The Dark and Deep Underworld in the Veda*

The characteristics of the various underworlds, particularly depth and darkness, and of the beings associated with and consigned to them in the Vedic conceptual cosmology are treated through a survey of pre-Upaniṣadic passages.

In earlier publications I have discussed the concept of yonder world in the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā (1994; this vol. ch. 8) and in the Atharvaveda Saṁhitā (1999c; ch. 11), as well as holes and pits (1999b; ch. 12) and distance (2000b; ch. 13), items which sometimes are associated with an underworld. The South and some other quarters of space connected with death and ancestors are studied in Bodewitz 2000a (ch. 14). In the present article I will especially treat the aspects of depth, downward movement, and darkness. In my view these items refer to concrete worlds lying under the earth.¹ Since depth and darkness sometimes occur together and other aspects of the underworld will occasionally be included here, I will not deal separately with the two aspects, but focus on the persons or beings connected with the dark and deep underworld, which forms an opposition to a world of light, high in heaven. We may distinguish here the following groups of beings:

1. Demons and diseases
2. Sinners
3. Rivals and enemies
4. Ignorant persons (and other disqualified people)
5. Ancestors and diseased relatives or clients.

It is obvious that demons and beloved relatives are not generally supposed to live in the same world. However, the older texts in particular often do not make clear distinctions. An undivided underworld may sometimes be assumed. The concept of darkness² is connected with such an underworld.

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¹ Converse (1971, 303) denies this and observes: “Night, darkness, death, hunger, want are frequently identified with death without immortality, but there is no negative immortality, no hell.” We should take into account that in identifications and classifications abstract concepts may function as ciphers or code-names for concrete entities.

² Bertholet (1985, 244): “Mit der Unterwelt verbindet sich gerne die Vorstellung des Dunkeln, mit dem Himmel verknüpft sich die des Lichten.”
Chapter 17

1 Demons and Diseases

The demon Śuṣṇa or Vṛtra is killed by Indra in ṚV 5, 32, 5 and placed in darkness (tāmasi) in a stone house (harmyā). Converse (1971, 136) interprets harmyā as the grave. It is doubtful whether demons would be buried in a grave. They are sent to an underworld or hell. The harmyā seems to be the nether world. This world continues the primeval, chaotic world of Vṛtra. Note that the demon is said to be already suvṛḍham tamogām (5, 32, 4) and asūryétāmasivāvṛdhānām (5, 32, 6) before his death.

A similar qualification is found in ṚV 7, 104, 1, where Indra and Soma are requested to send down (nyàrpayatam) some evil powers who are tamovṛḍhah. In verse 4 a Rakṣas who should be destroyed is said to be vāvṛdhānām (cf. 5, 32, 6). In verse 5 the two gods should throw down (nī ... vidhyatam) demons called Atrins into the abyss (pārśāne), which obviously refers to hell (see Bodewitz 1999c, 110; this vol. p. 139 f.). Whitney translates the verb with "pierce" in the parallel AV 8, 4, 5, which does not convince. In verse 17 a female demon (Geldner, between brackets: "Die Unholdin") should fall down (āva ... padiṣṭa) in endless depths or holes (vavrāṁ anantān).

It is remarkable that this hymn deals not just with demons. Whitney calls its parallel AV 8, 4 "Against sorcerers and demons." However, other human beings also play a role. They belong to the categories of sinners and rivals. In this hymn Vasiṣṭha seems to place his rival Viśvāmitra on a level with demons and sorcerers. The destination of all hated beings in this hymn is at least the underworld, in the case of the demons probably hell.

After having been killed by Indra, Vṛtra lay down in long darkness (dīrghāṁ tāma āśayat) in ṚV 1, 32, 10. Remarkably a similar expression refers to human beings in 2, 27, 14 (mā no dīrghāḥ abhū naśan tāmisrāḥ). Though the verb ā-śay in 1, 32, 10 might point to a local rather than a temporal connotation of tāmas, and

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3 See Kuiper (1983, 68f.): “Varuṇa’s ‘lofty dwelling,’ his ‘house with a thousand doors’ is also called a ‘stone house’ (harmyā). In the early morning the goddess Dawn, when arising from the nether world, is said to come ‘from the harmyāni in the East,’ just as Agni is born in this stone house before becoming the navel of the radiant firmament. The notion of darkness appears to be intimately associated with this ‘stone house.’ It was, indeed, the dwelling-place of the dead, just as Varuṇa was the god of death. Hence also Yama was supposed to dwell in it. The same association with darkness is also found in the story of Indra bringing the bellicose Śuṣṇa ‘into the darkness, into the stone house.’” See further Bodewitz (1999c, n. 11; this vol. p. 139, n. 11).

4 In ṚV 8, 6, 17 Indra’s killing of Vṛtra is called a covering with darkness. In a note to his translation Geldner observes: “Vṛtra, der Finstemis brachte, wird selbst mit Finsternis des Todes zugedeckt.”
in post-Vedic texts this term denotes hell, we may also assume (on account of 2, 27, 14 and the use of the adjective dirghā) that long darkness is just a synonym for death (the long night). Still this indicates that death could be associated with darkness rather than with light and heaven. The adjective dirghā seems to imply that death is not a total annihilation.

Indra not only defeats or kills demons; he also throws them down into the depth. See ṛv 2, 14, 4 yó árbudam áva nícá babādhé “der den Arbuda hinab in die Tiefe stiess” (tr. Geldner). However, such a specification is not current.

The cremation fire should go down in ṛv 10, 16, 9 (= av 12, 2, 8) kravy-ádam agním prá hinomi dūrán yamarájño gachatu. Geldner observes on the ṛv version: “Das Reich des Yama als die äusserste Ferne und zugleich als der richtige Ort für das Leichenfeuer.” For the connection between dūrám and yonder world, which is probably the underworld (cf. av 12, 2, 1), see Bodewitz (2000b, 104, n. 2; this vol. p. 162, n. 2).

