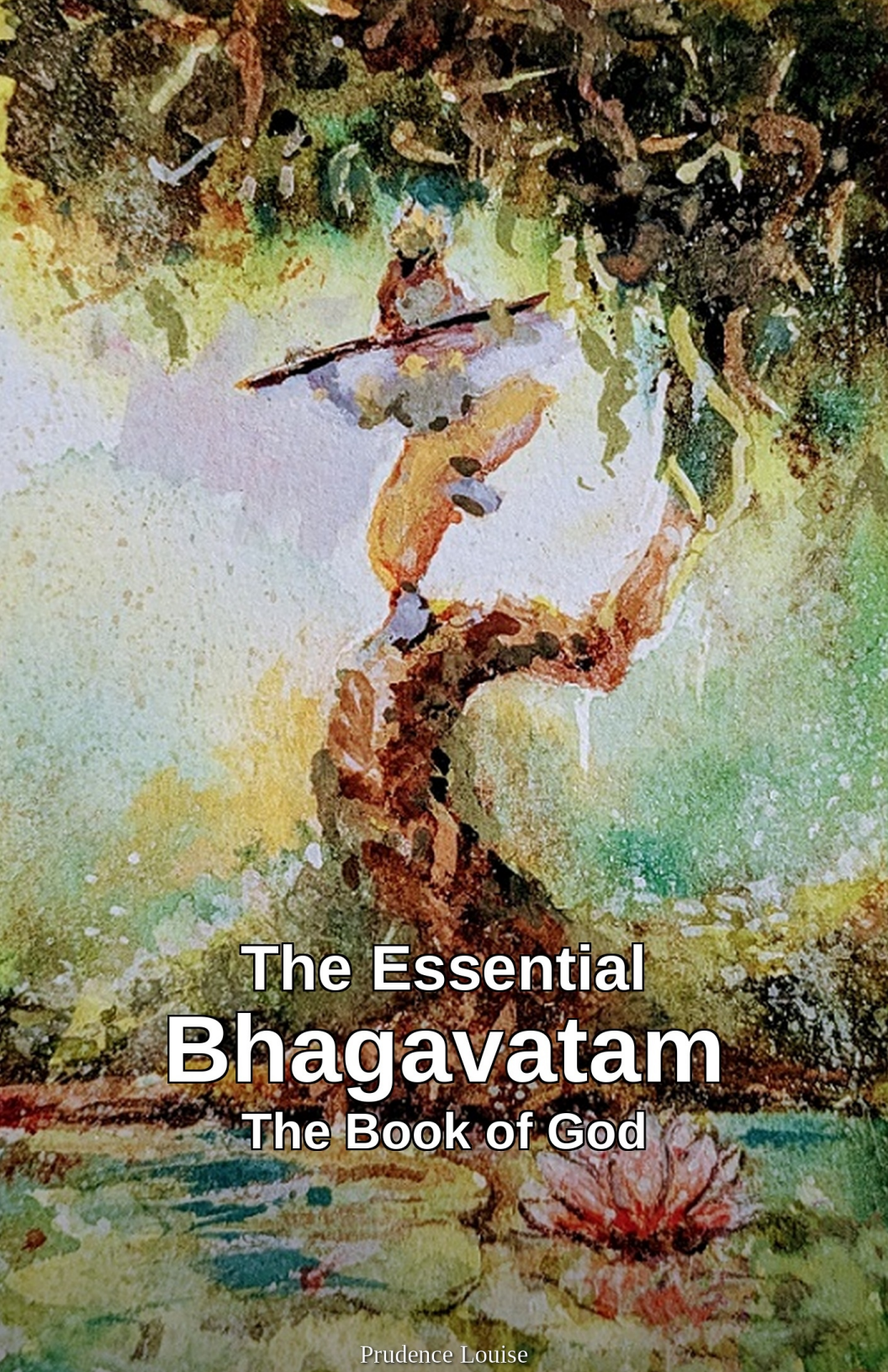


The background of the cover is a watercolor illustration. It depicts a figure, possibly a deity or a sage, seated in a small boat on a river. The figure is wearing a white dhoti and a white shawl. The river is surrounded by lush greenery, with various shades of green and yellow. In the foreground, there is a large, pink lotus flower. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and a mix of colors.

The Essential **Bhagavatam** The Book of God

Prudence Louise

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Unity in Difference

The Essential Bhagavatam: The Book of God

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Introduction

The Bhagavatam, also known as Bhagavata Purana, is one of the most influential spiritual texts of ancient India. While it's well known and loved within the Indian culture, the same isn't true of the West. This might be because it's not an easy text to access. It spans 12 volumes and thousands of verses. It contains stories within stories and there is no obvious thread connecting them. There are creation myths and cosmologies, genealogies of kings and sages, stories of avatars and philosophical dialogues. People retell stories about other people, who are retelling stories about other people.

The text is a labyrinth. It can feel overwhelming if it's approached with the expectation there will be a neat linear presentation moving in an orderly fashion from start to finish.

But Bhagavatam plays by its own rules. This is a text that declares its value confidently. According to its own testimony, it contains the supreme truth that describes the ultimate reality, thereby removing illusion and eradicating all suffering.

When it tells us the qualifications the reader needs to understand the supreme truth we expect it to mention intelligence, or some kind of prowess the reader would need to possess so they could achieve such a lofty goal. But instead, Bhagavatam tells us we need to be free of envy and pure of heart.

With Bhagavatam we're introduced to a way of knowing that's foreign to the Western mind. It's knowledge gained from hearing. We're not listening to facts, we're listening to a narrative. The stories themselves bring us in contact with the divine. They enter the ears and travel directly to your heart. In this way a living truth captures you with charm, not argument.

When I first encountered Bhagavatam I was surprised by a presentation of philosophy that was also a love story. I grew up with two pictures of reality. There was the scientific view in which the universe can be measured and its behaviour predicted and thereby mastered. And there was the biblical view, in which God was a patriarch, powerful, distant and often displeased.

And then I encountered Krishna. He was unapologetically mischievous. Playing with his friends, stealing butter and feeding it to the monkeys and being chastised by his mother. Making music with his flute in the moonlight and causing the cowherd women to forget their family duties.

This was a picture of reality in which love was the supreme controlling principle and even God himself had surrendered control to it. It's a world where beauty isn't ornamental, it's the substance the world is made from. A reality composed not of matter or force, but the many flavours of loving relationships. A place where every step is a dance and every word is a song.

I spent a long time looking for the thread that connected the seemingly disparate subjects in the Bhagavatam. I looked at the structure, examined the titles of the Cantos, tried to map the 10 subject matters to the text itself. I searched for an organising principle around which the whole text could cohere.

And eventually I realised the answer was right at the start of the narration of Bhagavatam. King Pariksit had been cursed to die in 7 days and so he approached the sage Suka Goswami. He asked him to explain the path of perfection for all people and particularly for someone who is about to die. Suka Goswami responded that anyone who wishes to be free from all suffering must hear about, glorify and remember the Supreme Lord. Everything else in the Bhagavatam is commentary on that.

That is the essence of Bhagavatam, everything else is in service of that. And so I called this presentation The Essential Bhagavatam. The word essential has a particular meaning within the Gaudiya tradition. It signifies extracting the essence of the teachings from the vast Vedic corpus without being distracted by the flowery language and promises of material rewards.

This book is an attempt to do that. This isn't a translation, but a retelling of selected stories that I think reveal the heart of the Bhagavatam. Not only do they contain the essential teachings, they promise a variety of blessings to anyone who hears them. The language aims to be accessible because the hearing is the key. It's not intended as a text to study, but as one that can be read for pleasure and savouring the vision of God it offers.

The Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition holds the Bhagavatam in the highest esteem considering it the foremost source of divine knowledge. Accordingly, this presentation is an offering to Sri Gauranga and all those in his line of devotion. I hope it pleases them.

Invocation

Om Namah Bhagavate Vasudevaya

Let us first offer our respect to the Supreme Lord. We meditate on him because he is the cause of the creation, maintenance and destruction of all the universes. He is conscious of everything and completely independent. There is no other cause beyond him for he is the absolute truth.

This Bhagavatam rejects all religious activities that are performed for material rewards. The knowledge it contains completely transcends all material considerations. It contains the supreme truth, which can be understood by those who are free of envy and pure of heart.

The supreme truth describes the ultimate reality, thereby removing illusion and eradicating all suffering. This is the source of the true welfare of all beings.

The great sage Vyasadeva wrote this beautiful book in his spiritual maturity. There is no need for any other scripture, because the Supreme Lord becomes confined within the heart of anyone who hears this Bhagavatam.

Those who are knowledgeable and thoughtful will take great pleasure in hearing this Bhagavatam because it contains the mature fruit of all Vedic knowledge.

Chapter 1 – The Ultimate Goal of Life

Years ago, in the sacred forest of Naimisha, many sages gathered to worship the Supreme Lord. They offered a seat of respect to the sage Suta Goswami and enquired from him as follows:

Suta Goswami, you are free from corruption and you are educated in the Vedic literatures as well as the oral histories. Because you are devoted and humble, your teachers have given you all the knowledge which is confided to a worthy disciple.

Would you please explain, in a simple way, what you have concluded to be the highest benefit for all humanity.

O great sage, in the age of Kali people are short lived, lazy, lacking intelligence and always in anxiety. There are many different scriptures and they describe many different duties. For the benefit of humanity would you please distil the essence of these scriptures and explain them to us, because only this knowledge can satisfy the soul.

Would you also tell us about the character and personality of the Supreme Lord and the activities he performs. Please explain those teachings to us. The Lord performs his activities to bring about the prosperity of all beings. Those people who are trapped within the material world of birth and death can be liberated from suffering by calling the name of the Lord.

Is there anyone who doesn't desire to be free from the corruptions of the age of Kali? Why would they not want to hear the virtues and glorious qualities of the Lord? His activities are wonderful and benevolent and the sages always sing about them.

So please tell us about the different activities the Supreme Lord performs. Those who have acquired the taste for hearing of his wonderful activities never grow tired of listening to them.

We know the age of Kali has arrived so we have assembled here in this sacred place to hear and discuss spiritual topics and perform sacrifice to please the Lord. Providence has blessed us with your presence because you can guide us through the difficult times of the age of Kali.

The age of Kali is characterised by disagreement and hypocrisy and it deprives human beings of their virtue. O Suta, tell us where we should take shelter now that Lord Krishna, the protector of religion has returned to his abode.

Suta Goswami was pleased with the questions he had been asked, so he thanked the sages and said, I bow down to the great spiritual teacher Suka Goswami, who is the son of Vyasadeva. Due to compassion for those in the material world who desire to be free from suffering, Suka narrated this Bhagavatam, the most confidential of all the Vedic literatures.

Before reciting this Bhagavatam we should offer respects to the Supreme Lord; to Sarasvati the goddess of learning; and to Vyasadeva, the author.

O sages, your questions are about Lord Krishna and relevant to everyone. The highest benefit for all humanity is to achieve continuous devotion to the Supreme Lord. That devotion should be free of any ulterior motive for only this can fully satisfy the soul. Any religious activities which do not awaken attraction for the Supreme Lord are a waste of time and effort.

Wealth and material benefits are not the proper objective of religious activities. All religious activities are meant for liberation from suffering.

One's desires should not be focused on satisfying the senses because the aim of a human life is to enquire into the truth.

The highest perfection one can achieve by their actions is to please the Supreme Lord. One should therefore constantly hear about, worship, remember and glorify the Supreme Lord, who always protects those who are devoted to him.

The learned sages cut through the bonds of karma by remembering the Supreme Lord, so who will not listen to talks about him? By serving the great souls who are free from corruption, one develops attraction to hearing about the Supreme Lord. The Supreme Lord is the benefactor of those who are honest and devoted. He purifies all material desires from the heart of anyone who hears and sings of his virtues.

By hearing this Bhagavatam, impiety is dissolved and firm devotion to the Lord arises. Lust, desire and anger disappear and one becomes satisfied. The knot of ego in the heart is cut and all doubts and fears are destroyed.

This is why learned people delight in the service of the Supreme Lord because such service enlivens the soul. Whoever follows those sages who worship the Supreme Lord deserves to be liberated from material suffering. Those who seek liberation are without envy and they respect everyone.

The Supreme Lord is the object of Vedic knowledge, he is the purpose of performing sacrifice and the goal of religion. He controls all material rewards and is the ultimate goal of life.

Chapter 2 – The Incarnations of the Lord

Using his power of illusion, the Supreme Lord creates the forms of being and non-being, or cause and effect. After creating, he enters into the creation and appears to have material qualities. Just like fire is hidden in wood, the Lord pervades all things.

Outwardly he appears to be the variety of all created things, but he is one. Thus, the Lord maintains the entire creation. To enjoy his pastimes he takes many avatar forms and in that way he protects the universe.

The first incarnation of the Lord was the Kumaras, the celibate sons of the creator god Brahma. They practised extremely difficult austerities in search of the truth. In the second incarnation, the Supreme Lord assumed the form of a boar and raised the earth from the lower regions of the universe.

In the third, the Lord took the form of the great sage Narada. He assembled descriptions from the Vedas which explain service to Vishnu and how by following those actions, the ropes of karma do not bind the soul. In the fourth incarnation, the Lord became the twin sages Nara and Narayana, the sons of King Dharma. He performed severe austerities and controlled his mind and senses.

In the fifth incarnation the Lord's name was Kapila and he was preeminent among the sages. He explained the Sankhya philosophy to Asuri because this knowledge had been lost in the course of time. The sixth incarnation was the son of the sage Atri, who spoke about spiritual knowledge. The seventh incarnation was Yajna, who controlled the period during the change of Manu.

The eighth incarnation was King Rishaba. He demonstrated the path of renunciation which is respected by people in all stages of life. The Lord

assumed the body of King Prthu in the ninth incarnation and milked the earth to produce all kinds of crops.

In his tenth incarnation, when the world was completely flooded, the Lord took the form of a fish and protected the Vedas and Vaivasvata Manu. For his eleventh incarnation, the Lord took the form of a tortoise and used his shell as a pivot for the Mandara mountain when the gods churned the ocean of milk.

In his twelfth incarnation he was Dhanvantari, and in his thirteenth he assumed the form of a woman, Mohini. He gave nectar to the gods to drink while their rivals were infatuated with his beauty in a female form. For his fourteenth, he assumed the man-lion form of Narasinha, and killed Hiranyakashipu by ripping his body apart with his sharp claws.

For his fifteenth incarnation, the Lord was the dwarf-brahmin Vamana. He wanted to recover the three worlds and so he begged three footsteps of land from Bali Maharaja. In the sixteenth incarnation, the Lord was angry that the kings were hostile to the brahmins and so he destroyed the ruling class from the earth twenty-one times.

In the seventeenth incarnation, the Lord appeared as Vyasadeva. He saw the intelligence of people was degenerating and so he divided the tree of the Veda into different branches. In the eighteenth incarnation, the Lord appeared as King Ramacandra and performed acts of great bravery.

In the nineteenth and twentieth incarnations, the Lord appeared as Balarama and Krishna in the Vrishni lineage to lessen the burden of the world.

Then, when the age of Kali begins, the Lord will appear as Lord Budha and deceive the enemies of the gods. At the end of the age of Kali

when the kings will be like robbers, the protector of the world will incarnate as Kalki, the son of Vishnuyasa.

Like rivers flowing from inexhaustible sources of water, there are countless incarnations of the Lord. Whenever the world is afflicted by the disturbances created by the impious people, the Lord appears and emancipates the world.

Anyone who devotedly, in the morning and the evening, narrates the mysterious births of the Lord will be freed from all sufferings.

Those who are wise describe the births and activities of the birthless and inactive Supreme Lord. He is the Lord of the heart and is undetectable even within the Vedic literature. Ignorant people cannot understand the performance of an actor.

Similarly, those who are less intelligent cannot comprehend, either by their mind or their words, the spiritual nature of the Lord's forms, names and activities. If someone offers wholehearted and continuous service to the Supreme Lord, only then can they understand the creator of the universe.

The venerable sage Vyasadeva composed this Bhagavatam, the book of God. It is intended for the benefit of all the worlds and it is supremely conducive to the welfare of all. This Bhagavatam illuminates like the sun, and it has arisen after Lord Krishna departed to his own abode. It will give light to those lost in dark ignorance of the age of Kali.

Sri Vyasadeva distilled the essence of the Veda and the histories and composed this Bhagavatam. He then taught it to his son, Suka who is honoured among the self-realised sages.

When King Pariksit sat on the bank of the Ganges, fasting from food and water and awaiting death, Suka spoke this Bhagavatam to King Pariksit. I was present there in the audience and so I also heard the Bha-

gavatam from the great sage Suka. I shall now recite that same Bhagavatam to you, to the best of my ability and as I have learned it and personally realised it.

One of the sages in the audience addressed Suta Goswami and said, O great sage, could you please tell us when this Bhagavatam was first composed and why it was written? What inspired the great sage Vyasadeva to compose this literature? Suka Goswami was a great sage. How did the meeting between this great sage and King Pariksit take place?

King Pariksit was the best among those devoted to the Lord. Please tell us about his wonderful birth and activities. King Pariksit was such a magnanimous ruler even his enemies would come to bow down and pay tribute to him. He was young and possessed many royal pleasures. Why did he give up everything, including his life? Why did he sit down on the bank of the sacred river Ganges to fast until death?

Those who are devoted to the welfare and prosperity of the world, do not live for their own selfish interest but as the protector of others. King Pariksit was detached from the world, but his body protected many others so how could he give it up? We know that you are skilled in speaking on all these subjects, and so you can clearly tell us the answers to all these questions.

In answer to the questions of the sages Suta Goswami said, When he was creating the universe, Brahma received instructions from the Supreme Lord. When Brahma's son, Narada, desired to know about the powers of the Supreme Lord he enquired in detail about it from his father.

Brahma then repeated the instructions he had received from the Supreme Lord and spoke this Bhagavatam to his son Narada. Narada then instructed the Bhagavatam to the sage Vyasadeva at his ashram on

the bank of the River Sarasvati. Vyasadeva in turn explained it to his son Suka Goswami.

Chapter 3 – Vyasadeva's Inspiration

Suta Goswami said, Now I will tell you about Vyasadeva's inspiration to compose this great literature.

One day as the sun rose, Vyasadeva touched the sacred waters of the Sarasvati river and sat alone to concentrate. Vyasadeva was a great sage with knowledge of the past and future and he perceived the decline of all things due to the progression of time. He could see that the lifespan of people would be shortened and they would be sceptical and impatient. Thus he meditated on what would be beneficial for humanity.

