

# The reconstruction of time in the Vedic fire altar\*

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The Hindu temple is an *imago mundi*; its configuration is a semblance of the cosmogenetic procedure of finite space from the Infinite; it is also a similitude of the production of time from Eternity. The cosmogonic procession from Unity to multiplicity, through the deployment of the directions of space from the Centre, is commonly expressed by the symbolism of a heavenly sacrifice. The reintegrative Return of multiplicity to Unity is, in turn, expressed in terms of terrestrial sacrifice. This is formulated in Brahmanic literature and physically expressed in the construction of the Vedic fire altar. The Vedic fire altar is the prototype of the Hindu temple, which assimilates its meanings.<sup>1</sup> The construction of the Altar is a reconstruction of time; the temple incorporates this symbolism.



In the beginning Prajāpati, the Lord of Progeny (*prajā*), who was One, desiring offspring, emptied himself out into existence.<sup>2</sup> Prajāpati is

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1946, p.72 ff. (New edition, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> 'Now this Person (*puruṣa*) Prajāpati desires, 'May I be more (than one), may I be reproduced'. He toiled, he practised austerity... He created the Waters out of the Word (*vāc*)... He desired, 'May I be reproduced from the Waters... Thence an egg arose. He touched it. 'Let it exist! Let it exist and multiply!', so he said... And that which was the shell became the earth' (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* VI.1.2.1 ff, tr. J. Eggeling, 5 Vols., London, Clarendon, 1882; herein ŚB). Cf. M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas Vol.1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, London: Collins, 1979, p.228; J. Gonda, *Les Religions de l'Inde 2 Vols.*, Paris: Flammarion, 1962, p.227.

Unity; his “children” are the fragmented and discrete parts of the world of differentiation and separateness. His emptying out, or emanation (*visrj*, from *srj*, “to flow” and *vi*, “asunder,” expressing dispersion) is a passage from integral concentration of the One to the decomposed dispersion of the multiple. By passing into his “children,” who are the separate entities of the sensible world, the whole and unified body of Prajāpati is severed and disjointed: ‘After Prajāpati had emitted the living beings, his joints were disjointed.’<sup>3</sup>

Prajāpati’s disjointing is a sacrifice (*yajña*).<sup>4</sup> The cosmogenesis is a sacrifice of Prajāpati’s body into the world, and Prajāpati is Ātman<sup>5</sup> and the unmanifested Unity-Totality. He is also time, the Year: ‘Now Prajāpati is certainly the Year, and his joints are the two joinings of day (that is, dawn and twilight), the full moon and the new moon, and the beginnings of the seasons.’<sup>6</sup>

Prajāpati, dismembered into manifestation, is mortal, and afraid of his mortality: ‘Prajāpati, the Year, has created all living beings and things, gods and men; having created all he felt like one emptied out and was afraid of death.’<sup>7</sup> Prajāpati is time, but time is also death, and ‘the gods were afraid of this Prajāpati, the Year, Death, the Ender.’<sup>8</sup> The Year is mortality and ‘beyond the Year lies the immortal.’<sup>9</sup> To conquer mortality, the deadly toll of time, the gods must reverse Prajāpati’s sacrificial act and must rejoin his dismembered joints. Having emptied himself out into time, ‘Prajāpati was unable to rise with his joints loosened; and the gods healed him by (the ritual of) the *agnihotra*,

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<sup>3</sup> ŚB I.6.3.35.

<sup>4</sup> On the sacrifice, see S. Levi, *La Doctrine du Sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*, Paris, Hermann, 1898; A. Coomaraswamy, ‘Āmayajña: Self Sacrifice’ in *Selected Papers Vol.2: Metaphysics*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1977, p.107 ff; 1943a, 19 ff.; *Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1943; Gonda, *Les Religions de l’Inde 2Vols.*, p.227 ff; Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas Vol.1*, p.227 ff; *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, p.109 ff; P. Mus, *Barabudur: Éskisse d’une histoire du bouddhisme fondée sur la critique archéologique des textes 2Vols.*, Hanoi-Paris, 1935; reprinted in one volume, New York: Arno, 1978, p.144 ff; herein *Barabudur*.

