

Vedic and Upaniṣadic ideas of death,  
deathlessness, and forms of existence after death.

by

Margaret Cone.

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## Preface

My object in preparing this thesis was to ascertain the ideas of the authors of the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas and earlier Upaniṣads. To gain a clearer impression of the background to the texts and as an aid to a better understanding of them, I of course studied the Indian commentators, especially Sāyana and Śaṅkara; various treatises of the later main philosophical schools, including literature of Buddhism; and several Western interpreters of Vedic literature as a whole. But in writing the thesis I have deliberately restricted myself to discussing the original Sanskrit texts themselves, and my own understanding of them.

A survey such as this, covering a wide expanse of time and literature, must of necessity be selective in the use of its material. For the Saṃhitās therefore I used only the Ṛg-Veda and Atharva-Veda as a basis for my study. The Sāma-Veda and the two Saṃhitās of the Yajur-Veda, the Taittirīya Saṃhitā and the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā, seem to me to contribute few ideas which are not to be found in the Ṛg-Veda and Atharva-Veda, or in the Brāhmaṇas.

For the period of the Brāhmaṇas and Aranyakas my main study was devoted to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. I consulted

other Brāhmaṇas, but found that in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa especially were represented all the main ideas on the subject found in the Brāhmaṇic literature generally, and that this Brāhmaṇa expressed such ideas most clearly and in the greatest quantity. I have treated any quotations from the Yajur-Veda as appear in the Brāhmaṇa as exhibiting ideas of the stage of the Brāhmaṇas rather than that of the Saṃhitās.

For the Upaniṣadic stage I studied several Upaniṣads generally accepted as among the earliest and most representative for this body of literature: the Brhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Iśā , Kena, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Śvetāśvatara, Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa and Maitrāyaṇiya Upaniṣads. I treated the Gauḍapāda Kārikā as a supplement to and expansion of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, rather than as an Upaniṣad itself.

All translations, unless specifically acknowledged, are my own, and any correspondence between my words and the words of other translators is coincidental. I did, of course, make use of translations, particularly those of Geldner and Griffith for the Ṛg-Veda; that of Whitney and Lanman for the Atharva-Veda; and that of Eggeling for the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. For the Upaniṣads I studied the work of several translators, both of collections and of individual Upaniṣads.

Texts and translations used.

Texts

The hymns of the Ṛg-Veda	edited by M.Müller	London, 1890
Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā	edited by R.Roth & W.D.Whitney	Berlin, 1924
Satapatha Brāhmaṇa	edited by Vidyādhara- sarma Gauḍa & Chandradhara Śarma	Benares, samvat 1994-5
Eighteen principal Upaniṣads	edited by V.P.Limaye & R.D.Vadekar	Poona, 1958
Les Upaniṣads	edited by L.Renou & others	Paris, 1943

Translations

The hymns of the Ṛg-Veda	translated by R.T.H.Griffith	Benares, 1920
Der Ṛg-Veda	translated by K.F.Geldner	Leipzig, 1923
Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā	translated by W.D.Whitney completed and revised by C.R.Lanman	Harvard, 1905
Satapatha Brāhmaṇa	translated by J.Eggeling in Sacred Books of the East, vols. 12, 26, 41, 43, 44.	Clarendon Press, 1882-1900

Abbreviations used

R̥g-Veda	R̥V
Atharva-Veda	AV
Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā	VS
Taittirīya Saṁhitā	TS
Satapatha Brāhmaṇa	SPB
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad	BAU
Chāndogya Upaniṣad	ChU
Aitareya Upaniṣad	AitU
Taittirīya Upaniṣad	TU
Kena Upaniṣad	Kena
Kaṭha Upaniṣad	Kaṭha
Praśna Upaniṣad	PU
Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad	MuU
Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad	MāU
Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad	SvU
Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad	KauṣU
Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad	MaiU

Chapter One

The Saṃhitās.

1. Attitude to death

The hymns of the Rg-Veda, whether one considers them as fervent and spontaneous outpourings of awefilled simple souls, or as liturgy composed to order for the ritual of the sacrifice, or as a mixture of both, presuppose a quite considerable advance on the way from a primitive community to a civilised society. The flexible and expressive language of the hymns; their poetry which is at times very fine; the gradual distinguishing of social classes and functions; the complicated myths only hinted at; as well as the implications that the ritual is firmly established and already subject to elaboration; all these point to a society self-conscious and comparatively stable. Such a society is no longer obsessively concerned with the problem of mere survival, of tomorrow's meals or tonight's safe sleep; it has time and imagination to tackle constructively wider problems: the nature of man and of the gods, and of the relationship of the two; teleology and the workings of the universe; and of course death and its consequences.

These problems are indeed recognised by most societies



at most times, and it is significant that on the subject of death the evidence from many surviving "primitive" tribes shows a similarity of outlook. They consider death as an intrusion, a mistake, the general feeling being that because of some error of man, deliberate or accidental, eternal life which was naturally mankind's was lost, just as the eating of the forbidden fruit debarred Adam and Eve, and therefore all men, from access to the tree of eternal life. It would, I think, be permissible to assume that the ancestors of those responsible for the Vedas shared this resentment of death.

This resentment is one aspect of the common human tendency to look back to a golden age when the majority of the hardships of life were not present; when, so it is believed, the crops grew without the farmers' excessive labour, and bore fruit more than once a year; when men were supposedly taller and stronger, and are imagined, by primitive tribes, to have been immortal, and by more advanced societies, increasing in cynicism and realism, to have lived for hundreds or thousands of years. These heroic men could meet the gods: the soldiers of Thucydides' history knew an unbridgeable gulf between the two races which was not there for the heroes of the Iliad. Similarly, the Rg-Veda envisages a time when

certain men were companions of the gods, and shared in their exploits, as in RV 7.76.4

ta id devānāṃ sadhamāda āsann ṛtāvānaḥ kavayaḥ pūrvyāsaḥ /  
 gūḥyaṃ jyotiḥ pitaro anvavindant satyamantrā ajanayann  
 uṣāsam //

'Those former thinkers who upheld the fixed order of things rejoiced together with the gods. Our Fathers found the hidden light; by their effectual hymns they generated the dawn.'

The poets of the Ṛg-Veda accept death as inevitable, and do not ponder on its first appearance in a search for an explanation of the unwelcome fact of mortality. One passage, however, seems to say that Yama, often referred to as the first man, chose death deliberately as a service to the gods, RV 10.13.4

devebhyaḥ kam avṛṇita mṛtyuṃ prajāyai kam amṛtam nāvṛṇita /  
 bṛhaspatiṃ yajñam akṛṇvata ṛṣiṃ priyaṃ yamas tanvaṃ  
 prārirecit //

'For the gods indeed he chose death; for men he did not choose deathlessness. They made Brhaspati the seer their sacrifice; Yama relinquished his precious form.'

Death, although inevitable, is nonetheless to be deplored, for the hymns of the R̥g-Veda reveal a great love for and enjoyment in life. This is in fact the abiding impression left by them on the reader. There is an excitement in the strength the sacrificer shares with Indra; an exultation in the bright flame flaring upwards; a firm confidence in the continued help and generosity of the gods, and even in the forgiving and releasing powers of Varuṇa, so that the consciousness of evil and wrongdoing is merely a temporary depression, to be overcome without too much soul-searching or suffering. The authors ask from the gods, who are pleased by their hymns and offerings, all the blessings required for a full and satisfying life on earth. They ask for wealth in goods, and especially in cattle; for strong sons and brave warriors to bring such victory as Indra won and continues to win against Vṛtra and other enemies, some of whom are human; and for a long life and a full one, as in R̥V 1.53.5 & 11.

- 5 sam indra rāyā samīṣā rabhemahi saṃ vājebhiḥ puruścandrair  
abhid'yubhiḥ /
- saṃ devyā pramatyā viraśuṣmayā goagraṣāśvāvatyā rabhemahi //
- 11 ya udrcīndra devagopāḥ sakhāyas te śivatamā asāma /
- tvāṃ stoṣāma tvayā suvirā drāghīya āyuh prataraṃ dadhānāḥ //

'O, Indra, may we take hold of wealth and booty, its brightness reaching to the sky; may we obtain that divine provider, who holds the strength of heroes, richness in cattle and abundance of horses.'

'O Indra, may we, with the gods as our protectors, as your friends, prosper greatly at last. We praise you; by your favour may we have strong heroes, and a lengthened and increased term of life.'

The gods are the proper bestowers of long life, for they are themselves usually amṛta, free from death. In RV 10.48.5 Indra so describes himself:

aham indro na parā jigya id dhanam na mṛtyave 'va  
tasthe kadā cana /  
somam in mā sunvanto yācatā vasu na me pūravah sakhye  
riṣāthana //

'I, Indra, have never been defeated so that I lost the prize; I have never gone down to death. Pressing the soma for me, ask for wealth. In my friendship, O Purus, you do not suffer any harm.'

The gods have power over death, and over its opposite. RV 10. 121.2 says of Prajāpati

yasya chāyamṛtaṃ yasya mṛtyuḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā  
vidhema //

'Which god shall we worship with oblations, the god whose shadow is deathlessness, in whose power is death?'

The gods' help is sought to preserve life, for protection against all the accidents of existence. Those gods who ensure the continuity of all things are asked to make man's life continue: Parjanya, the fertilising rain holding the germ of life (e.g. RV 7.101.6); the Adityas, particularly Mitra and Varuṇa, who uphold and guard the ṛta, the fixed order of things (e.g. RV 8.18.); Savitr and Uṣas, giving man each time they appear another day of life (e.g. RV 10.36.14). Often gods are asked rather to keep away danger and disease, to ward off anything that might put life at risk. Indra and the Maruts are asked for aid in battle, to give their worshippers safety in its dangers, as in RV 7.30.2

havanta u tvā havyaṃ vivāci tanūṣu śurāḥ suryasya sātau /

'Our warriors call on you, who are fit to be invoked, for [the safety of] their bodies and for gaining the sunlight.'

Agni keeps away especially the supernatural enemies: the Rākṣases, the demons; the sorcerers who plot to spoil and invalidate the sacrifice; and so Agni wards off danger from the sacrificer and all he owns and cherishes, including his own body, which depends on the ritual. Soma, as the healing plant par excellence, is prayed to for health and long life.

For RV 8.79.2 says of the god

abhyūrṇoti yan nagnam bhiṣakti viśvaṃ yat turam /  
premandhaḥ khyanniḥ śrono bhūt //

'Whatever is bare, he covers; everything that is sick he heals; the blind man sees, the deaf hears.'

Rudra has power to ward off or cure disease, as well as to inflict it, as in RV 2.332

tvādattebhī rudra śantamebhiḥśataṃ himā aśiya bheṣajebhiḥ /  
vy asmad dveṣo vitaraṃ vy aṃho vy amivās cātayasvā  
viṣuciḥ //

'By means of those most beneficial medicines given by you, O Rudra, may I reach my hundredth winter. Frighten far away from us in all directions hostility and distress and disease'.

As in this passage, generally one hundred years is stated to be the natural length of a man's life, and it is accepted that after this period death is unavoidable and to be calmly endured, as RV 1.89.9 shows

śatam in nu śarado anti devā yatrā naś cakrā jarasaṃ  
tanūnām /  
putrāso yatra pitaro bhavanti mā no madhyā rīriṣatāyur  
gantoh //

'A hundred autumns are before us, O gods, during which you bring old age to our bodies, and during which our sons become fathers. Do not shatter our span of life in the middle of its course.'

It seems improbable that this optimistic claim bore any relation to the average life-expectancy of the Vedic Indian. Even now, many Indians do not survive until old age. Does this claim of the R̥g-Veda, and indeed the later theory of the four āśramas, which would require a long life for their performance, reflect a healthier India, or a country just as difficult but a people who relieved their desperation and fear in myths and hopes of a peaceful and long old age? The climate was presumably very little kinder to health a thousand years before Christ than it is now. Men were at greater risk from wild animals and the natural disaster of crop failure; and the hymns reflect the concerns of a people at war, either against an incompletely subdued indigenous population, or against rival invading tribes. Against this it can be said that the Buddha very likely reached the age of eighty, and Mahāvira the age of seventy, but their careful diet and way of life may have contributed to their longevity. The probability is that the uncertainty of life and the ever-near threat of death, at least in middle-age, urged on the R̥g-Vedic authors to

pray for a postponement, for the term of which one hundred years was a satisfying and auspicious number. There is also the wish, shown in RV 1.89.9 above, to see one's grandchildren, to be sure of the continuity of the line. This was important, for RV 10.56.6 says that sons and grandsons will make offerings to their ancestors, and so give them sustenance in the next world. On a different plane, they will continue to perform the sacrifice, and so strengthen ṛta, the world order, and preserve the existence of the universe.

A premature death, however, that is a death at an age less than one hundred years, from whatever cause, is considered an intrusion, something to be dreaded and fought and prayed against, as in RV 10.59.4

mo ṣu ṇaḥ soma mṛtyave parā dāḥ paśyema nu sūryam  
uccarantam /  
 dyubhir hito jarimā sū no astu parātaraṃ su nirṛtir  
jihītaṃ //

'Do not give us up to death, O Soma; let us see the sun arising. Let our old age with its passing days be kind to us; let destruction be off, far away.'

In RV 10.18.1 death, claiming one victim, is urged to



spare the living;

paraṃ mṛtyo anu parehi panthāṃ yas te sva itaro  
devayānāt /

cakṣuṣmate śṛṇvate te bravimi mā naḥ prajāṃ rīriṣo  
mota virān //

'Be off, O death, on your path separate from that  
way of the gods. I say to you who have eyes and  
ears: do not injure our offspring nor our heroes.'

And RV 10.18.4 asks that the living may

śataṃ jivantu śaradaḥ puruḥir antar mṛtyuṃ dadhatāṃ  
parvatena //

'survive one hundred full autumns, and bury death  
within this mountain.'

In general the attitude of the Atharva-Veda to death is very similar to that of the Ṛg-Veda. Life is good; death, although inevitable, is to be postponed until old age. There are many hymns whose purpose is, often by magic, that is by the priests' control over the natural forces by means of the ritual and their spells, rather than by the propitiation and persuasion of the gods controlling those forces, to prolong someone's life, to seek protection against death in its one hundred forms. Such a prayer is AV 3.11.8

yas tvā mṛtyur abhyadhata jāyamānaṃ supāśyā /

'That death which put around you when you were born  
its strong noose.'

and AV 17.1.29 & 30

29 mā mā prāpat pāpma mota mṛtyur ... /

30 ... udyant sūryo nudatāṃ mṛtyupāśān /

'Let not evil reach me, nor death ...

' ... may the sun as it rises thrust away death's nooses.'

Death is the extreme punishment to be wished for one's  
enemies, the worst that can happen to them, as in AV 8.8.10

mṛtyave 'mūn pra yacchāmi mṛtyupāśair amī sitāḥ /

mṛtyor ye aghalā dūtās tebhya enān prati nayāmi badhvā //

'To death I hand those over; they are bound with the  
feters of death. Having bound them I lead them to  
meet those fearful messengers of death.'

It is unlikely that the subjects of this verse were  
present and literally bound, in which case the words might  
refer to a human sacrifice or execution. The verse sounds  
more like a magician's curse. The hymn probably accompanied  
complicated army rites such as those detailed in the Kauśika  
Sūtra 16. "Feters" of hemp and muñja grass were strewn over  
the tracks of the hostile army to hinder and restrain it.

The enemies are bound by a magical power which should bring about their death.

More often than in the R̥g-Veda death is personified in the Atharva-Veda and becomes a god to be worshipped and entreated, as in AV 8.2.8

asmai mṛtyo adhi brūhimaṃ dayasva ... /

'Speak favourably to this man, O death; pity him ...'

and in AV 8.1.1

antakāya mṛtyave namaḥ ... /

'To the ender, to death, be homage ...'

Death is frequently identified with Yama, the lord of the dead, as in AV 6.28.3

yaḥ prathamah pravatam āsasāda bahubhyaḥ panthām

anuspaśānaḥ /

yo 'syeṣe dvipado yaś catuspadas tasmai yamāya namo

astu mṛtyave //

'To him who first reached the slope, spying out the road for many, who is lord of the two-footed and the four-footed, to that Yama, to death be homage.'

Death has a great importance as the ender of all the sacrificer holds dear; and so other concepts, to gain importance, are identified with it. A hymn extolling breath

(AV 11.4.), states that breath is death, presumably because breath is so vital for life. It is seen as an independent force, and if it leaves the person, he dies. A hymn to svapna, sleep, says, AV 6.46.2

... antiko 'si mṛtyur asi /

'... you are the ender, you are death.'

Sleep is the nearest approximation in life to death; as this same hymn states, AV 6.46.1

yo na jīvo 'si na mṛto devānām amṛtagarbho 'si svapna /

'You who are not alive, not dead; womb of deathlessness for the gods are you, O sleep.'

This idea of sleep as an in-between stage was later much elaborated and explored, for sleep was felt to afford clues to the nature of that other life, the natural state of the real self, the ātman, attained in deep sleep and at death.

Another hymn, AV 10.10., in praise of the cow, identifies her with death and with deathlessness. She seems to symbolise the whole universe, with its two equally valid and unchangeable aspects, mortality and immortality, men and gods.

Death itself seems more in the minds of the authors of the Atharva-Veda than is the case with the authors of the Rg-Veda. The two collections complement one another. The

R̥g-Veda concentrates for the most part on the pleasures and goods of life, implying the unwelcomeness of death. In the Atharva-Veda the dreadfulness of death is explicit; the R̥g-Veda's message, that life is good, is implicit.

Death, then, for both these Saṃhitās, is an enemy, a problem. The problem is one common to most societies and religions: all must come to terms with death by some means or other. Christianity, without necessarily detracting from the value of earthly life, makes death the entrance to a new existence, where man sees God face to face, and knows even as he is known. In the Jātakas and other birth-stories (in the Mahāvastu, the Lalita-vistara and the Avadānas), the fact of samsāra takes much of the menace from death; it is simply the moment of transition from one life to the next. The Upaniṣads, and much of later Indian philosophy, turn the tables and see life, not death, as the great enemy. Indeed, much of Indian thought is influenced by a certain obsession with death and the transitoriness of life and its joys: the Buddha searches, as do the Vedāntins and the followers of other schools, for the state which transcends both life and death, and thus saves men from the grief which otherwise attends on death. There are traces of this continuing insecurity in the Saṃhitās, but the

R̥g-Veda's answer is to concentrate on the avoidance of death in this life rather than on a passing beyond it into another life; that is, the putting-off, the delaying of the inevitable. The R̥g-Veda's prayers, as a general rule, are for this-worldly boons, among them long life being very prominent. Prayers for eternal life or fellowship with the gods after death are very rare. The Atharva-Veda is hardly more revealing than the R̥g-Veda concerning any solution to the problem of death, except that again the usual method was to keep it away as long as possible, to prolong life, to hang on to this world, and to try to ignore what may await one after death.

## 2. Concepts of freedom from death

There is evidence in the Samhitās, however, of a belief in freedom from death, which I wish to define as of two main kinds. Needless to say, in works of such wide scope and heterogeneity we must not expect consistency, or clear demarcation lines. The two concepts overlap and influence one another. The one we may call the concept of existence beyond an earthly death; this concerns man. The other we may call the concept of amrtatva, deathlessness, and in these two Vedas it almost exclusively concerns gods. The latter, in its most usual application, denies death and

envisages a full eternal life presumably lived with a body and all senses, as appropriate to the god. The concept of existence after death is more vague, and envisages a further life with a body and at least some senses. The eternity of this existence is not claimed.

(i) Further existence after death

I deal first with the concept of existence after earthly life, and beyond death. The evidence of the Saṃhitās is fairly scanty on this subject, and some assumptions must be made; first of all, that a lack of references in the greater number of the hymns does not argue against the prevalence of the belief in existence after death. General sociological research would seem to suggest that the absence of such a belief would be exceptional. In much material from surviving primitive tribes, as well as from Roman, Greek and Egyptian civilisations, there is overwhelming evidence that some existence after death is assumed without question. For example, myths from New Zealand Maoris,<sup>1</sup> from Thompson River Indians;<sup>2</sup> the Coffin Texts of Egypt with their prayers, for

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1. Sir Edward B. Tylor, Primitive culture, London, 1929. For ideas of existence after death, vol. II pp. 1-108, for this myth, pp. 50-52.
  2. H. B. Alexander, The mythology of all races, vol. 10 - North America, Boston, 1916, quoted in Mircea Eliade, From primitives to Zen, London, 1967.

example, for the ritual assimilation to the god Osiris of the dead man, who thus gained the god's power to survive death;<sup>1</sup> the Iliad and the Odyssey, where the reality of Hades is never called into question; all these accept existence after death. For this reason it seems very probable that a belief in existence after death was prevalent in Vedic India. With this in mind, although very few hymns in the Samhitās explicitly describe or treat of existence after death, I will assume that these hymns express not a minority opinion, but beliefs which were widely held at that time.

There seems to be an almost universal dread of whatever of the person survives death, of the ghost, the spirit. If it remains at hand it is a source of danger to the survivors. And so many religions have a complicated ceremonial designed to send the dead man away from his earthly home to another sphere. This frequently involves a long and often dangerous journey for the dead man, for the ordeals of which he is prepared only by the habits and knowledge laid down by his society's customs and beliefs. For example, a member of

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1. R.T. Rundle Clark, Myth and symbol in ancient Egypt, London, 1959 pp.121-3, 134, 142-3.



the Siberian Goldi tribe needs the shaman to guide him to the land of the dead;<sup>1</sup> the Guarayu of Eastern Bolivia can reach the land of the dead only if he has followed the tribal custom in perforating his lips and ears.<sup>2</sup> I suggest that we find in most civilisations three strata of belief underlying these common phenomena in customs and myths to which civilisations we can assume Vedic India was no exception, since traces of the beliefs are found in its literature.

First there is a fear, presumably born of the horror of death, of a dead person, however dear and kind he has been during life; that fairly universal dread and terror which makes men afraid to sleep in a house where a corpse lies, makes them fear the walking dead, the ghosts whose movements and powers are so much less limited by flesh and the laws of gravity than ours, and over whom we have so little control. The second is a purely instinctive belief in the continued existence of a known dead person; this belief is closely founded on memory and of necessity presupposes the continuity of the personality. Connected with this is the uncanny awareness of the presence of a much-loved but recently-dead person in the home and the optimistic

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1. M. Eliade, Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy, New York, 1964, pp. 210-212.
  2. A. Métraux, Native tribes of Eastern Bolivia in Bulletin 134 of the American Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, 1942 quoted in Eliade's From primitives to Zen, op.cit.

and comforting certainty that thoughts addressed to such are heard and responded to. The third stratum is a more theoretical set of beliefs, owing their form and nature to the particular set of dogmas or mythology associated with each religion or to the particular concepts associated with each philosophy. All these strata have influenced the Vedas' theories of life after death.

The evidence of the Rg-Veda and the Atharva-Veda for their theories on this subject is, however, fragmentary and at times obscure or ambiguous, and does not present a clear or coherent picture. I suggest the difficulties and inconsistencies arise because the basis is an instinctive belief in a known person's existence after death, inconceivable except very much as he was on earth, and on to this are grafted various theories, to explain or elaborate, whether they are appropriate or not.

The tenth book of the Rg-Veda and the eighteenth book of the Atharva-Veda contain a number of what we might call funeral hymns, which would appear to have been sung at the funeral ceremonies. These ceremonies usually involved the cremation of the dead body, but in RV 10.18.10 & 11 it is burial that is described;

10 upa sarpa mātaram bhūmim etām uruvyacasam pṛthivīm

suśevām /

...

11. ucchvañcasva pṛthivi mā ni bādhatāḥ sūpāyanāsmāi  
 bhava sūpavañcanā /  
 mātā putraṃ yathā sicābhyenaṃ bhūma ūṛṇuhi //  
 'Go to your mother, the earth; the kind earth,  
 wide and capacious ...'  
 'Earth, cleave open, do not press down; be easy of  
 access to him, and friendly. Cover him, O earth,  
 as a mother covers her son with the hems of her skirts.'

In the service of consistency, this has been assumed by Sāyana among others as a burial of the bones or ashes remaining after the cremation, but this hardly seems necessary. The two customs could have existed side by side: at a later time Manu legislates for the burial of very young children but the cremation of the majority of people.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the Atharva-Veda shows that the Vedas accept various ways of disposing of the dead body, AV 18.2.34 & 35

- 34 ye nikhātā ye paroṣṭā ye dagdhā ye coddhitāḥ /  
 sarvāṃs tān agna ā vaha pitṛṇ havīṣe attave //  
 35 ye agnidagdhā ye anagnidagdhā madhye divaḥ svadhayā  
 mādayante /  
 tvaṃ tān vettha yadi te jātavedaḥ svadhayā yajñam  
 svadhitiṃ juṣantām //

1. Manusmṛti 5.68 & 69.

'O Agni, bring all those Fathers to eat the oblation; those who were buried, those who were scattered, those who were burnt and those who were exposed.'

'You know those, if they are yours, Jātavedas, whether burnt by fire or not burnt by fire, who rejoice in the svadhā in the midst of the sky. May they enjoy the sacrifice and svadhiti with the svadhā.'

The basic belief is that something of the dead person survives,<sup>1</sup> as his memory survives in his relatives and friends. Motivated perhaps by the need to dismiss a possibly malignant influence from their homes and to destroy the impurity a corpse possesses inherently, the relatives take out the body and, normally, burn it, so that it is purified by the holy fire and whatever survives is transported to another plane. In RV 10.16.1 Agni is asked to prepare the dead person for the company of his ancestors:

yadā śṛtaṃ kṛṇavo jātavedo 'them enaṃ pra hiṇutāt  
pitṛbhyaḥ //

'When you have made him ready [lit. cooked], Jātavedas, then send him on to the Fathers.'

Or, in RV 10.16.4, to prepare him for the consequences of his (ritual) deeds:

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1. For a discussion of what survives, see below (p.49 f.).

yās te śivās tanvo jātavedas tābhir vahainaṃ

sukṛtām u lokam //

'Carry him to the sphere of those who have performed their ritual duties well, with those auspicious forms of yours, O Jātavedas!'

But Agni must not destroy the person completely, as

AV 18.2.4 states:

mainam agne vi daho mābhi śūśuco māśya tvacaṃ cikṣipo

mā śarīram /

śṛtaṃ yadā karasi jātavedo 'themam enaṃ pra hiṇutāt

pitṛm upa //

'O Agni, do not burn him up; do not be too hot upon him; do not warp his skin, or his body; when you have made him ready, Jātavedas, send him forward to the Fathers.'

a) The Fathers and Yama

Two of the prayers quoted above mention the pitaras, the Fathers. The Fathers are former mortals; thus are described the earlier famous ṛṣis, those seers and thinkers who are now dead. The Fathers are also one's own dead ancestors: father, grandfather and great-grandfather, who are part of the collective past of the people. It is to

join the Fathers that the dead person is usually imagined to go, and to join Yama, the first man to die, who as such spied out the way to the next existence for other men to follow, as described in RV 10.14.2

yamo no gātuṃ prathamō viveda naiṣā gavyūtir  
apabhartavā u /

'Yama was the first to find out the way of access for us; and that home can not be taken away.'

