

DASHAVATARA





KRISHNA IS THE SOURCE OF ALL INCARNATIONS

Srimad Bhavatam Canto 1 Ch. III V.28

TRANSLATION

All of the above-mentioned incarnations are either plenary portions or portions of the plenary portions of the Lord, but Lord Śrī Krishna is the original Personality of Godhead. All of them appear on planets whenever there is a disturbance created by the atheists. The Lord incarnates to protect the theists.



PURPORT

In this particular stanza Lord Śrī Krishna, the Personality of Godhead, is distinguished from other incarnations. He is counted amongst the avatāras (incarnations) because out of His causeless mercy the Lord descends from His transcendental abode. Avatāra means “one who descends.” All the incarnations of the Lord, including the Lord Himself, descend to the different planets of the material world as also in different species of life to fulfill particular missions. Sometimes He comes Himself, and sometimes His different plenary portions or parts of the plenary portions, or His differentiated portions directly or indirectly empowered by Him, descend to this material world to execute certain specific functions. Originally the Lord is full of all opulences, all prowess, all fame, all beauty, all knowledge and all renunciation. When they are partly manifested through the plenary portions or parts of the plenary portions, it should be noted that certain manifestations of His different powers are required for those particular functions. When in the room small electric bulbs are displayed, it does not mean that the electric powerhouse is limited by the small bulbs. The same powerhouse can supply power to operate large-scale industrial dynamos with greater volts. Similarly, the incarnations of the Lord display limited powers because so much power is needed at that particular time.

For example, Lord Paraśurāma and Lord *Nrsimha* displayed unusual opulence by killing the disobedient *ksatriyas* twenty-one times and killing the greatly powerful atheist *Hiranyakaśipu*. *Hiranyakaśipu* was so powerful that even the demigods in other planets would tremble simply by the unfavorable raising of his eyebrow. The demigods in the higher level of material existence many, many times excel the most well-to-do human beings in duration of life, beauty, wealth, paraphernalia and all other respects. Still they were afraid of *Hiranyakaśipu*. Thus we can simply imagine how powerful *Hiranyakaśipu* was in this material world. But even *Hiranyakaśipu* was cut into small pieces by the nails of Lord *Nrsimha*. This means that anyone materially powerful cannot stand the strength of the Lord's nails. Similarly, *Jāmadagnya* displayed the Lord's power to kill all the disobedient kings powerfully situated in their respective states. The Lord's empowered incarnation *Nārada* and plenary incarnation *Varāha*, as well as indirectly empowered Lord *Buddha*, created faith in the mass of people. The incarnations of *Rāma* and *Dhanvantari* displayed His fame, and *Balarāma*, *Mohini* and *Vāmana* exhibited His beauty. *Dattātreyā*, *Matsya*, *Kumāra* and *Kapila* exhibited His transcendental knowledge. *Nara* and *Nārāyaṇa* *Rsis* exhibited His renunciation. So all the different indirectly or directly empowered incarnations of the Lord manifested different features, but Lord Krishna, the primeval Lord, exhibited the complete features of Godhead, and thus it is confirmed that He is the source of all other incarnations. And the most extraordinary feature exhibited by Lord Śrī Krishna was His internal energetic manifestation of His pastimes with the cowherd girls. His pastimes with the *gopīs* are all displays of transcendental existence, bliss and knowledge, although these are manifested apparently as sex love. The specific attraction of His pastimes with the *gopīs* should never be misunderstood. The *Bhāgavatam* relates these transcendental pastimes in the Tenth Canto. And in order to reach the position to understand the transcendental nature of Lord Krishna's pastimes with the *gopīs*, the *Bhāgavatam* promotes the student gradually in nine other cantos.

According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's statement, in accordance with authoritative sources, Lord Krishna is the source of all other incarnations. It is not that Lord Krishna has any source of incarnation. All the symptoms of the Supreme Truth in full are present in the person of Lord Śrī Krishna, and in the *Bhagavad-gītā* the Lord emphatically declares that there is no truth greater than or equal to Himself. In this stanza the word *svayam* is particularly mentioned to

confirm that Lord Krishna has no other source than Himself. Although in other places the incarnations are described as *bhagavān* because of their specific functions, nowhere are they declared to be the Supreme Personality. In this stanza the word *svayam* signifies the supremacy as the summum bonum.

