

Where Language Came From

A FIVE PART REFLECTION



From the awareness beyond thought and words, known through the light of consciousness and love, language was born in human mouths. Over a long arc of evolution, we are still searching for the words to express the relationship between that awareness and the word.

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For all who are still finding the words.



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PART ONE

Why Begin Here

This section rests on the awareness I wrote about in *Light, Love and the Limits of Understanding*. I will not explain it again here. My thesis is simple: language is that primordial awareness expressing itself. It began before any record, it has changed form through every culture, and it is still happening now.

Communication is the currency of human civilisation. Before we can trade, teach, govern or pray together, we must first share a thought. Thought gives rise to words and to action. Words sometimes come before action: a promise, a command or a vow sets something moving. Words and action then feed back into thought, changing what we think next. Thought, word and action make one loop, and each shapes the others. All three arise in awareness.

This essay follows that currency from its origins to the present day. It sets out what is known, what is only reconstructed, and what the older spiritual traditions have taught. Then it returns to awareness, here and now.

The Deep Past: Speech Without a Record

Spoken language is far older than any writing. Modern humans probably had full language at least 100,000 years ago. Some researchers think Neanderthals or earlier humans had some form of it. Speech leaves no trace, so no one can name the first language. Every language spoken today has evolved without a break from that deep past, so none can be called the oldest.

The earliest signs of symbolic thought are not language we can read. Engraved ochre from Blombos Cave in South Africa is between 75,000 and 77,000 years old. Geometric signs in Ice Age caves in Europe, thirty two kinds repeated across many sites, date from about 40,000 to 10,000 years ago. Scholars still debate whether these were writing, counting or art. Sign languages are probably as old as speech, but they leave no record either.

Before the Record: The Pulse of Awareness

Behind the oldest record lies a time with no memory and no evidence. The mainstream record stops there. This is where the essay turns to conviction.

Kashmir Shaivism calls the movement of primordial awareness spanda, the pulse. Awareness is never still. It expresses itself, and the first expression is thought. Thought takes the form of sound, and sound takes the form of speech. Language, at its root, is this pulse reaching the human voice.

Physics offers an image, and only an image. It describes every field in the universe as never perfectly still. Even in the quantum vacuum, the lowest state of all the fields, there is a constant trembling. Everything that appears rises from that restless ground. Physics does not say this ground is aware. That is my conviction, and the Kashmiri sages held it too. But the picture fits: a ground that is always moving, and forms that rise from it, including the first human speech.



PART TWO

The Written Word

The First Writing

The earliest known writing appears around 3400 to 3200 BCE. Sumerian cuneiform comes from Mesopotamia, and Egyptian hieroglyphs follow close behind. The two languages are unrelated. Sumerian is an isolate, with no known relatives. Egyptian belongs to the Afro Asiatic family. Writing appears to have arisen separately in China and Mesoamerica, and possibly in Mesopotamia and Egypt too, though scholars debate whether Egypt took the idea from Mesopotamia. No record can settle whether there was an earlier source.

All of this is the mainstream academic record, built from what has been excavated, dated and compared. Awareness found a new form here: the thought could now be held on clay and stone.

The Indo European Family and Sanskrit

Nobody wrote down Proto Indo European. Linguists rebuilt it by comparing its daughter languages and working backward. Estimates of when it was spoken range from about 4500 to 2500 BCE. The leading view places its speakers on the steppe north of the Black Sea, herding peoples whose descendants, the Yamnaya, spread out from about 3300 BCE. From it came Greek, Latin, the Germanic, Celtic and Slavic languages, Persian and Sanskrit. Behind it, the trail goes cold.

Indo Aryan speakers entered the Indian subcontinent between about 2000 and 1600 BCE, and the earliest Vedic Sanskrit dates from about 1500 BCE. Sanskrit is not the oldest language on record. Sumerian and Egyptian are more than 1,500 years older, and Hittite, an Indo European cousin, was written in Anatolia in the same period or slightly earlier. Its real distinction is the way the Vedas were passed on. Reciters preserved the hymns by memory for centuries before they were written, with remarkable accuracy. In Sanskrit, the same awareness found its most detailed account of itself.

What the Ancients Said About Themselves

The Sumerians did not claim to have invented language. They credited the gods.

The goddess Nisaba was patron of writing and scribes, and Enki was the god of wisdom. The myth *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* describes a time when all people spoke one language, until Enki confused it into many.

This is myth, not historical record. It shows how one of the oldest peoples saw language, as a gift from the gods.

Hieroglyphs: The God's Words

The Egyptians called their writing *medu netjer*, the god's words. They believed the god Thoth had invented it. Hieroglyphs appear around 3200 BCE and were used for more than 3,500 years, until the last dated inscription, carved at Philae in 394 CE. They were not simple pictures. Some signs stood for whole words, some for sounds, and some for the kind of thing a word named.

For the Egyptians, a written word was not only a record of a thing. It was part of the thing. A person's name, the *ren*, was part of the soul. Keeping it spoken and written kept the person alive, and erasing it was feared as a second death.

The Pyramid Texts, carved in royal pyramids from about 2400 BCE, are among the oldest religious writings known. Each section begins with the words "words to be spoken". They were meant to be said aloud, and the saying was the action: it helped the dead king rise to the sky. Here the loop of thought, word and action appears in stone.

The Memphite Theology goes furthest. Ptah conceives the world in his heart, then speaks it with his tongue, and it comes into being. The heart was the seat of thought and the tongue was the voice. The surviving text was cut on the Shabaka Stone around 710 BCE, copied from an older source whose date scholars debate.