He shares in the offerings of men, and is mentioned in company with Varuṇa in AV 18.1.54

ubhā rājānau svadhayā madantau yamaṃ paśyāsi varuṇaṃ  
ca devam //

'You will see both kings rejoicing in the svadhā;  
Yama and the god Varuṇa.'

He also drinks with the gods (e.g. RV 10.135.1). The name Yama seems to be applied to various beings in the Rg-Veda. On more than one occasion "Yama" apparently refers to the sun, especially the sun seen as a form of Agni (e.g. RV 1.83.5, and RV 1.164.46); or perhaps to Prajāpati (RV 1.116.2). As such Yama is a god. But the ruler of the Fathers seems a different Yama and is not specifically called a god. He was a mortal, perhaps the first. He discovered

how to make fire (RV 10.51.3). He and his twin sister Yami appear to be in RV 10.10. the only surviving mortals, on whose union the future of the human race depends. Yama's position as chief of the dead means that naturally power over life and death is attributed to him. For example, he is asked in RV 10.14.14 to grant long life; in RV 10.97.16 death is called yamasya padbīsam, Yama's fetter; and his messengers move among men bringing death (RV 10.14.12). And in RV 10.165.24, in a hymn which in style and spirit is very like the majority of the Atharva-Veda hymns, he is exceptionally for the Rg-Veda identified with death itself.

Yama is in fact almost a god, and deathless, in the sense that the memory of him survives. Like the gods, like those other former mortals, the Rbhus and the Angirases, who became amṛta, deathless, by their sacrifices and services to the sacrifice, he is remembered by each generation as a personality, while the Fathers are individually remembered by only two or three generations, and really only by their families. Generally with Yama is the community of the Fathers, for Yama is king over the realm of the dead. This realm is not always well localised. It is impossible to say which dictated which, but the practice of cremation

accords with the conception of a world of the Fathers above the earth rather than below it. While a custom of cremation does not of itself require an after-life in the sky, as the underworld of Greek mythology shows, yet, in the case of the Vedas, the similarity of cremation to the sacrifice, which Agni was certainly believed to carry to the gods in the sky, very probably influenced the location of the next home of the dead. In any case, it is on high, as in RV 10.14.1

pareyivāmsaṃ pravato mahir anu bahubhyaḥ panthām

anupaspaśānam /

vaivasvataṃ saṅgamaṇaṃ janānāṃ yamaṃ rājānaṃ

haviṣā duvasya //

'Honour with your oblations the king, Yama, the son of Vivasvān, who gathers men together, who went to the great height, who spied out the path for many to follow.'

Or in highest heaven, as in RV 10.14.8

saṃ gacchaṣva pitṛbhiḥ saṃ yamaneṣṭāpūrtena parame

vyoman /

'Join the Fathers, join Yama, join what you have sacrificed and offered in the highest sky.'



In the Atharva-Veda Yama and the Fathers dwell in the third heaven, e.g. AV 18.2.48

udanvatī dyaur avamā pilumatīti madhyamā /  
 tṛtīyā ha pradyaur iti yasyāṃ pitara āsate //

'The lowest heaven is watery, the middle is called Pilumat, the third is the ancient heaven, in which the Fathers sit.'

Or they are connected with the third light, as in AV 18.3.7

... tṛtīyena jyotiṣā saṃ viśasva /  
 '... enter together with the third light.'

The Fathers indeed have often a close association with light, especially that of the sun. For example, in RV 10.154.5 the seers are said to guard the sun:

sahasraṇīthāḥ kavayo ye gopāyanti sūryam /  
 ṛṣīn tapasvato yama tapojām api gacchatāt //

'O Yama, let him go to those ṛṣis, born of religious fervour (i.e. tapas, which is also the heat of the sun), the thinkers, full of fervour, skilled in a thousand ways, who protect the sun.'

In RV 10.107.1 they are said to give light (... mahi jyotiḥ pitṛbhir dattam ...), and in RV 10.68.11 to have placed the stars in the sky:

abhi śyāvaṃ na kṛśanebhir aśvaṃ nakṣatrebhiḥ pitaro  
dyām apiṃśan /

'The Fathers adorned the sky with the constellations  
like a dusky horse decked with pearls.'

Such references, as well as bearing witness to the  
common Vedic association of an after-life and eternal life  
with the light of the sun (which I will discuss below), and  
to the later association of them with the light of the moon  
too, also suggest that the Fathers have a cosmological  
function. They are often said to have been present when  
the cows, representing the waters or light, were released  
from the mountain/clouds; the waters which made the earth  
fertile and habitable, and brought richness and prosperity  
and precious cattle; the light, which gave life and space  
in which to live; e.g. RV 9.97.39

sa vardhitā vardhanaḥ pūyamānaḥ somo mīdhvāṃ abhi  
no jyotiṣāvīt /  
yenā naḥ pūrve pitaraḥ padajñāḥ svarvīdo abhi gā adrim  
uṣṇan //

'The bountiful Soma, the exhilarating strengthener,  
being purified, favoured us with his brightness, by  
which, formerly, our Fathers, knowing their places,  
winning the light of heaven, burnt out the mountain  
for the cows.'

The verse I have already quoted (RV 7.76.4) expressing the claim that the Fathers generated the sun, although indeed every Vedic sacrificer ensures the sunrise every morning by his oblations and worship, hints that the earliest Fathers were perhaps present at an original creation.

These statements tend to create two groups of Fathers. There are those who are the near-mythical ancestors of the race, the ṛṣis who were close to the gods and some of whom, like the Angirases, became gods. They are part of the universe, existing in their own right, as it were from the beginning of recorded time. This concept of them is clearly seen in the Manusmṛti 2.1.37 where the pitaras are created at the same time as such beings as the Yakṣas, Gandharvas and Nāgas. Secondly, there are those who are the nearer ancestors, the dead of the previous three or four generations, a group of which the present generation will be a part. This separation between the concept and state of the Fathers, the pitaras, as a class of beings, and the fate of one's own relatives and friends, indeed of oneself, continues and increases throughout the period of the Brāhmaṇas.

In the Samhitās, however, the newly-dead is still said to join the community of the Fathers, e.g. in RV 10.154.4

ye cit pūrva ṛtasāpa ṛtāvāna ṛtāvṛdah /  
pitṛn tapasvato yama tāṃscid evāpi gacchatāt //

'O Yama, let him go to those earlier Fathers, full of religious fervour, who cherished and performed what is right, who strengthened the fixed order of things.'

In hymns of requests to them, the Fathers are described as graded, as in RV 10.15.1 (AV 18.1.44)

udīratām avara utparāsa unmadhyamāḥ pitarahḥ somyāsaḥ /  
'May they ascend; the lowest, middle and highest Fathers, who drink the soma.'

It is not clear whether these positionings have a qualitative connotation, or, if so, on what basis they are allotted. Sāyana suggests that merit gained on earth by sacrifice determines the Fathers' station, but in this particular case there is no evidence for his suggestion. Nor is there an explanation for the different dwelling-places assigned to the Fathers in AV 18.4.78-80

svadhā pitṛbhyaḥ pṛthiviṣadbhyaḥ ... antarikṣasadbhyaḥ ...  
diviṣadbhyaḥ ...

'Hail to the Fathers who dwell on the earth ... in the atmosphere ... in the sky ...'

and inRV 10.15.2

ye pāṛthive rajasyā niṣatta ye vā nūnaṃ suvrjanāsu  
vikṣu //

'Those [Fathers] who have their place in the earthly stratum of the atmosphere, or those who live among the peoples with beautiful settlements.'

It cannot be said with certainty whether the Fathers share a heaven with the gods and form a community with them. They are thought of usually as a separate group, coming to their own sacrifices. Death's pathway, along which the dead person travels, is separate from that of the gods; Agni knows two roads along which to carry offerings, one to the gods, devayāna, and one to the Fathers, pitryāna. The Fathers are regarded as different from the gods, although as both groups of beings are normally envisaged as inhabiting the bright heaven, variously named as dyaus, the sky, or svar, the light of heaven, or svarga, heaven, some communication is natural. For example, inRV 10.15.10 the Fathers travel with the gods, presumably to the sacrifice. The author of RV 10.17.3 prays that Pūṣan may give the dead one to the Fathers, and Agni give him to the gods. RV 1.125.5 claims that givers of dakṣiṇā reach the gods.

nākasya pr̥ṣṭhe adhi tiṣṭhati śrito yaḥ pr̥ṇāti sa ha  
 deveṣu gacchati /  
 tasmā āpo ghr̥tam arṣanti sindhavas tasmā iyaṃ dakṣiṇā  
 pinvate sadā //

'The man who gives liberally takes his place and  
 stands on the top of the sky; he goes to the gods.  
 Water and ghee flow for him, for him this dakṣiṇā  
 always causes the streams to over-flow.'

And RV 10.135.7 identifies Yama's realm with the abode of  
 the gods:

idaṃ yamasya sādānaṃ devamānaṃ yaḥ ucyate /

'This is the seat of Yama which is called the dwelling  
 of the gods.'

But these claims that the dead person goes to the gods,  
 or that the Fathers as a whole are with the gods, are very  
 rare.

Little detail is given about the manner of their life.  
 They seem to dwell in light and rest, according to RV 10.15.9  
 and RV 10.14.9

15.9 āgne yāhi suvidatrebhir arvāṅ satyair̥ kavyair̥ pitṛbhir  
 gharmasadbhir̥ //

'O Agni, come here with the benevolent Fathers, the  
 true Kavyas, who live in the heat [of the sunlight].'

14.9 ahobhir adbhir aktubhir vyaktaṃ yamo dadāty avasānam

asmai //

'Yama gives him a resting-place, adorned with days and waters and rays of light.'

The Fathers come to the worship and the sacrifice; they eat and drink the offerings given to them, as in AV 18.2.30

yāṃ te dhenuṃ nipṛṇāmi yam u kṣīra odanam /

tenā janasyāso bhartā yo 'trāsad ajīvanah //

'That cow I please you with, and that rice in milk, with them be a sustainer of the person who is without means for life there.'

The gift of an actual cow, however, is not always necessary to satisfy the Fathers, e.g. AV 18.4.32

dhānā dhenur abhavad vatso asyāstilo 'bhavat /

tāṃ vai yamasya rājye akṣitāṃ upa jīvati //

'The grains became a cow, the sesame became her calf; one lives on that, unailing, in the kingdom of Yama.'

The Fathers come to sacrifices to drink the soma and eat the svadhā offerings, as in AV 18.1.42

sarasvatīṃ pitaro havante dakṣiṇā yajñam abhinakṣamānah //

'On Sarasvatī the Fathers call, arriving at the sacrifice from the south ...'

In AV 18.1.45, like the gods, they come to the sacrifice and sit on the prepared seats:

barhiṣado ye svadhayā sutasya bhajanta pitvas ta

ihāgamiṣṭhāḥ //

'They who, sitting on the barhis, drink the pressed drink together with the svadhā, have come here.'

They keep a close interest in this world, for their descendants make requests to them, which they are expected to consider and grant.

The indication (ṚV 10.18.8-9) that the wife and bow of the dead man were once burnt with him, to be companion and weapon in the next existence, is alone in suggesting the idea of such a worldly heaven. There is no talk of wealth for the dead; ṚV 1.154.6 speaks of gāvo bhūriśringāḥ in Viṣṇu's place, but this has been assumed by Sāyana and most Western translators to refer to the sun's rays or to the stars. Two considerations make this interpretation tempting; first, this reference to cattle in a heaven is quite exceptional, which suggests that the literal meaning ought not to be accepted without careful thought. And secondly, the next line talks of a bull, vr̥ṣan. Here the literal meaning is almost impossible, and the natural



interpretation is that it is Viṣṇu as the sun which is being described. Since the term cow is used often and of several disparate things in the Vedas, including the sun's rays, there is no difficulty in so understanding it here. A belief in another existence I suggest is intuitive; its formulation and elaboration may well be the work of priests rather than of warriors and herdsmen. The descriptions of the Fathers' life are a reflection of the priests' pre-occupation with the sacrifice in this life; they do not reflect the layman's desires.

The dead person in the sphere of the Fathers is endowed with qualities and abilities he did not have on earth. Some of them are perfections of the imperfect man. His body is whole and complete, as RV 10.14.8 states;

hitvāyāvadyaṃ punar astam ehi saṃ gacchasva tanvā  
suvarcāḥ //

'Cast away imperfection; come again to your home, and being splendid, join a body.'

and in AV 18.4.8 and AV 18.4.64

8 ... samaṅgaḥ sarva upā yāhi śagmaḥ //

'... go with your limbs, whole, able.'

... sāṅgāḥ svarge pitaro mādayadhvam //

64 '... rejoice, Fathers, in heaven with your limbs.'

The Fathers are free from disease and all infirmity, as

in AV 6.120.3

yatrā suhārdaḥ sukṛto madanti vihāya rogaṃ tanvaḥ  
svāyāḥ /

aślonā aṅgair ahrutāḥ svarge ... /

'Where the goodhearted, the good performers of the ritual rejoice, having thrown aside disease of their own bodies, not lame in their limbs, uninjured in heaven.'

They have been made whole by the cremation fire; any wounds suffered in life are healed, e.g. RV 10.16.6

yat te kṛṣṇaḥ śakuna ātutoda pipilaḥ sarpa uta vā  
śvāpadaḥ /

agniḥ tad viśvād agadaṃ kṛṇotu ... //

'Whatever wound the black bird has inflicted, or the ant, or the serpent or the beast of prey, let Agni, consumer of all, make that free from hurt ...'

The Fathers' time is spent in rejoicing, e.g. AV 18.2.11

adhā pitṛnt suvidatrāṃ apehi yamena ye sadhamādaṃ  
madanti /

'Be off to the beneficent Fathers, who rejoice in common with Yama.'

Other qualities resemble those of the gods. The

Fathers live usually above the earth; they are not subject to the natural laws; they can travel quickly to the sacrifice and effect things impossible for man at his request. How they spend their time when not attending sacrifices, apart from madamānah, is not specified.

b) The sukrtasya lokah

An instinctive belief in survival gives a further existence to all, automatically; any question of reward or punishment does not in that case arise, especially as the basis of the belief is primarily a personal feeling for one's own relatives. Distinctions and exclusiveness arise from the superimposition on to the basic belief of theories evolved in the interests of particular sections of the population. As the sacrifice grew more developed and elaborate, depending to a greater extent on the priests and therefore giving them greater influence, so propaganda such as claims for the effect of the ritual on a life after death, grew up to magnify the importance of the ritual and to persuade patrons to more and more generosity. This persuasion is supported either by the hope of rewards greater than those normally expected, as in the case of givers of dakṣiṇā, who were promised a life with the gods,

or by casting doubt on the automaticity of the gaining of the world of the Fathers by the introduction of a sukṛtām/sukṛtasya lokah, literally 'the sphere of those who have performed well / of that which has been performed well'.

It is likely, from the infrequency of ethical considerations in the Vedas, and from their preoccupation with the ritual of hymns and sacrifice, that the performance was a ritual one, that is, that the sukṛtaḥ are those who have performed sacrifices and given offerings and dakṣiṇā in the correct way. There is in fact a direct reciprocity in this life. Man, the sukṛt, gives offerings, and the gods give rewards. For example, in RV 7.9.1 Agni is the agent:

dadhāti ketum ubhayasya jantor havyā deveṣu draviṇam  
sukṛtsu //

'He gives their proper possession to both groups of beings: offerings to the gods, wealth to those who give the correct offerings.'

Indeed on a few occasions sukṛtasya lokah refers to this world and life, for example the bride in the marriage hymn RV 10.85. is placed sukṛtasya loke (RV 10.85.24); and in AV 7.83. the expression seems to describe good health, presumably the consequence of correct ritual behaviour.

Just as good sacrificial actions supposedly bring health and wealth and happiness in this life, so they win a life after death, as in AV 18.4.1

...ijānaṃ ... sukṛtāṃ dhatta loke //

'... place the sacrificer in the world of those who give correct offerings.'

To reach this sphere any constricting bonds must be loosed, as AV 6.121.1 says:

viṣānā pāśān vi ṣyādhyasmadya uttamā adhamā vāruṇā ye /  
duṣvapnyam duritam niḥ ṣvasmadatha gacchema sukṛtasya  
lokam //

'An untier, untie from us the fetters which are highest and lowest and are Varuṇa's; remove from us evil dreams and difficulty. Then may we go to the sphere of what has been offered correctly.'

The gods too are inhabitants of a sukṛtasya lokah, according to AV 11.1.37

yena devā jyotiṣā dyām udāyan brahmaudanaṃ paktvā  
sukṛtasya lokam /  
tena geṣma sukṛtasya lokam svar ārohanto abhi nākam  
uttamam //

'With which light the gods ascended to the sky, having cooked the rice-dish, to the sphere of what is performed correctly, with that may we go to the sphere of what is performed correctly, ascending to heaven, to the highest firmament.'

It is, of course, by virtue of a ritual deed, an offering of rice, that the gods reach this desirable sphere of existence. Here the sukṛtasya lokah seems to be equated with sva, the light of heaven, and the sacrificer who was consigned to the sukṛtām lokah in AV 18.4.1 is consigned to svarga, heaven, in the second verse:

tebhir yāhi pathibhir devayānair yair ījānāḥ svargaṃ  
yanti lokam //

'Go by those paths, the ways of the gods, by which the sacrificers go to the heavenly sphere.'

But, although in RV 10.107.2, where sukṛtasya lokah is not mentioned, those sukṛtaḥ, the givers of dakṣiṇā, may expect a home uccā divi, above in the sky, in RV 10.16.4, quoted above, sukṛtasya lokah appears to be the pitṛloka, the sphere of the Fathers. When Agni is asked (RV 10.16.4) to carry the dead man to sukṛtām lokah, it is implied that this

is a fairly exclusive place, to be gained only by those who perform their ritual duties, and not an automatic home won by all the dead. Naturally, in practice, each funeral ceremony must have sent its dead one to the Fathers, as a sukrt, as his friends and relatives would wish his happiness and assume his deserving of it, although in theory some would not be so deserving. Whether this sukrtasya lokah is a more desirable part of the pitrloka, or whether it is a separate loka is not clear.

The mechanics of the action of the ritual by which it ensures an after-life are not explored in the Vedas as they are later in the Brāhmanas, except that RV 10.14.8 implies that one's deeds await one in a tangible form, as it were, in the next world after death. We may see here, as Bloomfield pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the germs of the concept of karma, later to become such an integral part of much of Indian thought.

While the rewards of correct ritual behaviour are thus more and more discussed throughout the Vedic period, the recompense for evil deeds is not so clear. The Rg-Veda has

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1. M. Bloomfield - Religion of the Veda (1908), pp. 194-5.

little if anything to say on the subject: presumably later thought was that those who did not perform the ritual conscientiously and accurately or who did not give generously to the priests were deprived of extra joys and delights after death, but were not necessarily punished. One hymn, RV 7.110.4, might be regarded as a description of punishments and torments meted out to evil-doers in a hell, but the simplest interpretation shows it an imprecation against spoilers or slanderers of the sacrifice and its priests. The majority of these enemies appear to be supernatural; demons, fiends, taking various shapes, and for those who may be human beings the punishment is requested for here and now, in this life, not after death. The supernatural enemies may suffer in a "hell" of fire and chaos, but this is not an after-life punishment for men.

The Atharva-Veda does have a few remarks on the subject, for example on the fate of an oppressor of Brahmins, AV 12.5.38

aśitā lokāc cchinatti brahmagavi brahmajyam asmāc  
cāmuṣmāc ca //

'When eaten, the Brahmin cow cuts off the Brahmin oppressor from this world and from that one.'

This must mean complete death; the unspecified threat



is frightening enough. AV 12.5.63 & 64 prescribes a punishment for the enemy of the Brahmins who reviles the gods:

63 brahmajyaṃ devyaghnya ā mūlād anusandaha //

64 yathāyād yamasādanāt pāpalokān paravataḥ //

'Burn up the Brahmin-oppressor, root and all, O divine, inviolable one.

'That he may go from Yama's seat to a sphere of evil, to the lower distance.'

This is followed by a gruesome list of tortures for the offender, for example, his flesh is to be cut in pieces, and his skin is to be stripped off. AV 12.4.36 inveighs against the ungenerous:

sarvān kāmān yamarājye vaśā pradadhuse duhe /  
athāhur nārakaṃ lokaṃ nirundhānasya yācitām //

'The cow yields all desires in Yama's realm to him who gives here; they call hell the sphere of him who holds her back when asked.'

It is interesting to note that these dread punishments are reserved for those who offend against the Brahmins and the sacrifice. In the context of the Vedas to do ill, as to do well, is a ritual matter.

It seems likely that in the earlier stages of Vedic belief, everyone was believed to go after death to join the community of the tribes' ancestors in some dwelling-place, usually in the sky, where there was some communication with the gods. Famous earlier ṛsis, like the Āṅgirasas, exceptionally joined the gods by virtue of their outstanding contributions to the ritual. Later this achievement of a life shared with the gods was promised to contemporary men, if they too were generous and punctilious sacrificers; or those sacrificers were promised an after-life which was by implication denied to others less conscientious. Those who actively opposed the sacrifice were threatened with some punishment after death. It seems reasonable to see these elaborations as the work of the priests.

c) What survives death?

Is this picture of the Fathers and their powers consistent with stated theories of what parts of the person survive death? The survivors have an awareness of the dead person, but he is conceivable only as he was on earth, therefore in their thoughts he has a body and is a recognisable individual. In the relatives' imagination memory clothes the person with his own body, in spite of the fact that that

body has been seen to decay or be destroyed, as RV 10.56.1 states:

saṃveśane tanvaś cārur edhi priyo devānāṃ parame  
janitre //

'Entering a body, be pleasing and dear to the gods in their highest birthplace.'

Agni is asked in RV 10.15.14 to grant a body to the dead person:

ye agnidagdhā ye anagnidagdhā madhye divaḥ  
svadhayā mādayante /  
tebhiḥ svarāḥ asunitim etāṃ yathāvaśaṃ tanvaṃ kalpayasva //

'Those who, burnt by the fire or not burnt by the fire, rejoice in the svadhā in the midst of heaven, for them contrive another life, O svarāḥ, and their body, according to your will.'

He is similarly addressed in RV 10.16.5. The relatives gather together the bones after the cremation; their actions symbolise and indeed effect the dead person's gathering together of his new body in another life, AV 18.3.9

pra cyavasva tanvaṃ saṃ bharasva ... /  
'Start forward; bring together your body ...'

The similarity of cremation to the sacrifice, especially the animal sacrifice, may have suggested the theory that burning does not destroy the body entirely, but renders it in the one case fit for the gods, and in the other fit for the Fathers' sphere. For the animal consumed by fire has yet fed the gods, or indeed gone itself to heaven, svarga, the home of the gods. As AV 2.34.5 says of sacrificial animals, in this case the goat:

divaṃ gaccha prati tiṣṭhā śarīraiḥ svargaṃ yāhi ... //

'Go to the sky; stand firm with your limbs; go to heaven.'

Apparently the burnt bones may still have an existence in another world. In fact, it is necessary to get rid of one's earthly body in order to reach the other world. According to AV 4.11.6 even the gods had to do so:

yena devāḥ svar āruruhur hitvā śarīram ... /

'By which [the draft-ox] the gods ascended to heaven, abandoning the body.'

There are no theories in the Vedas of the construction of the new body from the sacrifices performed during life, such as appear often in the Brāhmaṇas. Here there is only

the idea, influenced I suggest by the sacrifice, that the fire purifies, recreates, and transports the body. This solves the paradox of the survival of a body seen to be destroyed.

The individual after death, as we have seen, eats and drinks and presumably breathes. Yet references to the prāṇa, the breath, suggest it is thought of as an independent force, which leaves the body at death, e.g.

AV 10.5.25

sa mā jīvit taṃ prāṇo jahātu //

'Let him not live; let his breath leave him.'

The author here and in RV 3.53.21 prays that breath may desert his enemy, in other words, that he may die. Prāṇa seems a universal principle, part of the force which manifests itself also in wind, present in the body with the life-principle. If the Fathers breathe, if they have the breath within them, presumably they were thought to regain prāṇa in the next world, as AV 18.2.26 suggests:

yat te aṅgam atihitaṃ parācāir apāṇaḥ prāṇo ya u

vāte paretāḥ /

tat te saṅgatya pitarāḥ samīdā ghāsād ghāsaṃ punar ā

veśayantu //

'What limb of yours is at a distance, what prāna or apāna has reached the wind, let the Fathers who dwell together, having assembled, make that enter you again, bit from bit.'

Asu seems to denote the life-breath; how exactly it differs from prāna is uncertain. Its passing too means death; it is not coexistent with the body. It perhaps more than prāna is the life-principle, that which animates the body, as AV 5.29.5 in an attempt to restore life to a sick man says:

... śarīre māṃsam asuṃ erayāmaḥ //

'... we send flesh and asu into the body.'

It (or they: asu is often used in the plural) leaves the body at death, and has to be kept firmly in sickness and danger, as is shown in the prayers AV 8.1.1 and AV 5.30.1

ihāyam astu puruṣaḥ saḥāsunā ... //

'Let this person be here with his asu.'

... asuṃ badhnāmi te dr̥ḍham //

'... I bind your asu firmly.'

When it leaves the body it also leaves this world, as in AV 18.2.24

mā te mano māsor māṅgānāṃ mā rasasya te /  
 mā te hāsta tanvaḥ kiṃ caneha //

'Let nothing of your manas, your limbs, your asu,  
 your sap or your body be left here.'

The prāṇa goes too, but we are not told where. But the  
asu goes to Yama or the Fathers, according to AV 18.3.62 and  
 AV 18.2.27.

... mo ṣveṣām asavo yamaṃ guḥ //

' ... let not their asus go to Yama.'

... asūn pitṛbhyo gamayāṃ cakāra //

' ... he made his asus go to the Fathers.'

Also, asuniti or asunita, 'leading of asus, 'seems to  
 denote the other world, Yama's realm, as, for example, in  
 AV 18.2.56

imau yunajmi te vahnī asunitāya voḍave /  
 tābhyām yamasya sādanaṃ samitiś cāva gacchatāt //

'I yoke these two horses of yours [the sun?] to carry  
 him to asunita; [carried by] them may he go to the seat  
 and gatherings of Yama.'