The summum bonum Krishna is one without a second. He Himself has expanded Himself in various parts, portions and particles as *svayam-rūpa*, *svayam-prakāśa*, *tad-ekātmā*, *prābhava*, *vaibhava*, *vilāsa*, *avatāra*, *āveśa*, and *jīvas*, all provided with innumerable energies just suitable to the respective persons and personalities. Learned scholars in transcendental subjects have carefully analyzed the summum bonum Krishna to have sixty-four principal attributes. All the expansions or categories of the Lord possess only some percentages of these attributes. But Śrī Krishna is the possessor of the attributes cent percent. And His personal expansions such as *svayam-prakāśa* and *tad-ekātmā*, up to the categories of the *avatāras* who are all *visnu-tattva*, possess up to ninety-three percent of these transcendental attributes. Lord Śiva, who is neither *avatāra* nor *āveśa* nor in between them, possesses almost eighty-four percent of the attributes. But the *jīvas*, or the individual living beings in different statuses of life, possess up to the limit of seventy-eight percent of the attributes. In the conditioned state of material existence, the living being possesses these attributes in very minute quantity, varying in terms of the pious life of the living being. The most perfect of living beings is *Brahmā*, the supreme administrator of one universe. He possesses seventy-eight percent of the attributes in full. All other demigods have the same attributes in less quantity, whereas human beings possess the attributes in very minute quantity. The standard of perfection for a human being is to develop the attributes up to seventy-eight percent in full. The living being can never possess attributes like Śiva, Vishnu or Lord Krishna. A living being can become godly by developing the seventy-eight-percent transcendental attributes in fullness, but he can never become a God like Śiva, Krishna or Krishna. He can become a *Brahmā* in due course. The godly living beings who are all residents of the planets in the spiritual sky are eternal associates of God in different spiritual planets called *Hari-dhāma* and *Maheśa-dhāma*. The abode of Lord Krishna above all spiritual planets is called *Kṛsnaloka* or *Goloka Vṛndāvana*, and the perfected living being, by developing seventy-eight percent of the above attributes in fullness, can enter the planet of *Kṛsnaloka* after leaving the present material body.

A. C. BHAKTI VEDĀNTA SWĀMĪ



VISHNU



वशिणु

INTRODUCTION



The ten incarnations of Vishnu are a recurrent theme in Vedic history. Vishnu exists outside the material realm as the creator, and he exists within every being as the Supersoul. He also enters this world as avatar, *one who descends*, to restore balance whenever his presence is needed. His descent is described by Krishna : *Whenever there is a decline of religion, and a rise of irreligion, I incarnate myself. To protect the good, to destroy the wicked, and to re-establish religious principles, I appear in every age.*

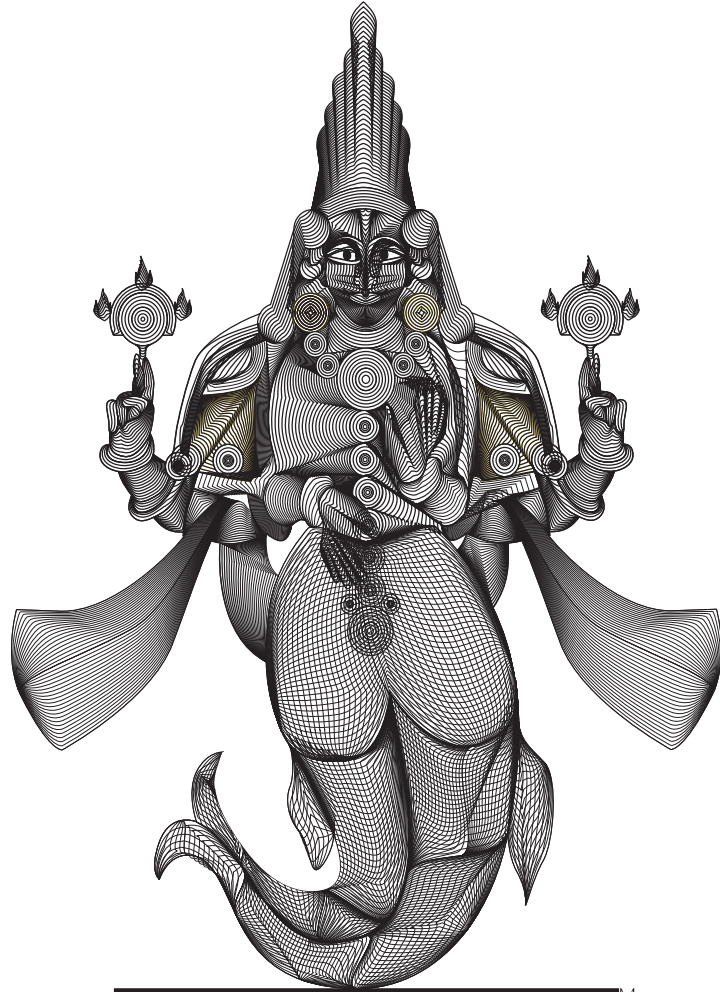
There are said to be more incarnations of Godhead than there are waves in the ocean. It is also said that Vishnu incarnates in all species of life. The ten avatars of Vishnu are of particular interest because He takes progressively more developed forms, from fish, tortoise and boar to half-animal, half-man, and finally human form. That God should incarnate as an animal, even a supernatural one, shows that animals have an important role to play in God's eyes. They are not simply dumb beasts, or *livestock* meant for satisfying human needs and appetites. They are living expressions of the spirit and of the presence of God.