<sup>5</sup> *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I.68, tr. R. Vira & L. Chandra, *The Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa of the Saṁveda* (Sanskrit), Nagpur, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> ŚB I.6.3.35; cf. VII.1.2.11, etc.

<sup>7</sup> ŚB X.4.2.2.

<sup>8</sup> ŚB X.4.3.3.

<sup>9</sup> ŚB X.2.6.4.

strengthening his joints.<sup>10</sup> The gods reassembled Prajāpati by building up the fire altar according to instructions given them by Prajāpati:

Prajāpati then spoke: “Lay ye down 360 enclosing stones and world-filling (bricks), lay ye down 10,800 and ye will be laying down all my forms and will become immortal” ...<sup>11</sup> The sacrificer (the self offerer), doubtless, is he who knows, “This my (new) body is procured thereby”. And even as a snake frees itself from its skin, so does he free himself from his mortal body.<sup>12</sup>

Prajāpati unceasingly spends himself in ever-proceeding sacrifice and by this sacrifice the world passes into existence. But the production of the multiple is the production of mortality: both Eternity and perpetuity are fragmented, and for all existent things time must have a stop. But mortality, the concomitant of fractioned time, is overcome when the gods rebuild the body of the Year in the fire altar.

What the gods did “in the beginning,” man repeats. His performance of the *agnihotra*, in which he builds up the altar as the body of the Year, is a *mimesis* of the primordial act of the gods whereby time and death were vanquished. Man’s performance of the ritual of sacrifice repeats the archetypal and primordial Sacrifice. The dismemberment of Prajāpati, which is the production of the universe, is reflected in the ritual as in a mirror, inversely. The sacrifice is a reversal of the cosmo-generative process whereby the manifold proceeds from the One. The sacrificer disjoins the mere-seeming cohesion of the partite sacrifice so as to reveal its impartible essence, which is one and whole. Whereas Prajāpati divides himself, making himself many so as to enter into his offspring in whom he is swallowed up and hidden, so in their turn his progeny empty themselves out, dismembering here for a remembering there. The body and self of the sacrificer, or of his ritual surrogate, the victim or Holocaust, are taken apart at the terrestrial level to be reassembled supernally. Multiplicity is immolated, Unity restored. The oblation, disintegrated here, is reintegrated above.<sup>13</sup> The sacrifice is

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<sup>10</sup> ŚB I.6.3.36.

<sup>11</sup> ŚB X.4.3.8. The significance of the numbers is given in the following.

<sup>12</sup> ŚB X1.2.6.13.

<sup>13</sup> Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1985, p.47 f.

a dismembering of partite time and a reassembling of the impartite Year; it is a rebuilding of integrated and divisionless Eternity.

The building of the fire altar is a sacrifice. The body of Prajāpati, the Year, dispersed and exhausted in the production of time, is reconstituted and rearticulated in the ritual of constructing the altar: ‘This Prajāpati (the Year) who became disjointed is now the same fire altar built formerly.’<sup>14</sup>



The *agnicayana*, the rite of constructing the fire altar,<sup>15</sup> lasts a year, since Prajāpati is the Year. In the first part of the ritual a horse is made to approach the site and snuffle upon the first layer of bricks. The horse represents Prajāpati and the Sun<sup>16</sup> and the bricks of the first layer of the altar are Prajāpati's progeny, all the beings of the worlds. The horse's snuffling or exhalation is the blowing of the Gale of the Spirit, coincident with the raying of light from the Sun, by which all living things are enspirited: ‘Just as he, the priest, makes it snuffle at these bricks, so yonder Sun strings to himself these worlds upon a thread,’<sup>17</sup> and ‘so bestows the Breath indeed upon them.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ŚB II.6.1.3.