Or the word denotes a being, perhaps identified with  
 Yama, who has power to ward off death, as in RV 10.59.6, where

asuniti is addressed:

... punaḥ prāṇam iha no dhehi bhogam /  
jyok paśyema sūryam uccarantam .. //

'Place in us here again our breath and enjoyment. May we see the sun rising for a long time.'

This usage of asuniti does make it likely that the person after death has an asu, and that the asu goes directly from the earthly body to the other world, where it animates the new body. It is not, however, the bearer of personality, it merely gives life.

Manas seems a more likely source of personality. The manas holds the wishes, the intentions, the desires. It is the manas of a lover as of a god that must be subdued and influenced. It also is something put into the body, which can leave it. AV 10.2.19 says of man:

... kenāsmiṇ nihitaṃ manaḥ //

'... By whom was mind put in him?'

A prayer for continued life states, RV 10.59.5

asunitē mano asmāsu dhāraya jivātave su pra tirā na

āyūḥ /

'O Asuniti, keep our manas within us. Extend the time we have to live.'



At death the manas leaves the body, e.g. AV 5.30.6

ihaidhi puruṣa sarveṇa manasā saha /  
dūtau yamasya mānu gā ... //

'Be here, O man, with all your mind; do not go after  
the messengers of Yama ... '

A few hymns suggest that at death the constituents of  
man separate and are absorbed into their equivalents in the  
universe, for example RV 10.16.3

sūryam cakṣur gacchatu vātam ātmā dyām ca gaccha  
pr̥thiviṃ ca dharmanā /  
apo vā gaccha yadi tatra te hitam oṣadhīṣu prati  
tiṣṭhā śarīraiḥ //

'Let your sight go to the sun, your ātman [here denoting  
breath?] to the wind; go to the sky and the earth,  
in accordance with the established order. Or go to  
the waters if it is suitable for you there. Take  
your place in plants with your bones.'

This idea, which will reappear in the Upaniṣads, is not  
very clear at this stage, but does affect speculation on the  
survival and location of the parts of a man after his death.  
Thus a hymn to preserve a man's life keeps his faculties  
from separating out into the universe, AV 8.2.3

vātāt te prāṇam avidaṃ sūryāc cakṣur ahaṃ tava /  
yat te manas tvayi tad dhārayāmi //

'I bring back your prāṇa from the wind, your sight from the sun, and what is your manas, that I keep in you.'

And an attempt (RV 10.58 ) to revive a dying man calls back his manas from Yama, from the four quarters of the world, from light, from the waters, from yad bhūtaṃ ca bhāvyaṃ, from what has been and what will be. The Vedic manas has two aspects. It resembles that vague spiritual essence in man which the people of pre-literate tribes sometimes conceal for safety in times of danger, or which, as some Brazilian tribes believe, by its absence causes illness to its owner.<sup>1</sup> It is also, in the Saṃhitās, the source of one's thoughts, intentions, desires and emotions; it is the intelligent consciousness and with ātman makes up the whole self, the personality, and is thought to leave as the dying man sinks into unconsciousness.<sup>2</sup> It is uncertain what happens to it. AV 18.2.23 is obscure:

1. Tylor, Primitive Culture (op.cit.) Vol.I, pp.436-440.
2. cf. V.S.34.1-6 for manas resembling the Upaniṣadic ātman as an experiencer of dreams and (V.S.34.3) īyotir antar amṛtaṃ prajāsu, 'deathless light within men.'

... svā gacchatu te mano 'dhā pitṛṃr upa drava //

'... let your mind go to its own; then run to the Fathers.'

Nor does AV 18.3.9 offer much illumination:

mano nivīṣṭam anusamviśasva yatra bhūmer juṣase tatra  
gaccha //

'Enter together after your mind has entered. Where in the world you rejoice, go there.'

We can say nothing certain then about the fate of the manas. The ambiguity of the relevant passages makes its presence in the Fathers' body unsure, according to reasoning, although its presence intuitively is likely. As the person continues to exist and discharge the functions of the manas, we must assume that it is the manas which joins the recreated body to form the Father.

The concept of the ātman is at an intermediate stage. In the majority of cases it denotes the body, or the self, referring to the whole person. But there are passages which suggest its more familiar connotations as the essence of something, especially of the person. There is the very Upaniṣadic AV 10.8.43-4

- 43 puṇḍarikam navadvāram tribhir guṇebhir āvṛtam /  
tasmin yad yakṣam ātmanvat tad vai brahṃavidō viduḥ //
- 44 akāmo dhīro amṛtaḥ svayambhū rasena tṛpto na kutaścanonah //  
tam eva vidvān na bibhāya mṛtyor ātmānaṃ dhīram ajaram  
yuvānam //

'The lotus of nine doors, covered with three strands,  
- what yakṣa with an ātman is within it, that the  
knowers of Brahma know. Free from desire, wise,  
deathless, self-becoming, pleased with sap, not  
deficient in any way, who knows that wise unaging  
young ātman is not afraid of death.'

As these verses are rather a surprise, it is difficult  
to know how to interpret ātman in this connection. Deussen  
sees this passage as the first statement of ātman as the  
principle of the world, but such a universal application does  
not seem justified. In any case the ātman here described  
differs from the Brahma / ātman principle of the Upaniṣads  
in certain ways. The ātman here is rasena tṛpto, gladdened  
with the prime essence, which implies a view of the ātman  
as an experiencer and enjoyer very early rejected by the  
Upaniṣadic authors. Also, while the Upaniṣadic ātman is

certainly, as here, ajara, unaging, and amṛta, deathless, it is never called yuvāna, young, a description which would have no meaning as applied to ātman / brahma. It is, however, a description well suited and elsewhere applied to Agni, who is born every day. Agni is moreover the subject of the rest of this hymn, and is delineated with expressions that later are used to refer to ātman / brahma, for example AV 10.8.27, which is also Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.3

tvam stri tvam pumān asi tvam kumāra uta vā kumārī /  
 tvam jirṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvam jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ//  
 'You are a woman, you are a man; you are a young boy  
 or a young girl; you are an old man, leaning crooked  
 on his staff. When born, you face in all directions.'

To read into the verses AV 10.8.43-4 references to Agni does not solve all the problems they present. Perhaps it is reasonable to see the verses as an interpolation,<sup>1</sup> an anachronistic insertion, and to base no theories of the ātman upon them. We may understand it as the self, that is the whole personality, and feel that the body is now looked

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1. This conjecture is slightly supported by the fact that while the greater part of the hymn appears in the Paippalāda recension 16, these verses, and a few others, are not found there.

on as a container, a dwelling, rather than as an intrinsic part of the self.

AV 6.53.2 and AV 7.67.1 indicate that the ātman could be separate from the body:

punaḥ prāṇaḥ punar ātmā na etu punaś cakṣuḥ punar  
asur na etu /

'Let the prāṇa come again, again the ātman, again the sight, again the asu.'

punar maitv indriyaṃ punar ātmā ... /

'Let the sense come again, let the ātman ... '

These passages do not, however, elucidate what the ātman denotes. That it is thought of as essential or basic is suggested by, for example, AV 7.111.1, of, probably, the soma vessel:

... ātmā devānām uta mānuṣāṇām /

'... ātman of gods and men.'

and AV 13.2.35, of the sun:

... sūrya ātmā jagastasthuṣaśca /

'... the sun is the ātman of all that moves or is stationary.'

Nor are we aided much by three occurrences of ātmanvat,

having an ātman. AV 10.8.2 glorifies the skambha, the support of the universe:

... skambha idaṃ sarvaṃ ātmanvad yat prāṇan

nimiṣac ca yat //

'... the skambha is all this, which has an ātman, which breathes and blinks.'

In AV 11.2.10 Rudra is said to contain everything:

... tavedaṃ sarvaṃ ātmanvad yat prāṇat pṛthivīm anu //

'... in you is all this that has an ātman, whatever breathes on the earth.'

According to AV 13.1.52 Rohita, the ruddy sun, made all that has an ātman. Perhaps to have an ātman here means to have individuality and life, the rights of an independent being.

In spite of the unclearness of the concept, I think that the ātman, together with the manas, constitutes the individual personality, which is then clothed in a recognisable form. The vagaries of Christian conceptions of heaven are an indication of man's inability to imagine an existence totally different from our material one in this life. The stumbling-block is the personality: it is individual survival which man

needs to believe in, the Vedic Indian as much as the Christian. As the Fathers are conceived as intelligent and accessible, as able to perform the functions of the manas, I feel that, despite the ambiguity of some passages, we must posit the manas, in company with the animating asu, as the sine qua non of the Father. We must assume that the Father automatically and obviously then had a self, an ātman, and that on to this combination material man had to graft a new material body, although he had seen the old one destroyed. And as the idea of the Father is very much conditioned by life on earth, he has an allotted life-span, an āyuh, as RV 10.16.5 states:

ava sr̥ja punar agne pitṛbhyo yas ta āhutaś carati

svadhābhiḥ /

āyur vasāna upa vetu śeṣaḥ saṃ gacchatām tanvā jātavedaḥ //

'O Agni, send him again to the Fathers, who goes, offered in you, with the svadhā oblations. Wearing a term of life, let him attain offspring. May he join a body, O Jātavedas.'

Can we assume that there was also envisaged an end to this life-span? Are the Fathers still subject to death, to mṛtyu? Although RV 10.14.2 states that Yama's realm can



never be taken from the Fathers (naiṣa gavyūtir apabhartāvā  
u) it is nowhere said specifically that they are free from  
 death, nor are they usually qualified as amṛtāḥ, deathless.

(ii) Deathlessness

a) Gods

Deathlessness, amṛtatva, is the Vedas' second concept  
 of freedom from death. The adjective 'amṛta' is almost  
 always applied to gods, and from its frequent occurrence in  
 juxtaposition to forms of 'martya', mortal, subject to death,  
 and from its even more frequent use as a noun to denote 'the  
 gods', I think we may deduce that amṛtatva is a, if not the,  
 main characteristic distinguishing gods from men. For example,  
 in RV 3.1.18 Agni is

... amṛto martyānām ... /

'... the deathless among those subject to death.'

and in RV 9.91.2 Soma is

... nṛbhir amṛto martyebhir ... //

'... the deathless among men who are prey to death ...'

AV 19.19 lists a number of deities with their specific  
 accompaniment or attribute; for example, Soma with the herbs,  
 Indra with heroism, and (AV 19.19.10)

devā amṛtenodakrāman ... //

'The gods ascended with deathlessness.'

Among the gods 'amṛta' is most frequently applied to Agni. Of course Agni is invoked in a large proportion of the hymns, but amṛtatva is associated with him much more often than that fact would account for. The reason is perhaps that Agni, as always present in the home, as well as ever-returning as the sun and the lightning, was continually present to the minds of the composers of the hymns. Agni too most clearly presents the contrast between the immortal and the mortal, both because the fire burns there in the home, the same fire which summons the gods to the sacrifice and carries the offerings to them, and also because it is present in the inanimate stone and the rubbing sticks, a living force supposedly ever-existent in what seems lifeless. It is of interest to speculate on the theories Agni's nature might have suggested to his worshippers. Agni as the fire could die and be relit, in effect, be reborn, as RV 3.29.13 says:

ajījanann amṛtaṃ martyāso ... /

'I, a mortal, have brought to life the deathless one ...'

And Agni as the sun dies every night to be reborn each morning, e.g. RV 10.72.9

prajāyai mṛtyave tvat punar mārtaṇḍam ābharat //

'She [Aditi] brought forth Mārtaṇḍa [the sun] to come to life and to die again.'

The sun indeed had great attraction to seekers of freedom from death. It denotes life; to see the sun is to be alive so that frequently there is the prayer: "aid us drśaye sūryāya, to see the sun." Its light was also associated with heaven. The commonest word for heaven in the Ṛg-Veda is sva, which denotes light, the light of the sun. The sun, unlike the moon, which disappears and "dies" for a few days each month, and whose physical appearance is affected by this "dying", passes through the death of darkness and reappears, unchanged. It is natural that the Indian should wish to use this power of the sun to carry him through death and darkness into its light, into heaven itself. This wish is explicitly stated in the Brāhmaṇas, as we shall see later.

The god who, with Agni, is closest to men and serves as a connection between them and the gods, that is Soma, is also often amṛta. This fact has additional interest when we examine the source of the amṛtatva of the gods. Generally speaking, amṛtatva is a distinguishing characteristic of the gods; the implication is that it is inherent in their

nature, that is, the gods have always been amṛta, as RV 10.72.5 states:

tām devā anvajāyanta bhadṛā amṛtabandhavaḥ //

'After her [Aditi] the blessed gods were born, who are closely associated with deathlessness.'

But occasionally we find accounts of how it was gained. There is no one theory about this. In RV 1.159.2 Heaven and Earth as parents of the gods, also make for them deathlessness:

... bhūma cakratur uru prajāyā amṛtaṃ varīm abhiḥ //

'... they have made the spacious earth, and for their offspring, wide deathlessness all around.'

Or deathlessness is gained for the gods by the sun, as in AV 13.1.7, or it comes from Savitr, the one who urges on, inspires, manifested as the sun, as in RV 4.54.2

devebhyo hi prathamam yajñiyebhyo 'mṛtatvaṃ suvasi

bhāgam uttamam /

'You first produced deathlessness, that best of good fortune, for the gods who are worthy of worship.'

But sometimes this gain is attributed to Agni, as in RV 6.7.4

tava kratubhir amṛtatvaṃ āyan ... //

'By your abilities they [the gods] reached deathlessness...'

and in RV 5.3.4

tava śriyā sudṛśo deva devāḥ purū dadhānā amṛtaṃ  
sapanta /

'Through your glory, O god, the beautiful gods, who give liberally, cherished deathlessness.'

In RV 1.96.6 Agni is as it were identified with the gods' deathlessness, and in RV 10.5.5 he declares that he will win amṛtatva for the gods. Twice at least the gods' gaining of amṛtatva is attributed to Soma, e.g. in RV 9.106.8

tvāṃ devāso amṛtāya kaṃ papuḥ //

'The gods have drunk you [Soma] up for deathlessness.'

and in RV 9.108.3

tvaṃ hy aṅga daivyā pavamāna janimāni dyumattamaḥ /  
amṛtatvāya ghoṣayah //

'For you, pure-flowing one, most splendid, called the divine beings to deathlessness.'

On these occasions Soma is like ambrosia, the drink which preserved the immortality of the Greek gods, a precious deathless substance which infects with its own qualities the body which absorbs it.

These theories of how the gods gained deathlessness help little in defining or explaining amṛtatva. But when we consider the concept as it relates to man, there is great significance in any ideas of the gods gaining amṛtatva and especially gaining it through the offices of Agni or Soma, the two gods most holy as the centre of the sacrifice, and yet most near and accessible to men. The two main instruments of the ritual bring freedom from death for the gods: the Brāhmanas will attribute the gods' supremacy, in amṛtatva as in other qualities, to their proficiency in the ritual, and claim that men too can use the ritual to gain the same ends. A move in this direction is AV 5.4.3, where the secret of the gods' deathlessness is stated to be a well-known plant, which will ward off death from men also.

What is implied by this amṛtatva of the gods? The nature of the Vedic gods suggests that their worshippers ascribed to them qualities impossible for man to possess. Usually this means an enlargement, an exaggeration of man's abilities; greater strength and health, swifter movement, a larger capacity for drink, a lesser dependence on the elements; but in one case, the gods have a quality man could never have, complete freedom from death. The almost exclusive attribution of amṛtatva to the gods suggests

that it denotes, not any possible future state after or beyond death, but a life inaccessible to death. The Indian, faced with the inescapable fact of death, of the body's decay, found it impossible to ascribe to man any deathlessness. The Vedic man's prime interest is this earthly life, and what he desires for himself, a full material life of unending enjoyment in a sensual world, he ascribes to those ideal figures, the gods. The amṛta is one not touched by death; he is not accessible to death. The concept of some sort of existence beyond death is a very different one. When the hymns speak of the gods simply as amṛtāḥ, it is because that word sums up the divine nature: its fullness, its freedom, its power, most clearly shown in its immunity from death.

b) Men

There are admittedly some passages where amṛta and amṛtatva are used of men. First there are those former mortals who have become amṛta, that is have become gods. There are the Rbhus: these craftsmen gained deathlessness, that is, their life continues and will continue, as it was on earth, but in more comfortable surroundings and with fewer limitations. They made the chalice fourfold

(RV 4.35.3)

athaita vājā amṛtasya panthāṃ gaṇaṃ devānām

ṛbhavaḥ ... //

'Then, O Vājas, the Ṛbhus gained the path of deathless-  
ness and the assembly of the gods.'

By their skill, closely connected with the sacrifice, they  
became gods, RV 4.35.8

ye devāso abhavatā sukṛtyā ... abhavatāmṛtāsaḥ //

'You who have become gods through your skill ...  
have become deathless.'

The Ṇgirases, also through their sacrificing, won deathless-  
ness, as told in RV 10.62.1

ye yajñena dakṣiṇayā samaktā indrasya sakhyam amṛtatvam

ānaśa /

'You who, adorned with dakṣiṇā because of the sacrifice,  
gained the friendship of Indra, and deathlessness.'

The winners of amṛtatva are closely connected with the  
sacrifice. The ritual and its accompaniments are the only  
way described to escape death. In spite of the success  
of the Ṛbhus and the Ṇgirases, there is little suggestion  
in the Saṃhitās that the contemporary man may also join the



gods as a deathless one. We seem to look back to an earlier, happier age, when men and gods were less apart and met more freely. As we have seen before, generous givers of dakṣiṇā, the fee to the officiating priests, are stated to go to the gods, and in RV 1.125.6 are said to share in amṛtatva:

dakṣiṇāvanto amṛtaṃ bhajante dakṣiṇāvantaḥ pra tiranta  
āyuh //

'Those who give dakṣiṇā share in deathlessness; givers of dakṣiṇā lengthen their life-times.'

But the amṛtatva they share is probably a long life on earth, not an endless life among the gods. For amṛtatva in the R̥g-Veda is an indefinite extending of life as it is on earth, not a state to be reached after death. The gods live as men do, only more so, and they never die. Some men have achieved the ideal, and by some means, having escaped death, live on with the gods, and so are amṛta. But for the majority of mankind, amṛtatva is usually freedom from death now, at this moment; as long a life as possible; the delaying of death until old age.

There are prayers in the Samhitās for amṛtatva. A hymn to the Maruts (RV 7.59.12) ends thus:

tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam /  
 urvārukam iva bandhanān mṛtyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt //

'We worship Tryambaka, sweet-smelling increaser  
 of prosperity. May I be released from death, like an  
urvāruka plant from its stem; but not released from  
 deathlessness.'

Although it is possible that the author does in fact  
 hope to escape death completely and live for ever with the  
 gods, it is more likely that the amṛtatva here thought of  
 is a continuing full life, and that the death to escape is  
 a premature one. Another hymn to the Maruts (RV 5.55.4)  
 has the prayer:

...asmāṃ amṛtatve dadhātana ... //

'... set us in deathlessness....'

Again we have two possible interpretations, but here  
 we can almost translate amṛtatva as life, giving the meaning  
 to the prayer of 'Keep us alive.' RV 1.164.23 ascribes  
amṛtatva to those with an esoteric knowledge of the metres:

śad gāyatre adhi gāyatram āhitam traīṣṭubhād vā

traīṣṭubham niratakṣata //

yad vā jagaj jagaty āhitam padam ya it tad vidus te

amṛtatvam ānaśuḥ //

'Those who know how the gāyatri was based on the gāyatri; or how the traistubh was fashioned from the traistubh; or how the jagat was based on the jagat; those who know that have gained deathlessness.'

What this knowledge really implies is obscure, and I do not think we can say whether amṛtatva with the gods is here thought of, or not rather again a full life and a long one. RV 1.164.21 does not throw any light on the problem.

yatrā suparnā amṛtasya bhāgam animesam vidathābhisvaranti /

'Where the beautiful-winged ones ceaselessly join together in praising in the assembly their <sup>portion of</sup> amṛta.'

We might interpret amṛta here as soma, the suparnāḥ being the priests. Or the priests by their participation in the ritual, gain a long life. In either case the amṛta is in this life; a complete amṛtatva is very unlikely.

In the Rg-Veda there are two passages connecting soma with amṛta for men. The first is RV 8.48.3

apāma somam amṛtā abhūmāganma jyotir avidāma devān /  
kiṃ nūnam asmān kṛṇavad arātiḥ kim u dhūrtir amṛta  
martasya //

'We have drunk soma, we have become deathless; we have gone to the light, we have found the gods. What can an

enemy do to us? What injury can befall this mortal, O immortal one?'

I think we are quite justified in interpreting amṛta here as metaphorical. The exultation of the singer, high on soma, seems to him to approximate to the exultation of amṛtatva. As the gods drink soma, this is a shared experience, a means of fellowship with the gods. For a short while he experiences the wider horizons, the greater potentialities of the immortals. For a short while he feels death cannot touch him. We should note that he feels that he has reached light, which is such an important quality of heaven. The ṛṣi does not cease to be in this world, to be a mortal; his amṛtatva is a temporary experience. Amṛtā abhūma may remind one of the modern expression, 'blowing one's mind.' When considering statements like this, however, it is important to remember that the Ṛg-Veda is a collection of poetry, where inspired flights of imagination have a place, while strict veracity is not always adhered to. Claims such as this hymn may owe more to a love of exaggeration, which is shown often elsewhere in the Saṁhitās, than to a genuine experience produced by soma and religious fervour.

RV 9.94.4 also attributes the gift of deathlessness to soma:

śriye jātaḥ śriya ā niriyāya śriyaṃ vayo jaritṛbhyo  
dadhāti /

śriyaṃ vasānā amṛtatvam āyan ... //

'Born in splendour, he has come forth in splendour.  
He gives splendour and strength to the singers.  
Wearing splendour as a garment they reach deathless-  
ness.'

The same conclusions apply here also; it is a meta-  
phorical amṛtatva the singers gain. It is soma which is  
absolutely amṛta. The drinker has for a while therefore  
the amṛta within himself, and so can consider himself  
temporarily amṛta. This use of amṛta has, I think, a  
greater interest than the preceding uses. It may, and  
probably does, denote as they do a freedom from death now,  
but it also implies a conception of amṛtatva as a meta-  
physical state which like the Christian kingdom of heaven  
is within one, in this life and on this earth. Amṛtatva  
can be a state of mind, where time and its attendant, death,  
have no relevance or meaning. This may seem to read too  
much significance into a fairly transparent Rg-Vedic verse,

but it is this very realisation, that there are two kinds of eternity, one in which time has no end, the other in which there is no time, which inspires and pervades the Upaniṣads as it does the teaching of the Buddha and of Christ. In this matter, as in many more, the roots of the Upaniṣads are firmly in the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas.

We find in the Atharva-Veda other hints of amṛta within man. For example, in AV 10.2. which is a description of man, verse 14 reads:

ko asmin yajñam adadhād eko devo 'dhi pūruṣe /  
 ko asmint satyaṃ ko 'nṛtaṃ kuto mṛtyuḥ kuto 'mṛtam //  
 'Which god put worship in man? Which one put in him  
 truth and falsehood? From where came death, from  
 where came the deathless?'

As the whole hymn is concerned with man, we must assume that the mṛtyu and amṛtam referred to are closely connected with him, but there is no clue to help us explain their significance. Perhaps we may say that within man is the capability to live and the liability of dying. AV 10.7.15 restates this, speaking of the skambha, the frame, the support of the universe:

yatrāmṛtaṃ ca mṛtyuśca puruṣe 'dhi samāhite /

'Where both the deathless and death are placed  
together in man.'

and a prayer to Rudra and Soma (AV 5.6.8) also speaks  
of amṛtam in man:

... amṛtam asmāsu dhattam //

'... put deathlessness [or the deathless] in us.'

This prayer simply amounts to saying, 'Put in us the  
power and health for long life: give us life.' But there  
can be seen in these quotations the germ of the idea that  
within man there is something amṛta, something inaccessible  
to death, something truly alive. The eighth hymn of the  
tenth book of the Atharva-Veda, as we saw above, names an  
ātman as this amṛta thing, although exactly what is meant  
by ātman is left unclear, AV 10.8.44

tam eva vidvān na bibhāya mṛtyor ātmānaṃ dhīram

ajaram yuvānam //

'He who knows that wise, unaging, young ātman, does  
not fear death.'

If the lotus-flower of the nine doors of verse 43 is  
in fact the human body, and this would seem a reasonable

explanation, then, whatever ātman refers to, we have here a statement that in man there is the capability to overcome death. To share in timelessness need not be only a temporary experience, brought about by drinking soma or by participating in the sacrifice, but is the natural state of man if only he realises it. For within man is a true self, which knows none of the limitations of the body, for which age and death are irrelevant, over which they have no power. We have in the Atharva-Veda only very early hints of this idea, and its implications for a life after death, in the pitṛloka or elsewhere, are not discussed.

An amṛtatva as a temporary state which man can gain through his participation in the sacrifice is also mentioned in RV 1.31.7

tvam tam agne amṛtatva uttame martam dadhāsi śravase  
divedive /

'O Agni, you place the mortal in deathlessness for  
glory day after day.'

Agni brings the gods to the sacrifice and as the recipient of the offerings is central to the sacrifice. As such he brings amṛtatva to men and himself personifies it. The place of sacrifice is at the "centre" of the universe,



the spot where communication between earth and heaven is possible.<sup>1</sup> In the sacrifice the sacrificer steps from the profane world into the sacred; he is powerful and indeed dangerous, to himself and to others. He steps into timelessness, into amrtatva.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, as was the case with the gods, the two main instruments of the sacrifice, Agni, the holy fire, and Soma, the holy drink, are most able to bestow deathlessness, whether it be a long life or a state of holiness and timelessness. In itself the sacrifice gives sacredness to the participants; while performing the rites, the sacrificer is no longer profane, no longer mortal and impure. The sacrifice is the means by which the gods are propitiated and persuaded to give blessings including a long life to their worshippers; and it could be said that the sacrifice and its two main instruments can thus grant amrtatva. The Brāhmanas indeed imply that it is the sacrifice of itself which grants man's desires: propitiation of the gods is not relevant, for they are ruled by the ritual. In

1. Cf. V.S.11.76 and V.S. 28.1 for the place of sacrifice as the "navel" of the earth.
2. Cf. T.S.1.7.9 for the gaining of heaven and amrtatva during the sacrifice.

addition to these reasons for the importance of the ritual in gaining amṛtatva, it was in the priests' interest to magnify its influence. The sacrifice is thus claimed to win for former ṛṣis eternal life with the gods, and for contemporary men a better world after death. Its instruments, Agni and Soma, are claimed to give long life on earth.

