The seers of the Vedic period possessed a peculiar awareness of sin and guilt. A brief study of the terms used in the Vedas for sin and evil leads us to discover three basic insight which, like three seeds, may later develop into complete theories. We discover, first, a series of words indicating an external cause for all sorts of violence, harming, hurting, and afflicting. Here the cause of evil comes from the outside; it encroaches upon us and hinders the happy and smooth development of our being. The evil is transcendent. Another set of words seem to denote an internal source. These words speak of anxiety, narrowness lack of expansion, a feeling of imprisonment within oneself. Here the cause is within and seems to be inherent in our own nature. We cannot blame others but only ourselves. We would like to be different and yet we are not. Evil is here immanent. A third set of words, most of them compounds, seem to suggests that evil springs from maladjustment and malfunctioning of a system that otherwise is far from being bad. These words postulate a kind of factual ambivalence in almost any human value, which can turn out to be either negative and mischievous or positive and beneficial. Evil here depends on the direction events and values take, on the use we or others make of the data.

We, thus, realize that sin is here conceived of as more than simply a pollution, and that it would be inappropriate to reduce the Vedic theology of evil to a cosmological theory. The distinction between the cosmic and the ethical should not, however, make of them two separate realities. Man, in fact, is not seen as a cosmic anomaly, but as part and parcel of the total reality. The words used for evil and sin re-inforce the impression that there is a close connection between these two notions. They are two sides of one and the same reality. Sin is not the cause of evil or of traditions that seem to recognize sin as the one single source of evil and put the blame on the free will either of Man or of another being, the sruti seems to find a close relationship between the two, though not a casual one, because they are not considered to be two really different things. It is not sin that is first and foremost responsible for suffering, nor does any kind of human distress lead inevitably to foreign to Vedic thinking, not because the ethical order is ignored but because the really existential order is anthropo-cosmic and, thus, includes both the ethical and the cosmic in one.
When we consider Varuna in the second subsection, we shall see that there is also room for compassion and mercy. One feature that will be noticed immediately is the non-capricious character of the readiness to forgive and the sober character of compassion. There is place for both mercy and compassion, but not as the result of an almighty Will operating outside order or reason. Mercy and compassion have their place in the framework of the universe; they too, we might say, have their own laws. Here the peculiar character of rta and dharma should be taken into account. There is no place for an automatic or mechanical ordering of the universe, or for a mathematical one, or for a certain type of physical determinism, so that miracles must be viewed as exceptions, mercy as a break of justice, or compassion as a sentimental weakness. The situation is different because the pattern of the universe is not physico-mathematical. Mercy can come about only as the fruit of a relationship, but the relationship is not exceptional nor does it militate against existing regulations. It is a part of the overall order of rta. Neither rta in the first period nor karman as it slowly begins to emerge in the pre-Upanisadic period is an automatic, merely mechanical force: both rta and karman are always functional and they function according to a set of relational factors, one of which is the human will along with its sentiments and feelings. Before the three already mentioned subsections we offer a selection consisting of verses mostly from the Rig Veda and covering a wide variety of experiences regarding sin and mercy.

The Vedas employ a term for grace which, unlike later words of common use, implies forgiveness pure and simple. The Gods are requested to forgive Man’s real sins and also his constitutional shortcomings. Man is never worthy of grace from the divine. Mrdika, though occurring only nine times in the Rig Veda, denotes the grace that elevates Man and wipes away all his stains. We have here a forgiveness that comes, unpredictably and undeservedly, from the divine. It would overstep the limits of this anthology to analyse all the passages referred to in the footnotes. Nevertheless, we may remark that this concept rests on a personalistic world view and on an approach to the Gods much more like the approach to an earthly monarch than to a cosmic power. Among these hymns, one prayer to Agni is a religious composition almost around the word mrlika. Each stanza ends on the same theme:

“...with your mercy come to us!” (v.1);
“We mortals invoke you, fiery God, for mercy we are craving” (v. 2);
>Show your grace to us who love your laws” (v. 3);
“At the great contest we cry for your grace, for victory!” (v. 4);
“The priest calls upon mercy” (v.5).

