

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, OR SONG OF THE BLESSED ONE

CHAPTER I

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TO MOST good Vishnuites, the Bhagavad Gītā is what the New Testament is to good Christians. It is their chief devotional book. In it many millions of Hindus have for centuries found their principal source of religious inspiration.

In form, it consists mainly of a long dialog, which is almost a monolog. The principal speaker is Krishna, who in his human aspect is merely one of the secondary heroes of the Mahābhārata, the great Hindu epic. But, according to the Gītā itself, he is in truth a manifestation of the Supreme Deity in human form. Hence the name—the Song (*gītā*) of the Blessed One or the Lord (*Bhagavad*). The other speaker in the dialog is Arjuna, one of the five sons of Pāndu who are the principal heroes of the Mahābhārata. The conversation between Arjuna and Krishna is supposed to take place just before the battle which is the main theme of the great epic. Krishna is acting as Arjuna's charioteer. Arjuna sees in the ranks of the opposing army a large number of his own kinsmen and intimate friends. He is horror-stricken at the thought of fighting against them, and forthwith lays down his weapons, saying he would rather be killed than kill them. Krishna replies, justifying the fight on various grounds, the chief of which is that man's real self or soul is immortal and independent of the body; it "neither kills nor is killed"; it has no part in either the actions or the sufferings of the body. In response to further questions by Arjuna, he gradually develops views of life and destiny as a whole, which it is the purpose of this book to explain. In the course of the exposition he declares himself to be the Supreme Godhead, and reveals to Arjuna, as a special act of grace, a vision of his mystic supernal form. All this appar-

ently goes on while the two armies stand drawn up in battle array, waiting to attack each other. This dramatic absurdity need not concern us seriously. It is clear that the Bhagavad Gītā was not a part of the original epic narrative. It was probably composed, and certainly inserted in its present position, by a later interpolator.¹ To be sure, he must have had in mind the dramatic situation in which he has placed the Gītā, for he repeatedly makes reference to it. But these references are purely formal and external; they do not concern the essentials of the work. We must think of the Gītā primarily as a unit, complete in itself, without reference to its surroundings. Its author, or whoever placed it in its present position, was interested chiefly in the religious doctrines to be set forth, not in external dramatic forms.

This is not to say that the author was lacking in artistic power. He was, on the contrary, a poet of no mean capacity. Indeed, we must think of his work as a poem: a religious, devotional poem. Its appeal is to the emotions rather than to the intellect. It follows that in order to understand the Gītā one must have a certain capacity for understanding its poetic, emotional point of view. One must be able and willing to adopt the poet's attitude: to feel with him. I say, to feel with him: not necessarily to think with him. It is possible to understand and enjoy sympathetically a poetic expression of an emotional attitude without sharing the poet's intellectual opinions. Philosophically speaking, the attitude of the Gītā is mystical. A mystic would probably prefer to say that it appeals to the mystic intuition, rather than to the emotions, as I put it. That is a question of terms, or perhaps better of philosophic outlook. My mystic critic would at any rate agree that it does not appeal to the reasoning faculty of the mind. The "opinions" which it presupposes or sets forth are not so much "opinions" in the intellectual sense as emotional—or, let us say if you like, intuitional—points of view. They are not supported by logic; they are simply proclaimed, as immediately perceived by the soul, or revealed by the grace of God. It is not my purpose to discuss their validity. That would indeed be futile. To the mystic they are above reason, to the rationalist below

¹ Such interpolations are numerous in the Mahābhārata; so numerous that we may fairly regard them as a regular habit. The great epic early attained such prestige among the Hindus that later authors were eager to win immortality for their works by framing them in so distinguished a setting. The author of the Bhagavad Gītā merely followed a custom which was not only common, but seemed to the Hindu mind entirely natural and innocent. The Hindus of ancient times had little notion of what we consider the rights of authorship. To their minds any literary composition belonged to the world, not to its author.

it; to both they are disconnected with it. Either you accept them immediately, without argument, or you do not. Argument will not move you in either case. But even a convinced rationalist, if he has some power of poetic appreciation, can follow much of the Gītā's presentation with sympathy, the sort of sympathy which would be inspired in him by any exalted poetry. The Gītā is poetic not only in formal expression, but in the ideas expressed. In both respects it may claim the attention of all but those who are so dominated by their opinions that they cannot appreciate noble ideas nobly expressed when they have a different intellectual background.

