eating men (and, perhaps, flaying them) in the other world. To avoid this, the sacrificer pretends to restore things to the way they were in the mythical past: by putting on the cow's skin, he prevents her from eating him.

The text leaves out terms that the ancient priests would have assumed, but that we have inserted, in brackets, for the contemporary reader.

Jaiminiya Brahmana 2.182–83

In the beginning, the skin of cattle was the skin of a man, and the skin of a man was the skin of cattle [i.e., cattle then had the skin that men now have, and the reverse]. Cattle could not bear the heat, rain, flies, and mosquitoes. They went to man and said, 'Man, let this skin [of ours] be yours, and that skin [of yours] be ours.' 'What would be the result of that?' [man asked]. 'We could be eaten by you,' [the animals said], 'and this [skin of ours] would be your clothing.' So saying they gave [man] his clothing. Therefore, when [the sacrificer] puts on a red hide, he flourishes in that form. Then cattle do not eat him in the other world [if he wears the skin, they think he is one of them]; for cattle do eat a man in the other world [otherwise]. Therefore, one should not stand naked near a cow, for it is liable to run away from one, thinking, 'I am bearing his skin [and he may try to get it back from me].' And this skin has got a tail, which makes it complete.

BHRIGU'S JOURNEY IN THE OTHER WORLD

The tale of Bhrigu in the otherworld is much retold in India. It is long and encompasses several major themes, including fathers and sons, the struggle with death, the symbolism of dreams, and the ethics of eating. Bhrigu is a mortal sage, but he is the son of the god Varuna; he moves back and forth between the world of mortals and the world of immortals. The hell that Bhrigu visits is a Vedic otherworld, perhaps above the earth, perhaps below it, perhaps even on the same level. It is a hell from which one can return during this life, but one that might also be interpreted as a vision of the next life in *this* world, once the idea of reincarnation takes root. This otherworld is the inverse of this world, an upside-down, looking-glass world, reversing the roles of subject and object.

Each of the three final worlds—above, below, and here—has positive as well as negative elements, so that they form a kind of transition from all the negative hells to the entirely positive final world, which is a heaven. The hells are depicted far more vividly than the heavens: the hells come first, there are more of them, and they are described in far greater detail than the heavens.

The central scene deals with the dangers that arise from incorrect, profane eating and are warded off by correct, sacred eating. The two types of eating are inextricably linked by the ancient Indian belief that it is wrong to take food without offering some, at least mentally, to the gods; in the broadest sense, all human food consists of divine leftovers. The fact that the trees eat the men in the otherworld, whereas in this world men do not eat trees, makes sense if one defines the things that are "eaten" not as literal food but as the things that humans consume. The text is not saying, "Do not consume things, for then they will consume you," but, rather, "Be sure to consume things in the right way, or they will consume you."

Bhrigu's immediate reaction to the first scene is to ask, "Has this happened?"—i.e., is it real or is it a dream, a nightmare? The images in his adventure recur in dreams: images of dismemberment, forbidden foods, sexual temptation, and cannibalism. But this is not the report of a dream; it is a highly stylized recasting of a dream in the form of a story with a happy ending: the son emerges stronger than before, for he has learned how to protect himself from the dangers he has seen. The other world turns out to be not a place from which one cannot escape but a nightmare from which one can awaken.

Jaiminiya Brahmana 1.42–44

Bhrigu, the son of Varuna, was devoted to learning. He thought that he was better than his father, better than the gods, better than the other Brahmins who were devoted to learning. Varuna thought to himself, 'My son does not know anything at all. Come, let us teach him to know something.' He took away his life's breaths, and Bhrigu fainted and went beyond this world.¹

Bhrigu arrived in the world beyond. There he saw a man cut another man to pieces and eat him. He said, 'Has this really happened? What is this?' They said to him, 'Ask Varuna, your father. He will tell you about this.' He came to a second world, where a man was eating another man, who was screaming. He said, 'Has this really happened? What is this?' They said to

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty.

1. The father's violence against his son takes other forms in other versions, such as *Rig Veda* 10.135; *Shatapatha Brahmana* 11.6.1–13; *Katha Upanishad* 1.6; and *Mahabharata* 1.3.146–75.

him, 'Ask Varuna, your father. He will tell you about this.' He went on to another world, where he saw a man eating another man, who was soundlessly screaming; then to another, where two women were guarding a great treasure; then to a fifth, where there were two streams flowing on an even level, one filled with blood and one filled with butter. A naked black man² with a club guarded the stream filled with blood; out of the stream filled with butter, men made of gold were drawing up all desires with bowls of gold. In the sixth world there were five rivers with blue lotuses and white lotuses, flowing with honey like water. In them there were dancing and singing, the sound of the lute, crowds of celestial nymphs, a fragrant smell, and a great sound.

Bhrigu returned from that world and came to Varuna, who said, 'Did you arrive, my son?' 'I arrived, father.' 'Did you see, my son?' 'I saw, father.' 'What, my son?' 'A man cut another man to pieces and ate him.' 'Yes,' said Varuna; 'when people in this world offer no oblation and lack true knowledge, but cut down trees and lay them on the fire, those trees take the form of men in the other world and eat [those people] in return.' 'How can one avoid that?'³ 'When you put fuel on the sacred fire, that is how you avoid it and are free of it.'

