

# Distance and death in the Veda

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## DISTANCE AND DEATH IN THE VEDA

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Yonder world denoted as *páraloka*, *pára loká* or *asáu loká*<sup>1</sup> is the heavenly world, the ideal situation wished for in Vedic literature dealing with the solemn (*śrauta*) rituals. There is, however, also a distant region associated with death which is less pleasant and therefore less mentioned in that literature. It is the realm of the dead which is not lying above but under or on the outskirts of the earth. In the *R̥gvedasamhitā* heaven is the final destination for only a few meritorious human beings in the latest layers of this text (Bodewitz 1994). The relative silence about the probably older conception of a subterranean realm of the dead, even in the oldest layers, is quite understandable. There was no incentive for mentioning it as the ultimate fate of man and since the opposition of heaven and hell or underworld still did not exist, the deterrent was missing. At most one might express the wish that bad people or rivals would be sent to it as soon as possible in a premature death.

In the *Atharvavedasamhitā* life after death is situated in both heaven and the nether world, namely as a reward for typically Atharvan rituals (the Atharvavedic answer to the challenge of the Vedic *śrauta* sacrifices) and in connection with sorcery (the magic of spells sending rivals or sinners to the nether world or of primitive medicine in which one tries to save the free soul of a dying person from the underworld) (Bodewitz 1999 a).

In the other *Samhitās* and in the Vedic prose texts (which to some extent miss the magic of the *Atharvaveda*) almost all emphasis is put on the future life of the meritorious in heaven. Still even here there are some traces of the old conception of a Vedic Hades. In post-Vedic literature Yama's seat is in the underworld and ideas about hell become further elaborated. In Vedic literature falling into the underworld or the hell occurs. These places are sometimes denoted as holes or pits, but some holes have to be interpreted as the doors to the underworld (Bodewitz 1999 b). The catchwords for underworld (and hell?) are pit, hole, abyss, depth, down, darkness and distance. The last mentioned code will be examined in this article.

1 The *para loka* or *asau loka* in the *Bṛghu* story of JB. 1, 42 forms an exception, since it evidently denotes the underworld or perhaps even hell.

References to a non-heavenly yonder world which is far away<sup>2</sup> are mostly expressed by the term *parāvát* ‘distance’. Its connotation is negative, though it is doubtful whether this implies that only some sort of hell is meant<sup>3</sup>. Hell and the underworld in general are lying under the earth. How can we connect the distant world with the underworld?

In several cultures the destination of the dead is situated in distant places on the outskirts of the world, often in the West. In Vedic texts, however, death is associated with the South. Since the West is the quarter where the sun sets, it may represent the entrance to the nether world. God Varuṇa is not only connected with the West but also with death and in the epics he is residing in the underworld. The fact that the sun appears from the *parāvát* may imply that the distance is not exclusively connected with the West and extends into the underworld<sup>4</sup>.

- 2 AV. 9, 2, 17 wants the rivals to be thrust far (*dūrám*) from this world. In the same and the following verse these rivals are compared with the Asuras and the Dasyus (who were led to lowest darkness by Indra). Cf. JUB. 2, 8, 4 “He said to them (i.e. the Asuras): ‘Go far away (*dūram*)’. This is a world called far (*dūra*). They went to it. These Asuras became irretrievably defeated”. The passage ends with “He who knowing thus sings the Udgītha places with exhalation the gods in the world of the gods, with inhalation men in the world of men, with the *vyāna* breath the fathers in the world of the fathers, with the *Hīnkāra* as a thunderbolt he drives the hateful rival away from this world” (JUB. 2, 8, 9). The order is remarkable and seems to reflect the subterranean position of the Pitṛs. The rivals are sent down to an even lower fourth world called *dūra*.