The poetic inspiration found in many of the Gītā's thoughts² can hardly be fully appreciated unless they are presented in a poetic form. We are fortunate in having a beautiful English rendering by Sir Edwin Arnold, from which those who cannot read Sanskrit may get, on the whole, a good idea of the living spirit of the poem. It takes a poet to reproduce poetry. Arnold was a poet, and a very gifted one. My own function is that of an analytic commentator; a more humble function, but one which has its uses, particularly in the case of a work that was produced in a place and at a time so remote from us.

This remoteness in time and scene makes exceptionally important one of the critic's duties: that of making clear the historical setting of his author. As every author, even the most inspired of poets and prophets, is a product of his environment, so we cannot understand the Bhagavad Gītā without knowing something of the ideas which flourished in its native land, during and before its time. It was composed in India, in Sanskrit, the ancient sacred and literary language of Brahmanic civilization. We do not know its author's name (indeed, almost all the early literature of India is anonymous). Nor can we date it with any accuracy; all that we can say is that it was probably composed before the beginning of our era, but not more than a few centuries before it. We do know this: it was preceded by a long literary and intellectual activity, covering perhaps a thousand years, and reaching back to the hymns of the Rig Veda itself, the oldest monument of Hindu literature. And the Gītā's thoughts are rooted in those of this older literature. It was born out of the same intellectual environment; it expresses largely the same ideas, often in the same or similar language. It quotes from older works a number of stanzas and parts of stanzas. There are few important

² Not all of them; it must be confessed that the Gītā is frequently commonplace in both thought and expression.

ideas expressed in the *Gītā* which cannot be paralleled from more ancient works. Its originality of thought consists mainly in a difference of emphasis, in a fuller development of some inherited ideas, and in some significant omissions of ideas which were found in its sources.

It is equally true, though less important for our purposes, that the *Bhagavad Gītā* itself has had an enormous influence on later Hindu religious literature. It has even had some influence on European and American literature of the last century, during which it became known to the western world. To mention one instance: a verse found in the *Gītā* was imitated by Emerson in the first verse of his poem on "Brahma":

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Compare *Bhagavad Gītā* 2, 19 (Arnold's translation):

He who shall say, "Lo! I have slain a man!"
He who shall think, "Lo! I am slain!" those both
Know naught! Life cannot slay. Life is not slain!

To be sure, this stanza is not original with the *Gītā*; it is quoted from the *Katha Upanishad*. It is more likely, however, that Emerson got it from the *Gītā* than from the less well-known *Upanishad* text. But the later influence of the *Gītā* lies outside the scope of this volume. I shall content myself with setting forth the thoughts of the *Gītā* and their origins.

Especially close is the connection between the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the class of works called *Upanishads*. These are the earliest extensive treatises dealing with philosophical subjects in India. About a dozen of them, at least, are older than the *Gītā*, whose author knew and quoted several. The *Gītā* itself is sometimes regarded as an *Upanishad*, and has quite as good a right to the title as many later works that are so called.³ All the works properly called *Upanishads* have this, and only this, in common, that they contain mainly speculations on some or all of the following topics: the nature of the universe, its origin, purpose, and guiding principle; the nature of man, his physical and mental and spiritual constitution, his duty,

³ The word *upanishad* may be translated "secret, mystic doctrine"; it is a title that is often claimed by all sorts of works, some of which hardly deserve to be called philosophical in any sense.

