

Food and Immortality in the Veda: A Gastronomic Theology?¹

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0 It is well known from the work of Wilhelm Rau that the opposition of eater (*atṛ*) and eaten (*adya*) is used by the Vedic poets as a conceptual frame to articulate social ideology.² As Ś.B 13.29.8 and numerous other passages put it: the brahmins and the *kṣatriya*-s unite to ‘eat’ the people (*viś*). Life and society are understood by the Vedic poets in terms of the basic struggle of acquiring food. Food itself becomes the most basic conceptual tool by which the functioning of the human being, human society and the cosmos are understood.

Food as a conceptual tool may be seen in its most basic form in the statement of Taittirīya Upaniṣad (TU) 3.10, which identifies food (*annam*) as *prathamajā ṛtasya* “the first born of *ṛta*.” That *annam* is conceived as more than just everyday, edible goods is clear from the fact that food is personified as the first born progeny of the most important abstract power in the Veda, namely, *ṛta*, “the active power of truth,” which underlies all cosmic, divine and human action. In this passage, food is placed at the center of the eschatological vision of Vedic culture. Immortality, an unending existence in the next world, is articulated in terms of food.

This paper begins to explore the role of food, as a general category, in the expression of concepts and ideas that form part of the eschatological vision of Vedic religion. The focus of this paper will be to show that key eschatological concepts - the notion of immortality (*amṛta*),³ the vision of heaven, and its opposite (*nirṛti*) - are construed within a ‘nutritionally fixated’ worldview; a worldview that at every turn construes ideas, concepts, and processes (both cosmic and human) from the point of view nutritional necessity. This does not mean, of course, that this is the only worldview present in the Vedic texts; rather this gastronomic worldview is one that can be pieced together from various hints and suggestions that are scattered throughout the corpus of Vedic literature.

1 As an important aside, it should be noted that the usage of the formula, X is the first born of *ṛta*, may provide a better understanding of the nature of abstract concepts such as *śraddhā* (confident intention on the efficacy of ritual), *tapas* (ascetic heat), *vāc* (speech), *satya* (truth), etc. Although this formula is theoretically open to an infinite number of permutations, it is interesting to note that there is, in fact, only a limited number of variations of this formula found in the texts. Only a handful of concepts are identified as *prathamajā ṛtasya*. Furthermore, these concepts generally tend to be abstract, impersonal forces such as *annam*, *śraddhā* and *apāṇi yonir* (the womb of the waters); or concepts that are understood as first principles, required for cosmogonic activity and continued development and sustenance of the cosmos, such as *agni*, *prajāpati*, *brahman* (and *brahmā*).

The locution *prathamajā ṛtasya* “first born of *ṛta*” provides the starting place for the exploration of the conceptual understanding of food as an analogue for articulating other ideas. Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.10 provides a snapshot into the unique Vedic understanding and fixation with food.

hāṣvu hāṣvu hāṣvu
aham annam, aham annam, aham annam
aham annādoṣ, ‘ham annādoṣ, ‘ham annādaḥ
ahaṁ ślokakṛd, ahaṁ ślokakṛd, ahaṁ ślokakṛt
aham asmi prathamajā ṛtāṣya
pūrvaṁ devebhyo ‘mṛtasya nāṣbhāyi
yo mā dadāti sa id eva māṣvāḥ
aham annam annam adanta māṣdmi
ahaṁ viśvaṁ bhuvanam abhyabhavāṣm

¹ The present version of the paper has been slightly edited since its original publication in email format in 1997.

² W. Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien*. Wiesbaden 1957.

³ On the concept of immortality, see Patrick Olivelle “Amṛta: Women and Indian Technologies of Immortality,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 25: 427-49.

suvarna jyotīḥ.

Ha u! Ha u! Ha u!
 I am Food, I am Food, I am Food.
 I eat food, I eat food, I eat food.
 I am a fame-maker! I am a fame-maker! I am a fame-maker!
 I am the first born of Truth,
 born before the gods
 in the navel of what is immortal.
 The one who gives me
 he, indeed, has aided me.
 I am food.
 I eat him who eats the food.
 I have conquered the whole universe.
 I am like the light in the firmament.⁴

In this passage, there is no reference to food as particular item such as a rice-dish or cake, but rather food, *annam*, is presented in the guise of a human being. Food is hypostatized. It is being given human qualities. It is an 'I', a self-referent entity as well as something that was born.

