

Water in Mythology

Michael Witzel

Abstract: Water in its various forms – as salty ocean water, as sweet river water, or as rain – has played a major role in human myths, from the hypothetical, reconstructed stories of our ancestral “African Eve” to those recorded some five thousand years ago by the early civilizations to the myriad myths told by major and smaller religions today. With the advent of agriculture, the importance of access to water was incorporated into the preexisting myths of hunter-gatherers. This is evident in myths of the ancient riverine civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, as well as those of desert civilizations of the Pueblo or Arab populations.

Our body, like the surface of the earth, is more than 60 percent water. Ancient myths have always recognized the importance of water to our origins and livelihood, frequently claiming that the world began from a watery expanse.

Water in its various forms – as salty ocean water, as sweet river water, or as rain – has played a major role in human tales since our earliest myths were recorded in Egypt and Mesopotamia some five thousand years ago. Thus, in this essay we will look toward both ancient and recent myths that deal with these forms of water, and we will also consider what influence the ready availability (or not) of water had on the formation of our great and minor early civilizations.

Many of our oldest collections of myths introduce the world as nothing but a vast salty ocean. The oldest Indian text, the poetic *Rgveda* (circa 1200 BCE), asserts: “In the beginning, darkness was hidden by darkness; all this [world] was an unrecognizable salty ocean [*salila*].”¹ This phrase is frequently repeated by later Vedic texts with the mythic formula: “In the beginning there was just the salty ocean.”

Mesopotamian mythology, in its Babylonian form, differs somewhat: there was both salty water and sweet water, which mingled to produce the gods.

MICHAEL WITZEL, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2003, is the Wales Professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University. His many publications include *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (2012), *Linguistic Evidence for Cultural Exchange in Pre-historic Western Central Asia* (2003), and *On Magical Thought in the Veda* (1979).

© 2015 by Michael Witzel
doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00338

“When on high heaven had not been named . . . Nought but primordial *Apsu* [the watery abyss], their begetter, and *Mummu-Tiamat*, she who bore them all, their waters, commingling as a single body . . . then it was that the gods were formed within them.”²

Ancient Maya mythology, as recorded in the sixteenth-century *Popol Vuh*, reflects the same concept: “Only the sky alone is there . . . Only the sea alone is pooled under all the sky. . . . Whatever there is that might be is simply not there: only the pooled water only the calm sea, only it alone is pooled.”³

Or, according to the first chapter of the Hebrew Bible: “In the beginning the gods⁴ created heaven and earth . . . and the spirit [*ruah*] of the gods⁵ hovered over water.” The Christian King James Bible revised this to read: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

In ancient Egypt, in the book of overthrowing the dragon of the deep, *Apophis*,⁶ the “Lord of All,” explains, “I am he who came into being as *Khepri* . . . I was . . . in the Watery Abyss. I found no place to stand.” Here and in the Biblical case, one or more deities predate the actual act of creation, a characteristic shared with other creation mythologies, such as with the Winnebago of Wisconsin: “Our father . . . began to think what he should do and finally began to cry and tears began to flow and fall down below him . . . his tears . . . formed the present waters.”⁷

Other Native American peoples agree, though not on all details. The Maidu of California, employing a motif that also appears in Siberian mythology, state: “In the beginning . . . all was dark, and everywhere there was only water. A raft came floating . . . in it were two persons.”⁸ In all these examples, which primarily originate from north of the equator, the initial stage

of a primordial ocean (or void) is followed by stages that lead to the emergence of the inhabitable world and finally the first humans. Michael Witzel

The myths of sub-Saharan Africa (and Australia) are structured differently from those mentioned in that they stress foremost the origins of humans, not of the world.⁹ Even then, rather exceptionally, the Boshongo in the Luanda area of Angola let the world begin with water *and* a preexisting deity: “In the beginning, in the dark, there was nothing but water. And Bumba was alone . . . he vomited the sun.”¹⁰