None of the other terms has this implication, Ksama means the patience and forbearance of the Gods with us mortals, and hence comes to mean mercy, compassion. Dayā is mercy that is prompted by a sense of compassion and sympathy. The later words for grace, anugraha and prasada, have altogether different implications:

“As a charioteer, O Varuna, tethers his horses, so with our songs may we bend your heart toward mercy.”

Break the Chains that Bind Us

Varuna scrutinizes Men’s deeds, good and bad alike. His piercing eye sees everything, and he, the all-powerful ruler of the universe who combines justice and mercy, knows how to punish the
recallitant and forgive the penitent. Yet Varuna is by no means compassion and forgiveness. This selection is composed of verses taken from many different hymns and addressed to different deities: the Waters, Varuna, Mother Aditi, Indra, Usas, Savitr, Visvedevāḥ, Rudra, Agni, Sûrya, the Vasus, Soma Brhaspati, Heaven, and Earth. Sin is a stain which the Waters are begged to wash away, a chain which Varuna will break, the infringement of a divine law which merits wrath and destruction (i-iv).

Sin is so interwoven in human life that Men can well foresee their daily weaknesses and implore Varuna in advance not to get angry (iii). We have here a whole range of feelings: awareness of sin, guilt, anguish, fear, repentance, longing for pardon, hope of purification (vi; xiv-xx). Underlying the complexities of the human heart and mind there are always the need for justification, the protestation of innocence and ignorance, the humble recognition of a constitutive weakness, and a sense of solidarity with other Men (v; vii-viii; xii; xiv). And what could be more expressive than the prayer to Soma-Rudra (xiii) which includes everything, bodies and souls, diseases and sins? Rudra, “the God who never slumbers”, is asked to be attentive to our cry, for we sometimes sin out of utter carelessness. Man is asking for forgiveness because to do so belongs to his existential condition. 

i) Whatever sin is found in me, whatever evil I have done, if I have lied or falsely sworn, Waters, remove this stain from me! Rig Veda I, 23, 22.

ii) It is I alone, who against you have sinned many times. You have punished me as a father punishes his gambler son. My offense, O Gods, remove far; then remove far your snares. Do not pounce upon me like a bird swooping down on her offspring. Rig Veda, II, 29, 5.

iii) God ever youthful, whatever sin unwitting we have committed, as men are prone to do, cleanse us, we pray, in the sight of Mother Aditi. Entirely remove, O Agni, our every sin. Rig Veda IV, 12, 4.

iv) If we weak men have sinned against the Gods through thoughtlessness and frailty or through pride, absolve us from this fault, O Savitr, and make us clean from sin before Gods and men. Rig Veda IV, 54, 3.

v) Come near to prove us free from sin, O Surya, Lord of mighty power. Rig Veda VI, 50, 2.

vi) Do not let us suffer for the sin of others or ourselves do the deeds you punish, O Gods. Rig Veda VI, 51, 7.

vii) Soma and Rudra, provide for our bodies all needful medicines. Loosen and withdraw from within us whatever sin we have committed, which still adheres within our persons. Rig Veda VI, 74, 3.

viii) If your true friends has sinned against you, O Varuna, he yet remains your friend, the one you love. Not as sinners, O Living One, may we come before you! Grant protection to him who hymns you, as to a sage! Rig Veda VII, 88, 6.

ix) Today may that great pair, Heaven and Earth, preserve us in peace and happiness, free from evil! May Morning, sending forth her light, drive sin afar! We pray to Agni, now kindled, to bring us joy. Rig Veda X, 35, 3.
x) In whatever way we have sinned with our eyes or our minds or words, awake or asleep, may Soma by his own pure nature cleanse us! *Atharva Veda* VI, 96, 3.

xi) Open yourself, create free space; release the bound one from his bonds! Like a newborn child, freed from the womb, be free to move on every path! *Atharva Veda* VI, 121, 4.

**Evil and Fear**

These hymns come from the inexhaustible *Rig Veda*, but they differ widely except in one respect: all evidence Man’s deep instinct for survival and his heartfelt cry for delivery from doom. In the first hymn Man uplifts his voice before the overwhelming grandeur of the heavens and the earth, their marvelous harmony and beauty, while at the same time he feels his own smallness and contingency. Man’s life here on earth continues to be possible only if the universe in all its complexity runs smoothly. Man prays to be spared the terror of the infinite. The second example is typically ‘religious’, or ritualistic. Here, Man does not face the universe but himself and, discovering his creatureliness and sin, sends up a prayer to Agni, the Lord. In the third hymn the feeling is neither cosmic nor anthropological. It is neither the sublimity of the cosmos nor the depravity of Man which gives rise to these deep and authentic human sentiments, but the experience of personal failure, of one’s own misery and sinfulness. Here, Man does not face himself in an abstract way but is confronted with his own present wretched life which he has failed to master.