In ṛv 10, 60, 11 the disease called rápas should go down (nyāṅ bhavatu te rāpah). The concreteness of the downward movement appears from the comparison with sunshine, wind, and milk which fall down from heaven and from the cow.

In av 2, 14, 3 the wish is expressed that the house that is below should be the destination for the Arāyis (some sort of female demons). Here asáu yó adharád grháḥ contains two codes for yonder world, asáu (mostly referring to heaven) and adharát (specifying yonder world as subterranean). Some scholars interpret this “house” as hell; others, e.g., Arbman (1928, 200) take it as referring to the nether world or the underworld in general.

In av 5, 22, 2–4 it is again a form of disease that is desired to be sent down (adharáḥ), namely fever. The code for underworld or hell is again a derivation of adhara, in verse 2 combined with nyāc.5

Another disease (yáksma) is pushed away downward (adharáñcam) in av 6, 127, 3. There is no reason to interpret these expressions as suppressing a disease or making fever abate. Rather, they refer to demons6 who have to be driven back to the region where they belong, the nether world.

5 The translation of Whitney misinterprets this and renders verse 2: “now go away inward or downward.” Griffith’s translation “Pass hence into the realms below or vanish” creates two options which the text does not offer. Bloomfield (1897, 445) rightly observes that nyāṅ and adharāṇi are synonymous and that a literal translation would result in “do thou go away down, or lower!” It is evident that the turn of phrase wishes to express the lowest possible region of the nether world.

6 See Rodhe (1946, 72) on the ambiguity of diseases and demons.
The disease called *yāksma* and the flesh-eating (cremation) fire should go forth downward (*adharāṅ párehī*) in *AV* 12, 2, 1. Cf. *RV* 10, 16, 9, where this fire is sent far away (*dūrāṁ*) to the realm of Yama.

The pigeon, a bird of ill omen which announces death, is sent away (*pārāṁ evā pára*) to the house of Yama in *AV* 6, 29, 3. To the remotest spaces (*pārā... parāvātaḥ*) should also go witchcraft (*AV* 8, 5, 9). The Piśāca demons are transferred to Yama with the help of a particular plant in *AV* 6, 32, 2. We may assume that Yama and his house here are not associated with a world of light in heaven. The far distances are the nether world.

In *TS* 1, 3, 9, 2 (cf. *TS* 6, 3, 9, 2–3) a Rakṣas demon and the hating rival are sent to lowest darkness. This lowest darkness (*adhamāṁ tāmaḥ*) is some sort of formula in the *AV*, where it refers to the destiny of rivals and enemies.

In *ŚB* 1, 9, 2, 35 the dispossession of the Asuras by the Devas is repeated in the ritual by pouring something worthless under a black antelope skin, thinking “Thou art the Rakṣas’ share.” Thus they cast it into blind darkness (*andhé tāmasi*), i.e., the world of Asuras and demons.

Blind darkness is again found in *JB* 1, 179 in connection with the Asuras. It is described as lying beyond the Agniṣṭoma and the year, and it is identified with the night.

*ŚB* 3, 8, 2, 15 quotes *VS* 6, 16 “Herewith I tread down the Rakṣas, herewith I knock down (*avabādhe*) the Rakṣas, herewith I lead the Rakṣas to the lowest darkness (*adhamāṁ tāmaḥ*).” See also *ŚB* 3, 7, 1, 10, where one offers ghee into a hole lest the evil spirits, the Rakṣas, should rise from below. Thus one knocks downward (*avabādhate*) these Rakṣas.

*AB* 4, 5, 1 connects the Asuras with the night, which is equated with darkness (*tāmaḥ*) and death. Cf. *GB* 2, 5, 1. Darkness and death are also associated by *AB* 7, 12, 2.

In *ŚB* 11, 1, 6, 8 the Asuras are associated with darkness and with being down. Prajāpati created them with the downward breathing and thereupon there was darkness for him.

In *ĪśU* three worlds covered with blind darkness (*andhena tamasā vrṭāḥ*) are called *asurya*.

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7 This place is mentioned by Klaus (1986, 53) as one of the very few references to a world outside the universe. It is put on a line with references to a fourth world. “Sofern darunter die Welt der Asuras und der verhassten Widersacher verstanden wird, ist er ein in weiter Ferne unterhalb der Erde gelegener Bereich der Finsternis” (p. 54). Klaus almost entirely rejects the concept of a hell for the Vedic prose texts and is silent on the possible existence of an underworld for normal people.
2 Sinners

The best human candidates for hell, at least for the underworld, would seem to be the sinners. References to them, however, are rather limited.

In RV 4, 25, 6 Indra will throw or strike down (avahantā ... ávācaḥ) people who do not prepare Soma. Of course the turn of phrase might just express the knocking down of somebody (Geldner: “schlägt er zu Boden”), but cf. JB 1, 123, where Asuras are thrown down from the one world to the other, i.e., from heaven, and the same expression is used. A knock-out by Indra is always lethal, and the addition of ávācaḥ emphasizes the downward movement. If these “sinners” are Aryans (and not un-Aryan enemies), their sin consists of the neglect of religious duties.

A similar category of non-sacrificers is hurled into a pit in RV 1, 121, 13 ápi kartám avartayó ‘yajyún “You hurled the non-sacrificers into the pit.” This downward removal definitely refers to the underworld (see Bodewitz 1999b, 216; this vol. p. 155).

In RV 9, 73, 8–9 ... ávájuštān vidhyati karté avratán ... áva padāty áprabhuḥ (“er stösst die missliebigen Gesetzlosen hinab in die Grube ... . Der Unvermögende soll dabei in die Grube abstürzen,” tr. Geldner) again, disqualified persons seem to be sent to the nether world. According to Geldner in a note on 9, 73, 9, “Das Bild der Wettfahrt mit Hindernissen.” See, however, Bodewitz (1999b, 216; this vol. p. 155). The formulation “er stösst ... in die Grube” can hardly refer to an accident caused by a deity.