Clearly, distinct from such concepts as primordial chaos (Greece) or darkness (Polynesia), the concept of water pervades many ancient and recent creation mythologies. Questioning the universality of *why* leads to psychology and, perhaps, to Jungian archetypes, though we cannot here explore the psychic origins of myths, whether due to universal characteristics of the mind or other human factors. Ethnologist Leo Frobenius and anthropologist Hermann Baumann pointed toward other explanations: namely, the spread of many myths by diffusion from an ancient center. More likely still is the development of our original myths (of the “African Eve”) in East Africa, which then spread along the shores of the Indian Ocean to Australia and South China some sixty-five thousand years ago, before finally expanding into the rest of Eurasia and the Americas.¹¹ Consequently, all humans have a few myths in common (though that is denied for “theoretical reasons” by scholars such as the folklorist Alan Dundes). For example, the flood myth is universal: it is found all over Africa, Australia, Eurasia, and the Americas. Further, both the southern and northern versions of the myths share the common theme of shamanism, which is part and parcel of many smaller local and major religions to this day.

As the Mesopotamian example indicates, there is an important distinction between sweet water and salty water.¹² Sweet water is obviously more important for the sustenance of humans; thus, from the *R̥gveda* onward, the ancient Indian texts praise the flowing sweet waters but not stagnant ponds (“tanks”).¹³ Indian texts regard rivers as goddesses, and the term “inviolable ladies” refers to their beneficial waters (which are believed to carry milk for women and semen for men). In Indian mythology, the *cakravāka* bird actually distinguishes between their water and milk.

Rivers are also invoked as sources of healing. Closely related is the ancient Indian and Iranian (Zoroastrian) idea of the river goddess *Sarasvatī*, “she who has many ponds.” *Sarasvatī* is the modern Helmand River in Southern Afghanistan, which has given its name (*Haraxvaitī*) to the ancient province of Arachosia. It swells in spring after the snow melt, while the *Sarsuti*, its Indian counterpart northwest of Delhi, swells in the monsoon season. *Haraxvaitī*’s rushing waters – or further downstream, its murmuring flows – gave rise to the belief that *Sarasvatī* is the goddess of speech and poetry. Indeed, almost all Indian rivers are regarded as female, with the major exception of the male Indus (*Sindhu*; Greek *Indos*), who has given his name to the subcontinent.¹⁴

Female river names, usually ending in *a*, are found throughout the regions of the Indo-European language family, from Iceland to Bengal: the Seine (*Sequana*), Thames (*Tamesis*), the Central European Elbe (*Albis*), Weser (*Visara*), Saale (*Sala*), Wistla/Weichsel (*Vistula*), and the Vltava/Moldau (Czech Republic), Drava (Slovenia; or *Drau* in Austria), Drina (Bosnia), Volga (Russia), and *Gaṅgā*/Ganges (India) are all feminine.

There are, however, quite a few male Indo-European river exceptions, such as the Rhône (*Rhodanus*), Rhein (*Rhenus*),

Danube (*Danubius*; now feminine as *Donau* or *Dunarea*), Tiber/Tevere (*Tiberis*), Po (*Padus*), as well as the Ebro, Tejo/Tajo, and Brahmaputra (India). Closer to home, we have the Ol’ Man River, the Mississippi, the Rio Grande, and the Colorado.

The mythical cleansing power of rivers is perhaps best demonstrated by the bathing festival *Kumbh Melā*, in which millions of Hindu pilgrims assemble every twelve years at the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna rivers with the mythical, underground *Sarasvatī* at Allahabad (*Prayāga*).¹⁵ The purifying bath delivers people from their *karma* and allows them to go to heaven after death. This belief has a long prehistory: taking a bath at certain confluences is followed by a march upstream toward the “world tree” situated in the lower Himalayas.¹⁶ The pilgrims believe that at the meeting point of the river and the sky, one can climb up to heaven. As a result of these beliefs, a bath at any confluence of two rivers (*trivenī*) is regarded as sacred and salvific.