The two following hymns are taken from a group of psalms of *the Atharva Veda*, all of them with striking simplicity asking for forgiveness and mercy. After a psalm requesting pardon for the many faults the priests may commit in performing the sacrifice,11 we have the simple prayer of a sinner asking to be cleansed and purified, as butter is cleansed after passing through the strainer. Man is a debtor on earth, for he feels himself to be a debtor to God as well as to his fellowmen.12 All too often, there is fear in Man’s life, but there is also an unlimited confidence that all his shortcomings can be overcome, not so much by looking back to the past as by looking forward toward the future.

We may note that repentance, regarded as an ethical virtue, presupposes certain cosmological assumptions, one of which is a particular relation with time and, more specifically, with the past. Repentance means to break with the past in one way or another in order to come back to the sinless state, to the original starting point to start anew. It is the means to recovery of the lost paradise. Now, to make it possible for Man to recover the sinless state, time (more specifically the past) has to be of such a nature as to permit him to start anew. Perhaps this is one of the reasons as to permit him to start anew. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that explain both the peculiarity of the Vedic conception and the character of the later Vedantic speculation. Leaving the latter aside, we may briefly consider certain traits of the former.

The word ‘repentance’ does not generally mean merely to feel sorrow for an action one has committed; it connotes also to ‘turn back’, to ‘recover’ to start again, to ‘reinstall’, and the like, all of these being operations connected with the past. It is assumed, moreover, that such reversions are meaningful and possible. This conception of repentance is hardly possible, or rather understandable, given the notion of time which has prevailed and still prevails in the Indian subcontinent. According to that notion, what has happened has happened and no power on earth or in heaven can unto what

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has been done. The past cannot be canceled. What Man can do, however, is to handle the future so as to modify it and get rid of the impact of the past; it is still in his power to prevent the actions of the past from conditioning by their repercussions the actions of the present.

The English word ‘rue’, probably connected with the Sanskrit karuna, may convey, perhaps in a less alien manner than ‘repentance’, the meaning of Vedic sorrow for sins committed. ‘Rue’ in a Vedic context does not look back into the past in order to ‘redeem’ it. It looks rather into the future in order to avoid a repetition of the same mistake and also the possible bad results or punishment for the mistake in question. Looking ahead is so deeply built into this world view that later on the idea of rebirth came to have a direct connection with it. The past is neither blotted out nor exempt from the reckoning; it will yield its fruits in the future and it is in view of the menacing future that Man, especially in later times, will feel rueful. Rue then will not expect to abolish the past by regretting it or need the almighty power of God to bring about forgiveness, but will contain a thrust toward the future. Thus the aim of a sacrifice or any expiatory rite is not that of undoing what cannot be undone, but of avoiding the destructive consequences of the past action. The subjective factor is here paramount. An antic structure has been damaged or broken and rue aims at repairing it insofar as its effects in the future are concerned.

The subjective factor here is not repentance or sorrow, that is, the feeling of having done something intrinsically wrong, of having betrayed the confidence of the Gods or broken a human pact; it is rather fear, fear of incurring punishment, fear of having set in motion a negative movement in the world, of having to go on living with a broken piece or a defective element.

The objective factor, however, is also present. A bad action is certainly bad and is to be deprecated, but the very fact that one has done something intrinsically wrong, of having betrayed the confidence of the Gods or broken a human pact; it is rather fear, fear of incurring punishment, fear of having set in motion a negative movement in the world, of having to go on living with a broken piece or a defective element.

The origin of evil is not repentance or sorrow, that is, the feeling of having done something intrinsically wrong, of having betrayed the confidence of the Gods or broken a human pact; it is rather fear, fear of incurring punishment, fear of having set in motion a negative movement in the world, of having to go on living with a broken piece or a defective element.