On distant fields representing the realm of the dead see also ṚV. 6, 61, 14 .. *mā tvát kṣétrāṇy āraṇāni ganma* “May we not go from you to distant fields”. Geldner, who in the past had equated distance and “Jenseits”, here and in places where *parāvát* occurs, leaves out this correct interpretation in his translation. Anyhow, TS. 7, 2, 7, 5 interprets these distant fields as those of death. In his translation Keith takes *āraṇa* as “joyless”, probably because he did not realize that distance and death belong to the same sphere. For further references see Arbman (1928: 208). See also ṚV. 10, 58 on dying or soul-loss and going far away (*dūrakām*) of the soul to various places including the *pārāḥ parāvataḥ*. Cf. PB. 1, 5, 18 “My soul that hath gone far away unto Yama, Vivasvat’s son, make thou return it again unto me” (tr. Caland).

- 3 Renou (1955: 12, n. 4) assumes that *parāvát* is the forerunner of terms denoting hell.
- 4 Arbman (1928: 231) does not exclude the possibility that distance and underworld are not identical: “Vielleicht wurde jenes in einer weiten Ferne, am Ende der Erde gelegene Land der Toten (...) als ein anderes, glücklicheres und besseres Land als das unterirdische Totenreich gedacht”.

Kuiper (1983: 224) observes: “As for the term *parāvát-*, it has long been observed that it often denotes the underworld”<sup>5</sup> and he even states that in the Rigveda *parāvát* “always denotes the nether world” (1983: 160). The latter conclusion is clearly exaggerated.

Hoffmann (1975: 50) criticizes Lüders’s interpretation of the term: “Die Gefahr, Wörtern seiner These zulieben eine bestimmte Bedeutungsnuance zu geben, hat L. nicht immer vermieden, so wenn er *parāvát*, das nach Ableitung und sonstigem Gebrauch nur ‘Ferne’ heißen kann, mit ‘Jenseits’ wiedergibt”. This criticism is not wholly fair, since derivation and application of the term sometimes may point to “Jenseits”, provided this is not (as Lüders assumed) a place in heaven.

The prefix *párā* expresses ‘far’ as well as ‘away’. This ‘away’ forms an opposition with ‘on this side’ and consequently *parāvát* may be rendered with ‘Jenseits’. Words consisting of a prefix and the suffix *-vat* always denote places<sup>6</sup>. In the plural *parāvát* may refer to cosmic subdivisions<sup>7</sup>. So *parāvát* may denote yonder world, wherever its exact localisation should be<sup>8</sup>. As a prefix to verbs *párā* means ‘away, off’; see e.g. *parā-i* and *parā-bhū*. These compounded verbs express dying, destruction and getting lost<sup>9</sup>.

It has to be admitted that in the R̥V. *parāvát* often just denotes distance, especially in the many cases where an opposition with nearness is found.

When coming from a or the *parāvát* is expressed and the subject is a solar deity connected with dawn, then the distant region may be the nether world (Kuiper 1983: 224-225). See R̥V. 1, 35, 3 (Savitṛ); 1, 47, 7 (Aśvins); 1, 48, 7 (Uṣas); 1, 92, 3 (Uṣas and Aśvins); 1, 112, 3 (Aśvins); 1, 134, 4 (Uṣas) and 8,5, 30 (Aśvins). It is remarkable that almost all the references are found in the late first book.

5 See also Arbman (1928: 207 f.).

6 See Wackernagel-Debrunner (1954: 871) and, with regard to *pravát*, Bodewitz (1997: 9 f.).

7 See R̥V. 1, 34, 7; 8, 5, 8 and 8, 32, 22 (= AVP. 19, 15, 8) on three worlds called *parāvátas* and TS. 4, 7, 12, 1 (and parallels) on four and AV. 10, 10, 2 on seven worlds.

8 For the association of *párā* and downward see AV. 12, 2, 1 ...*adharān párehi* and KauśS. 49, 6 where *adharācaḥ*, *parācaḥ* and *avācaḥ* occur together (Arbman 1928: 206, n. 1).

9 Ethni (1896: 28) draws attention to the parallelism of the sun which sets or goes down and the dying human beings in connection with the verb *parā-i*.