Reality obviously differs considerably. By now the Jumna is virtually a sewer due to the untreated waters of Delhi and other big towns upstream. The Ganges has not fared much better. Its river dolphins are fast disappearing, and the organized “clean-up campaigns” have not had much success. Nevertheless, local folklore about the Ganges’ cleanliness persists: the river “cleans itself” in spite of all its garbage, sewage, and half-cremated dead bodies. In fact, people not only bathe in the river, they also collect it to carry home over long distances; some habitually drink it. Such is the power of myth.

Water is used as a spiritual cleansing agent in diverse traditions inside and outside India, effectively blurring the boundary between cleaning and cleansing.¹⁷ In Japan, upon entering a Shintō shrine, visitors must cleanse themselves with water;

and Islam dictates that adherents wash their hands, faces, feet, and parts of their head before prayer in an act called *Wuḍūʾ*.¹⁸ Washing hands for purification was also common among the Greeks and Romans, and Pontius Pilate famously did the same in an attempt to remove himself from Christ's death.¹⁹

In ancient Israel, too, water was used for various types of purification, including the consecration of Levites and before priests approached the altar.²⁰ Individuals purified themselves from guilt by washing hands and giving offerings. The cleansing and salvific force of water is also obvious in the Christian rite of baptism, irrespective of how much water is used (complete submergence in a natural body of water versus a gentle blessing of holy water). Baptism places the baptized on a path toward heaven, just like the Indian bath at the *Kumbh Melā*.

Rain is welcomed in traditions worldwide, especially those rooted outside of colder and temperate climates. Innumerable prayers and rituals are performed to attract rain – an essential source of water for drinking and agriculture – to areas that do not receive regular precipitation, such as the Mediterranean winter rains, but instead depend on unpredictable precipitation, like the summer monsoons in India, Southern China, or Japan.

Similarly, the Hopi, living in the desert of Northern Arizona, depend on the spotty summer monsoon and on winter snow for the success of their crops of corn and beans. They therefore invite many of the roughly two hundred Katsina spirits from the nearby snowy mountains to bring rain. Secret rituals are performed in underground sacred chambers (*kiva*), while dances – with humans impersonating the Katsina – are performed outside.

In India and Nepal, priests perform various rituals and help stage great monsoon

festivals to ensure the timely beginning and end of the rainy season, on which the rice crops depend. The Jagannātha Festival at Puri in Eastern India is one famous example, featuring a giant “juggernaut” chariot carrying Hindu deities through town. In the Kathmandu Valley, there are two large, historically multilayered chariot festivals: the Indra Jātrā and the Macchen-dranāth Jātrā, both of which are celebrated to stop excessive rain. Furthermore, the divine *Nāgas* – moisture loving, snake-like, and shape-shifting beings – have their own festival at the onset of the rainy season, announced by the ritual of humans pasting an image of the *Nāgas* above their front door. There are folklore practices as well, such as burying a clay image of a rain-loving frog in a newly dug up rice field (to deliver rains).²¹ The connection between monsoon rain and revitalized frogs can be traced back to the oldest Indian text, the *Rgveda*.²² And should the rains fail, a village may send naked women out into its streets to dance and entice *Indra*, the god of rain.

Similar customs were observed just one hundred years ago along the river Rhine, in Serbia and Greece: a small naked girl was led into a river and hit with twigs. Or in Tyrol, Austria, young women caught on the road could have water poured over them to induce rain. The same idea may underlie the famous water festivals of Burma, Thailand, and Yunnan, which are carried out at the height of the hot season before the monsoon. Buckets of water are poured on passers-by, especially by young men chasing young women; or showers from a standpipe are splashed on onlookers.

