

# UNIT 1 APEX ASSIGNMENT - CLOSE READING ESSAY

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In the beginning of the world, gods tied up a deity, dismembered him, then burned him with flaming sticks. Yet he lives. He may outlive you, me, and the world we know.

The Hindu hymn Purushasukta describes the creation of the world through the sacrificial ritual. In this cruel rite, the body of the divine Purusha is divided to become different parts of the world. Yet the text suggests that Purusha never dies. So how did he survive the immolation? Why will he live forever?

I will argue that the reason lies behind an idea essential to many philosophical and religious traditions. It is the justification for why successor of Dalai Lama can come out of nowhere; it can count as the greatest miracle performed by Jesus; even Pythagoras once said: "Souls never die, but always on quitting one abode pass to another. All things change, nothing perishes."

However, Purushasukta reflects the idea with a high degree of subtlety. I intend to carefully examine the hymn and extract all the evidence supporting the notion of transmigration. We begin by confirming that Purusha is immortal. We then see how the disappearance and reappearance of things are scattered in the text. And finally, we infer the whereabouts of Purusha after the sacrifice. The rest of this essay proceeds with the same three steps.

The text explicitly stated the word "immortal" in paragraphs two and three. We inspect the second paragraph first: "Purusha ... whatever has been and whatever shall be." This part suggests that Purusha exists regardless of time. From any point on the timeline, tracing backwards or forwards infinitely, it is a fact that he exists. "He is also the lord of immortality." Being the lord of immortality, it behooves him to be eternal. We continue to the third paragraph: "All existences are a quarter of him; and three-fourths of him are that which is immortal in the sky." This excerpt shows that Purusha is not only all the existences, but he is also beyond them. So what is beyond all the existences? The question is hard to answer, but according to the sentence, it is three-fourths of Purusha, in the sky, being immortal.

Throughout the hymn, we find two things that conceivably vanished but started to exist again. To appreciate the first, we go to the fifth paragraph and encounter a mystic expression: "From him was born Viraj, and from Viraj, Purusha." If there is only one Purusha, the one Viraj produced is the same as

the one who gave birth to Viraj, then Purusha must have disappeared sometime before the second birth. And since Purusha never dies, his life somehow must have extended from before the birth to after the birth. Continuing to further down the hymn, we see that Purusha is not the only thing that rose from decease. In the sixth paragraph, “the gods performed a sacrifice . . . the spring was its butter, the summer its fuel, and the autumn its’ (accompanying) offering.” The three seasons were sacrificed alongside Purusha, however, the fourteenth paragraph describes the creation of the four seasons as follows: “. . . from his ear the (four) quarters . . .” This is a hint that the power of rebirth is not a Purusha-specific ability, but a more general concept.

By now the answer to the question “how did Purusha survive the immolation” might be clear. The intertwinement of his immortality and his return to existence is in accordance with Pythagoras’ thinking, revealing the concept of transmigration. Paragraphs eight to fourteen are all about how he became the world we know through the brutal sacrifice: “. . . formed those aerial (creatures) and animals both wild and tame. . . From it sprang horses, and all animals with two rows of teeth. . . The moon sprang from his soul, the sun from his eye. . . From his navel arose the air, from his head the sky, from his feet the earth. . .” If we go back to the fourth paragraph, we will understand better why Purusha was “diffused everywhere over things which eat and things which do not eat.” And if we revisit the second paragraph, we will understand better the description of “whatever has been and whatever shall be” Because not only he is timeless, but he is also spaceless. Purusha has transmigrated into the world itself. His spirit is in you and me. One day, the world we know will destroy, but he will live, perhaps by transmigrating into a new world.