Soma and Agni are brought to the human beings from the *parāvát*. Kuiper (1983: 219) observes that Soma is not only fetched from the *parāvát* but also from the rock which would denote the cosmic hill under which the nether world is situated. See also Kuiper (1983: 224) on Agni being brought from the *parāvát*, from the womb of the waters, from darkness etc. In later versions of the myth Agni and Soma are fetched from heaven and sometimes nether world and highest heaven alternate, a problem which is difficult to solve. See Kuiper (1983: 225): “Possibly these terms primarily denoted the mysterious world of totality of the dualistic cosmos (..). Be that as it may, this much is obvious that the *parāvát*-, which could be identified with *Nírṛti*-, was not a dwelling-place of the Devas”<sup>10</sup>.

Agni is brought from the *parāvát* by Mātariśvan in ṚV. 1,128, 2; 3, 9, 5; 6, 8, 4; Soma by the eagle in 4, 26, 6; 9, 68, 6 and 10, 144, 4.

As observed already, several references do not convincingly point to a nether world. Uncertain is the situation of Turvaśa and Yadu in connection with *parāvát* (ṚV. 1, 36, 18; 6, 45, 1). Perhaps they were rescued from the nether world, i.e. from death. In ṚV. 1, 119, 8 Bhujyu, who had been thrown down in the *parāvát* by his father, may have been rescued from death or the nether world.

All the material discussed above refers to coming from the *parāvát* and, apart from the uncertain references to Turvaśa, Yadu and Bhujyu, it does not concern human beings. There are also some places in the ṚV. where going to the *parāvát* is mentioned.

The Ṛṣi of 8, 30, 3 asks not to be led into the distances. In 10, 145, 4 the wish is expressed that a female rival should be sent to the *parā parāvát*. Indra is said to have thrown down (or destroyed) Namuci in the *parāvát* (1, 53, 7). In 10, 95, 14 Purūravas threatens his wife, the Apsaras Urvaśī who had left him and refuses to return, that he might commit suicide and then go to the farthest distance (*parāvátam paramám*) where he will be eaten by wolves in the lap of Nirṛti.

The material of the ṚV. shows that *parāvát* often denotes distance, sometimes the nether world from which the sun, Soma and Agni come forth and that as a destination for human beings it is seldom found. Most of

10 See also Kuiper (1979: 98) on *parāvát* being the dwelling-place of the Asuras, where Uśanas, the Purohita of the Asuras, is living. On *parāvát* and Nirṛti see also Renou (1955: 12, n.4).



the relatively clear references to a nether world are found in the late first and tenth books.

In the AV. the specific connotation is more evident. General references to distance are almost exclusively found in the twentieth book (Śaunaka rec.) containing hymns from the ṚV. References to the nether world are only found in books 3-12 (with one exception, AV. 18, 4, 41 dealing with the funeral).

The *parāvāt* is associated with the sun appearing from it in AV. 6, 34, 3; 6, 35, 1; 7, 27, 2<sup>11</sup>.

Rivals are wished to be sent to the farthest distance in AV. 3, 18, 3 (= ṚV. 10, 145, 4); 6, 75, 2 (from which they should not return)<sup>12</sup>. The same applies to witchcraft (8, 5, 9) and sinners (12, 5, 64)<sup>13</sup>.

The going to the *parāvāt* of a seriously ill person is tried to be prevented in AV. 8, 1, 8. In the context it is said that he should ascend out of darkness and not go after the Pitṛs. In 5, 30, 1 (an unclear verse in which the term *parāvāt* occurs) again not following the path of the Pitṛs is mentioned. On account of these two verses one might conclude that dying is going to the *parāvāt* and that this path is also followed by the Pitṛs. There