In his *Gita Govinda*, an elaborate poem of devotion to Krishna, the poet Jayadeva composed ten verses in praise of Vishnu's avatars. I have included with each verse the story of that incarnation. The tales of these incarnations have had a profound influence on Hindu culture.

THE FIRST INCARNATION

MATSYA

The Fish



मत्स्य

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of a fish. When the sacred hymns of the Vedas were lost in the waters of universal devastation, you swam like a boat in that vast ocean to rescue them.

Once a King named Satyavrata was performing a sacred ceremony beside a river. While scooping water from the river he accidentally caught a tiny fish in the palm of his hand. The fish begged him not to throw it back into the river where it would be eaten by larger fish. The king felt sorry for the little fish and took it home to his palace where he put it in a small bowl. Next morning the fish had outgrown the bowl and begged the king to put it in something larger. The king then transferred it into a pond, but it very quickly outgrew that too, so he put it into a small lake. Within no time the fish had outgrown the lake and had to be put into the largest lake in the kingdom. Soon, however it had grown so big that even this was not large enough and the amazing fish had to be put in the ocean.

By this time the king concluded that the fish must be a divine appearance of God. He offered prayers and asked it why it had taken this form. Matsya, the fish incarnation of Vishnu, replied that in seven days a huge devastation would engulf the lower part of the universe. He told the king to call the seven great sages and gather samples of all the herbs and seeds and all kinds of living creatures. He promised that he would send a large boat to save them all. After that the king would fully understand who he was. Then he swam away.

As Matsya had predicted, huge clouds appeared from all directions and began pouring incessant water on land and sea. Soon the ocean overflowed onto the land. Then Satyavrata and all his companions saw a large mysterious boat floating towards them across the waves. Remembering the words of Matsya, Satyavrata led them aboard it and they found safety. Matsya, who by now was a golden fish of inconceivable size, then appeared in the ocean. Using the giant serpent Vasuki, they tied the boat to Matsya's horn and he towed it, full of all the different species of life, across the waters of devastation. For countless years darkness covered the worlds and together they wandered across the stormy wastes waiting for the waters to subside. During their journey Vishnu-Matsya instructed King Satyavrata and the sages in the spiritual knowledge of the Vedas.

It is said that whoever hears this story is delivered from the ocean of sinful life.

THE SECOND INCARNATION

KURMA



The Tortoise



कुरुम

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of a tortoise. When the ocean of milk was churned you became the pivot beneath the churning rod of Mount Mandara leaving a beautiful impression on your back.

Once, the demigods and the demons both wanted to get the Nectar of Immortality. Whoever drank this nectar would be invincible. On the advice of Lord Vishnu, they made a pact and agreed to co-operate together to get it. Vishnu told them what to do. In the universe is a sacred ocean of milk. They should throw all kinds of vegetables, grass, creepers and herbs into that ocean and churn it. From this churning, he said, would come the Nectar of Immortality. To churn the ocean they would have to use the golden mountain, Mandara, as a churning rod. With great difficulty and Vishnu's help they managed to bring Mount Mandara to the Milk Ocean. They used Vasuki, the giant serpent, as a rope. Wrapping him round the mountain, the demons took hold of his head and the demigods took his tail.

They tried to churn, but the mountain sank into the ocean floor and they began to despair. Vishnu then took the form of a gigantic tortoise, Kurma, and supported the mountain on his back. Using Kurma as a pivot, the demons and the demigods started to churn again, back and forth. Kurma felt as though they were scratching an itch on his back and this gave him pleasure. The first thing the churning produced was a deadly poison which threatened the whole world. This was drunk by Lord Shiva to save everyone. As they continued churning many wonderful things came out of the ocean, but at last they got what they wanted - the Nectar of Immortality. Both groups wanted it, and a quarrel developed. Vishnu came to the aid of the demigods and helped them get the nectar for themselves. Seeing that they had lost the nectar, the demons attacked the demigods and after a terrible battle the demons were defeated.

In the form of a giant tortoise, Kurma balanced the opposing forces of the demons and the demigods about the churning rod of Mount Mandara in the Milk Ocean. In the end the demigods, who were his devotees, got immortal nectar. The demons, who had worked so hard, but who did not have the blessing of Vishnu, got only disappointment and poison. This is the fate of an atheistic society which works hard to acquire material success and comfort, but offers nothing to God - all its good work turns to poison and pollution and it ends up with nothing.

THE TIRTH INCARNATION

VARAHA



The Boar



वराह

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of a boar. When the earth fell into the ocean at the bottom of the universe you caught her on your tusk, where she looked like a spot on the moon.