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The Origin of Evil

If we try to trace the origin of evil in the world, we will find ourselves returning to the origin of the world itself or, in Vedic-Upanisadic terms, to the beginning of duality. The Vedas do not provide a clear myth of a fall of Man or of the origin of evil. We shall see later how Yama does not succumb to the temptation presented to him by Yami and thus becomes, not the first fallen Man, but the first immortal, the first to transcend death. Nevertheless, although it is nowhere explicitly stated that Prajapati’s desire for a second contained within itself the germ of evil and suffering, we cannot escape the fact that dissension and disobedience started precisely with the ‘second’. The Prajapati myth describes not the original Sin, but the originating Fall. Prajapati, being alone and ‘desirous of a second’, dismembered himself in order to produce his own offspring, in order to create. Once the world of multiplicity is there, the struggle begins. It is not the fall of Man or
fall of the creature but the fall of God, if we want to continue to use that idiom. We have seen in the
context of sacrifice\(^1\) that Prajapati ‘corrected’ his initial ‘mistake’ by means of the sacrifice, retrieving
thus his original wholeness. Many texts from the Brähmanas describe this process, as also the constant
struggle between good and evil powers, the devas and the asuras, which takes place at all levels of
divine, cosmic and human life.

One of the numerous accounts of the devasura fight, given in the Brhadâranyaka Upanisad,
provides a further clue to the origin of evil. The asuras are always intent on disturbing any sacred
act and any good intention. The devas, who are the good powers, are mostly weak, unable to resist
the attacks of their opponents. Yet both are the descendants of Prajâpati, Lord of all creatures, and
thus they are not two absolute principles, opposed to each other, but inimical brothers, the one
assuming the role of good, the other of evil.\(^1\) Even in later periods, the most famous enmities and
struggles in Indian myth and history are those that take place among brothers or relatives. The
enemy is not a principle of absolute evil, not something totally external to us, but our own brother, a
part of ourselves. Evil is here neither substantialized nor isolated in an absolute way.

The devas, to continue with our text, want to use the most sacred and powerful means they can
find to overcome their enemies. This weapon is the holy chant, the Udgitha. All the human organs—
divinities—take part in the chant, but they are not sufficiently strong in themselves and as a result
they succumb to the wicked asuras. Thus not only do all the organs perform holy actions, pronounce
holy words, and think pure thoughts, but they also perform evil deeds, speak evil words, and think
evil thoughts. They are subject to duality, being torn between good and evil. No human organ is
totally pure, without a tinge of evil and sin.

The only ‘divinity’ that is not overcome by the powers of evil is the principle of life, the
central life breath, prana, which is frequently identified with the atman.\(^1\) Here again we have the
strong conviction that life itself is invincible, that the Self is untainted and untouched by evil. Only
the external organs, only the nonessential part of reality, and not the very core of life, the atman, can
be overpowered by evil or fall victim to the asuras. Sin affects Man only in his manifestations, not
ultimately in his very Being, unless, of course, he is an atmahan, as the Isa Upanisad says, that is,
one who slays his own Self.\(^2\) Thus, it is only this selfsame core of our existence which will
ultimately overcome evil.

Even when it is overcome, evil is not totally annihilated. In the language of this Upanisad, it is
only expelled or sent to the very ends of the earth (or, historically speaking, to the limits of one’s
own ‘civilized’ world); hence it is dangerous to go beyond certain limits, even geographically,
because one may be affected by evil. Evil and death are encountered at the limit,\(^2\) and any transgression
of the set limits exposes us to their influence. The conquest of evil brings with it the conquest of
death.

1. The offspring of Parajâpati were of two kinds: Gods and demons. Of these the Gods were
the younger and the demons the older. They were disputing the possession of these worlds.
The Gods said: ‘Well, let us overpower the demons at the sacrifice with the Udgitha chant’.

2. They said to speech. ‘Chant for us!’ Chant for us!’ ‘Very well,’ she said. So speech
chanted for them the Udgitha. Whatever delight is in speech, that she chanted for the

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Gods; whatever she speaks well, that is for herself. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us’. They attacked her and pierced her with evil. The evil that makes one speak what is improper, that is that evil.

3. Then they said to the breath: ‘Chant for us!’ ‘Very well’, he said. So the breath chanted for them the Udgitha. Whatever delight there is no breath, that he chanted for the Gods; whatever fragrance he smells, that is for himself. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us’. They attacked him and pierced him with evil. The evil that makes one smell what is improper, that is that evil.