<sup>15</sup> The rite is described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *passim*. See Eggeling, 1882, pp.41, 143; A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads*, Harvard Oriental Series 32, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925, p.254; Gonda, *Les Religions de l'Inde 2Vols.*, pp.1, 231 d.; Krarnrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, p.68 ff. The following, in the main, is a repetition of materials in Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa*, p.47 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Prajāpati is the Year, and he is also the Sun. The year is nothing other than the sun moving on the ecliptic; so similarly, the Year is nothing other than the stationary Sun.

<sup>17</sup> ŚB VII.3.2.12.

<sup>18</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* V.2.8.1; V.3.7.4 tr. R. E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principle Upaniṣads* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1931; herein TU]. The rite pertains to the *suūtrātman* or “Breath-thread” doctrine, according to which we are all connected to the Sun-source by a ray of spiritual Light or thread of Breath. The doctrine is a recurrent theme in the writings of Coomaraswamy. See e.g., *Selected Papers Vol.1: Art & Symbolism*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1977, p.387, note 28, and cf. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa*, p.112 ff. On the symbolism of the horse's snuffling upon the bricks of the altar and the concepts it engenders such as the doctrine of the extromission of the senses to their objects from a central point of Consciousness, see Coomaraswamy, ‘The Sun-kiss’, *Journal of American Oriental Society* 60, 1940, p.47 ff.

The first layer of the altar having thus been enlivened, a golden plate is laid down upon a lotus leaf. The plate is the Sun: ‘The same man who is in that (Sun’s) disc, it is he whom he now lays down (on the altar),’<sup>19</sup> and it is immortality,<sup>20</sup> the lotus leaf is the primordial Waters, Agni’s womb.<sup>21</sup> The Sun and the Waters are a progenitive pair whose union produces Prajāpati, the altar, and as a sign of this production a Golden Man, an image of Prajāpati, the immortal Person (*puruṣa*) of the sacrifice is next laid down upon the golden plate. Next a tortoise, symbol of the cosmos<sup>22</sup> and the vital sap of the world,<sup>23</sup> is built into the altar, and above this five layers are constructed, representing the five seasons and the five directions: ‘... of five layers consists the fire altar (Agni); five seasons are a year, and the year is Agni.’<sup>24</sup> The heads of sacrificial animals are built into the layers: a human head,<sup>25</sup> and the heads of a horse, an ox, a ram and a goat.

The altar is an *imago mundi*. Each of its component parts has a cosmic reference.<sup>26</sup> The erection of the altar is a *mimesis* of the construction of the cosmos. The water used for mixing the clay of the bricks is primeval Water; the clay is the Earth, the side walls are Midspace; and so similarly for all its components. The altar is also an image of the Year. Its erection is a reconstruction of Time. As Paul Mus says, the altar is “time materialized.”<sup>27</sup> There are 720 enclosing bricks, 360 for the days and 360 for the nights in the year:

The altar of fire is the Year... the nights are the stones surrounding it and there are 360 of them because there are 360 nights in the

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<sup>19</sup> ŚB VII.4.1.1.

<sup>20</sup> TU V.2.7.2.

<sup>21</sup> ŚB V11.4.1.8; TS V.2.7.2.

<sup>22</sup> In Chinese mythology the tortoise is an *imago mundi*; this is explicit in the account of the Lo-Shu number diagram that was inscribed on the tortoise that came to Yü the Great; see M. Granet, *La Pensée Chinoise*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1950. See A. Snodgrass, *Architecture, Time and Eternity*, Ch.30 ‘The Symbolism of the Chinese Hall of Light.’

<sup>23</sup> ŚB VII.5.1.1.

<sup>24</sup> ŚB VI.1.8.15.

<sup>25</sup> The human head is of someone “killed in battle or by a thunderbolt” (*Āpastambīya-śrautasūtra*, quoted by Gonda, *Les Religions de l’Inde Vol.1*, p.231).