But only on very rare occasions is it suggested that even the sacrifice can gain for contemporary man amṛtatva in the next existence, after an earthly death. RV 5.4.10 envisages amṛtatva in one's children - a fairly common concept in early societies:

yas tvā hr̥dā kirīṇā manyamāno 'martyaṃ martyo

johavīmi /

jātavedo yaśo asmāsu dhehi prajābhir agne

amṛtatvam aśyām //

'Thinking of you with a heart full of praise, I, a mortal, call on you, the immortal. O Jātavedas, give us a good reputation. O Agni, may I gain deathlessness in my children.'

Amṛtatva here implies life. The recognition that the child born from the father is part of the father, and in fact

resembles his characteristic form, makes this idea natural. The other statement in the R̥g-Veda concerning man's amṛtatva after death is RV 9.113.7 & 8,

7 yatra jyotir ajasraṃ yasmiṃ loke svarhitam /  
tasmin mām dhehi pavamānāmṛte loke akṣita... //

8 yatra rājā vaivasvato yatrāvarodhanaṃ divaḥ /  
yatrāmūr yahvatir āpas tatra mām amṛtaṃ kṛdhi ... //

'O pure-flowing one, place me in that deathless, un-decaying sphere, where there is eternal light, where the light of heaven is placed ...

'Where is the king, the son of Vivasvān, where is the innermost part of the sky, where are those ever-flowing waters, there make me free from death ... '

The author prays to be placed in a sphere of existence which is eternal. It is a heaven, svaṛ, and it is light; here again is the close connection of the sun, light, heaven and life. This is a heavenly realm ruled by Yama, the first to die and the king of the dead, not necessarily a realm shared with the gods. The author asks to live in this sphere, for ever free from the threat of death. That this is Yama's realm makes it clear that this is a prayer for a state after death, and what is presumably desired is a continuation of an earthly life, with all of its joys but

without its limitations, after an earthly death. The hymn goes on to describe the advantages of this sphere of existence, RV 9.113.9-11

9. yatrānukāmaṃ caraṇaṃ trināke tridive divaḥ /  
lokā yatra jyotiṣmantas tatra mām amṛtaṃ kṛdhindrāyendo  
pari srava //

10 yatra kāmā nikāmās ca yatra bradhnasya viṣṭapam /  
svadhā ca yatra tṛptiś ca tatra mām amṛtaṃ kṛdhi ... //

11 yatrānandās ca modās ca mudah pramuda āsate /  
kāmasya yatrāptāḥ kāmās tatra mām amṛtaṃ kṛdhi ... //  
'Where one moves as one wills, in the third firmament,  
the third heaven of the sky; where are spheres full  
of light, there make me free from death. Flow, Indu,  
for Indra.'

'Where are one's desires and wishes, where is the  
highest region of the ruddy one, where are ease and  
contentment, there make me free from death ...

'Where are joys and pleasures, bliss and delights,  
where one's longings for one's desires are fulfilled,  
there make me free from death ...'

It is Soma who will aid the worshipper to this amṛtatva.

It is presumably to this same state in Yama's realm that

AV 18.4.37 refers:

martyo 'yam amṛtatvam eti ... //

'This mortal goes to deathlessness.'

When deathlessness is mentioned in funeral hymns, it is usually in reference to the survivors, e.g. AV 18.3.62

vivasvān no amṛtatve dadhātu ... /

'May Vivasvān place us in deathlessness.'

This is almost certainly a prayer for long life for those present at the funeral ceremony, a time of great danger. But AV 18.4.37 must be addressed to the dead man. We should note that it is a confident statement of expectation, not a prayer.

In spite of these exceptional claims of deathlessness in a pitṛloka, the general impression of the Saṃhitās is that the Fathers are not amṛta, free from death. They had died once, and so could not be absolutely amṛta, as the gods are. And in fact, for the majority of the poets of the Vedas, the Fathers' eternity or non-eternity is a matter of no concern. As a group they survive, as individuals they fade away.

## Chapter Two

### The Brāhmanic Period.

The Ṛg-Veda and the Atharva-Veda are collections of hymns designed to accompany the various rituals. The Brāhmaṇas give instructions and explanations for the ritual and the use of the hymns. Their chief concern is with the sacrifice: its power, its importance, its origins, its expected fruits. Because of this difference of purpose between the Brāhmaṇas and the Saṃhitās, it is not surprising that there is also a difference of emphasis in their respective attitudes to death, deathlessness and existence after death. The hints present in the Saṃhitās that proper performance of the ritual leads after death to life in a better world than that experienced by common folk, or even to life in heaven with the gods, are taken up and amplified in the Brāhmaṇas, and divine precedents are cited. They are also concerned still with prolonging the sacrificer's life on earth; this fruit of the ritual is now more emphasised than material prosperity, herds of cattle or strong sons, the main preoccupations of the Saṃhitās.

#### 1. Attitude to death

The writers of the Brāhmaṇas, in their desire to magnify

the importance and power of the sacrifice and its priests, chose an area of paramount concern to people in which to claim the ritual's efficacy and influence: death and the after-life. As Aryan invaders became farming inhabitants, perhaps a more settled life diminished men's wish for strong fighters to win battles, but increased their fear of death. There is testimony of how death loomed as a great menace in men's lives in the Brāhmaṇas' designation of death as the evil, pāpman; so that to describe the gods as apahatapāpmānaḥ, those who have evil dispelled from them, approximates to calling them amṛtāḥ, deathless.

Death then obviously remains a problem, but is accepted as inevitable for man, a natural consequence of being born on this side of the sun, as ŚPB 10.4.3.1 states:

eṣa vai mṛtyur yat samvatsaraḥ / eṣa hi martyānām  
 ahorātrābhyām āyuhḥ kṣiṇoty atha mriyante ... //

'The year is the same as death; for he wastes away the life of mortals with days and nights and then they die.'

When Prajāpati created men, he immediately created death to destroy them, for men have never been free of death,

## ŚPB 10.1.3.3

prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata / sa ūrdhvebhya eva  
 prāṇebhyo devān asṛjata ye 'vāñcaḥ prāṇās tebhyo  
 martyāḥ prajā athordhvam eva mṛtyuḥ prajābhyo  
 'ttāram asṛjata //

'Prajāpati created living beings. From the upward-breathings he created the gods, and from the downward-breathings the mortal beings; and above the [mortal] beings he created death as their devourer.'

The sun represents death, and is a barrier between life on earth and life immortal, as ŚPB 2.3.3.7 says:

taḥ vā eṣa eva mṛtyuḥ / ya eṣa tapati taḥ yad eṣa  
 eva mṛtyus tasmād yā etasmād arvācyāḥ prajāś tā  
 mriyante 'tha yāḥ parācyas te devās tasmād u te  
 'mṛtās ... //

'That burning one [the sun] is no other than death; and because he is death, therefore the creatures that are on this side of him die, and the gods, who are on the far side of him, are deathless.'

The sun, as in the Saṁhitās, is the symbol of life, especially of eternal life, and the world of heaven is thought of as either in the sun or beyond it. Because of



this the sun seems to separate this loka, the mundane earthly limited life, from that loka, the heavenly unrestricted life. It acts both as a barrier between the two spheres, and as a connecting bridge which helps man to cross to the other sphere. In this sense the sun symbolises death, which also separates this life from the next, and is yet the only way for man to achieve the next life. Unless a man dies, he cannot be born again. Unless he passes through destruction, through the sun, he cannot reach deathlessness, which is beyond the sun.

## 2. Concepts of freedom from death

But death is never to be welcomed, especially if it comes before a man's expected span of one hundred years is done. It is a threat to be dealt with; means must be found to overcome it. The Saṃhitās' concern with the blessings of this life is rare in the Brāhmaṇas, but this problem of overcoming death appears again and again. There are two desirable things no natural, worldly means can effect; two forms of "deathlessness", two ways of dealing with death. The first desirable thing is a long and full life on earth. The second is a happy existence

after death, a continuation in a better sphere of one's earthly life. War does not win such booty, nor indeed does hard work. Only the magic, supernatural sacrifice, so the priests claim, can affect one's destiny in these two areas. In their text-books, the Brāhmaṇas, the priests concentrate on these issues and declare over and over the efficacy of the ritual. By sacrificing, by understanding the rites, by the knowledge of their power, a man gains a long life on earth, he gains heaven and even freedom from another death after his earthly death.

(i) The delaying of death

The Brāhmaṇas accept, and frequently state, that a literal amṛtatva, deathlessness, is impossible for man. They do however carry on the convention of the Saṃhitās that amṛtatva for man means a long life, freedom from death at the present moment, and implies nothing of a complete freedom from death. Death cannot finally be escaped, but it can be delayed. It is possible for man to recapture life, to escape the unwelcome, premature forms of death and die in old age, SPB 2.2.4.7

sa hutvā prajāpatiḥ / pra cājāyatātsyataś cāgner  
 mṛtyor ātmānam atrāyata sa yo haivaṃ vidvān agnihotraṃ  
 juhoty etāṃ haiva prajātiṃ prajāyate yāṃ prajāpatiḥ  
 prājāyataivam u haivātsyato 'gner mṛtyor ātmānaṃ  
 trāyate //

'Prajāpati, having performed offering, came into  
 being, and saved himself from Agni, death, as he was  
 about to devour him. And whoever, knowing this,  
 offers the Agnihotra, brings forth that offspring  
 which Prajāpati brought forth, and saves himself  
 from Agni, death, when he is about to devour him.'

The Brāhmanas' means of escaping death, as this  
 states, is the ritual, either of sacrifice to the gods,  
 as in ŚPB 5.4.1.1

sarvān vā eṣa mṛtyūn atimucyate sarvān badhān yo  
 rājasūyena yajate tasya jaraiva mṛtyur bhavati ... //

'... he is freed from all kinds of death, from all  
 bonds, who sacrifices with the Rājasūya rite: old  
 age alone is his death ...'

or a type of sympathetic magic, as in ŚPB 5.4.1.12

atha rukmaṃ adhasṭād upāsyati / mṛtyoḥ pāhīty amṛtam  
 āyur hiraṇyaṃ tad amṛta āyuṣi pratitiṣṭhati //

'He throws a gold plate below [the king's foot];  
 "Save him from death," [he says]. Gold is a  
 deathless term of life. He thus takes his stand  
 on a deathless term of life.'

Here there is a belief that the constancy, the  
 abiding nature of gold could somehow be transferred to  
 the king. There are apparent in the Brāhmaṇas, as here,  
 traces of what becomes a common preoccupation in later  
 Indian thought: the search for something untouched by  
 death, something permanent, constant. The concern of the  
 Brāhmaṇas is similar to that expressed by a Bodhisattva  
 in Mahāvastu (ed. Senart page 144)

aham ajaram ārogyam amṛtaṃ pāṛthivottama /  
 vipattibhayanirmuktam abhigaṃsye asaṃskṛtaṃ //

'O best of princes, I shall go and find the "deathless",  
 that knows neither old age nor disease, is free from  
 fear of misfortune, and does not proceed from a cause.'

The arguments for Gautama's Great Renunciation, based on  
 the impermanency of all things and his desire to find the  
 one constant invariable, arise from the same awareness of  
 change and decay that made the Brāhmaṇic priests search for

a deathless entity which could bestow something of its quality on man. Some Buddhists found their invariable in nirvāna, and death and saṃsāra became irrelevant to them personally, indeed ceased to be a problem. The Upaniṣads looked inwards and found the deathless ātman / brahman, and so found also peace and freedom from fear. The Brāhmaṇas, as long as they still look outwards, almost inevitably do not succeed in finding a belief which transcends and diminishes death. Gold at best gives only amṛtam āyur, a deathless term of life. A deathless term of life is a span uninterrupted by death, and this is as much as un-  
deniably-mortal man can hope for, ŚPB 2.1.3.4

sa yatrodagāvartate / tarhy agni ādadhītāpahatapāpmāno  
devā apa pāpmānaṃ hate 'mṛtā devā nāmṛtatvasyāśāsti  
sarvam āyur eti ... //

'When the [sun] turns to the north, then one should set up the two fires; the gods have evil dispelled from them: he thus dispels evil. The gods are deathless: there is no hope of deathlessness, but he gets a full term of life ...'

The pāpman, evil, here is death itself. Soma, like

gold a deathless thing, is also believed able to affect the sacrificer with its own deathlessness. The exultation of the R̥g-Vedic author who cried in understandable hyperbole (RV 8.43.3)

apāma somam amṛtā abhūma ...

'We have drunk soma, we have become deathless ...'

is transmuted in the Brāhmaṇas to a prosaic confidence that the substance will give longevity, but nothing more, ŚPB 9.5.1.10

tat prātar abhipādyā / abhiṣutyāgnau juhōti tad  
agnāv amṛtaṃ dadhāty atha bhakṣayati tad ātmann  
amṛtaṃ dhatte so 'mṛto bhavaty etad vai manuṣyasyāmṛtatvaṃ  
tat sarvaṃ āyur eti tatho hānenātmanā sarvaṃ āyur eti //

'Having taken it [soma], and pressed it in the morning, he offers it in the fire. He places that deathless thing in the fire. He eats [it] and places that deathless thing in his self, and he becomes deathless. To have a complete term of life, that is a human's deathlessness, and so with that self he gets a complete term of life.'

Agni, the fire, is another element which it was hoped

could give something of its qualities to men, SPB 2.2.2.14

athainaṃ devāḥ / antar ātmann ādadhata ta imam  
 amṛtam antar ātmann ādhāyāmṛtā bhūtvāstaryā  
 bhūtvā staryānt sapatnān martyān abhyabhayaṃs  
 tatho evaiṣa etad amṛtam antar ātmann ādhatte  
 nāmṛtatvasyāśāsti sarvam āyur eti ... //

'The gods placed him [Agni] within themselves,  
 and when they had placed that deathless thing  
 within themselves, they became deathless and  
 invulnerable, and overcame their vulnerable,  
 mortal enemies. In the same way, he places  
 that deathless thing within himself, and although  
 there is no hope of deathlessness, he gets a com-  
 plete term of life.'

But even Agni and Soma, the main instruments of the  
 sacrifice, and so, as in the Saṃhitās, most able to bestow  
amṛtatva on man, cannot give more than a long life, a  
 temporary deathlessness. Only they and the ritual, however,  
 can promise even so much. This long life is a freedom from  
 death, an overcoming of death, is amṛtatva. SPB 10.1.5.4  
 gives a paradoxical claim which is the logical outcome of  
 this belief:

... śataṃ saṃvatsarās tāvad amṛtam anantam aparyantam ...  
 '... one hundred years; so much is deathlessness,  
 unending, unlimited ...'

(ii) Further existence after death

a) Pitṛloka

The other way to overcome death is to win an existence after it. The Brāhmaṇas are more forthcoming than the Saṃhitās on the means to achieve this existence and on the mechanics of the re-creation of the person, but are hardly more generous with descriptions of its nature. The Saṃhitās expected the dead man to join the pitāras, the Fathers, the ancient and recent ancestors of the community, who dwell, probably in the sky, with Yama. But there was a tendency already in the Saṃhitās to think of the Fathers in two ways: as one's dead nearest ancestors, father, grandfather and great-grandfather; and also as the earliest ancestors of the community, a group of supernatural beings who seem coexistent with the gods. In the Brāhmaṇas not only does the latter view prevail, but also the nature of the Fathers as one's nearest ancestors has suffered some



change. No longer are they said to enjoy the light and rest of a better world than this where they rejoice with Yama. Now they are poor things, wholly dependent on the offerings of their descendants, and so almost obliged to grant their requests. The pitṛloka is not the dwelling sought by most sacrificers: without ceasing to accept the existence of a group of beings, with certain supernatural powers, and nominally to declare his own nearest ancestors to be of their number, the sacrificer of the Brāhmanas does not expect his own fate to be to join the Fathers. To become a pitṛ was for the Samhitās usually an automatic sequel to death; surely for the generous and punctilious Brāhmanic sacrificer the magician-like priest, using the mighty sacrifice and its persuasion and power over gods and natural forces, can gain a better world, a higher light, a more blissful existence. And if the sacrificer himself confidently looked to a life in svargaloka, heaven, why should he condemn his father to the inferior sphere of the pitāras? Yet worship of the Fathers, to provide the sustenance of one's own near relatives, continued throughout the Brāhmanic period although the worshipper's father had presumably not attained

pitṛloka, or the state of a pitṛ. Such worship of course was stressed as a duty in Hinduism for many centuries even when the doctrine of samsāra, apparently completely and unquestioningly accepted, made the chances of one's father's birth as a pitṛ no better than slim.

Thus although the Brāhmaṇas still recognise the Fathers as including those recently dead, there is much evidence that the prevailing view of them was as a separate non-human group. They are referred to as a particular class of beings in ŚPB 6.3.1.24

... eṣa ha vā anaddhāpuruṣo yo na devān avati  
na pitṛn na manuṣyān...

'...for he who does not satisfy the gods, nor the Fathers, nor men is not truly a person ...'

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 3.31 lists five groups of beings: gods, men, Gandharvas, Apsarases and Fathers. They have their own forms and times of worship due to them in ŚPB 2.4.2.8

... pūrvāhṇo vai devānām madhyandino manuṣyānām  
aparāhṇaḥ pitṛnām tasmād aparāhṇe dadāti

'...the morning [belongs] to the gods, midday to men, and the afternoon to the Fathers; therefore he offers in the afternoon.'

ŚPB 12.5.1.7f describes the different procedures used in offering to the gods and to the Fathers. They also have their own ways of doing things, for example, of killing the sacrificial victim (ŚPB 3.8.1.5). They are even stated to have been created, in ŚPB 8.4.3.7

...pitāro 'sr̥jyanteti pitāro 'trās̥r̥jyanta ...

'... "the Fathers were created"; the Fathers were indeed created there ...'

They seem to be of like age to the gods, and to have fought with the gods against Vṛtra, as in ŚPB 2.6.1.1

...tām atha yān evaiṣāṃ tasmint saṃgrāme 'ghnaṃs  
tān pitṛyajñena samairayanta pitāro vai ta āsaṃs  
tasmāt pitṛyajño nāma //

'... and by means of that pitṛyajña [sacrifice to the Fathers] they [the gods] brought to life those of them who had been slain in that battle [with Vṛtra]; they were the Fathers, therefore it is called "pitṛyajña".'

The Fathers are allotted their own region of influence,

the southern region, as in ŚPB 9.3.4.11 and ŚPB 12.7.3.7. But they are also said in ŚPB 2.6.1.11 to be the intermediate regions. All of these passages give an impression of the Fathers as a group coexistent with the universe, as an integral part of it. They are quite different from the primary idea of the Fathers of the Ṛg-Veda, where they are seen as an ever-increasing number of human beings passing into a new existence after an earthly death. In the same way their dwelling-place has changed: when they were clearly the human dead, their home was felt to be better than earth. They were above the earth, in light, nearer the gods. In the Brāhmaṇas a pitṛloka is often referred to, but its location is not clear. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (7.5) places the Fathers in the atmosphere, while the gods live in the sky. But ŚPB 4.5.7.8 links the Fathers with the earth, and men with the atmosphere. In ŚPB 3.7.1.6 a pit dug in the earth is sacred to the Fathers. The pitṛloka no longer seems situated in the vault of heaven, as in the Samhitās. Indeed ŚPB 3.7.1.25 suggests that the pitṛloka is the lowest of the spheres, physically and qualitatively:

tasya yan nikhātam / tena pitṛlokaṃ jayaty atha yad

ūrdhvaṃ nikhātād ā raśanāyai tena manuṣyalokaṃ  
jayaty atha yad ūrdhvaṃ raśanāyā ā caṣālāt tena  
devalokaṃ jayati ...

'With that part of it which is dug in, he gains  
the sphere of the Fathers. With what is above  
the dug-in part, up to the rope, he gains the  
sphere of men. With what is above the rope, up  
to the ring at the top, he gains the sphere of the  
gods ...'

In spite of this seeming insistence on the concept  
of the Fathers as an independent primeval group, on many  
occasions they still retain their character as one's  
ancestors. The pitrloka's location may be uncertain,  
but the fate of individual pitaras may be improved,

ŚPB 2.6.1.3

... yān u caivaibhyo devā bhāgam akalpayāṃs tam  
u caivaibhya eṣa etad bhāgaṃ karoti yān u caiva  
devāḥ samairayanta tān u caivaitad avati svān u  
caivaitat pitṛñ chreyāṃsaṃ lokam uponnayati ...

'...he grants those [the Fathers] that share the  
gods assigned to them, and thus he satisfies those  
whom the gods brought to life, and leads his own  
Fathers up to a better sphere...'

As in the Saṃhitās, Yama is their king, (ŚPB 7.1.1.4)  
and they live in his realm, ŚPB 12.8.1.19

... ye samānaḥ samanasaḥ pitaro yamarājye ...

'... [the Fathers] who one in form and one in  
mind are in Yama's realm ...'

Their dwelling in Yama's realm may have echoes of  
the Ṛg-Veda, but otherwise the Brāhmanas' picture of the  
Fathers differs from that of the Saṃhitās, in that it no  
longer seems based on that instinctive belief in a relative's  
survival which arises mainly from memory.

The main function of the Fathers is one nevertheless  
which involved their identity as one's nearest ancestors.  
Their raison d'être is to be the recipients of offerings  
made to them by their descendants, as a duty, ŚPB 1.7.2.1

ṛṇaṃ ha vai jāyate yo 'sti / sa jāyamāna eva  
devebhya ṛṣibhyaḥ pitṛbhyo manuṣyebhyaḥ //

'Whoever exists, in being born is born as [owing]  
a debt to the gods, to the ṛṣis, to the Fathers and  
to men.'

This debt is paid by daily offerings, ŚPB 11.5.6.2

...aharahaḥ svadhākuryād odapātrāt tathaitaṃ  
pitṛyajñaṃ samāpnoti ... //

'... day by day one should offer with svadhā up to the cupful of water: thus one performs the sacrifice to the Fathers ...'

Several substances are offered to them: soma, milk, cows, ghee, honey and cakes. These offerings are given for four main reasons. Firstly, the Fathers deserve homage and worship as a right, SPB 1.5.2.3

īdāmāhai devān / īdenyān namasyāma namasyān  
yajāma yajñīyān iti dāmāhai tān devān ya idenyā  
namasyāma tān ye namasyā yajāma yajñīyān iti  
manuṣyā vā idenyāḥ pitaro namasyā devā yajñīyāḥ //

'Let us praise gods, for they are worthy of praise; let us pay homage to them for they are worthy of homage; let us sacrifice to them for they are worthy of sacrifice,' means "let us praise those gods who are worthy of praise; let us pay homage to those who deserve homage; let us sacrifice to those who are worthy of sacrifice." Those worthy of praise are men, those worthy of homage are the Fathers, and those worthy of sacrifice are the gods.'

Secondly, the pitaras are thus persuaded to aid their

descendants and grant their requests, SPB 12.9.3.15

... pitṛṇ eva tat pitṛloke prīṇāti ta enaṃ prītāḥ  
prīṇanty atho pitṛlokaṃ eva jayati //

'... thus [by various offerings] he gratifies the  
Fathers in the sphere of the Fathers; and gratified  
they then gratify him, and he wins the sphere of  
the Fathers.'

Thirdly, the Fathers need sustenance so as not to  
suffer, 'SPB 11.3.3.7

apa ha vai snātvā bhikṣāṃ jayaty apa jñātīnāṃ  
aśanāyāṃ apa pitṛṇām ...

'for having bathed he overcomes the beggary of his  
relatives, and the hunger of his Fathers.'

and also to remain alive, SPB 12.9.3.12

dakṣiṇe 'gnau surāgrahān juhvati / dakṣiṇe 'gnau  
pāvayanti pavitrābhis triṣaṃhuktābhiḥ pitṛṇ eva tan  
martyānt sato 'mṛtayonau dadhāti martyānt sato

'mṛtayoneḥ prajānayatya apa ha vai pitṛṇām punarmṛtyuṃ  
jayati nāsmād yajño vyavacchidyate ya evam etad veda  
yasya vaivāṃ viduṣa etat karma kriyate //

'In the southern fire they offer the cups of surā;



near the southern fire they purify with the triple strainers. He places the Fathers, who are mortal, in a deathless womb, and causes those who are mortal to be born from a deathless womb. He who knows this, or for whom, knowing this, this sacrificial rite is performed, overcomes the repeated death of the Fathers, and the sacrifice is not cut off from him.'

In this passage the Fathers are exceptionally given deathlessness, but at other times they are specifically stated to be subject to death, as at SPB 2.1.4.9

... anapahatapāpmānaḥ pitaro na pāpmānam apahate  
martyāḥ pitaraḥ purā hāyuso mriyate yo 'nudite  
manthati ...

'... the Fathers have not the evil dispelled from them; he [the sacrificer] does not dispel the evil. The Fathers are mortal; he dies before his full term who stirs the [fire] before the sun has risen.'

Here the day symbolises the gods, the night the Fathers. By stirring the fire before the dawn, the man

falls under the influence of the Fathers.

Fourthly, by worship of the Fathers the sacrificer preserves and strengthens the continuity of the family, ŚPB 1.7.2.4

atha yad eva prajāṃ iccheta / tena pitṛbhya ṛṇam  
jāyate tad dhyebhya etat karoti yad eṣāṃ  
saṃtatāvyavacchinā prajā bhavati //

'As he wishes for offspring, because of that he is born as a debt to the Fathers. It is for them that he ensures that there is a continuous, uninterrupted line of descendants.'

He thus strengthens also the connection between the Fathers and men, ŚPB 13.8.1.6

...etad dha vai pitaro manuṣyaloka ābhaktā  
bhavanti yad eṣāṃ prajā bhavati ...

'...in this way, in that they have descendants, the Fathers are sharers in the sphere of men ...'

But in the main for the Brāhmaṇas the pitṛloka is not a sphere of existence to be desired. The pitaraḥ are only nominally the sacrificer's ancestors; they have lost any enjoyment in their existence; they are at times

closer to spirits of the earth and man's surroundings than to the spirits of the departed, although they never completely cease to be closely connected with man.

b) Svargaloka and sukṛtasya lokah.

If we can detect in the references to the Fathers a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the sacrificer for existence in their sphere, does he then expect to dwell with the gods in their heaven? Heaven, svaṛ or svarga, is of much more frequent occurrence in the Brāhmaṇas than in the Saṃhitās. Physically it resembles that world of light and rest allotted to the Fathers in the R̥g-Veda, but denied them in the Brāhmaṇas. Svarga is in the highest sky, uttame nāke, ŚPB 7.2.1.10

...uttame nāke adhi rohayainam iti svargo vai  
loko nākaḥ svarge loke yajamānam adhirohayeti ...

'... "raise him to the highest vault of the sky."

The sky is the sphere of heaven. He thus says,

"raise the sacrificer to the sphere of heaven" ...'

