

CREATION

(An Indian poem)

I

The towering peaks of the Himalayas were crowned with dark clouds from which lightning was flashing, and at the foot of the mountains more clouds were dropping a shower of pearls over the flowers.

Above the pure waters of the Ganges, the symbolic lotus flower was dancing, and on the banks, waiting for its next victim, was a crocodile as green as the leaves of the aquatic plants that were hiding it from the eyes of the traveler.

In the jungles of Hindustan there are gigantic trees whose branches provide a shady pavilion for the tired pilgrim, and others whose lethal shadows carry him from a dream into the arms of death.

Love is a chaos of light and darkness; woman a mixture of false vows and tenderness; man an abyss of greatness and pettiness; and life, in short, can be compared to a chain with links of steel and gold.

II

The world is an aberration that spins in a vacuum to the astonishment of its inhabitants. Do not search for an explanation in the *Vedas*, a testimony to the madness of our elders, nor in the *Puranas*, where, dressed in dazzling poetic form, you will find a collection of bizarre ideas about its origin.

Brahma is the totality of existence; everything comes from him and everything returns to him. He had no beginning, nor will he come to an end.

Before there was either time or space, Maya surrounded Brahma like a confusing fog because, while he was absorbed in the contemplation of himself, he still had not filled it with his desires.

Since everything is tiring, Brahma became tired of contemplating himself and raised the eyes in one of his four faces but saw only himself; so he opened the eyes of another and saw himself again; because he was in everything, and everything was in him.

When a beautiful woman wipes a piece of steel and sees her face, she is pleased with what she sees: but in the end she seeks other eyes on which she can fix her own, and if she can't find them, she becomes bored.

Brahma is not vain like the woman, since he is perfect. But imagine if he were bored on finding himself alone, alone in the middle of eternity, and with four pairs of eyes with which he could see himself.

IV

So Brahma felt desire for the first time, and with this desire filling the pulsating Maya which surrounded him, out of his bosom came millions of points of light, like those glowing, microscopic atoms that swim in a ray of sunlight that shines through the top of the trees.

That golden dust filled the emptiness and, as it moved, it gave rise to myriads of beings that were destined to sing hymns of glory to their creator.

The *gandharvas*, or heavenly singers, with their lovely faces, their multicolored wings, their sonorous laughter and their childlike playfulness, brought forth the first smile from Brahma, and from it Eden was born: Eden with its eight circles, and the tortoises and the elephants which supported them, as well as a sacred sanctuary on the top.

V

Children are always children: boisterous, mischievous and incorrigible, they start out having fun; but after a short time they become confused, and then they lose interest. Something similar must have happened when, getting off the giant white swan on which he was riding through the heavens, Brahma left the multitude of *gandharvas* in the lower circles and retired to his sanctuary.

There, where not even the slightest echo or sound can reach, where an august silence reigns and the deep tranquility is an invitation to meditation, Brahma searched for a distraction that would relieve his boredom and, after locking the doors with two turns of the key, he began to use alchemy.

VI

The wise men of the world who have spent time pouring over ancient parchments, who know the properties of precious stones, metals, and cabalistic words, have used this broad knowledge to make fabulous transformations. They convert carbon into diamonds and clay into gold; they decompose water and air, they analyze flames, and from fire they can understand the secret of vitality and light.

If all this can be accomplished by a mere mortal with the use of his knowledge, imagine for a moment what would be possible for Brahma, who is the master of all knowledge.

VII

In one fell swoop, he created the four elements, and he also created their guardians: Agnis, who is the spirit of flames; Vajous, who howls in the hurricane; Varunas, who floats in the depths of the Ocean; and Prithivi, who knows all the subterranean caverns of the worlds and lives in the depths of creation.

After that, using some unknown substance, in transparent flasks he enclosed the germs of immaterial and intangible things: passions, desires, abilities, virtues, the rudiments of pain and joy, of life and death, and of good and evil. And he divided it all into different species and classified it by putting a written label on each of the flasks.

VIII

The swarm of young creatures who were filling the lower circles with their loud voices and their noisy antics, eventually began to notice the absence of their Lord. “Where can he be?” some asked. “What can he be doing,” others said to themselves. And if this wasn’t enough to raise their curiosity, they also saw thick columns of black smoke rising out of Brahma’s laboratory, and then there were balls of fire that exploded outward until they began to spin around in a magnificent, luminous circle.

IX

The imagination of the young is like a horse, and curiosity is the spur that urges it on and carries it through the most unimaginable endeavors. Moved by it, these tiny singers began to climb up the legs of the elephants that sustained the eight circles of heaven and, rising from one to the other, they finally reached the mysterious place where Brahma was still absorbed in his scientific inventions.

Once they reached the summit, those who were boldest gathered around the doorway; some tried to peek through the keyhole, while others looked through gaps in the loosely connected boards in order to cast their gaze over the immense laboratory which was the object of their curiosity. And the spectacle which greeted their eyes could not have been more surprising.

X

There, scattered without any evident order or reason, were vessels and gigantic flasks of many different sizes and colors. Skeletons of worlds, embryos of stars, and fragments of moons were scattered among the partially completed figures of men and animals along with unfinished parchments and books, and a group of strange instruments. The walls were full of geometric designs, cabalistic signs, and magic formulas, and in the middle of the room a gigantic pot was resting over a constant flame and was simmering with thousands of nameless ingredients, whose combination would eventually result in perfect creations.