In RV 7, 104 (besides several references to demons) we find indications of a nether world for sinners. See 7, 104, 3 índrāsomā duškīto vavré antār anārāmbhanē támasi prā vidhyatam “Indra and Soma! Stosset die Übeltäter in die Grube, in die haltlose Finsternis” (tr. Geldner). It is obvious that vavré here should refer to the nether world, since in 7, 104, 17 the same term is used in connection with an “Unholdin” (Geldner), and darkness generally refers to this world.\(^8\)

There seems to be a reference to hell in AV 12, 4, 3, if falling down into a pit here denotes falling down into hell. The sinner is somebody who gives a lame cow to a Brahmin. Here again the sin concerns the neglect of religious duties. For further punishments of misbehaviour against Brahmins in the AV, see Bodewitz (1999c, 109–111; this vol. pp. 139–140). The destinations of these

\(^8\) See Bodewitz (1994, 30; this vol. p. 101) and (1999c, 110; this vol. p. 139f.) for further literature on this place which is interpreted as hell or as underworld. See also Bodewitz (1999c, 117, n. 11; this vol. p. 139, n. 11) on Butzenberger (1996, 62f.) and his wrong association of darkness and the grave in connection with this verse, which has a parallel in AV 8, 4, 3.
sinners are not characterized by darkness or being down, but in AV 12, 4, 36 the term nāraka (“hell”) is explicitly used, and AV 12, 5, 64 calls the destination of someone who has taken the Brahmin’s cow pāpalokān parāvātaḥ, i.e., the far distances (= underworlds), which are hells.

He who defiles his sister will go down (adharāk) (i.e., to the underworld or to hell), according to AV 20, 128, 2.

VS 30, 5 mentions as destination for a thief darkness (tāmas), for a murderer hell (naraká). Perhaps hell and darkness are more or less identical here.\(^9\)

Nirṛti is invoked in TS 4, 2, 5, 4 to seek the man who does not sacrifice. She should seek somebody other than the speaker. The road she follows is that of the thief and robber. Nirṛti here is also called the earth, because her realm is below the earth.

Hell seems to be predicted for someone who draws blood from a Brahmin in TS 2, 6, 11, 2. He will not see the Pitṛloka for a period of years corresponding to the number of particles of dust on which the blood falls. For sinners there is no place in heaven, according to JB 1, 291, where the specification of the destruction is likewise missing.

In KauṣU 3, 8 the ātman causes a person to do wrong deeds whom he wishes to lead downward (yam adho ninisat) and good deeds whom he wishes to lead upwards from these worlds. The leading downwards of the sinner definitely has the underworld or hell as the final destination.

According to MaiU 4, 3 one becomes ūrdhvabhāj by following the rules of one’s own āśrama. Otherwise one becomes arvāṇ, i.e., goes to the underworld.

ChU 5, 10, 9 mentions the five main sins (in later texts called the mahāpātakas) and concludes that the sinners “fall down” (patanti). This seems to refer to going down to hell or to the underworld, since one of these sins is the killing of a Brahmin.

3 Rivals and Enemies

The non-ethical category of rivals is more often associated with the underworld, at least in the RV and the AV Samhitās. The killing or destroying of these rivals forms a current topic in the Vedic prose texts, but their ultimate destination is generally not specified.

RV 3, 53, 21 (= AV 7, 31, 1) yó no dvéṣty ādharāḥ sás padiṣṭa yám u dvīṃsās tám u prāṇo jahātu is translated by Geldner with “Wer uns Feind ist, der soll unter-

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\(^9\) MBh 12, 183, 3 and Manu 8, 94 equate hell and darkness.
liegen. Wem wir Feind sind, dem soll der Odem ausgehen!" I think that the two wishes for the two sorts of enemies are more or less identical and that both will die. Therefore I doubt whether "unterliegen" is a correct rendering of ádharah ... padiṣṭa, translated by Whitney in the AV with "may he fall downward." The term ádharah and its derivations are often associated with the underworld.

In RV 7, 104, 11 enemies should sink below (adhás) three earths. Gombrich (1975, 114) observes that "the idea may be just to get him right out of the universe," and he also refers to AV 6, 75, 3 where rivals are sent beyond the three heavens. However, adhás is rather explicit and precise, and the whole hymn (which has a parallel in AV 8, 4) refers to downwards movements. See 7, 104, 17 on falling into endless abysses or caves (= the underworld). The whole of RV 7, 104 matches demons, sinners, and rivals with their destinations. In 7, 104, 16 someone who accuses the speaker of being a sorcerer or who denies being a sorcerer himself should be killed by Indra and sink deep below all creatures (vīśvasya jantró adhamás padiṣṭa). Undoubtedly this refers to the underworld.

In RV 10, 145, 4 (= AV 3, 18, 3) the wish is expressed that a female rival should be sent to the farthest distance (párā parāvāt). This might refer to the outskirts of the earth, but the term parāvāt is often used to denote the nether world (see Bodewitz 2000b; this vol. ch. 13). Moreover ŚB 1, 2, 4, 16 equates the farthest distance with blind darkness.

RV 10, 89, 15c (= 103, 12d) andhena ... tāmasā sacantām is the earliest reference to blind darkness in connection with underworld or hell,11 the destiny of the enemies in this verse. Cf. 4, 5, 14 ásatā sacantām (probably also referring to hell).

RV 10, 152, 4 makes the rival go to lower darkness12 (ádharam ... tāmah), a combination of depth and darkness not unusual in later texts for denoting the underworld. Its parallel AV 1, 21, 2 reads ádhamam for ádharam.

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10. In a note Geldner, on the one hand, refers to RV 7, 104, 16 (where a sorcerer should sink down below every creature, i.e., into the nether world), on the other hand, to the sphere of the contest with a loser who falls down to the earth.

11. For post-Vedic references see BhāgP 5, 6, 11 (anti-Vedic people); Manu 8, 94 (referring to hell). In AV 18, 3, 3 (a hymn from the funeral ritual), a young woman (the widow?) is said to be carried to the funeral pile, enveloped with blind darkness. I doubt that this refers to the fact that she was covered with a veil, as Griffith assumes in a note on his translation. Blind darkness was death, her destiny, from which she was rescued.

