

The Mystical Meaning of Fire (AGNI) in the Rig-Veda and the Big-Bang Theory of the Creation of the Universe

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There are two traditions of Indian, essentially Hindu, spiritual thought - Shruti (direct experience) and Smriti (recollection). The mystical discourses of the Upanishads and the revelation of the Rig-Veda are part of the Shruti tradition. With the recital and methodical translation of appropriate mantras from the Rig-Veda and passages from the Upanishads, Prof. Saraswat explains in this talk how the ceremonial fire (AGNI) of Vedic worship symbolizes the sacred and supreme spirit that Generates (G), Operates (O) and eventually Destroys (D) the universe. In the Rig-Veda, AGNI is called the "first born of creation," and represents the pure and primordial energy of the universe that was created at the moment of Big Bang. At this moment two "numinous" forces, "Prakriti," the creative power of the Supreme Spirit of the universe, and "Purusha," the omniscient and all-pervasive mind of the cosmos, united to create the "phenomenal" universe. The Rig-Veda tells us that this primal energy later transforms into (1) the energy of life (Vaishvanar Agni), (2) the energy of thought (Pragya Agni), and (3) the Radiation energy (Taijas Agni).

As opposed to the almost pervasive contemporary scientific belief that mind is an epiphenomenon of matter, the mystical doctrine of the Rig-Veda posits that Mind and Matter both are eternally present, even before Big Bang, as the "inspiring" and the "creative" powers of the Supreme Spirit. Motivated by time, their union creates the Big Bang. Space and Time, created with the Big Bang, thus become inextricably interwoven into the fabric of existence. Noble prize winning scientists such as Steven Hawking and Steven Weinberg explain in their theories and books what happened after the moment of creation, how hot the universe was 1/1,000 seconds after the Big Bang, how rapidly the universe expanded, and how hydrogen and helium atoms synthesized from the primordial soup of electrons and positrons. But the discussion of what happened before the moment of the Bang is considered completely outside the realm of science. Professor Saraswat's presentation will shed some light on how the Rig-Veda addresses this issue.