4. Then they said to the eye: ‘Chant for us!’ ‘Very well’, he said. So the eye chanted for them the Udgitha. Whatever delight there is in the eye, that he chanted for the Gods; whatever beautiful he sees, that is for himself. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us’. They attacked him and pierced him with evil. The evil that makes one see what is improper, that is that evil.

5. Then they said to the ear: ‘Chant for us!’ ‘Very well’, he said. So the ear chanted for them the Udgitha. Whatever delight there is in the ear, that he chanted for the Gods; whatever he hears well, that is for himself. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us’. They attacked him and pierced him with evil. The evil that makes one hear what is improper, that is that evil.

6. Then they said to the mind: ‘Chant for us!’ ‘Very well’, he said. So the mind chanted for them the Udgitha. Whatever delight there is in the mind, that he chanted for the Gods; whatever he thinks well, that is for himself. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us.’ They attacked him and pierced him with evil. The evil that makes one think what is improper, that is that evil. Thus they afflicted these divinities with evil; they pierced them with evil.

7. Then they said to the Life Breath in the mouth: ‘Chant for us!’ ‘Very well’, he said. So the Breath chanted for them. The demons knew: ‘By this singer they will overpower us’. They attacked him and wanted to pierce him with evil. But just as a lump of earth is scattered when it strikes on a stone, in the same way they were scattered in all directions and perished. Therefore the Gods increased and the demons diminished. He who knows this increases in himself and his enemies diminish.

8. Then they said: ‘What has become of him who thus took care of us? He is within the mouth; he is called Ayāsya Angirasa, for he is ‘the essence of the limbs’.

9. Assuredly, the name of this divinity is Dūr, for death remains far from him. From him who knows this, death is far off.

10. Moreover, this divinity, having warded off evil and death from those other divinities, made them go to the farthest limits of the four regions; there he placed the evils. Therefore one should not go to those people; one should not go to those limits, lest one go to evil and death.

11. As that divinity had warded off evil and death from those other divinities, it led them beyond death.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad I 3, 1-11.

October, 2000
Heaven and Earth Deliver Us from Evil

Heaven and Earth, from a pair indissolubly linked. In not a single hymn of the Rig Veda is Heaven mentioned alone, while Earth is addressed alone only in one short hymn. Another hymn says explicitly that Heaven was created from the head and Earth from the feet of the pursusa. Here the question of the first stanza seems to be somewhat rhetorical, for the poet does not go on the answer the query how, but states that between them Heaven and Earth support all other beings and that their tension is relational so that the one cannot be without the other. There is no earth without a heaven and heaven would be devoid of meaning if it were not populated by the dwellers on earth. Heaven and Earth encompass human life and even the life of the Gods. They are the parents of Men and Gods alike. We are all embarked on the same adventure. It would be misleading to speak of ‘nature-mysticism’ in this connection. This hymn is describing rather the all-encompassing reality that shelters the divine-human drama. It is precisely the awareness of this reality which evokes on the lips of the poet and in the heart of his hearers an urgent cry for deliverance from the horrors and evils of the cosmos. This prayer for protection is addressed, not to another power mightier than the one that threatens, but to the power that, like a mother whose child runs back to her after a scolding, both menaces and shelters us.

Which of these two came earlier, which came later?
How did they come to birth? Who, O Seers, can discern it?
They contain within them all that has a name,
while days and nights revolve as on a wheel. Rig Veda I, 185.

Burn Away Our Sin!

In this heartfelt prayer, the human, divine and cosmic elements are all present. Agni is the material fire, but he is also God and the fire within us. He shines in all directions, purifying all he touches; he kindles our own interior fire and imparts to all fires their power and strength. He illumines us and thus rescues us from darkness.

This hymn affirms clearly that there is a fire that has power to burn away all impurities and sins. Unlike other creatures, Man has the privilege and the responsibility of praying for the cleansing of his stains; or, to express it in stronger and more appropriate terms, for the cauterising of his evil. The message of this psalms is that such and operation is still possible and needful: Agni may still burn away our sin.