12. Oldenberg (1917a, 544) rejects every connection with hell and interprets this simply as death. However, his position is not clear, as Arbman (1928, 204) points out. Elsewhere he would adduce such a place as proof for the existence of an underworld (to be distinguished from hell).
Lowest darkness is the destiny of rivals and enemies in AV 9, 2, 4; 9; 17. It is also denoted by blind darkness (9, 2, 10). For blind darkness in connection with rivals see also AVP 10, 12, 12 and 15, 19, 2. As we have seen above, this blind darkness also represents the world of Asuras and Rakṣases.

AV 1, 21, 2 (cf. RV 10, 152, 4) states that the enemies go to the lowest darkness (ádhamaṁ tāmaḥ), but in AV 8, 2, 24 this seems to be a general destination of the deceased.

AV 9, 2 mentions lowest darkness (4; 9; 17) in connection with the destiny wished for the rivals or enemies.

In AV 10, 3, 9 the rivals again should go to lowest darkness, and a space without sun (asúrtám rájaḥ) seems to denote the same. The hating enemy should go to darkness (AV 12, 3, 49) or to lowest darkness (AV 13, 1, 32). Cf. AVP 10, 10, 2; 16, 152, 10, where the rising sun should also knock them down.

AV 9, 2, 1 refers to rivals who should fall downward (nīcāīḥ sápatnān máma pādayāḥ; cf. 9, 2, 9 and 15). Since several verses of the same hymn also refer to falling into blind darkness (9, 2, 10) and lowest darkness (9, 2, 4; 9; 17), the falling downward has to be taken rather literally, and the destination is the underworld or hell. Besides nīcāīḥ we also find the indication adharāṅcaḥ, namely in 9, 2, 12 (“Let them float away downward”). Cf. also AV 11, 1, 6 nīcāīḥ nyuḥja dvīsatāḥ sapātnān “Push down the hating rivals.”

AV 3, 19, 3 expresses the wish that the enemies of the patron should fall down and remain there (nīcāīḥ padyantāṁ ádhare bhavantu). One may doubt whether ádhare simply refers to inferiority, as Whitney assumes in his translation. See also AV 7, 31, 1c yó no dvéṣṭy ádharaḥ sás padiṣṭa.

In AV 10, 3, 3 an amulet should make the enemies go downward (ádharaṁ pādayāti). AV 10, 5, 36 and 16, 8, 1 (idám enam adharāṅcam pādayāmi) are used in a charm against an enemy. KauśS 49, 3–14 uses verses from AV 10, 5 for this charm and lets the performer pour out water with a verse which states that Prajāpati should pour down the enemies adharācaḥ parāco ṣvēcāḥ (49, 6).

In 13, 1, 30 the rivals should be smitten downward (avācīnān ... jahi); in 13, 1, 31 they should fall low (ádhare padyantāṁ); in 13, 1, 32 the rising sun should smite down (áva ... jahi) the rivals and they should go to the lowest darkness. The parallel AVP 18, 18, 2 reads sapatnān me adharāṁ kṛṇu. It is evident that all these references to a downward movement are to be associated with the nether world.

The most explicit association between adharāṅc pādayati and death is found in AV 16, 8, 1 “... Of him now I bind up the splendour, brilliancy, breath, lifetime. Now I make him fall downward.” Here AVP 18, 52, 1 reads ... enam adhamaṁ tamo gāmayati instead of enam adharāṅcam pādayāmi.
In all these turns of phrase death and elimination are meant. The same may be said about the expression “to send to the most remote distance.” See, e.g., AV 6, 75, 2 paramāṁ tāṁ parāvātam indro nudatu. The same hymn states that he should never return and that his “banishment” concerns a place beyond the three worlds of light (6, 75, 3).

The terminology of the AV is rather uniform and to some extent continues that of the RV. The dark and lower worlds are associated with enemies or rivals. However, as we will see below, the same may refer to beloved human beings. The distinction between underworld and hell still is not quite clear. For a more elaborate discussion of the AV material I refer to Arbman (1927b, 350 ff.), who is inclined to interpret it as almost exclusively referring to the underworld for human beings who are not qualified for heaven or as a survival of the older conceptions of life after death (with the exception of some undeniable references to hell). It is, however, possible that sending rivals or enemies to low darkness may be interpreted as sending them to hell (just as already in the RV demons are sent to such places).

In the other Samhitās and in the Brāhmaṇas the material becomes scarce. Still some references can be found.

In TS 1, 3, 9, 2 the hated and hating rival shares the destiny of the Rakṣas demon: lowest darkness. See also TS 6, 3, 9, 2–3.

In TS 5, 5, 10, 2 Yama seems to be associated with the nadir, and one places “him whom we hate and who hates us” in his jaws. The nadir is obviously subterranean.

Someone who has rivals should use a devayajana before which a hole is found according to MS 3, 8, 4: 97.14. The implication is of course that the rivals will fall into this hole, which represents hell (see Bodewitz 1999b, 219; this vol. p. 158).

The strategy of the ritual prescribes that one should leave darkness to the rival and obtain for oneself the light of heaven. See AB 5, 24, 12 “or rather when the sun has set they should utter speech. Thus they make the rival who hates them have the darkness as his portion.”

ŚB 1, 2, 4, 16 identifies the farthest distance where the rival should be tied down with blind darkness. For farthest distance functioning like blind darkness as a cipher for underworld or hell, see Bodewitz 2000b (this vol. ch. 13).

In JB 1, 93 the rival is thrown or kicked down (ārād evaitena dvīṣantam pāṃmānam bhṛātryam avāṅcam apabādhate (v. 1. avabādhate)). AB 1, 13, 5 uses the verb apa-bādh in connection with a rival who should also fall down (dvīṣantam evāsmai tat pāṃmānam bhṛātryam apabādhate ‘dharam pādayati). Just as in the AV this seems to refer to sending enemies to the underworld.
According to JUB 1, 325 one should remove (by ritual means) the hating rival to “that direction” (etāṁ diśam ... nirbādhet), i.e., to the region of death or rather to hell (the South-West). Then the text continues by saying that there are three heavens and three hells of the sāman. One should make one’s rival fall into such a hell based on magical symbolism.