Its region is the north-east (ŚPB 6.6.2.4). It is beyond the sun, that divisor between Darkness and light,

death and life, SPB 8.6.3.19

...etaṃ nākaṃ gr̥bhṇānāḥ sukṛtasya loka itī svargo  
vai loko nākaḥ svargaṃ lokaṃ gr̥bhṇānāḥ sukṛtasya  
loka ity etat tṛtīye pṛṣṭhe adhi rocane diva ity  
etad dha tṛtīyaṃ pṛṣṭhaṃ rocaṇaṃ divo yatraiṣa  
etat tapati //

'... "gaining the sky in the sphere of what has  
been performed well." The sky is the world of  
heaven, therefore it means, "gaining the world of  
heaven in the sphere of what has been performed  
well." "Above the third shining back of the sky." The  
third shining back of the sky is where this [the fire,  
the sun] is burning.'

The svarga is indeed the highest light, SPB 1.9.3.10

...ya eṣa tapati tasya ye raśmayas te sukṛto 'tha  
yat paraṃ bhāḥ prajāpatir vā sa svargo vā lokas  
tad evam imāṃl lokānt samāruhyāthaitāṃ gatim etāṃ  
pratiṣṭhāṃ gacchati ...

'...the rays of that burning one [the sun] are  
those who have performed the ritual well. What  
highest light there is, that is Prajāpati, or the

world of heaven. When one has thus ascended these spheres, one reaches that goal, that safe refuge.'

As in the Saṃhitās, so in the Brāhmaṇas the sun and its light are closely associated with life, heaven, and life after death. In this passage the sacrificers after death become physically part of the heavenly world, they become the rays of the sun. Of the many spheres of existence in the whole universe the sphere of greatest light is thought the most desirable: the sun is there and that is the sphere of heaven, svargaloka.

The sukṛtasya / sukṛtām lokah, the sphere of existence won after death by those who perform the ritual acceptedly, which was in the Saṃhitās sometimes the pitṛloka, but sometimes a heaven gained by the gods only, is in the Brāhmaṇas definitely the heavenly sphere. The only way to gain heaven is by sacrifice and the ritual, for heaven is the sphere of the sukṛtaḥ only. The gods indeed live there, but not by right, not automatically, but because they have used the ritual correctly, SPB 1.6.1.10

caturthena vai prayājena devāḥ / yajñam āpnuvaṃs  
 taṃ pañcamena samasthāpayann atha yad ata ūrdhvam  
 asaṃsthitam yajñasya svargam eva tena lokam  
 samāśnuvata //

'By the fourth preliminary offering the gods obtained the sacrifice, and by the fifth they completed it, and by what part of the sacrifice remained uncompleted after that, they gained the world of heaven.'

This sort of statement destroys any idea that man accomplishes his object through the sacrifice by propitiating the gods with his offerings. The sacrifice itself in the Brāhmaṇas effects what the gods were asked to do in the Saṃhitās. By its own power the sacrifice gains benefits, including heaven, for the sacrificer. The gods need take no part; in any case they themselves owe their power and supremacy to their use of the ritual. It is claimed that they gained the world of heaven by their use of the whole sacrifice, and of various components of the ritual, such as the metres,

the altar and the bricks. Or the gods made the sacrifice their selves, their bodies, ŚPB 8.6.1.10

etāvān vai sarvo yajñāḥ / yajña u devānām  
 ātmā yajñam eva tad devā ātmānaṃ kṛtvaitasmin  
 nāke svarge loke 'sīdams tathaivaitad yajamāno  
 yajñam evātmānaṃ kṛtvaitasmin nāke svarge loke  
 sīdati //

'So much is the whole sacrifice. The sacrifice is the gods' self. Having made the sacrifice their own self, the gods settled in the sky, in the world of heaven. In the same way, having made the sacrifice his own self, the sacrificer settles in the sky, in the world of heaven.'

By fulfilling the requirements of the ritual life, by marrying and producing children the gods settled in heaven (ŚPB 8.6.1.21)

Each of these passages, and many other similar passages, declares that what the gods did the sacrificer can do, and what the gods won the sacrificer also wins. For in the Brāhmaṇas the main object of the sacrifice is to win for the mortal sacrificer a place in heaven, after

death. The sacrifice itself goes to the gods, SPB 9.5.1.48

prastareṇa paridhinā / srucā vedyā ca barhiṣā /  
 ṛcemaṃ yajñam no naya svar deveṣu gantava ity  
 etair no yajñasya rūpaiḥ svargaṃ lokaṃ gamayety  
 etat //

'With the bunch of grass, with the stick, with the spoon, the altar and the strewn grass, with the verse of praise, lead this our sacrifice to heaven, to go to the gods.' This means, "with these forms of the ritual, make it go to the world of heaven." It is the means by which the sacrificer gains svarga.

It seems to carry the sacrificer with it to heaven,

SPB 2.3.3.15

naur ha vā eṣā svargyā yad agnihotraṃ tasyā  
 etasyai nāvāḥ svargyāyā āhavanīyaś caiva  
 gārhapatyaś ca naumaṇḍe athaiṣa eva nāvājo yat  
 kṣīrahotā //

'The Agnihotra is a ship bound for heaven; the Ahavanīya and Gārhapatya fires are the two sides of that heaven-bound ship, and that offerer of the milk is its helmsman.'



and SPB 2.3.3.16

sa yat prañ upodaiti tad enāṃ praçim abhyajati  
svargaṃ lokam abhi tayā svargaṃ lokam samaśnute ...

'Now when he walks up towards the east, he steers  
that [ship] in an eastern direction towards the world  
of heaven, and he gains the world of heaven by it.'

The necessary instruments of the ritual perform the  
same function as the sacrifice itself, for example, the stake  
to which the animal is tied, (SPB 3.7.1.23). The one aim of  
the sacrifice is the world of heaven, SPB 8.7.4.6

tāni vai nānaprastāvāni samānanidhanāni ... atha yat  
samānanidhanāny ekā hy eva yajñasya pratiṣṭhaikaṃ  
nidhanaṃ svarga eva lokas tasmāt svarjyotirnidhanāni //

'They [the Sāmans] have different preludes and the  
same finale ... they have the same finale because  
there is one foundation, one finale to the sacrifice,  
that is, the world of heaven; therefore their finale  
is "heavenly light." '

(Eggeling's translation.)

The sacrifice causes the sacrificer to be born there,

SPB 7.3.1.12

... addho vā ayam aśmīṃ loka jāto yajamānaḥ svarga  
eva loka prajijanayiṣitavyas tad yad āhavanīya

evāpyānavatībhyāṃ abhimṛśati na gārhapatyē svarga  
evainam talloke prajānāyati //

'... indeed this sacrificer, although born in this sphere, is really intended to be born in the heavenly sphere. When he strokes [the sand] level<sup>1</sup> on the Ahavanīya fire with the two [verses] containing [the verb] "to swell"<sup>2</sup> and not on the Gārhapatya fire, he causes him to be born in the heavenly sphere.'

But occasionally it is stated that one reaches heaven because the gods have been gratified by the sacrifice, as in ŚPB 3.8.1.16, or even because the Brahmins also are gratified, ŚPB 4.3.4.4

dvayā vai devā devāḥ / ahaiva devā atha ye  
brāhmaṇaḥ śuśruvāṃso 'nūcānās te manuṣya-devās teṣāṃ  
<sup>tesāṃ</sup>  
~~devāḥ~~ dvedhāvibhakta eva yajña āhutaya eva devānāṃ  
dakṣiṇā manuṣyadevānāṃ brāhmaṇānāṃ śuśruvuṣāṃ  
anūcānānāṃ āhutibhir eva devān priṇāti dakṣiṇābhir  
manuṣyadevān brāhmaṇāñ chuśruvuṣo 'nūcānāṃs ta  
enam ubhaye devāḥ prītāḥ svargaṃ lokam abhivahanti //

- 
1. See ŚPB 7.3.2.45-6 for the instructions for this ritual.
  2. Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā 12.113 & 4 āpyāyamāno amṛtāya soma ...

'There are two kinds of gods, for the gods are gods, and the learned Brahmins versed in sacred lore are human gods. The sacrifice to them is two-fold: oblations to the gods, and gifts for the sacrificial priests to the human gods, the learned Brahmins versed in sacred lore. With oblations one gratifies the gods, with gifts for the sacrificial priests [one gratifies] the human gods, the learned Brahmins versed in sacred lore. These two kinds of gods, when gratified, convey him to the heavenly world.'

This boasting claim of the Brahmins is significant in that rather than elevating the Brahmins to the status of the gods, it demotes the gods to below the situation of the Brahmins. The Brahmins control the sacrifice to gain great rewards for the sacrificer who is generous to them. The gods, although nominally they have freedom of action, are in fact controlled by the sacrifice. They are dependent on it for food, and cannot withstand its power. They have lost their independence, their mastery; they are not free to exercise their supernatural powers as they wish. The real masters, the controllers of the sacrifice, and therefore the controllers of the gods' powers, are the

Brahmins, the human gods.

A new idea is that knowledge, with or even without the ritual, is sufficient to gain existence in a heavenly world, for example, ŚPB 12.3.5.11

... sa yo haivam etāṃ yajñakratūnāṃ saṃvatsare

'pitiṃ vedāpy asya svarge loke bhavati //

'... whoever knows this entering of the sacrificial rites into the year, comes into being in the world of heaven.'

At this stage such knowledge is usually specifically concerned with the ritual; it is the understanding of the ritual, the awareness of its full significance, its purpose and its origins. But the idea is a step on the way to that exalting of knowledge, in that case the knowledge of brahman and ātman and the true nature of the universe, and that consequent belittling of ritual, which are such prominent features of Upaniṣadic thought. The phrase ya evaṃ veda, he who knows thus, already present in this passage, recurs again and again in the Upaniṣads.

Little is said of the nature of existence in heaven: presumably it was expected to be pleasant since it was so coveted and striven for. Certainly there was no pain,

SPB 8.4.1.24

... tad yat tam āha nāka iti na hi tatra gatāya  
kasmaicanākaṃ bhavati ....

'... as to why he calls it the sky, nāka: it is  
because there is no pain [na aka] for anyone who  
goes there...'

It was a dwelling-place probably shared with the  
gods, who are usually free from care, and whole in body  
and mind. The Brāhmaṇas are not concerned with  
descriptions of what everyone could better imagine for  
himself: their concern was to claim the efficacy of  
their methods for gaining that happy existence.

The svargaloka can also be, as amrtatva was in the  
Saṃhitās, a metaphorical state, which is reached on occasions  
during man's earthly life. The place of sacrifice, the  
"centre", was in the Saṃhitās a place of sacredness and  
amrtatva, in which qualities the sacrificer shared for  
the duration of the sacrifice. In the Brāhmaṇas the place  
of sacrifice is metaphorically the svargaloka, SPB 13.2.8.5

... svarge loke prornuvāthām ity eṣa vai svargo  
loko yatra paśuṃ saṃjñāpayanti ...

'... "in the heavenly world you envelop yourselves,"  
for that is the heavenly world where they kill the  
animal...'

By sacrificing man attains a heavenly state at that  
very moment, and man also ensures that he will reach this  
heavenly state after death, SPB 9.4.4.15

...aharahar vā eṣa yajñas tāyate 'harahaḥ saṃtiṣṭhate  
'harahar enaṃ svargasya lokasya gatyai yuñkte 'harahar  
enena svargaṃ lokaṃ gacchati tasmād aharahar eva  
yuñjyād aharahar vimuñcet //

'...day by day this sacrifice is performed; day by  
day it comes to completion; day by day he yokes  
that in order to attain the heavenly world; day  
by day through that he goes to the heavenly world.  
Therefore he should yoke it day by day and loose it  
day by day.'

Each day the sacrificer performs an act of creation,  
and each day he dissolves it. The repetition of the  
sacrifice each day takes him out of time and into eternity.

c) What survives death and experiences heaven?

For the sacrificer who reaches svargaloka after death even fewer occupations are described in the Brāhmaṇas than are assigned to the pitaras in the Vedas. Indeed it hardly seems necessary to assume that those in heaven have the senses and faculties they had on earth. But the Brāhmaṇas do, more clearly than the Vedas, designate which parts of man are mortal and which deathless, and which make up the person in heaven. The bodily frame, śarīra, is in fact identified with pāpman, the evil, which is so often death. The body is the mark of man's mortality. But other parts of man are said to be deathless, ŚPB 10.1.3.4

tad etā vā asya taḥ / pañca martyās tan va āsaṁl  
loma tvaṁ māṁsam asthi majjāthaitā amṛtā mano vāk  
prāṇas cakṣuḥ śrotram //

'These five parts of him were mortal; his hair, skin, flesh, bone and marrow; and these were deathless: his mind, speech, breath, sight and hearing.'

The manas, source of the personality, survives death, as it seems to do in the Saṁhitās. So too do the mind's

servants, the three senses of speaking, hearing and seeing, believed not so dependent on the physical bodily frame as the senses of touch and taste. These senses, including the mind, the manas, are on occasions called prānas, and are deathless even as the prāṇa, the breath, is. The prāṇa is an independent force which enters the body at birth (ŚPB 2.2.1.10), animating it, giving it life (ŚPB 11.2.6.2 and ŚPB 8.7.2.14). It is essential for life (ŚPB 12.7.3.16); when the prāṇa leaves, the body dies (ŚPB 11.6.3.7).

The prāṇa seems to connect the two selves of the sacrificer, his ordinary self and his divine self. The self, the ātman, comprehends usually the whole person. This person is partly mortal, for the physical frame perishes, so that to experience another existence in heaven the sacrificer needs another body, so that he may be a whole person, have an ātman in heaven; so that he may overcome the death of the earthly body. While those deathless entities, gold and the instruments of the sacrifice, Agni and Soma, by themselves were not felt able to free man from death, the ritual as a whole has greater power. The sacrifice is untouched by death, untouched by time, and can be used by man as a means to overcome death.



While he is alive the sacrifice or the sacrificial fire is the sacrificer's self, his ātman, or his divine self, daiva ātman, ŚPB 9.5.2.13

... athaiṣa ha vā asya daivo 'mr̥ta ātmā sa ya  
etāni parasmai karoty etaṃ ha sa daivam ātmānaṃ  
parasmai prayacchaty atha śuṣka eva sthānuḥ  
pariśiṣyate //

'...for these [rites] are his divine, deathless ātman. He who performs them for another person hands over his divine ātman to another person, and only a dried up trunk remains.'

and similarly of the fire, ŚPB 6.6.4.5

... daivo vā asyaiṣa ātmā mānuṣo āyam ...

'... for that [Ahavaniya fire] is his divine ātman, and this his human one ...'

It is by making the rites his real self that man is freed from death, ŚPB 11.2.2.5

... yajño vā asyātmā bhavati tad yajña eva  
bhūtvaitan mr̥tyum atimucyata eteno hāsya sarve  
yajñakratava etaṃ mr̥tyum atimuktāḥ //

'...the sacrifice becomes his ātman, and when the sacrifice has become that, he is freed from that death, and all his sacrificial acts are freed from that death.'

This ātman, created with the priests' help, of course, is his in the next existence, in heaven, ŚPB 4.3.4.5

tā vā etāḥ / ṛtvijām eva dakṣiṇā anyam vā eta  
 etasyātmānaṃ saṃskurvanty etaṃ yajñam ṛṇmayam  
 yajurmayaṃ sāmamayaṃ āhutimayaṃ so 'syāmuṣmiṃ  
 loka ātmā bhavati tad ye mājījananteti tasmād  
 ṛtvigbhya eva dakṣiṇā dadyān nāṃṛtvigbhyah //

'These gifts of his belong to the officiating priests, for they perfect another ātman for him, that is, this sacrifice consisting of the Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and the offering. That becomes his ātman in that other sphere. Thinking, "They have generated me," for this reason he should give gifts to the officiating priests, and not to the non-officiating priests.'

The new existence is a new birth, as ŚPB 7.3.1.12, quoted above, states. Cremation is the final sacrifice; from the fire is born the sharer in heaven. A prayer to Agni at the end of a funeral ceremony asks, ŚPB 12.5.2.15

...asmāt tvam adhi jāto 'si / tvad ayaṃ jāyatām  
 punaḥ / asau svargāya lokāya /

'...from him you were born. Let this one be born again out of you for the heavenly world.'

He comes into being in heaven made up from some constituents of the ritual. By sacrificing he has created a body suitable for existence in heaven, ŚPB 12.5.2.13

tām vā etām / yajamānātmāhutim antato juhōti sa yo  
'sya svarge loko jito bhavati tata āhutimayo 'mṛtaḥ  
sambhavati //

'He offers that oblation of the sacrificer's self at the end. From that sphere that has been won for him in heaven he comes into being in the form of an oblation, and deathless.'

As usual in the Brāhmaṇas, whoever does not perform the ritual is deprived of the rewards. The non-sacrificer is here denied a further existence, ŚPB 2.2.4.8

sa yatra mriyate / yatrainam agnāv abhyādadhāti  
tad eṣo 'gnēr adhiajāyate 'thāsya śarīram evāgnir  
dahāti tad yathā pitur vā mātur vā jāyetaivam eṣo  
'gnēr adhiajāyate śasvād dha vā eṣa na sambhavati  
yo 'gnihotraṃ na juhōti tasmād vā agnihotraṃ  
hotavyam //

'When he dies and they place him in the fire, he is born from that fire. The fire consumes only his bodily frame. Just as one is born from a father or

a mother, so he is born from the fire. But whoever does not offer the Agnihotra, does not come into being. Therefore the Agnihotra should be offered.'

He must shake off his mortal body, which is an evil, death, and take up this body made up of the ritual. In ŚPB 11.2.6.13 the sacrificer says

...idaṃ me 'nenāṅgaṃ saṃskriyate idaṃ me 'nenāṅgaṃ  
upadhīyata iti sa yathāhis tvaco nirmucyetaivam  
asmān martyāc charīrāt pāpmano nirmucyate sa ṛṇmayo  
yajurmayāḥ sāmāmaya āhutamayaḥ svargaṃ lokam  
abhisambhavati //

'... "this body of mine is formed by that [the sacrifice], this body of mine is procured by that." So, just as a snake frees itself from its skin, he frees himself from that mortal body, from the evil. And made up of the Ṛg, of the Yajur, of the Sāma, and of offerings, he passes on to the heavenly world.'

Thus the sacrificer is a new kind of person in heaven. By his performance of the rites he has won a loka, a place in the heavenly sphere. Those parts of him which were mortal are gone, and replaced in some way by the ritual

itself. The dead person in RV 10.14.8 was told to join Yama and the Fathers, and his own iṣṭāpūrta, his ritually-correct deeds. This idea has been incorporated into the theory of the creation of a new body, which was a rather vague concept in the Saṃhitās. The man's iṣṭāpūrta, his yajña, and āhuti, and all that was later called his karma, his works, become his new body, his new self. His deathless parts, his personality and the breath which gives him life, survive in his new body. His self thus remains whole.

(iii) Deathlessness in heaven.

The ritual has already provided two ways of dealing with the problem of death. The first claim is that by sacrificing man ensures a kind of amṛtatva, a long life on earth, and escaping all premature forms of death, falls prey only to the death of old age. The second claim is that the ritual wins an existence in heaven with the gods, making the sacrificer's self able to survive the earthly death, and making the sacrificer able to be reborn into a life in heaven, with the ritual as his body. But there is still fear of another death, even in heaven. In the

Samhitās the pitaras had an āyur, an allotted term of life, which presumably came to an end like life on earth, although whether the pitaras are mortal or not is very little discussed. The Brāhmaṇas, as is natural with their greater concern in life after death, consider the question of freedom from death, amṛtatva, in heaven.

a) The gods.

There are two types of divine beings in the Samhitās: those who are gods by birth, and those who have become divine because of their actions. These two groups are alike in that both have amṛtatva as a characteristic quality, and for both this means that they are completely untouched by death. Neither the "born" gods, like Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, nor, so it seems, the "made" gods, the Ṛbhus, and the Āṅgirasas, were ever subject to death in any way. They are different in that the former either possessed amṛtatva inherently, or gained it through the agency of other gods, while the men who became amṛta did so by virtue of their service to the ritual.

In the Brāhmaṇas, however, all gods win amṛtatva by means of the ritual at least as often as they win it through

other gods. For example, in ŚPB 9.11.2.34 by singing Sāma hymns they become amṛta; in ŚPB 10.4.3.8 by building the fire-altar correctly they win amṛtatva. The gods still are completely untouched by death, although sometimes Prajāpati has to perform rites in order to stave off death, as in ŚPB 2.2.4.7 and ŚPB 10.1.4.1. Amṛtatva is still the characteristic quality of the gods.

b) Men.

Man cannot be completely amṛta because he must die, but the Brāhmaṇas acknowledge a freedom from a further death and call this amṛtatva. This further death is punarmṛtyu, which may be a final death, but is sometimes stated to be recurrent death, ŚPB 10.4.3.10

te ya evaṃ etaḍ viduḥ / ye vaiṭat karma kurvate  
 mṛtvā punaḥ sambhavanti te sambhavanta evāmṛtatvam  
 abhisambhavanty atha ya evaṃ na vidur ye vaiṭat  
 karma na kurvate mṛtvā punaḥ sambhavanti ta  
 etasyaivānnaṃ punaḥ punar bhavanti //

'They who know this and/or who perform this rite, when they die come into being again, and coming into being they come to deathlessness. But those

who do not know this and/or do not perform this rite, when they die come into being again, and become the food of that one [death] again and again.'

To escape this man must become amṛta, free from death, and only the ritual can make him so. For example the performance of the Agnihotra offers hope, ŚPB 2.3.3.7-9

- 7 tad vā eṣa eva mṛtyuḥ / ya eṣa tapati ...
  - 8. sa yasya kāmāyate / tasya prāṇam ādāyodeti sa mriyate sa yo haitaṃ mṛtyuṃ anātimucyāthāmuṃ lokam eti yathā haivāsmiṃ | loke na saṃyatam ādriyate yadā yadaiva kāmāyate 'tha mārayaty evam u haivāmuṣmiṃ | loke punaḥ punar eva pramārayati //
  - 9 sa yat sāyam astam ite dve āhuti juhoti / yad etābhyāṃ pūrvābhyāṃ padbhyāṃ etasmin mṛtyau pratitiṣṭhaty atha yat prātar anudite dve āhuti juhoti tad etābhyāṃ aparābhyāṃ padbhyāṃ etasmin mṛtyau pratitiṣṭhati sa enam eṣa udyann evādāyodeti tad etaṃ mṛtyuṃ atimucyate sa iṣṭāgni-hotre mṛtyor atimuktir ati ha vai punarmṛtyuṃ mucyate ya evam etāṃ agnihotre mṛtyor atimuktiṃ veda //
- 'That burning one is death ...'



'He takes the breath of whomever he wishes, and that one dies. He makes whoever goes to that sphere without being freed from that death die again and again in that sphere, just as in this world one does not pay regard to one who is fettered, but puts him to death whenever one wishes.'

'When a man offers two oblations in the evening after sunset, he takes his stand on that death with those two forefeet; and when he offers two oblations in the morning before sunrise, he takes his stand on that death with those two hind-feet.

'As it rises, it takes him and rises, and so he is freed from that death. This is the freedom from death in the Agnihotra; he is freed from recurrent death who knows this freedom from death in the Agnihotra.'

Performance of the rites, then, although it cannot save the sacrificer from an earthly death, yet keeps him from being in the control of death. The sun, that symbol of the light of life, the light of heaven, also symbolises the dividing bridge between earth and heaven, the bridge which is death. The sacrificer uses death, the sun, as a means of reaching the world of heaven, and is not subject

to it. The knowledge of this, the realisation that performance of the rite will guarantee heaven, frees the sacrificer from further death in heaven. For death of the earthly body is necessary for life in heaven, and so cannot be avoided; and the knowledge of performance of the ritual is necessary to ward off punarmṛtyu, recurrent death.

In the Brāhmaṇas man no longer always considers himself as inherently and eternally inferior to the gods in power or status. He can use the same means to gain heaven as the gods used: why should he not then gain amṛtatva, by using the ritual as the gods did? He cannot however ignore the fact that the physical body perishes, so he claims that man can be deathless by means of the ritual, but he must lose his body to experience his amṛtatva fully, ŚPB 10.4.3.9-10

9 sa mṛtyur devān abravīt / ittham eva sarve manuṣyā  
amṛtā bhaviṣyanty atha ko mahyaṃ bhāgo bhaviṣyatīti  
te hocur nāto 'paraḥ kaścana saha śarīreṇāmṛto 'sad  
yadaiva tvam etaṃ bhāgaṃ harāsā atha vyāvṛtya  
śarīreṇāmṛto 'sad yo 'mṛto 'sad vidyayā vā karmaṇā  
veti...

10 te ya evam etad viduḥ / ye vai tat karma kurvate  
 mṛtvā punaḥ sambhavanti te sambhavanta evāmṛtatvam  
 abhisambhavanti ...

'Death said to the gods: "In this way [by building  
 the fire-altar] all men will become deathless.

What will be my share then?" They replied, "From  
 now on no-one will be deathless with his body. Only  
 when you have taken that as your share shall he  
 become deathless, casting aside the body, he who  
 will become deathless through knowledge or works ..."

'They who know this or who perform this rite, when  
 they die come into being again, and coming into  
 being they come to deathlessness.'

This passage shows quite clearly the importance which is  
 being gradually assigned to knowledge throughout the  
 Brāhmanas. The process is one of interiorisation of the  
 ritual. Knowledge of the significance of the rites and  
 meditation on that significance, achieves the same purpose  
 as the rites themselves. As we saw above, the fate of  
 the man of deficient knowledge, who does not perform the  
 rites correctly, is to suffer recurrent death. Indeed  
 in the Brāhmanas the usual "punishment" for blameworthy

sacrificers is merely to deny them the rewards won by the sukṛta. The sukṛta win svargaloka and even amṛtatva: others perhaps merely reach pitṛloka or suffer death again and again. An exception is the story of Bṛgu, a son of Varuṇa, found in ŚPB 11.6.1. and in a more expanded version in the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa 1.44. Because of his arrogance Bṛgu is sent by his father to visit another loka, where he sees for example men being cut in pieces or devoured, and also rivers of honey covered with lotuses, where there is dancing and singing, pleasant noise and fragrance, and crowds of Apsarases. Varuṇa explains that those who cut down trees, or kill and cook animals, or cook rice and barley, without offering the Agnihotra, and without correct knowledge, are themselves cut and eaten in another sphere. The pleasant sphere is Varuṇa's, won by those who, with correct knowledge, offer the Agnihotra. The picture of this heavenly sphere is the most detailed description the Brāhmaṇas gave of the next life.

The story of Bṛgu, however, is so closely bound up with the ritual, in that deficiency leads to suffering, while ceremonial expiation can prevent it, that it seems unlikely that a belief in such punishments after death was

widely held.