An ancient Iranian text contained in the *Avesta* provides a dramatic account of how the star Sirius (*Tištriia*) fights with his opponent *Apaoša*²³ at the mythical lake *Vourukaša* until fog and clouds rise and rain covers all “seven parts of the earth.”²⁴

The many “methods” used to attract rain are all based on the shared belief that

similar actions result in similar outcomes (sympathetic magic). In some parts of India, such as in Maharashtra, one ceremoniously “marries” two frogs to stop a drought and induce rain.²⁵ At least since the early eleventh century in parts of Europe and Algeria, humans or animals are ceremoniously dunked in rivers and ponds to attract rain. In many traditions, rain is regarded as the tears of deities: the Maori of New Zealand believe Heaven cried after he was pushed up and forever separated from his wife, the Earth.²⁶ In early India, however, rain was divine urine.

In many areas of the Greater Near East, the weather god – similar to the thunderer Zeus and the Indian rain god *Indra* with his troupe, the Marut – was regarded as the dominant deity. Memories of this pagan incarnation persevere: the Icelandic Thor is commemorated every Thursday (Thor’s day) or the German *Donners-tag* (day of Thunder).

Because deities tend to live on mountains, pilgrims may travel to the mountains from great distances to ask for rain. If making the request directly to a deity is not an option, there are alternatives: the newly introduced Tantric Buddhism in eighth-century Japan allowed for religious rituals to be performed for the emperor in a period of drought. Across the East China Sea, the Chinese thunder god *Lei-shih* was a significant deity, more so than, for example, the river God *Ho po* of the Huang He (the Yellow River).²⁷

The rainbow – prominently connected with rain – also plays a great role in various mythologies. In ancient India, and still with the pagan Kalasha people who live on the border east of Afghanistan, the rainbow is regarded as the bow (*Indradyumna*; *Indron*) of the great warrior and rain god Indra.

According to common European folklore, either treasure or a dragon – the mon-

strous reptile guarding hidden treasure – awaits visitors at the end of a rainbow. The rainbow can also function as a bridge between heaven and earth, such as in Southern Germany, in the Icelandic *Edda*, or in Japan. The Roma (Gypsies), originally from Northwestern India, believe that at Pentecost, it is possible to mount the rainbow and ascend to heaven, a belief that echoes the old Indian concept of reaching heaven by traveling upstream along certain rivers.²⁸

In much of the Southern Hemisphere, the rainbow is viewed as a serpent. In Australian Aboriginal mythology, the rainbow is the primordial mother deity that gives birth to the totem animal-like ancestors of humans, who roamed the continent in “dream time” before sinking back into eternal slumber beneath the surface.

Some of the world’s early civilizations arose on major rivers, such as in Egypt, Iraq, China, and the Indus Valley, while other early civilizations developed apart from major rivers, such as in Greece, Iran, Japan, Mesoamerica, and the Andes. This division obviously depends on particular geographical conditions. The riverine civilizations made use of the perennial water supply of the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Indus, and Huang He. Other Neolithic peoples invented schemes to harness river waters for irrigation. These civilizations developed ingenious means – such as surprisingly complex irrigation networks that terraced and distributed small streams – to harvest the much less abundant local water resources. This is evident in the long, underground canals (*qanat*) of Iran; in the sharing water schemes for rice agriculture in the Himalayan hills, the Philippines, Java, or Japan; or in the remarkable irrigation channels of Peru that have endured since the Incas. Along the Salt and Gila rivers of Arizona we find the massive irrigation schemes of the Hohokam civilization, abandoned around 1450 CE after some

twenty-five years of drought (a similar drought-induced decline hit the Anasazi peoples of Northern Arizona).

In their mythologies, these varied civilizations all share a close link with the divine sources of water. An old Egyptian hymn addresses the Nile: "Greetings to you, O Waters that *Shu* [air] has brought . . . in which the earth [*Geb*] will bathe its limbs! Now hearts can lose their fear." The Nile spirit announces: "I am . . . the provider of the fields with plenty," to which the gods answer: "There was no happiness until you came down! . . . 'Canal of happiness' will be the name of this canal as it floods the fields with plenty."²⁹ A special god, *Hapy*, controlled the annual flooding of the River Nile, which is caused by rains in the Ethiopian Highlands.