The personification⁵ of *annam* as the first-born suggests that there is something more to food than just simply being an edible substance. As one can see from this passage, and the preceding ones in this upaniṣad, food is conceived as being part of the entire cosmic and human process. Food is understood as the immortality-granting agent because of its primary, filial relationship to *ṛta*. The first born of *ṛta* existed before the gods and before creation. It is the prerequisite not only for the living cosmos but also for heavenly life. Food stands at the beginning of all, and it is essential for all existence (even that of the gods). Transactions of food are conceived as transactions of immortality; it is by means of food that immortality (in heaven) is achieved. Food is a code substance⁶ used to articulate ideas about immortality and the after world.

The image of food being at the navel of immortality immediately brings to mind the later image of Viṣṇu lying on the serpent Śeṣa (the remnant), on the cosmic ocean. Brahmā, the creator, is born from the navel of Viṣṇu. Like *ṛta*, Viṣṇu is 'undying' as he (and Śeṣa, which is understood to be Viṣṇu as well) remains 'alive' in between *yuga-s* and from him the cosmos is once again reborn through the agency of Brahmā. The same idea seems to have been already expressed in TU 3.10: *ṛta*, the source of everything, 'grants' immortality through the agency of *annam*, food.

The connection of immortality (*amṛta*) and food is found in many passages throughout the Veda. Kāṭhaka-brāhmaṇa-saṃkalana 7 explicitly equates the two:

átho annádyam vá amṛtam / amṛtam evásmiṃs tád dadhāti

Moreover, indeed, immortality is proper food / Into him (the student), he puts that which is immortal.

In the context of the initiation ceremony (*upanayana*), the guru instills his student with the essence of immortality, which is clearly understood to be food.

⁴ Patrick Olivelle, *The Upaniṣads*. World's Classics Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1996.

⁵ An example of this well known literary device is found in Jewish Apocryphal literature's personification of Wisdom in the Song of Solomon and Letters of Aristeas, where Wisdom is in the position of teaching the king. Wisdom as a concept or idea is said to have been present at the beginning of time, at the time of creation, according some interpretations.

⁶ Following McKim Marriott's terminology.

2 The concept of immortality in the Veda is not expressed exclusively by the term *amṛta*. *amṛta* is one among several concepts in the Vedic texts that express the idea of immortality in heaven as a permanent existence in the best of all possible worlds. ṚV 9.113.10 expresses this sense most clearly:

yātra kāmā nikāmās ca yātra bradhnāsya viṣṭāpam /
svadhā ca yātra tṛptis ca tātra mām amṛtaṃ kṛdhīndrāyendo pari srava //

Where wish and inclinations [are fulfilled], where the zenith of the sun [is found],
where food of the spirits and satisfaction/fill [is found], there make me immortal.
(following Geldner)

The place where one will not die is called by different names. ṚV 10.14.8 states that it is in the highest heaven (*paramṇ vyóman*) as well as the place where the Ancestors and Yama are located, which is called home (*astam*). Immortality is equated with a permanent stay in yonder world (*amuṣmin loke*) where one does not die.

There are several substances, which result from ritual, that play a significant role in determining the length of the one's stay in yonder world. TS 1.7.3.4 speaks about yonder world as a place where it is hoped that food would be imperishable.

kṣīyate vā amúṣmiṃ loké ‘nnaṃ, itāḥ-pradānaṃ hy àmúṣmiṃ loké prajā upajīvanti,
yād evām abhimṛśāty ákṣitim evāinad gamayati nāsyaāmúṣmiṃ loké ‘nnaṃ kṣīyate

Food perishes in yonder world, for given hence in yonder world people live upon it; in
that he touches thus, he makes it imperishable; his food perishes not in yonder world.
(Keith)

This passage shows that food, here the word *annam*, and its availability in yonder world is an issue of great concern for the Vedic poets. From this passage, there is little doubt that life in the “yonder world” is dependent on food. The implication is that without food, and in this case, imperishable food, *amṛta*, un-death, in heaven is not possible.