The Brāhmanas, then, claim for the ritual rewards in this life and the next: here it prolongs one's life, and ensures death from old age only; after death it guarantees the joys of heaven, and it protects from a further death, \$PB 10.2.6.19

... punar mṛtyuṃ jayati sarvam āyur eti ya evaṃ veda tad etad amṛtam ity evāmutropāsītāyur itīha ...

'... "He who knows this [the building of the fire-altar] overcomes recurring death and reaches a full term of life." He should consider "freedom from death" as in the next world, and "full term of life" as here...'

### 3) The Brāhmanas as a bridge to later thought.

The Brāhmanas reflect, of course, the thinking of the priestly class even more than do the Saṃhitās. That the priests had relegated the world of the Fathers in favour of a svarga shared with the gods by their patrons, does not prove that the majority of the ordinary people accepted this system. We have, however, no way of knowing their thoughts. It does seem likely, nevertheless, that some of the theorising passed into popular belief, or perhaps

shows the influence of non-Vedic popular belief. The leap from the concepts of the Ṛg-Veda to those of the Upaniṣads is too great unless general thought had been influenced by speculation on this subject similar to that found in the Brāhmaṇas.

In fact, on several important points the Brāhmaṇas move on from the ideas of the Saṃhitās on a path which leads straight to the Upaniṣads. The pitṛloka gives way to another life in a svarga won by the ritual, by works, karma, a life experienced in a body made up of these works. The gods are no longer wholly independent, but themselves depend on the ritual for their position. The development to the idea of the gods merely as a succession of men with exceptional karma, as they appear in Buddhist literature, is clear. Death, in the Saṃhitās, the dreaded end, is in the Brāhmaṇas a new birth, a new beginning, although it is as yet only a new birth in another sphere, not back on earth. And finally there is a search to define the real self, the ātman, the essential person, a matter of little concern to the Saṃhitās, but of overpowering interest to the Upaniṣads. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa separates the bodily frame, and dismisses it as peripheral. The real self is the personality, SPB 10.6.3.2

sa ātmānam upāsita / manomayaṃ prāṇasarīraṃ bhārūpam  
 ākāśātmānaṃ kāmarūpiṇaṃ manojavasam satyasamkalpaṃ  
 satyadhṛtiṃ sarvagandhaṃ sarvarasaṃ sarvā anu diśaḥ  
 prabhūtaṃ sarvaṃ idam abhyāptam avākam anādaraṃ  
 yathā brīhir vā yavo vā śyāmāko vā śyāmākatandulo  
 vaivam ayam antarātman puruṣo hiraṇmayo yathā jyotir  
 adhūmam evam jyāyān divo jyāyān ākāśaj jyāyān asyai  
 pṛthivyai jyāyānt sarvebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ sa prāṇasyātmaisha  
 ma ātmaitam ita ātmānaṃ prety ābhisambhaviṣyāmiti  
 yasya syād addhā na vicikitsāstīti ha smāha śāṇḍilya  
 evam etad īiti //

'One should contemplate the self as consisting of  
 mind, with the breath as its bodily frame, with  
 light as its outward appearance, with ether as its  
 body, taking whatever form it wishes, swift as  
 thought, whose intentions and will are effectual,  
 which contains all odours, all tastes, appearing  
 through all regions, pervading all this universe,  
 without speech, indifferent. Just like a grain of  
 rice or barley or millet, or the smallest grain of  
 millet, so is this person of gold within the self.  
 Like a smokeless light, it is greater than the sky,

greater than the atmosphere, greater than this earth, greater than all existing things. "That self of the breath is my self. Passing away from here I shall reach that self." "For the man who is certain of this there is no doubt." So said Śāṇḍilya, and so it is.'

This description of the self, while it may be more poetically evocative than revealing, obviously will, with its universal rather than personal applications, seriously affect ideas on life and death. On this subject, as on many others, it is clear that the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad and the rest of earliest Upaniṣadic literature, are the natural culmination of the thought of the Satapatha and other Brāhmaṇas, and not a quite different system of speculation.



## Chapter Three

### The Upaniṣads

#### 1. Attitude to death

In the Samhitās the prevailing attitude is that life is good and death is a hateful and almost unnatural interruption. Their solution to the problem is to delay one's end as long as possible; to perform sacrifices, and so please the gods that they will ward off death, at least until one is one hundred years old. The Brāhmaṇas, in their discussion of the sacrifices, emphasise this object of the ritual again and again; sarvam āyur eti, he lives a full term of life who performs this or that rite. For both Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas then, in the main, death is an intrusion to be resisted and overcome. But by the time of the Upaniṣads there is much more acceptance of death as an integral part of existence, as a natural consequence rather than as an unnatural interruption. In these three sets of literature there is discernible a progression from the enjoyment and awareness of the pleasures of life, expressed in the hymns of the cattle-herding warriors and nomads, to the full disillusionment

as regards this world, shown in that obsession with the disadvantages of life which culminates in the cry of despair in the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 1.3 & 4.

3 bhagavān asthicarmasnāyumejjāmāṃsaśukraśonitaśleṣmās-  
ruduṣikāviṇmūtravātapittaśkaphasaṃghate durgandhe  
niḥsāre 'smiñ charīre kiṃ kāmopabhogaiḥ kāmakrodha-  
-lobhamohabhayaviṣāderṣyeṣṭaviyogāniṣṭasamprayogakṣut-  
pipāsājarāmṛtyurogaśokādyair abhigate 'smiñ charīre  
kiṃ kāmopabhogaiḥ //

4 sarvaṃ cedaṃ kṣayaiṣṇu paśyāmo ... etadvidhe 'smint  
saṃsāre kiṃ kāmopabhogaiḥ / yair evāśitasyāsakṛd  
ihāvartanaṃ dr̥śyatā ity uddhartum arhasi / andhodapānastho  
bheka ivāham asmint saṃsāre ... //

'O Lord, in this evil-smelling, sapless body, a conglomerate of bone, skin, muscle, marrow, flesh, semen, blood, mucus, tears, rheum, faeces, urine, wind, bile and phlegm, what is the good of enjoying one's desires? In this body which is afflicted with desire, anger, greed, delusion, fear, depression, envy, separation from what one wants, contact with what one dislikes, hunger, thirst, old age, death, disease, sorrow and the like, what is the good of enjoying one's desires?'

'And we see that everything here is liable to perish ...

in such a cycle of existence as this, what is the good in enjoying one's desires? He who has fed on them is seen to return here again and again. Please deliver me. I am like a frog in a waterless well in this cycle of existence.'

King Brhadratha is here only too aware, as were the authors of the Vedic hymns, of the transitoriness of all things, and especially of man, but he cannot find their consolation in life's pleasures, for he sees also the snares in all enjoyments. He has an additional cause for despair in that he accepts the idea that after death a man returns to this world again and again, to experience over and over the apparently meaningless frustration of earthly life. The Upaniṣads thus have two important problems: how to overcome death; for however acceptable it is as a universal fact, it remains fearful to the individual man; and later, how to escape from the cycle of births and deaths, from saṃsāra.

The Upaniṣads do in fact exhibit a certain preoccupation with the subject of death. In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 1.2.1 death is placed at the beginning of creation;

naiveha kiṃcanāgra āsit/mṛtyunaivedam āvṛtam āsīd  
 aśanāyayā / aśanāyā hi mṛtyuḥ ... //

'There was nothing at all here in the beginning.  
 This was enveloped by death, by hunger, for hunger  
 is death ...'

Doubtless there is here, in the identification of death and hunger, a hint of the hardship of life, the possibility of death by starvation. Bloomfield,<sup>1</sup> among others, has seen in India's debilitating climatic conditions a reason for the pessimism and world-weariness that informs so much of Indian thought and speculation. If the people, now in Upaniṣadic times an agricultural community, found food difficult to grow and the climate enervating, it would go some way towards explaining this hyper-awareness of the nearness of death, even in times of peace, especially of death from starvation.

In BAU 1.3.28 three verses are interpreted as all concerned with death and deathlessness;

...tad etāni jayet/asato mā sad gamaya tamaso mā  
 jyotir gamaya mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamayeti / sa yaḍ  
 āhāsato mā sad gamayeti / mṛtyur vā asat sad amṛtaṃ

1. M.Bloomfield, The religion of the Veda, New York, 1908, pp.264-6.

mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamayāmṛtaṃ mā kurv ity evaitad āha /  
 tamaso mā jyotir gamayeti / mṛtyur vai tamo jyotir  
 amṛtaṃ mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamayāmṛtaṃ mā kurv ity evaitad  
 āha / mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamayeti / nātra tirohitam ivāsti...//

'He [the sacrificer] should recite these [verses];

"From non-existence lead me to existence; from

darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to

deathlessness." When he says "from non-existence

lead me to existence," non-existence is death,

existence is deathlessness, and what he says is

"from death lead me to deathlessness, make me free

from death." When he says "from darkness lead me

to light," darkness is death, and light is deathlessness,

and what he says is "from death lead me to deathlessness,

make me free from death." When he says, "from death

lead me to deathlessness, "there is nothing obscure here.'

There are also in some of the Upaniṣads several stories concerned with death. In BAU 1.5.21 it is said that the senses wished to know, to become a form of, the faculty over which death has no power:

...tāni mṛtyuḥ śramo bhūtvopayame / tāny āpnot ...

athenam eva nāpnod yo 'yam madhyamaḥ prāṇaḥ / tāni

jñātuṃ dadhrire / ayaṃ vai naḥ śreṣṭho yaḥ  
 sañcaramś cāsañcaramś ca nā vyathate 'tho na riṣyati/  
 hantāsyaiiva sarve rūpam asāmeti / ta etasyaiiva sarve  
 rūpam abhavan ... //

'... death became weariness and took control of them [the senses]; it took possession of them ... but it did not take possession of what was the middle breath. They sought to know that; "This is the best of us, since it is not disturbed, it is not injured, whether moving or still. Let us all take a form of this;" and they all became a form of that.'

In the Upaniṣads, as in the earlier Vedic literature, the breath is deathless and independent of the body. In another story the breath in the mouth struck the evil from the senses; that evil, which is, as in the Brāhmaṇas, death. The breath carried the senses beyond death to become, or be absorbed in, the elements. In this absorption into the universe man's faculties, which, as they include his mind, make up much of man himself, become deathless, amṛta, as BAU 1.3.10-12 says:

10 sā vā eṣā devataitāsāṃ devatānāṃ pāpmānaṃ mṛtyum  
 apahatya yatrāsāṃ diśāṃ antas tad gamayāṃcakāra ..//

11 sã vã eṣã devataitāsãṃ devatãnãṃ pãpmãnaṃ mṛtyum  
apahatyãthainã mṛtyum atyavahat //

12 sa vai vãcam eva prathamãm atyavahat / sã yadã  
mṛtyum atyamucyata so 'gnir abhavat .. //

'That divinity [breath] having struck off the  
evil, death, of these divinities [the senses], made  
it go to where is the end of the regions ...

'That divinity, having struck off the evil, death,  
of these divinities, carried them beyond death.

'It carried speech beyond it first. When it was  
freed from death, it became fire ...'

Death also appears in creation myths as an integral  
part of existence, as in the Aitareya Upaniṣad 1.1.4 and  
1.2.4

... nãbhir nirabhidyaata / nãbhyã apãnaḥ / apãnãn  
mṛtyuḥ ...//

... mṛtyur apãno bhütvã nãbhiṃ prãviśat ... //

'...the navel was separated out; from the navel  
the apãna breath, from the apãna breath [was separated  
out] death ...

'...death becoming the apãna breath entered the navel ...'

Death is in man, his mortality is inherent.

Death is powerful; personified he is a cosmic power and named with Indra, Varuṇa and Rudra as a kṣatra, a wielder of power and sovereignty among the gods, in BĀU 1.4.11.

Often there is a statement of the inevitability of death, the impossibility of its avoidance, followed by a prayer, a wish, an inquiry as how yet to overcome it, for example, BĀU 3.1.3

yājñavalkyēti hovāca yad idaṃ sarvaṃ mṛtyunāptaṃ  
sarvaṃ mṛtyunābhipannaṃ kena yajamāno mṛtyor āptim  
atimucyata iti ... //

' "Yājñavalkya," he said, "since everything here is possessed by death, since everything is overcome by death, by what means does the sacrificer free himself from the possession of death?..." '

and BĀU 3.2.10

yājñavalkyēti hovāca yad idaṃ sarvaṃ mṛtyor annaṃ  
kā svit sū devatā yasyā mṛtyur annam iti ... //

' "Yājñavalkya," he said, "since everything here is food for death, which is the divinity for which death is the food? ..." '



## 2. Concepts of freedom from death

The earliest Upaniṣads return again and again to the subject of death, and all the older Upaniṣads very often talk of amṛtatva, deathlessness. To say, however, that their main search is for amṛtatva would be an oversimplification. They search for an explanation, an attitude which will make life bearable and liveable, by defining man's relation to the universe, to time, and to his mental and spiritual faculties. In this search the problem of death of course figures large; but the consciousness of its inevitability makes the Upaniṣads propose not avoidance and delay as a solution, as the Saṃhitās do, but various theories to minimise its importance and its hatefulness. One of these theories is the idea, already found in the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, that death is the necessary gateway to the joys of heaven, which are the reward for the dutiful worshipper and sacrificer. The second theory, traces of which at any rate are present in the Saṃhitās, places man within an eternal, homogeneous universe, where a fundamental individuality and duality are denied, and an individual's death rendered irrelevant and meaningless. These ideas lead to the third train of thought: the quest to isolate the real individual self of

man, early accepted as the same as, or part of, the creative force of the universe, and as transcending both life and death. These three main concepts are interrelated and influence one another, so that for example the quest for the deathless self becomes even more important as it has to deal with the threat of rebirth and samsāra created by the mingling of the first two theories, of rewards in heaven and of the emission and reabsorption of individual beings by an homogeneous universe. All three involve not merely an individual's life and physical death, but a complete philosophy of creation, universal existence, and man's fate during whole cycles of the universe.

(i) Rewards in heaven

As regards the theory of rewards in heaven, in certain of the Upaniṣads there is evidence that the sacrifice and ritual were still considered valid means to win a life in heaven after death, and that such an after-life was desirable, as in BAU 3.1.6

yājñavalkyēti hovāca yad idaṃ antarikṣam anārambaṇam  
iva kenākramaṇa yajamānaḥ svargaṃ lokaṃ ākramata iti /

brahmanartvijā manasā candreṇa ... //

"Yājñavalkya," he said, "since the atmosphere is without a support, as it were, by what means of ascent does the sacrificer ascend to the world of heaven?"

[Yājñavalkya replied], "By the Brahman priest, by the mind, by the moon ... "

Even if Yājñavalkya's subsequent statement that these means of ascent in reality are one and are the same suggests his own ideas of man's absorption into the universe at death, the question shows that heaven was the assumed destiny of the sacrificer.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad emphasises the efficacy especially of hymns and sounds. The gods, the dwellers in heaven, feared death but found safety in the syllable "om", (ChU 1.4.4); and chanting the hymns correctly wins the world of heaven for the sacrificer, (ChU 2.22.2).

The fire sacrifice taught to Naciketas by Death is a means of winning heaven, a place of deathlessness and joy, Kaṭha Upaniṣad 1.12 & 13

svarge loke na bhayaṃ kiṃ canāsti na tatra tvaṃ na  
jarayā bibhēti /

ubhe tirtvāśanāyāpipāse śokātigo modate svargaloke //  
 sa tvam agniṃ svargyam adhyeṣi mṛtyo prabrūhi  
 tvam śraddadhānāya mahyam /  
 svargalokā amṛtatvam bhajanta ... //

'In the world of heaven there is no fear at all.  
 You are not there. One does not fear old age.  
 Having crossed both hunger and thirst, gone beyond  
 sorrow, one rejoices in the world of heaven.  
 'You, O Death, know that fire which leads to heaven.  
 Tell it to me, who am resolved [to know]. Those  
 who dwell in heaven share in deathlessness...'

Heaven in this passage is much to be desired.

Naciketas does not mention punarmṛtyu, a further death;  
 for him, to win heaven was also to win freedom from death.  
 There are indeed few references in the Upaniṣads to  
punarmṛtyu, that fear of the Brāhmaṇas. In the Aranyaka  
 portion of the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad there are given means  
 to conquer punarmṛtyu: for example, a milk offering  
 (BAU 1.5.2); an understanding of the cosmic interpretation  
 of the aśvamedha, the horse-sacrifice, and meditation on the  
 world, especially the sun and the fire, as the horse  
 (BAU 1.2.7). But generally in the Upaniṣads the fear of  
samsāra incorporates the old fear of a further death.

Life in the Brahmaloḥa is the reward promised to sacrificers in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.5 & 6. The ascendancy of the god Brahma means that a life in his sphere of influence is more desirable than life in the sphere of any other god. MuU 1.2.5 & 6

5. eṭeṣu yaś carate bhrājamāneṣu yathakālaṃ cāhutayo  
hy ādadāyan /

taṃ nayanty etāḥ sūryasya raśmayo yatra devānāṃ  
patir eko 'dhivāsaḥ //

6 ehy eḥiti taṃ āhutayaḥ suvarcasāḥ sūryasya raśmibhir  
yajamānaṃ vahanti /  
priyāṃ vācam abhivadantyo 'rcayantya eṣa vaḥ  
punyaḥ sukrto brahmalokaḥ //

'Whoever performs works when these [tongues of fire] are shining and makes offerings at the proper time, him these rays of the sun lead to where the one lord of the gods dwells.

'Crying, "Come, come!" the brilliant offerings carry the sacrificer by means of the rays of the sun, honouring him, addressing him with pleasant words [saying]; "This is your good sphere of Brahma, won by your works." '

This passage carries on the tradition of the Saṁhitās and Brāhmaṇas. First of all, the desirable loka after death is attained because the ritual has been correctly performed. In the earlier literature the sacrificer reaches a sukṛtasya lokah; in this passage the Brahmaloḳa is sukṛtaḥ, literally "well-made", but here meaning "won by good sacrificial performances", or indeed, as the Brāhmaṇas state, the loka is "made" by the sacrifices. The first half of MuU 1.2.5 defines how a man may be a sukṛt: it is by the proper performance of the rites. Secondly the sacrificer is led to the Brahmaloḳa by the rays of the sun. The sun is throughout Vedic literature associated with life and heaven; it is both the gateway and the barrier to existence after death. We saw that in ŚPB 1.9.3.10 the rays are regarded as the sukṛtaḥ, the punctilious sacrificers themselves. In this Upaniṣad the rays lead the sacrificer, which suggests that the Brahmaloḳa is probably in the region of the sun, in the region of highest light, svar. It is interesting that it is said that the offerings "carry" the sacrificer. In the Saṁhitās Agni is said to carry the dead man to where he meets the actions, the offerings he performed on earth; in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the sacrificer takes up in heaven a new

body made up of those offerings. The Upaniṣad seems to emphasise rather that the loka is made by the man's offerings, that his works, his karma, create the conditions into which he moves.

As in the Brāhmaṇas knowledge is an alternative means of winning heaven, as in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.3

...ya evam etā mahāsaṃhitā vyākhyātā veda /  
saṃdhiyate prajayā paśubhiḥ / brahmavarcaśenānnādyena  
suvargyena lokena //

'...he who knows these great conjunctions here explained is joined with offspring, with cattle, with pre-eminence in sacred knowledge, with food and with the world of heaven.'

Here theoretical knowledge wins the rewards that the Vedic gods dispensed in return for sacrificial offerings. Knowledge of man's three births, that is his natural birth, a second birth in a son, and a coming to life after death, brings deathlessness in the heavenly world according to AitU 2.6

sa evaṃ vidvān asmāc charīrabhedād ūrdhvam  
utkrāmyāmuṣmin svarge loke sarvān kāmān āptvāmṛtaḥ  
samabhavat ... //

'Knowing this, he rose upwards after the breaking-up of the body and obtaining all his desires in that world of heaven he became free from death.'

To the world of heaven go also the knowers of the syllables of hrdayam (BAU 5.3.1 and ChU 8.3.3). Those who meditate on Indra as life (KauṣU 3.2) and on the person who is in space (KauṣU 4.8) win a similar fate. Again, those who know the secret truth of brahman achieve heaven, Kena 4.9

...apahatya pāpmānam anantē svarge loke 'jyeye  
pratitiṣṭhati ... //

'... striking off the evil [they are] established in the endless, invulnerable<sup>1</sup> world of heaven...'

Death is often the pāpman; in the Brāhmaṇas the gods, being free from death, are apahatapāpmānaḥ, while mortals are anapahatapāpmānaḥ, and this winning of the heavenly world is a conquering of death. So this first solution to the problem of death is that by sacrifice, combined with knowledge, one may win another life in heaven and so in one way conquer death by surviving it. A heavenly world however is not the subject of much discussion in the

1. Reading ajyeye with Renou.



Upaniṣads. They usually accept the law that certain actions effect certain results, that the ritual produces a loka in heaven for the sacrificer, but their concern is to avoid another life, even in heaven. For although some passages, for example Naciketas' description of svargaloka in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad state that there is no death in heaven, yet generally the heavenly existence is considered to be as temporary and transitory as life on earth. In fact, any amṛtatva there is no more absolute than that envisaged for man in the Vedas, that is, a full term of life.

(ii) Cyclic existence

The second theory to deal with the problem of death arose out of the Upaniṣads' ideas about creation, both of man and of the universe. This question is another of their major preoccupations. For example, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.1 & 2 poses the problem and lists various ideas that were presumably current at that time. Suggestions found there that forces such as time or chance were the primary cause of the universe are however not much favoured elsewhere. The idea of creation from one material source which is identified with brahman, that problematical and

and rather mysterious power, appears again and again and remains paramount.

This primary source is named in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad as an ātman, that is a person, an individual, who is the efficient and material cause of the universe, including man. The whole universe is then materially the same; the whole universe is this one individual. This ātman also entered into his creation. Thus to understand, to know the whole of creation, one need know and understand only oneself, but one must know one's whole self. This theory is outlined in BAU 1.4.1-7

- 1 ātmaivedam agra āsīt puruṣavidhaḥ ...
- 3 ... sa haitāvān āsa yathā striṣṭumāṃsau sampariṣvāktau /  
sa imam evātmānaṃ dvedhā 'pātayat / tataḥ patiś ca  
patnī cābhavatām ... tāṃ samabhavat / tato manuṣyā  
ajāyanta //
- 4 ... evam eva yad idaṃ kiṃ ca mithunam ā pipīlikābhyas  
tat sarvaṃ asṛjata //
- 5 so 'ved ahaṃ vāva sṛṣṭir asmy ahaṃ hīdaṃ sarvaṃ  
asṛṣṭi //
- 7 taddhedam tarhy avyākṛtam āsīt / tan nāmarūpābhyām  
eva vyākriyata ... sa eṣa iha praviṣṭa ā nakhāgrebhyaḥ ...  
prāṇann eva prāṇo nāma bhāvati / vadan vāk paśyaṃś

cakṣuḥ śṛṇvañ chrotraṃ manvāno manaḥ ... sa  
 yo 'ta ekaikam upāste na sa veda / akṛtsno  
 hy eṣo 'ta ekaikena bhavati / ātmety evopāsita /  
 atra hy ete sarva ekaṃ bhavanti / tad etat  
 padanīyam asya sarvasya yad ayam ātmā / anena hy  
 etat sarvaṃ veda ... //

'In the beginning this was only an ātman, in the form of a person ... he was as large as a man and woman in close embrace. He caused his body to fall into two parts, and from that came into being a husband and wife ... he united with her, and from that mankind was born ... in this way he emitted all that is in pairs, down to ants. He knew, "I am indeed creation, for I created all this" ... at that time this was undifferentiated; it became differentiated by means of name and form ... he entered here up to the tips of the fingernails .. breathing he is called the breath, speaking the voice, seeing the eye, hearing the ear, thinking the mind ... he who identifies him with any one of these does not know, for he is incomplete with just one of them. One should identify him with

the whole self, for in that all these become one. The self is the footprint of everything here, for through that one knows everything here ...'

This original ātman, identified with brahman, is free from death, and as part of it the individual man is also fundamentally free from death, but his individuality is not eternal, as BAU 1.6.3 says;

... tad etat trayam sad ekam ayam ātmā /  
 ātmo ekaḥ sann etat trayam / tad etad amṛtaṃ  
 satyena channam / prāṇo vā amṛtaṃ / nāmarūpe  
 satyam / tābhyām ayam prāṇas channah //

'... these [name, form and work], being three, are one, this self. This self being one, is these three. This is the deathless covered by the real. Breath is what is deathless, name and form are what is real. By them breath is covered.'

The macrocosm, the universe, and the microcosm, man, have two aspects. They have breath, life, which is unchanging and imperishable, and they have individuality, differentiation, which can perish and change. An individual man is but a differentiation, a manifestation, of the basic,

eternal stuff of the universe. The logical outcome of this theory of creation is Yājñavalkya's answer to his wife Maitreyī when she asks how she may be deathless. He propounds his idea of the unity of all things, that men arise from a great bhūta, being (the primeval ātman), which is vijñānaghana, a mass of knowing, and into it are absorbed at death. There is no consciousness after death, no duality, no individuality, no personal survival, BAU 2.4.12 & 14.

12 ... etebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāny evānuvimaśyati/  
na pretya saṁjñāsti ...//

14 yatra hi dvaitam iva bhavati tad itara itaraṁ  
jighrati ... paśyati ... śṛṇoti .../  
yatra vā asya sarvaṁ ātmaivābhūt tat kena kiṁ  
jighret ... paśyet ... śṛṇuyāt ... yenedaṁ sarvaṁ  
vijānāti taṁ kena vijāniyāt / vijñātāram are kena  
vijāniyād iti //

' "...having arisen from these elements one vanishes away into them. After death there is no consciousness... for where it seems there is duality, there one smells another ... sees another ... hears another ... but where everything has become only the self, by what and whom would one smell ... would one see ... would

one hear ...? by what would one understand that by which one understands all this? By what, my dear, would one know the knower?"

One's own self is the same as the controller in all elements and faculties, a controller who emitted them from himself and then entered into them. That controller is amṛta, and so man is also amṛta, but not as an individual, as BAU 3.7.23 states;

yo retasi tiṣṭhan retaso 'ntaro yaṃ reto na veda  
 yasya retaḥ śarīraṃ yo reto 'ntaro yamayaty eṣa ta  
 ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ // adṛṣṭo draṣṭā 'śrutaḥ śrotā  
 'mato mantā 'vijñāto vijñātā / nānyo 'to 'sti draṣṭā  
 nānyo 'to 'sti śrotā nānyo 'to 'sti mantā nānyo  
 'to 'sti vijñātā / eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ ... //

'He who, established in the semen, is other than the semen, whom the semen does not know, whose body the semen is, who controls the semen from within, he is your self the deathless inner controller. He is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought-of thinker, the unknown knower. There is no other seer than he, no other hearer, no other thinker, no other knower. He is your self, the deathless inner controller...'