'What [did you see] second?' 'A man was eating another man, who was screaming.' 'Yes,' he said; 'when people in this world offer no oblation and lack true knowledge, but cook for themselves animals that cry out, those animals take the form of men in the other world and eat in return.' 'How can one avoid that?' 'When you offer the first oblation with the voice, that is how you avoid it and are free of it.'

'What third?' 'A man ate another man, who was soundlessly screaming.' 'Yes,' he said; 'when people in this world offer no oblation and lack true knowledge, but cook for themselves rice and barley, which scream soundlessly, that rice and barley take the form of men in the other world and eat in return.' 'How can one avoid that?' 'When you offer the last oblation with the mind, that is how you avoid it and are free of it.'

'What fourth?' 'Two women were guarding a great treasure.' 'Yes,' said he, 'they were Faith and Nonfaith. When people in this world offer no oblation and lack true knowledge, but sacrifice without faith, that [sacrifice] goes to Nonfaith; what [they sacrifice] with faith goes to Faith.' 'How can one avoid that?' 'When you eat with your thumb, you avoid it and are free of it.'

'What fifth?' 'Two streams were flowing on an even level, one filled with blood and one filled with butter. A naked black man with a club guarded the stream filled with blood; men made of gold were drawing up all desires with bowls of gold out of the stream filled with butter.' 'Yes,' said he; 'when people in this world offer no oblation and lack true knowledge, but squeeze out the blood of a Brahmin, that is the river of blood; and the naked black man who guarded it with a club is Anger, whose food is that [blood].' 'How can one avoid that?' 'When you eat with a sacrificial spoon, you avoid it and are free of it. And when you wash out the spoon and pour the water out toward the north, that is the river of butter; and out of that [butter] the men made of gold draw up all desires with bowls of gold.'

2. Probably a form of Yama, the god of the dead (who is often described as a black man with a golden club); blood would then naturally be his food, while gold is symbolic of immortality; the golden men seem to represent the benefit of good

deeds in the other world.

3. The term for "avoid" (*nishkriti*) describes not an attempt to suffer in order to pay for a sin but a plan to avoid making a mistake that will bring unwanted consequences.

'What sixth?' 'Five rivers, with blue lotuses and white lotuses, flowed with honey like water; in them there were dancing and singing, the sound of the lute, crowds of celestial nymphs, a fragrant smell, and a great sound.' 'Yes,' said he; 'those were my own worlds.' 'How can one get that?' 'By dipping in⁴ five times and drawing out five times.' Then he added, 'There is no chance of getting worlds except by the oblation. Today I am fasting before building the sacrificial fire.' And they made it for him in that way. Whoever offers the oblation with this true knowledge, he is not eaten in return by trees who take the form of men in the other world, nor by animals, nor by rice and barley; nor do his good deeds and sacrifices go to Faith and Non-faith. He wards off the streams of blood and wins the streams of butter.

4. That is, dipping in and out with the sacrificial spoon that is the subject of the previous explanation.

THE GODS MAKE MEN EVIL

Although the majority of the Brahmanas depict the relationship between gods and humans as one of mutual nourishment, some passages reveal a deep-seated jealousy and even hostility of the gods toward humans, a conflict that will re-emerge in later texts. In the following passage, the gods of the three worlds unite to keep humans out of heaven; they take away from humans the Vedic hymns that are the source of their divine strength, hymns that the gods use in their battles against their fraternal enemies, the anti-gods (Asuras). When the human pawn outlives its usefulness in the fraternal battle, the battle between divine fathers and human sons takes precedence over the battle between brothers. The thunderbolt-man is dismembered in order to destroy him and to protect the gods. The concept of sacrifice as a force that joins together the powers of gods and humans has been transformed into the concept of sacrifice as a force that has the potential to drive humans and gods apart, by making humans so good, and hence so powerful, that they rouse the jealousy of the gods.

Jaiminiya Brahmana 1.97–98

The gods and demons¹ were striving against each other. The gods created a thunderbolt, sharp as a razor, that was man [*purusha*].² They hurled this at the demons, and it scattered the demons, but then it turned back to the gods. The gods were afraid of it, and so they took it and broke it into three pieces. Then they saw that the divinities had entered into this man in the form of hymns. They said, 'When this man has lived in the world with merit, he will follow us by means of sacrifices and good deeds and asceticism. Let us therefore act so that he will not follow us. Let us put evil in him.' They put evil in him: sleep, laziness, anger, hunger, love of dice, desire for women. These are the evils that assail a man in this world.

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty.

1. The anti-gods (Asuras).

2. This is the paradigmatic male that we encountered in the Vedic "Hymn of the Primeval Man," p. 82.

Then they enjoined Agni [fire] in this world: 'Agni, if anyone escapes evil and aspires to do good things in this world, try to ruin him.' And they enjoined Vayu [wind] in the intermediate air in the same way, and the sun in the sky. But Ugradeva Rajani³ said, 'I will not harm mankind, though I have heard that these three high gods are inclined to harm mankind.' And the gods do not harm the man who knows this, though they do try to destroy the man who tries to harm the man who knows this.

3. In the *Rig Veda* (1.36.18) Ugradeva Rajani is a powerful protector; in the *Panchavimsha Brahmana* and the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* he is a leper. Here he seems to be saying that a human like himself cannot be blamed for injuring human

beings, since he is acting as an instrument of the gods. He may be referring to his own situation—as a leper he may have been regarded as dangerous and as personally responsible for the danger he was producing.