Hiranyaksha was the first and greatest demon that ever walked this earth. His body was so big and strong that it blocked the view in all directions just like a mountain. The crest of his crown seemed to kiss the sky and cover the sun. When he walked the earth shook at his every step. Even the demigods hid themselves from him. Fearing death at the hands of no one, he wandered the earth searching for a suitable opponent to fight. He wore golden anklets, a golden girdle, golden bracelets on his arms, golden armour and a crown of gold. To obtain this gold he mined the earth. He considered the earth as his property to do with as he wished, and so he mined her deeper and deeper - so deep that she lost her inner balance and fell from her position in space. Plunging to the depths she came to rest in the primeval waters which lie at the very bottom of the universe. There she lay, lost and helpless in the darkness. Vishnu saw the distress of the earth planet as she was lying in the dark ocean. He took the form of a gigantic boar, Varaha, and entered the universe to rescue the earth from the deep. It is said that he first appeared in a tiny form no larger than a thumb, and steadily grew until he seemed to fill the heavens. Although a boar is normally considered to be an ugly animal, Varaha was most beautiful. All the demigods and sages sung his glories as he dived into the ocean. Meanwhile Hiranyaksha, not caring for the earth's predicament, roamed about restlessly looking for someone with whom to do battle. As Varaha was picking up the earth on his tusks, the angry demon came upon him and eagerly challenged him to fight. There was a great battle, fought for the sake of the earth, in which the demon finally lost his life. Varaha picked up the earth and carefully restored her to her proper position in space.

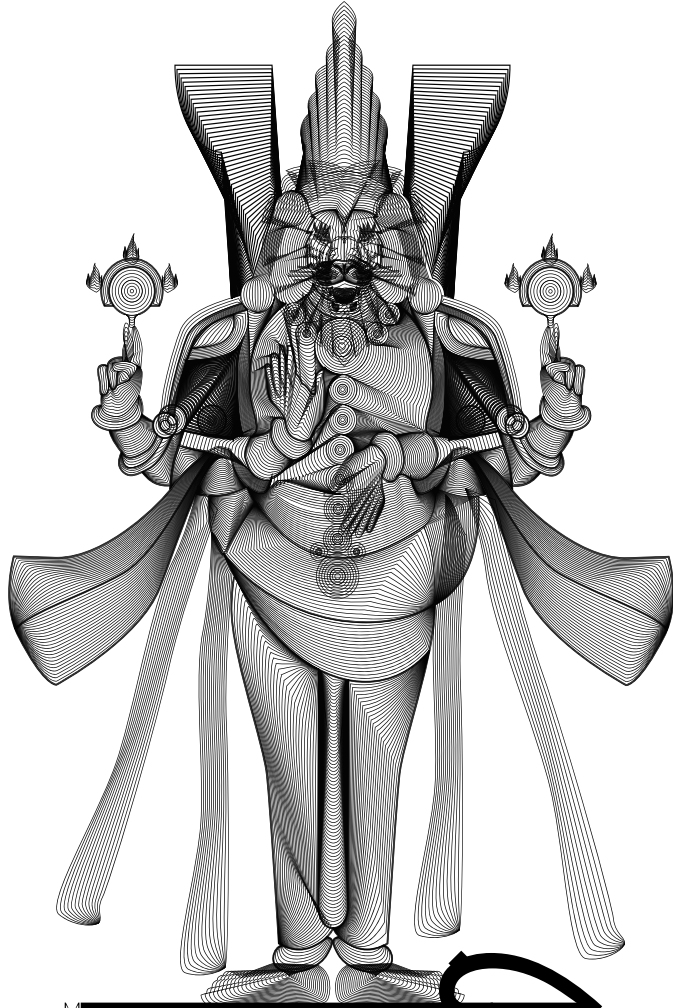
When modern industrialists drill for oil, Hindus remember what happened to the earth all those millennia ago. Scientists say that oil has no value lying under the ground where it serves no purpose for anyone. In their opinion it only has value when engineers extract it and use it to produce energy and manufacture plastics. No one stops to ask whether the oil might have been serving some more fundamental purpose, lying beneath the surface for all those thousands and millions of years. Are we to suppose that the entire process of evolution of oil and other fossil fuels was just to satisfy twentieth-century man's lust for gold? Now that they are rapidly disappearing into the atmosphere in the form of pollution, what unseen imbalance has been created in the subterranean depths? To what dangers have we exposed our dear, forgotten mother, the earth planet, who was once rescued by Vishnu-Varaha from the cruel exploitation of the demon Hiranyaksha?