XI

Brahma’s eight arms and sixteen hands were barely enough to open and close all the flasks, as he shook them and poured out the contents. He was also holding a large tube

like a blowpipe and, like children who make soap bubbles using the stems of dry wheat, he submerged it in the liquid and blew into one end of the tube until, from the other, a burning globe emerged and began to spin along with the others that were already floating in space.

XII

Bent over the boundless abyss, the Creator watched his creations and smiled with great satisfaction. Populated with beautiful, happy beings, the luminous globes, which are the stars we see shining in the sky at night, were filled with the sound of hymns of gratitude to their god, as they spun with a solemn and majestic movement on their axis of diamond and gold.

Not even daring to breathe, the tiny *gandharvas* looked at each other with amazement, full of wonder and fear, in the face of that magnificent spectacle.

XIII

Brahma eventually became tired of making these experiments and, locking the laboratory with a key which he placed in his pocket, he mounted his swan again, with the idea of getting some fresh air. But in spite of his precaution, he who sees all and knows everything did not notice that, when he placed the key in his pocket, it fell out again. However, the restless crowd of those who were following him did not make the same mistake and, after watching him until they thought he was far enough away, one of them picked up the key and opened the door to look inside. Soon the entire group entered the laboratory, and they began to make themselves at home.

XIV

It would be impossible to give an accurate description of the strange scene that then began to unfold inside the laboratory.

First, they examined all the objects with great astonishment, after which they dared to touch them and, finally, they began to upset everything. They threw parchments into the fire so that they would feed the flames; they opened flasks and even broke some in the process; they took other vessels and poured out their contents; some were able to grab hold of the unfinished suns and stars that were hanging from the ceiling to dry, and others climbed up on the skeletons of giant animals whose form had not pleased their creator. They tore out pages from the books to make paper hats, they placed compasses between their legs like a horse, and they broke staffs that held some mysterious power and waved them back and forth.

Eventually they tired of wreaking havoc with their childish games, and they decided to try and create a world in the same way they had seen it done by Brahma.

XV

After this there was a loud uproar and some confusion, with a great deal of laughter. The pot was already boiling. One of them came and poured more liquid in it, until a column of smoke rose up. After this another came, and on top that he poured the contents of a flask that was so large and flowed so quickly it almost reached the edges of the receptacle. After each new ingredient that was poured into the pot, bright red and blue flames rose from it, and all of this was greeted by the *gandharvas* with shouts of jubilation and continuous laughter.

XVI

In the pot they mixed together all the elements of good and evil, of joy and sorrow, of ugliness and beauty, and of selflessness and egotism. They also mixed the germs of ice, destined for worlds created so that coldness would produce a delightful gratification in its inhabitants, with those of heat, designed for worlds whose beings were meant to delight in flames; then, they mixed together the elements of divinity and those of gross matter, of clay and of mud, creating a single concoction of impotence and desire, of greatness and pettiness, of life and death.

All those contradictory elements became agitated on seeing themselves joined together in the bottom of the pot.

XVII

Once this was finished, one of the *gandharvas* pulled a feather off his wings and, after biting off the feathery part with his teeth, he dipped the quill into the swirling liquid and blew into it until a world came out. A world that was dark and crusted on the poles, and that slowly rotated, with snowy mountains and burning sands, with fire in the center and oceans on the surface, with a fragile and presumptuous humility, and with aspirations of divinity, and weaknesses of clay. The principle of death which destroys everything, and the principle of life with efforts to achieve eternity, reconstructed out of their own ruined remains; a nonsensical and absurd world: our world, in short.

The tiny creatures who had constructed it watched it spinning grotesquely in the void, and they celebrated with laughter so loud that it resonated through every one of the eight circles of Eden.

XVIII

When he heard all that noise, Brahma looked up and saw what was happening, and he realized at once what they had done. Indignation flamed in his eyes. His angry words thundered through the heavens and he threatened the mob of children who were trying to escape his wrath. He raised his hand and thought of destroying the world, and just this threat brought about the catastrophe which we remember as the Diluvium, when one of

the *gandharvas* who was the most mischievous, but also the most charming, threw himself at Brahma's feet and begged him:

"Lord... Lord..., please don't break our toy."

XIX

Because he is God, Brahma is circumspect, but when he heard these words he had to make a great effort to keep from breaking out in laughter. Finally, taking control of his emotions, he exclaimed:

"Get out of here, you impious and incorrigible creatures! Go where I can't see you and your ugly creation any longer. This world should not, and cannot exist, because even its atoms struggle against other atoms. But as I said, get it away from here. My hope is that under your influence, it won't last very long."

After Brahma had spoken, the children shoved each other and, laughing uncontrollably and shouting with glee, they began chasing after our world, while one was pushing it in one direction and another was pushing it somewhere else... Ever since then, they wander with it through the heavens, to the surprise of other worlds, and to the desperation of its inhabitants.

Luckily for us, what Brahma foresaw certainly will happen. There is nothing more tricky or more frightening than the hands of little children; in their hands, the toy won't last very long.

END OF THE
"Legends"