The Aitareya Upaniṣad also attributes creation to an original ātman, (AitU 1.1f) while the Chāndogya Upaniṣad traces the universe back to sat, being, which, unmanifest, enters manifest creation. Man is part of this creation, man is this "sat"; he has been manifest from it, and at death he goes back into it, ChU 6.2.1 & 6.8.6-7

2.1 sad eva somyedam agra āsid ekam evādvitīyam ... //

8.6 ...sanmulāḥ somyemāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sadāyatanāḥ  
satpratiṣṭhāḥ ... asya somya puruṣasya prayato vān  
manasi sampadyate manāḥ prāṇe prāṇas tejasi tejaḥ  
parasyāṃ devatāyām //

7 sa ya eṣo 'nimaitad ātmyam idaṃ sarvam / tat satyam /  
sa ātmā / tat tvam asi śvetaketo iti ... //

'In the beginning, my dear, this was only being, single, without a second ... all these creatures have being as their root, being as their dwelling, being as their base ... when a man dies, my dear, his voice is merged in his mind, his mind in breath, his breath in fire, and fire in the supreme divinity. All this has as its self that which is the subtle. That is what is real. That is one's self. You are that, Śvetaketu.'

Again there is no talk of personal, individual survival. The basic stuff of which all the universe, all living things are made, and by which in its subtlest unmanifest form they are animated, is deathless, and as part of it man is deathless too. The idea of the original creative matter, whatever name it is given, emitting individuals and receiving them back at their death, because all are fundamentally the same, occurs several times, for example, TU 3.1.1

... tam hovāca yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante /  
yena jātāni jīvanti / yat prayanty abhisamviśanti/  
tad vijijñāsasva / tad brahmeti...//

'... he said to him, "That from which these beings are produced, by which, once produced, they live, into which they enter when they die; desire to know that. That is brahman...'

This brahman is in this Upaniṣad identified in turn with matter, with breath, with mind, with vijñāna and with bliss, which have already been listed as the successive layers of the individual personality. Probably the thought here is that these constituents of the individual merge into the corresponding constituents of the primeval brahman.



The final constituent, bliss, ānanda, may be taken as the nearest to the real nature of the brahman, and so of the individual person. We see here the tendency of the Upaniṣads to strip away the personality from the self, and thus to accept as the first cause only a pure principle, unaffected by senses and emotions.

In the Praśna Upaniṣad 6.5 the sixteen constituents of the individual, both physical and mental, merge into their source, here designated as the puruṣa, losing all distinction and differentiation. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1 compares beings to the sparks from a fire: they issue forth from the imperishable and return to it.

The theory in its simplest form then is that man is part of a continuous existence, of a universe which all springs from one deathless source and in time returns to that source, to be emitted once more. As part of such a system, man as a whole is ultimately deathless: even his body, when it breaks up, carries on its existence as an element in the universe. There is also probably in man something which shares the nature of the source, indeed is the source. It is untouched by time and death, but since it is universal, it gives no freedom from death to the personality. This material view, with its reminiscences

of the Vedic idea of the parts of a man going into the elements and plants, although logically satisfying and consistent, is emotionally barren and denies man's instinctive belief in personal survival.

The clearest statement of the individual's wish for survival is in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.13

yājñavalkyēti hovāca yatrāsya puruṣasya mṛtasyāgniṃ  
vāg apyēti vātaṃ prāṇas cakṣur ādityaṃ manaś  
candraṃ diśaḥ śrotraṃ pṛthiviṃ śarīram ākāśam  
ātmauśadhīr lomāni vanāspatīn keśā apsu lohitaṃ  
ca retaś ca nidhīyate kvāyaṃ tadā puruṣo bhavatīti..//

' "Yājñavalkya," he said, "when a dead person's voice enters into fire, his breath into the wind, his sight into the sun, his mind into the moon, his hearing into the regions, his bodily frame into the earth, his body into the atmosphere, the hairs of his body into herbs, the hairs of his head into trees, when his blood and semen are placed in water, where then is that person?" '

The questioner, Artabhāga, is clearly not happy with the "absorption" theory. It implies the cessation of the individual personality at death, for all that seems to

constitute the person has been scattered to its equivalent in the universe. And it also does not provide for the promised results of performance of the ritual. In answer to his plea, Yājñavalkya talks of "karma", BAU 3.2.13

... puṇyo vai puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati pāpaḥ pāpeneti...//

'...one becomes full of merit by meritorious action, full of demerit by wrong action.'

At this point Yājñavalkya does not elaborate or explain his utterance, but in another passage he outlines a theory of continuous existence which includes some survival of the individual and explains the creation of the new self and its connection with the individual in this world/life, BAU 4.4.1-4

1 sa yatrāyam ātmābalyaṃ nyetya sammoham iva nyeti /  
athainam ete prāṇā abhisamāyanti / sa etās tejomātrāḥ  
samabhyādādāno hr̥dayam evānvavakrāmati ... //

2 ... tasya haitasya hr̥dayasyāgraṃ pradyotate / tena  
pradyotenaiṣa ātmā niṣkrāmati ... tam utkrāmantam  
prāṇo 'nūtkrāmati / prāṇam anūtkrāmantam sarve  
prāṇā anūtkrāmanti / savijñāno bhavati / savijñānam  
evānvavakrāmati / tam vidyākarmaṇi samanvārabhete  
pūrvaprajñā ca //

3 tad yathā trṇajalāyukā trṇasyāntaṃ gatvānyam  
 ākramam ākramyātmānam upasaṃharati / evam evāyam  
 ātmedaṃ śarīraṃ nihatyāvidyāṃ gamayitvānyam  
 ākramam ākramyātmānam upasaṃharati //

4 tad yathā peśaskārī peśaso mātrām apādāyānyam  
 navataram kalyāṇataram rūpaṃ tanute / evam evāyam  
 ātmedaṃ śarīraṃ nihatyāvidyāṃ gamayitvānyam navataram  
 kalyāṇataram rūpaṃ kurute / pitryaṃ vā gāndharvaṃ vā  
 daivaṃ vā prājāpatyaṃ vā brāhmaṃ vānyeṣāṃ vā bhūtānām //

'When this self becomes weak, becomes as though confused, the breaths [the vital organs] gather round him. He takes those particles of fiery light and descends into the heart ... the point of his heart lights up and by that light the self goes out ... the breath goes out after him as he leaves, and all the senses follow the breath as it goes out. That becomes one which has knowledge. It goes down as something which has knowledge. His comprehension and actions take hold of him, and also his previous experience. 'Just as a caterpillar, when it reaches the end of one blade of grass, gathers itself together to make an approach to another, so this self strikes off this body and gets rid of ignorance, and gathers

itself together for an approach to another.

'Just as a goldsmith takes a piece of gold and shapes from it another, newer and more beautiful form, so this self strikes off this body and gets rid of ignorance, and makes another, newer and more beautiful form, of a pitr, or gandharva, or a god, or Prajāpati or of Brahma or of other beings.'

In the discussion leading up to this passage Yājñavalkya has stressed that brahman, the world source, and the universe, including man, are one in essence. He has also been attempting to define the true nature of brahman and so of the real self of man. He has concluded that the state of that self in deep sleep, where it is merely a knowing subject, unattached to the senses, is its true state. For him then the most desirable fate at death is to attain that state, which is to be absorbed, without consciousness of individuality, in brahman. But he does not deny that the performance of sacrifices and other rites must produce its effect, and thus he describes how the person retains the senses and personality at death, and as an individual takes a new body for life in some heavenly loka.

This passage does not make clear how the new body is made. Yājñavalkya uses two similes: first that of the caterpillar which draws itself together to move to a new blade of grass. This suggests that the individual, the essential self, gathers round itself the senses, the breath and the man's ritual actions, knowledge and general experience, and moves on from one body to another, separate body, whose form and condition are presumably dictated by his karma and knowledge, but whose material is drawn from the material of the universe. This is a body for a life not on earth. The second simile is of the goldsmith re-forming a piece of gold, which would suggest that the new body is merely a re-forming of the old one, using the same materials. This is how Śaṅkara interprets it. But this verse too says that the ātman strikes off the old body. And BAU 4.3.36 also implies an absorption of the physical body into its source;

sa yatrāyam aṇimānaṃ nyeti jarayā vopatapatā  
 vāṇimānaṃ nigacchati ... ayaṃ puruṣa ebhyo 'ṅgebhyaḥ  
 sampramucya punaḥ pratinyāyaṃ pratiyony ādrayati  
 prāṇāyaiva //

'When this person becomes thin, because of old age or disease ... he frees himself from these limbs and

goes quickly back again to his origin, just as he came [from it], for breath [or for life].'

This appears to mean that the individual is not completely merged at death into the primeval creative matter; only his body is absorbed. From that matter he attaches to himself a form appropriate to the intentions and acts of his earthly life, appropriate in fact to his true worldly nature, for, as BAU 4.4.5 says;

...yathākārī yathācārī tathā bhavati ... atho  
khalv āhuḥ / kāmamaya evāyaṃ puruṣa iti / sa  
yathākāmo bhavati tat kratur bhavati / yat kratur  
bhavati tat karma kurute / yat karma kurute tad  
abhisampadyate //

'... as one acts, as one behaves, so one becomes ... some say that a person is made up of his desires. As one desires, so is one's intention; as is one's intention, so are one's acts. One becomes one with whatever acts one performs.'

At this stage the idea of the self as the whole personality and as an experiencing agent is not necessarily deplored. Man comes into being from the primeval source; he sacrifices in the hope of heaven; his physical body

perishes, his mental body, his self, makes, probably from the same source, a new body for heaven whose form is dependent on his earthly actions, which accompany him. Here we have fundamentally the belief of the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas: a man's deeds, especially, if not exclusively, his ritual acts, determine his state after death. The Brāhmaṇas say that the sacrifices become, make up the new body. Yājñavalkya uses a man's actions, not as the material of the new body, but as the influence impelling the assembling of the new body.

A question arises from this theory. If the conception of the universe, including man, being emitted and re-absorbed underlies this theory, as it seems to, we should expect that the person even in heaven will eventually be again absorbed. Can the man's karma attain for him a body which is free from death, and so free from absorption? Can karma attain the amṛtatva of the whole personality? The Ṛg-Veda did not doubt, or at any rate did not discuss, the limitlessness of the stay in heaven; the Brāhmaṇas vaguely envisaged a second death there. Yājñavalkya says that the stay is limited, for the rewards of one's acts are finite. The karma which accompanies the person in the second life can be used up, and then one must



return to another life on earth, BĀU 4.4.6

tad eva saktah saha karmanaiti lingam mano yatra  
niṣaktam asya /

prāpyāntam karmanas tasya yat kiṃ ceha karoty ayam /  
tasmāi lokāt punar aity asmai lokāya karmaṇe //

'The subtle self, together with one's deeds, goes to wherever the mind is attached, being attached to that alone. Reaching the end of whatever acts he did here, he returns from that world to this world for action.'

The liṅga, the subtle self, is the real person, the ātman, together with the breath and the senses, which earlier were said to leave the physical body at its death. The liṅga is accompanied by the man's ritual actions to the loka in desire for which those actions were performed. When these actions are used up, there must be a return to this world, presumably because here alone can the ritual be performed to gain once more a life in heaven.

Several ideas contribute to this theory of a cycle of births and deaths. There is a conviction of the essential unity of all things, which may be the result of meditation and trance, for it is a conviction common to

many mystics of whatever professed religion. Thinkers like Yājñavalkya, as they evolve their theories of the creation of the universe and of man in line with this conviction, envisage a continuous emitting and reabsorbing of individual persons by the basic force and matter of the universe. But such men do not question the validity of the Vedic sacrifice in its own sphere: acts of sacrifice must have a life in heaven as their effect. In order that this can be maintained, the personality must continue into the new life for which it gathers a new body. But the concept that there is a rhythm in the workings of the universe, that life moves cyclically and not in a straight line, determines that life in heaven too must end, and a further new life begin. As from the Saṃhitās onwards life has been seen as requiring a second "birth"<sup>1</sup> and probably involving a second death, a parallelism between the two types of existence, life on earth and life in heaven, is easily accepted.

There is one problem here. I would expect that the liṅga, having experienced all the results of the man's actions, would then be scattered and reabsorbed, and a new

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1. For 3 births of man, cf. AitU 2.1-4.

self, with no causal link with the previous self, be emitted from the universal source. For, if the karma is used up, what can be the causal link? BAU 4.4.6 however implies that the liṅga itself returns to this world, and the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad also states that a man's further birth on earth is determined, even when the fruits of his actions have been consumed, MUU 1.2.10

iṣṭāpūrtaṃ manyamānā variṣṭhaṃ nānyac chreyo  
vedayante pramūḍhāḥ /  
nākasya pṛṣṭhe te sukrte 'nubhūtvā imaṃ lokaṃ  
hīnataraṃ vā viśanti //

'Thinking works of sacrifice and merit the best, they do not know any other good, deluded ones. Having consumed the fruits of their actions in the heights of heaven they re-enter this world, or a worse one.'

Praśna Upaniṣad 5.4 states that he who meditates on the syllables a and u of "om" only, achieves greatness in the world of the moon, and then returns to this world.

There is something then which as it were holds the subtle self together, and prevents its reabsorption into the source of the universe. This something appears to be ignorance or false knowledge, avidyā. He who sacrifices

in hope of heaven, if his performance is accurate, will inevitably win a life in heaven. The man who does not wish for heaven because perhaps he longs for permanency, for true amṛtatva, and sees in life, whether on earth or in heaven, only temporariness and death, and therefore something undesirable, is not subject to the determining influence of his actions, BAU 4.4.22

...etam u haivaite na tarate iti / atah pāpam  
 akaravam iti / atah kalyāṇam akaravam iti / ubhe  
 u haivaīṣa ete tarati / nainaṃ kṛtākṛte tapataḥ //

'... these two thoughts do not overcome him: "For this reason I have done wrong", or "For this reason I have done right." He overcomes them both. What he has done or has not done does not hurt him.'

He is the one who recognises the true nature, the unity of the universe and of himself, BAU 4.4.12 & 13

12 ātmānaṃ ced vijānīyād ayam asmīti puruṣaḥ /  
 kim icchan kasya kāmāya śarīram anusamjvaret //

13 yasyānuvittaḥ pratibuddha ātmāsmiṃ saṃdehye gahane  
 praviṣṭaḥ /

sa viśvakṛt sa hi sarvasya kartā tasya lokaḥ sa u  
 loka eva //

'If a person understands the self, thinking "I am this," wishing for what, desiring what, would he feel distressed about the body?

'Whoever has found and realised the self which has entered into the hiding-place in the body, he is the maker of everything, for he is the maker of all this. His is the world; he is indeed the world himself.'

The determining factor then is one's knowledge.

He who knows the original ātman as fundamentally the same as himself and the whole universe, at death merges into that ātman, which is brahman. He who has not this knowledge continues to act in justified hope of rewards, but is born again and again in heaven and on earth, BAU 4.4.19

...mr̥tyoḥ sa mr̥tyum āpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati //

'...he goes from death to death who sees diversity here.'

True knowledge of the self and the subsequent lack of desire for heaven mean that at death the subtle self as well as the physical body breaks up, MuU 3.2.7

gatāḥ kalāḥ pañcadaśa pratiṣṭhā devāś ca sarve  
 pratidevatāsu /  
 karmāṇi vijñānamayaś ca ātmā pare 'vyaye sarva  
 ekibhavanti //

'The fifteen parts are gone to their supports [the elements]; and all the sense-organs to their corresponding deities. One's actions and the self that consists of knowledge all become one in the supreme unchanging being.'

When the essence of the person, which is the source of the universe, leaves the body, the senses do not follow, BAU 4.4.6

...yo 'kāmo niṣkāma āptakāma ātmakāmo na tasya  
 prāṇa utkrāṃanti / brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti //  
 '...he who is without desires, freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose desire is the self, his senses do not go out [of the body]. Being very brahman, he enters brahman.'

The inferiority of the man who desires and acts and the desirability of mergence in the original ātman is of course implied here, but other versions and elaborations of the rebirth theory stress it more and more, and he who

depends on ritual is pitied or despised, for example,  
BAU 3.8.10

yo vā etad akṣaram gārgy aviditvāsmiṁ loke  
juhoti yajate tapas tapyate bahūni varṣasahasrāny  
antavad evāsyā tad bhavati / yo vā etad akṣaram  
gārgy aviditvāsmāl lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇaḥ ...//  
'He who makes offerings, sacrifices, performs  
austerity for many thousands of years in this  
world without knowing that imperishable, O Gārgī,  
that work of his will have an end. He who leaves  
this world without knowing that imperishable,  
Gārgī, is pitiable.'

and MuU 1.2.7-9

7. plavā hy ete adṛḥhā yajñarūpā aṣṭādaśoktam avaram  
yeṣu karma /  
etac chreyo ye 'bhinandanti mūḍhā jarāmṛtyuṁ te  
punar evāpiyanti //  
8. avidyāyam antare vartamānāḥ svayaṁ dhirāḥ paṇḍitaṁ  
manyamānāḥ /  
janghanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā andhenaiva  
nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ //

9 avidyāyāṃ bahudhā vartamānā vayaṃ kṛtārthā ity  
 abhimanyanti bālāḥ /  
 yat karmino na pravedayanti rāgāt tenāturāḥ  
 kṣīṇalokaś cyavante //

'These boats, the eighteen sacrificial forms, in which there is said to be inferior action, are unsteady. Those who delight in that as the best, deluded return again to old age and death.

'Living in false knowledge, wise to themselves, considering themselves learned, afflicted, they go around deluded, like blind men led by the blind.

'Living in many ways in false knowledge, they think "We have accomplished our aim," the fools. Since the performers of ritual do not understand because of attachment, wretched, their worlds exhausted, they fall down.'

This first statement of the theory of rebirth on earth declares that at the death of the man who sacrifices in hope of heaven, in ignorance of his own true nature, his subtle self, together with his actions, knowledge and previous experience, leaves the body, and takes a second birth in a new body appropriate to its merits, for example



the body of a pitr, or of a gandharva. When the actions are exhausted, the subtle self, presumably impelled by its deficient knowledge, returns to earth for another life and death. The births appear to follow immediately upon the deaths: the transition period between bodies is momentary.

In other statements of a theory of rebirth, however, a rather different process is envisaged. In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 6.2.16 the sacrificers pass into the smoke of the cremation fire, and by stages to the moon, where they are eaten by the gods. What part of the sacrificer it is that moves is not made clear; presumably it is much the same as the subtle self described in BAU 4.4.2f. From there the sacrificers become successively rain, food, semen and a new individual. The only reward is to be eaten by the gods; there is no bright joyful heaven. But there is a close adherence to a natural material cyclic continuity. The individual rises as the smoke of his cremation fire, and after a while comes back to earth as rain. The first theory suggests that the individual, with personality and actions clinging to him, creates new bodies determined by those actions, seemingly from the potential matter with which he cannot yet merge. Here the individual, impelled by his

personality and actions, moves through the natural material cycle of existence of the universe. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad elaborates upon this journey (ChU 5.10.3f), but also stresses the determining power of one's deeds on one's condition on earth, ChU 5.10.7

tad ya iha ramaṇīyacaraṇā abhyāśo ha yat te

ramaṇīyāṃ yoniṃ āpadyeran brāhmaṇayoniṃ

vā kṣatriyayoniṃ vā vaiśyayoniṃ vā / atha ya iha

kapūyacaraṇā abhyāśo ha yat te kapūyāṃ yoniṃ

āpadyerañ śvayoniṃ vā sūkarayoniṃ vā caṇḍālayoniṃ vā //

'Those whose conduct here has been good will quickly enter a good womb, as a Brahmin, a Kṣatriya or a Vaiśya. Those whose conduct has been foul will quickly enter a foul womb, as a dog, or as a hog, or as a Caṇḍāla.'

The contrast with the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.2f is clear: there one's (ritual) acts won enjoyable experiences in a heavenly world, although these had an end involving a return to earth; here one's acts win no heavenly world, but determine one's next birth on earth. Also, for the first time, birth as an animal is specifically threatened. Other passages describe a stay in the moon, involving no obvious

enjoyment, followed by a new birth on earth determined by one's actions. For instance the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad 1.2 says that all go to the moon which feeds upon them during its bright half-month, and causes them to be born again during the dark half. They are sent as rain, and born according to their deeds and their knowledge. The Praśna Upaniṣad 1.9 states that those who depend on sacrifice and ritual win only the world of men. They take the southern path, to the moon, and return again. Yet other passages, stressing how death comes again and again, do not make it clear whether they accept the possibility of a joyful life in heaven, or whether they envisage man suffering existence after existence in various conditions on earth only. For example, the Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.6 states that he who believes this to be the only world, falls again and again into the power of death. His actions, as he desires the things of this world, presumably determine his birth again and again on earth. Kaṭha 4.10 says that whoever sees diversity goes to death after death, and Kaṭha 3.7 talks of saṃsāra, the cycle of existence;

yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty amanaskaḥ sadāśuciḥ /  
na sa tat padam āpnoti saṃsāraṃ cādhighacchati //

'He who does not understand, who is without intellect, always impure, does not reach that state, but comes into the cycle of existence.'

Kaṭha 5.7 states that people are reborn according to their deeds and what they have heard and learnt. There seems to be no interval here, in the moon or anywhere else, between death and the new life on earth. The self moves immediately into an appropriate womb, to be born in the ordinary way.

The Praśna Upaniṣad emphasises that a man's actions determine the loka in which will be his next existence, PU 3.7

athaikayordhva udānaḥ puṇyena puṇyaṃ lokaṃ nayati /  
pāpena pāpam / ubhābhyāṃ eva manuṣyalokam //

'Going up through one of these [arteries], the udāna breath leads, because of meritorious [action] to a sphere of merit, because of wrong [action] to a sphere of demerit, and because of both to the sphere of men.'

The subtle self enters the sphere its thoughts and actions have created, Pu 3.9-10

9 tejo ha vā udānaḥ / tasmād upaśāntatejāḥ / punarbhavam  
indriyair manasi sampadyamānaih //

10 yac cittas tenaiṣa prāṇam āyāti / prāṇas tejasā  
yuktaḥ saḥātmanā yathāsaṅkalpitaṃ lokaṃ nayati //

'Fire is the udāna breath. Therefore he whose fire has gone out, goes to another birth with his senses absorbed in his mind.

'One reaches the breath with whatever are one's thoughts. The breath, joined with the fire, along with the self, leads to the sphere which has been produced.'

Meditation on the "a" of "om" only, according to PU 5.3, brings a man quickly back to earth, and to greatness, mahimānam, and the possession of spiritual qualities like faith, while meditation on "o" (a and u), as we saw above, leads to a period of greatness in the moon followed by another life on earth. Desires, which after all dictate actions, are claimed as the determining factor in rebirth in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.2.2, but the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 5.7 & 11 once more attributes the blame to karma;

7 guṇānvayo yaḥ phalākarmakartā kṛtasya tasyaiva sa

copabhoktā /

sa viśvarūpas triguṇas trivartmā prāṇādhipaḥ

sañcarati svakarmabhiḥ //

11 saṅkalpanasparśanadr̥ṣṭimohair grāsāmbuvr̥ṣṭyā  
 cātmaivivṛddhijanma /  
 karmānugāny anukramena dehī sthāneṣu rūpāny  
 abhisamprapadyate //

'He who has qualities and is the performer of deeds which will bear fruit, is also the experiencer [of the results] of what he has done. This one of all forms, having the three qualities, having three paths, the lord of the senses, moves around according to his own actions.

'Because of errors of intention, sensation and opinion, there are the birth and growth of the self through rain, food and water. The embodied one takes up in succession forms appropriate to its karma in various conditions.'

It is clear that a life in heaven, when it is placed within the samsāra, cannot give amṛtatva, freedom from death. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa promised release from a further death, punarmṛtyu, to the sacrificer, but the Upaniṣads deny this. Dependence on the ritual wins at best only a limited stay in heaven; knowledge ensures a different fate.

For Yājñavalkya in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.2f

ignorance leads to rewards in heaven followed by another life on earth; knowledge means mergence in the world-source, brahman. But in the other cyclic rebirth theory knowledge too leads to rewards. Parallel to the description of the journey of the ritualists to the moon and back to earth as part of the natural cycle is a description of the journey of those who are not concerned with works. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad those who understand the natural cycle of the universe symbolised as five sacrifices move through light to the sun, the moon and the lightning. From there a person who is non-human, amānava, leads them to Brahmā.<sup>1</sup> That is called the devayānaḥ panthā, the path leading to the gods. The devayānaḥ panthā was in the Saṃhitās Agni's way as carrier of offerings to the gods. Here it is the way to a different life with Brahmā. More usually in the Upaniṣads only the word devayāna is used, not the full phrase. Perhaps here there is a deliberate reference to the Saṃhitās, to stress that their ideas are no longer tenable.

Knowledge wins a desirable sphere of existence, just as good actions may, ChU 5.10.10

atha ha ya etān evaṃ pañcāgnīn veda na saha tair

apy ācaran pāpmanā lipyate /

śūdrāḥ pūtaḥ punyaloko bhavati ya evaṃ veda ...//

1. The use of this very rare word, amānava, is perhaps a claim for the total "other-worldliness" of the existence won by this understanding, that is outside the profane universe.

'But he who knows these five fires in this way, even if he associates with such people [various wrongdoers], is not defiled by the wrong. He becomes purified and cleansed, the inhabitant of a sphere of merit, who knows this ...'

It is not said whether this sphere is permanently won.

In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 6.2.15 those who know the doctrine of the five fires move through light and the sphere of the gods to the sun and lightning, (not to the moon) from where a person made of mind, mānasa, leads them to the spheres of brahman. They live there for long periods of time and for them there is no return. "Long periods of time" suggests an ultimate temporariness, which is however contradicted by the statement that there is "no return." These passages are a claim for the superiority of knowledge over ritual, knowledge which brings rewards on the same plane as those expected by the ritualists, not on the metaphysical plane of the monists. There is nothing inconsistent in the claiming of these rewards, for the knowledge cited is not the realisation of the identity of the individual ātman with brahman. The brahmaloka here



attained, although a higher sphere than those of the gods, is yet a sphere in heaven. The statement that from there there is no return is rather an advantage gained over the ritualists than a positive doctrine of complete freedom from samsāra.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.11 does not define the knowledge required, but says that the man who practises faith and tapas in the forest, and who has knowledge, goes through the door of the sun to where is the imperishable person. And MuU 3.2.6 reconciles the paradox of BAU 6.2.15 above by asserting that the dwellers in the brahmalokas are free and deathless at the end of time. Similarly the Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.3.6 gives heavenly life as a result of knowledge.