THE FOURTH INCARNATION

NARASIMHA



The Man Lion



नरसिंह

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of a man-lion. As easily as crushing a wasp between your fingers, you tore apart the demon Hiranyakashipu with the pointed nails of your bare hands, which are beautiful like the lotus flower. The brother of Hiranyaksha was another demon named Hiranyakashipu. When he saw that Hiranyaksha had been killed by Vishnu he swore vengeance. With blazing eyes he called all his associates together and vowed, "I will kill Vishnu and sever his head from his body. You all go down to earth and attack the brahmanas and devotees of Vishnu. Wherever cows are protected set fire to the houses and cut down the trees." Vedic culture places special importance on the welfare of brahmanas (spiritual teachers), cows and trees. Hiranyakashipu knew that if they attacked these three they would be destroying all that was most dear to Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu then set about becoming the most powerful person in the universe, trampling all beneath him and spreading a reign of terror. But always he was searching for Vishnu to kill him. He tried to force Brahma, chief of the demigods, to make him immortal. Brahma, however, could not do that because even he had to die eventually. So instead the demon extracted from him various assurances: he would not die during the day or the night; on land, at sea or in the sky; inside or outside; by the hands of human or beast; or by any weapon.

Now, he thought, he was immortal! In due course Hiranyakashipu had a son. The boy turned out to be quite different from his father - he was a devotee of Vishnu. His name was Prahlad. From the beginning of his life Prahlad spread light and love around him. His father tried every possible way to turn the boy into a demon like him, but nothing worked. Unable to tolerate a member of his family worshipping his mortal enemy, he decided to kill his own son. But it was not easy. He gave him to his soldiers to execute, but they couldn't do it. He tried throwing him off a cliff, crushing him beneath an elephant, putting him amongst venomous snakes and poisoning his food. Nothing would work. Prahlad's life was protected by some supernatural force. Finally in anger Hiranyakashipu demanded, - "Where do you get your strength?" - "From the same place you get yours, father, from Vishnu." - "Where is this Vishnu of yours! Let me see him so that I can kill him!" - "He's everywhere!" - replied Prahlad - "Then he's in this pillar," cried the demon, and rushing at a nearby pillar of the palace struck it a terrible blow. At that moment a fearful sound came from the pillar, as if the universe itself was about to split apart. All who heard it were afraid. The pillar burst asunder and a terrifying form emerged from it - with the head of a lion and the body of a man. This was Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, who had come to protect his devotee, Prahlad. Hiranyakashipu tried to attack him, as an insect flies into a fire. After a brief struggle, Narasimha picked up the demon and killed him. He was killed at the point of dusk, neither day nor night; he was on the lap of Vishnu, neither land nor air nor sea; his death took place on the threshold of the palace, neither inside nor outside; he was killed by the Lord's nails, not by any weapon; he died at the hands of neither human nor animal, but half-man, half-lion.

Thus Narasimha-Vishnu, whilst keeping all the conditions of Brahma, still killed the demon Hiranyaksha, who had so cruelly tried to end the life of his devotee Prahlad. After his death, Hiranyakashipu was freed from his hatred of Vishnu. Being purified by Narasimha's touch, he gained liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Whenever they hear the roar of a lion, devotees of Vishnu remember how Narasimha rescued Prahlad and if there is danger, they pray to Narasimha for protection.

THE FIFTH INCARNATION

वामना



The Dwarf



वामन

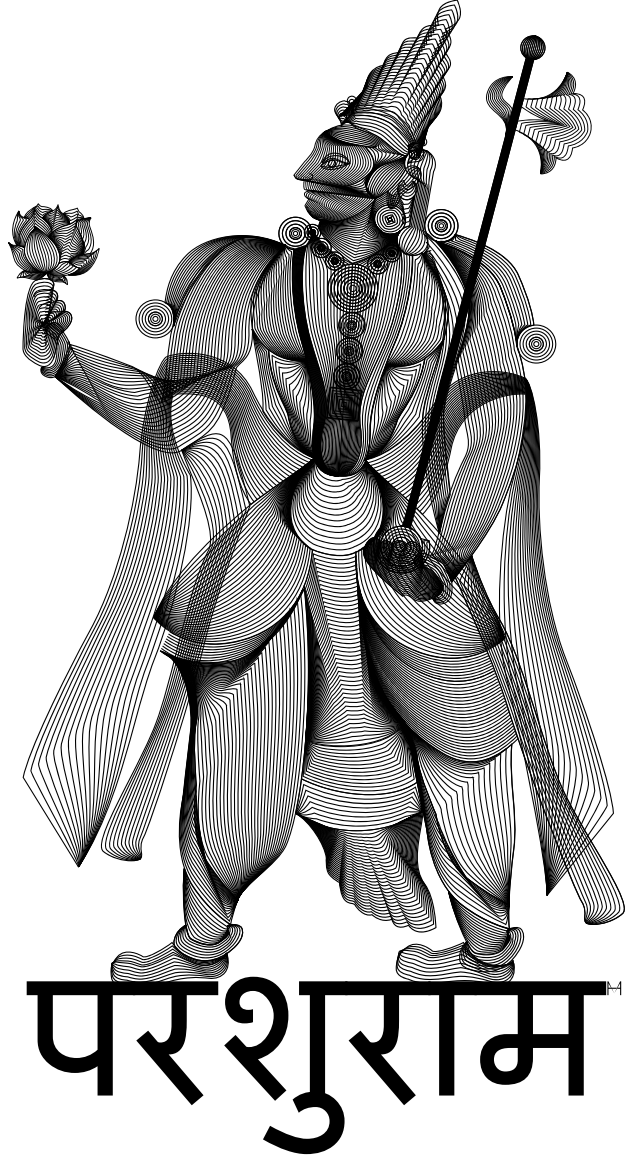
All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of a brahmana dwarf. By covering the world in three steps you deceived Bali and released the waters of the Ganges, which flow from your toes to purify all beings of the world. The demon-king Bali once became so powerful that he conquered all the planets of the universe, forcing Indra, the king of heaven, out of his heavenly kingdom. The demigods prayed to Vishnu for help. To save them he appeared as the beautiful dwarf Vamana. He was so enchanting that no one could resist his charm. One day he came to the court of King Bali dressed as a brahmana. It is the custom that a king should always give in charity to a brahmana, so Bali offered charity to Vamana, saying, "Whatever you want you can have." Vamana replied, "I don't need anything from you. Just give me three paces of land, as measured by my own steps. That will satisfy me." "But I can give you a whole island," urged Bali, "Whoever takes charity from me should never have to ask for anything ever again. Please take as much as you want." "If I were not satisfied with just three paces of land," responded Vamana, "I would not be satisfied even with the whole universe. If I got one island, I would want others.