1. Shine brightly, Agni, and chase away our sin; beam down upon us grace. May the Lord burn away our sin!
2. Rescue us safely, as in a boat, across the stream, from dark to light. May the Lord burn away our sin!

Lament of a Rueful Gambler

Among the hymns of the Rig Veda the lament of the unlucky gambler is certainly one of the most vivid and realistic. It is a dialogue of the gambler with his conscience (represented by two ‘witnesses’, the poet himself and the God Savitr) when passion for the gaming board has destroyed his happiness.
The first verses describe in a graphic fashion how, carried away by the lure of the dice, he has been the downfall of his family. He would like to renounce gambling but is incapable of doing so (v. 5). The irresistible attraction of the fatal dice is described both realistically and poetically (vv. 7, 9). Once again he is overwhelmed by remorse and by the misery of being gripped so inextricably by his craving. Suddenly, however, he makes a decision to start a new life, to abandon the dice board, make his wife happy, and cultivate his fields. It is the God Savitr who bids him rebuild his life and who encourages and inspires him to the task.

The Indian reader will here remember one of the climaxes of the Mahābhārata. Yudhisthira, the living symbol of righteousness, the embodiment of dharma, the real hero of the whole epic, had a weakness for dice. He fell under their spell, and in the presence of King Dhrūtarāstra and all the Pândavas as well as of Duryodhana and all his retinue, played and gambled away all that he had, he himself and even Draupadi, the virtuous wife of all the five brothers. Having regained all that he had lost because of the presence of mind of Draupadi, who challenged the validity of Yudhisthira’s wagering her, when he had already lost his own freedom, he yet returned to the fatidic game and lost. As a result he and his brothers were forced to spend the famous twelve years in the forest and a thirteenth year in hiding before the great battle. Against this background the hymn surpasses its moral character and attains epic grandeur. The greatest Man is not perfect and yet his weakness reveals the power of dharma the more forcefully.

1. These nuts that once tossed on tall trees in the wind but now smartly roll over the board, how I love them! As aturing as a draught of Soma on the mountain, the lively dice have captured my heart. Rig Veda, X, 34.

2. Grant us your friendship, have mercy upon us! Do not overwhelm us with your fierce attach May your anger and evil intention be assuaged! Let the brown dice proceed to ensnare another!

Cleanse Me from My Sins

In this prayer addressed to all the Gods, the psalmist prays that he may be set free from all possible sins, committed willingly or unwillingly, in the waking state or asleep, in the past or in the future. The comparisons that the poet uses here remind us of different sacrificial acts. He feels that his guilty conscience ties him to a state of sin just as a victim is tied to the sacrificial stake, and he begs for release from sin in the same way as a victim is freed from the stake. Again, he wants to be completely pure from the defilement of guilt as a man who is pure after a cleansing bath, or to be as transparent and free from impurities as sacrificial butter that has been carefully strained.

These comparisons are just faint expressions of a deep and strong yearning to get rid for all time of all guilt, wickednesses, and impurities—to be wholly purified. However, this yearning can never be fulfilled once and for all, and the poet, knowing human frailty only too well, prays in advance to be set free from future sin.

1. And sin we have committed, consciously or unconsciously, deliver us from it, O Gods one and all!

2. From whatever sin I, a sinner, committed awake or asleep, may both past and future set me free, as if from a stake to which I was fastened!

October, 2000
Forgive Us Our Debts

This hymn is addressed to Agni who, like Varuna, unlooses ‘other world’. Whether it is the prayer of a man who in old age thinks of his imminent departure to the beyond and who wants to be cleared from any debt to Yama and to the Gods, or whether it is simply the routine prayer of a man engaged in the daily sacrifice, the same sentiment is apparent: ‘Man, so soon as he is born, is to be regarded, his whole person, as a debt owed to death.’ It is through sacrifice that he purchases himself back from death. Throughout his lifetime he is preoccupied with freeing himself from his existential debt to his fellowmen, to the sages, to the ancestors, and to the Gods who form a link between this world and the other. Furthermore, there are precise regulations regarding the special offering due to Yama. One hymn of the Atharva Veda says that when the deceased reaches Yama’s realm he has to pay one sixteenth of his ‘wish-fulfilling sacrifices’ but that he may discharged this debt in advance in his earthly life by offering a ram in sacrifice.