In JUB 2, 8, 9 one drives away the hating rival from this world. Similarly the Asuras are driven away in JUB 2, 8, 3. The downward removal is not explicitly mentioned here, but it is striking that JUB 2, 8 deals with gods, human beings, Pitṛs, and Asuras/rivals in this order: i.e., the Asuras and rivals are even below the Pitṛs. Moreover the world of Asuras as well as of rivals is called dūra, probably denoting the nether world or even a world below that.

4 Ignorant Persons

The Upaniṣads, though belonging to the śrauta tradition, become less and less interested in the heavenly destination of the deceased, since mokṣa and knowledge about the ātman replace the sacrificial merits that produce a loka in heaven. The Pitṛs and the Pitṛloka are not frequently mentioned. The world of these ancestors is situated (in the vertical hierarchy) between the world of the human beings and the world of the gods in BĀU 1, 5, 17, or even lower, between the world of the human beings and the world of the Gandharvas, in BĀU 4, 3, 33. This Pitṛloka is obtained by ritual (BĀU 1, 5, 17). Other passages attribute a lower future to those who miss the releasing insight.

See BĀU 4, 4, 10 (= ĪśU 9; cf. also ĪśU 12) on the entering of blind darkness or even greater darkness by those who are dedicated to ignorance or (profane) wisdom (andham tamah praviśanti ye ’vidyām upāsate / tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāh). See also 4, 4, 11 on the going to worlds which are covered with blind darkness and which are joyless by people who have no knowledge at all and are unwise: anandā nāma te lokā andhena tamasāvṛtāḥ / tāṁs te pretyābhigacchanty avidvāṁso ‘budho janāḥ. This verse was partly used by KaṭhU 1, 3 (piṭodakā jagdhatṛṇa duḍghadohā nirindriyāḥ / anandā nāma te lokās tān su gacchati tā dada). Where Naciketas criticizes (one aspect of) ritual. Another version of the verse is found in ĪśU 3, where the nether world is called asurya and the ignorant people are differently characterized: asuryā nāma te lokā andhena tamasāvṛtāḥ. tāṁs te pretyābhigacchanty ke ke cātmanahano janāḥ. Since a reference to suicide does not suit the context and the ātman cannot be killed, we may assume that ātmahan should not be taken literally here.

MuU 1, 2, 9–10 does not directly transfer the unknowing dead to a world of darkness. They only sink down (cyavante) after their world (i.e., their merit)
has become exhausted; then they enter this world or even a lower one (hīna-tara), i.e., the underworld.

5 Ancestors and Diseased Relatives or Clients

Here we will deal with the life after death of the average human beings who are not sinners, rivals, or other disqualified persons, but one’s relatives staying in a world of darkness below. In the oldest Vedic text the deceased in general seem to have had the underworld as their destination; later (from the latest layers of the ṚV onwards) to some of them a heavenly abode was promised. However, the dark underworld is rarely mentioned even in the oldest layers of the ṚV.

In ṚV 2, 27, 14 a normal human being asks from the gods that long darknesses (dirghāḥ ... tāmisrāḥ) may not reach him. This darkness undoubtedly denotes death or the world of the dead. Cf., however, ṚV 1, 32, 10, where long darkness is the destiny of Vṛtra slain by Indra.

Somebody is afraid of being devoured by a wolf and of falling in a pit in ṚV 2, 29, 6 (trādhvaṁ no devā njúro vṛksya trādhvaṁ kartád avapádo yajatrāḥ). This also refers to death. It is true that the speaker admits in the preceding verse that he may have sinned, but we may compare ṚV 10, 95, 14, where Purūravas (not a sinner) describes his destiny after death. He will fall (or throw himself down) (prapáte) and go to the farthest distance (parāvátam paramām) (mostly denoting the underworld), lie in the lap of Nirṛti, and be devoured by wolves. It is unclear whether the devouring wolves produce a second death or are just torturers.

Lying in the lap of Nirṛti is more peacefully described in ṚV 1, 117, 5, where Vandana (who apparently was buried alive) is compared with the sun lying in darkness and a dead person sleeping in the womb of Nirṛti. All these instances refer to a dark “life” after death.

The term parāvāt (mentioned above in connection with Purūravas in ṚV 10, 95, 14) also occurs in ṚV 8, 30, 3, where the gods are asked not to lead people far in the distance (dūrāṁ naiśṭa parāvātah), i.e., to the underworld.

Against the lap of Nirṛti (cf. ṚV 10, 95, 15 and 1, 117, 5, discussed above) the earth should protect the deceased whose bones are buried after cremation in ṚV 10, 10, 10. This seems to imply that there are at least two options for life after death.

For more or less recent literature see Horsch (1971, 106), Bodewitz (1994; this vol. ch. 8), and Oberlies (1998, 466–473).
A deathly ill person is taken back from the lap of Nirṛti in RV 10, 161, 2 (yādī kṣitā́yuryādi vā pāreto yādi mṛtyó̄r antikáṁ náta evá, tám á harámi nírṛter upáśt̄h ...). This verse points to a general destination of the deceased.

Immortality in heaven is rarely found in the RV and only in its latest layers. In the older layers the Pitṛs are mythical demigods rather than one’s own ancestors. The term pitṛloká is not yet found here. In later Vedic texts this world seems to be some sort of second option reserved for those who did not reach the highest destination. This world, even if not situated under the earth, later was distinguished from the heaven of the gods.

In the AV the dark or lower world of the deceased is mentioned in a limited number of hymns. The information, however, is very rich and leaves no doubt about the concept of a dark world which is situated below. The references concern a world from which the deathly ill person should be saved or fetched back. RV 10, 161, 2 is repeated in AV 3, 11, 2.

In AV 7, 53, 3 Agni has taken life and breaths out of the lap of Nirṛti, and the speaker of this magical hymn causes them to enter the body again. The hymn ends with the well-known verse in which is said that one has ascended from darkness to the highest light (údvayáṁ támasas pári róhantah ...) (7, 53, 7).