It is better to be satisfied with whatever destiny brings, for discontent can never bring happiness." In this way he hinted that Bali should not have set out to conquer the whole universe, because it would never bring him happiness. When Bali's counsellor heard Vamana's words he urgently warned Bali, "This is Vishnu himself in disguise, come to trick you. Don't give him anything." But Bali would not go back on his word. "How can I behave like an ordinary cheater," he said, "I have given my word, and there is nothing worse than untruthfulness. The earth once said that she could bear any heavy thing except a person who is a liar. Therefore I don't fear hell so much as I fear cheating a brahmana. And anyway, if this is Vishnu, what have I to lose by giving to him?" Turning to Vamana, he agreed, "Very well, please take three steps of land." Then Vamana-Vishnu started to grow in size. He grew and grew until he filled the whole universe. Everything was within his form - the earth, the seas, the birds, beasts and human beings and the planets themselves. Bali saw everything that existed in that wonderful form of the Lord. His feet were the surface of the earth, his breath was the wind, his hair was the clouds and his eyes were the sun.

The lower planets were on the soles of his feet and the heavenly planets were on his head. Then he took his three steps. With his first step he covered the entire surface of the earth. With his second step he covered all the planets of heaven, and nowhere remained for his third step. "You promised me three steps," he said to Bali, "I have covered everything with two. Now you should think about where I can put my third step." Bali was defeated. "Please, Lord, put your third footstep on my head," he replied. In this way he surrendered everything he had, even himself, to Vishnu. One may possess everything there is to have, and still not be happy. Sometimes, out of mercy, God takes away a person's possessions in order to help that person realise where true happiness lies. At the present time, Western society has become obsessed with having more and more of the earth's limited resources, thinking that happiness can come from owning material things. One day God will take away the West's opulence and pride, as he did with Bali, so that we can all appreciate what brings real happiness in this world. When Vamana took his second step, his toe pierced the coverings at the edge of the universe, and some of the surrounding waters of creation poured in from outside. Falling down through the different planets these waters eventually reached earth, where they were caught by Lord Shiva in his matted locks of hair. The same water flows down from the Himalayas as the Ganges and the Yamuna Rivers. That is why all Hindus revere the Ganges and Yamuna. They are the waters that have washed Lord Vishnu's toes. By bathing in these waters all their sins are washed away.

THE SIXTH INCARNATION
PARASURĀMA

The Warrior



All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of Parashurama. You bathed the earth with the blood of the warriors whom you killed and washed away the sins of the world, releasing people from the fire of material life.

The world was once overburdened with soldiers and kings who were always fighting one another and creating disturbance. Vishnu incarnated as Parashurama to kill these fighting men. It is said that he killed the entire kshatriya (warrior) race twenty-one times over, armed with nothing more than an axe. Then he renounced fighting and went to the Himalayas to perform penances.

The duty of the rulers of society is to protect religious principles and the teachers of religion, the brahmanas. When they fail to do this they become a burden on the earth. There can be no happiness in a society ruled by such men. At the present time the world is dominated by the military-industrial might of a few countries. New machines of death are invented almost daily and manufactured at vast expense, while millions of people don't even have enough to eat. At the same time industry is poisoning the earth. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna describes this kind of society: "Ungodly persons, who are lost to themselves and have no understanding, perform harmful, painful work for the destruction of the world." Such manipulation of human affairs by governments and armies is misguided and sinful. Although Vishnu is benevolent and merciful he can also punish. Therefore he came as Parashurama to save the world from warlike aggressors.