Heaven (*svarga*) is also understood to be supported by food. Furthermore, one who cooks a particular rice-dish assures his stays with Yama. AV 4.34.3, 5, 8 informs us that having cooked the *viṣṭārīn* rice-dish, one stays with the gods; one enters heaven.

viṣṭārīṇam odanāṃ yé pácanti nāinān ávartīḥ sacate kadā canā /
āste yamā úpa yāti devānt sām gandharvāir madate somyēbhiḥ //3//

eśā yajñānām vítato váhiṣṭho viṣṭārīṇam paktvá dívam á viveśa /
añḍīkaṃ kúmudaṃ sām tanoti bīsaṃ sālúkaṃ śáphako mulālī /
etās tvā dhāra úpa yantu sárvaḥ svargé loké mádhumat pínvamānā
úp tvā tiṣṭhantu puṣkarīṇīḥ sāmantaḥ //5//

imām odanāṃ ní dadhe brāhmaṇéṣu viṣṭārīṇam lokaḥitaṃ svargám /
sá me má kṣeṣṭa svadhāyā pínvamāno vísvárūpā dhenúḥ kāmádúghā me astu//8//

Whoso cooks the *viṣṭārīn*-rice mess, ruin (*ávartī*) fastens not on them at any time;
[such a one] stays with Yama, goes to the gods, revels with the soma-drinking (*somyā*)
Gandharvas. //3//

This, extended, is of sacrifices the best carrier; having cooked the *viṣṭārīn*, one has entered the sky;
the bulb-bearing lotus spreads (*sām-tan*), the *bīsa*, *sālúka*, *śáphaka*, *mulālī*;
let all these streams (*dhāra*) come unto thee, swelling honeyedly in the heaven (*svargā*) world;

let complete (*sámanta*) lotus-ponds approach thee. //5//

This rice mess I deposit in the brahmanas, the *viṣṭārin*, world conquering, heaven-going (*svargā*);
let it not be destroyed (*ksi*) for me, swelling with *svadhā*, be it a cow of all forms, milking my
desires. //8// (Whitney)

This rice dish is also full of *svadhā*,⁷ another substance which is stored and with which one hopes to be united with upon coming to heaven (in order to create the new body). There are other passages that hint that heaven is full of food. AV 11.1.19-20 deals with the heaven-going *brahmaudana* that is thousand backed, hundred streamed and inexhaustible.

urúḥ prathasva mahatá mahimná sahárapṛṣṭhaḥ sukṛtásya loké /
pitāmaháḥ pitāraḥ prajāpajāhaṃ paktá pañcadaśās te asmi //19//

sahárapṛṣṭhaḥ śatādharo ákṣito brahmaudanó devayánaḥ svargāḥ /
amúṣ ta á dadhāmi prajāyā reṣayainān balihārāya mṛdatān máhyam evá //20//

Spread thyself broad, with great greatness, thousand backed, in the world of the well-done/
Grandfathers, fathers, progeny, descendants (*upajā*); I am thy fifteen-fold cooker //19//

Thousand-backed, hundred-streamed, unexhausted [is] the brahman-rice-dish, god-traveled, heaven-going/
them yonder I assign to thee; lessen (?) though them with progeny; be gracious then to me [as] bringer of
tribute //20// (Whitney)

These verses express a vision of cornucopia, of the overflowing abundance of this particular dish. This cornucopic image fits nicely with the vision expressed in TS 1.7.3.4 discussed above - of heaven as place where endless food is found. The connection between food and immortality is clear in this passage: the *brahmaudana* becomes inexhaustible in the world of *sukṛta*, the place where the result of well-done ritual action is stored, which is the place where *svadhā* is stored, and where one wishes to be immortal (*amṛta*).

Food or nourishment is required for the new body in heaven. ṚV10.14.8 speaks directly to this point:

sám gachasva pitṛbhiḥ sám yaména iṣṭāpūrténa paramé vyòma /
sitvāyāvadyám púnar ástam ehi sám gachasva · tanívā suvárcaḥ //8//

Unite with the Fathers, with Yama, unite with [that which you] have offered and other good works in the
highest heaven /
having left behind flaws - come home, unite with your [new] vigorous body. // (following Geldner)

Although, of course, the texts never tell us directly, the implication is that this very food or nourishment is what maintains the new body in heaven. If this was not the case, then it would be impossible to understand the statement in TS 1.7.3.4 about imperishable food in heaven.