Vyasadeva could understand that the sacrifices mentioned in the Vedas would purify the people. He simplified the process by separating the single Veda into four. Then Vyasadeva edited the Vedas so less intelligent people could understand them. The compassionate sage compiled the great historical narration, the Mahabharata, for those who were less intelligent and in this way gave them a way to achieve the highest good.

Yet although Vyasadeva had assembled all this literature and worked for the welfare of all humanity, his heart was still dissatisfied. Vyasadeva contemplated the reason for his dissatisfaction.

Vyasadeva said to himself, I have accepted all the traditional disciplines and vows. I have humbly chanted the Vedic hymns. I have worshipped the spiritual teachers and performed sacrifice without pretence. I have not deviated from the instructions of the great spiritual teachers in my explanations within the Mahabharata, and I have properly explained the path of religion so that all people can understand it.

Although I have done everything required and I myself have everything necessary, I still feel that something is missing. This may be because I did not include devotion to the Lord, which is loved by the perfect beings and the infallible Lord. While Vyasadeva was contemplating the

cause of his deficiency the great sage Narada arrived at his residence. Vyasadeva quickly got up and respectfully welcomed him.

After the sage Narada was comfortably seated he said to Vyasadeva, You have fully comprehended all that you studied. You have compiled the wonderful Mahabharata, which explains all the principal goals of human life and described the knowledge of spirit as well as its attainment. You have achieved all this, then why are you still not satisfied?

Vyasadeva said, Everything you say is true. I ask you to tell me the cause of my dissatisfaction, for you are a man of unfathomable wisdom. Could you please explain the reason for my shortcomings?

Narada said, You have not praised the wonderful and immaculate virtues of the supreme person. Any literature which does not please the Supreme Lord is incomplete. Although you have elaborately described religious principles and activities, you have not described the glories of the supreme person.

Any literature which does not describe the purifying glory of the Lord, is like a dwelling place for crows. The saintly people, who are like swans and have their minds absorbed in the supreme spirit, can find no pleasure in such things.

Words that describe the spiritual virtues and activities of the unlimited supreme person can reform the attitude of even impious people. Even if such spiritual literature is imperfectly composed, the virtuous people will hear it and recite it.

Even action free of karma, or knowledge without error, is of little use if it lacks an understanding of the perfect and Supreme Lord. So what is the value of material actions if they are not dedicated to the Lord?

Vyasadeva, your insight is infallible and your reputation is exemplary. You are devoted to the truth and steady in your practices. So you can

meditate on the pastimes of the Lord in order to free humanity from material suffering. There can be no peace of mind for those who fix their attention on anything separate from the Lord, just as a boat tossed around by the wind can never find a stable harbour.

Generally people are addicted to material enjoyment and you have been negligent by encouraging that tendency in the name of religion. Because they accept your instructions, they will perform such activities under the guise of performing spiritual activities and they will not consider restricting that way of life.

Only someone who has given up material activities is capable of understanding the Supreme Lord. Therefore people who are materially attached should be shown the path of self realisation through narrations of the spiritual activities of the Supreme Lord.

One who has abandoned the conventional religious duties to devote themselves to the Lord loses nothing if they fail while they are still immature. But one who performs their conventional duties without devotion achieves nothing.

Intelligent people should only seek those things that are not available anywhere within the material world. There is no need to seek happiness that comes from sensual enjoyment because it comes of its own accord, just as unhappiness comes without us seeking it out.

My dear Vyasa, those who are engaged in serving the Supreme Lord will not become entangled in the cycle of karma and transmigration of the soul. Anyone who has even once experienced the joy of serving the Supreme Lord can never forget it and they do not desire to ever let it go.

The universe is the supreme person himself, but he is also distinct from it. The creation, preservation and destruction of this universe are from him. You understand all this. I have only given you a small indication.

Your insight is without fault and you are without birth, because you appear for the welfare of the world. Therefore, please describe the spiritual qualities and activities of the supreme person in more detail. The sages declare that poetic glorification of the Lord is the completion of religious activities.

In a previous era, I was the son of a serving-maid of brahmin priests. During the rainy season, I personally served those priests. Although they viewed everyone with an equal outlook, those followers of the Veda showed favour to me. They would give me the remnants of their food and in this way I was purified and thus spiritual life attracted me. O Vyasadeva, I would listen to them describing the attractive activities of Lord Krishna and thus my inclination to hear about the Lord increased.

As my understanding developed, I could understand that it was due to illusion that I accepted the bodily coverings as my self, because my true nature is spiritual. Thus during the rainy season and the autumn I listened to these great sages constantly describing the faultless qualities of the Supreme Lord. As my devotion increased, my material ignorance vanished.

Although only a child I was faithful and devoted to them and by serving them all my karma was destroyed. They taught me the most secret knowledge and thus I could clearly understand the influence of the Supreme Lord's illusory power. By learning that knowledge one can attain to his feet.

The wise have determined that the best corrective method for removing all suffering is to dedicate all one's activities to the service of the Supreme Lord. If someone dedicates all their activities to worship of the Lord, instead of their activities binding them to the world, they destroy all karma and one is liberated from the world.

Any activities which are performed only for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord, as well as knowledge that depends on him, is called devotion. When one constantly performs activities for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord Krishna, one also remembers him and his names and qualities.

Let us all bow down before him and meditate on him. Those who worship the supreme person – who has no material form and is represented in the form of spiritual sound – perceive things as they are. This is the knowledge I obtained. Because I was devoted to him, the Lord bestowed on me this wealth of knowledge.

Vyasadeva, you are vast in knowledge, so please describe the glories of the Supreme Lord for the sake of those who are experiencing perpetual suffering. There is no other means to remove such suffering.

After Vyasadeva heard all about Narada's birth and activities, he asked, When those sages departed, where did you go? How did you pass your life and how did you receive your present body? Time eventually destroys everything, so how do you still remember these events when they happened in a previous lifetime?

Narada said, The sages who taught me spiritual knowledge left to travel to other places. Since I was the only son of my mother, she had no one else to look after her and she bound me to her with affection. One night, when my mother went out to milk a cow, she was bitten by a snake and died. I considered this as the grace of providence and so I started travelling to the north. I travelled through many cities and towns, farmlands and forests.

After some time I stopped in a forest, and in the shadow of a sacred fig tree I began to meditate on the Supreme Lord within my heart, as the sages had taught me. As I meditated, my mind was overwhelmed by de-

votion, tears rolled down my eyes, and the Supreme Lord manifested himself in my heart.

I was immersed in bliss and thus I could no longer see the Lord or myself. I was disturbed when I lost that form so I attempted to see that form again by concentrating upon the heart. However, I could not see him any more, and so I was distressed.

While I struggled alone, the Supreme Lord spoke to me to alleviate my distress and said, Narada, unfortunately during this lifetime you will not be eligible to see me anymore. It is difficult for those who are not free from contamination to see me. I revealed myself to you once, and this will fix your mind on me and slowly remove all the material desires in your heart.

By serving the sages, if only for a short time, you have achieved firm faith in me. Because of this, you will be with me in the spiritual world after achieving liberation from the material world. By my grace your devotion will not waver and your memory will not fade.

After saying this, the Supreme Lord stopped speaking. I bowed my head and offered him my respects. From that time onward, I began to sing the names and activities of the Supreme Lord and roamed around the earth. My mind was free of desire, envy and pride.

After some time, death appeared like a bolt of lightning. The material body made of the 5 elements fell off and all my karma stopped. At the dissolution of the world, when Brahma was withdrawn into the Lord along with the material elements, I also entered the Lord through his breathing.

When Brahma woke up and desired to create again, Marichi and the other sages and I were created from his breath. Since then, I travel everywhere in the three worlds and by the grace of the Lord my movements are never impeded.

And so I wander around and sing about the exploits of the Lord. The Supreme Lord appears within my heart, as if he has been summoned, when I begin to sing of his valour and his glories. The singing of the activities of the Lord is a boat that can cross the ocean of worldly existence and can save those whose hearts are afflicted with the desire for material enjoyment.

Vyasadeva, I have now told you everything you asked me about my birth and my activities. After saying this, Narada left to wander at his free will. All glory to the great sage Narada, who always sings the splendour of the activities of the supreme person. By doing this, he himself gains pleasure and inspires all the troubled souls within the material universe

After Narada's departure, Vyasadeva sat down to meditate. With his mind purified by devotion, he saw the Supreme Lord as well as his power of illusion, which was fully under his control.

Although the living being is beyond the material nature, being deluded by the Lord's illusory power, they think of themselves as material and so suffer the miseries associated with the body. Knowing that the unwanted material suffering of the living beings can be alleviated by devotion to the Supreme Lord, Vyasadeva composed this Bhagavatam for those who are ignorant of that truth.

By hearing this Bhagavatam, devotion to Krishna develops and thus removes all grief, illusion and fear. After Vyasadeva composed this Bhagavatam, he taught it to his son, Suka Goswami.

Suka Goswami was already devoid of attachment to the world and delighted by his higher self, but nonetheless he studied this great literature because he desired to serve the supreme person. The Supreme Lord has wonderful spiritual qualities that attract the hearts of everyone, even those who are liberated.

Suka Goswami, the son of Vyasadeva, was attracted by the excellent qualities of the Lord and so he studied this Bhagavatam. Suka Goswami spoke the Bhagavatam to King Pariksit, as Pariksit sat on the bank of the Ganges awaiting death.

Chapter 4 – King Pariksit and Suka Goswami

Now I will tell you about the birth, activities and liberation of King Pariksit, the sage amongst kings.

After the battle of Kuruksetra where the warriors from both sides were killed, Asvatthama, the son of Dronacarya, tried to kill the last living heir in the Pandava family. He released a sonic missile aimed at King Pariksit, the embryo of Uttara.

Lord Krishna saw Uttara hurrying toward him, overwhelmed with fear. Uttara said, Please save me Lord Krishna. No one else can save me from death in this material world. An arrow of fire is approaching me, please do not let this weapon destroy my embryo.

Lord Krishna loves his devotees and he could see that his devotees were in great danger. So the all-powerful Lord used his sudarsana disc weapon to protect Uttara and her son Pariksit. The Supreme Lord is present within everyone's heart and he protected the embryo of Uttara by covering Pariksit with his energy. The weapon released by Asvatthama was invincible, but the power of Lord Krishna disabled it and the embryo in Uttara's womb was saved.

When King Pariksit was in the womb and being scorched by the heat of the weapon, he saw the Supreme Lord coming toward him. The Lord was only as tall as a thumb and wore a shining gold helmet. He had a beautiful body of dark complexion with garments shining like a flash of lightning.

He had four long arms, earrings of gold and his angry eyes were as red as blood. He waved his golden mace in all directions and it circled him like a meteor. King Pariksit in the womb was watching him and won-

dering who he was. When he had destroyed the weapon, the Supreme Lord, who is the protector of the virtuous, vanished.

In time, when the auspicious planets aligned, the preserver of the Pandu dynasty Pariksit was born. The educated brahmins who were present after the birth spoke about the future of the child. The brahmins said, This child was saved by the Supreme Lord when he was nearly destroyed by unavoidable destiny. Because of this, the child will become known as Vishnurata, the one who is protected by Vishnu.

This child will have many good qualities. He will be a generous giver of charity and he will protect those who are surrendered. He will be as invincible as fire, as brave as a lion, as impassable as the ocean and he will give shelter like the Himalaya Mountains. He will be as patient as the earth, and as tolerant as a parent. This child will be the father of royal sages. To preserve religion on the earth he will be the punisher of those who stray from the path of virtue.

When he hears about his imminent death by the bite of the snake-bird which is caused by the curse of a son of a brahmin, he will free himself from all worldly attachments and take refuge of the Supreme Lord. He will give up all fear and enquire about self-realisation from the great sage, Suka Goswami, the son of Vyasadeva. He will test all human beings to try and discover that person he saw in the womb. Thus he will continuously meditate on the Lord and become known as Pariksit (one who enquires).

For many years, King Pariksit ruled over the world in the way that was foretold at the time of his birth. One day King Pariksit was hunting deer in the forest with his bow and he became exhausted and was very hungry and thirsty. He couldn't find any water and so he entered the hermitage of the sage Samika Rishi where he saw the sage sitting peacefully and his eyes were closed.

The sage was sitting in a meditational trance. He was covered by the hide of a deer and his hair was long and scattered all over him. King Pariksit was hungry and thirsty and so he asked the sage for some water. When the sage did not respond or welcome him by offering him a seat or food or water, King Pariksit considered he was being insulted and became angry.

The King had never been overtaken by anger before but because he was hungry and thirsty he felt hostility toward the sage. The King picked up a dead snake and placed it around the sage's neck before leaving the hermitage. As King Pariksit was returning to his palace he was wondering whether the sage was really in a meditative trance or merely pretending so he could avoid receiving King Pariksit.

The sage had a young and inexperienced son. While his son was playing with his young friends he became aware of his father's ill treatment by the king. The young boy said, What impiety and offensiveness from the king, he has become like a fat crow! This is like a servant committing offences against their masters, because the brahmins appoint the kings as doorkeepers. How can the doorkeeper enter the house and eat from the same plate as his master?

I will punish him. Behold my power! The sage's son was filled with anger, and while speaking to his playmates he cursed King Pariksit with a thunderbolt of words. The brahmin's son said, The snake bird will bite that destroyer of his family who has insulted my father.

The boy returned to the hermitage and saw the dead snake on his father's neck. He was overwhelmed with grief and he wept loudly. The sage heard his son lamenting and opened his eyes and saw the snake. He tossed the dead snake off his neck and said, Why are you crying, has someone harmed you? Then his son told him what had happened.

The sage was not at all pleased with the actions of his son and he said, What a terrible thing you have done. You have awarded a very harsh punishment for a trivial offence. King Pariksit should never have been cursed, for he is a human being worthy of our respect.

My son, your understanding is childish, you do not realise the king should not be considered an ordinary man. He is the protector of all the citizens and the cause of their well-being. The Supreme Lord is represented by the monarchy. Without them the thieves will overpower the unprotected citizens like an unprotected flock of sheep.

Because of the downfall of the monarchy, people will have their wealth stolen by thieves and there will be violence among them. King Pariksit is an honourable and saintly king. He was merely tired and thirsty and he certainly did not deserve to be cursed.

While King Pariksit was returning home, he was thinking of the sage and regretting the act he had committed. He was depressed because he considered his behaviour to be uncivilised. He thought to himself, I have acted in a reprehensible way and failed to respect the brahminical culture. I should certainly expect some misfortune to come upon me soon.

While the king was feeling remorse for his actions, he heard of his impending death by the bite of the snake bird. He regarded it as a blessing because it would be the cause of his non-attachment to worldly things. Thus King Pariksit decided to sit on the bank of the sacred river Ganges to fast until death. He meditated on the Supreme Lord and freeing himself from all attachments, he took on the vows of a sage to prepare for his imminent death.

At the same time, many great personalities and sages arrived there on the pretext of making a pilgrimage. When they were all seated, King

Pariksit stood before them with folded hands and explained to them what he intended to do.

The Supreme Lord has assumed the form of a brahmin's curse. In this way, he has given me the opportunity to detach myself from the material world. Then King Pariksit sat down on a grass seat. Then the great sage Suka, son of Vyasadeva, arrived. He was naked and showed no external symptoms of social class. He was only 16 years old and his body was very attractive because of his youth. He had curly scattered hair and a dark complexion. The sages who were present all paid their respects to him by rising from their seats.

King Pariksit bowed his head in respect. Suka Goswami then took an elevated seat surrounded by all the sages. King Pariksit approached Suka and bowed before him and said, Respected Suka Goswami, you have blessed us with your presence. You are the spiritual teacher of great sages. Would you please explain the duty of someone who is about to die. Please tell me what should be heard, contemplated, recited and worshipped and also what should be avoided.

Then the exalted son of Vyasadeva, Suka Goswami, who understood true religion, addressed Pariksit in reply.

Chapter 5 – Suka’s Answer to King Pariksit

Suka Goswami said, King Pariksit, among all the subjects that should be heard, this one is of the greatest benefit for all people. The answer to your question is esteemed by those who have knowledge of the soul and they consider it the most important topic for discussion.

There are thousands of topics that are heard and discussed by those who are attached to material life and do not know the truth of the soul. During the day their life is stolen in time spent making money and maintaining their family. At night they spend their time sleeping or indulging in sexual enjoyment.

People who are attached to their body, their family, and related things do not see that all these things are destined for destruction, even though they know that death is inevitable.

My dear King Pariksit, anyone who wishes to be free from the bondage and fear of birth and death must hear about, glorify and meditate on the Supreme Lord, who is the soul of all. The supreme achievement of human life is to remember him at the time of death. This can be achieved either by analytical knowledge or by performance of one’s religious duties.

Generally, it is the sages who withdraw themselves from religious rules and prohibitions and take delight in describing the qualities of the Lord. O saintly King Pariksit, I studied this Bhagavatam from my father Vyasadeva.

I was firmly established in the spiritual reality, but even so I was still attracted by the excellent verses describing the Lord’s activities. Because you are sincerely devoted to the Lord, I will now recite that Bhaga-

vatam to you. By hearing this Bhagavatam, the faithful listener achieves devotion to the Supreme Lord who bestows liberation.

The best method of achieving liberation from suffering is chanting the name of the Lord. People who have no material desires, or those who desire all material enjoyments, or those who are completely satisfied by their spiritual knowledge; they can all achieve success by the constant chanting of the Lord's name.

What is the use of a long life if that time is carelessly wasted in material pursuits? It is far better to have even a moment spent in searching for life's ultimate goal. King Pariksit, you have only seven more days left to live, so during this time you have the opportunity to perform all those activities which are needed to achieve your welfare in the next world.

At the end of your life, you should overcome your fear of death by removing all attachment to the body and everything connected to it. You should leave home and bathe in the waters of a sacred place. Purified and seated in a secluded place, you should meditate on the three transcendental letters [a-u-m]. By controlling the breath, you can keep the spiritual seed (om) within the mind.

Using your intelligence as your guide, you should withdraw the mind from sensual activities. If the mind is too distracted you should fix it on contemplation of the supreme person. Then with an undivided mind you should meditate on the limbs of Vishnu and thereby free your mind from passion and ignorance. Only Vishnu should be the object of your thoughts. On achieving Vishnu's supreme abode, the mind is pacified.

By focusing their attention with persistence, the wise can overcome the distractions of the mind which are caused by passion and ignorance. By purifying yourself of the contamination created by these modes you

will become peaceful. By practising this meditation and focusing on the Supreme Lord you will soon achieve the shelter of the Lord.

King Pariksit said, Would you please explain the method of meditation in more detail. What type of practices will quickly purify the mind of all contamination?

Suka Goswami said, You should master the sitting posture and control the breath. In this way you can control the mind and the senses. Then with determination, use your intelligence to concentrate your mind on the physical conception of the Supreme Lord.