<sup>26</sup> ŚB VI.5.1.1 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Mus, *Barabudur*, p.384; M. Eliade, ‘Centre du monde, temple, maison’ in *Symbolisme cosmique des monuments religieux*, Series Orientale Roma 14, Is.M.E.O., 1957, p.68; *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, p.372; *Images and Symbols*, London: Harvill, 1961, p.25.

year; the days are the *yajusmati* (self-perforated) bricks, for there are 360 of them; and there are 360 days in the year.<sup>28</sup>

The altar contains 10,800 bricks, which is the number of hours in the year (the day having 30 hours (*muhūrta*) of 48 minutes, giving a total of  $30 \times 360 = 10,800$  in the year).<sup>29</sup> When the enclosing wall is being constructed 1200 syllables are recited at the laying of each brick, which number is obtained by multiplying 15, the number of hours in the day and in the night, by 80, the number of sections in the *Vedas*. There are 360 stones so that  $360 \times 1200 = 432,000$  syllables are built into the altar,<sup>30</sup> which is the total number of syllables in the *Rg Veda* and the number of years in a *manvantara* or total world cycle, being a multiple of 25,920 the number of years in a precession of the equinoxes.<sup>31</sup>

The altar has five layers, which are the seasons:

... of five layers consists the fire altar, and five seasons make a year, and the year is Agni (that is, the altar) ...<sup>32</sup> and that Prajāpati who became relaxed is the year; and those five bodily parts (*tanū*)<sup>33</sup> of his which became relaxed are the seasons; for there are five seasons, and five are those layers: when he builds up the five layers he thereby builds him up with the seasons.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ŚB X. 5.4.10.

<sup>29</sup> ŚB X.4.2.18. The day and the night are divided into 15 parts each, corresponding to the 15 days of the waxing moon and the 15 days of the waning moon making up the lunation month. Cf. ŚB X.4.2.17. The 10,800 bricks of the altar also correspond to the 10,800 *panktis* of the *Rg Veda*, that is, the number of verses formed of five feet (*pada*) of eight syllables. See Mus, *Barabudur*, p.281; Eggeling, 1882, pp.42, 112, note 1. The three *Vedas* together have  $10,800 \times 80 = 864,000 = 2 \times 432,000$  syllables. On the predilection for calculations involving the number 80, see Eggeling, *idem*.

<sup>30</sup> ŚB X.2.4.30; and see Eggeling, 1882, pp.43, 354, note 2, on the method for determining the number 360.

<sup>31</sup> Guénon, *Formes Traditionnelles et cycles Cosmique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p.22 [*Traditional Forms & Cosmic Cycles*, tr. H. D. Fohr, Hillsdale N.Y.: Sophia Perennis, 2003]; ‘Quelques remarques sur la des cycles cosmiques’, *Études Traditionnelles*, 1938, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> ŚB VI.1.8.15.

<sup>33</sup> The *tanūs* are the two groups of five qualities or “powers” which constitute the “inherent body” or bodily self of Prajāpati (ŚB VI.1.2.17 ff.). There are five *tanūs* that are mortal (hair, skin, flesh, bones and marrow) and five that are immortal (mind, speech, breath, sight and hearing). See ŚB X.1.3.4. Each of these two groups of five qualities is identified with the five layers of the altar.

<sup>34</sup> ŚB VI.1.2.18.

The piling up of the altar thus replicates the course of the year, which is a reduced image of the Great Year, identified with Prajāpati. The five layers are also identified with the five directions:

...and those five bodily parts of his, the seasons, which became relaxed, are the regions (the four directions and the zenith); for five in number are the regions and five those layers: when he builds up the five layers he builds up Prajāpati with the regions.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the fire altar has five layers which correspond simultaneously to the five directions (north, south, east, west and the centre) and the five seasons. The correlations are ritually established by the five animal heads—man, horse, ox, ram and goat—that are immolated within the layers. The myth establishes that Agni, who is at once the Fire and the Altar, is the son of Prajāpati, engendered in Uṣas, the Dawn.<sup>36</sup> As soon as he was born Agni began to howl because he had no name, and so Prajāpati called him Rudra, “Howler.” But the infant god was not satisfied and said, “Give me yet a name,” and Prajāpati gave him seven more names: Sarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Aśani, Bhava, Mahān Deva and Īśāna. The child Agni entered into these forms in turn.<sup>37</sup> These eight forms of Agni are the regents of the eight directions of space.<sup>38</sup> They are subsumed within the single form of Agni, who occupies the centre: when Agni enters into these forms he unifies them within himself, the directions are reintegrated within their centre. Agni represents there constructed unity of the dispersed world.

Perceiving Agni’s wholeness and desiring it for himself, Prajāpati pursued Agni, who hid by splitting himself into five parts and entering into five animals—a man, a horse, an ox, a ram and a goat. But Prajāpati recognized Agni in the five animals and prepared to sacrifice them to the five gods of the directions: the man to Viśvakarman, the horse to Varuṇa, the ox to Indra, the ram to Tvastṛ and the goat to Agni. These

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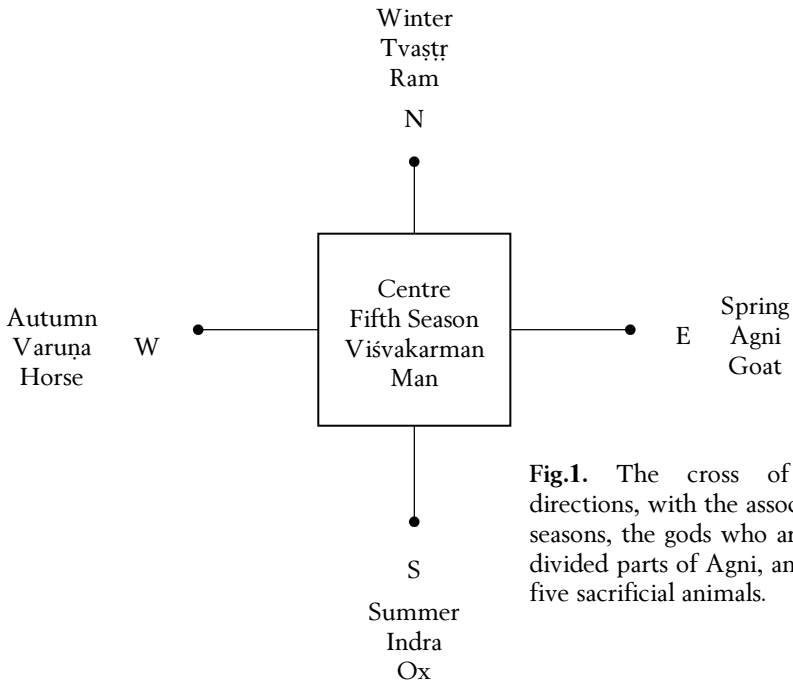
<sup>35</sup> ŚB VI.1.2.19.

<sup>36</sup> Given in ŚB VI.1.3.8 ff. The following considerations are elaborated in Mus, *Barabudur*, Ch. XV, ‘La réconstruction de Prajāpati et l’unité de l’univers’, p.495 ff. Cf. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa*, p.47 ff.

<sup>37</sup> ŚB VI.1.18-19.

<sup>38</sup> With the exception of Mani, who is replaced by Bhima, the list of names is that of the eight regent gods in the cardinal and intercardinal directions given in the later Hindu texts, where they are described as eight forms of Śiva.

five gods are regents of the directions and the seasons: Agni is the god who governs the east and the spring, Varuṇa governs the west and the autumn, Tvaṣṭṛ is in the north, the direction of winter, Indra rules the south and summer and the centre and the fifth season are given over to Viśvakarman, the Architect and Creator, the Maker of all things, whose four faces turn towards the four cardinal points and who is identified with Prajāpati himself and with his cosmo-productive activity. The five gods form a pentagram of the spatial and temporal world; they constitute a schema of the quincuncial divisions of space and of time; and they are the five divided portions of the body of Prajāpati, “emptied out” into the world. They are his emanations, the dispersal of his original unity into multiplicity.