3 From the above passage from the ṚV, it is clear that there is a connection between the condition of being immortal in heaven, the new body that is obtained there, and ritual by-products that function analogically as food or nourishment. The most often discussed ritual by-products that play an important role in determining the length of the stay in yonder world, as alluded to above, are *sukṛta* “that which is well done in ritual” and *iṣṭāpūrta* “that which is offered and given away”. *Iṣṭāpūrta* signifies an unseen result, which is stored in heaven, of goods given to

⁷ *Svadhā* is a difficult term which requires further investigation. For the purposes of this paper, I have followed Geldner’s understanding of the term.

the priests and poets (*dakṣiṇā*) acting in the ritual on behalf of the sacrificer.⁸ *sukṛta* similarly refers to something which is correctly performed during ritual: the result of the correctly executed ritual action. These are the indirect effects of ritual, the remnant (*ucchiṣṭa*) of the ritual offering stored in heaven, different from the remnant that is visible on earth.

Vedic ritual in its most general scheme follows the paradigm of guest worship. The gods are invited to attend, and a food offering made to the fire. The analysis of the transformation of the offering during the ritual is found Vādhula Brāhmaṇa 4.19a.9⁹ The burning of the offering in the sacrificial fire transforms or, rather, transsubstantiates the nature and character of what is being offered. Every offering is transsubstantiated into *medha* “juice, essence, aroma,” which is then available to the gods for eating, and *asu* “life force.” The gods, it seems, cannot eat ‘normal’ food as they are rather different bunch of folks. The Mahābhārata tells us that they do not blink, do not walk on the earth (but rather float a few inches off the ground), and cast no shadows. Furthermore, Kaṭh. Ā 2.143 tells us that the gods eat by smelling. In a discussion about what to do with the remnant of the ritual offering, the question of how to properly dispose of the leftover portion arises. The conclusion is that the offering must be smelled in order to prevent waste. The logic behind smelling the leftovers is typical of the brāhmaṇa-s: not eating the remnant of the offering would cancel its value as an offering since the ritual is defined as a cycle in which something is offered to the gods (food) and they, in turn, returned something to the sacrificer. What the gods return to the sacrificer is, at the visible level, the *ucchiṣṭa*, the visible leftover, but at the invisible level there is also something that is returned. However, one can not eat the remnant of the offering because it is polluted - as a leftover, even that of the gods. This ritual dilemma is solved by finding a way of eating that allows the completion of the ritual which avoids the problem of eating polluted food. The way out is, of course, to do what the gods do, to smell the leftover, which allows the completion of the cycle of offering but avoids pollution.

The transsubstantiated offering leads to the creation of several remnants or by-products, both in heaven and on earth. At the visible, physical, human level, the result is *ucchiṣṭa*, the remnant that is returned. *Prasād* of the Hindu *pūjā* ceremony is clearly nothing more than a theologized *ucchiṣṭa*.

At the unseen level, in heaven (the main concern of the Mīmāṃsaka-s!), the already mentioned ritual by-products, *sukṛta* and *iṣṭāpūrta*, are created. These remnants of the offering are said to be stored in heaven and are never lost there. ṚV 6.28.2, 3 speak about Indra protecting that which the sacrificer has offered (*yājvāne*) and has given away (*prṇate*) - *iṣṭāpūrta*. The result of that is never lost or destroyed.

The concern over the fate of these ritual by-products that are associated with how long one can stay in heaven (without dying again, as we shall see) is reflected in TB 3.10.11.2.

sá svām lokām prátiprājānāti / eṣá u caiváinaṃ tát sāvitrāḥ svargám lokám abhívahati / ahorātráir vá idám sayúgbhiḥ kriyate

táni hánevám vidúṣaḥ / amúṣmiṃ lloké śevadhím dhayanti / dhítám haivá sa śevadhím ánu páraiti / ...átha yó haiváitám agníṃ sāvitrám véda / tása haiváhorātráni amúṣmiṃ lloké śevadhím ná dhayanti / ádhítám haivá sá śevadhím ánu páraiti

He recognizes his own world / and then the savitra (fire) carries him to the heavenly world / Verily this (rite) is performed with the days and nights as companions.