The vast material universe is the personal body of the Supreme Lord. The past, present and future are manifest in this physical conception of the Supreme Lord.

The planets known as Patala are the soles of his feet and the Rasatala planets are his heels. The Mahatala planets are his ankles, and his lower legs are the Talatala planets. Sutala is his knees and his two thighs are Vitala and Atala. His hips are the surface of the earth, and outer space is the hollow of his navel.

The host of stars forms the chest of the universal Lord and his neck is the Mahar planets. The Janas planets are his mouth, and the Tapas planets are his forehead. Satyaloka is the tip of his thousand heads. The celestial gods are his arms, the compass points are his ears and sound is his sense of hearing. The two Asvini-kumaras are his nostrils, fragrance is his sense of smell and burning fire is his mouth.

The sun is his eyeball and the power of seeing. Day and night are his eyelids. Water is his palate and taste is his tongue. Feelings of affection are his teeth, and his laugh is his power of illusion. His jaws are Yamaraja, the god of death. The unending creation of the world is merely his sidelong glance over us.

Humility is his upper lip and his lower lip is greed. Piety is his chest and impiety is his back. Brahma, the god of creation, is his genitals. The ocean is his belly, and the mountains are the bones of his gigantic body. The rivers are his veins, the trees are his bodily hair, and the air is his breath. His movement is the passage of time and his deeds are the reactions of material nature.

His hair is the clouds, the moon is his mind and the twilight is his garment. The cause of creation is his intelligence and the primordial nature is his heart. The horses, donkeys and elephants are his nails, and the deer and other beasts are his hips.

The various kinds of birds display his skill in artistic expression. Manu, the progenitor, is the power of his intellect and humanity is his dwelling place. The celestial species of human beings indicate his musical voice, and the demoniac warriors are his strength. The brahmins are his mouth, the monarchs are his arms, the merchants are his thighs and the workers are his feet.

Now I have described the extent of the body of the Supreme Lord. Those who desire liberation should meditate on this form of the Lord, because there is nothing beyond this. You should worship the Supreme Lord who is the one true reservoir of bliss. Attachment to anything else leads to the corruption of the soul.

Suka Goswami said, even the wise can be misled by the words of the Veda and succumb to the insignificant pleasures of the celestial realm. Like a person who sees empty dreams they wander aimlessly without gaining any true happiness.

Therefore, a wise and thoughtful person should only accept what is essential to sustain life while residing in this world. You should strive only for things that achieve the goal, understanding the wasted effort for attaining unnecessary things.

When the earth is there to lie on, are beds needed? A pillow is not necessary when one can use his own arms. When you can use your hands for eating, do you need utensils? Are there no old clothes lying on the road?

Have the rivers stopped supplying water to those who are thirsty? Is there no shelter in the caves of the mountains? Does the Supreme Lord no longer protect the fully surrendered souls? So why would the wise person serve those who are blinded by their own wealth?

In this way, you should remove your worldly attachments and then search out the Lord in your own heart. You should always worship that eternal and infinite supreme person and in so doing you will be liberated from the suffering of this material existence.

You should concentrate on the Supreme Lord who resides within your heart. He has four hands which are holding a lotus, a wheel, a conch-shell and a club. He has a captivating smile and large lotus eyes. His clothes are yellow like the filament of kadamba flower and are decorated with precious jewels. He is adorned with sparkling ornaments made of gold.

The great sages place his feet over their hearts. He wears the Kaustubha jewel around his neck and his chest is decorated with garlands of fresh flowers. His dark, glossy hair curls around his smiling face.

His blessings are bestowed by his glances and the movement of his eyebrows. You should therefore concentrate your mind on this form of the Lord, and step by step progress from his feet to his smile. As the mind concentrates on the different parts of the Lord, the intelligence is progressively purified.

Until you develop an attitude of devotion toward the Supreme Lord, you should meditate on the gross universal form of the Lord. However if you still have a desire for material enjoyment, then you will have to

keep the material mind and senses. Only those who are completely purified of all material contamination reach the Supreme Lord. Anyone who can achieve this is never attached to this material world again.

King Pariksit, these paths are described in the Vedic literature and are eternal truths. For anyone entangled in worldly existence, the practice of devotion to the Supreme Lord is the most favourable method of achieving liberation. The god Brahma, after scrutinising all the Vedic literature, concluded the method of devotion to Lord Krishna is how liberation is achieved.

In all times and places, every human being should hear about, worship and remember the Supreme Lord. Anyone who hears the wonderful description of Lord Krishna, who is loved by the virtuous souls, will purify themselves of all material contamination and achieve his lotus-like feet.

Suka Goswami said, King Pariksit, all of this is what you have asked me to explain about the duty of the intelligent person, and especially someone who is approaching death. Whoever desires to be absorbed in the spiritual radiance should worship Lord Brahma, anyone who desires the vigour of the senses should worship Indra, and anyone who desires offspring should worship the Prajapatis.

Anyone who desires prosperity should worship the goddess Durga, those who desire power should worship the god of fire and those who desire wealth should worship the Vasus. Rudra should be worshipped for those who desire valour. Anyone who wants plentiful food should worship Aditi and those who desire to reach the celestial realm should worship Aditi's sons.

Whoever desires a kingdom should worship Vishvadeva, and those who want to control people should worship the Sadhyas. Anyone who

desires a long life should worship the Asvini-kumaras, and a person desiring physical strength should worship the earth.

Anyone who desires beauty should worship the Gandharvas, and whoever desires beautiful women should worship the heavenly damsel Urvashi. One who desires reputation should worship Yajna, and one who desires treasure should worship Varuna. Those seeking learning should worship Shiva, and if one desires a harmonious marriage they should worship the goddess Uma.

Anyone who desires dominion should worship the Manus. Those who want to destroy their enemies should worship Nirriti, and those who desire all types of pleasure should worship Soma.

But those who desire freedom from attachment and desire should worship the Supreme Lord with devotion. Whether one is full of worldly desire, without any desires, or aspiring after liberation, they should in all ways possible worship the supreme person.

Spiritual knowledge in relation to the Supreme Lord satisfies the soul. Is there anyone who would not be attached to this? The rising and the setting of the sun steals away the lives of all people with the exception of the time they use to converse about the Supreme Lord.

Anyone who has never listened to the stories of the glorious acts of the Supreme Lord has ears like empty holes. If a person has never sung about his deeds, their tongue is like that of a frog. Even if a head is adorned with a crown, if it never bows down before the Supreme Lord it is only a heavy burden. Hands that are decorated with golden bracelets are like the hands of a corpse if they do not worship the Supreme Lord.

Eyes that never look at the images of the Supreme Lord are like the eyes on the peacock's tail, and feet that never walk to the sacred places of pilgrimage are nothing more than the trunks of trees. Anyone who has

never had the dust of the great sages upon their head is a dead body that still breathes. The heart that does not melt when one is absorbed in singing the holy name of the Lord is certainly made of the hardest stone.

Chapter 6 – The Process of Creation

King Pariksit said, Suka Goswami, as you describe the Supreme Lord I find your words dispelling the darkness of my ignorance. Would you please explain how the Supreme Lord uses his cosmic illusory power to create the universe? How does the Supreme Lord of infinite power also preserve and then withdraw the universe?

The mysterious and wonderful actions of the Lord seem incomprehensible even to the wise. You are educated in the Vedic literature and spiritual knowledge. Would you please clarify these questions.

When Suka was asked to explain the creative energy of the Supreme Lord, he meditated on Lord Krishna and said, I bow down before the Supreme Lord who assumes three powers for creation. Though his ways are imperceptible, he is within all of creation.

I bow down again before him because he removes the sorrows of the virtuous souls and impedes the progress of the impious. He is the embodiment of goodness. I bow before the Supreme Lord who is unequalled and unsurpassed and abides in his own spiritual nature.

Those who worship the Supreme Lord, remember him, hear of him and praise him will purify themselves of all impiety. I bow before that auspicious Lord again and again. The wise who take shelter of him dissolve their attachments both now and in the future and easily reach the spiritual realm.

I constantly bow before the Supreme Lord. Without offering devotion to him one cannot achieve any beneficial result even if they give generously in charity, have fame and reputation, practice penance, chant mantras or are virtuous in their conduct. May that Lord of all sacrifice and the protector of all the worlds be gracious to me. May that venerable Lord kindly decorate my words.

This Bhagavatam was first communicated to Lord Brahma by the Supreme Lord. It removes the suffering of people absorbed in insignificant pleasure and I will now narrate that same Bhagavatam to you.

Before the creation of the material universes, the three worlds were submerged in the water of dissolution. Lord Vishnu was floating there on his bed made of the king of snakes, Ananta. Vishnu was alone and inactive, his eyes almost closed as though he was sleeping.

He was viewing the subtle elements within himself, and agitated by the quality of passion the elements were then impelled by time. They sprouted from his navel and formed the bud of a lotus flower. Vishnu personally entered that universal lotus flower thereby illuminating the vast expanse of water. Lord Brahma, the creator of the world, was born out of that lotus flower. He was within the stalk of the lotus and so he couldn't understand the world, the lotus, or his own self.

He thought to himself, Who am I and where has this lotus come from? There must be something below me that supports this lotus. Although Brahma entered the stem of the lotus and moved nearer to the navel of Lord Vishnu, he could not find the source of his lotus seat.

He returned to the top of the lotus. He desired to create but he could not get any insight into the method to do so. While he was contemplating all this, from somewhere nearby he heard a voice say, 'Austerity'.

He looked all around him trying to find the speaker, but he was unable to see anyone. He accepted this vibration from the sky as divine guidance and returned to his lotus seat. He then gave his attention to performing austerities as he had been directed. Brahma engaged in austerity for a thousand celestial years and controlled his mind and senses. After meditating in this way, he could see the Supreme Lord within himself.

Brahma said, O Lord, after many long years of meditation, today I have finally realised you. It is a great defect to be conditioned by a body because those embodied people do not know you. They experience the fear that comes from wealth, desire, dishonour and greed. The cause of their sufferings is their false sense of ownership. Until they seek your protection they will not be free from fear.

My heart is disturbed by seeing these people who are constantly afflicted with hunger, thirst, severe cold and heat and many other disturbing elements. They are overwhelmed by strong sexual urges and unrelenting anger.

While they continue to regard their body as the self and pursue sensual enjoyment, their worldly existence will not end and will bring them constant troubles. Virtuous activities such as religious vows, charity, austerity and serving you with devotion will last forever and never perish.

I bow down to the Supreme Lord, whose incarnations and activities are mysterious. At the time of death, if anyone chants your name they will achieve immortality. The Supreme Lord is the friend of all the worlds. May he bestow on me the intelligence and knowledge to create this universe.

The Supreme Lord said, Brahma, you have performed excellent austerities after hearing my words. It was I who first instructed you to undergo austerity when you were bewildered about how to create. Such austerity is my heart and I am the soul of such austerity. It is by austerity that I create, maintain and withdraw the worlds. My power lies in austerity.

Brahma said, O Lord, you are in every heart and know everyone's desires. Please tell me of your gross and subtle forms, although you have no form. You are like a spider that weaves a web around itself, by your own power you create, preserve and withdraw the universe.

Would you please explain this to me. If I can understand this I will be able to create all the different living beings without being entangled by the bondage of karma. Then I will not become proud and insolent and think myself supreme.

The Supreme Lord said, This knowledge of me is the greatest secret but I will explain it to you and then you will know who I am and my true nature. It is only I who existed before the creation, there was nothing else, not even the primordial nature or its cause. Everything here now is also me and after the destruction of the universe only I will remain.

If something appears to be separate from me, it has no value, even if it appears to exist. It is a reflection in the dark and the result of my energy of illusion. The gross elements enter into all beings and yet they also do not enter. In the same way, I exist within everything and I am outside of everything. At all times and places, directly and indirectly, you must search for this. Brahma, concentrate your mind on this doctrine and you will not be proud of your role as creator.

After giving these instructions to Brahma, the Supreme Lord disappeared and Brahma began to create the universe.

Chapter 7 – The Appearance of Lord Boar

The first creation of Brahma was the sages Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanat-kumara. Brahma then asked them all to create offspring, but the sages refused because they had taken a vow of celibacy in order to achieve liberation from material life.

Because his sons had disobeyed him, Brahma became angry. Although he tried to control his anger and not express it, his rage came out from between his eyebrows and created a child who was red and blue. The child wept and cried out, O creator, please give me a name and somewhere to reside.

Brahma appeased the boy and said, Please don't cry I will name you and give you a home. Because you have cried like a child, your name will be Rudra. You may reside in the heart, the senses, the breath, the sky, wind, fire, water, earth, sun, moon and austerity.

Please accept your name and the places of your residence and create abundant offspring. Rudra was powerful and following his father's order he created a large number of offspring which were like him in their strength and their furious nature. When Brahma saw Rudra's fierce offspring devouring the world, he became afraid.

Brahma said to Rudra, That is enough, there is no need for you to create such fierce living beings. Their terrible eyes are burning in all directions as well as burning me. You should now engage yourself in performing austerity because that is favourable for everyone. It is only through austerity that one can attain the Supreme Lord dwelling in the hearts of all beings. Following the order of his father, Rudra entered the forest to perform austerity.

Then Brahma turned his attention to creating living beings and produced ten sons. Narada was born from his lap, Daksa came from his thumb, Vasistha from his breath. Kratu from his hand and Bhrgu from his skin. From his navel Pulaha was born, Atri came from his eyes and Marici from his mind. Angira was generated from his mouth and Pulastya from his ears.

Although Brahma had created the sages, the population of the worlds did not expand, so he contemplated how the population of the world could be increased. While Brahma was considering the problem, his body was split in two and produced a male and female couple. The male form named Svayambhuva became known as the father of mankind (Manu), and the woman became known as Satarupa, the queen of the great soul Manu.

After Svayambhuva Manu was born he said to Brahma, You are the father of all living beings, their creator and their support. Tell me what I can do to serve you. What should I do so my fame will spread throughout all the worlds and lead to success in the world to come.

Brahma said, O my son, may you and your wife be blessed. May you both have all good fortune. You have sincerely asked for my instructions and advice. This is the correct attitude for a child to have toward their father. A child should follow the advice of their father to the best of their ability and act without jealousy or malice.

Brahma said, I ask you and your wife to have children like yourself. Protect the world and perform sacrifices to worship the Supreme Lord. If you protect all your subjects, the Supreme Lord will be satisfied and pleased. If the Supreme Lord is not pleased, then one's activities are useless. Anyone who does not satisfy him disregards their own welfare.

Svayambhuva Manu said, I will follow your instructions. The earth is the residence of all living beings. But the earth has fallen into the waters

of devastation, so you must lift it. When Brahma saw that the earth was immersed in the water at the bottom of the universe, he thought about how he could lift it for a long time.

Brahma thought, While I have been occupied with the creation, the earth was engulfed by the water and sunk to the bottom of the ocean. What can I do about this? I was born from the Lord's heart so it is best if I take instruction from the Lord. While Brahma was thinking in this way, a small boar no larger than the top of his thumb, came out of his nostril. As Brahma watched, the boar positioned himself in the sky and rapidly expanded into the size of an elephant.

Brahma was amazed at the boar in the sky and he said to his sons and Manu who were present, It is wonderful that this boar has emerged from my nose. Is this a powerful being pretending to be a boar? At first, the boar was no larger than the top of my thumb, but within an instant, he filled the sky with his giant form. I cannot understand this. Is this a manifestation of the Supreme Lord Vishnu?

While Brahma was considering the situation, the Supreme Lord in the form of a boar roared and his exceptional voice reverberated throughout the sky. The Supreme Lord inspired Brahma and his sons by roaring again. Lord Boar's hairs were bristling and his tail was held high. He dispersed the clouds by kicking his hooves as he moved across the sky. The Lord was dazzling with his white tusks and shining eyes.

Though the Lord was completely spiritual, he had accepted the body of a boar and so he searched for the earth using his sense of smell. The brahmins praised him as he entered the water. He dived into the ocean with great force creating a great swell of waves. He saw the earth lying as it was in the deluge before creation and balancing it on his tusks, he lifted the earth out of the ocean.

While he was lifting the earth the criminal Hiranyaksa attacked him with a club. With his anger blazing Lord Boar killed him as easily as a lion kills an elephant. Brahma and all the sages watching on understood he was the Supreme Lord and they offered prayers.

The sages folded their hands and said, Victory to you, O invincible Lord. To lift the earth you have taken the form of a boar. The sacred Vedic hymns and mantras are in the touch of your skin. The objects of sacrifice are in your body. You can be known by detachment, self-control and devotion. Who else but the Supreme Lord could save the earth from its inundation within the water?

Even this is not miraculous for you, because you have created this amazing material universe. We reside on the most virtuous planets in the universe, but still we have been purified by the water sprayed from your hairs when you shake your body. Your wonderful activities are endless. The whole universe is under the control of your powerful illusory energy. O Lord, please show your blessings to us.

While the sages praised him, Lord Boar placed the earth on top of the water and stabilised the waves. The Supreme Lord, the protector of the world, thus raised the earth from within the water of devastation. When he had placed it so it floated on the water he disappeared.

Anyone who hears this story of Lord Boar, or narrates it to another, will please the Lord who resides within everyone's heart. Nothing is difficult to achieve for those who have pleased the Supreme Lord. Everything else is unimportant. Hearing the descriptions of the Lord's activities can free one from all material suffering, who would not want to hear them?

Chapter 8 – The Appearance of Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakashipu

King Pariksit said, Why did Lord Boar fight and kill the criminal Hiranyaksa? Could you please explain this to me?

Suka Goswami said, The story of the fight between Lord Boar and Hiranyaksa begins with Hiranyaksa's mother Diti and his father Kasyapa. Diti desired to have a child and one night she was overcome with passion and so she approached her husband Kasyapa.

Expressing her desire to her husband Diti said, I am pierced by the arrows of desire and they are tormenting me. Please show me your favour, I am saddened to see my co-wives blessed with children while I have none. Please satisfy my desire. A superior man never allows the appeals of those in distress to remain unfulfilled.

Kasyapa said, Of course I will satisfy your desires, who would not satisfy one who helps them accomplish the goals of human life? Just as a ship can be used to travel across the ocean, a wife helps one travel across the ocean of misery in this world. The wise have declared a wife is the equal partner in all one's attempts at happiness. A man can entrust many responsibilities to his wife and doing so he can move through the world free of trouble.

With the association of a wife a man can rule over his senses which are difficult to control, just as the ruler of a fort can repel hostile invaders. If I tried my whole life I could never achieve the obliging and generous qualities you possess.

I shall satisfy your desire for children, but in order for me to remain free of blame please be patient and wait for a favourable time to conceive. This particular time is terrible and most unfavourable because the hor-

rible-looking ghouls and companions of the lord of the ghosts are wandering around.

