XI

The Ribhush, Artisans of Immortality

Rig Veda I.20

अर्यं देवाय जन्मने स्तोभो विश्वभिरासया ।
आकारि रहस्यात्म: ॥ १ ॥

1. Lo, the affirmation made for the divine Birth with the breath of the mouth by illumined minds, that gives perfectly the bliss;

प्रजन्नं चतुष्णुजा तत्क्ष्णमेनसा हृदि ।
शमीर्ध्वयमात्रत ॥ २ ॥

2. Even they who fashioned by the mind for Indra his two bright steeds that are yoked by Speech, and they enjoy the sacrifice by their accomplishings of the work.

तक्ष्णासत्याभ्यां परिश्रमायं सुर्य रथम् ।
तक्ष्णाय सर्वेष्याम् ॥ ३ ॥

3. They fashioned for the twin lords of the voyage their happy car of the all-pervading movement, they fashioned the fostering cow that yields the sweet milk.

युवाना स्वर्ग घुन: सत्यसत्याः श्रुव्ययः ।
अभन्वो विहुत्त: हृत ॥ ४ ॥

4. O Ribhush, in your pervasion you made young again the Parents, you who seek the straight path and have the Truth in your mentalisings.
5. The raptures of the wine come to you entirely, to you with Indra companioned by the Maruts and with the Kings, the sons of Aditi.

6. And this bowl of Twashtri new and perfected you made again into four.

7. So establish for us the thrice seven ecstasies, each separately by perfect expressings of them.

8. They sustained and held in them, they divided by perfection in their works the sacrificial share of the enjoyment among the Gods.

**COMMENTARY**

The Ribhus, it has been suggested, are rays of the Sun. And it is true that like Varuna, Mitra, Bhaga and Aryaman they are powers of the solar Light, the Truth. But their special character in the Veda is that they are artisans of Immortality. They are represented as human beings who have attained to the condition of godhead by power of knowledge and perfection in their works. Their function is to aid Indra in raising man towards the same state of divine light and bliss which they themselves have earned.
as their own divine privilege. The hymns addressed to them in the
Veda are few and to the first glance exceedingly enigmatical; for
they are full of certain figures and symbols always repeated. But
once the principal clues of the Veda are known, they become on
the contrary exceedingly clear and simple and present a coherent
and interesting idea which sheds a clear light on the Vedic gospel
of immortality.

The Ribhus are powers of the Light who have descended
into Matter and are there born as human faculties aspiring to
become divine and immortal. In this character they are called
children of Sudhanwan,\(^1\) a patronymic which is merely a parable
of their birth from the full capacities of Matter touched by the
luminous energy. But in their real nature they are descended
from this luminous Energy and are sometimes so addressed,
“Offspring of Indra, grandsons of luminous Force.” For Indra,
the divine mind in man, is born out of luminous Force as is Agni
out of pure Force, and from Indra the divine Mind spring the
human aspirations after Immortality.

The names of the three Ribhus are, in the order of their
birth, Ribhu or Ribhukshan, the skilful Knower or the Shaper in
knowledge, Vibhwa or Vibhu, the Pervading, the self-diffusing,
and Vaja, the Plenitude. Their names indicate their special nature
and function, but they are really a trinity, and therefore, although
usually termed the Ribhus, they are also called the Vibhus and
the Vajas. Ribhu, the eldest is the first in man who begins to
shape by his thoughts and works the forms of immortality;
Vibhwa gives pervasiveness to this working; Vaja, the youngest,
supplies the plenitude of the divine light and substance by which
the complete work can be done. These works and formations of
immortality they effect, it is continually repeated, by the force
of Thought, with the mind for field and material; they are done
with power; they are attended by a perfection in the creative and
effective act, \textit{svapasyayā suḥṛtyayā}, which is the condition of the
working out of Immortality. These formations of the artisans of

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\(^1\) “Dhanwan” in this name does not mean “bow” but the solid or desert field of Matter
otherwise typified as the hill or rock out of which the waters and the rays are delivered.
Immortality are, as they are briefly summarised in the hymn before us, the horses of Indra, the car of the Ashwins, the Cow that gives the sweet milk, the youth of the universal Parents, the multiplication into four of the one drinking-bowl of the gods originally fashioned by Twashtri, the Framer of things.

The hymn opens with an indication of its objective. It is an affirmation of the power of the Ribhus made for the divine Birth, made by men whose minds have attained to illumination and possess that energy of the Light from which the Ribhus were born. It is made by the breath of the mouth, the life-power in the world. Its object is to confirm in the human soul the entire delight of the Beatitude, the thrice seven ecstasies of the divine Life.2

This divine Birth is represented by the Ribhus who, once human, have become immortal. By their accomplishings of the work,—the great work of upward human evolution which is the summit of the world-sacrifice,—they have gained in that sacrifice their divine share and privilege along with the divine powers. They are the sublimated human energies of formation and upward progress who assist the gods in the divinising of man. And of all their accomplishings that which is central is the formation of the two brilliant horses of Indra, the horses yoked by speech to their movements, yoked by the Word and fashioned by the mind. For the free movement of the luminous mind, the divine mind in man, is the condition of all other immortalising works.3