THE SEVENTH INCARNATION

RĀMA

The King



All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of Rama. You distributed the ten heads of the terrible demon Ravana for the pleasure of the gods of the ten directions, fulfilling their desires to see him dead.

Rama was heir to the throne of Ayodhya. He married the beautiful Sita. Before he could take his rightful place on the throne he was banished to the forest for fourteen years by his envious stepmother, who wanted her own son to be king. While he was in the forest he lived very peacefully with Sita and his brother Lakshmana. They showed how to live a simple and happy life without unnecessary luxuries and conveniences.

While Rama and Sita were in the forest the demon-king Ravana heard about Sita's beauty and decided he must have her for himself. He sent a magical deer to lure Rama and Lakshmana away from their cottage. Then the ten-headed demon Ravana came and carried off Sita in his aerial chariot pulled by mules. Rama was mad with grief and he and Lakshmana searched everywhere for her. They met Hanuman, the powerful and supernatural monkey, who helped them find her. Hanuman is the hero of the Ramayana because, although a monkey, he was the dearest servant of Rama and Sita. With his supernatural powers, he found Sita on the island of Sri Lanka and helped Rama bring an army of monkeys there to save her. In the battle Rama killed Ravana. Rama brought Sita back to Ayodhya where he at last became King. His reign was the perfect example of monarchy. Even among today's political parties in India it is remembered, as Rama-Rajya - the rule of Rama.

The full story of Rama and Sita is told in the Ramayana, the most popular tale in India. It is the subject of infinite dances and plays which are performed the length and breadth of South-East Asia. People never tire of hearing or seeing the story, no matter how many times they have heard or seen it before. It is full of moral tales and, together with the Mahabharata, teaches the traditional wisdom of Hindu society in a way which everyone can enjoy.

Animals played an important part in Rama's adventures. Hanuman the monkey was his dearest servant and best devotee. His army was made up of monkeys. A vulture named Jatayu gave his life to try and save Sita from being kidnapped. Jambavan the bear helped in the battle on Lanka. The role of these animals in helping Rama has given special status to all their kind, especially to monkeys.

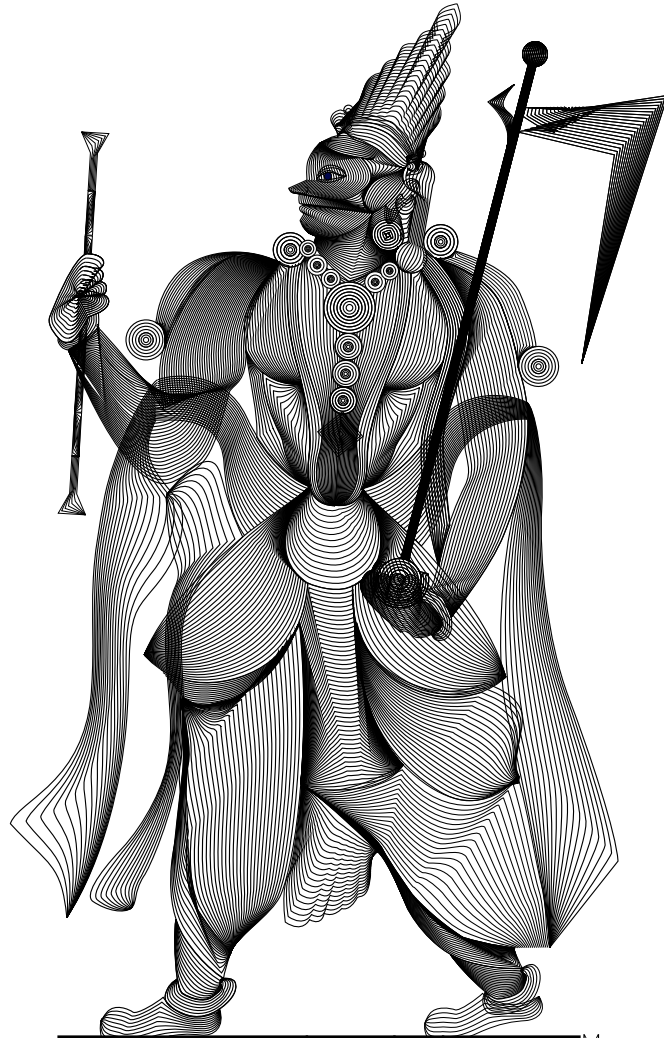
The picture of Sita and Rama living together with his brother in the forest is very dear to all Hindus. It underlines the Hindu ideal of simple life, depending on nature's goodness. Even God, when he plays the earthly role of a king, is content to work and live alongside nature in her natural state.

THE EIGHTH INCARNATION

BALARĀMA



The Cowherd



बलराम

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of Balarama, carrying a plough. The garments on your brilliant white body are the colour of the Yamuna River, whose dark waters reflect the fresh rain clouds, and who was afraid of the striking of your plough.