If a man does not know them thus, they (the days and nights) suck his treasure (i.e., the treasure of his meritorious deeds) in yonder world, and he finds a treasures that has been sucked...but if a man does know, the savitra (fire-altar), the days and nights do not suck his treasure in yonder world and he finds a treasure that has not been sucked. (Following Dumont)

⁸ In the Rigvedic period, the *dakṣiṇā* was given to poet who composed new poetry on the behalf of the chieftain (*dānastūti*).

⁹ te ‘svam ālabhanta; tasyālabdhasya medhas cāsuś cāpākramantām

This passage speaks of the treasure in heaven that is connected to what has been sacrificed and offered, which is said to be protected by Indra. The treasure can be sucked out, and thus depleted, by the days and nights. The only way to prevent the depletion of the store (and thus the implied fall from heaven) is by means of the *sāvitra* fire-altar.

ŚB 2.3.3.11 also calls attention to this concern.

ahorātré ha vā amúṣmiṃ loké pariplávamāne / púruṣasya sukṛtām kṣiṇuto ‘rvācīṇaṃ vā áto ‘horātré tátho
hāsyāhorātré sukṛtām ná kṣiṇutaḥ //11//

Now, day and night, revolving, destroy [the fruit of] man’s righteousness in yonder world. But day and night are on this side [of the sun] from him [after he has gone up to heaven]; and so day and night do not destroy [the fruit of] his righteousness. (Eggeling)

This passage, however, makes it clear that this treasure in heaven is *sukṛta*, the result of a well-done ritual, which is essential for the stay in heaven and for the nourishment of the new body in heaven, as noted above. This is not made explicit but an understanding of immortality as non-dying in heaven and the associated of immortality of a new body, which must be sustained, suggests that *sukṛta* and food are being analogized. *sukṛta* and other ritual by-products are understood to function like food to sustain the body in heaven. This fits perfectly with the idea often expressed in the Veda that we must feed the gods: they are dependent on our food offerings because there is no food in the abode of the gods (and similarly for the *pitṛ-s*).

Anxiety about the nature of the other world (heaven) and the condition of our supply of heavenly nourishment is seen early in the Vedic texts. The supply of nourishment, as noted above, diminishes immediately upon entering into heaven. AV 3.29.1 notes that upon entrance to heaven, a 1/16th fee that must be paid, which immediately reduces our store of merit.¹⁰ TB 3.10.11.3 also corroborates the notion of the treasure that one has carried (*abhi- vah*) to heaven during the ritual can potentially be sucked out of heaven (*dhayati*). ŚB 2.3.3.11 also signals the concern for the reduction of the ‘heavenly nourishment’ that sustains the new body in heaven after one is born there. ŚB leaves little doubt that it is the results of the well-done ritual, *sukṛta*, which are destroyed.

The depletion of *sukṛta* is generally associated with the idea of *punarmṛtyu*¹¹ “the repeated death,” which is only discussed in terms of what happens when *sukṛta* (or *puṇya*) runs out. Although the texts never make clear what happens when *punarmṛtyu* takes place, whether one returns to this world or not, one can be fairly sure that the only way to guarantee a continued stay in yonder world is by having a sufficient supply of nourishment, *sukṛta* and *iṣṭāpūrta* for the new body. The only way this supply can be replenished is, of course, by means of the ritual. Thus, we would not be too far off to maintain that *punarmṛtyu* involves death in yonder world and a rebirth in this world in order to replenish the supply of *sukṛta*. MS 1.8.6 already hints at this when it speaks of *pitṛs* falling back to earth like shooting stars!

iṣṭāpūrta is not as clearly discussed in the texts. This old term, as can be seen from the -ā ending of the first member of the compound (paralleled in *mitrāvaruṇā*), appears only once in the ṚV (according to Grassman). Like *sukṛta*, *iṣṭāpūrta* is also stored in heaven. This is clear from TS 5.7.7.2:

pathíbhīr devayājñair iṣṭāpūrté kṣiṇutād āvīr asmai

By the path that is the sacrifice to the gods, make visible for him that which is sacrificed /offered and brought up [to heaven]. (Keith)