Although Kasyapa explained to Diti that the time was unfavourable, she was overcome by passion and she brazenly grabbed his clothing. Seeing the urgency of his wife, Kasyapa lay down with her in a private place.

Later Diti felt ashamed of herself and she timidly approached her husband and said, Do not let the lord of the ghouls kill my embryo because I offended him, please protect me. Let him show mercy to me, even hunters show compassion toward women.

Kasyapa said, Your mind was impure, the time was unfavourable, you disobeyed my advice and disregarded the gods. Because of this you will give birth to two degenerate sons. They will torture the entire universe, kill many innocents and cause disturbance to the gods and the sages. They will enrage the Supreme Lord and he will come down to this world and kill them, just as Indra wields his thunderbolts to crush the mountains.

Diti said, My dear husband, It is my desire that my sons be killed by the Supreme Lord and not by the anger of the brahmins. Even the residents of hell do not show compassion to those burnt by the curse of a brahmin.

The sage Kasyapa replied, Because you are sincerely regretting what you have done and feeling grief and contemplating what is pious, and also showing respect for the Supreme Lord and me, your grandson will be respected by the sages and the Lord himself. His deeds will be sung about and glorified. Many people will try to follow his example and purify themselves by renouncing hatred and being a friend to all living beings. He will be admired by all because the Supreme Lord will be pleased with him.

Diti was delighted to hear her grandson would be a saintly person and that her sons would be killed by the Supreme Lord. Because she knew her sons would disturb the gods she kept the semen of Kasyapa Muni in her womb for a hundred years.

The power of Diti's pregnancy caused the world to be deprived of light and the power of the gods was subdued. The gods approached Brahma, the creator of the universe and said, This darkness of the world is causing us disturbance. There is nothing that is unknown to you, can you please tell us what is causing this.

Brahma replied, It is the embryo within the womb of Diti that is causing this. I will tell you the story of how Diti's pregnancy has caused this darkness throughout the universe. Sanaka and my other sons who were born even before you, wander through all the worlds without any specific purpose. At one time they travelled to Vaikuntha, the spiritual realm, where the Supreme Lord resides.

All those who dwell in that realm have a form like Vishnu and are devoted to him. In those worlds everything is pure with no influence of passion or ignorance. There are many trees that yield whatever one desires and they blossom and fruit in all seasons. These trees are the form of liberation.

My four sons were overjoyed when they reached Vaikuntha. They had already passed through six gates and as they approached the seventh gate, they saw two gatekeepers armed with maces and dressed in beautiful clothing. They wore valuable jewellery and garlands of flowers which attracted many bees.

The doormen appeared to be angry, their eyebrows were raised and they had red eyes and flared nostrils. As they had done at all the other gates, my four sons walked through the seventh gate without asking the doorkeepers for permission.

These four sages were old and knew the truth of the soul, but they were naked and looked like they were only 5 years old. The gatekeepers laughed at their appearance and used their canes to prevent the sages from entering. In this way, they disregarded the good manners approved of by the Lord and the sages who should have been respected. When their entrance was blocked by the gatekeepers, the sages were overcome by anger because of their disappointment at being obstructed in seeing the Lord.

The sages said, How is it that these two people have attained an exalted position serving the Lord yet their nature is opposed to their position? They reside in Vaikuntha, the realm transcending anxiety and hatred, yet their nature is the opposite of those qualities. What could have caused these gatekeepers to develop qualities of distrust and hostility toward others?

Here in the spiritual realm, there is undisturbed concordance between everything and the Lord. These two gatekeepers are dressed like gods but their nature is discordant. Let us consider what can be done for their welfare and remedy their offence. Since they perceive enmity between the Lord and others, they should reside in the material world where such enmity exists.

The gatekeepers became frightened when the sages cursed them. They prostrated themselves before the sages in great anxiety because there is no weapon that can destroy a brahmin's curse. The gatekeepers said, Let your punishment be inflicted on us since we have disrespected sages like you. Please show compassion at our repentance and allow us to always remember the Lord.

Meantime, the offence of the gatekeepers became known to the Lord, and he and the goddess of fortune arrived at the scene. The Lord's affectionate smile touched everyone's hearts and enhanced the beauty of his abode.

He wore a yellow cloth and bees were humming around his garland of fresh flowers. His wrists were adorned with lovely bracelets. He rested one hand on Garuda's shoulder and in the other he twirled a lotus flower. He wore a helmet set with gemstones and the Kaustubha jewel was around his neck.

The sages looked at his beautiful figure and joyously bowed down before him. The air had the fragrance of tulsi and when they breathed it in, their minds and bodies were excited. Seeing his charming face they felt completely satisfied.

The sages said, O Lord, although you are within the hearts of everyone, the impious cannot detect you there. Today you are visible to our eyes. Our father Brahma, described your mysteries to us and now we see you in person. You are the supreme soul of all. By your grace, those who are purified of all attachment can know you in their hearts. Those who have a desire for liberation take shelter of you and listen to descriptions of your activities. They see no value in other achievements.

Even if we are born in the depths of hell, we desire to always find joy in remembrance of you and delight in hearing and singing of your qualities. You are never visible to those who lack self-control and we bow down to you who have graciously appeared before us.

The Supreme Lord said, These two servants of mine, Jaya and Vijaya, disregarded me and have insulted you. The punishment you have given them has my approval. The brahmin should always be respected. I apologise and ask you to please forgive the insult, because if a servant causes offence, the master is responsible and his reputation is spoiled.

Hearing my glories can purify the entire world. My reputation comes from sages like yourselves, so I would cut my own arm from my body if its movement displeased you.

I consider the brahmins, the cows and other innocent creatures to be the same as my own body. I am won over by anyone who respects the brahmins even if the brahmin's speak harshly. My servants Jaya and Vijaya have committed an offence against you because they did not know the intention of their master. I would consider it an act of kindness to me if you would order that once they have suffered the results of their wrongdoing they may quickly return to me. In this way, they will not be banished from me for a long time.

Although the sages were polluted by anger and they listened to the Lord's words carefully, they were still not satisfied. The sages contemplated the meaning of his words but they could not fathom the Lord's intention.

But they were overjoyed with seeing and hearing the Lord and with folded hands and the hairs on their bodies standing on end they said, O Lord, we do not understand why you spoke in our favour. You are the supreme ruler. Whatever punishment you think Jaya and Vijaya deserve we will accept wholeheartedly. Or you may inflict punishment on us for cursing innocent people.

The Supreme Lord said, I was the cause of the punishment, and so they will take birth in the material world. However, their meditation on me will be increased by anger and concentration of mind and in that way they will be tightly bound to me and soon return to me. Having learned the glories of the servants of the Supreme Lord, the sages bowed down and offered the Lord their respects and then took their leave.

The Lord said to his servants, You must depart but do not be afraid. I will not cancel the brahmin's curse although I have the power to do so. I approve of this punishment. Your banishment was ordained by the goddess of fortune, Lakshmi because you prevented her from entering the gate when I was resting. You will purify yourselves of the offence to

the brahmins by the intensity of concentration created by your anger, and you will return to me quickly.

Instructing the gatekeepers in this way, the Supreme Lord entered his abode. The curse of the brahmins destroyed the prosperity of the gatekeepers and they fell from the realm of the Lord. While they were falling there were cries of lamentation from the gods. Jaya and Vijaya have entered Diti's womb. It is the power of these two godforsaken siblings that has agitated you. This is all happening by the desire of the Supreme Lord, he has ordained this.

Chapter 9 – The Battle Between Lord Boar and Hiranyaksa

Diti was afraid that the children in her womb would cause trouble, so she only gave birth to twin sons after one hundred years. When the children were born, there were many bad omens that caused great fear to the people of the world. The mountains on the earth shook with earthquakes and the world seemed on fire with meteors, comets and thunder showering down.

Sharp winds roared and uprooted the trees and raised streams of dust. Masses of clouds covered the stars and darkness enveloped the world. The waves on the ocean were agitated and howled as if in distress. Seeing all these bad omens, the people were afraid and thought the world was about to end.

The twin sons of Diti grew quickly. Their bodies were like mountains and as hard as rock. Their names were Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakashipu. The elder child, Hiranyakashipu gained control over the three worlds. Because he received a blessing from Brahma he was arrogant and did not fear death from anyone.

He loved his younger brother, Hiranyaksa, who was always willing to please him. He travelled all over the universe with a club in his hand looking for a fight. He was proud of his physical powers, and the gods were afraid of him and hid themselves like snakes afraid of Garuda.

When Hiranyaksa discovered that Indra and the other gods were hiding so he couldn't find them he roared loudly. He gave up searching for them and dived into the ocean. When he entered the ocean, the aquatic animals were terrified and ran as far away from him as they could. For many years he roamed the ocean, striking the massive waves with his

club again and again. He reached the home of Varuna, the lord of the aquatic animals.

Hiranyaksa approached Varuna and mockingly bowed down and said with a smile, O great King, you are famous as the protector of the world and one who defeats arrogant warriors. Fight with me!

Varuna was angry at being ridiculed by such a vain enemy, but he controlled his anger and said, O brave warrior, I am too old for battle and have left the path of warfare and adopted tranquillity. You are so strong that I can think of no one else except the original person, Lord Vishnu who can satisfy you in battle.

You should approach Lord Vishnu who is even praised by heroes like you. On finding him you will swiftly lose your pride and lie dead on the battlefield, surrounded by dogs. It is to destroy impious people like you and favour the virtuous that he assumes various forms.

Hiranyaksa ignored the words of Varuna. He discovered where Vishnu was and swiftly went to the depths of the ocean. There he found the Supreme Lord in the form of a boar holding the earth on the tips of his tusks.

Hiranyaksa said to the Lord, O amphibious beast come and fight. Leave the earth to us, the creator of the world gave it to us and I will hurt you if you try to take it. You have killed the impious by invisible trickery. There will be little left of your bewildering power when I remove the sorrow of my friends by killing you. When you are killed by my club shattering your head, the gods and sages who offer worship to you will be uprooted and lose their foundation.

Hiranyaksa's words pierced the Lord like a spear, but he saw that the earth was frightened and he rose out of the water. Hiranyaksa chased the Lord while he was coming out of the water. In a thundering voice he roared, How shameful to refuse my challenge!

Lord Boar placed the earth on the surface of the water and endowed it with the power to float. Brahma praised him for his action and the other gods showered him with flowers. Hiranyaksa pursued Lord Boar wielding with his club. He continued wounding the Lord's heart with his angry and abusive words.

The Lord said, It is true we are a wild beast of the jungle and we are searching for dogs like you. Heroes who are free from the bondage of death have no fear from boasting words like yours, for you are bound by the noose of death. Stop talking and take action to quickly defeat me. One who does not fulfil his vow is not fit for respectable society.

Hiranyaksa was overcome with rage when he heard the Supreme Lord's insulting words. Shaking with anger and indignation, Hiranyaksa quickly attacked and struck the Lord with his club. But the Lord evaded the blow by stepping slightly to the side. Hiranyaksa picked up his club and rushed toward the Lord, biting his lip in anger and repeatedly brandishing his club about.

Then the Lord struck the enemy with his own club, but Hiranyaksa was a skilled fighter and he protected himself and struck the Lord. The Lord and Hiranyaksa were both enraged and they repeatedly struck each other with their heavy clubs. As they engaged in combat both were injured from the blows inflicted by their clubs. The smell of blood increased their anger even more.

Brahma came to see the battle for the earth taking place between Hiranyaksa and Lord Boar. Brahma said, O Lord, Hiranyaksa has caused trouble and fear to the gods, the brahmins, the cows and innocent people. Do not play with him, he is full of tricks and very proud. Lord please kill this impious demon quickly. It is fortunate that Hiranyaksa has freely come before you to meet the death ordained for him. Display your power and valour and slay him. This will bring peace to the world.

Hearing the sincere and poetic words of Brahma, the Lord laughed and glanced at him with affection. Then he leapt at Hiranyaksa and struck him on the chin with his club. His blow was stopped by Hiranyaksa's club, and the Lord's club fell out of his hand whirling with a miraculous glow.

Although Hiranyaksa could have struck the Lord while he was unarmed, he honoured the warrior code of not attacking anyone without a weapon and did not strike the Lord. This aroused the anger of the Lord further. As his club fell the gods gave a cry of lamentation.

The Lord appreciated Hiranyaksa's respect of virtue and took up his sudarsana disc. Hiranyaksa glared at the Lord with his eyes burning like fire. Then he hurled his club at the Lord saying, You are defeated!

The Lord easily kicked his club with his foot and said, You desire victory, so pick up your weapon and try again. Hearing those words, Hiranyaksa roared loudly and attacked again. Seeing the club coming toward him, the Lord caught it as easily as Garuda would catch a snake. Hiranyaksa raged and took up a trident and using all his strength he threw it at the Lord. But the Lord shattered the flaming trident into pieces with his sudarsana disc.

When Hiranyaksa saw his trident cut to pieces, he became so angry he rushed toward the Lord and struck his fist against the Lord's chest. Then he disappeared. Hiranyaksa then assailed the Lord with illusory tricks. Ferocious winds began to blow spreading dust and hail storms. Stones were catapulted from all directions. The light of the stars was blocked behind thick clouds and it rained pus, blood, urine and bones.

Naked demonesses armed with spears and tangled hair appeared. Many savage devils appeared shouting murderous words. The Lord released his sudarsana weapon and dispelled the illusions created by Hiranyaksa. Hiranyaksa returned and again rushed at the Lord trying to crush

him in his strong arms but found the Lord outside his grip. He struck the Lord with his hard fists, but the Lord slapped him under his ear.

Although the Lord had casually struck the demon, Hiranyaksa spun around and his eyeballs fell from their sockets. With his arms and legs lifeless and his hair shattered, he fell like a giant tree uprooted by the wind. When Lord Brahma saw the demon lying on the ground he said, O who could achieve such a glorious death. He was kicked by the foot of Lord and died while looking at the Lord's face. Then the gods all praised the Lord. After having killed the very powerful Hiranyaksa, the Lord returned to his own abode.

Those who hear, chant or take pleasure in this sacred story of the Lord killing Hiranyaksa will have wealth, fame, long life and all their desires will be fulfilled.

Chapter 10 – Kardama Muni and Devahuti

King Pariksit said, Would you please describe the respected dynasty of Svayambhuva Manu whose descendants populated the universe.

Suka said, Svayambhuva Manu and his wife Satarupa had five children: two sons, Priyavrata and Uttanapada, and three daughters, Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti. Their daughter Devahuti was the wife of the son of Brahma, the sage Kardama. Brahma instructed Kardama to populate the worlds and Kardama underwent austerities on the bank of the Sarasvati river for 10,000 years.

The Supreme Lord was pleased with Kardama and so he appeared before him as resplendent as the sun. He wore silken clothing and a crown and earrings. He held a conch-shell, disc, club, and white lotus in his four hands. His smiling glances brought pleasure to the heart.

Having achieved his desire, Kardama was overjoyed to see the Lord. He bowed his head to the ground, placed his palms together and said, O praiseworthy Lord, my eyes have achieved their greatest success by seeing you. Worship of your lotus feet is like a boat that can carry one across the ocean of material existence. You can fulfil everyone's desire. I desired to marry a girl of similar temperament to mine, so I approached you to fulfil my undignified desire. You are like a tree that fulfils all wishes.

Lord Vishnu smiled affectionately and replying to Kardama with sweet words he said, Knowing your intentions, I have already arranged to fulfil your desire. Those who worship me with devotion are never disappointed. In a few days, Svayambhuva Manu, will come here with his queen Satarupa to see you.

Their daughter Devahuti is ready for marriage and seeking a good husband. They will come to give their daughter to you as your wife. She has the temperament your heart has been longing for all these years. She will soon be here to serve you as you desire. You will have nine daughters together and a portion of me will be born as your son and I will teach Devahuti the philosophy of the ultimate reality.

Having spoken to Kardama, the Lord departed. A few days later Svayambhuva Manu with his wife Satarupa and their daughter Devahuti, arrived at Kardama's residence. Kardama greeted them with respect. Kardama said, Svayambhuva Manu please tell me why you have come to see me.

Svayambhuva Manu said, O great sage, my daughter is seeking a husband. When she heard of your noble character and other virtues she wanted you as her husband. She is compatible with you in every way and is capable of managing your household. I heard that you were preparing to take a wife and end your vow of celibacy. Please accept my daughter as your wife.

Kardama said, It is true that I am willing to marry and your daughter has not promised herself to anyone, so our marriage is suitable. Who would not desire to marry her? She is the jewel of womanhood and the beloved daughter of Svayambhuva Manu. I will accept her as my wife, and after we raise our children I will take to the path of renunciation.

So Svayambhuva Manu happily gave his daughter to Kardama and Satarupa lovingly gave the couple valuable gifts of jewellery, clothes and household items. Then Svayambhuva Manu and Satarupa embraced their daughter, boarded their chariot and left for their home.

After her parents departed, Devahuti served her husband with affection. Together the couple had nine daughters. When Devahuti realised that her husband would soon leave home to accept the life of renunci-

ation, she became distressed and said to Kardama, You have given me everything that you promised me, but I would like you to also give me freedom from fear. Our daughters will all find husbands and leave for their new homes. But who will comfort me when you leave for a life of renunciation?

I have passed so much of my life in sensual enjoyment without thinking of the supreme self. Anyone who does not perform spiritual activities that lead them to detachment or worship of the Supreme Lord must be considered a dead body even while they are still alive. I have been deceived by the illusory power of the Lord, because although I married someone who could give me liberation, I did not take advantage of the opportunity.

Kardama remembered what Lord Vishnu had said to him and he said, Please do not be disheartened princess, for your behaviour is always exemplary. Very soon the Supreme Lord will incarnate as your son. You should faithfully worship the Lord, control your senses, follow religious vows and give charitable donations. Then the Supreme Lord will be pleased with you and be born as your son. He will teach you spiritual knowledge and cut the bonds of karma in your heart.

Some time later, the Supreme Lord incarnated as Kapila, the son of Kardama and Devahuti. When he was born the gods showered flowers from the sky and sang his praise. Brahma travelled to Kardama and Devahuti's residence and said to them, The Supreme Lord has incarnated as your son. He is the chief among those with perfect knowledge and will sever the bonds of your ignorance and doubt.

Many years later when Kapila had matured, Kardama approached him and said, My Lord, I would now like to renounce my family life and adopt the life of a travelling renunciate so I can give up my material attachments and achieve spiritual progress.

