

# NAASADIYA SUKTAM

Commentary by Swami Shuddhabodhananda Saraswati

The very famous Vedic hymn *Naasadiya Suktam* describes in brief the origin and nature of *srushti* – Creation (universe/cosmos/*jagat*). It points indirectly to the ultimate reality, Brahman, which is the basis of the *jagat*. This brief commentary is based on Sayana *Bhasya* (*Rig Veda*, *Ashtaka* 8, *Mandala* 10, *Adhyaya* 11, *Sukta* 129).

न असत् आसीत् नो सत् आसीत् तदानीम् न आसीत्  
रजः नो व्योमा परः यत् ।  
किम् आवरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन् अम्भः किम् आसीत्  
गहनम् गभीरम् ॥ १ ॥

**तदानीम्** – then (when Creation was in a state of dissolution); **असत्** – non-existence (as the cause of this universe); **न आसीत्** – was not (there); **सत्** – existence; **नो आसीत्** – indeed was not (there); **रजः** – *loka* (fields of experience); **न आसीत्** – was not (there); **व्योम** – *antariksha* (intervening space) (and); **यत्** – whatever; **परः** – yonder (heavens up to *satyaloka*); **नो** – indeed were not (there); **किम्** – what to (speak of that); **आवरीवः** – the elemental (*bhautika*) coverings of the *Brahmanda* (cosmos)(were not there); **कुह** – where (was the place for these coverings to abide?); **कस्य** – (because) for whose; **शर्मन्** – joys and sorrows (can there be these coverings?); **गहनम्** – extremely dense; **गभीरम्** – deep and unfathomable; **अम्भः** – water; **किम् आसीत्** – was it there? (No).  
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1. When Creation was in a state of dissolution, there was neither non-existence nor existence. There were no *lokas*, or fields of experience. There was no intervening space and no

heavens yonder. What to speak of the elemental coverings of the *Brahmandas*, these too did not exist. Where was the place for these coverings to abide? (There was none). For whose joys and sorrows could there be these coverings (in the absence of *jivas* / individuals and *Brahmandas* themselves)? (In the state of dissolution) was there extremely dense, deep (unfathomable) water? (No).

As a prelude to the Creation to be described in *rik* or *mantra* three, the state of dissolution (*pralaya*) totally devoid of the cosmos to be created is described. Then (*tadaanim*), in that state of dissolution, there was no non-existence (*asat*), which has been alleged to be the root cause of the *jagat* (Creation) by some schools of thought. For how can an existent *jagat* be ever born from a totally non-existent entity such as the horn of a rabbit? Was there anything else? There was not even *sat*, the entity that is described as existent in nature.

A principle that cannot be defined as either existent (*sat*) or non-existent (*asat*) is *maya*, the Creative power. The existence of this principle, *maya*, in the state of dissolution is refuted by the denial of both *sat* and *asat*.

**Question :** The statement ‘There was no *sat* (existence principle)’ also refutes the possibility of the presence of Brahman, the

ever-existent principle, in the state of dissolution. How is that possible? Does it not mean that Brahman ceases to exist?

**Ans.:** No. The word *sat* referred to in this context is a term used in the relative sense and stands for that which is born and exists. It does not refer to Brahman, the unborn ever-existent principle. The continuance of Brahman during dissolution will be indicated by the phrase '*aanit avatam*' in the next *mantra*.

**Q.:** If the denial of both *sat* and *asat* points to the absence of *maya*, the phrase *tadanim* (i.e. in the state of dissolution) is redundant. Because *maya* does not exist in reality (*paramarthatah*) even during the period of the empirical existence of the cosmos.

**Ans.:** True. But the statement 'there was neither *sat* nor *asat*' serves to highlight the absence of *maya* along with its explicit projection, the manifest *jagat*.

A doubt may arise at this point: how was (the born and existent) *sat* not present during the dissolution when the great elements such as earth, space continued to exist? The *suktam* denies first that *sat* was present and now elaborately describes that the manifest empirical *jagat* too was absent.

There was no *raja* (*loka* – fields of experience). According to Vedic lexicographer Yaska, the word *raja* also means *loka*. The absence of *vyoma* (intervening space) is also specifically mentioned. Therefore, the absence of *raja* stands for the absence of all *lokas* from *patala* to earth and onwards. There was not even *vyoma* (*antariksha* – intervening space). All that (*yat*) exists beyond (*parah*) viz. heavens up to *satyaloka*, were absent. Thus the

presence of *Brahmandas* with its fourteen *lokas*, from *patala* up to *satyaloka*, is refuted. In the absence of the *Brahmandas* themselves, how could there be *avariva*, i.e. the elemental (*bhautika*) coverings of the *Brahmandas* described in the Puranas? That is, there were no coverings in the absence of the *Brahmandas* themselves. *Kuha* – where is the place for those coverings to abide? i.e. such a place itself did not exist.

These coverings would exist if the *Brahmandas* provided the *lokas* (fields of experience) for *jivas* (individual souls) to eke out the experiences of joys and sorrows based on their *karmaphalas* (results of actions). The seer of this *suktam* exclaims: for whose (*kasya*) joys and sorrows (*sharman*) could these coverings of *Brahmandas* exist, because the experiencer (*bhokta*) itself was absent. This shows that during dissolution, both the experiential world and its experiencers, the host of *jivas*, are absent.

The absence of water in the state of *pralaya* was already indicated by denying the presence of the *Brahmandas* with elemental coverings. Even so, there can be a doubt: perhaps there was water in the state of dissolution because a statement in the *Taittiriya sruti* declares the presence of water at the time of dissolution. This concept is refuted by asking a rhetorical question: "Was there extremely dense, deep (unfathomable) water?" That is to say, there was not. The *Taittiriya sruti* referred to speaks of an intermediary state of dissolution where water was still present and not the final state, totally devoid of everything.

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