

CHAPTER
3

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from the Rig Veda*

Written in Sanskrit, the Rig Veda is the oldest of the four Vedas, India's earliest religious text. The Rig Veda consists of 1,028 hymns addressed to Aryan gods. Whom do the following hymns address?

“To Dawn”

She hath shone brightly like a youthful woman,
stirring to motion every living creature.

Agni hath come to feed on mortals' fuel. She hath
made light and chased away the darkness.

Turned to this all, far-spreading, she hath risen and
shone in brightness with white robes about her.
She hath beamed forth lovely with golden colours,
mother of kine, guide of the days she bringeth.

Bearing the gods' own eye, auspicious lady, leading
her courser white and fair to look on,
Distinguished by her beams, Dawn shines appar-
ent, come forth to all the world with wondrous
treasure.

Dawn nigh will wealth and dawn away the foeman:
prepare for us wide pasture free from danger.
Drive away those who hate us, bring us riches:
pour bounty, opulent lady, on the singer.

Send thy most excellent beams to shine and light
us, giving us lengthened days, O Dawn, O god-
dess,

Granting us food, thou who hast all things pre-
cious, and bounty rich in chariots, kine, and
horses.

O Dawn, nobly-born, daughter of heaven, whom
the Vasisthas with their hymns make mighty,
Bestow thou on us vast and glorious riches.
Preserve us evermore, ye gods, with blessings.

“To Night”

With all her eyes the goddess Night looks forth
approaching many a spot:
She hath put all her glories on.

Immortal, she hath filled the waste, the goddess
hath filled height and depth:
She conquers darkness with her light.

The goddess as she comes hath set the Dawn her
sister in her place:
And then the darkness vanishes.

So favour us this night, O thou whose pathways we
have visited
As birds their nest upon the tree.

The villagers have sought their homes, and all that
walks and all that flies,
Even the falcons fain for prey.

Keep off the she-wolf and the wolf; O Night, keep
the thief away:
Easy be thou for us to pass.

Clearly hath she come nigh to me who decks the
dark with richest hues:
O morning, cancel it like debts.

These have I brought to thee like kine. O Night,
thou child of heaven, accept
This laud as for a conqueror.

*from Nicol Macnicol, trans., The Rig Veda. Reprinted in
Hinduism (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 63, 71.*

Activity Options

1. **Describing Character** With classmates, take turns reading these hymns aloud. Then discuss your impressions. What did Aryans ask of each goddess? Which lines best convey the traits and qualities possessed by each goddess?
2. **Using Visual Stimuli** Draw a sketch of Dawn based on your reading of the hymn.

"To Dawn," and "To Night," from *The Rig Veda*, translated by Nicol Macnicol. Used by permission of Everyman's Library, Everyman Publishers PLC.