TS 4.7.13.5 further tell us:

úd budhasvāgne prāti jāgṛhy enaiṃ iṣṭāpūrté sám śjethām ayám ca

¹⁰ yadrājāno vibhājanta iṣṭāpūrtāsya ṣoḍāśaṃ yamāsyaṃ mī sabhāsādaḥ / ávis tasmāt prá muñcati dattāḥ śitipātsvadhā

¹¹ On *punarmṛtyu* see Bodewitz, “Redeath and its relation to Rebirth and Release” in *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, Band 20, 1996.

Awake, O Agni! Watch (?) for him; unite this one to that which [he] has sacrificed and given away. (Keith)

4 Food is also used metaphorically to articulate the vision of the opposite of heaven, namely the extra-cosmic realm where there is an absence of everything that there is on this world (earth) including food.¹² Already, the ‘equivalent of hell’ as described in RV and AV is imagined in stark contrast to this world - the here and now - earth. RV 7.104.1, 9-11¹³ describes the realm of *nirṛti* as an endless pit without light, cold, a place of silence - a place reserved for those who act against the most basic values of Vedic society.

AV 6.63.1 portrays *nirṛti* in further opposition to ‘this world,’ the here and now, using food as a key point of distinction between the two realms.

yāt te devī nirṛtir ābabāndha dāma grīvāsv avimokyāṃ yāt /
tāt te ví ṣyāmy āyuṣe vārcase bālāyādomadām ānnaṃ addhi prāsūtaḥ //

The tie that the divine Nirṛti [perdition] bound upon thy neck, [and] that was unreleasable, that do I untie for thee, in order, to long life (āyus), splendor, strength; do thou, quickened (*pra-su*), eat uninjurious (?) food. (Whitney)

To be taken out of the extra-cosmic realm of *nirṛti* means to have access to (proper) food. This realm is thus outside of the system of contingent exchange and re-circulation of the universe according to *ṛta*; it is outside the sphere of ritual. Those consigned to *nirṛti* are cut-off from their own store of ritual by-product (if they had any), their progeny, and the nourishment that they may provide for them through ritual. In other words, they do not receive nourishment from the offerings of the descendants.

¹² N. W. Brown, “The Rigvedic equivalent of hell.” *JAOS* 61: 76-80.

¹³ RV 7.104.19-11: índrāsomā tāpataṃ rākṣa ubjātaṃ nī arpayataṃ vṣṣaṇā tamovṛdhaḥ / pārā śṣṇītām acīto nī oṣataṃ hatāṃ nudéthaṃ nī śiṣītāṃ atrīṇaḥ //11//

yé pākaśamsāṃ vihāranta évair yé vā bhadrāṃ dūṣāyanti svadhābhiḥ / āhaye vā tán pradādātu soma á vā dadhātu nirṛter upāsthe //9//

yó no rāsaṃ dípsati pitvó agne yó áśvānāṃ yó gāvāṃ yás tanūnāṃ / ripú stená steyakṛd dabhrām etu ní śá hīyatāṃ tanūvā tánā ca //10//

parāḥ só astu tanūvā tánā ca tistrāḥ pṛthivír adhó astu vísvāḥ / práti śuṣyatu yáso asya devā yó no dívā dípsati yás ca náktam //11//

Indra and Soma, burn the bad spirit, catch him. Put down/beat those who have become strong in darkness; You, O bulls, break the unsuspecting ones, burn them down, kill them, chase them away, pierce the lowly devours. //9//

Those who intentionally twist simple speech or who intentionally make the good [speech] along with the spirit food bad, O Soma, those must be either abandon to the snake or take them into the lap of complete annihilation. //9//

Who want to spoil for us the juice of food, O Agni, the one of our horses, of our cows, of our bodies, that low man/scoundrel, the thief who commits theft must fade away. He must wither away with his body and children. //10//

May his own body and his children be away; may he sink under the three earths; may his reputation, O gods, whither, who in the night or in the day who search to destroy us. //11// (following Geldner)

The use of the metaphor of food to paint this eschatological picture is clear in AV 5.18-19.¹⁴ Rather than talking about hell as a place that is without food, the place reserved for those people who act against Vedic society (Brahmin-killers, cow-killers, (male) embryo-killers), the image is taken one step further. Hell is pictures as being replete with the most unsuitable things to eat: blood and hair! Hell is presented in this hymn as a place of extreme pollution. Here we have a glimpse at what may be said to be a characteristic theme of Hinduism: pollution.¹⁵ Evil people in this vision of the AV are destined to go to a place of extreme pollution.