Similarly, rain, flooding, and irrigation played various major roles in ancient Mesopotamia. Outside of Egypt, irrigation was necessary: rainfall and subsequent flooding was insufficient for agriculture.³⁰ Thus, Sumerian texts quote the major deity "*Enki*, the King of the Abzu [watery abyss]" who authoritatively states: "I am he who has been born as the first son of the holy *An* [one of the two leading deities] . . . When I approached high heaven a rain of prosperity poured out from heaven, when I approached the earth, there was a high flood."³¹ Enki "filled the Tigris with fresh, life-giving water," and to make both rivers function, he appointed the god *Enbilulu* as "canal inspector."³² The myth expresses this in striking terms: "He stood up proudly like a rampaging bull, he lifts his penis, ejaculates, filled the Tigris with sparkling water. . . . The water he brought is sparkling water, its 'wine' tastes sweet." And the texts rejoice: "the inundation of *Enlil* has come, the Land is restored."

In South Asia, the "river hymn" of the *Rgveda* praises the "three times seven" rivers of Eastern Afghanistan and the Punjab, but singles out the Indus River (*Sindhu*)³³ as

the mightiest river: "ahead of all streams, the *Sindhu* overtakes them by his might"; it is "the best flowing one of the rivers, white-streamed."³⁴ All other rivers "rush towards it like mothers to their young, like cows," while the *Sindhu* "moves like a bellowing bull . . . its noise stretches across the earth up toward heaven."

This praise is in addition to that of the aforementioned half-mythical *Sarasvatī*. Her name signifies two rivers in Southern Afghanistan and in Eastern Punjab, now the Helmand (the ancient *Haraxvaitī*) and the almost disappeared Indian *Sarsuti* (*Ghagghar*). The *Sarasvatī*, too, is praised in the *Rgveda* as a mighty river, and is later on connected with the myth of the heavenly and mundane river *Gaṅgā* (Ganges). The heavenly *Gaṅgā*, the Milky Way, first fell on the Great God *Śiva*'s head before reaching earth as the Ganges, which is depicted in a famous rock sculpture at Mahabalipuram in Southern India. Thus, just as the pilgrimage upstream the *Sarasvatī* leads to the world tree in the lower Himalayas – and from there to heaven – so, too, does the pilgrimage and bath during the *Kumbh Melā* at the Allahabad confluence of the Ganges and the *Jamna* (*Yamunā*), where the *Sarasvatī* – "flowing underground" from its disappearance in the deserts of Southwestern Punjab – joins them as the third "braid" (*trivenī*).

In China, the Yellow River is regarded as potentially dangerous (like the Egyptian and Mesopotamian rivers), and it has justified its reputation as recently as the 1850s and 1930s, when it completely changed its course, leading to the deaths of millions. Thus, the fearsome river is the target of prayer. In Chinese origin myths, one of the major deeds of the second "emperor" *Nuwa*, an early mythical deity, was to kill the Black Dragon and to tame the river's flood waters.³⁵ *Nuwa* collected reed ashes and built river dams, letting the flood flow out through gorges to the eastern abyss.

Michael
Witzel

Beyond Nuwa, there are a number of minor river goddesses in Chinese mythology, such as the goddess *Fufei*, the deity of the river Lo, along which the early capital Lo-yang was built.

In contrast to these riverine civilizations, the “desert religions,” such as Zoroastrianism or Islam, extol the water of “life giving” springs and the resulting green oases. Around 1000 BCE, the monotheistic religion of Zarathustra (*Zarathustra*) developed in the desert borderlands of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, in which there are only a few perennial rivers. Zoroaster’s society was dominated by pastoralism, with some limited agriculture.³⁶ The later Zoroastrian texts (*Avesta*), which were largely composed in the arid lands of Bactria and Arachosia, are rightfully much concerned with water: they mention several deep, broad lakes³⁷ and rushing rivers³⁸ alongside the mythical rivers (*Arāduuī*, *Daitiā*) and lakes (*Vourukaša*, *Pūitika*, *Pišinah*). One Arachosian text gives a geographic account of the Helmand and the other rivers flowing into the lake Hamun; all of which could be used for irrigation.³⁹ The text warns, however, to look out for the sometimes devastating floods “at the end of winter” that can hit villages and spread through channels and underground canals.⁴⁰