his destiny, and his relation to the rest of the universe, particularly to the guiding principle thereof, whether conceived personally or impersonally. Now, these are precisely the questions with which the Bhagavad Gītā is concerned. The answers attempted vary greatly, not only in different Upanishads, but often in adjoining parts of the same Upanishad. This also is true of the Gītā, and is eminently characteristic of the literature to which it and the Upanishads belong. We often hear of a "system" of the Upanishads. In my opinion there is no such thing. Nor is there "system" of thought in the Bhagavad Gītā, in the sense of a unitary, logically coherent, and exclusive structure of philosophic thought. He who looks for such a thing in any work of this period will be disappointed. Or, worse yet, he may be tempted to apply Procrustean methods, and by excisions or strained interpretations to force into a unified mold the thoughts of a writer who never dreamed of the necessity or desirability of such unity. The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gītā contain starts toward various *systems*; but none of them contains a single *system*, except possibly in the sense that one idea may be made more prominent than its rivals in an individual work or part of a work. Still less can we speak of a single system as taught by the Upanishads as a whole.

The very concept of a philosophic "system" did not exist in India in the time of the early Upanishads and the Gītā. In later times the Hindus produced various systems of philosophy, which are quite comparable with what we are accustomed to understand by that term. These systems all grew, at least in large measure, out of the older ideas found in the Upanishads. Each of the later thinkers chose out of the richness of Upanishadic thought such elements as pleased him, and constructed his logically coherent system on that basis. Thus, the Upanishads, broadly speaking, are the prime source of all the rival philosophies of later India. But they themselves are more modest. They do not claim to have succeeded in bringing under one rubric the absolute and complete truth about man and the universe. If they seem at times to make such claims, these statements are to be understood as tentative, not final; and often they are contradicted by an adjoining passage in which a very different view-point finds expression. This may seem to us naive. But I think it would be truer, as well as more charitable, to regard it as a sign of intellectual modesty, combined with an honest and burning eagerness for truth. Again and again an Upanishadic thinker arrives at an intellectual *aperçu* so lofty, so noble, that we might

well forgive him for resting content with it. Instead, he abandons it, as it seems without hesitation and without regret, and straightway tries another approach to the same eternal problems. Some ideas recur more frequently than others; but no formula ever gives entire and permanent satisfaction to these restless thinkers. Is this to their discredit?

Thus there grew up in Upanishadic circles not one but a group of attempts to solve the "riddles of the universe." The Bhagavad Gītā, we have seen, belongs to these circles intellectually, and many, if not most, of its ideas are derived from the older Upanishads. More important than this is the fact that it shares with them the trait of intellectual fluidity or tentativeness to which I have just referred. Unlike most of the later Hindu philosophic works, which also derive from the Upanishads but which select and systematize their materials, the Gītā is content to present various rival formulas, admitting at least a provisional validity to them all. To be sure, it has its favorites. But we can usually find in its own text expressions which, in strict logic, contradict its most cardinal doctrines. From the non-logical, mystical view-point of the Gītā this is no particular disadvantage. Rationalistic logic simply does not apply to its problems.

In one other respect there is an important difference of fundamental attitude between the Bhagavad Gītā and most western philosophic thought. All Hindu philosophy has a practical aim. It seeks the truth, but not the truth for its own sake. It is truth as a means of human salvation that is its object. In other words, all Hindu philosophy is religious in basis. To the Hindu mind, "the truth shall make you free." Otherwise there is no virtue in it. This is quite as true of the later systems as of the early and less systematic speculations. To all of them knowledge is a means to an end. This attitude has its roots in a still more primitive conception, which appears clearly in the beginnings of Vedic philosophy and is still very much alive in the early Upanishads: the conception of the magic power of knowledge. To the early Hindus, as to mankind in early stages of development the world over, "knowledge is power" in a very direct sense. Whatever you know you control, directly, and by virtue of your knowledge. The primitive magician gets his neighbors, animal, human, or supernatural, into his power, by acquiring knowledge of them. So the early Vedic thinkers sought to control the most fundamental and universal powers by *knowing* them. This idea most Hindus of classical times never quite outgrew. The