- 11 AV. 3, 4, 5 invites the man who has to be consecrated as a king, from the farthest distance. In the cosmification of the context the new king seems to come like the sun or like Indra from the nether world. On the other hand the preceding hymn 3, 3 deals with an exiled king (*áparuddha*) who should be lead hither from afar (*párasmād*) (3, 3, 4). Cf. MS. 2, 2, 11 *parāvátam vā eṣá gató yó niruddháh*. The mantra to be recited for such an exiled king was *á préhi paramásyāḥ parāvátah* (cf. AV.3, 4, 5 *á prá drava paramásyāḥ parāvátah*). If indeed in all the three places an exiled king plays a role the term *parāvāt* cannot denote the nether world, unless the return of the exiled king has to be taken metaphorically as the return (from yonder world) of someone thought to be dead.
- 12 The following verse (AV. 6, 75, 3) contains the same wish about no return and states that the rival on his way to this farthest distance should pass all kinds of cosmographic items among which three *parāvátas*; i.e. he leaves the universe and goes to the fourth world. In cosmological classifications this fourth world may denote totality, but also death and night. See Bodewitz (1973: 87 ff.; 1982: 47-51; 1983: 45). In the Vrātya hymn of the AV. (Ś. 15, 13, 1-5; P. 18, 39, 1) the cosmic triad is followed by all worlds in fourth position (P.) and the *parāvatas lokās* in fifth position (P.). In distinction to the four preceding worlds the distant worlds are not called *punya*!! Evidently they are the world of death, not regarded as a paradise.
- 13 According to Gonda (1966: 53) the distances would be an euphemism for destruction and annihilation and the term *pāpa-loká* would refer to “a ‘situation’ rather than a locality”. I disagree.

is no indication that this Pitṛloka is positive; it is even associated with darkness in 8, 1, 8. In AV. 18, 4, 41 (in a funeral hymn in which one might expect references to heaven rather than to an underworld) the Pitṛs and the *parāvátas* occur together, but the meaning of the verse is not certain.

The turn of phrase *ā mrtyor ā parāvataḥ* is found twice in the Paippalāda rec.<sup>14</sup>, in AVP. 1, 98, 4 and 20, 65, 11. In both places a relationship should last “till death, till the *parāvata*”. Whatever should be the exact translation, so much is clear that obviously the world called *parāvata* was associated with life after death in general (and not exclusively with sinners and rivals).

It is evident that in this text *parāvát* denotes the destination of rivals, bad people and sinners and even of some Pitṛs and deceased people in general.

The prefixes compounded with the suffix *vat* and denoting “Ortsabstrakta” are only found in the ṚV., the AV. and in Vedic verses (Wackernagel-Debrunner 1954: 871). Only *parāvát* sometimes occurs in Vedic prose. The fact that these prose texts do not give much material and that in the older Upaniṣads (with one exception) the term is not found, does not prove that ideas on the nether world disappeared. Other terms may have taken over its role.

The Yajurvedic Saṃhitās do not offer much new material in their Mantras. In TS. 4, 1, 9, 3 (and parallels) the sun comes from the farthest distance. The four *parāvátas* mentioned in TS. 4, 7, 12, 1 (and par.) form an extension of the three occurring in the ṚV. and may imply the existence of a fourth world (= nether world?). In MS. 4, 14, 1 Prajāpati is said to be the lord of the worlds, quarters of space, *parāvátas*, *nivátas*, *udvátas*. In this context the horizontal extension seems to be meant. For the verse of MS. 2, 2, 11 as a variant of AV. 3, 4, 5 see n. 11.

Vedic prose has a limited number of topics in which *parāvát* plays a role. The most famous is that of Indra hiding himself after having killed Vṛtra. See TS. 2, 5, 3, 6; 6, 5,5, 2; TB. 1, 6, 7, 4; ŚB. 1, 6, 4, 1; AB. 3, 15, 1; PB. 15,11, 9; JB. 1, 137; 2, 152; 3, 296. The reason for Indra to withdraw was his misconception that he had failed<sup>15</sup>. Now one may ask

14 For these and other references to Paippalāda places with *parāvata* I am grateful to Arlo Griffiths.

15 Keith in his translation of TS. 2, 5, 3, 6 assumes that Indra felt himself guilty. Though strange enough the killing of Vṛtra is counted among Indra’s sins, the parallels prove that Indra thought to have failed, i.e. that he had missed Vṛtra.

what was the place to which Indra went. Gods who hide themselves and have to be rediscovered mostly enter the nether world. In this episode Indra acts like a king who has lost his authority and withdraws to the wilderness. Therefore JB. 1, 137 explicitly equates Indra with such a king and makes the ritual apply to dispelled kings. See also n. 11 on dispelled kings who are said to go to the farthest distance (MS. 2, 2, 11).

