1. The advance teams of the peoples hitched me up in front. As always,
   I carried Pūṣan within.
   All the gods then guarded me. There was a shout, "The one of bad
   command has come."

2. They scorch me all about, like cowives, (like ailing) ribs.
   Inattention, nakedness, and exhaustion oppress me. Like a bird, my
   attention keeps fluttering here and there.
3. Like mice their tails, the cares gnaw at me, your praiser, o you of a
   hundred resolves.
   At once show mercy to us, bounteous Indra, and become like a
   father to us.

4. I chose Kuruśravaṇa of Trasadasyu's line as my king,
   most liberal to his cantors—I a seer—
5. (Saying,) "He whose three tawny (horses) convey me on his chariot along
   the straight way—
   I shall praise him at a (sacrifice) with a priestly gift of a thousand
   (cows)"—
6. (I chose) the father of Upamaśravas for whom there were sweet songs,
   delightful like a dwelling place for one at home in it.
7. Learn, o Upamaśravas, his son, o grandson of Mitrāthiti:
   I am the celebrant of your father.
8. If I could be the master of immortals or of mortals,
   my bounteous patron would still live.
9. No one lives beyond the commandment of the gods, even one with a
   hundred selves.
   And thus have I turned away from my yokemate.

X.34 (860) Gambler

Kavaṣa Ailūṣa or Akṣa Maujavant
14 verses: triṣṭubh, except jagatī 7

One of the most famous, most translated, and most anthologized hymns in the Ṛgveda, this lively and vivid lament of the gambler depicts the sad lot of a man addicted to dicing but unsuccessful at it. This hapless speaker describes the intoxication that grips him when he is playing or even contemplating play and that leaves him helpless to resist (vss. 1, 5–9), as well as the toll this compulsion takes on his personal life and the self-pity this evokes in him (vss. 2–4, 10–11). At the end of the hymn the gambler vows to renounce play (vs. 12), and the god Savitar restores him to his former position (vs. 13). The final verse (14) is the gambler's address to the dice, urging them to leave him alone and find another victim. This portion of the

hymn has the form of a ritual expiation, embodied especially in the last words of 12d, in which the gambler avows the truth of his speech.

Dicing was an important cultural feature of ancient India, especially associated with kings and the ruling class. Already in middle Vedic sacrifice, in the Rājasūya, the ritual of the consecration of the king, there is a ritual dicing match, rigged so that the king-to-be wins. Of course, the whole of the great epic, the Mahābhārata, is determined by the outcome of the dicing match between Yudhiṣṭhira and his cousins: Yudhiṣṭhira gambles away his kingdom, his brothers, his wife, and himself and must fight to regain his kingship. The much-loved story of Nala and Damayantī also involves the gambling away of a kingdom, this time by Nala. And the dharma texts consider gambling, along with hunting and womanizing, to be a characteristic pursuit—and vice—of kings (cf. Mānava Dharma Śāstra VII.47, 50; for condemnation of gambling in general see, e.g., MDŚ IX.220–28).

Ancient Indian dicing was quite different from the game that the word conjures up in the modern mind, and much scholarship has been devoted to figuring out what the play actually consisted of (see, e.g., Lüders 1907; Falk 1986). It seems to have involved a large quantity of a particular kind of nut (*vibhīdaka* /*vibhītaka*) as the dice; these had no markings on them. They were thrown into a hollow on the ground, and the players took turns pulling out a handful. The best "hand" was one divisible by four, and the other hands were ranked according to how many nuts were left over after a division by four, with a single leftover nut being the worst (see vs. 2c). For details, see Falk (1986: 73–133). Although it may be hard for us to imagine the passions enflamed by this kind of long division, our own games of chance probably will not stand up to scrutiny some millennia in the future.

The monologue form found here is almost unprecedented in the Ṛgveda, and the shifting play of emotions—guilty excitement, tender remembrance of his past life and family, scorn for his own weakness and the disgust he arouses in others, bitter anger at the inanimate dice that brought him low, to which he ascribes agency and malign intention and for which he still longs—is psychologically convincing and very moving. Showing our own biases, we might proudly deem it quite "modern."

1. The dangling (nuts) of the lofty (tree) exhilarate me, the ones born in a
   windy place, constantly whirling in the gaming hollow.
   Like a draught of soma from Mt. Mūjavant, the wakeful vibhīdaka nut
   has pleased me.
2. She did not oppose me, nor did she get angry; she was gracious to my
   comrades and to me.
   I, on account of one die too many, have pushed away my avowed wife.
3. Her mother-in-law [=my mother] hates me; my wife pushes me away.
   A man in distress finds no one to pity him.