**Fig.1.** The cross of the directions, with the associated seasons, the gods who are the divided parts of Agni, and the five sacrificial animals.

As he was preparing to sacrifice the five animals containing the hidden portions of Agni, Prajāpati began to have second thoughts. If he sacrificed these portions to the gods of the directions and of divided

time, he would affirm their dispersal and thus reinforce his own division. The sacrifice would merely enhance his own exhaustion. He began to realise that to sacrifice the five animals to the regents of the directions and the five seasons would be a fatal error. ‘He thought, “For different deities, indeed, I mean to sacrifice now; but I myself desire Agni’s forms; well then, I will sacrifice them as (the objects of my) desire”.’<sup>39</sup> Thus thinking, the disjointed god decided to sacrifice the five animals to the unified Agni, and thereby regain his own wholeness. He therefore seized the five animals and sacrificed them, but at the same time built up the five-layered altar, identifying each layer with an animal,<sup>40</sup> and thereby with a direction and a season.

The five animals are the five parts of Agni. By incorporating them within the single altar Prajāpati built a single, whole Agni—with whom he identified himself, and thus made himself whole again. Agni became Prajāpati’s own self: ‘(the victims) are five; for there are those five Agnis, to wit, the five layers. For them he lays down five homes: and seeing that, Agni turns unto him.’<sup>41</sup>

In the *agnicayana* ritual of constructing the altar—which is Agni—the builder re-enacts the myth. By building up the five layers and sacrificing one of the five animals at each layer, the performer of the ritual, in imitation of Prajāpati, reintegrates Agni’s five parts, which are the directions and the seasons. He reunifies the scattered parts of the two coordinates of the sensible world, space and time, within the Principle whence they derive. The altar is the image of time unified in the Timeless. ‘Assuredly, these (five) layers are the seasons,’<sup>42</sup> and ‘The fire altar has five layers, (each layer is a season), the five seasons make a year, and Agni is the year.’<sup>43</sup> Agni, the altar, is the unified Year, time reconstructed in Eternity.

Prajāpati creates all living creatures, animals and men, from his “breaths,”<sup>44</sup> and from his breaths he “creates” the five sacrificial animals immolated within the layers of the altar. The five animals, the sacrificial

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<sup>39</sup> ŚB VI.1.2.6.

<sup>40</sup> ŚB VI.2.1.11; VI.2.1.16.

<sup>41</sup> ŚB VI.2.1.16.

<sup>42</sup> ŚB VI.2.1.36.

<sup>43</sup> ŚB V1.8.1.15.

<sup>44</sup> ŚB VII.5.2 ff.; J. Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and History of the people of India, their Religions and Institutions 5 Vols.*, London, 1868-1874, Vol.1, 1968, pp., 24 & 28.

victims, identified with the directions of space and the divisions of time, are the disjunct portions of Prajāpati's body: the man is Prajāpati's self (*ātman*), the horse is his eye, the ox is his breath, the ram his ear, and the goat his voice. Building the animals into the altar is a reassembling of the dismembered parts of his body, which are the portions of space and time. Built into the altar the animals are unified, as are the directions and the times they signify. The construction of the altar signifies that the "breaths" of his senses, which overflow and pour out to perceive spatial and temporal extension, are withdrawn back to the source of their dispersal, the indwelling Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

In this way the directions, times, the body of Prajāpati, man's sensing of the outside world, are identified. The building of the altar is the integration of all of these; the doctrine is concerned with the reunification of fractured time within the Present that eternally abides at the innermost centre of everyman.