There are some indications that the *parāvāt* to which Indra withdraws is the underworld. According to TS. 2, 5, 3, 6 and AB. 3, 5 Indra is first discovered by the Pitṛs. AB. 3, 15 and JB. 3, 296 emphasize the identity of the *paramā parāvāt* and the Anuṣṭubh metre. I think that the *tertium comparationis* is based on the fact that the Anuṣṭubh is elsewhere equated with the fourth world, with death<sup>16</sup>.

Another topic is the sacrificial horse which, if unrestrained, might go to the farthest distance (TS. 5, 4, 12, 3; TB. 3, 8, 9, 3; 3, 8, 12, 2; 3, 9, 13, 2; ŚB. 13, 3, 3,5). Since the situation does not refer to the horse which is freely roaming about before being slaughtered, I cannot imagine that the fear is expressed that this horse would actually run away. Probably the opposition is between reaching heaven and getting lost in the nether world.

In the Yajurvedic Saṃhitās (both in the Mantras and in the prose sections) the material for the equation of *parāvāt* and nether world is rather limited. Moreover we still have not dealt with human beings in this connection.

In a verse found in TS. 1, 1, 9, 1 (and Yajurvedic parallels) Savitṛ is requested to bind him who hates us and whom we hate, with a hundred fetters in the farthest distance. Instead of *paramáśyām parāvāti* parallels also read *paramáśyām pṛthivyām*. The outskirts of the earth seem to be meant here, but ŚB. 1,2, 4, 16 interprets the version of VS. 1, 25 as referring to the underworld by denoting it as blind darkness.

PB. 5, 8, 8 equates going to the end of the six-day period of the sacrifice with going to the farthest distance, but does not give any information on the implications of this going to the farthest distance. This much is clear that *anta* 'end' and *parāvāt* are identical and consequently *parāvāt* may refer to the end of the world. The same identification is found in the Brāhmaṇas when verses from the Saṃhitās are quoted and explained in which the ablative *parāvátas* is found. This 'afar' is explained as 'end'

16 See n. 12.



(*anta*) in AB. 5, 2, 11; 5, 21,16; ŚāṅkhB. 22, 5; 23, 7. Or does *anta* here refer to death?

PB. 15, 7, 2 states that using the Anuṣṭubh as Stoma-verse would imply that the sacrificer goes to the farthest distance. Does this refer to his death, since Anuṣṭubh is not only the end of the metres but is also equated with the fourth world (= death)? The formulation *parām parāvataṃ yajamāno gacchen na pratitiṣṭhet* has a parallel in ṢaḍvB . 3, 8, 14, where, however, the rival is the subject. In its context it appears that the rival is removed from heaven and earth with two particular Sāmans and that due to the use of a Sāman of which the name denotes ‘floating’ he misses a support. So perhaps both places refer to being sent to a world outside the universe.

According to ŚāṅkhB. 5, 7 the Pitṛs have gone to the farthest distance.

Perhaps TB. 3, 7, 12, 5 implies the relegation to the farthest distance of some deceased. The text states that sin is left at the farthest distance or place (*paramé sadhásthe*) and that one may rise to the world of the meritorious people where sinners do not come (since they have to go to the farthest distance?).

The Sūtras contain verses in which *parāvata* occurs.

It is evident that the creative use of the term *parāvata* already began to disappear in the Vedic prose texts. In the older Upaniṣads we find only one reference and a strange one at that.

BĀU. 6, 2, 15 concludes its description of the Devayāna by stating *te teṣu brahmalokeṣu parāḥ parāvato vasanti. teṣāṃ na punarāvṛttiḥ*. Hume unsatisfactorily translates “In those Brahmaworlds they dwell for long extents. Of these there is no return”. What does “for long extents” mean? Deussen more convincingly renders “Dort in den Brahmawelten bewohnen sie die höchsten Fernen”, but it remains strange that the Brahmaloḥa has a gradation based on distance.