From the fetters of Nirṛti the diseased is carried upwards (úttvā ... bharā- masi) in AV 8, 1, 3. He should stand up from there and not fall down (mávapathāḥ), being freed from the fetters of death (8, 1, 4). For him there should be up-going, not down-going (8, 1, 6). He should not go after the Pitṛs (8, 1, 7), who apparently are down rather than high in heaven. He should come to the light, ascend out of darkness, and not heed the departed who lead one to the distance (parāvát, obviously the underworld) (8, 1, 8). He should not fall to that darkness (táma etát puruṣa má prá patthāh) (8, 1, 10). Darkness should not find him (8, 1, 16). In this hymn the rescuing is several times said to be upwards; see, e.g., 8, 1, 19 (úttvā mṛtyó̄r apíparam). Darkness has left the diseased (8, 1, 21); i.e., he has left darkness.

In the next hymn similar statements are made. The speaker says that he brings back the life (ásu and áyus) and that the diseased should not go to darkness (rájas and támas) (AV 8, 2, 1). He should come up from there (8, 2, 8). Just as in 8, 1, 19, the speaker says that he has rescued him out of death (8, 2, 9). Dying is called a down-going into darkness (yāt te niyánam rajasám ...) (8, 2, 10).

The magician carries the almost deceased upwards from the lower to the upper earth (8, 2, 15), from death (8, 2, 23). Men do not die and also do not go to the lowest darkness (adhamám támah), where this magic charm is performed (8, 2, 24–25).

AV 5, 30, 11 mentions the deep and black darkness from which a diseased man should rise (udéhi mṛtyó̄r gambhirát krṣṇác cit támasas pári). Apparently
his free-soul had already reached the underworld. In 5, 39, 14 the hymn states that the almost deceased should not stay in a house which is the earth (má nū bhúmigrho bhuvat). This might refer to the same item as the mṛnmáya grhá in RV 7, 89, 1 (generally taken as the grave), but the context refers to a deep darkness, i.e., the underworld. Therefore we may as well take into account the house which is below (adharát) in AV 2, 14, 3. That house cannot be the grave, since it is the destination or seat of the Arāyī demons.

AV 18, 3, 3 does not refer to a diseased person, but to a woman who in time is rescued from death, the widow who is allowed to leave the funeral pyre and is said to be covered with blind darkness (andhéna ... támásā prāvṛtā) (see n. 11).

According to TS 2, 5, 8, 7 the fathers drink in a descending order after the human beings, i.e., in the sequence gods, men, fathers; the last seem to be connected with the subterranean world. Cf. JUB 2, 8, 3/9, where the order is gods, men, fathers, Asuras/rivals. See also BĀU 4, 3, 33 on a Pitṛloka mentioned after the world of the human beings.

Darkness is equated with death in TS 5, 7, 5, 1. AB 4, 5 equates night, darkness, and death (in the well-known context of the contest between gods and Asuras, in which night is conceived as a particular space). Cf. GB 2, 5, 1. In an expiation for taking out the fire too late (i.e., after sunrise), the shadow may represent the night in AB 7, 12, 2, and shadow then is equated with darkness and death.

Darkness is not only associated with demons and Asuras, but also with the Pitṛs. See ŚB 2, 1, 3, 1, where the light halves of the year, of the month, of the twenty-four hours, and of the day belong to the gods and the corresponding dark halves to the ancestors. ŚB 13, 8, 4, 7 states that the participants in the funeral ritual should return to the village reciting VS 35, 14 "We have risen out of the darkness" and then explains: “from the darkness, the world of the fathers, they now indeed go to the light, the sun.” This world of the fathers does not show the well-known association with light and happiness.

The darkness of death seems to be regarded as hell in AB 7, 13, 6, where it is said that sons rescue fathers from thick darkness. Cf. the well-known pseudo-etymology of putra, regarded as saving (tra) from hell (*put), occurring already in GB 1, 1, 2.

Those who perform at the southern fire go down (anvavayanti) to the world of the fathers (ŚB 12, 8, 1, 18).

JB 1, 167 mentions people who have risen up from death (mytódirinah) and who say that they have seen something in Yama’s hall. Apparently Yama’s palace is regarded here as being below instead of in highest heaven. The context concerns soul loss and getting one’s soul back from Yama.

For the association of the Pitṛs with pits, holes, and roots see Bodewitz (1999b; this vol. ch. 12). Here I only mention ŚB 3, 7, 1, 25, where the top of a
The stake used in the ritual is dedicated to the gods, the middle part to the human beings, and the part which is dug in is associated with the Pitṛlokā.

JU 3, 9, 1 mentions the emission of seed into the womb as one of the three forms of dying. This is explained by saying that the womb (the place which the dying entity enters) is blind darkness.

I may also draw attention to BĀU 1, 3, 28, where the verse asato mā sad gamaya. tamaso mā jyotir gamaya. mṛtyor māmṛtaṁ gamaya is commented upon. Here asat, tamas, and mṛtyu are obviously identical, and the prose text explicitly identifies death and darkness. For the association of darkness and death see also BĀU 3, 9, 14, where the puruṣa consisting of shadow, whose abode is darkness, is called death.

The fathers, death, and god Yama are sometimes associated with the moon and then night, and the darkness rather than the light of the moon may play a role, since the moon is also connected with the night. Clear references to the nocturnal aspect of the moon, however, are missing outside the classifications, in which the moon occupies the fourth position (see Bodewitz 2000a; this vol. ch. 14).

The idyllic image of ancestors enjoying the celestial light also does not agree with the association of death, Yama, and the Pitṛs with sleep and dreams. This association is not only Vedic, but has parallels in other cultures. See Kelsey (1987, 134a): “In many cultures the otherworld is viewed as a shadowy state, gray and dull ... It is a dull, colorless place of half-existence ... a place of diminished existence.” Death is the brother of Sleep in Homer, Iliad 14, 231; 16, 672. Both are sons of the night (Hesiod, Theogony 212 and 758). See also Virgil, Aeneid 6, 278. Cf. Kuiper (1979, 31 f.) on sleep in archaic religions described as residing (together with death) outside the universe in the underworld during the night.