Lord Kapila said, I have taken birth as your son to fulfil the promise I made to you. I have appeared in the world to explain knowledge of the soul and self-realisation because this knowledge has been lost. I have incarnated as Kapila to restore this knowledge for the benefit of those who desire liberation from suffering. I will also explain this knowledge to my mother so that she can achieve knowledge of the self and become free from all fear. You have my permission to now leave home as you wish.

When Kardama received permission from his son, he left home to travel all over the world as a renunciate.

Chapter 11 – The Teachings of Lord Kapila

After Kardama left, Kapila stayed on at home to benefit his mother Devahuti. One day Devahuti remembered the words of Brahma and she said to Kapila, I am disgusted with the agitation produced by my senses because it has caused me to become overcome by the darkness of ignorance. Because of this ignorance I have suffered the illusion of attachment to my body and things identified as I and mine. Would you please enlighten me and explain the relationship between spirit and matter.

Kapila was pleased to hear Devahuti's questions and he smiled and said, The path of yoga which causes detachment from both happiness and sadness is the most beneficial to people. I will explain this path to you. The mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation for the soul.

When someone is attached to the sensual pleasure the mind will cause bondage. When someone is attached to the supreme person it leads to liberation. When the mind is free from impurities like lust and greed, which are born of attachment to conceptions of me and mine, it is peaceful and sees happiness and sadness equally.

Those with a purified mind can understand that although it is infinitesimal in size, the soul is self-luminous, eternal, indivisible and untouched by matter. This understanding produces detachment and the material existence loses its influence. There is no other path as favourable for spiritual knowledge than devotion to the Supreme Lord. The wise know that attachment for worldly objects will bind the soul to material existence. But attachment to the enlightened sages opens the gate to the soul's liberation.

The sage is peaceful, tolerant, compassionate and friendly toward everyone. The sage is fixed in devotion to the Supreme Lord. They are

always hearing and singing about my qualities and activities and so they are free of suffering. You should seek out the association of such people, because by their influence you will become indifferent to sensual enjoyment. This is the easiest process to control the mind.

Devahuti said, What is the correct conception of devotion which can help me easily and quickly achieve liberation? The yoga system is meant for liberation from material suffering. Can you please describe that yoga system?

Kapila said, Devotion to the Supreme Lord dissolves the subtle body just as the fire of digestion dissolves food. Those who are devoted to me always glorify my qualities and activities. They achieve liberation without any separate effort. One cannot be free from fear of death without taking shelter of me, for I am the controller of everything and the soul of all beings.

Kapila said, Now I will explain the characteristics of the truth and by knowing this you can be freed from the bondage to material nature. Spiritual knowledge cuts the bonds of attachment to the material world and leads to realisation of the self.

The Supreme Lord is the beginningless and eternal supreme soul. He is superior to matter, self-luminous and maintains the entire creation. Of his own free will and as his sport, he accepts the material energy which is constituted of three modes of nature. By means of these modes of nature, the various forms of the living beings are created. The modes shroud the knowledge of the soul's identity and cause the living being to suffer the illusion they are material beings.

The living beings are spiritual and therefore distinct from material activities, but due to illusion they think they are the doer, although really it is the modes of nature that are the cause. The modes of nature are the

cause of the body and the senses, but the perceptions of pleasure and pain are caused by the soul.

The material energy consists of five physical elements, namely earth, water, fire, air and space. There are also five subtle elements – smell, taste, colour, touch and sound. There are five senses for gaining knowledge – the senses of hearing, taste, touch, sight and smell. There are five organs for action – the mouth, hands, legs, genitals and anus. The internal subtle sense has four aspects – mind, intelligence, ego and conditioned consciousness.

Time is the combining element and the power of the Supreme Lord that causes the illusioned soul to fear death. The creation begins when the power of time stimulates the equilibrium of the unmanifested material nature. The Supreme Lord is within the creation as the supreme soul and externally as the form of time.

The Supreme Lord deposits his seed into nature and stimulates the destinies of the souls who are bound by the material nature. The quality of goodness is pure and tranquil. Just as water in its natural state is clear, so too the natural state of consciousness has the qualities of serenity and clarity.

Then the material ego arises and displays three types of potential for the performance of actions – goodness, passion and ignorance. The mind emerges from the modifications of the material ego in the mode of goodness. The mind has the characteristics of thought and deliberation and it is these that generate desire. When the material ego is modified by the mode of passion, it produces the intelligence. The function of the intelligence is to help in understanding reality and to facilitate the senses. Intelligence is characterised by doubt, misconception, right conception, memory and sleep.

The senses for acquiring knowledge and the senses of action are produced by the material ego in the mode of passion. The senses of action depend on the breath of life, and intelligence gives power to the senses for acquiring knowledge.

Impelled by the energy of the Supreme Lord the material ego in ignorance gives birth to the subtle element sound. From sound the element of space emerges followed by the sense of hearing. The wise define sound as that which conveys meaning and reveals the speaker. Sound is the subtle form of space. The characteristic of the space element is the expanse for living beings and it pervades them inside and out and supports the life air. When space is stimulated by the time element, the subtle element of touch arises and then the air, followed by the skin. Touch is the subtle form of air and its characteristics are heat, cold, softness and hardness.

When air and the sense of touch are impelled by destiny, different forms evolve and from the modifications of these forms, fire arises. From fire, the subtle element colour and the eye evolve. The qualities of fire are light and the capacity to destroy cold, cook, evaporate and produce hunger and thirst.

From the modifications of fire and vision, the subtle element taste is produced. From taste, water evolves and then the tongue which perceives taste. The varieties of taste are sweet, bitter, astringent, pungent, sour and salty. The qualities of water are moistening, coagulating, sustaining life, softening and removing heat.

When water along with taste was impelled by destiny, the subtle element of smell evolves. Then the earth and the nose become apparent. The earth is the place of sustenance for all the elements. Because the cause also exists in the effect, the characteristics of the former elements are perceived in the latter elements. Thus, the characteristics of all the elements exist within the earth.

Although the soul resides in a material body, it is beyond the modes of nature. The soul is changeless and not the doer. Although within a material body, the soul remains separate from the modes, just as the sun remains separate from its reflection on water.

When the soul is attached to the modes of nature and under the illusion of ego, he thinks he is the doer. Because of faulty actions and association with material nature the soul must helplessly accept the path of repeated birth and death and reincarnate into different species of life.

Although the soul does not exist in the material form, his material existence continues just as one experiences miseries in a dream. Therefore, the mind should be controlled by engaging in devotion with detachment.

One should practice non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possessiveness. One should hear and chant about me and thus elevate their consciousness. One should be impartial toward all living beings, treat no-one with hatred, practice celibacy and offer their actions to the Supreme Lord.

One should be content with whatever they can easily acquire and not eat more than they need to sustain the body. One should prefer to live in a secluded place and be serene, compassionate, friendly to all and aim to realise the self. One should understand the difference between spirit and matter and realise they are different from the body and so not become attached to possessions relating to the body.

Devahuti said, Can the soul ever be separated from matter since they depend on each other? If the soul is inactive, how can they ever find freedom as long as the ropes of material nature bind them? Even if one avoids the fear of material bondage by theoretical knowledge and inquiry into essential questions, the bondage may still return because its cause, the modes of nature, are not destroyed.

Kapila said, One can gain freedom from bondage by being detached from the rewards of their actions and with a pure mind hear about my activities and be devoted to me. The illusory power of the material nature has covered the knowledge of the living being. By understanding the mistake of material desires and renouncing such desires, the living being becomes independent.

When you are dreaming there are many unpleasant and troublesome things that are presented to you. But the same things don't confuse you when you are awake. The material nature never causes harm to those who have realised the truth and knows the self. Their mind is always focused on the Supreme Lord and their knowledge of the self removes all doubts. The wise reach the ultimate goal and having reached that spiritual abode the devoted soul never reverts to material existence.

Kapila said, Now I will describe the yoga system, which when practised it purifies the mind and then the soul calmly and joyfully adopts the path of virtue. You should perform your duty according to your ability and avoid duties meant for others. You should be content with what is achieved by destiny and perform activities that lead to liberation. You should eat moderately and stay in a peaceful and secluded location.

You should be truthful and non-violent. You should not steal and be satisfied with having only as much as needed to maintain yourself. You should practice celibacy, austerity and cleanliness. You should study the Vedic scriptures and worship the Supreme Lord. You should achieve steadiness by practising yoga postures, controlling the breath and the senses. By these processes, or any other legitimate method, you should control the mind and fix yourself in thought of the Supreme Lord.

Devahuti said, You have described the characteristics of the material nature and also the spiritual nature. Would you now please explain the path of devotion. Could you also please describe the various types of births in this world because this will help me gain detachment from

worldly activities. Please also explain the nature of time. O Lord, like the sun you can dispel the darkness of material life. Due to a lack of spiritual knowledge, people are deluded and without your shelter. They are weary because they are bound by their actions.

Kapila said, There are many paths of devotion that different people perform according to their individual nature. Devotion performed by a person who intends violence, who is disrespectful, angry or jealous, is devotion in the mode of ignorance. If someone desires fame and wealth and worships me publicly, or they consider their interests to be separate from mine, then their devotion is in the mode of passion.

Devotion in the mode of goodness is worship of the Supreme Lord which is performed with the motivation of freeing oneself from karma. A person whose mind is naturally attracted to hearing about the Supreme Lord just as the Ganges naturally flows towards the sea, displays pure devotion. This type of devotion is spontaneous and has no ulterior motive. By achieving pure devotion, you can defeat the influence of the three modes of material nature and attain the spiritual nature.

You should perform the duties prescribed by the scriptures without any motive. Avoiding causing harm to any living beings, you should perform daily devotional activities: offer prayers to me, look upon my image, worship and bow down to me. You should see me in all living beings and live with detachment. You should offer respect to the sages, show compassion to the afflicted and friendship toward your equals.

You should listen to philosophical teachings and chant my name. You should be honest and sincere in all one's dealing with others and associate with virtuous people. By these practices you will purify your consciousness and become naturally attracted to hearing about me. Anyone who is constantly engaged in such devoted service can perceive the Supreme Lord's presence everywhere.

I am present in the heart of all living beings as the supreme soul. If anyone neglects me and worships only images, their devotion is artificial. Those who offer respect to me but are hostile to other living beings will never achieve serenity. Anyone who is ignorant of my presence in everyone's heart will never please me, even if they worship my image with all the correct rituals.

I cause a great fear of death in whoever discriminates between themselves and other living beings. You should try to satisfy me by viewing all living beings as equal and being friendly towards all of them. I do not know anyone who is superior to those who constantly offer everything to me. They understand that I am present in all beings and offer respects to them. Those who follow this path of pure devotion to me can achieve my supreme abode.

Time is the feature of the Supreme Lord that causes the various transformations in the appearance of things. Time causes fear among the living beings. It is due to fear of time that the wind blows, the sun shines, the rains come and the trees and plants bear fruit and flowers in their own season.

The universe expands under the control of the Supreme Lord as the power of time. Time does not begin and it does not end and time is death and causes the end. People do not know the great power of time even though they are controlled by it just as a mass of clouds is carried by the wind. In the pursuit of happiness one works hard for material things, and time destroys it all and the materialist weeps. Due to ignorance, the materialist forgets that the body is temporary and thus all things in relation to that body are also temporary.

In whatever species they are born, the living being finds pleasure in it and is never disgusted with it. Even in hell they are never inclined to give up their body. Due to their strong attachment for their body, wife, home, children, wealth and friends they think of themselves as happy

but their body burns in anxiety and they perform impious actions to maintain their existence. They are seduced by the duties of family life which cause all kinds of suffering. They are acting only to avoid suffering yet they consider the absence of suffering to be happiness.

O mother, I have now described the path by which one can come to understand the relationship between matter and spirit. Both devoted service and philosophical study have the same goal – to reach the Supreme Lord. Just as an object is perceived differently by the different senses, the Supreme Lord is perceived differently according to the different paths described by the scriptures.

By performing sacrifice; giving charitable gifts; performing austerity; studying the Vedas; controlling the mind and senses; engaging in one's occupational duties; practising yoga; engaging in devoted service and understanding the method of self-realisation and practising detachment, one can realise the Supreme Lord. I have now explained the process of devotion as well as time. These instructions are not meant for those who are envious, greedy, proud or hypocritical.

The story of Kapila and his mother Devahuti is the purest of narrations. Anyone who hears this will become devoted to the Supreme Lord and attain his abode.

Chapter 12 – The Story of Dhruva Maharaja

Svayambhuva Manu and his wife Satarupa had two sons named Uttanapada and Priyavrata. King Uttanapada had two wives, named Suruci and Suniti. Suruci was the favourite wife of the king. Suruci had a son named Uttama and Suniti's son was named Dhruva.

One day King Uttanapada was playing with his son Uttama and he placed him on his lap. Dhruva also tried to climb into his father's lap, but the King turned him away.

While Dhruva was trying to sit on his father's lap, his stepmother Suruci loudly said, Dhruva, although you are the son of the king, you do not deserve to sit on the throne or the lap of the King because you did not take birth from my womb.

If you wish to become the king, you must first worship the Supreme Lord. When you have satisfied the Lord by such worship then you will have to take your next birth from my womb.

Dhruva was very angry to hear his stepmother's words. When his father did not say anything to protest at his stepmother's harsh words, Dhruva began to cry and ran away to his mother. Queen Suniti lifted her son on her lap and with a trembling voice Dhruva told her what had happened.

Suniti was very sorry to hear about what had been said and her eyes filled with tears. She didn't know what she could do to solve it and so she said to Dhruva, My dear son, please don't think badly of others or wish for anything unfavourable for other people. A person who wishes pain for others will have to suffer from that same pain themselves.

What your stepmother has said is actually true. You have been born from the womb of an unfortunate woman, because the king does not favour me and he is ashamed of me. So, if you want to sit on your stepbrother Uttama's throne, you should follow the advice of your stepmother and begin to worship the Supreme Lord. It is by worshipping the Supreme Lord that your great grandfather Lord Brahma was able to create this entire universe. That was also the case for your grandfather Svayambhuva Manu, who by his worship of the Supreme Lord achieved earthly and heavenly happiness followed by liberation.

Those who seek liberation from the cycle of birth and death must take shelter of the Supreme Lord. Only the Supreme Lord can alleviate your suffering, so worship him by fixing your mind on him with exclusive devotion. Dhruva thought about what his mother had said and then with firm determination he left his father's palace.

The sage Narada heard about these events and he was amazed. He approached Dhruva and said, The spirit of the monarchs is wonderful. They are unable to tolerate even the slightest insult to their honour. You are only a small child, yet you have taken the harsh words of your stepmother to heart.

My dear boy, why are you so upset by words insulting your honour? Young boys should only be concerned with playing sports and other games. This dissatisfaction you feel is only part of the illusory material energy, everyone must suffer or enjoy the results of their previous actions.

The Supreme Lord controls everything, so you should accept whatever providence has in store for you and be contented with whatever comes to you, whether it is good or bad. In my opinion, the meditation your mother advised you to perform to satisfy the Supreme Lord is not possible for you. Many yogis have tried this process for lifetimes, but they were unable to succeed.

So it is best if you go home. You should not persist with this, when you are older you will have the opportunity and then you can try to achieve this. You should try to be happy in whatever circumstances you find yourself because it is all by the arrangement of the Supreme Lord.

Dhruva said, Narada you have given very good advice, but I am very ignorant and so it is difficult to see it that way. I know it is disrespectful of me not to follow your instructions, but because I have been born in a family of monarchs and rulers I am not tolerant. My stepmother has wounded my heart with her unkind words and so your valuable advice cannot stay in my heart. I desire to attain a position higher than anything achieved before. Would you please advise me how I can achieve this goal?

Narada felt compassion towards Dhruva and he said, The advice of your stepmother to worship the Supreme Lord will lead you to the highest good. Anyone who desires to achieve purity, wealth, sensual satisfaction and liberation should worship the Supreme Lord. Go with my blessing. You can purify yourself by going to the Madhuvana forest on the bank of the sacred Yamuna river.

You should bathe in the Yamuna river three times a day. After bathing you should sit in a quiet place and gradually purify your mind and senses by the relevant breathing exercises. With a steady mind you should meditate on the Supreme Lord.

The Supreme Lord is very beautiful. He is always happy and prepared to give blessings to everyone. He is youthful, and all his limbs are attractive. His lips are as red as the rising sun. He is the refuge of the surrendered souls and an ocean of mercy.

The Lord is a deep blue colour and bears the mark of Srivatsa on his chest. He is garlanded with flowers and in his four hands he holds a conch-shell, a disc, a club and a lotus flower. He wears yellow silk

garments and he is decorated with a jewelled helmet, necklace and bracelets and the Kausthubha jewel. He wears small golden bells around his waist and ankles. He is always peaceful and serene and he delights the mind and the eyes.

With the gem like nails of his feet glittering, he stands on the lotus of the heart and occupies the mind of those who worship him. One should always see the Lord in this form and with full attention meditate on the Supreme Lord who gives the greatest of all blessings. Anyone who meditates on the Lord in this way will be liberated from material contamination and will never leave that position.

Now please hear the confidential mantra which should be chanted. One should chant 'Om namo bhagavate vasudevaya' (I offer my respects to the Supreme Lord Vasudeva). While chanting this mantra one should offer the Lord flowers, fruits and food. One can offer water, flowers, fruits and vegetables which are appreciated by the Supreme Lord. One should worship the Lord and chant the mantra three times a day. One should also meditate on activities of the Supreme Lord in his different incarnations.

One should follow the advice of previous spiritual teachers regarding the regulations of deity worship. Or if this is not possible or practical one should worship the Lord within one's heart and recite the mantra. Anyone who follows these instructions and sincerely worships the Lord with their body, mind and words will be blessed by the Supreme Lord with the fulfilment of all their desires. If one desires to be free from material life, they must engage in this process of devotion and be detached from material sensual pleasures.

After hearing the advice of Narada, Dhruva offered him respects as his spiritual teacher and then started for the Madhuvana on the Yamuna river. After Dhruva had left, Narada went to visit Dhruva's father King Uttanapada. After greeting the King, Narada said, King Uttanapada,

you do not look well. Is there some deficiency in your religious or royal duties or material pleasures?

King Uttanapada said, Narada, I have been thinking of my son Dhruva who is only 5 years old. Because I was too attached to my wife I neglected him although he is an innocent child. I am very worried about him. He is not protected by anyone in the forest and he may be fatigued or hungry or in danger. It is most unfortunate that I allowed myself to be controlled by my wife. It was cruel of me to reject my son when out of affection for me he was trying to climb on my lap.

Narada said, Please do not worry about your son, he is being well protected by the Supreme Lord. He will perform feats that are difficult even for the greatest personalities and then he will return to you. After speaking to Narada, the king spent his time thinking about his son Dhruva and neglected his kingdom and royal duties.