Perhaps the observation on no return caused the insertion of the *parāḥ parāvatas*. These were in the older texts also associated with no return, but then not referring to rebirth but to the excluded return of rivals or of everybody who dies<sup>17</sup>. See ṚV. 10, 95, 14 .. *prapáted ánāvṛt parāvátam paramám*; AV. 6, 75, 2 *paramám táṃ parāvátam indró nudatu yáto ná púnar áyati*. This place does not prove anything on a heavenly *parāvata*.

17 See Arbman (1928: 209, n. 2) on the land of no return denoting the realm of the dead in several cultures.

The interpretation of *parāvát* as a nether world (from which deities may come or to which deities go) is supported by evidence from the texts. For our purpose the *parāvát* as the destination of human beings who die or are killed is essential. We will summarize the relevant data and give some comments on details. Here we distinguish three categories: a) sinners (hell); b) rivals (underworld or hell); c) ordinary people and Pitṛs (underworld).

- a) Sinners are only mentioned by AV.12, 5, 64  
*yáthāyād yamasādanāt pāpalokān parāvátah*  
 “That he may go from Yama’s seat to the worlds of the sinners<sup>18</sup>,  
 to the distances”.

The sinner, who elsewhere in this hymn is explicitly sent to hell, is someone who insults the Brahmin and takes away his cow. Apparently sinners and saints are selected by Yama.

- b) Rivals should be sent to the distance in the following three places:  
 ṚV. 10, 145, 4 *pārām evá parāvátam gamayāmasi*  
 “To the far distance we drive the rival woman  
 away”<sup>19</sup>.  
 AV. 6, 75, 2 *paramāṁ táṁ parāvátam índro nudatu vṛtrahā /*  
*yáto ná púnar áyati śasvatībhyah sámābhyaḥ //*  
 “Indra, the killer of Vṛtra, must drive him forth into the  
 farthest distance, whence he shall not return in all years  
 that come”<sup>20</sup>.

18 Whitney translates “to evil worlds”. Gonda (1966: 53) prefers “‘worlds’ of evil” or rather “worlds of demerit”.

19 This typically Atharvan spell is also found in AV. 3, 18, 3. In the Paipp. parallel this verse is missing. One may assume that the death of the female rival is aimed at.

20 The following verse elaborates the way to go:

*étu tistráh parāváta étu páñca jánām áti /*  
*étu tistró ‘ti rocanā yáto ná púnar áyati /*  
*śasvatībhyah sámābhyo yāvat sūryo ásad diví //*

“Let him go beyond the three distances, beyond the five races of mankind.  
 Let him go beyond the three spaces, whence he shall not return in all years  
 that come, as long as the sun will be in the sky”.

The formulation points to a realm of the dead rather than to complete annihilation and excludes banishment.

The whole hymn concerns a rival.

ṢaḍvB . 3, 8, 14 *yaṃ kāmāyeta parām parāvataṃ iyān na pratitiṣṭhed iti pavamāne rathantaraṃ kuryāt bṛhat pṛṣṭham plavaṃ brahmasāma. bṛhadrāthantarābhyām evainam ebhyo lokebhya uddhṛtya plavena pra-plāvayati. parām parāvataṃ eti na pratitiṣṭhati.*

“When he (the sacrificer) desires (about his rival): ‘may he go to the farthest distance, may he have no firm support’, then he should apply in the Pavamāna laud the Rathantara, make the Bṛhat the Pṛṣṭha laud and apply the Plava as Brahma Sāman. By the Bṛhat and the Rathantara he removes him from these two worlds (i.e. from heaven and earth) and by the Plava he causes him to float. He goes to the farthest distance then and obtains no firm support”. Cf. ĀpŚS. 22, 4, 27.