ṚV 1, 117, 5 compares Vandana, who was apparently dead but became reanimated by the Aśvins, with the sun lying in darkness (i.e., in the underworld) and with someone who is sleeping in the womb of Nirṛti. AV 6, 46, 1 describes sleep as the son of Yama and of Varuṇa’s wife (i.e., a rare instance of adultery in the Vedic pantheon). In the next verse (6, 46, 2) sleep is called death. Cf. AV 16, 5, 1–6.

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14 ŚB 1, 6, 4, 13/18 even homologizes the moon with Vṛtra.
15 The background of the connection between Yama or death and sleep and between Yama and dreams may be rather different. The term svapna is used for both. On death and sleep see also Bodewitz (1999c, 115; this vol. p. 146 f.).
16 See Bodewitz (1994, 32; this vol. p. 103).
17 He is called Araru, who is denoted as an Asura by MS 4, 1, 10: 13.8 and TB 3, 2, 91, and who is also equated with the rival. This indicates the sphere of the underworld.
This sleep, being an Asura (cf. n. 17), went over to the Devas according to AV 19, 56, 3.\(^\text{18}\) Having been created in the dwelling of the Asura, he came from Yama and went over to the Devas (19, 56, 1/3). The transition from the Asuras to the Devas seems to be described in verse three, the coming to man from Yama in verse one. Here sleep might also be interpreted as a bad dream. In any case Yama and death here are lying outside the universe.

Kāṭhakasamīkalana 50, 4–5 equates svapna and mṛtyu, and ŚB 12, 9, 2, 2 equates sleeping with Pitṛs and being awake with men.

In the Upaniṣads we find the association of dream and Yama (KauṣU 4, 15) and of dream or sleep and the Pitṛloka (KaṭhU 6, 5).

See also JUB 4, 5, 1–2 on the highest deity (or the sun) who, in setting, becomes Yama, who in the stones (aśmasu, i.e., probably in the nether world) becomes Soma, who in the night becomes the king of the Fathers, and who in sleep or dream enters man.

6 Conclusions and General Observations

Clear distinctions between the destinations of demons and enemies as well as of sinners and other persons are hardly found as far as the underworld is concerned. At least these destinations seem to overlap. The general impression is that “life” after death in such a case is in a deep, dark, and unhappy world. Life has become sleep or at best a dream.

However, the term hell is sometimes found in Vedic texts, and characterizations of the underworld as a pit, hole, or a place of darkness into which one falls point to a hell in post-Vedic literature. This means that besides the concept of a common nether world, the idea of hell undoubtedly occurred in the Veda.

What we most miss in the passages discussed is one of the well-known characteristics of hell: punishment and cruelties. The vague indications of the underworld point instead to some sort of Hades.

The term naraka/nāraka indeed is found sometimes,\(^\text{19}\) but we miss descriptions of the horrors of hell. The clearest indications of a hell are found in the AV. In AV 5, 19, 3 (not discussed above, since there is no reference to darkness

\(^{18}\) See Kuiper (1979, 31).

\(^{19}\) See AV 12, 4, 36; VS 30, 5; TB 3, 4, 1; JB 1, 325; GB 1, 1, 2; JUB 4, 25, 6; 4, 26, 1; TĀ 1, 9, 1. Since the main themes of this article are not at all or hardly touched upon in these places, they were not discussed above. In late Vedic texts like the Dharmasūtras the concept of hell and the term naraka occur several times; see Kane (1953, 161f.). The lateness of these texts need not imply lateness of the concept.
and a downward movement) people who have severely and physically insulted a Brahmin are described as sitting in a stream of blood and as devouring hair. However, being (partly or completely) devoured by wolves seems to be a harsher punishment, and this is mentioned in connection with people who are not sinners.\footnote{See RV 2, 29, 6; 10, 95, 14.}

One may ask why for sinners and other bad persons severe punishments were seldom predicted. Some scholars imply that ethics and morals were not interesting to Vedic authors.\footnote{The existence of ethical ideas in pre-Upaniṣadic literature is often denied. According to Tull (1989, 31), the doctrine of karman with its opposition of sukrta and duṣkṛta would even in the Upaniṣads still be based on correctness in the performance of the ritual.} Here I have some doubts. It is true that not much attention was paid to the future of the sinners, but sins as such were definitely discerned.\footnote{See Bodewitz (1997–1998, 591; this vol. p. 8f.), referring also to earlier publications.} However, the main interest of the authors of the Vedic prose texts was a happy life on earth and its continuation in heaven (to be obtained by rituals).

Originally Vedic priests did not have much competition. People who did not want to comply with their demands for sponsoring rituals or performing meritorious acts were hardly interesting to them. At the end of the Vedic period, however, we see that with the popularity of other circles, their claims on a different “life” after death and their criticism of the Vedic claims for unlimited happiness and immortality were definitely taken seriously. Life in heaven became more and more dissociated from corporeal enjoyments.\footnote{See Bodewitz (1997–1998, 597; this vol. p. 13f.).} Criticism of the Vedic claim on permanent immortality in heaven was countered by the doctrine of the overcoming of death in heaven (punarmṛtyu).\footnote{See Bodewitz (1996b, 46; this vol. p. 134).} In this threatened position the closed front of Vedic ritualism broke down, and deliverance from death in heaven (i.e., Vedic immortality) now became claimed by a limited number of rituals (especially the Agnicayana).\footnote{See Rodhe (1946, 93): “It is interesting to see in this text that the priests of the Agnicayana deny the value of other sacrifices.”}

In this new situation there was no room for warnings against unethical behavior. The circles outside Vedic orthodoxy and Vedic ritualism would hardly be impressed by such warnings, since the search for liberation (mokṣa) implied transcending the morals of daily life. For philosophers who left the prescripts of society, hell was associated with ignorance (or even ritualism) rather than with bad behavior and the neglect of ritual.
In the older Vedic texts the main opposition was between heaven and the underworld. Heaven was the destination of the happy few who organized the rituals and were liberal to the priests. The Pitṛs became situated somewhere in heaven after the oldest layers of the ṚV, at least in the śrauta texts. It is remarkable that the term pitṛloka is missing in the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā as well as in the Grhyaśūtras. In some Vedic texts at least, gods and Pitṛs seem to share heaven, though the world of the gods and of the less privileged ancestors probably was not the same.