Meanwhile, Dhruva had arrived at Madhuvana and bathed in the sacred Yamuna river. Following the instructions of Narada, he worshipped the Supreme Lord according to the instructions Narada had given him. For the first month, he ate every third day. He only ate enough fruits and berries to keep his body alive. In the second month he ate only dry grass and leaves every 6 days and continued his worship.

In the third month, with his mind fully concentrated on his worship, he drank only water every 9th day. In the fourth month, Dhruva mastered the breathing exercises and ate only air every 12 days. By the fifth month, Dhruva was able to stand on one leg without moving and completely focus his mind on the Supreme Lord.

When Dhruva had firmly fixed his mind on the Supreme Lord the three worlds began to shake. As Dhruva stood on one leg, his big toe pressed down half the earth. Dhruva had confined his breathing and closed all the gates of his body, and by confining his life air the gods

of the celestial realm began to feel suffocated. They approached the Supreme Lord for protection. The gods said, Dear Lord, you are the shelter of all existence and kind to those in need. We do not know why the flow of the universal breath is obstructed. Please save us.

The Supreme Lord said, Do not be afraid. This is due to the severe penances being performed by the son of King Uttanapada who is engrossed in thinking of me. I will ask the boy to stop this and you will be saved. The Supreme Lord then went to the Madhuvana forest to see Dhruva.

In his meditation, Dhruva was seeing the form of the Lord brilliant as lightning standing on the lotus of his heart. All of a sudden he noticed that the Lord had disappeared. He opened his eyes and saw the Supreme Lord present before him in the same form he had been seeing him in his heart. When Dhruva saw the Lord, he fell prostrate on the ground to offer his respects to the Lord.

The Lord could understand that Dhruva wanted to offer prayers to glorify him but he lacked the necessary experience to do so. The Lord mercifully touched his conch-shell to Dhruva's forehead. Thus Dhruva received the inspiration to be able to express his feelings and offer his prayers to the Lord

Dhruva said, Let me offer my respects to you, the Supreme Lord and original person. You have animated all my senses and my words. You are the one Supreme Lord who creates the total material world by your own energy. Through the different qualities of nature you create the varieties of material existence, just as fire in different types of wood burns in different shapes and forms.

In the beginning of creation, you gave Brahma the knowledge to understand the entire universe. You are the refuge of everyone who desires liberation from this material world. How can you be forgotten by those

who are grateful for your benevolent acts. You are the cause of liberation from birth and death.

I am a fool because I have worshipped you only to gain material pleasures, but these pleasures are even available to those who live in hell. The bliss that is obtained from meditation on the impersonal feature of the Absolute, or the bliss of life in the celestial realms cannot compare to the bliss that is achieved by meditating on you or hearing about your qualities or activities.

When Dhruva finished his prayers the Supreme Lord said, Dhruva, I know the determination in your heart. Although your wish is difficult to attain, I will give it to you because you have performed virtuous actions. I will give you the brightly glowing planet around which all the other stars are circling just as bulls tread around a central post used for crushing grain.

After your father retires to the forest he will give you the rule of his kingdom. As the king, you will perform many great sacrifices and be very charitable. You will enjoy material happiness and at the time of death you will remember me. After saying this Lord Vishnu returned to his abode.

Although he achieved what he desired, Dhruva was not very pleased. Dhruva thought to himself, I am most unfortunate. I approached the Supreme Lord who can stop the cycle of birth and death but I foolishly prayed for temporary material things. Out of foolishness I have asked the Lord for material prosperity. I am like a poverty stricken man who asks a generous emperor for only a few broken grains of rice. Persons who are devoted to the Supreme Lord are satisfied with serving him. They are content with whatever comes to them by destiny.

Anyone who listens to this story will achieve illustrious and glorious qualities like Dhruva. Those who desire bravery and respect will develop those qualities by hearing the story of Dhruva Maharaja.

Chapter 13 – King Rishaba

King Priyavrata was the second son of Svayambhuva Manu and his wife Satarupa. King Priyavrata's grandson was King Nabhi. King Nabhi desired to have sons, so he worshipped Lord Vishnu for the fulfilment of his desires. Because King Nabhi worshipped the Lord with faith and devotion Lord Vishnu appeared before him.

Lord Vishnu was effulgent and the greatest of all living beings. He wore yellow silk clothing and a garland of flowers. He had a helmet, earrings, bracelets, a necklace, ankle bells and other beautiful ornaments. In his four hands he carried a conch-shell, lotus flower, disc and club. When they saw Lord Vishnu, King Nabhi and his priests respectfully bowed their heads and offered Lord Vishnu items of worship. They were like paupers who had obtained great treasures.

The priests said, O Supreme Lord, please accept the worship we have offered you, we are your servants. You transcend all material conceptions, so we are not capable of ascertaining your name, form and qualities. We can only partially understand you. Speaking and hearing of your spiritual qualities will remove the impious deeds of humanity.

You become pleased when your servants offer you prayers and items of worship like water, leaves and sprouts of grass. We do not think that all these arrangements we have made for your worship are necessary to please you. You have no need of all these offerings, they are all performed for our benefit so we may receive your mercy. You are the supreme benefactor, and by appearing before us you have given us the greatest blessing.

Saintly people continuously speak of your excellent virtues. By the power of their spiritual knowledge they have already achieved detachment from the material world. But even such saintly people have rarely

seen you. King Nabhi desires to have a son so he has worshipped you. By performing this worship our only aim was to obtain a son. This is not very intelligent because we have worshipped you for material gain. Please forgive us for our ignorance.

The Supreme Lord said, Your prayers are pleasing because they are honest. You have prayed for King Nabhi to obtain a son like me. However this is difficult to attain because I am the supreme person and no one is equal to me. Since you are all saintly brahmins I consider your words to be as good as my own, so your words should not prove to be false. There is no one equal to me, so I will personally exhibit a part of myself and appear as the son of King Nabhi.

The Lord said this and then disappeared. The Supreme Lord decided to appear as King Nabhi's son so he could fulfil King Nabhi's desire and also demonstrate to the world how the sacred vows of the renunciant sages should be performed.

From the beginning of his appearance as the son of King Nabhi, he displayed the characteristics of the Supreme Lord. He was peaceful and impartial, he was unattached to sensual pleasure and had great influence and power. Because of his competence and his wonderful qualities of strength, beauty, fame, influence and bravery, King Nabhi named him Rishaba, the greatest one.

King Nabhi knew Rishaba was popular among the citizens and the administrators, and so at the appropriate time he retired from the throne and crowned Rishaba as the monarch. Rishaba accepted his kingdom and set an example to the people by his actions. He accepted instructions from a spiritual teacher and when his education was complete he gave gifts to his teacher. He then married Jayanti and had many sons who were all as qualified as he was. He performed the duties that are specified in the Vedas for a married man and also for a king.

Rishaba was the Supreme Lord and thus completely independent and transcendental to the material world. He was always self-controlled and peaceful. He was friendly and compassionate towards all living beings. Although he was the supreme controller, he acted as an ordinary human being in order to teach the people. By his personal example, he showed the people how to perform their everyday activities and live in family life so they could develop spiritual awareness, material prosperity and finally achieve liberation from the material world.

Although Rishaba was aware of the confidential conclusion of the Vedic literatures, he still followed the scriptural regulations and ruled over the people with a controlled mind, controlled senses and tolerance. Once Rishaba and his sons were attending a meeting and listening to the instructions of the spiritual teachers there. At that meeting, Rishaba gave instructions to his sons, despite the fact that they were already self-controlled and devoted. The citizens of Rishaba's kingdom were also present and listened to the instructions he gave to his sons.

Rishaba said, My dear sons, those who are fortunate enough to have received a human body in this lifetime should not waste their time in the pursuit of sensual pleasure because this leads to misery which is fit for animals like dogs and pigs. The human form of life is meant for enquiry into the absolute truth. Humans should perform austerities to purify the heart and thereby achieve eternal spiritual bliss.

To serve the great souls is the path leading to liberation from suffering. To associate with people who are attached to women and sensual activities is the path that leads to a hellish existence. The great souls view all living beings equally. They are always peaceful, desire the best for everyone, and are never offensive.

People who are trying to develop their love for the Supreme Lord are not eager to associate with materialistic people. Although they are not neglectful of their family duties, they are not overly attached to their

home and family. They are only interested in acquiring what they need for their maintenance.

It is not intelligent to engage in performing undesirable actions only for the sake of sensual satisfaction. It is due to such behaviour in the past that one has received a temporary material body which is in fact the cause of suffering. Anyone who does not enquire into spiritual matters and engages in material activities must accept a material body and all the suffering that involves.

When the soul is covered by ignorance, the mind is dominated by material activities. If one does not develop love for the Supreme Lord one must accept a material body. A person may be well educated, but if they do not understand that the pursuit of sensual satisfaction is futile, they are unaware of their own self-interest. Anyone who tries to find happiness in this temporary material world is a fool.

Sexual attraction reciprocally binds a man and woman. From sexual attraction one becomes attached to home, relatives and wealth. Under this illusion one thinks in terms of 'I' and 'Mine'. When the tie of material attachment in the heart is loosened, the soul gives up the illusory false conception of ego. Thus they are liberated from the material world and attain the spiritual world.

To give up the false identification with the material world one should practice devotion to the Supreme Lord under the guidance of a spiritually advanced person. One should avoid sense pleasures and practice self-restraint. One should try to understand the truth of the miseries of the material world and hear about the Supreme Lord in association with spiritually inclined people.

One should view everyone as equal in the spiritual conception. One should abandon hatred and subdue anger and despondency. Do not identify yourself with the material body and things associated with it.

Observe celibacy and do not speak unnecessarily. Always think of the Supreme Lord and develop spiritual knowledge. By practising devotion in this way, one can give up identifying with the material world which is the cause of all suffering.

By carefully practising this yoga I have described, you will become free from the desire for material gains. One should consider achieving the Supreme Lord's grace and reaching the spiritual world as the ultimate goal of life. Whether you are a monarch teaching their citizens, a parent teaching their children or a guru instructing their disciples, you should instruct your students and not be angry with them if they do not follow your instructions.

People who are engaged in material activities have lost sight of the path to good fortune. They are foolishly preoccupied with fulfilling their passionate desires. In order to find temporary happiness they create an atmosphere of envy and achieve only suffering. A person who understands spiritual knowledge would not engage someone in material activities.

How could a wise or compassionate person seeing someone approaching danger allow them to continue? If one is not capable of rescuing their dependants from the cycle of birth and death, they should not become a parent or spiritual teacher.

Although my body appears material, it is a spiritual body composed of eternal, blissful, knowledge. My spiritual heart is occupied with devotional activities and has forsaken irreligious activities. Because of this, civilised people know me as Rishaba, the best one.

It is the brahmins who study the Vedic knowledge and realise the Vedic conclusions and thus maintain my eternal body in the form of the Vedas. In the brahmins one finds the qualities of supreme goodness:

control of the mind, control of the senses, honesty, compassion, austerity, tolerance and realisation of the position of the living being and God.

I am superior to all the gods and have infinite power and can grant celestial comforts and even liberation, yet the brahmins never ask me for anything. They have no desire to possess anything and only perform devotional activities. One should be respectful to everyone and because I reside in the hearts of all living beings, by respecting them, you are indirectly offering respect to me.

Unless one engages their mind and all their senses in my service they can never gain liberation from the illusory material world and the noose of illusion that binds him to death.

After instructing everyone, Rishaba handed over the rule of his kingdom to his eldest son Bharata and retired from material life. He left his palace to adopt the life of a renunciant and roam around the world. He wandered around speaking to no one and acted as if he was blind, deaf and dumb.

As Rishaba wandered around, people insulted him and gave him trouble. He didn't care about such insults because he understood the physical body was temporary. He didn't become angry with anyone and continued wandering throughout the world unconcerned.

Because Rishaba acted as though he was dumb and materially entangled, no one could see his divine glory. He did this to instruct others. While he was wandering he entered a forest in South India. While he was in the forest a fire began and Rishaba's body was burnt to ashes. We should offer all respect to Rishaba, who out of compassion taught the world the true identity of the soul.

Whoever hears this commentary of Lord Rishaba's activities will achieve devotion to the Supreme Lord and thus be relieved from the troubles of material existence.

Chapter 14 – The Story of King Bharata

When he retired, Rishaba handed over the sovereignty of his kingdom to his eldest son Bharata. Following his father's instructions, Bharata began to rule the kingdom. Bharata was wise and experienced and he governed the kingdom with compassion. Just as his father and grandfather before him, he was a benevolent ruler. He ruled perfectly by engaging himself and his citizens in their respective duties.

King Bharata worshipped the Supreme Lord by performing all the religious sacrifices specified in the Vedic literatures. Bharata enjoyed his royal wealth for many years and at the end of his rule he divided his wealth among his sons and retired from the throne. He left his home and went to Pulaha ashram in Hardwar.

In Pulaha ashram Bharata collected water, fruits and various plants and offered them to the Supreme Lord. By worshipping the Lord in this way, Bharata achieved peace of mind and his heart was purified of any desire for sensual pleasure.

One day while Bharata was performing his activities on the bank of the river, a deer came to the river to drink. While the deer was drinking, a lion that was close by roared very loudly. This frightened the deer and caused it to leap across the river. The deer was pregnant and her baby fell from her womb into the river. Due to her miscarriage and distress, the mother fell onto the bank of the river and died.

Seeing the baby deer floating down the river, Bharata compassionately rescued it and took it back to his shelter. Every day, Bharata would feed and protect the baby deer. Being absorbed in caring for the deer, Bharata gradually became attached to it and neglected his spiritual duties and worship of the Supreme Lord.

Bharata thought to himself, this deer is completely dependent on me for its sustenance and protection. Because it has resorted to me as its shelter, I cannot neglect it. It is important that the civilised human beings protect those who have surrendered to them, even at the expense of their own self-interest. In this way Bharata became attached to the deer and his heart became captivated by affection and would keep it with him while he was sitting, walking, laying down and even eating.

When he would enter the forest to collect firewood and fruit and water, he would always take the deer with him because he was afraid it would be attacked by other animals. He would carry the deer and keep it on his lap, or on his chest, when he slept. He would gain pleasure from patting the animal. Sometimes while he was in the middle of worshipping the Supreme Lord, he would get up to look for the deer and make sure it was safe and comfortable. If he couldn't see the deer, he would feel great anxiety.

Bharata was thus carried away from his practice of yoga and spiritual activities by his attachment to the deer. This attachment must have been due to his past karma as he had already given up his sons and his kingdom, which was difficult to do, for the sake of his spiritual advancement. Soon enough, the time for the death of King Bharata arrived, and he saw that he had foolishly neglected his own soul for the sake of a baby deer.

At the time of his death Bharata could see the deer sitting beside him grieving his death. Because he was absorbed in thought of the deer, he was born into the body of a deer. Although Bharata was now in the body of a deer, he could remember what had happened to him and the events of his past life.

In the deer's body, Bharata was tormented with regret and said, What a miserable situation I am now in. I have strayed from the path of self realisation even though I had given up my family and my kingdom to live

in a secluded ashram in the forest. I had taken shelter of the Supreme Lord and was constantly engaged in hearing and thinking of him. Then I became attached to a deer and now due to my foolishness I have obtained the body of a deer myself. Bharata stayed in that ashram and ate only dry leaves and waited for his death in the body of a deer. One day while he was bathing in the water in that holy place he left the deer's body.

After leaving the body of a deer, he took birth as Jada Bharata, the son of a brahmin. Jada Bharata's father had all the qualities of a brahmin. His senses and mind were controlled and he was educated in the Vedic literature and had knowledge of the self. He was tolerant, contented, compassionate, wise, and never jealous.

Jada Bharata could still remember his previous lives because of the grace of the Lord and he was apprehensive about straying from the path of self realisation again. Always afraid of obstructions on the path of devotion to the Lord, he was careful to avoid any bad association. Although he was always thinking of the Supreme Lord and remembering his qualities and activities, externally he acted as if he was blind, deaf and dim-witted.

His father felt affectionately obligated to teach Jada Bharata all the Vedic regulative principles. But Jada Bharata acted as if he couldn't understand anything. His father tried his best to teach his son, but Jada Bharata did not succeed in mastering his instructions.

In the course of time, Jada Bharata's father died and Jada was left in the care of his elder brothers. His brothers considered him a fool and did not recognise his elevated spiritual position. They consequently stopped trying to educate Jada Bharata any further. His brothers neglected him.

Jada Bharata would eat whatever food he was given or acquired by begging whether it was palatable or not. He didn't eat for the pleasure of his senses because he had ceased to live for any material reason. He was fully absorbed in spiritual consciousness and did not identify himself with the material body.

He only wore a dirty cloth and never covered his body whether it was summer or winter, raining or windy. Because he was always dirty, his spiritual splendour was covered and he was insulted by ignorant people. Because he only wanted food in exchange for his work, his brothers employed him in farming, but he didn't perform his tasks very well. His brothers only gave him worm eaten rice or burnt rice that had stuck to the pot, but Jada Bharata ate whatever he was offered as if it were nectar.

One day, a gang of thieves came searching for a beastly low class human to offer as a sacrifice to the goddess Kali. They came to the rice field where Jada Bharata was guarding the field against deer and wild pigs. Considering Jada Bharata an appropriate choice for a man-animal sacrifice, they tied him tightly with ropes and took him to the temple of the goddess Kali.

They bathed him, covered him with a new cloth, and decorated him with sandalwood paste and garlands of flowers in preparation for the sacrifice. They fed him well and brought him before the goddess Kali along with offerings of incense, flowers, fruits and other articles of worship. They made Jada Bharata sit before the deity while they played drums and offered prayers to the goddess.

Then they took up a razor sharp sword in preparation for offering Jada Bharata's blood to the goddess. The thieves possessed a passionate and ignorant nature and they were overcome with a lust for violence. Thus they were prepared to kill Jada Bharata even though he was a brah-

min, he had no enemies and he was always engaged in thought of the Supreme Lord.

Understanding that the thieves were about to kill the innocent Jada Bharata, the deity of the goddess Kali broke open and the goddess appeared with an intense spiritual effulgence. The goddess was enraged and unable to tolerate the offensive and criminal behaviour of the thieves. She exhibited a frightening form, with blood red eyes and fierce crooked teeth. She jumped from the altar with a terrifying laugh as if she wanted to destroy the world.

Taking the same blade the thieves wanted to use to kill Jada Bharata, she decapitated the thieves and together with her associates she drank the blood which poured from their necks. She became intoxicated from drinking the blood and began to loudly sing and dance while playing with the heads of the thieves as if they were balls. Jada Bharata knew that the soul is distinct from the body and that he is always protected by the Supreme Lord. Even when he was threatened with decapitation, he knew he had nothing to fear.