1. The food that I eat and the debt that I owe and my offering to Yama which ever sustains me—O Agni, make me free from these debts, you who know how to loosen all bonds. Atharva Veda IV, 117.

2. Standing before you, we restore this gift. I restore it, O Agni, the grain I have eaten, the living for the living, so that I may become free from guilt and debt.

3. Free from guilt and debt, in this world and the higher, free from guilt and debt in the third world also; in the world of the Gods and in those of the Fathers, on all our paths, may we ever remain free from guilt and debt!

Free Us from Our Creditors

Gambling, as is well recognized, was one of the favorite pastimes of Vedic Man. As we have already seen, this pastime led to the ruin of the gambler and of his family and aroused in him strong remorse for the money wasted, the life spoiled, and he debts contracted. The preset hymn, another supplication of a remorseful gambler, begs for forgiveness for cheating at the gaming table. As in the preceding psalm the man who utters the prayer may or may not be on the point of death. He is worried at the thought that the man he has wronged may get him tied up in the land of Yama; that is, he may have to pay there a heavy debt for his cheating. This prayer which is addressed, it seems, to two Apsarases (who like Varuna scrutinize Men’s deeds) and to all the Gods, expresses sincere regret and the fear of well-deserved punishment. It is a cry for mercy and compassion. 1. For the various ways we have sinned with our hands, desiring to possess the reward of the dice, forgive us this day our guilt and our debt you frightening and all-conquering spirits. (Atharva Veda, VI, 118). 2. Forgive the transgressions we committed while gambling, you terrifying ones, who scrutinize men. May we not be compelled to pay the debt in the world of Yama, tied with a rope! 3. Let not my creditor or his wife whom I approach or the man to whom I go begging, O Gods, raise their voices against me overwhelmingly, O you divine spirits, companions of the Gods!

The Rigveda is the most developed expression in Vedic literature of the concept of righteousness, so that Samhita contains the most elevated expression of the sense of sin and the desire to be set free from it. Varuna is the god to whom the sinner addresses himself, as Varuna is the god who is omniscient, and who of himself or by his spies knows the thoughts of men. In the hymn VII. lxxxvi,
the poet with unusual earnestness asserts his anxiety to be at peace with Varuna, of whose anger with him he is convinced by the testimony of his friends. He assures the god that the sin which he has committed, whether his own or inherited from his father, is not deliberate; heedlessness, drunkenness, dicing, passion and thoughtlessness are pleaded as excuses; even sleep may produce wrong-doing, and the older may be involved in the sin of the younger. The god is, therefore, invoked to set free the sinner from his bounds, as the calf is released from the rope which fetters it. The hymn itself does not reveal the cause of the poet’s appeal, and it is most probable that the sense of sin must be considered to have been brought home to him by disease, as is admitted freely in the later hymn VII. lxxxix., but even on this assumption the hymn is not without moral value. It confesses sin, even if it seeks to explain it; it assumes the justice of the divine anger, which it seeks to remove by supplication, probably accompanied by offering, though the hymn does not expressly say so.

Besides this comparatively elevated conception of sin as an offence against the divine majesty there appears, freely enough in the Rigveda and predominantly in the Atharvaveda, the more primitive conception of sin as a pollution which can be removed by physical means. It is not difficult to trace remains of this earlier view in the hymns to Varuna from VII. lxxxix. It is plain that the sinner was afflicted by dropsy and the watery nature of the disease can hardly have failed to suggest connexion with Varuna, who is even in the Rigveda closely connected with the waters. Nor is it unlikely that Varuna’s power to loosen the bonds of sin is derived ultimately from the cleansing power of the waters. Agni is also asked to loosen the bonds of the sinner, for fire by itself is potent to destroy by burning evil. In place of the more complicated conception of fetters imposed by a god, the sin itself is regarded as the fetter.

The same conception of sin as a kind of disease is implicit in the view of inherited sin or sin which comes from contagion. Sin can be obtained not merely from the father, but from the mother and other close kindred. In other cases the kinship of sin to a pollution is more evident: “the black bird, the harbinger of Nirrti, the goddess of misfortune, by its excrement creates guilt on the person affected; the wailing of the women in the house of the dead creates a pollution on the kin; the lowing of the victim at the sacrifice lays on the sacrifice the burden of a sin which he must expiate”. Even the sins of other men may pass over to a guiltless man, and in this category perhaps, must be reckoned the mysterious sins caused by the gods which appear in the Yajurveda. Sin, therefore, it is legitimate to suppose, was to the Vedic Indian primarily the actual pollution of disease present in his body, and only by a gradual process of moral development was the disease interpreted as the punishment inflicted for an act, or thought, or word, displeasing to gods who exacted obedience to moral laws.