TS. 1, 1, 9, 1 emphasizes the prevention of return from the farthest distance of someone who is an enemy:

*badhāná deva savitaḥ paramāsyām parāvāti śatēna pāśaiḥ /  
yó ‘smān dvèṣṭi yám ca vayám dviṣmās tám áto má mauk //*

“O god Savitr, bind him in the farthest distance with a hundred fetters who hates us and whom we hate. Don’t let him free from there”.

c) For ordinary people going to the distance should be prevented.

ṚV. 8, 30, 3 *mā naḥ patháḥ pítiryān mānavād ádhi dūrám naiṣṭa parāvataḥ*

“Don’t lead us far from the human path of the ancestors to the distances”<sup>21</sup>.

ṚV. 10, 95, 14 *sudevó adyá prapáted ánāvṛt parāvátam paramám gántavá u /*

*ádhā śáyīta nírrter upásthé ‘dhainam vṛkā rabhasāso adyúḥ //*

“What if your idol today should throw himself down (into an abyss) in order to go to the farthest distance without returning, and then should lie in the lap of Destruction, and the ferocious wolves should eat him?”<sup>22</sup>

21 Geldner’s translation “Führet uns nicht vom väterlichen Wege des Manu weit ab in die Ferne” is also defensible. It is uncertain whether the path to the parāvát is opposed to the Pítiryāna.

22 Geldner translates “Liefere heute dein Abgott davon auf Nimmerwiederkehr, um in die fernste Ferne zu gehen ...”. Elsewhere, however, ‘no return’ and ‘farthest distance’ belong together and just by walking away one does not reach the farthest

AV. 5, 30, 1 *āvátas ta āvátah parāvátas ta āvátah /  
iháiva bhava má nú gā má púrvān ánu gāḥ pitṛn ásum badhnāmi  
te dr̥dhám//*

“For you nearnesses (should be) nearnesses, for you distances nearnesses. Remain here. Don’t go. Don’t follow the former fathers. I bind your lifesoul fast”.

The first quarter is rather obscure. I follow Whitney in assuming plurals instead of ablatives singular and an ellipsis of the verb (which mostly supposes an imperative). The text seems to imply that the distances of life after death for the time being should be replaced by present life. By implication not following the path of the Pitṛs is not dying, not going to the (farthest) distances, and consequently Pitṛs are associated with the distances. This place illustrates the well-known conception of a lifesoul which at the same time as an external soul may temporarily or eternally leave the body. In RV. 10, 58, 11 the *mānas* (another conception of the soul) has gone far away to the farthest distances (*pārāḥ parāvátah*; AVP.1, 84, 10 reads *paramāḥ parāvátam*; the hymn is missing in AVŚ). This place, however, does not prove much since all kinds of other cosmographic entities are also mentioned<sup>23</sup>.

AV. 8, 1, 8 *mā gatānām ā dīdhīthā yé náyanti parāvátam /  
ā roha támaso jyótir éhy ā te hástau rabhāmahe //*

“Do not long for the departed who lead to the distance. Rise up from darkness into light. Come, we take both your hands”.

distance. Purūravas threatens to commit suicide. On *prapat* see Bodewitz (1999 b : 223, n 11). Butzenberger (1996: 86) is inclined to interpret the expression ‘to go to the farthest distance’ as “an euphemism”. The expression, however, occurs rather often and distant fields seen as realms of the dead are well known from other cultures.

23 Still it is interesting to see that in this hymn belonging to the Gaupāyana songs applied to the recovering of Subandhu’s lifebreath the first verse (Yama) and the last two verses (the farthest distance; past and future) refer to dying (having gone to the god of death; having gone to the farthest distance; having left the present time). The special connection between *manas* and *paramā parāvát* is to be observed in AVP. 2, 82, 5, where the mind of a Yātudhāna who is to be killed should go to the furthest distance and breath, sight and hearing correspond to wind, sun and the intermediate space. Since mostly mind and moon are associated, one may assume that the *paramā parāvát* here represents the sphere of the moon and the world of the dead.

In the original application this must have concerned somebody who is on the verge of dying. Apparently all who die go to the distance. In the preceding verse is said: “Do not follow the Pitṛs”.