Islam, too, was first situated in the desert regions of Western Saudi Arabia, in a predominantly pastoral society with some trading towns, including Mecca and Medina. By definition, nomads look at oases and towns “from the outside,” though they rely on their perennial springs for their animals. Thus, it is no wonder that the green of the oasis has become the favorite color of Islam, so much so that Muammar Gaddafi’s Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya chose an unadorned green rectangle for its national flag (Gaddafi also published his political theories in *The Green*

Book); Saudi Arabia uses the same uniform green for its flag, adding only a sword and the Islamic declaration of faith.

Much of this is also found in the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Bible, with their frequent references to deserts and wastelands⁴¹ and the search for water: for example, Moses’s water miracle when the Israelites wandered in the Sinai desert for forty years,⁴² or a recluse’s stay in the desert (often of forty days): such as that of John the Baptist in the mountainous wilderness of Judea while baptizing people in the River Jordan, by Moses while fasting for forty days, or by Jesus who also fasted for forty days in the wilderness.⁴³

In the myths of Sumer, Egypt, India, China, Japan, the Torah, and the Christian Bible, to those of modern populations across the globe, water is a central, critical force. As we have seen, this is in part due to the various individual ecological conditions encountered by the ancient civilizations, especially since the beginning of food production some ten thousand years ago. The early civilizations were in need of a reliable supply of water for their crops, by rain or irrigation, and hence stressed the importance of river or rainstorm deities. However, ready access to water was imperative even for our earliest human ancestors, and thus, water myths persevered through their descendants, whether hunter-gatherers or agriculturalists, all over the globe.

Water was and still is predominant in creation myths and their connected rituals, underlining the close relationship of mythological traditions with their immediate environment. While many of us today may not observe the same direct, spiritual connection with water, depending on our industrial water supply, we still worship water when we – as the great comic George Carlin used to say – satisfy the great American fetish of carrying with us our own water bottles wherever we go.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Rgveda* 10.129:3. The word *salila* clearly is related to the Indo-European word for *salt* – Latin *sal* – and thus indicates the primordial salty ocean.
- ² From the Babylonian creation hymn, “Enuma Elish”; see Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 98; which has more recently been published as *Essential Sacred Writings from around the World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992). Eliade’s text is based on Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, “Akkadian Myths, Epics, and Legends,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950).
- ³ Dennis Tedlock, trans., *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings* (New York: Touchstone, 1985); see also the German translation of L. Schulze Jena, *Popol Vuh. Das heilige Buch der Quiché-Indianer von Guatemala. Nach einer wiedergefundenen alten Handschrift neu übersetzt und erläutert* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1944), 4: “Invisible was the face of the earth; only the ocean accumulated under the vault of the sky; that was All” (my translation from German).
- ⁴ The word *elohim*, clearly a plural, creates a problem, though this is disregarded in the standard Christian translations (or is explained away).
- ⁵ Again the plural *elohim*.
- ⁶ Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings from around the World*, 96.
- ⁷ Paul Radin quoted in *ibid.*, 83.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁹ See Michael Witzel, *The Origins of the World’s Mythologies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ¹⁰ Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings from around the World*, 91.
- ¹¹ For a discussion of archetypes and diffusion see Witzel, *The Origins of the World’s Mythologies*, 22 *sqq.*
- ¹² It would be interesting to see how many myths deal with real water bodies versus those that are thought to be truly mythological. However, such a statistical investigation is impossible for the time being since we only have partial myth indexes, such as Stith Thompson’s effort of the 1930s or Yuri Berezkin’s more comprehensive index, which appears mostly in Russian. See Yuri E. Berezkin, “World Mythology and Folklore: Thematic Classification and Areal Distribution of Motifs. Analytical Catalogue,” <http://ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin/eng.htm>.
- ¹³ For flowing and standing waters, see *Rgveda* 7.49:2: “The heavenly waters, or those that flow, those that have been dug, or that have been self-created . . . these divine waters shall protect me here!” Similarly, with the Prasun of Nuristan (Northeast Afghanistan); see G. Buddruss and A. Degener, *Materialien zur Prasun-Sprache des Afghanischen Hindukusch* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Oriental Series 80, 2015), Text 24.
- ¹⁴ The Indus was regarded as salty: it flows through the Salt Range of Northern Pakistan.
- ¹⁵ See my blog Vedagya, “Kumbh Mela – Its Sources,” <http://vedagya.blogspot.com/2013/03/kumbh-mela-its-sources.html>.
- ¹⁶ For a full treatment, see Michael Witzel, “Sur le chemin du ciel,” *Bulletin des Etudes indiennes* 2 (1984): 213 – 279, <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/CheminDuCiel.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Purification with *earth* and water is mentioned by the eleventh-century poet-historian Kalhana in his *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* 6.69.
- ¹⁸ Qur’an 5.5 – 6
- ¹⁹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 725 *sqq.*; and Matthew 27:24.
- ²⁰ Numbers 8:7; and Exodus 30:17.