The building of the altar is a sacrificial act. The body of Prajāpati, which had been fragmented and dispersed in the cosmogenesis, is reconstituted and rearticulated—healed—by the sacrificial ritual of constructing the altar: 'This Prajāpati who became disjointed is now the same fire altar built formerly.'<sup>46</sup>

The being, who is a portion of Prajāpati's body, is likewise scattered, dispersed, discontinuous and deprived of cohesion. The creature and the creation are both subject to time—and time is the destroyer: the Year is Death.<sup>47</sup> Days and nights are the arms of Death that squeeze man. They are the waves that swallow everything.<sup>48</sup> Partite and divided, the being partakes of desolation, disorder and death.<sup>49</sup>

The construction rite restores Prajāpati's lost unity and by the rite the sacrificer is likewise made whole again. Prajāpati, who was dismembered in the beginning, is reassembled (*samskr̥*) in the altar. By constructing it the sacrificer identifies himself with Prajāpati. The building ritual identifies the sacrificer, the altar and Prajāpati: the extent of the base is that of the outstretched arms of the sacrificer, the bricks

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<sup>45</sup> The theme of the outflowing of the senses to their objects and their withdrawal to the central Inner Controller is developed in Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stūpa*, p.58 ff.

<sup>46</sup> ŚB II.6.1.3.

<sup>47</sup> ŚB X.4.3.3.

<sup>48</sup> Gonda, *Les Religions de l'Inde 2Vols.*, p.236.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.228.

are the length of his foot, the navel (*nābhi*) is a square with the dimensions of the span of his hand. The Golden Man, built into the courses of the altar, represents the immolated sacrificer. In analogous ways the sacrificer is identified with the sacrificial animal and with the consuming fire: the officiant is the altar, the holocaust, the sacrificial fire and the God to whom the sacrifice is offered.<sup>50</sup>

When the sacrificer builds the altar he is renewing himself in unity. By the performance of the sacrifice he is reintegrated. Retracing the course of Prajāpati's descent into the world he returns from multiplicity to unity. He passes beyond space and time, is reborn, and attains immortality.<sup>51</sup>

Prajāpati is Unity or Being fragmented into the diversity and flux of manifestation. In his essence he is Puruṣa, the Person, the unchanging, eternal and indivisible Essence of man and the cosmos. In an alternative version of the cosmogonic myth it is Puruṣa who is scattered into manifestation. Puruṣa is sacrificed by the gods (*deva*) at the beginning of the world. From his dismembered body proceed the animals, the liturgical elements, the castes, the sky and the earth, the gods.<sup>52</sup>

By way of the five layers of the altar the five divisions of the year—the centre, the equinoctial and solstitial points—are correlated with the five directions and with the five parts of the cosmic body of Prajāpati.

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<sup>50</sup> Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, London: Perennial Books, 1967, pp.20-21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>52</sup> *Ṛg Veda* X.90.1, tr. R. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛg Veda 2Vols.*, 1963, repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973. Cf. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* Vol.1, p.224; Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, p.17 ff.; Krarnrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, p.68; J. Auboyer, *Le trône et son symbolisme dans l'Inde ancienne*, Paris: Falmmarion, 1949, p.144; Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts Vol.5*, p.367 ff.; Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 11.1.4 (tr. Hume, 1931). The gods who sacrifice Puruṣa are the Intelligences ("Angels") or "distributive essences" (*vibhūtaya*) (*Aitareya Āraṇyaka* II.1.7, tr. A. B. Keith, *Anecdota Oxoniensia Aryan Series 9*, 1909; *Bhagavad Gīta* X.10, tr. Nikhilananda, New York, 1944) whose operation is our consciousness (Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers Vol.2: Metaphysics*, p.337.). They are the powers of the soul, the delegations and extensions of the power of the Spirit, sent forth by him to do his bidding. The Spirit indwells man and so likewise do the powers of the Spirit: 'Having made him their mortal house, the gods inhabited man' (*Atharva Veda* XI.8.18b, tr. W. D. Whitney & C.R. Lanman, *Harvard Oriental Series 7-8*, Cambridge Mass., 1905); 'All these gods are in me' (*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I.14.2ff, tr. H. Oertel, 'The Jaiminīya or Talavakāra Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 16, 1896, pp.79-260); and 'They are neither in the sky nor on earth: whatever breathes, therein they are' (*ŚB IX.2.1.15*).