The turn of phrase *ā mr̥tyor ā parāvataḥ* (AVP. 1, 98, 4; 20, 65, 11) likewise refers to ordinary people.

On account of the parallelism with ṢaḍvB . 3, 8, 14 (sending a rival to the farthest distance where he will find no support) we may assume that going to the farthest distance and getting no support there may be prevented in PB. 15, 7, 2 by not openly applying the Anuṣṭubh (which is end or death).

Instead of preventing the going to the farthest distance (= death) one may also rescue someone who is almost dead (and whose lifesoul is perhaps already ‘in the farthest distance’). Here the ablative plays a role:

RV. 6, 45, 1 *yá ānayat parāvataḥ súnītī turváśam yádum /  
indraḥ sá no yúvā sákhā //*

“He who guided Turvaśa (and) Yadu with good guidance from the distance, this Indra must be our youthful companion”.

Since there is no reason to assume that the mentioned persons are simply led from a far region, it is likely that *parāvát* refers to (the realm of) death, the more so since Indra is elsewhere also said to have rescued them (i.c. from being drowned). See Macdonell & Keith 1912: 316. This rescuing seems to be described as leading back from the world of the dead. In RV. 1, 36, 18 the two mentioned persons are called upon by means of Agni from the *parāvát*, but the situation is unclear here.

Likewise rescued from being drowned was Bhujyu. In this case the Ásvins were the saviours.

RV. 1, 119, 8 *ágachatam kṛpamāṇam parāvāti pitúḥ svásya tyájasā  
nibādhitam/*

“You two came to complaining (Bhujyu) who had been thrown down in the distance<sup>24</sup> due to abandonment by his own father”.

24 Geldner translates “zu dem in der Ferne jammenden (Bhujyu)”. I connect *parāvāti* with *nibādhitam* and compare RV. 1,53, 7 .../ *námyā yád indra sákhya parāvāti nibarháyo námuciṃ náma māyīnam //* “... als du, Indra, mit dem Genossen Namī in der Ferne den Zauberer Namens Namuci niederstrecktest” (tr. Geldner).



A different approach is found in the following text-place from the AV.

AV. 18, 4, 41 *sá veda níhitān nidhīn piṭṛñ parāvátō gatān*

“He (i.e. Agni) knows the treasured stores gone to the Pitṛs, to the distances”.

My translation agrees with Griffith. Whitney translates “he knoweth the deposited deposits, the Fathers that are gone away to the distances”. I do not think that the fathers can be described as “deposited deposits”, an expression that refers to sacrifices and their merits. Probably Agni knows the sacrificial merits of the deceased which earn him a place in the Pitṛloka. It is remarkable that *parāvát* here has a positive meaning and denotes a Pitṛloka in heaven. This may be an adaptation to the context of this hymn which exclusively deals with the heavenly future of the dead who is being cremated.

In ŚāṅkhB. 5, 7 the Pitṛs are simply said to have gone to the farthest distance. There is no negative connotation and we do not know where their Pitṛloka should be situated.

We may conclude that at least in some contexts *parāvát* means more than just distance and that there are more than ten references in which this distant region denotes the destination of people who have died or are going to die. Apart from one or two exceptions this region is not in heaven. This distant world which if not identical with the underworld at least lies in the same sphere, should not be (exclusively) interpreted as hell. Only once sinners are mentioned. Often rivals play a role. Their only sin might be their hatred, but Vedic literature (also once here) describes the rival as someone who hates us and whom we hate. One fears to go to the farthest distance, but even Pitṛs are sometimes said to have gone there. The farthest distance is the realm of the dead which preceded the discovery of heaven as a destination for the deceased and is a conception which together with other terms denoting the underworld survived in Vedic literature. The ideal in the later Vedic texts of course was heaven, but those who did not sacrifice or failed to perform the sacrifice according to the esoteric rules still had to go down or far away instead of upwards. It is significant that *parāvát* was the only compoundending in *-vat* which was still found in the prose texts.

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