- ²¹ See Gautama V. Vajracharya, “The Adaptation of Monsoonal Culture by Rgvedic Aryans: A Further Study of the Frog Hymn,” *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 3 (2) (1997), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/ejvs0302/ejvs0302.txt>.
- ²² *Rgveda* 7.103; 9.112 :4.
- ²³ Bernhard Forssman, “Apoša, der Gegner des Tištriia,” *Kuhn’s Zeitschrift* 82 (1968): 37 – 61.
- ²⁴ *Yašt* 8.31 – 33.
- ²⁵ My Own Market Narrative, “Well, They Practice Magical Thinking over Here Too,” July 14, 2012, http://myownmarketnarrative.blogspot.com/2012_07_08_archive.html.
- ²⁶ See the modern version at “Stories of Old; Creation,” <http://www.maori.org.nz/korero>.
- ²⁷ Wolfgang Münke, *Die klassische chinesische Mythologie* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 86.
- ²⁸ In the Bible, however, the rainbow is the sign of God’s covenant with Noah after the great flood; with some Native American peoples, the rainbow is the web of a giant spider, woven to catch the sun, or it is the coat of the Great Spirit that covers rain.
- ²⁹ R. T. Rundle-Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 100 and 102.
- ³⁰ This became even more important after the water level of the Euphrates and the Tigris fell considerably during the major climate reversal of the late twenty-first centuries BCE, and before it stabilized again during the seminal Ur III period.
- ³¹ See “Enki and the World Order” in Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings from around the World*, 22.
- ³² Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 173, 179, 183.
- ³³ *Rgveda* 10.75.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.26.
- ³⁵ Lihui Yang and Deming An with Jessica Anderson Turner, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio, 2005), 11 and 105; and Münke, *Die klassische chinesische Mythologie*, 219 sqq.
- ³⁶ *Vīdēvdād* 3.23 :30 sqq.
- ³⁷ “Caēcašta” in *Yašt* 9.21.
- ³⁸ *Yašt* 10.14.
- ³⁹ “Kaṣaoiia” in *Yašt* 19.65 – 68.
- ⁴⁰ *Vōiynā* or “inundation.” See *Vīdēvdād* 1.3; and *Yašt* 8.61, 8.56.
- ⁴¹ See the Internet Sacred Text Archive, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/ebd/ebd102.htm>.
- ⁴² The mysterious number forty appears in several ancient traditions, including those of Iran and India; it may be linked to an astronomical feature: the forty days of the disappearance of the Pleiades. See Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1914), 383 sqq., <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/works.htm>; and discussion in Michael Witzel, “Jungavestisch apāxədra- im System der avestischen Himmelsrichtungsbezeichnungen,” *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* (MSS) 30 (1972): 163 – 191.
- ⁴³ Matthew 3 :1; Exodus 24 :18; Exodus 34 :28; Matthew 4 :2.