When Krishna came down to this world he did not come alone. With him were all his eternal associates from the spiritual realm. Chief among them is his brother Balarama. Balarama is the direct expansion of Krishna, like a second candle lit from the first, of equal power and illumination. In this prayer from Gita-Govinda he is counted as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. (Krishna is not included because Jayadeva considers him to be the original Godhead himself, not an incarnation.) Like Rama, Balarama and Krishna lived in the forest as cowherds with their friends, the boys and girls of Vrindavan, the cows, the monkeys, the peacocks and the deer.

Balarama always carried a plough, and he is particularly associated with the soil of Vrindavan. He loved to play in the forest. On one occasion he wanted to bathe with his friends in the Yamuna River, but she was too far away. Rivers in India sometimes shift their course from season to season, depending on the amount of rainfall. It appears that on this occasion the Yamuna had moved further away than Balarama liked. So he threatened her with his plough. She was afraid and immediately ran towards him, but not before he had scratched her banks and created small streams along them.

Nowadays the Yamuna is again too far from Vrindavan. Devotees of Krishna and Balarama pray to Balarama to once more bring her back to her place, running sweetly beside the sacred groves where Krishna and Balarama danced with the cowherd girls to the music of Krishna's flute.

THE NINTH INCARNATION

BUDDHA



The Teacher



All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who took the form of Lord Buddha. Your heart is full of compassion for the poor animals who were slaughtered in the ritual sacrifices of the Vedic age.

It may come as a surprise to know that Buddha is revered by Hindus as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Most of the recorded teachings of Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are readily accepted and endorsed by Hindus. He stopped the ritual slaughter of animals which was going on in the name of Vedic sacrifice, and taught compassion to all living beings. Nowadays many followers of Buddha eat animal flesh. However, among Hindus he is particularly remembered for his compassion, as is recorded in this prayer, and for his teaching of ahimsa - non-violence. These are universal principles of religion. The Srimad Bhagavatam instructs:

“One should treat animals such as deer, camels, asses, monkeys, snakes, birds and flies exactly like one’s own children. How little difference there actually is between children and these innocent animals.”

THE TENTH INCARNATION

KALKI

The Slayer



कल्का

All glories to you, O Lord of the universe, who will take the form of Kalki. Like a comet, you will appear riding a white horse and carrying a terrible sword. You will come to destroy all wicked people at the end of Kali Yuga.

In the Vedic understanding of time, history passes in cycles of four yugas – Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali. Satya Yuga is the age of goodness, but as each age passes goodness is replaced by passion and finally ignorance. By the end of the Kali Yuga – the present age – almost all who remain of the human race will be sinful. The earth will be crowded with a corrupt population and terrorised by merciless rulers. Plants and trees will be tiny. The bodies of all creatures will be reduced in size. Innocent people will be driven by famine and fear to hide in the forests and mountains.

At this time, nearly half-a-million years from now, Kalki comes. He will kill the cruel leaders and the thieves who support them. Then fragrant breezes will purify the world and the minds of the people, bringing Kali Yuga to an end. Those who remain will be left to populate the new golden age of Satya Yuga. Then the whole cycle will start again.

MUSEUM OF SACRED ART

• MOSA •



The Museum of Sacred Art is a Foundation based in Brussels dedicated to promoting Indian and ISKCON (Hare Krishna) Spiritual Art. It has 12 Collections of Indian Artists and 12 Collections of ISKCON Artists. Each Collection is an Exhibit in itself and they all have nicely produced catalogues. Besides these 24 Collections/Exhibits/Catalogues MOSA is organising this wonderful exhibit entitled *Narasimha and the Avatars* which includes more than 60 artists from all the 24 Collections. MOSA is also preparing another exhibit drawn from its Collections entitled *Shakti: Fair and Fierce - Path Breaking Women Artists of India*. It includes over 20 Contemporary Artists from the MOSA Collections as well as over 10 Women Embroidery Artists from Kutch and Bihar.

MOSA presents its Collections/Exhibits/Catalogues in its own Galleries in Radhadesh, Belgium, Villa Vrindavan, Italy and ISKCON Tenerife, Spain as well as well known Museums and Cultural Centers throughout the world with a focus on Europe. It also organises Residencies for Artists in Tuscany, Italy and loans Art to Major ISKCON Temples and Centers in Europe.

MOSA has also produced a major book entitled *Forms of Devotion: The Spiritual in Indian Art* & a wonderful Documentary directed by Goutam Ghose called *Studios of Devotion*.

It is supported by the Indian Government through the ICCR- Indian Council for Cultural Relations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

May the visitors to MOSA enjoy this amazing exhibit depicting the Avatars of Krishna/Vishnu with a focus on Narasimha Avatar.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. HÖEBREGS ©2023