Sanskrit word *vidyā*, "knowledge," means also "magic." Let westerners not be scornful of this. Down to quite modern times the same idea prevailed in Europe. In Robert Greene's play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, produced in England at the end of the sixteenth century, we find it in full force. Roger Bacon, the greatest of medieval English Scholars, is there represented simply as a mighty magician, and a contest of scholarship between him and a rival German scholar resolves itself into a mere test of their powers in necromancy. In short, knowledge meant primarily magic power. No doubt Roger Bacon himself knew better. But he was an exceptional man, intellectually far in advance of his time. The more advanced Hindu thinkers, also, kept their speculations free from magic, at least in its cruder forms. Even such a comparatively early work as the Bhagavad Gītā has no traces of the magical use of knowledge for the attainment of trivial, wordly ends, though many such traces are still found in the Upanishads, its immediate predecessors. To this extent it marks an advance over them, and stands on essentially the same footing with the best of the later systematic philosophies. But the Bhagavad Gītā and the later systems agree with the early Upanishadic thinkers in their practical attitude towards speculation. They all seek the truth, not because of its abstract interest, but because in some sense or other they think that a realization of the truth about man's place in the universe and his destiny will solve all man's problems; free him from all the troubles of life; in short, bring him to the *summum bonum*, whatever they conceive that to be. Just as different thinkers differ as to what that truth is, so they also differ in their definitions of salvation or of the *summum bonum*, and of the best practical means of attaining it. Indeed, as we have seen, the early thinkers, including the author of the Gītā, frequently differ with themselves on such points. But they all agree in this fundamental attitude towards the objects of speculation. They are primarily religious rather than philosophical. And the historic origin of their attitude, in primitive ideas about the magic power of knowledge, has left a trace which I think was never fully effaced, although it was undoubtedly transcended and transfigured.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF HINDU SPECULATION

The records of Hindu religious thought, as of Hindu literature in general, begin with the Rig Veda. This is a collection consisting mostly of hymns of praise and prayer to a group of deities who are primarily personified powers of nature—sun, fire, wind, sky, and the like—with the addition of some gods whose original nature is obscure. The religion represented by the Rig Veda, however, is by no means a simple or primitive nature-worship. Before the dawn of history it had developed into a ritualistic cult, a complicated system of sacrifices, the performance of which was the class privilege of a guild of priests. In the hands of this priestly class the sacrificial cult became more and more elaborate, and occupied more and more the center of the stage. At first merely a means of gratification and propitiation of the gods, the sacrifice gradually became an end in itself, and finally, in the period succeeding the hymns of the Rig Veda, the gods became supernumeraries. The now all-important sacrifices no longer persuaded, but compelled them to do what the sacrificer desired; or else, at times, the sacrifice produced the desired result immediately, without any participation whatsoever on the part of the gods. The gods are even spoken of themselves as offering sacrifices; and it is said that they owe their divine position, or their very existence, to the sacrifice. This extreme glorification of the ritual performance appears in the period of the Brāhmanas, theological text-books whose purpose is to expound the mystic meaning of the various rites. They are later in date than the Rig-Vedic hymns; and their religion, a pure and quasi-magical ritualism, is the apotheosis, or the *reductio ad absurdum*, of the ritualistic nature-worship of the hymns.

Even in Rig-Vedic times the priestly ritual was so elaborate, and so expensive, that in the nature of things only rich men, mainly princes, could engage in it. It was therefore not only a hieratic but an aristocratic cult. The real religion of the great mass of the people was different. We find it portrayed best in the Atharva Veda. This is a collection of hymns, or rather magic charms, in-

tended to accompany a vast mass of simpler rites and ceremonies which were not connected with the hieratic cult of the Rig Veda. Almost every conceivable human need and aspiration is represented by these popular performances. Their religious basis may be described as primitive animism, and their method of operation as simple magic. That is, they conceive all creatures, things, powers, and even abstract principles, as animated by "spirits," which they seek to control by incantations and magic rites. They know also the higher gods of the Rig Vedic pantheon, and likewise other gods which perhaps belonged at the start to aboriginal, non-"Aryan" tribes ("Aryan" is the name which the Vedic Hindus apply to themselves). But they invoke these gods after the manner of magic-mongers, much as medieval European incantations invoke the persons of the Trinity and Christian saints in connection with magic practices to heal a broken bone or to bring rain for the crops.