Sometime after this, King Rahuguna was travelling to Kapilashrama and required another carrier for his palanquin. He came across Jada Bharata and considered him suitable for the job. Although he was unsuitable for the task, the king forced Jada Bharata to carry his palanquin.

However, due to the non-violent nature of Jada Bharata, he was constantly checking in front of him to avoid stepping on ants. Because of this, he wasn't walking at the same speed as the other carriers and so the palanquin was being jolted.

King Rahuguna became annoyed and said to his men, Walk together, why are you carrying this palanquin so erratically? The other carriers said to the King, This new man who has been hired to carry the palan-

quin is not walking smoothly or quickly, so we are unable to perform our work properly.

The King became angry and he sarcastically said to Jada Bharata, What a lot of trouble for you my brother. You must be very tired from having to carry this palanquin alone for such a long way. Your body is obviously not very strong. You must be troubled by old age and it seems your fellow workers are of no help to you. Despite being criticised by the King, Jada Bharata was unaffected. He remained silent and continued carrying the palanquin as before.

When the King's palanquin continued to be carried unevenly, he became very angry and said to Jada Bharata, You fool, are you a living corpse? Why are you ignoring my orders? I will punish you so you will come to your senses and understand that I am your master! Under the influence of passion and ignorance, King Rahuguna scolded Jada Bharata. However, Jada Bharata was free of pride and a friend to all living beings, and he smiled slightly as he spoke to the King.

Jada Bharata said, Your sarcastic words could certainly be considered truthful if I was not different from the body. While the body is indeed the carrier, this body is different to me, because I am the soul residing with this body. Being strong or weak, fat or skinny, old or young, hungry, thirsty, fearful or angry are all qualities of the body. Those who believe they are the body are affected by these things, but for me these things are not reality.

You have called me a living corpse and this is indeed true because the body is destined to die. You think that you are my master, but this is not true because it relates only to the body and is therefore only temporary. The distinction between master and servant comes only from custom. However, if you consider yourself the master, you may order me and tell me what I should do for you. You have assumed that I was a fool and by punishing me, you will bring me to my senses. But if I am indeed a crazy

and stupid person then what purpose will punishment serve? How can you cure a madman by punishing him?

Jada Bharata did not consider himself an elevated soul and accepted that the things happening to him were due to his past karma. He thought that by carrying the palanquin he was removing his acquired karma. After he calmly and peacefully responded to the King's harsh words, Jada Bharata continued carrying the palanquin.

King Rahuguna had faith in discussions relating to the absolute truth. Because he possessed this qualification, Jada Bharata's truthful words destroyed his bodily conception of himself as the master. The king quickly got down from his palanquin and bowed at Jada Bharata's feet so he would be excused for his offence.

King Rahuguna said, My dear brahmin, who are you that moves in this world in disguise and wears a sacred thread. Where have you come from and where do you live? Why have you come here? Have you come for our benefit? I do not fear Yamaraja, the lord of death, nor do I fear the trident of Lord Shiva or the thunderbolt of Lord Indra. But I am terrified of offending a brahmin.

You are wandering around like a dull-witted person and your spiritual wisdom is hidden. Please explain the words you have spoken to us, because none of us have been able to comprehend what you have said. You are a wise sage who is aware of the reality of the soul and therefore you are a representative of the Supreme Lord. Please explain to us the best engagement and the true shelter in this material world.

Are you travelling through the world observing people without revealing your real identity? Although I am very attached to material life and family matters, please instruct me how I can progress in spiritual awareness. Although you claim to be unaffected by fatigue, due to your body when you are carrying the palanquin, there is certainly fatigue.

You have also said that the designations of master and servant are temporary, yet they also exist.

You have also said that bodily characteristics like old and young, fat and thin are not qualities of the soul. But just as when a cooking pot is heated the rice will cook due to its connection with the heat, in the same way, the soul is affected by the body's pleasure and pain due to its connection with the senses and the mind.

And although it is true that the position of king and servant is not eternal, it is the duty of a king to govern the citizens and ensure they conform to the laws. By punishing even those people who are deaf and dull, a king is engaging in his prescribed duties and thereby worshipping the Supreme Lord by his activities. He is therefore released from all kinds of karma. Your words seem incongruous to me. Please excuse my proud and arrogant attitude and forgive me for offending you. Kindly show me your mercy as a friend to the distressed.

Jada Bharata said to the king, Although you use the words of a learned man, you are saying ignorant things. You don't speak of the nature of reality but only mundane social behaviour. These are all superficial material activities and the wise never speak of these things.

Those people who concern themselves only with talks of material relationships and material rituals and activities do not display spiritual development. Although they are familiar with the words of the Vedas, the true purpose of the Vedas is unknown to them. Worldly happiness is like a dream that one eventually realises to be false and not real.

If one's mind is under the control of the modes of material nature, any actions, pious or impious simply increase one's material attachment through the use of the senses. The mind absorbed in material actions is attached to material happiness and sensual enjoyment. The mind there-

fore causes the soul to take birth in many different bodies according to its desires and perceptions.

The mind embraces the material nature and causes the living being to enjoy and suffer continued material actions and reactions. For this reason, the wise speak of the mind as the cause of the living being wandering in the material world in different species of life. The mind absorbed in material activities is like the wick of a lamp burning poorly. The lamp becomes blackened and smoke is produced. However when the mind is detached from sensual activities it is like a lamp burning properly and illumination is produced.

Smell, form, touch, taste and sound, are the objects of the senses from which one acquires knowledge. Speech, movement, sexual intercourse, evacuation, and travelling are the activities of the working senses. There is also the false conception by which the mind has the perception of 'I' and 'Mine'. Wise men consider all these to be the sphere of action for the activities of the mind.

The material elements, nature, karma, lifestyle, and time are the material causes of all these activities of the mind. They are modified into hundreds, thousands and millions of activities. These changes arise under the control of the Supreme Lord and not their own power. These are all activities of the mind that are continuously being created by the material energy. While awake, these activities sometimes appear and during sleep, they may not be displayed. Those who are free from material illusion are aware of this.

The Supreme Lord is the cause of creation and he pervades everything. He is independent, unborn and the shelter of all living beings. He is the reservoir of consciousness and the supreme controller. He is present within the hearts of all living beings, controlling everyone's activities.

Until the soul gains freedom from the contamination and attachment of the material mind and senses, he must wander through different species of life in the material world. The mind is the cause of the miseries of disease, illusion, grief, hatred, greed and attachment. Those who are unaware of this must reside in the material world.

The mind is a formidable and powerful enemy and one should not neglect to control it. One should always try to control the mind by worship of the spiritual teacher and the Supreme Lord, for in this way one can conquer the illusory perceptions of the mind that have covered the soul.

King Rahuguna said, I offer my respects to you, for you are the embodiment of the Supreme Lord. Disguising yourself, you have hidden your spiritual position. I have been bitten by the serpent of pride and your words are the antidote for my material disease. The nectar of your instruction is like cool water for someone who has been scorched by the sun.

I am very curious to understand your teachings about self-realisation. Please explain them to me in simple words so I may comprehend them more clearly. I do not understand how the fatigue that can be directly perceived by moving the body does not actually exist.

Jada Bharata said, The material body is made of the transformation of various material elements. Some of these forms are feet, ankles, knees shoulders, neck and head. On those shoulders rests a palanquin and the body of a king. All these elements are only a transformation of material elements, yet you are residing within that body and are captivated by the illusory conception that you are the king. You have forced these people to suffer in order to carry your palanquin under the pretext that you are engaged in protecting the citizens. This is cruel and foolish behaviour and would not gain you any respect in a society of the wise.

All the moving and non-moving living entities on the earth are simply in different forms. We are all born out of the earth and eventually our bodies disappear and are absorbed back into the earth. All the different bodies are only different functions and products of the material elements. In order to deal with such a situation factually, we should consider the cause of all these material activities and transformations. The varieties of nature come from the earth itself. They are created from atomic particles, yet these particles are temporary. Although the material world appears to be real, eventually it will cease to exist.

All the different forms within the material universe, whether fat, skinny, big, small or inanimate are all temporary phenomena. The different forms are named differently according to their disposition, substance, time and activity. You should understand that they are all created by the duality of material nature and ultimately they do not really exist.

The absolute truth is non-dual and transcendental to material qualities. This is known as spirit. On a higher level of awareness, one can realise that absolute truth as the supreme soul within all living beings. Higher still is the complete realisation of the absolute truth as the supreme person, Bhagavan who is the cause of everything.

It is not possible to realise the absolute truth by austerity, deity worship or following rituals and regulations. The absolute truth is only revealed to those who have covered their entire body with the dust from the feet of the exalted souls. Exalted souls are those who have put an end to their material concerns and only discuss the qualities and activities of the Supreme Lord. By means of association with those great souls, one can destroy the material illusion with the sword of knowledge. By hearing and speaking of the activities and qualities of the Supreme Lord, you can regain your lost consciousness and achieve the spiritual abode.

King Rahuguna said, Birth as a human being is the most exalted position because in a human body we can associate with saints like you

whose hearts have been purified by love and devotion to the Supreme Lord. I have associated with you for a short time, yet I have been liberated from the false prestige and illusion which have caused my bondage in this material world. Let us all worship such great saints wherever and in whatever form they appear in this world and let us bow down before them all. By their grace there will be good fortune for everyone.

After hearing the instructions of Jada Bharata, King Rahuguna came to a full understanding of the position of the soul and was freed from the bodily conception. Anyone who hears and narrates this story of King Bharata will receive all blessings possible. Hearing about the lives of the great saints will fulfil all one's material and spiritual desires.

Chapter 15 – The Life of Ajamila

There was once a brahmin named Ajamila who married a prostitute. He was contaminated by his association with her and he neglected the virtuous way of life. Ajamila earned his livelihood and maintained his family through dishonourable means: stealing, cheating and giving trouble to other people.

Ajamila wasted his life engaging in these kinds of activities. By the time he was 88 years old, Ajamila had ten sons. His youngest son was named Narayana and both his parents doted on the boy.

Ajamila spent a lot of time with Narayana because he was captivated by Narayana's childish speech and activities. Ajamila was always taking care of Narayana and calling to him. Ajamila was so immersed in his family and his son Narayana he forgot that he was growing old and therefore death was not far away.

When Ajamila was dying he was thinking of his son Narayana. As he was dying Ajamila saw three horrible looking creatures coming towards him. They had disfigured, twisted bodies and were carrying nooses. They had come to take Ajamila away to stand before Yamaraja, the lord of death. When Ajamila saw them he was afraid and he loudly cried Narayana, Narayana.

When Ajamila called out the name of Narayana the messengers of Lord Vishnu immediately arrived on the scene. They prevented Yamaraja's servants from forcibly dragging Ajamila's soul from his heart.

The messengers of Yamaraja said, How dare you defy the order of Yamaraja the lord of death? Why are you stopping us from taking Ajamila? Who are you and where have you come from?

The servants of Lord Vishnu smiled and said, If you really are the messengers of Yamaraja then you will be able to describe the true nature of virtue and the characteristics of impiety. What are the principles for determining punishment and who deserves to be punished?

The messengers of Yamaraja said, The principles of virtue are described in the Vedic literature. Whatever is contrary to this is impiety. The gods, the sun, the moon, day, night, water, land and the Lord within the heart bear witness to the actions of every living being.

If these witnesses verify that a living being has performed impious actions, then punishment is appropriate. Anyone who has incurred karmic reactions can be punished according to the nature of the actions they have performed. Everyone who is living within the material world is incurring karma, therefore all living beings can be punished.

A living being's present life indicates their past actions and their likely future actions as well. Depending on their pious or impious actions in this life, the conditions of the living beings' next life are determined. One's happiness or suffering in this lifetime indicates whether one performed pious or impious activities in their previous lives.

Just as someone who is asleep will consider the body they have in their dream to be their self, one will identify with their present material body which has been acquired from the past deeds and act accordingly. No-one is aware of their past or future lives.

The subtle material body consists of the mind, the intelligence and contaminated consciousness or the false conception of accepting the body as the self. This subtle body has strong attachments and desires and these cause the living being to travel from one body to the next in an attempt to fulfil those desires. This attachment binds the living being to their worldly desires and he experiences happiness, sadness, fear and suffering.

The living being is unable to control their mind and senses and the modes of natural nature force them to act. They are like a silkworm that spins itself into a cocoon from which it cannot escape. The living being becomes imprisoned within a web of their own material desires and actions and cannot find a way to escape. Thus they are subject to repeated births and deaths.

It is not possible for the living being to remain inactive, everyone is forced to act according to their attachments and desires which arise from the modes of material nature they have previously acquired. The physical bodies and the subtle bodies that a living being acquires are the form of their material desires.

This is the unfortunate position of the living being though their continuous contact with the material nature. This contact dissolves through contact with devotion to the Supreme Lord.

At the beginning of his life, Ajamila was a brahmin who studied the Vedas. He had pious qualities and his actions were virtuous. He controlled his senses and his mind and he was honest and respectful. He was compassionate to all living beings and never envious or arrogant.

One day when Ajamila was in the forest gathering fruits and flowers he encountered a low class man and a prostitute. The man and the prostitute were both drunk and they were shamelessly singing and laughing as they kissed and embraced one another.

When Ajamila saw the prostitute, his passions were aroused and he could not control them. Ajamila tried to control his desires, but he was unable to control his mind. He constantly thought about the prostitute. Soon he arranged for her to be a servant within his house and he stopped performing the activities of a brahmin.

He began to spend all his money on gifts to please the prostitute. He left his beautiful and respectable wife to enjoy with the prostitute. Be-

cause of the influence of the prostitute, Ajamila lost his intelligence, and he earned money by any degraded occupation so he could maintain the prostitute and their children.

Ajamila has spent his long life living in this way, not caring for the Vedic religious principles. He has lived an impious life addicted to sensual enjoyments. Ajamila has not tried to redeem himself for his irresponsible actions. So because of his impious life, he must be taken to Yamaraja who will give him a suitable punishment that will purify him of his contamination.

After listening to the explanations of Yamaraja's messengers the servants of Lord Vishnu said, It is most unfortunate that those who are responsible for preserving the principles of virtue are about to punish an innocent man. A ruler or monarch must act as the protector of their citizens and treat everyone equally and fairly. But if the ruler or their servants are corrupt and try to punish innocent people, where will the citizens go for refuge and justice?

The people accept the behaviour of the leaders as the correct example to follow. Ajamila has atoned for all his impious actions. In fact he has not only atoned for his actions in this lifetime, but the actions he has performed in millions of lifetimes because he has called out the name of Narayana. Because he called the name while he was in a vulnerable situation, his reciting of the name of the Lord had no ulterior motive and he is now qualified for liberation.

Throughout his life Ajamila would call his son Narayana. Although he was calling his son's name, he has still recited the name of Narayana. By such recitation, he had purified himself of the reactions of all the impious actions he has performed.

Calling the name of the Lord is the most effective form of atonement for everyone. Calling out the Lord's name will attract his attention and the Supreme Lord will then protect that person.

Even if one follows all the Vedic rituals for atonement they will not be purified as much as by once calling out the name of the Lord. Atonement may give one release from karmic reactions, but reciting the Lord's name will remind one of the Lord and awaken awareness of the Lord's qualities and activities.

Rituals that are performed for atonement will only temporarily relieve one of karmic reaction, because after atonement one will again be attracted to material activities. But calling the name of the Lord purifies the mind of material desire.

You should not take Ajamila to Yamaraja for punishment because as he was dying he loudly called out the name of Narayana. That has liberated him from all karmic reaction. Anyone who calls the name of the Lord is liberated from karmic reactions, even if they are joking when they say the name, or are only singing for enjoyment, or they are thinking of someone else as Ajamila was.

Regardless of how impious someone is, if they recite the name of the Lord, they are released from all karmic reactions to their deeds. Anyone who practices austerity, charity and other sacrificial vows can remove the reactions to impious actions, but those things cannot eradicate material desires. If one recites the name of the Lord, they will not only be freed from all material contamination but also from all their material desires will be destroyed.

Just as a fire turns wood to ash, reciting the name of the Lord, whether knowingly or not, will burn to ashes all one's karmic reactions. If someone takes medicine without knowing how it will work, the medicine

will still cure them of their disease. So even if one is unaware of the benefits of calling the name of the Lord, it will still produce the results.

The servants of Lord Vishnu then released Ajamila from the ropes of Yamaraja's messengers. Yamaraja's servants then left to report everything that had happened to their master, Yamaraja.

After Ajamila was released from the bonds of Yamaraja's messengers, he bowed down to the servants of Lord Vishnu to offer them respect. He was very grateful to them for saving him from the bonds of Yamaraja. The servants of Lord Vishnu could understand that Ajamila was about to speak to them and thus they immediately disappeared.

Ajamila had heard all that had been said about his impious actions and the value of reciting the name of the Lord. He was feeling great remorse for his actions. Ajamila said, How regrettable it is that I could not control my sensual desires. I was degraded from my elevated position as a brahmin and thus wasted my valuable human life. I have acted in such a terrible way by dishonouring my family traditions. I abandoned my virtuous wife to enjoy with a prostitute. I deserve to be condemned for such actions.

Someone who has ignored the principles of virtue and acted in such a dishonourable way deserves to be punished for their actions. Was I dreaming when I saw those fearsome people approach me with their noose? And where are those wonderful and beautiful people who saved me? I must have previously done something virtuous to have been able to see them.

If I had not performed virtuous actions in the past it would not have been possible for me to call out the name of the Lord at the moment of my death. Although I am an impious person, I must take advantage of this opportunity and try to control my mind and senses so I do not descend into the ignorance of material life again.

Because I considered myself the body I was under the control of my sensual desires and thus imprisoned by my material desires. Now I shall abandon my material desires and free myself from the suffering of material existence. Because I have called out the name of the Lord my mind is becoming purified. I will no longer consider myself the body and I will concentrate my mind on the Supreme Lord.

Thus Ajamila freed himself from his material consciousness and left his home and departed to the Vishnu temple at Hardwar. In Hardwar he stayed at the Vishnu temple and practised devoted service to the Lord. He withdrew his mind from the senses and worldly pleasures and focused it in concentration on Lord Vishnu.

When his mind became fixed in its concentration on the Lord, Ajamila saw the servants of Lord Vishnu come before him again. He respectfully bowed before them. Ajamila then left his material body and attained a spiritual form suitable for a servant of the Lord.

Because Ajamila had engaged in stealing, lying, drinking and other impious activities, he should have been taken away by Yamaraja's servants for a suitable punishment. He was saved by calling out the name of the Lord.

Anyone who desires to be free from material suffering should recite the name of the Lord and absorb their mind in concentration of the Lord's qualities and activities. This is the only method that will enable one to purify their heart of all material desires.