Similarly the underworld was shared by the human dead and demons. We may assume that the unhappy few consisting of demons, sinners, and perhaps also rivals or enemies inhabited hell, whereas the majority lived in an underworld.

So we have an opposition of heaven and light (for two groups, gods and Pitṛs, whose domains were overlapping) and of underworld and darkness (again for two groups, demons and Pitṛs, with overlapping domains of hell and Hades).

In the classificatory system (see Bodewitz 2000a; this vol. ch. 14) the East belongs to the gods, the South-east to (some of) the Pitṛs, the South to (some of) the Pitṛs, and the South-west to the demons (at least it represents hell).

Here the South (the region of some of the Pitṛs) is in opposition to the North (the region of people living on earth). Again this opposition has to do with light (North) and darkness (South). It also deals with above and below, since the North (uttarā) and the South (adharā) are qualified by adjectives in this sphere.

The difficult point is formed by the position of the Pitṛs (and gods like Yama and Varuṇa), who belong to the upper as well as to the lower party.

God Yama is mostly connected with heaven and light in the śrauta texts from the latest layers of the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā to the latest Brāhmaṇas. However, in post-Vedic literature the negative associations are numerous. Even in Vedic texts the (literal and metaphorical) “dark” side of Yama is sometimes to be observed. See, e.g., Ehni (1896, 51), who identifies Yama’s world with sunset and night and observes that a different development was marked by the connection of Yama with the highest heaven.

The relation between these two opposite aspects is mostly interpreted as a development in which Yama (and his world and its inhabitants) gradually becomes less benevolent and is degraded from heaven to the underworld or even to hell. See, e.g., Kane (1953, 160): “Thus from being a beneficent ruler of the departed souls in the very early Vedic times, Yama came gradually to be looked upon as a dreadful punisher of men.”26

26 Horsch, who correctly assumes a transition from the concept of an underworld to a heav-
It is unclear how a celestial, benevolent deity could become degraded to a dark god of the underworld. Rather we should assume that the darker side of Yama was original, that his celestial transformation took place as a consequence of the discovery of heaven for human beings, first discernible in the latest layers of the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā, and that the original aspect continued outside the sphere of the śrauta sacrifices and the Atharvavedic sava rites.\textsuperscript{27}

So the dark and dreaded Yama continues the older situation. In this respect he may be compared with Varuṇa, who also shows this ambivalence. See Kuiper (1983, 82f.) on the sharing of place and function of these two gods and Kuiper (1979, 67) on “Varuṇa as a demoniacal figure and as the god of Death.” In the epic, Varuṇa’s residence is also the nether world, as Kuiper (1979, 81ff.) shows. This agrees with his original position as an Asura. Both gods are connected with night, death, and the moon, as well as with the underworld.

If we only look at the association with the moon and the nocturnal sky and do not take into account its celestial and luminous aspects, then the connection with the underworld looks less surprising. Gonda (1965a, 43) observes that “on the one hand so many peoples regard the earth’s satellite as the region of the death, and on the other hand lunar deities not rarely are at the same time chthonic and funeral divinities.” His explanation of this phenomenon (“And because what happens to the moon and to the agricultural cycle proves that there is life in death, the dead could be conceived to go either to the underworld or to the moon—which each month enters the realm of death—to be regenerated and to prepare themselves for a new earthly existence”) is interesting, but would seem to apply to the Hinduism of transmigration, rather than to the Vedism of classifications and mythological identifications. The homology of night, death, darkness, the South, moon, Soma, waters, and the nether world forms a safer basis for the Vedic approach to cosmic mysteries. See Kuiper (1983, 138 ff.) and Bodewitz (1982, 45ff.; this vol. p. 37ff.).

Still we have to bear in mind that the association of Yama and the Pitṛlokā with heaven, light, and pleasure cannot exclusively be explained by homologizing the nether world and the nocturnal sky. Here we see the destiny of the dead and of the gods of death made celestial. The original situation continued as an undercurrent and reappeared much more clearly in post-Vedic literature.

\textsuperscript{27} See Bodewitz (1994, 37 [this vol. p. 108f.], 1999c, 113 [this vol. pp. 145ff.]), where references to further literature are given.
The positive and negative aspects not only concern the gods of death and the position of their realms in which the ancestors stay, but also the fathers themselves, who sometimes show traces of a demonic nature (see Bodewitz 2000a; this vol. ch. 14). The rites for them are “rites of darkness dear to the night and have to be performed in the winter months, the ‘dark half of the year’” (Das 1977, 14).

I am under the impression that the Pitṛs and their world were viewed ambivalently. The texts refer to them, but mostly in a rather vague way. These Pitṛs are to some extent worshipped and perhaps feared, but they represent a group, a category, rather than one’s own ancestors. Depending on the texts and the contexts, the Pitṛloka seems to be the second best world (above this world but distinct from and lower than the Svarga) or the second worst world (subterranean but perhaps distinct from and superior to the world of the sinners, the rivals, the demons, at least superior to hell).

In this article we have emphasized depth and darkness in connection with yonder world. Statistically the references to the lofty and luminous aspects of life after death form the majority in the śrauta texts, which are chronologically situated between the Ṛgveda Samhitā and the Upaniṣads. However, if one would only take into account the general impressions produced by these texts, one could not imagine how towns and houses made of bricks, how commerce and urban life, how renunciation and rebirth could ever have come into existence. Perhaps the “Veda Belt” of central northern India (the country of the Kurus and Pañcālas) is not the best source of information on India in the first half of the first millennium B.C.