Later Hindu thought developed primarily out of the hieratic, Rig-Vedic religion; but it contains also quite a dash of lower, more popular beliefs. The separation of the two elements is by no means always easy. The truth seems to be that the speculations out of which the later forms of thought developed were carried on mainly by priests, adherents of the hieratic ritual religion. Almost all the intellectual leaders of the community belonged to the priestly class. But they were naturally—almost inevitably—influenced more or less by the popular religion which surrounded them. Indeed, there was no opposition between the two types of religion, nor such a sharp cleavage as our description may suggest. The followers of the hieratic cult also engaged in many practices that belonged to the more popular religion. This accounts for the constant infiltration of ideas from the "lower" sphere into the "higher," which we see going on at all periods. At times it is hard to decide whether a given new development is due to the intrusion of popular ideas, or to internal evolution within the sphere of the priestly religion itself.

For we can clearly see the growth of certain new ideas within the Rig Veda itself. Out of the older ritualistic nature-worship, with its indefinite plurality of gods, arises in many Rig-Vedic hymns a new attitude, a sort of mitigated polytheism, to which has been given the name of *henotheism*. By this is meant a religious point of view which, when dealing for the moment with any particular god, seems to feel it as an insult to his dignity to admit the competition of other deities. And so, either the particular god of the moment is made to absorb all the others, who are declared to be

manifestations of him; or else, he is given attributes which in strict logic could only be given to a sole monotheistic deity. Thus various Vedic gods are each at different times declared to be the creator, preserver, and animator of the universe, the sole ruler of all creatures, human and divine, and so on. Such hymns, considered separately, seem clearly to imply monotheism; but all that they really imply is a ritualistic henotheism. As each god comes upon the stage in the procession of rites, he is impartially granted this increasingly extravagant praise, until everything that could be said of all the gods collectively is said of each of them in turn, individually. We see that Vedic henotheism is rooted in the hieratic ritual, without which so strange a religious attitude could hardly have developed.

Indeed, it was not long before some advanced thinkers saw that such things as the creation of the world and the rulership over it could really be predicated only of one Personality. The question then arose, how to name and define that One? We might have expected that some one of the old gods would be erected into a truly monotheistic deity. But, perhaps because none of them seemed sufficiently superior to his fellows, perhaps for some other reason, this was not done. Instead, in a few late hymns of the Rig Veda we find various tentative efforts to establish a new deity in this supreme position. Different names are given to him: "the Lord of Creatures" (Prajāpati), "the All-maker" (Vishvakarman), and the like. As these names show, the new concept is rather abstract, and no longer ritualistic. Yet it is still personal. It is a *God* who creates, supports, and rules the world; a kind of Yahweh or Allah; not an impersonal First Cause. It is an attempt at monotheism, not yet monism.

These starts toward monotheism remained abortive, in the sense that they did not, at least directly, result in the establishment of a monotheistic religion comparable to that of the Hebrew people. Many centuries were to pass before such religions gained any strong foothold in India; and the connection between them and these early suggestions is very remote and tenuous. The later religions owe their strength largely to other elements of more popular origin. Yet sporadic and more or less tentative suggestions of the sort continued to be made.

