

Silent Night

- Swami Veda Bharati -
(*Revelries in Sanctity*, pages 2-3)

The following paraphrase by Swami Veda, from the “Rig-Veda X.127.18 Hymn to the Night” (*Ratri-Sukta*), is indispensable for understanding the many metaphors, allusions and images of this collection of his holiday greetings to us all. Included are Swami Veda's own footnotes to help us understand this Hymn to Night and to understand why his Preface speaks of a transformation from fear and darkness to a song of dawn and light.

"Night with myriad eyes in all directions
has come bearing us the gift of Discerning Wisdom;¹
O, how many glories has She besparked.

This expansive and immortal one
has flooded the lower and higher places² with light;
She dispels, wards off, all that is of darkness within us.

When this celestial Lady comes forth,
She makes image Her sister Dawn,
and darkness flees in terror far.

She is our today, and we are Hers;
We settle in Her ways as we are led;
She settles us into Her shelter
like trees settle birds down.

All the nomadic groups³ have settled;
Those with feet, with wings, have settled.
The hawks that fly hunting have settled too.

Drive from us the violent beast (lioness) and thief;⁴
O Thou who ever come in waves.⁵
Be Thou our own more beautiful self!

Darkness has shaped us into its forms,
and black manifestation⁶ called the world;
blow it away, O Dawn,⁷
like a debt forever discharged.

I compose these words unto Thee,
Do accept my gift, Heaven's Daughter!
They are my paean sung for Thee victorious.”

Notes:

1. Final realization comprising the discernment between matter and spirit; that all my faculties constituted of matter are non-self; I am the Spiritual Self.
2. Lower and higher centers of consciousness.
3. Wandering senses, unsettled faculties, perturbed states of mind. They have feet and wings, and fly off to hunt like hawks.
4. The beast and the thief within us – the thief who has stolen our very Self from us.
5. The Great Mother is called *Tri-pura-sundari*: She the Beauty of the three universes who touches us in spiritual waves. The primary text extolling Her Is *Saundarya-lahari*, *Wave of Beauty*.
6. *Tamas*, one of the three constituents of our Nature (*prakrti*), is synonymous with that "heaviness" and inertia that turns energy into forms and keeps them such. It's symbolic colour is black. The energy of our Nature is so subtle that it is intangible but *tamas* keeps it in the "heavy" manifest dark shapes and forms, including our own. The Night that is Light is being asked to dissolve this darkness of shapes and forms, to return energy to its primordial state of consciousness.
7. Because this Night is the Night of profound spiritual silence that is light, She is addressed as Dawn.

Silent Night is that state of the soul wherein all disturbing glitter ceases, senses are abandoned, and the word "night" becomes synonymous with spiritual light. Only then God's manifestation can be born in the poor manger of our body and personality. At first, Dawn of knowing seems to emerge from Night, till we realize that here Night Herself may be sung to as Dawn.

To understand this, do read, in preparation for the celebration of the silent night: St. John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*, and his own commentary on the same. Then read this hymn from the *Rig-Veda* again.