REFERENCES

1. Atharva Veda I, 25, 3; VII, 112, 2; VIII, 7, 3.
2. Rig Veda I, 17, 1; I, 36, 12; I, 94, 12; I, 114, 2; 9; II, 27, 14 II, 33, 11; 14 (II 29); IV, 43, 2; VII, 93, 7; VIII, 48, 9 (III 17); X, 25, 3; X 34, 14 (IV 12); X, 64, 1-2.
3. Rig Veda I, 25, 3; 5 (I 26); IV, 1, 3, 5; VI, 33, 5; VI, 48, 12; VI, 50, 1; VII, 86, 2 (IV 18); VIII, 48 12 (III 17); X, 150, 1-5 (quoted here).
4. The root mrd, Rig-Vedic mrd- means first of all to forgive, and then to be merciful, gracious, to bestow favour (cf. IV 19).

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5. **Rig Veda**, X, 150 to Agni, *mṛlika* is also the name of the ṛsi of this hymn.


7. For practical reasons we have arranged the verses according to the books of the Rig Veda to which they belong though we could equally well have arranged them according to the different Gods they address, or according to the kinds of feelings they express.


9. **Rig Veda**, X, 37, 12 (II 1).

10. We could equally well have quoted from the Atharva Veda prayers for obtaining pardon (Atharva Veda VI, 51; VI, 96) and for freedom from sin (Atharva Veda VI, 97, 2; VI, 121; VII, 77, 3; VII, 83; VII, 89, 3; VII, 112, 2).


13. Rue comes from the Old English *hreow*, compassion (cf. also Old Norse *hryggja*, *hryggva*, distress, grief) *Karunā*, neuter comes from the root *kr-* (*krnoti*), with the morning of sacred work, holy action (the Rig Veda, I, 100, 7).

14. *The Atharva Veda*, I, 10, a rite by which a sinner who has offended Varuna is forgiven. Cf. *Sātpatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIII, 5, 4, 1, the performance of the horse sacrifice for expiatory reasons.


18. *The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad*, I, 3, 7 (in this chapter), where the word used for ‘enemy’ means at the same time the cousin-brother *bhrāṭvy*.

19. For *prāṇa* cf. II 6.


The Vedic Civilization was the culture and traditions of the society prevalent during the Vedic age (1500-600 BCE). In various examinations which have a section of general studies, often ask a question or two about the Vedic civilization. This chapter of the history study material & notes is meant to cover the essential and exam-worthy details of the ancient Vedic period. Typically, the age of Aryans is known as the Vedic age because the four major Vedas were created in this time. The word Aryan is derived from the Sanskrit word आर्य which means noble, not ordinary. Four major Vedas constitute the vedic literature. They are ऋग ऋ, यजुर ऋ, साम ऋ, and अथर्व ऋ. ऋग ऋ “Earliest veda. Quotes tagged as "awareness-of-guilt" Showing 1-3 of 3. Very harmful effects can follow accepting the philosophy which denies personal guilt or sin and thereby makes everyone nice. By denying sin, the nice people make a cure impossible. Sin is most serious, and the tragedy is deepened by the denial that we are sinners. The really unforgiveable sin is the denial of sin, because, by its nature, there is now nothing to be forgiven. By refusing to admit to personal guilt, the nice people are made into scandalmongers, gossips, talebearers, and supercritics, for they must project their rea. Introduction to Vedic Literature in Sanskrit- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Art and Consciousness in Light of Maharishi Vedic Science. Maharishi Achievements. Lectures of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. This is the subject matter of his first book, Human Physiology: Expression of Veda and the Vedic Literature. This discovery has been appreciated by scientists and political leaders throughout the world. Its practical application has been documented by original research conducted by medical doctors and scientists, which demonstrates the effectiveness of Vedic Sounds and Vedic Vibrations for the treatment of chronic disorders.