The second work of the Ribhus is to fashion the chariot of the Ashwins, lords of the human journey,—the happy movement of the Ananda in man which pervades with its action all his worlds or planes of being, bringing health, youth, strength, wholeness to the physical man, capacity of enjoyment and action to the vital, glad energy of the light to the mental being,—in a word, the force of the pure delight of being in all his members.4

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2 Ayāṁ devāya saṁmane, stomo viprebbhir āsaya; akāri ratnadbātamah.
3 Ya indrāya vacoyuṇā, tatāksur manasā hari; ūmabhīr yajīgam āṣata.
4 Takṣan nāsasyābhāyāṁ, parijmanam sukham ratham.
The third work of the Ribhus is to fashion the cow who gives the sweet milk. It is said elsewhere that this cow has been delivered out of its covering skin,—the veil of Nature’s outward movement and action,—by the Ribhus. The fostering cow herself is she of the universal forms and universal impetus of movement, viśvajñam viśvarūpām, in other words she is the first Radiance, Aditi, the infinite Consciousness of the infinite conscious Being which is the mother of the worlds. That consciousness is brought out by the Ribhus from the veiling movement of Nature and a figure of her is fashioned here in us by them. She is, by the action of the powers of the duality, separated from her offspring, the soul in the lower world; the Ribhus restore it to constant companionship with its infinite mother.5

Another great work of the Ribhus is in the strength of their previous deeds, of the light of Indra, the movement of the Ashwins, the full yield of the fostering Cow to restore youth to the aged Parents of the world, Heaven and Earth. Heaven is the mental consciousness, Earth the physical. These in their union are represented as lying long old and prostrate like fallen sacrificial posts, worn-out and suffering. The Ribhus, it is said, ascend to the house of the Sun where he lives in the unconcealed splendour of his Truth and there slumbering for twelve days afterwards traverse the heaven and the earth, filling them with abundant rain of the streams of Truth, nourishing them, restoring them to youth and vigour.6 They pervade heaven with their workings, they bring divine increase to the mentality;7 they give to it and the physical being a fresh and young and immortal movement.8 For from the home of the Truth they bring with them the perfection of that which is the condition of their work, the movement in the straight path of the Truth and the Truth itself with its absolute effectivity in all the thoughts and words of the mentality. Carrying this power with them in

5 Taṃṣan dhvānum sabardughāṃ. For the other details see R.V. IV.33.4 and 8, 36.4 etc.
6 R.V. IV.33.2, 3, 7; 36.1, 3; I.161.7.
7 R.V. IV.33.1, 2.
8 R.V. V.36.3.
their pervading entry into the lower world, they pour into it the immortal essence.\(^9\)

It is the wine of that immortal essence with its ecstasies which they win by their works and bring with them to man in his sacrifice. And with them come and sit Indra and the Maruts, the divine Mind and its Thought-forces, and the four great Kings, sons of Aditi, children of the Infinite, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, the purity and vastness of the Truth-consciousness, its law of love and light and harmony, its power and aspiration, its pure and happy enjoyment of things.\(^10\)

And there at the sacrifice the gods drink in the fourfold bowl, *camasam caturvayam*, the pourings of the nectar. For Twashtri, the Framer of things, has given man originally only a single bowl, the physical consciousness, the physical body in which to offer the delight of existence to the gods. The Ribhus, powers of luminous knowledge, take it as renewed and perfected by Twashtri’s later workings and build up in him from the material of the four planes three other bodies, vital, mental and the causal or ideal body.\(^11\)

Because they have made this fourfold cup of bliss and enabled him thereby to live on the plane of the Truth-consciousness they are able to establish in the perfected human being the thrice seven ecstasies of the supreme existence poured into the mind, vitality and body. Each of these they can give perfectly by the full expression of its separate absolute ecstasy even in the combination of the whole.\(^12\)

The Ribhus have power to support and contain all these floods of the delight of being in the human consciousness; and they are able to divide it in the perfection of their works among the manifested gods, to each god his sacrificial share. For such perfect division is the whole condition of the effective sacrifice, the perfect work.\(^13\)

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9. Yuvānā pitarā purāṇaḥ, satyamantrā tījyavah; tathāvo viśyakrata.
10. Sam vo madāsa agnata, indreṇa ca marutvataḥ; adityabhū ca rājaḥbhīḥ.
11. Uta tyam camasam nasam, tvāṣṭier devasya niṣketam; akarta caturah puraṇaḥ.
12. Te no ratnāni dhattana, trir asaṣṭāṇi suṇvate; ekam ekam suśiṣṭibhyah.
13. Adhārayanta vahmayo, abhajanta sukrtyayā; bhāgaiREM devesu yaśiṣyam.
Such are the Ribhus and they are called to the human sacrifice to fashion for man the things of immortality even as they fashioned them for themselves. “He becomes full of plenitude and strength for the labour, he becomes a Rishi by power of self-expression, he becomes a hero and a smiter hard to pierce in the battles, he holds in himself increase of bliss and entire energy whom Vaja and Vibhwa, the Ribhus foster. . . . For you are seers and thinkers clear-discerning; as such with this thought of our soul we declare to you our knowledge. Do you in your knowledge moving about our thoughts fashion for us all human enjoyings,—luminous plenitude and fertilising force and supreme felicity. Here issue, here felicity, here a great energy of inspiration fashion for us in your delight. Give to us, O Ribhus, that richly-varied plenitude by which we shall awaken in our consciousness to things beyond ordinary men.”

14 R.V. IV.36.6-9.