Hieroglyphs are awareness taking visible form. A thought became a word, and the word became a sign cut into stone, so that it outlasted the one who thought it. The Egyptians did not explain awareness as we do. They said creation begins as thought in the heart and becomes real through the word. That is the same movement, in the language of their own gods.

The meaning of the signs was lost for about fourteen centuries. In 1822 Champollion announced that he had read them, using the Rosetta Stone. A language can be lost, and found again.

Logos: Greece Names the Principle

The Greeks gave that source a name: *logos*. It means word, reason or account. It comes from the verb *legein*, to speak or to gather, so at root it is speech that carries order and meaning. Heraclitus used it for the rational order beneath all change. The Stoics called it the divine reason that runs through nature, and said humans share in it through their own reason. Philo of Alexandria made it the link between God and the world.

John's Gospel opens with "In the beginning was the Word." The Greek word is Logos. John goes on to say that the life was the light of men. Meister Eckhart took the idea inward. For him the Word is spoken eternally in the soul, and this is the birth of God within.

The texts are documented. The claim is philosophical and religious: that language is the ordering principle reality comes from, not a human tool laid over it. The Greeks said this in their own language, as the Egyptians had said it in theirs.



PART THREE

Beyond the Mainstream

Everything in this part has no archaeological or linguistic support. It is included because many people have found meaning in it.

Edgar Cayce, in his trance readings, said Atlantis had an advanced language and that fragments survived in Egypt. He spoke of a hidden hall of records near the Sphinx. Helena Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy, wrote of a root language called Senzar, the supposed source of Sanskrit, hieroglyphs and Chinese characters, kept by hidden adepts. Zecharia Sitchin argued that the Anunnaki, beings from elsewhere, gave language and writing to the Sumerians.

These accounts differ in detail. They share one idea: language was given or handed down, and was not built up slowly by humans.

The Ringing Cedars and the Sound Om

The Ringing Cedars material comes from the Anastasia books. It says humans first communicated by direct transmission of images and feelings. A whole image passed between people at once. Words came later, as humanity's link with nature and with this direct perception weakened. Spoken language became a slower and less precise substitute. Some followers add that old Slavic root sounds kept more of the original meaning than modern languages do.

The Vedic tradition is older and more structured. It teaches that Om is the *pranava*, the first vibration from which creation unfolds. The Mandukya Upanishad reads its three sounds, A, U and M, as waking, dreaming and deep sleep. The silence after the sound is a fourth state, beyond all of them. Om is not a word with a meaning. It is the sound beneath all words.

Sanskrit holds a special place here. The tradition says its sound alphabet, the *matrika*, reflects the structure of creation itself. This idea runs through Kashmir Shaivism, where the sounds of Sanskrit are the stages by which silent awareness becomes speech, a movement called *Vak*.

The two traditions are far apart in time and place. Yet they agree on the main point. Something unified came first, whether image or sound, and spoken language is what remains after it descended and divided.



PART FOUR

From Many Tongues to the Screen

Many Tongues, and the Loss of Them

From one speech, the Sumerian myth says, came many. Today about seven thousand languages are spoken, and each is the same awareness taking a different form. Linguists describe this as a time of mass language extinction. Ethnologue classifies about 44 percent of languages as endangered, and UNESCO's atlas puts the figure at over 40 percent. When the last speaker of a language dies, a way of expressing awareness goes with them.

From Clay to Screen

Writing let the currency travel. By the usual dating, around 1050 BCE the Phoenicians reduced it to 22 signs for the consonants. The Greeks added vowels by the eighth century BCE, and the Latin alphabet followed through the Etruscans. A few dozen signs could now record any language. Paper came from China and reached Europe through the Islamic world in the twelfth century. Printing multiplied the page, in China and Korea first and then with Gutenberg's press in Germany, around 1450.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the currency left the page. The telegraph, the telephone, radio and television carried words across the world in a moment.

Today most communication travels by the internet, and the internet is quantum in its nature. The transistors inside every phone and computer work because of the quantum behaviour of electrons in silicon. Fibre optic cables carry our words across oceans as pulses of light, and the screen in our hands turns those pulses back into words and images, again as light. Even our messages are made of light. The pulse that began before the record is now moving through glass and silicon.

Federico Faggin, who led the design of the first microprocessor and whose touch technology sits under the glass of the screen, came to believe that consciousness is itself fundamental and works through quantum processes. I wrote about him in *Going Deeper*, the companion to *An Ocean Journey*, where his work stands beside the Kashmiri teaching. The man who helped put thought into silicon came to believe that thought does not come from silicon.



PART FIVE

Back to the Present Moment

We have followed language from a time before any record to the screen in our hands. It has changed form many times, and many tongues have been lost. The source has not changed, and the pulse has not stopped.

Spanda is not an event in the past. It is happening now. Awareness is expressing itself in this moment, as thought, and the thought is taking form in words. You are reading them. I am writing them. Every conversation on earth is part of the same expression.

Sanskrit shows this as clearly as any language we know. Its thinkers studied how awareness becomes thought, how thought becomes sound, and how sound becomes speech. Om, the matrika and Vak are names for the stages. The Greeks reached for the same truth with Logos, and John joined it to light.

We may never find the first word. We do not need to. The source is not behind us in the past. It is here, in the awareness in which these words are read. Thought, word and action, taken with awareness, shape our world and communicate the reality we are in.



*With love,
Hosshin*

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