More striking, and more significant for the later development of Hindu philosophy, is a movement towards *monism* which appears, along with the monotheistic movement, even in the Rig Veda itself, though only tentatively and very rarely. One or two Rig-Vedic hymns attempt to formulate the One in strictly impersonal, non-

theistic terms. Among these I must mention the one hundred and twenty-ninth hymn of the tenth book of the Rig Veda, which to my mind is a very remarkable production, considering its time and place. This "hymn" (for so we can hardly help calling it, since it is found in the "hymn-book" of the Rig Veda) also seeks to explain the universe as evolving out of One; but its One is no longer a god. It knows no Yahweh or Allah, any more than the ritualistic Indra or Varuna. It definitely brushes aside all gods, not indeed denying their existence, but declaring that they are all of late and secondary origin; they know nothing of the beginnings of things. The First Principle of this hymn is "That One" (*tad ekam*). It is of neuter gender, as it were lest some theologian should get hold of it and insist on falling down and worshiping it. It is not only impersonal and non-theistic, but absolutely uncharacterizable and indescribable, without qualities or attributes, even negative ones. It was "neither existent nor non-existent." To seek to know it is hopeless: in the last two verses of the hymn (there are only seven in all) the author relapses into a philosophic scepticism which remains characteristic of Hindu higher thought in certain moods. While the later Upanishads often try to describe the One all-inclusively, by saying that it is *everything*, that it contains all possible and conceivable characteristics; still in their deepest moments they too prefer the negative statement *neti, neti*⁴—"it is not (this), it is not (that)." To apply to it any description is to limit and bound that which is limitless and boundless. It cannot be conceived; it cannot be known.

But the ancient Hindu thinkers could never resign themselves to this scepticism. Even if cold reason showed them at times that they could not, in the nature of things, know the Unknowable, still their restless speculation kept returning to the struggle again and again, from ever varied points of attack. In the Rig Veda itself, in one of its latest hymns (10.90), appears the first trace of a strain of monistic thought which is of the greatest importance for later Hindu philosophy: the universe is conceived as parallel in nature to the human personality. The First Principle in this hymn is called Purusha, that is, "Man" or "Person." From the several parts of this cosmic Person are derived, by a still rather crude process of evolution, all existing things. The significance of this lies in its anticipation of the Upanishadic idea of the identity of the human soul (later called *ātman*, literally "self," as a rule) with the universal principle.

⁴ Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad 3.9.26, and in other places.

Other, later Vedic texts, especially the Atharva Veda, also contain speculative materials. They are extremely varied in character; they testify to the restlessness and tentativeness which we have seen as a characteristic of all early Hindu thought. At times they seem monotheistic in tendency. The "Lord of Creatures," Prajāpati, of the Rig Veda, appears again and again, as a kind of demiurge; and other names are invented for the same or a similar figure, such as the "Establisher," Dhātār, or the "Arranger," Vidhātār, or "He that is in the Highest," Parameshthin. But never does such a figure attain anything like the definite dignity which we associate with a genuine monotheistic deity. And more often the thought centers around less personal, more abstract entities, either physical or metaphysical, or more or less both at once. The sun, especially under the mystic name of Rohita, "the Ruddy One," enjoys a momentary glory in several Atharva-Vedic charms, which invest him with the functions of a cosmic principle. Or the world is developed out of water; we are reminded of Thales, the first of the Greek philosophers. The wind, conceived as the most subtle of physical elements and as the "life-breath" (*prāna*) of the universe, plays at times a like role, and by being compared with man's life-breath it contributes to the development of the cosmic "Person" (*Purusha*) of the Rig Veda into the later *Atman* or Soul (of man) as the Supreme One. The word *ātman* itself seems actually to be used in this way in one or two late verses of the Atharva Veda.⁵ The power of Time (*kāla*), or of Desire (*kāma*)—a sort of cosmic Will, reminding us of Schopenhauer—is elsewhere conceived as the force behind the evolution of the universe. Or, still more abstractly, the world-all is derived from a hardly defined "Support," that is, a "Fundamental Principle" (*skambha*), on which everything rests. These and other shadowy figures flit across the stage of later Vedic speculation. Individually, few of them have enough definiteness or importance to merit much attention. But in the mass they are of the greatest value for one who would follow the development of Hindu thought as a whole.