(iii) The amṛta ātman

On the subject of the fate of the enlightened man after death, the majority of speculation in the Upaniṣads accepts that he is merged into the universe and into brahman, the source of the universe. He attains what is in fact his true state, complete identity with the primeval ātman / brahman. Speculation differs only on descriptions of this state.

The theory which conceives of ātman / brahman as both the universe and its material and efficient cause, states

that after death the whole person is variously absorbed and ceases to exist as a conscious individual (BAU 2.4.12). The Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.6 reabsorbs beings into sat, the unmanifest source, and the individuality given them when sat entered into its creation (ChU 6.3.3) is lost again at this merging. This sat is the great, the infinite; it is deathless; and it is a state free from duality. The Praśna Upaniṣad 4.10 & 11 emphasises how the individual realises himself to be also the universal, and to be merged into everything at death. And MuU 3.2. 4 & 5 also states that those who know their true nature enter into everything, for they are everything. Clearly by this knowledge of brahman / ātman one realises one's freedom from death, one's amṛtatva. BAU 4.4.14 says that they who know the self are deathless, others go only to sorrow. ✓ As part of the creator / creation one shares its deathlessness.

The idea that the whole of man is identical with brahman, since he is part of the universe of which brahman is both material and maker, is however little stressed except in the Brhadāranyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads. Elsewhere the emphasis is on the indwelling unmanifest source, the concept that the core of man is identical with the essential core of the universe. The creator / ātman

enters each part of creation; in the vyakta object there is an avyakta core. In each individual perishable body there is an imperishable force, something of the potential from which the universe evolved. The Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad expresses this within its own theistic framework, ŚvU 4.10

māyāṃ tu prakṛtiṃ vidyān māyīnaṃ tu maheśvaram /  
 tasyāvayavabhūtais tu vyāptaṃ sarvam idaṃ jagat //  
 'Know that prakṛti is māyā, and the Great Lord is the controller of māyā. And all this world is pervaded by beings that are parts of him.'

It is the attempt to define this core satisfactorily, to isolate the true ātman, and to describe its natural state which exercises most the minds of the Upaniṣadic thinkers.

The body and senses are early rejected as inessential. Man experiences action and sensations in dreams when the physical faculties are inactive. The self in its true state is not in the power of the body's actions (BAU 4.4.22), and so the fate of the man who recognises his true self is not determined by his actions. His self is merged into its source (TU 2. 8 & 9). While the self of the man who desires

goes to a heaven and then returns again, accompanied by his faculties and actions, the self of the man who has realised the futility of desires, knowing he is one with brahman / ātman, is merged in brahman, while his senses, and presumably his actions, perish in the discarded body (BAU 4.4.6-7). The individual self and brahman have in this Upaniṣad just been identified with all faculties, emotions and elements, but the nature of the unmanifested essence of all those, and therefore the nature of the real individual self, is obviously not yet clearly determined.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.14.4, in a passage already in the main found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 10.6.3, emphasises that the real self, which is within the heart, encompasses all creation, for it contains the potentiality for all creation. This individual self is brahman and becomes one with brahman at death.

sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ  
 sarvam idam abhyātto 'vāky anādarah /  
 eṣa mā ātmāntar hr̥daye / etad brahma/ etam itaḥ  
 pretyābhisambhavitāsmīti ... //

'That which contains all actions, all desires, all odours, all tastes, which encompasses all this, without speech, indifferent, is my self within the

heart, and that is brahman. Passing away from here I shall reach that ...'

There is here no attempt to describe the state of brahman and the self, but it seems there is no individual consciousness. Although this self is separate from the physical body, it is not a completely independent principle, but consists of the mind and breath and the senses in potential form, ChU 3.14.2

manomayah prāṇasarīro ... sarvakarmā sarvakāmah  
sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ ... //

'Consisting of mind, with breath as its bodily frame ... which contains all actions, all desires, all odours, all tastes ...'

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad also states at one point that the real self is the mind, TU 1.6

sa ya eṣo 'ntarhṛdaya ākāśaḥ / tasminn ayaṃ puruṣo  
manomayah ... //

There is this space within the heart, and in it is this person consisting of mind ...'

But other passages emphasise that the mind, like the other senses, is controlled by the self, for example, BAU 3.7.20 and Kena 1.6. There is a clear metaphor to this effect in Katha 3.3. & 9

3 ātmānaṃ rāthinaṃ viddhi śarīraṃ ratham eva tu /  
 buddhiṃ tu sārathiṃ viddhi manaḥ pragrahaṃ eva ca //  
 9 vijñānasārathir yas tu manaḥpragrahavān naraḥ /  
 so 'dhvanaḥ pāram āpnoti tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ paḍam //

'Know the self as the rider in the chariot, and the bodily frame as the chariot; know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the bridle.

'But the man who has knowledge as his charioteer, and holds the bridle which is his mind, reaches the end of his journey, the highest place of Viṣṇu.'

Here the true self is said to use the body and the mind to attain its purpose, which is presumably full unity with brahman. This indescribable state is compared with the Vedic heaven, the abode of Viṣṇu, a place of light and life. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad talks of the breath and the mind as successive sheaths covering the real self, which are not themselves the real self (TU 2.3 & 2.4). And the Kaṭha Upaniṣad emphasises that the true state of the self is when the senses, including the mind, do not function, Kaṭha 6.10

yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha /  
 buddhiś ca na viceṣṭate tām āhuḥ paramāṃ gatim //

'When the five means of knowledge [the senses] stop, together with the mind, and the intellect is not active, that, they say, is the highest state.'

At this stage then the self is seen as separate from and independent of the body, the breath, and the senses including the mind, but as controlling them. There are means of more clearly understanding its true nature, for the self can function in its natural state even in this world: it does so in sleep and presumably in trance. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad describes two states of the self, the self in the mundane world and the self in a state of sleep or trance, where old age, actions, bodily deformities have no meaning, ChU 8.4.1-2

1. atha ya ātmā sa setur vidhr̥tir eṣāṃ lokānām  
 asambhedāya / naitaṃ setum ahorātre tarato na jarā  
 na mṛtyur na śoko na sukṛtaṃ na duṣkṛtaṃ / sarve  
 pāpmāno 'to nivartante / apahatapāpmā hy eṣa brahmalokaḥ //
2. tasmād vā etaṃ setuṃ tīrtvāndhaḥ sann anandho bhavati //  
 viddhaḥ sann aviddho bhavati / upatāpī sann anupatāpī  
 bhavati / tasmād vā etaṃ setuṃ tīrtvāpi naktam ahar  
 evābhiniṣpadyate / sakṛd vibhāto hy evaiṣa brahmalokaḥ //

'The self is a bridge, a separating-line for keeping these spheres apart. Day and night do not cross that

bridge, nor do old age and death, nor do sorrow, nor meritorious actions, nor wrong actions. All ills turn back from it, for the sphere of brahman has ill dispelled from it.

'Therefore on crossing that bridge the blind man is no longer blind, the injured no longer injured, the sufferer no longer suffers. When one has crossed that bridge, night becomes as day, for that sphere of brahman was made light once for all.'

The brahmaloka is here used metaphorically: what is meant is not literally the highest sphere of heaven, but a desirable state attainable at any time, since it is the natural state of one's real self, ChU 8.3.2

... tad yathāpi hirānyanidhiṃ nihitam akṣetrajñā  
upary upari sañcaranto na vindeyuh / evam evamāḥ  
sarvāḥ prajā aharahar gacchantya etaṃ brahmalokaṃ  
na vindanty anṛtena hi pratyūdhāḥ //

'...just as those who are not familiar with the land, although they walk over and over a hidden store of treasure do not find it, so all these creatures, although they go day after day to the sphere of brahman, yet do not find it, for they are kept away by what is not real.'



This independent functioning of the self and its isolation from the rest of the body are translated into physical terms in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.6.1-6 where the self is said to move into the arteries of the body during sleep. At death it travels up by its rays to the sun, the gateway of the world, an entering for the knowers. Using, probably metaphorically, the familiar symbols of the sun as a barrier to the deathless state and of its rays as bearers of the dead to a heaven, this passage describes the ātman's journey beyond the sun to its true state of timelessness, the permanent state of sat or the primeval ātman. This path is given in more detail in the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, where one ray in the heart leads beyond the heavenly brahmaloka, probably located in the sun, to the parāṃ gatiṃ, the supreme state. Other rays lead to the sphere of the gods, and yet others keep a man wandering in samsāra, MaiU 6.30

...ity atrodāharanti

anantā raśmayas tasya dipavad yaḥ sthito hr̥di //

sitāsītāḥ kadrūṇīlāḥ kapilā mṛdulohitāḥ //

urdhvam ekāḥ sthitas teṣāṃ yo bhittvā sūryamaṇḍalam //

brahmalokam atikramya tena yānti parāṃ gatiṃ //

yad asyānyad raśmiśatam ūrdhvam eva vyavasthitam /  
 tena devanikāyānāṃ svadhāmāni prapadyate //  
 ye naikarūpās cādhistād raśmayo 'sya mṛduprabhāḥ /  
 iha karmopabhogāya taiḥ saṃsarati so 'vaśaḥ //  
 tasmāt sargasvargāpavargahetur bhagavān asāv āditya iti //  
 '...on this subject they quote; "The rays of that one  
 which is established like a lamp in the heart are  
 endless; they are white and black, brown and blue,  
 ruddy and pale red. Men go to the highest state  
 by means of one of them which is placed upwards,  
 having pierced the orb of the sun and gone beyond the  
 sphere of Brahmā. By means of the other hundred rays  
 of it which are positioned above one reaches the various  
 spheres of the groups of gods. By the rays of pale  
 light and many forms which are below, one wanders  
 helplessly here for the experience of the results of  
 one's actions." Therefore that sun, the blessed one,  
 is the cause of emission, heaven and liberation.

This is a localising, materialising of what we should  
 probably prefer as a purely metaphysical concept. The  
 Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad describes the journey of the  
 enlightened individual after death in very physical terms.  
 He passes through the spheres of the gods to the brahmaloka

where there are various points to be passed. Eventually he comes to the river Vijarā, Ageless, where he shakes off his good and evil actions, which pass to his dear and not dear relatives respectively. Then past other symbols he goes, gradually taking on the fragrance, radiance and wisdom of Brahmā, until he reaches Brahmā himself, KauṣU 1.5-7

- 5 ...taṃ brahmā pṛcchati ko 'sīti / taṃ pratibrūyāt //
- 6 ... ākāśād yoneḥ sambhūto bhāryāyai retaḥ / saṃvatsarasya tejo bhūtasya bhūtasyātmā bhūtasya bhūtasya tvam ātmāsi / yas tvam asi so 'ham asmīti / tam āha ko 'ham asmīti / satyam iti brūyāt / kiṃ tad yat satyam iti ... etāvād idaṃ sarvam / idaṃ sarvam asīti ... //
- 7 ... sā yā brahmaṇo jitir yā vyaṣṭis tāṃ jitiṃ jayati tāṃ vyaṣṭim vyaśnute ya evaṃ veda ... //

'...Brahmā asks him, "Who are you?" He should answer, "...From space as the womb I am brought into being as semen for a wife, as fiery light for the year, as the self for every being. You are the self of every being. What you are, that I am." He [Brahmā] says, "Who am I?" "The real," he should say. "What is the real?" ... "It is all this, and you are all this ... "

'...whatever victory is Brahmā's, whatever attainment, that victory he gains, that attainment he achieves, who has this knowledge.'

In spite of the complicated mythologising of the passage, the doctrine is quite clear: those who do not recognise the identity of their own self and the force which creates and is the universe are continuously bound up in a natural cycle of birth and death; but those who do recognise this identity are free, merged in the primeval brahman.

These passages do not really describe the state of the enlightened person after death, nor the true nature of the self, but elsewhere there are glimpses of such descriptions. This state is without the obvious disadvantages of mundane life, and many of its qualities are negative, for example in ChU 8.7.3

.. ya ātmāpahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko  
vijighatso 'pipāsaḥ ... //

'...the self which has the evil dispelled from it, which is free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst ...'

The most important of these freedoms is the freedom from death, amṛtatva. Since the individual self is identical with the creative force of the universe, it is accepted as inevitably not subject to death. In fact, the definition of the self is that part of man which transcends, is unaffected by, ills including death, as in BAU 3.5.1

...eṣa ta ātmā sarvāntaraḥ / katamo yājñavalkya  
 sarvāntaraḥ / yo 'śanāyāpipāse śokaṃ moḥaṃ jarāṃ  
 mṛtyum atyeti ... //

'..."[brahman is] that self of yours which is in  
 all things." "Which one is in all things,  
 Yājñavalkya?" "That which transcends hunger and  
 thirst, sorrow, delusion, old age and death ..." '

The main characteristics of the state of the man who  
 knows this self are given in ŚvU 1.11

jñātvā devaṃ sarvapāśāpahāniḥ kṣīṇaiḥ kleśair  
 janmamṛtyuprahāniḥ /  
 tasyābhidhyānāt tṛtīyaṃ dehabhede viśvaiśvaryaṃ  
 kevala āptakāmaḥ//

'From knowing the god there is a casting off of  
 all fetters; when afflictions are destroyed there  
 is a casting off of birth and death; through  
 meditation on him there is the third state; at the  
 dissolution of the body, complete lordship. As  
 he is one, his desires are fulfilled.'

There is freedom from rebirth, complete independence  
 and liberation. For realising, through Yoga and meditation,  
 the true nature of his own self, he understands the nature

of the creative force, and so all the misconceptions which influence him to think and act as a normal man, and so bind him in a cycle of rebirth, are corrected.. He awakes to the truth of the deathlessness and self-sufficiency of his own self, ŚvU 2.14 & 15

14 yathaiva bimbaṃ mṛdayopalīptaṃ tejomayaṃ bhrājate  
tat sudhautam /

taḍ v ātmatattvaṃ prasamīkṣya dehī ekaṃ kṛtārtho  
bhavate vītaśokaḥ //

15 yadātmatattvena tu brahmatattvaṃ dīpopameneha  
yuktaḥ prapāśyet /

ajaṃ dhruvaṃ sarvatattvair viśuddhaṃ jñātvā devaṃ  
mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ //

'Just as a mirror stained with dust shines brightly when cleaned, so, having seen the nature of the self, the embodied one becomes integrated, his purpose fulfilled, free from sorrow.

'When, by means of the nature of the self, he sees, as though by a lamp, the nature of brahman, integrated, knowing the god who is unborn, steady, free from all tattvas, he is freed from all fetters.'

Only by this knowledge does one gain freedom from death; everything else is bondage (ŚvU 3.8, 3.10, 3.21).

Amṛtatva is full liberation from life as well as death. It is a positive state. In the two Vedas the word is used to describe a metaphorical state in life, a confidence in the possession of godlike qualities and powers, an awareness of timeless eternity, where death has no meaning. Svargaloka in the Brāhmaṇas has similar application: the sacrificer can step outside time and reach svargaloka, share in sacredness, divinity and deathlessness, even while he is alive. In both cases there is a positive experience, almost an emotion, which has nothing to do with merely a prolonged earthly life or a sensual heavenly life, but is near the Upaniṣadic ānanda, bliss. These Vedic and Brāhmaṇic ideas are the forerunners of the amṛtatva of the Upaniṣads, where a need is felt to describe more fully the true state of the self, its state in sleep and trance, and when free after death. It is not devoid of awareness, only of duality. In his search for the true self Indra rejects the self in deep sleep, ChU. 8.11.2.

...nāha khalv ayaṃ bhagava evaṃ sampraty ātmānaṃ  
 jānāty ayaṃ aham asmīti / no evemāni bhūtāni /  
 vināśam evāpīto bhavati / nāham atra bhogyāṃ paśyāmīti //

'...indeed, sir, this one does not know himself, to say "I am this one," not does he know these beings. He has reached annihilation. I see no good in that.'

This is a rejection of the doctrine of complete mergence. Some consciousness is required. The self must be capable of mental experiences, must be a knowing subject, even without an object. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.12.5 states that the self experiences with the mind, the divine eye. The Aitareya Upaniṣad stresses that prajñā underpins everything, that brahman is prajñānam, intelligence, discrimination. Vijñāna, knowingness, is also often used to describe the ātman, for example in BAU 4.3.7

katama ātmēti yo 'yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu hr̥dy  
antarjyotiḥ puruṣaḥ / sa samānaḥ sann ubhau lokāv  
anusañcarati dhyāyatīva lelāyatīva / sa hi svapno  
bhutvemaṃ lokam atikrāmati mṛtyo rūpāni //

' "Which one is the self?" "The one which consists of knowingness among the breaths [the senses], the person who is the light within the heart. That one, remaining the same, moves in the two states. It seems to meditate, it seems to wander about. When asleep, it goes beyond this state, and the forms of death." '



This vijñānamaya ātman is the one who sees dreams, but even in deep sleep, where there is no duality, there is still consciousness, BAU 4.3.23

yad vai tan na paśyati paśyan vai tan na paśyati /  
na hi draṣṭur drṣṭer viparilopo vidyate 'vināśitvāt /  
na tu tad dvitīyam asti tāto 'nyad vibhaktam yat  
paśyēt //

'When he does not see anything [in deep sleep], he is still seeing, although he does not see anything. For there is no destruction of the power of seeing of the seer, since it is indestructible. But there is no second thing, and so there is nothing separate from himself that he could see.'

The self does not perform actions, but it is their spectator, according to ŚvU 6.11; and Kaṭha 1.2.17 describes the self as vipaścin, the wise one. It is the false identification of the self as a performer of action and as an experiencer which binds the person in samsāra, MaiU 3.2

...yo ha khalu vāva śarīra ity uktam sa bhūtātmety  
uktam ... sa vā eṣo 'bhibhūtaḥ prakṛtair guṇair iti /  
ato 'bhibhūtāt tvāt sammūḍhatvam prayātaḥ / sammūḍhatvād  
ātmastham prabhum bhagavantam kārayitāram nāpaśyat /

guṇaughair uhyamānaḥ kaluṣīkṛtaś cāsthiraś cañcalo...  
 cābhimānitvaṃ prayāta iti / ahaṃ so mamedam ity evaṃ  
 manyamāno nibadhnāty ātmanātmānaṃ jāleneva khacaram /  
 kṛtasyānuphalair abhibhūyamānaḥ sadasadyonim āpadyatā  
 iti / avāñcyordhvā vā gatih dvandvair abhibhūyamānaḥ  
 paribhramati ... //

'...he who is said to be the one in the body is called the elemental self ... he is overcome by the qualities of nature. Because he is overcome he becomes confused. Because he is confused he does not see the exalted lord, who impels to action, dwelling within himself. Carried along and defiled by the flood of qualities, unsteady, wavering ... he becomes self-conscious. Thinking, "I am he, this is mine," he binds his self with his self, like a bird in a net. Overcome by the fruits of his action he reaches a good or bad womb so that his course is upward or downward. Overcome by the pairs he wanders about.'

The determining personality and karma that could take one to heaven are here a binding prison, suffocating and fettering the pure self, of which nothing can be predicated. For even this consciousness, this state of the knowing subject,

is not satisfactory as a description of the self. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad makes vijñāna merely the penultimate sheath of the self (TU 2.5.1). The vijñānātman, according to the Praśna Upaniṣad 4.11 is established in the real self, but is not the real self. And the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.2.7, quoted above, merges the individual vijñānamaya ātman in the supreme being, where all individuality is lost. The self in deep sleep is rejected: a fourth state, caturtha or turiya, is the true state of the self, MAU 7

nāntaḥprajñam na bahiḥprajñam nobhayataḥprajñam na  
 prajñānaghanam na prajñam nāprajñam / adṛṣṭam  
 avyavahāryam agrāhyam alakṣaṇam acintyam avyapadeśyam  
 ekātmapratyayasāram prapañcopaśamaḥ śāntaḥ śivam  
 advaitam caturtham manyante / sa ātmā / sa vijñeyah //

'They consider the fourth state as that which is not intelligence directed to internal objects, not intelligence directed to external objects, and not intelligence directed to both; which is not a mass of intelligence, not intelligence and not non-intelligence; as that which cannot be seen, cannot be expressed, cannot be grasped, cannot be defined, cannot be thought of, cannot be named; as that which is the core of the understanding of the one self; which is the cessation of the manifest, phenomenal world; as that which is made tranquil, which is benevolent, without duality. That is the

self. That is what one should know.'

This ātman / brahman is without all qualities, and yet is capable of some description. The self is aware. It is especially aware of ānanda, bliss. This is very probably what is experienced in trance, as the revelation of the unity of all breaks upon the meditator. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad gives as the innermost layer of the individual the self consisting of bliss (TU 2.5); at death this is his form (TU 3.10.5). To describe this state the old ideas of heaven are used, metaphorically, for heaven means joy and happiness. In Kaṭha 3.8 & 9 the Vedic phrase viṣṇoh paramaṃ padam is used to describe this desired state: Viṣṇu's place which is at the top of heaven, the summit of bliss. Svarga is probably a metaphorical expression in BĀU 4.4.8

tad ete ślokā bhavanti //

anṇuḥ panthā vitataḥ purāṇo māṃ spr̥ṣṭo 'nuvitto mayaiva /  
tena dhīrā apiyanti brahmavidāḥ svargaṃ lokam ita

urdhvaṃ vimuktāḥ //

'On this subject there are these verses:

'The narrow ancient path, stretching away, has been touched and discovered by me. By that the wise knowers of Brahman go up to the sphere of heaven, released.'

The Kena Upaniṣad 4.9 uses svargalokā in the same way, to convey the state of those who know the true self. The discovering of the true self, both in oneself and in creation, frees one alike from life as from death, (Kāṭha 3.15) and brings that bliss, here called sukha, Kāṭha 5.12

eko vaśī sarvabhūtāntarātmā ekaṃ rūpaṃ bahudhā yaḥ  
karoti /

tam ātmasthaṃ ye 'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṃ sukhaṃ  
śāśvataṃ netaraṣāṃ //

'The one controller, the inner self of all beings, who makes his one form manifold; those who perceive him as established in their selves, the wise, gain eternal bliss; others do not.'

This happiness is vividly conveyed in TU 3.10

sa ya evaṃvit / asmāl lokāt pretya ... etam  
ānandamayam ātmānam upasaṅkramya / imāṃ lokān  
kāmaṇī kāmarūpy anusaṅgaran / etat sāma gāyann āste /  
hāvu hāvu hāvu ... .. aham asmi prathamajā ṛtāsya /  
pūrvaṃ devebhyo 'mṛtāsya nābhāyi ... aham annam  
annam adantam ādmi / ahaṃ viśvaṃ bhuvanam abhyabhavāṃ /  
suvarṇa jyotiḥ...//

'He who knows this, when he passes away from this state ... reaching that self which consists of bliss,

moves about these spheres, eating what he wishes, taking whatever form he wishes. He sits singing this chant; "O marvellous, O marvellous, O marvellous! ... I am the first-born of the universal order, earlier than the gods, in the navel of deathlessness ... I, who am food, eat the one eating food. I have overcome all that is. [I am] brilliant light."'

This supreme state of happiness is approachable in life, in deep sleep, according to P.U 4.6, and through Yoga, according to Kaṭha 6.10. Or one may achieve it through meditation on the sound "om" as in PU 5.7.

tam omkāreṇaivāyatanenānvēti vidvān yat tac chāntam  
ajaram amṛtam abhayaṃ paraṃ ca //

'The knowing one attains, with only the sound "om" as support, that which is peaceful, unaging, deathless, fearless and supreme.'

The Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 6.23 repeats and elaborates this concept.

All the disturbing influences, the fears and passions, are stilled. The turiya is śānta (MāU 7), for the state of the self is peace, śānti, as well as happiness (SvU 4.11, 4.14, 6.12). The true brahmaloka, the true nature of brahman / ātman is free from fear of death or old age (PU 5.7). Finding

a constant invariable among the impermanency of samsāra,  
a man finds his own tranquillity, and retains it beyond the  
death of his body, Kāṭha 5.13

nityo 'nityānāṃ cetanaś cetanānāṃ eko bahūnāṃ  
yo vidadhāti kāmān /  
tam ātmasthaṃ ye 'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṃ śāntiḥ  
śāśvatī netareṣāṃ //

'The permanent among the impermanent, the intelligent  
among the intelligent, the one among the many, who  
grants their wishes. For the wise who see the one  
who dwells in the self, there is eternal tranquillity,  
but not for any others.'

This is the state of nirvāṇa, the haunting image of the  
fire with its fuel burnt, ŚvU 6.19

niṣkālaṃ niṣkriyaṃ śāntaṃ niravadyaṃ nirañjanam /  
amṛtasya paraṃ setuṃ dagdhendhanam ivānalam //

' [I resort to] the one who is without parts, without  
activity, tranquil, irreproachable, without blemish,  
the highest bridge to deathlessness, like a fire with  
its fuel burnt.'

The realisation of the true state of the self allows

a man to exist in that state, during life and after death. His actions do not affect the man who knows the un-integral nature of his senses, and so his self is freed from his senses as from his actions, and free from the individual cycle of life and death. The unity achieved after death, which is amṛtatva, is merely the realisation of what has always been true, that the essence of the universe and of each man is not subject to death and is aware of bliss and peace. Achieving this realisation and this state, one is detached from saṃsāra, on a completely different plane, as MaiU 6.28 says

...ataḥ sve mahimni tiṣṭhamānaṃ drṣṭvāvṛttacakram iva  
saṃsāracakram ālokayati ...

'...when he sees [the self] existing in its own greatness, he looks at the wheel of existence as at a revolving chariot wheel ...'



Abstract.

The Samhitās deplore death as the inevitable end to an enjoyable existence on earth, and seek the gods' help to postpone it. Complete deathlessness, amṛtatva, is a distinguishing characteristic of the gods, unattainable by contemporary man, for whom amṛtatva describes a full term of life, one hundred years, or a temporary transcendental experience. But the manas and animating asu of man usually survive death, gaining a new material body to join the Fathers in Yama's Kingdom. Attempts to stress the power of the ritual, however, claim that sacrificers will join the gods, or will alone survive death.

The Brāhmanas emphasise the importance of the ritual and show a drawing together of gods and men. The punctilious sacrificer delays death and achieves a full term of life. After death he is reborn in heaven with a new self created by his sacrifices, and, through his earthly actions or knowledge, escapes a second death there. The gods too owe their heavenly state and deathlessness to their proper performance of the ritual.

The Upaniṣads seek to minimise death's hatefulness by giving it an integral part in man's fate. Thus, according to one theory, death is the necessary gateway to heaven,

the reward of the punctilious sacrificer. According to another, man is part of a homogeneous universe, the impersonal deathlessness of which he shares, although he dies as an individual. The merging of these two ideas leads to the concept of a continuous cycle of births and deaths. In order to realise his true freedom from this samsāra, man must understand the identity of the core of the universe, and the core of his own self, and understand their nature, eventually defined as deathlessness and awareness of bliss and tranquillity.