"I find no more use for a gambler than for an old nag up for sale," (so they say).

4. Others fondle the wife of a man whose possessions the die with eyes on the prize has hungered for.
Father, mother, brothers say about him, "We do not know him; lead him away bound."

5. When I resolve, "I will not play with them," I am bereft of my comrades, who go off (without me).
And as soon as, scattered down, the brown (dice) have raised their voice, I just go to their appointed place, like a girl with a lover.

6. The gambler goes to the hall of play asking himself, "will I win?" puffing himself up with "I will win!"
The dice run counter to his desire, conferring the winning throws on his opponent.

7. They are just "dice"—but hooking, goading, debasing, scorching, seeking to scorch,
giving (temporarily) like a child, then in turn slapping down the victor, infused with honey, with power over the gambler.

8. The troop of them plays, three times fifty strong. Like god Savitar's, their ordinances hold true.
Even to the battle fury of the mighty they do not bow; even the king makes his bow to them.

9. Downward they roll; up above they ricochet. Lacking hands, they overpower the man with hands.
Heavenly coals scattered down in the gaming hollow, though they are cold they burn up the heart.

10. The wife of the gambler, abandoned, is scorched, and the mother of the child wandering who knows where.
In debt, fearful, seeking money, he approaches by night the house of others.

11. It scorched the gambler to see a woman—the wife and well-ordered home of others.
Since early in the day he hitched up his brown horses [=dice], the "little bullock" fell [=left off gambling and sought shelter] (only) at the end of the fire [=late at night].

12. [Gambler:] He who has become the general of your great throng, the foremost king of the troop,
to him I put forth my ten (fingers): "I withhold no money. This truth I speak."

13. [Savitar:] "Don't keep playing with dice; just plow your own plowland. Be content in your possessions, thinking them much.
There are your cows, o gambler, there your wife." In this way does Savitar here, protector of the stranger, watch out for me.

14. [To all the dice:] Make alliance (with us) now; have pity on us. Do not conjure against us boldly with your terrible (mind/eye).
Let your battle fury now settle down, your hostility. Let another now be in the toils of the brown ones.

The next four hymns (35–38) form a group, though they are not all attributed to the same author (see Oldenberg 1888: 229 n. 2, 235). The first two, to the All Gods, are attributed to Luśa Dhānāka, while the other two were given fanciful poets' names derived from the contents of the hymn itself: 37 Abhitapas Saurya ("Scorching Heat, son of the Sun") and 38 Indra Muṣkavant ("Indra, possessing testicles").

X.35 (861) All Gods

Luśa Dhānāka
14 verses: jagatī, except triṣṭubh 13–14

This is primarily a morning hymn, calling especially on the gods associated with the early morning sacrifice for aid and protection: the Sun, the Dawn, Agni, Indra, the Aśvins, as well as Heaven and Earth. The ten interior verses (3–12) have a pāda-length refrain dedicated to the kindled ritual fire, and the activities of Dawn occupy much of the hymn (esp. vss. 3–6). The hymn opens out toward its end, with special focus on the Ādityas (vss. 9, 11–12), but the later prominence of the Ādityas has been prepared by mention of "blamelessness" in earlier verses (2–3) and by the "proclamation of truth" in verse 8. This truth, formulated in 8c, is simply that "the Sun, as spy," rises every day, but we know from elsewhere in the Ṛgveda (nearby X.37 belonging to the same poetic group [see discussion there], as well as, e.g., VII.62.2, VII.63.1) that the Sun is the eye of the Ādityas, especially Mitra and Varuṇa, who attests to the innocence or guilt of the men whom he sees as he rises. Thus this brief truth formulation encapsulates our knowledge that our place in the moral order is mediated through the cosmic order of the daily rhythm of sunrise.

1. They have awakened—these fires accompanied by Indra, bringing light at the early brightenings of the dawn.
Let great Heaven and Earth take cognizance of our work. Today we choose the help of the gods.
2. We choose the help of Heaven and Earth. The Mother Rivers, the Mountains filled with (soma-)reeds,
the Sun, the Dawn we beseech for blamelessness. Let Soma, being pressed, make good for us today.
3. Heaven and Earth—let the two great mothers protect us, who are blameless, for our welfare.