Especially important is the eminently *practical* spirit which animates all this speculation. As we saw in the first chapter, metaphysical truth *per se* and for its own sake is not its object. Earnest and often profound though these thinkers are, they never lose sight for long of their practical aim, which is to control, by virtue of their superior knowledge, the cosmic forces which they study. That, I think, is why so many of their speculations are imbedded in the

⁵ 10.8.43, 44.

Atharva Veda, a book of magic spells, which to our minds would seem the most inappropriate place possible.

It might seem to follow from this that the speculative activity of this period belonged to the popular sphere represented by the religion of the Atharva Veda, more than to the ritualistic cult that was the heir of the Rig Veda. But I think there is evidence to the contrary. However appropriate to the spirit of the popular religion it seemed in some respects, this activity was carried on mainly by the priests of the hieratic ritual. And this fact, which for various reasons seems to me indubitable, finds a striking concrete expression in a philosophic concept produced in this period which deserves special consideration.

Among all the varied formulations of the First and Supreme Principle, none recurs more constantly throughout the later Vedic texts than the *brahman*. The oldest meaning of this word seems to be "sacred utterance," or concretely "hymn" or "incantation." It is applied both to the ritual hymns of the Rig Veda and to the magic charms of the Atharva Veda. Any holy, mystic utterance is *brahman*. This is the regular, if not the exclusive, meaning which the word has in the Rig Veda. But from the point of view of those times, this definition implies far more than it would suggest to our minds. The spoken word had a mysterious, supernatural power; it contained within itself the essence of the thing expressed. To "know the *name*" of anything was to control a thing. The *word* means wisdom, knowledge; and knowledge, as we have seen, was (magic) power. So *brahman*, the "holy word," soon came to mean the mystic power inherent in the holy word.

But to the later Vedic ritualists, this holy word was the direct expression and embodiment of the ritual religion, and as such a cosmic power of the first magnitude. The ritual religion, and hence its verbal expression, the *brahman*, was omnipotent. All human desires and aspirations were accessible to him who mastered it. All other cosmic forces, even the greatest of natural and supernatural powers, were dependent upon it. The gods themselves, originally the beneficiaries of the cult, became its helpless mechanical agents, or were left out of account altogether as useless middlemen. The cult was the direct controlling force of the universe. And the *brahman* was the spirit, the expression, of the cult; nay, it *was* the cult, mystically speaking, because the word and the thing were one; he who knew the word, knew and controlled the thing. Therefore, he who knew the *brahman* knew and controlled the whole universe.

It is no wonder, then, that in the later Vedic texts (not yet in the Rig Veda) we find the *brahman* frequently mentioned as the primal principle⁶ and as the ruling and guiding spirit of the universe. It is a thoroughly ritualistic concept, inconceivable except as an outgrowth of the theories of the ritualistic cult, but very simple and as it were self-evident from the point of view of the ritualists. The overwhelming prominence and importance of the *brahman* in later Vedic speculation seems, therefore, a striking proof of the fact that this speculation was at least in large part a product of ritualistic, priestly circles. If it shows a magic tinge suggestive of the popular rites and incantations, this simply means that the priests were also men, children of their times, and imbued with the ideas which prevailed among their people.

Not content with attempts to identify the One, the Vedic thinkers also try to define His, or Its, relation to the empiric world. Here again their suggestions are many and varied. Often the One is a sort of demiurge, a Creator, Father, First Cause. Such theistic expressions may be used of impersonal, monistic names for the One as well as of more personal, quasi-monotheistic ones. The One is compared to a carpenter or a smith; he joins or smelts the world into being. Or his act is like an act of generation; he begets all beings. Still more interestingly, his creative activity is compared to a sacrifice, a ritual performance, or to prayer, or religious fervor (*dhī, tapas*). This obviously ritualistic imagery appears even in the Rig Veda itself, in several of its philosophic hymns. In the Purusha hymn, already referred to, the universe is derived from the sacrifice of the cosmic Person, the Purusha; the figure is of the dismemberment of a sacrificial animal; from each of the members of the cosmic Purusha evolved a part of the existing world. The performers of this cosmogonic sacrifice are "the gods,"—inconsistently, of course, for the gods have already been declared to be secondary to the Purusha, who transcends all existing things. In later Vedic times we repeatedly meet with expressions suggesting such ritualistic lines of thought. They confirm our feeling that we are moving in hieratic circles.

