

## APOLOGUE

A satisfied Brahma was resting over the calyx of a gigantic lotus floating on the surface of a nameless sea. The fertile and luminous Maya enveloped his four heads like a golden veil.

The burning ether pulsed around the magnificent creations that were the result of the conjunction of his two mystical powers.

Brahma wanted heaven, and heaven emerged from the abyss of chaos with its seven circles, one on top of the other, like an immense spiral.

He wanted worlds to spin around his head, and worlds began to rotate in space like a circle of flames.

He wanted spirits that worship him, and spirits like a life-giving, divine fluid began to circulate in the heart of the elemental principles.

Some of them sparkled with fire, and others spun in the air, gave off sighs in the water, or shook the ground, penetrating into the depths.

Vishnu, the sustaining power enveloping all of creation, enclosed it in his being, as though he were placing it inside an immense lantern.

Shiva, the spirit of destruction, gritted his teeth in anger. This was not something he could ignore.

He had seen the elephants that were supporting the eight circles of heaven, and when he tried to demolish them he found they were like diamonds, which shows how difficult they were to destroy.

He tried to stop the creation of the elements, but found they had a reproductive strength which was so spontaneous and so vital that he decided it would be easier to find the outer edge of the circle.

This is not to say that the spirits, even as pure essences, were entirely able to resist his destructive efforts.

At this point in the moment of creation, and with this attitude of the two spirits who presided over it, Brahma was satisfied with his work, and he asked for something to drink with a loud voice.

They gave him what he asked for, he drank, and it must not have been water, since the vapors rising over his head left him completely befuddled.

In this state of inebriation he wanted something that was extravagant, ridiculous, and small; something that would make a contrast with the magnificent and grandiose nature of all that he had just created: and it was Humanity.

Shiva rubbed his hands with pleasure, when he saw it.

Vishnu knit his brow with concern, when he saw that something so fragile had now been entrusted to his care.

Meanwhile, sad and solemn men were moving about and hiding from each other with embarrassment, closing their eyes so they would not see all that was grand and eternal, and would not have to compare it with their own insignificance.

Because men were immediately able to realize what they were.

“Do you want to get rid of your troubles once and for all?” Shiva asked them. “Do you want to die?”

“Yes, yes!” they exclaimed loudly. “Why would we want this teeny bit of existence?”

“I am stupid, I know it, and I am ashamed of my foolishness,” one said.

“I am ugly,” another commented, “and I am saddened by the ridiculous spectacle of my repulsiveness.”

“Yes, we have all these faults, and we suffer from all these miseries,” others continued, when they thought of the multitude of evils and defects that would plague mankind.

“So that is decided,” Shiva declared, seeing the decision that Humanity had made.

He raised his hand and was about to destroy it; but at that moment Vishnu interrupted his action.

“Wait for a day,” he said, turning to the human beings he had created; “for only a day. I am going to give you a mystical elixir to drink. If by tomorrow, after you drink it, you still want to die, your wish will be granted.”

The humans accepted this offer, and Shiva stepped back, grumbling under his breath, because he knew how crafty and cunning his rival could be.

Because Vishnu was a man, or rather a god, of many resources who acted quickly in crucial times like these, in a short time he had made a large quantity of elixir.

During that night, men found they were able to inhale a sort of magical ether through their noses. When dawn broke, Shiva came again to renew his offer of death.

But when men heard his proposal, at first they were amazed, and then they laughed in his face.

“You want us to die?...” they exclaimed, “when such an incredible future is opening before us?...”

“I am going to move the heaven and earth with the strength of my arm,” one said.

“I am going to immortalize my name in this world,” someone declared.

“I am going to captivate many hearts with the charm of my beauty,” another insisted.

And in a similar way, they all expressed the same optimism:

“Why should I die, now that I can feel the power of genius glowing in my heart; I, who am beautiful; I, who will be immortal!”

Shiva could not believe what he was hearing; at times he felt like screaming, and at others, he felt like laughing madly at the spectacle of such a ridiculous transformation. At that moment Vishnu passed by his side, and the destructive spirit could not help but ask for an explanation:

“What the devil did you give to those imbeciles, who yesterday were gloomy and downcast, filled with the realization of their own insignificance, but today are walking around with their heads held high, challenging each other, each one believing that he is a god?”

“I have given them self-respect.”

END OF THE  
“STORIES”