Anxiety of one's fate as well as the nature of yonder world¹⁶ is further developed in the JB and ŚB.¹⁷ In the Bhṛgu Story, JB 1.43, the vision of a 'hell' as a place where food is unavailable is further developed by introducing the idea of a 'reverse world' or 'inverted food chain' into the conception of hell.

kiṃ dvitīyam iti / puruṣa eva puruṣam ākrandayantam aghad iti / om iti hovāca / ye vā asmin loke
'gnihotram ajuhvano naivaṃ vidadḥ paśūn krandayataḥ pacante tān vā amuṣmin loke paśavaḥ
puruṣarūpaṃ kṛtvā pratyadanti /

kiṃ tritīyam iti / puruṣa eva puruṣam tūṣṇīm avyāharantam aghad iti / om iti hovāca / ye vā asmin loke
'gnihotram ajuhvato naivaṃ vido vṛhiyavāṃs tūṣṇīm avayāharataḥ pacante tān vā amuṣmin loke
vṛhiyavāḥ puruṣarūpaṃ kṛtvā pratyadanti /

"What [did you see] the second time?" "A man devoured another man who was crying." "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the agnihotra without knowing thus and cook for themselves animals that cry out, those the animals, after taking human form, eat in their turn in yonder world."

"What [did you see] the second time?" "A man devoured another man who was inaudibly uttering sounds." "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the agnihotra without knowing thus and cook for themselves rice and barely, which inaudibly utter sounds, that rice and barely, after taking human form, eat in their turn in yonder world." (Bodewitz)

Instead of 'hell' being a place devoid of food, it becomes the place where humans become the food of that which they ate in their lifetime. In this new vision of hell, one becomes the food of those whom one ate in this world. The ecosystem is turned on its head: the predator becomes the prey. Man becomes the food of animals, plants and grains. Anxiety about the very nature of what the next life beyond this world may be like is expressed in terms of food. It is, however, this anxiety that becomes a turning point in the development of the idea of *ahimsa* and of rebirth in Indian thought. The Hindu idea of rebirth and its correlative, *karma*, finds its earliest expression in the ritualistic transactions of food.

5 What can be seen in the Vedic texts is a clear movement in the understanding of the notion of immortality. In the earliest texts, for the most part, immortality is understood as permanent stay in 'yonder world,' which is eternally filled with "food," and where the body is free from any defects. At the same time, once can notice the emergence, here and there, of a generalized angst about the possibility of such an eternal stay; "food" does run out and when it runs out the body dies. The implication is that there is another death. Both of these visions of immortality can be found at the same linguistic levels. However, one can see that in the later texts the idea of a permanent stay in heaven loses centrality, and immortality begins to be seen as an impermanent state,

¹⁴ AV 5.18-19 deals in part with the repercussion of anyone who insults a Brahman and eats the cow of a Brahman. One who insults a Brahman, especially by spitting at him, sits "in the midst of a stream of blood, devouring hair." (AV 19.3) The implication seems to be that one who insults a Brahman goes to 'hell,' which is filled with blood and hair - two extremely polluting substances.

¹⁵ One gets a glimpse at this image of hell at the end of the Mahābhārata when Yudhiṣṭhira, unable to find his beloved brothers and wife in heaven, is taken down to hell where he can join them.

¹⁶ This slowly emerging anxiety can be seen as far back as KS 8.8 and TS 6.1.1.1.

¹⁷ ŚB 12.9.1.1

which one must some how constantly safeguard by means of ritual. These visions of immortality, of the afterlife, are expressed in terms of a proper understanding of the physiology of the body: food is essential to the survival and the continuing existence of the body. It is thus not surprising that food, which is the first born of *fta* and which plays such a central role in human survival, comes to be seen as the agent of immortality.

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