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* specifies other correlations. The five “forms” of Agni are identified with “powers” belonging to the performer of the ritual:<sup>53</sup> Agni is the voice, the eye, the mind, the ear, and the breath, which latter is his supreme form, since the other forms are sustained by and dependent upon it.<sup>54</sup> The text then indicates cosmic equivalents: the voice is fire, the ear is the four directions of space, the eye is the sun, the mind is the moon, and the breath is the wind.<sup>55</sup> The passage concludes by stating that at death he who understands the doctrine

passes into fire by his speech, into the sun by his eye, into the moon by his mind, into the quarters by his ear, and into the wind by his breath; and being composed thereof, he is identified with that one among their divinities who corresponds and is at peace. “<sup>56</sup>

By ritual means the sacrificer is identified with the altar, which, we have seen, is identified part by part with the total body of the universe. His five “breaths”—voice, eye, mind, ear and breath—are identified one by one with the layers of the altar, which in their turn are identified with the directions and the seasons and with fire, the sun, the moon, the quarters and the wind. Those who practice the sacrificial ritual come to realise this identification of the “breaths” or faculties with those of the universe and likewise realise their reconstitution within the Unity which the altar represents: at his death he does not perish, but returns to the One.<sup>57</sup>

To construct the altar is to return the scattered parts of Prajāpati, the body of the cosmos, to the Centre: spatial extension is brought back to the geometric centre, the navel (*nābhi*) of the altar; temporal duration is reconcentrated at the *viśuvat*, the central day of the ceremonies; and the bodily elements and mental faculties of the person performing the ritual are withdrawn to the centre of his being, the “immortal centre,” which is coincident with the centre of Prajāpati. These three centres coalesce

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<sup>53</sup> Mus, *Barabudur*, \*p.144 ff.

<sup>54</sup> Compare this doctrine with that given in *Chandogya Upaniṣad* V.1.7-15 (tr. Hume, 1931) and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* VI.7-14 (tr. Hume, 1931), where it is taught that when these functions cease man becomes dumb, blind, mad or deaf, but when breath is withdrawn, he dies.

<sup>55</sup> ŚB X.3.3.1-6.

<sup>56</sup> ŚB X.3.3.8.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Mus, *Barabudur*,\*p.146.

in the rite, and whatever operates for one operates for all: the construction rites performed in space are simultaneously performed in time, and exercise their influence on the celestial powers, on the universe, and on the person of the sacrificer.<sup>58</sup>

The altar is the image of the universe in both its spatial and its temporal aspects, for not only does it embody the days and nights and seasons of the year but it is also oriented according to the four cardinal directions, each governed by a season.<sup>59</sup> ‘The altar is imbued with the substance of the world;’<sup>60</sup> it is the hypostasis of the cosmos; its construction brings together the directions and all times—the seasons, the months, the days and nights—into a single, reintegrated whole. It is the coalescence of all space and all time within a compounded Unity.



As in the Vedic Fire Altar, in the mandala that prefigures the plan of the Hindu temple time is transmuted into space. The mandala abstracts the sequential and successive from the cycles of becoming and renders them in their instantaneity. The divisions of time are made whole, reintegrated, brought back to Unity; the disjointed and dispersed fragments are reintegrated within a punctual Now. The mandala shows the world as the similitude of the timeless; it is a diagram of the world as it abides in the equilibrium of stasis, in which all times are seen as so many successive projections of the eternal Instant.

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<sup>58</sup> Gonda, *Les Religions de l'Inde* 2Vols., p.234.

<sup>59</sup> See Mus, *Barabudur*, \*p.97 & pp.733-789; Eliade, ‘Centre du monde, temple, maison’, p.68.

<sup>60</sup> Mus, *Barabudur*, \*p.112.