We see from what has just been said of the Purusha hymn that the One—here the Purusha, the cosmic "Person" or "Man"—may be thought of as the material source (*causa materialis*) as well as the creator (*causa efficiens*) of the world. All evolves out of it, or

⁶ "There is nothing more ancient or higher than this *brahman*," Shatapatha Brāhmana, 10.3.5.11.

is a part of it; but frequently, as in the Purusha hymn, it is *more* than all empiric existence; it transcends all things, which form, or derive from, but a part of it. Again, it is often spoken of as the ruler, controller, or lord of all. Or, it is the foundation, fundament, upon which all is based, which supports all. Still more significant are passages which speak of the One as subtly pervading all, as air or ether or space (*ākāśha*) pervades the physical universe, and animating all, as the breath of life (*prāna*) is thought of as both pervading and animating the human body.

Such ideas as the last mentioned lead to a deepening and spiritualizing of the concept of a parallelism between man, the microcosm, and the universe, the macrocosm, which as we have seen dates from late Rig-Vedic times. In the Purusha hymn of the Rig Veda we find a crude evolution of various parts of the physical universe from the parts of the physical body of the cosmic "Man." But in the later Vedic texts the feeling grows that man's nature is not accounted for by dissecting his physical body—and, correspondingly, that there must be something more in the universe than the sum total of its physical elements. What is that "something more" in man? Is it the "life-breath" or "life-breaths" (*prāna*), which seem to be in and through various parts of the human body and to be the principle of man's life (since they leave the body at death)? So many Vedic thinkers believed. What, then, is the corresponding "life-breath" of the universe? Obviously the wind, say some. Others think of it as the *ākāśha*, "ether," or "space." But even these are too physical, too material. On the human side, too, it begins to be evident that the "life-breath," like its cosmic counterpart the wind, is in reality physical. Surely the essential Man must be something else. What, then? Flittingly, here and there, it is suggested that it may be man's "desire" or "will" (*kāma*), or his "mind" (*manas*), or something else of a more or less psychological nature. But already in the Atharva Veda, and with increasing frequency later, we find as an expression for the real, essential part of Man the word *ātman* used. *Atman* means simply "self"; it is used familiarly as a reflective pronoun, like the German *sich*. One could hardly get a more abstract term for that which is left when everything unessential is deducted from man, and which is at the same time the principle of his life, the living soul that pervades his being. And, carrying on the parallelism, we presently find mention of the *ātman*, self or soul, of the universe. The texts do not content themselves with that; they continue to speculate as to what that "soul" of the universe is. But

these speculations tend to become more and more free from purely physical elements. Increasing partiality is shown for such metaphysical expressions as "the existent," or "that which is" (*sat*),⁷ or again "the non-existent" (*asat*); in the Rig-Vedic hymn 10.129 we were told that in the beginning there was "neither existent nor non-existent," but later we find both "the existent" and "the non-existent" used as expressions for the first principle. But perhaps the favorite formula in later Vedic times for the soul of the universe is the originally ritualistic one of the *brahman*.

This parallelism between the "self" of man and the "self" of the universe is still only a parallelism, not yet an identity. But we are now on the eve of the last and the boldest step, which it remained for the thinkers of the early Upanishads to take: that of declaring that the soul of man *is* the soul of the universe.

⁷ Compare the Greek τὸ ὄν or τὸ ὄντως ὄν, "that which (really) is," and, for a less exact parallel, the Kantian *Ding an sich*.