Anyone who hears or recites this story of Ajamila will not have to suffer the karmic reactions to material life.

Chapter 16 – Lord Narasimha, Prahlada and Hiranyakashipu

After Lord Boar killed the demon Hiranyaksa, his brother Hiranyakashipu was tortured by rage and grief. His eyes blazing and biting his lips, Hiranyakashipu said to his demoniac associates, My beloved brother Hiranyaksa was slain by an inferior enemy. Although the Supreme Lord should be impartial, he sided with the gods after being worshipped by them.

The Supreme Lord has abandoned his pure nature of treating everyone equally. He has been affected by the illusory power by taking the form of a boar. I will avenge my brother and find peace when I cut off his head with my trident. When I have destroyed him, this will also destroy the gods. Just as cutting a tree at its roots destroys the branches, killing the Supreme Lord will kill those for whom he is their very life.

In the meantime, you should all go to the earth and destroy everyone who is practising austerity, studying the Veda and giving in charity. These activities are the foundation of Lord Vishnu's existence and when the brahmins are killed there will be no one to perform sacrifices. Go to those places where there are brahmins, cows and the Veda and set fire to them so they are all destroyed.

Being ordered by Hiranyakashipu, his servants bowed before him and being pleased at giving trouble to others, they proceeded to terrorise the pious people of the earth. They burnt the orchards, fields, gardens and forests. They set fire to the cities, villages and the ashramas of the sages. When the people were constantly tormented by the followers of Hiranyakashipu they stopped performing sacrifice. The gods, deprived of their share of the rituals, left the celestial realm to wander over the earth.

Hiranyakashipu desired to become immortal and invincible and the unrivalled ruler of the universe. To achieve this he began practising a severe penance by stretching his arms upward toward the sky while standing on the tips of his big toes. Because of his penance, a light as radiant as the sun began emanating from his head and the beams drove all the gods back to their own realm.

A fire was generated from the top of his head, and the fire and smoke spread throughout the universe scorching all the worlds. The rivers and oceans became turbulent, the continents and mountains of the earth began shaking and the stars fell from their orbits.

The gods were afflicted by the harsh austerities being performed by Hiranyakashipu and so they approached Lord Brahma and said, Due to the heat being generated by Hiranyakashipu, we can no longer reside in the celestial realms. If you consider it the right thing to do, would you please extinguish this fire before all those who worship you are destroyed.

Because you attained your position as ruler of the worlds by practising harsh austerities, Hiranyakashipu intends to do the same so he can achieve an exalted position like yours. You are the ruler of this universe, so you should take the proper action.

After hearing the appeal of the gods, Brahma and his associates went to the hermitage of Hiranyakashipu. They couldn't see Hiranyakashipu at first, because he had been standing there so long his body was covered by an ant hill, overgrown grass and bamboo and the ants had eaten away his flesh. When Brahma saw Hiranyakashipu he was amazed at how he was heating the entire world by his austerity.

Brahma said, Hiranyakashipu, please come here. You have achieved the purpose of your austerity because I have come to grant you a blessing. You may ask me for whatever benediction you desire. Your stamina is

amazing. Your body has been eaten away by all kinds of insects and worms yet you have managed to keep your life air flowing through your body.

No one else has ever performed such austerity in the past, and no one in the future will be able to do this. How can anyone stay alive without even drinking water for such a long period of time? Your self discipline has allowed you to perform austerity that is impossible for even the greatest of saints, and therefore you have defeated me. Because of this I will grant you whatever benediction you desire.

After saying this, Lord Brahma sprinkled celestial water from his waterpot on Hiranyakashipu's body. When the water touched Hiranyakashipu, his body was fully restored and he arose from the anthill with a strong and youthful body.

When he saw Lord Brahma standing before him, Hiranyakashipu was elated and he bowed before Brahma and said, I bow before the Supreme Lord of this world, who creates, maintains and destroys the universe. You are the source of all the living beings within the material world. You are the controller of the mind, intelligence and the material nature. You are the supreme soul of all living beings.

You are without beginning or end and the supreme inspiration. As time, you decrease the length of everyone's life yet you are unaffected by time yourself. You are the supreme controller and the fundamental cause of all life. There is nothing that exists apart from you. You are the sustainer of the universe yet you transcend the modes of material nature. You are changeless, yet the oldest, the supreme one.

Please grant me the blessing benediction that I will not be killed by any of the living beings who are created by you. Let me not be killed inside or outside, during the day or during the night. Let me not be killed by any weapon and not on the ground or in the sky.

Let me not meet death at the hands of men or beasts, living or non-living being nor at the hand of any god, demon or serpent. Further grant me the blessing that I will be unmatched in fighting, always be victorious in battle and the ruler of all embodied beings.

Brahma said, Hiranyakashipu, the blessing you seek are rarely obtained by anyone. But I am pleased with your austere penances, so despite the fact that these blessings are difficult to achieve, I will give them to you. After saying this Brahma departed.

Hiranyakashipu subjugated the rulers of all the planets and brought all the three worlds under his control. He began living in the celestial realm in the palace of Indra, the king of heaven. Indra's palace had floors made of emeralds and steps made of coral. The walls were made from crystal and the seats were decorated with rubies. The white silk bedding was adorned with pearls.

Hiranyakashipu was always intoxicated on strong wine and his red eyes rolling because of his drunkenness. He was honoured with presentations and gifts from important people. He was honoured with sacrifices and great gifts and appropriated it all for himself.

Although he became the absolute ruler of all the worlds and enjoyed as many pleasures as he liked, Hiranyakashipu did not conquer his own senses and so he remained dissatisfied. For a long time Hiranyakashipu lived in such a way, arrogant and proud of his affluence he paid no regard to the rules of the Vedic scriptures.

All the residents of the universe were afraid and in anxiety because of his punitive rule and control of Hiranyakashipu. So they sought the protection of Lord Vishnu. They prayed, Let us offer our homage in the direction where we will find the Supreme Lord, that region where the peaceful, renounced and pure souls go and never return.

Then they heard a loud resonating voice that said, O best of the wise, there will be good fortune for you all. The evil acts of the demoniac Hiranyakashipu are known to me and I will put an end to them. Please be patient and wait until the right time.

Those who are hostile toward the gods, the Vedas, the cows, the Brahmins, the virtuous and me, the Supreme Lord, will very shortly meet with destruction. His son Prahlada is virtuous and has no hostility toward anyone. When Hiranyakashipu is violent towards his own son, I will kill him despite the blessings he has received from Brahma.

The words of the Lord pacified them and they returned to their homes secure in the knowledge that Hiranyakashipu would soon be dead. Hiranyakashipu's son Prahlada was endowed with all the virtues. He had control over his senses and his mind. He possessed a noble character and was always honest. He was kind and friendly to all living beings. He was never arrogant or proud despite his good education, nobility and wealth.

Although he was the son of the demoniac Hiranyakashipu, he was devoted to the Supreme Lord. He was never perturbed even in the midst of the greatest danger and he considered material things to be insubstantial. He restrained his senses and his mind and was therefore devoid of the demoniac nature.

In gatherings of the saints and sages Prahlada would be cited as an example of a virtuous and devoted soul. Even as a young boy, Prahlada was not interested in toys. His mind was always fully absorbed in thought of Lord Krishna and thus he was not interested in the activities of the material world. As Prahlada sat, walked, ate, drank or talked he was always embraced by Govinda and impervious to anything outside of that.

Prahlada would be absorbed in thoughts of the Lord and so he would sometimes cry or laugh aloud. At other times he would should loudly or dance in bliss. Sometimes he would be lost in his thoughts of Krishna and would imitate his activities. At times he would be overcome with spiritual ecstasy and would stand silently with his hairs standing on end and his eyes filled with tears. Prahlada was harassed by Hiranyakashipu even though he was his son.

One day Hiranyakashipu took his son Prahlada on his lap and said, What do you think is good Prahlada? Prahlada said, I think people are always distressed because they are encumbered with false ideas of I and Mine. So it is good if people give up all their material pursuits and reside in the forest where they can seek the refuge of the Supreme Lord.

When Hiranyakashipu heard this he laughed and said, How has your intelligence been corrupted with such ideas?" Then he said to his assistants, Please make sure Prahlada is protected at school so he will not be subject to the bad influence of any worshippers of Vishnu who are present there.

When Prahlada returned to school his teachers spoke gently to him and said, Prahlada, how has your intelligence been perverted? Please tell us the enemy who has taught you these ideas. Answer us truthfully.

Prahlada said, I bow down before the Supreme Lord whose power of illusion has created the false idea of friends and enemies. The wise do not consider some people their friends or enemies, they understand that everyone is a soul beloved of the Lord. Like metal attracted to a magnet, my consciousness is always drawn to the Supreme Lord Vishnu.

Hearing this Prahlada's teachers became angry and said, Prahlada is damaging our reputation with his stupidity. Bring us a cane and maybe we can teach him something that way. Prahlada's teachers threatened

him in various ways and began to teach him about the goals of human life: religion, wealth and pleasure.

Later, when his teachers judged he had mastered the lessons they taught him, they brought him before his father. Hiranyakashipu greeted Prahlada affectionately and placed him on his lap and said, Prahlada you have been working very hard at school. Please tell me what you think is the best thing you have learnt.

Prahlada said, There are nine forms of devotion to Lord Vishnu, hearing his names, singing about him, bowing before him, worshipping Vishnu, offering service to him, being his friend, praying to him, remembering him and surrendering one's soul to him. I consider this to be the supreme knowledge. When Hiranyakashipu heard this his lips began to quiver and he became extremely angry. He said to Prahlada's teachers, What nonsense have you taught this boy? Have you disregarded me and joined the side of my enemies?

Prahlada's teacher said, O King Hiranyakashipu, I did not teach Prahlada these things. Please do not be angry and blame us in this way. Hiranyakashipu said to Prahlada, You bring shame to our family Prahlada. If your teachers have not taught you this, then how did you learn these things?

Prahlada said, The mind doesn't fix itself on Krishna because of the advice of another, or what someone does. It does not develop in those who do not control their senses. People who are too attached to material pleasures live a life that leads them into a hellish condition.

They look for guidance among those who regard material success as the goal of life. They care like blind persons being led by the blind. They cannot understand that the goal of human life is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Their attachments continuously bind them to this world of suffering.

On hearing this Hiranyakashipu became enraged and his eyes turned red. He shouted at Prahlada's teachers, Take this boy away from my presence and kill him immediately! This boy is like the murderer of my brother. He has given up his own family to worship Lord Vishnu who killed his uncle. This boy is only 5 years old yet he has given up the love of his father and mother. Such an untrustworthy person would be unlikely to behave well toward Vishnu either.

Even if it is someone else's child, if they are beneficial they should be treated like a son. But if a son born of oneself is inimical, they should be rejected, just as one would cut off a diseased limb to save the rest of the body. This Prahlada is my enemy masquerading as my friend and an enemy should be killed by any means possible.

As they were commanded by their master Hiranyakashipu, the demons began attacking Prahlada and piercing him with the tridents. Prahlada sat silently meditating of the Supreme Lord. Because Prahlada was fully absorbed in the Supreme Lord, all the attempts on Prahlada's life were ineffectual.

Hiranyakashipu began trying other ways to kill Prahlada. He tried to trample him with elephants, he threw him from a great height, he tried to poison him, put him amongst snakes, put him in the snow, in a fire, imprisoned him, starved him and tried to crush him with heavy rocks. But Hiranyakashipu was unable to harm Prahlada in any way and he became very anxious.

He thought to himself, I have tried many ways to kill Prahlada but despite all this he has survived by his own strength. Although he is only a small child he is not afraid as if he was immortal. Then his servant spoke to him and said, My Lord, I see no reason for you to be so miserable. You have conquered the entire universe. Prahlada is only a child, you should merely tie him up so he will not escape until your teacher Sukra returns. His intelligence will improve with age.

Hiranyakashipu agreed and said, Teach Prahlada the duties of the royal householders. So Prahlada was taught the three kinds of material advancement – occupational duty, wealth creation and sensual satisfaction. When the teachers went home for the day, Prahlada's classmates would call him to come and play.

Prahlada said to his classmates, Even in childhood one should seek knowledge about the Supreme Lord and liberation from this world of suffering. Although our lives are temporary, a human life is not easily achieved and it gives the opportunity to worship Lord Vishnu.

The happiness available through sensual pleasure is available in any species of life. Such happiness comes to one automatically according to destiny, the same way suffering comes to us without making any effort. So it is a waste of your valuable lifespan to work hard for sensual pleasures. One should work toward liberation while they are in good health.

A human being has a life span of 100 years but half of those years are wasted. One spends time sleeping, 20 years are lost in childhood and another 20 when one is old and infirm. One who is too attached to sensual pleasures and family life also wastes the remaining years. He forgets that the purpose of human life is realisation of the absolute truth and is distracted by maintaining his family. Although he sees misery all around him, he does not become averse to the world.

So he becomes tightly bound by the ropes of attachment to worldly pleasure and is unable to liberate himself. Those whose minds are absorbed in sensual pleasures are thus imprisoned with chains of their own making. You should all therefore avoid associating with people whose minds are absorbed in sensual pleasures and seek the protection of the Supreme Lord because absorbing your mind in him is the means of liberation. t

The Supreme Lord is present within all species of life whether moving or non-moving. He is also present within the inert material elements. Although he is undivided he is present everywhere. Because he conceals himself with his illusory power and in this way creates the modes of material nature. One should always try to please the supreme person by giving up attachment to material things and showing compassion to all living beings.

What can those who please the Supreme Lord fail to achieve? He is the origin of everything in existence. Why would we aim for material benefits or pursue occupational duty, wealth creation and sensual satisfaction when these are the product of material nature? These goals are only valuable when done with the goal of pleasing the Lord.

The Supreme Lord taught this spiritual knowledge to the great sage Narada and Narada taught it to me. Prahlada's classmates said, Prahlada, we are all just children and we live within this palace. We do not know any other teachers apart from Sanda and Amarka. We have doubts that a child like you has been taught by a great sage like Narada, give us some reason to believe you.

Prahlada said, When my father Hiranyakashipu was practising his severe penances so he could gain a benediction from Brahma, the gods took the opportunity created by his absence to conquer the rest of the demons in battle.

When the demons heard of the plan of the gods and saw the strength of their forces, they were afraid of being killed and they all retreated in different directions. To save themselves they left their homes, wives and children behind. The gods ransacked my father, Hiranyakashipu's palace. Indra captured Hiranyakashipu's queen, my mother and she cried out in fear.

The great sage Narada appeared and said to Indra, This woman is innocent and has committed no crime. She is the wife of another man. You should not drag her off in this way, you should let her go. Indra replied, This woman is pregnant with a child of the great demon Hiranyakshipu. She will remain our prisoner until the child is born and then she will be free to go.

Narada replied, This woman's child is innocent. In fact he is a servant of the Supreme Lord Vishnu. He is powerful and you will be unable to harm him. When Indra heard this from Narada he respected the words of the sage and set my mother free and returned to the celestial realm. Narada took my mother to his ashram and said, You may stay here under my protection until your husband returns.

While my mother was staying in the ashram Narada gave her instruction on virtue and knowledge of the soul. I also heard those instructions and I remembered them. It is only necessary to trust these instructions and then it will be possible for you to remove the illusion of identifying the soul with the body. The material body undergoes constant change and transformation. However there is no transformation of the soul.

The soul is eternal and it does not decay. It is individual and the witness and knower. It is untouched by matter, self-luminous and pervades the body. Knowing these characteristics of the soul, the wise can renounce false ideas of I and Mine. Just as a scientist can extract gold from ore, a person with spiritual knowledge can distinguish their soul from their body.

There are said to be eight material elements and soul exists as their coordinator. The body is the combination of these elements and it is here that one should discriminate to find the soul by eliminating what it is not and saying, This is not it and that is not it.

By distinguishing between matter and the soul this way, using one's intelligence and a purified mind, the soul can be realised. You can know the nature of the wind by the fragrances it has, and in the same way you can know the nature of the soul by distinguishing it from matter. Material things are created, maintained and destroyed.

The soul is subject to the influence of the qualities of material nature which is caused by ignorance and is unreal. Like a dream, one suffers the illusion of material existence. The easiest way to gain liberation from the bondage of material existence is to develop love for the Supreme Lord.

This can be achieved by offering service to a spiritual teacher. One should worship the Lord and hear about his qualities and activities. The Supreme Lord resides within the heart of every living being. Remembering this, one should offer respects to every living being.

By doing this one can conquer the passions that bind the soul to this world: lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride and envy. By performing service to the Supreme Lord one can achieve love for him. Then one experiences tears and their hair stands on end, a their voice trembles when they hear about the Lord's qualities and activities. Sometimes laughing or crying out, sometimes meditative and offering respects to all seeing the Lord within them. They unashamedly loudly sing the names of the Lord.

Because their body and mind are always attuned to the Lord, they become liberated from material obstacles. Their material desires are incinerated and they achieve the protection of the Supreme Lord. Because they are constantly in touch with the Supreme Lord, their material existence ceases and they experience spiritual joy. Those wise know this as the bliss of the spiritual existence. Therefore my friends devotedly sing the glories of the Supreme Lord who resides within the core of your heart.

What is difficult about this worship? He resides in the hearts of all. He is the friend and benefactor of all living beings, so why would people not want to worship him? What is the need of all these efforts to obtain sensual enjoyment? Wealth, friendship, spouse and children, houses, land, animals and sensual pleasure are all temporary. How can these temporary things bring real pleasure to anyone who understands their real self is eternal?

Even life on the celestial planets are temporary. Although there are enhanced pleasures available in the celestial sphere even they have the disturbances caused by the material nature. However, the Supreme Lord has no faults therefore one should worship him to obtain self-realisation.

Someone may think they are very wise and intelligent and can obtain pleasure from the rituals described in the Vedas, but in fact they achieve the opposite. Everyone in the material world performs their activities with the aim of achieving happiness and avoiding suffering. However, this merely leads to unhappiness because the attempt to achieve material happiness conceals the joy that comes from detachment from material activities.

The physical body by which one desires to secure enjoyment is perishable, so what lasting value can be found in all the things connected to the body like family, home, a kingdom or wealth? Eventually one will be separated from all these things.

These perishable things are of no value to the eternal soul. While the body exists they seem to have value, but they are worthless in achieving eternal happiness. It should be understood that the living being suffers in all phases of their life. This is a result of their previous karma. So why engage in material activities when they only cause suffering? The body one has at present is a result of one's previous actions and the actions

one performs in this body determines the next body one receives. The cycle of birth and death continues in this way.

Those who worship the Supreme Lord will receive all their material sustenance, therefore one should always worship the Supreme Lord without ulterior motives. The beloved Supreme Lord has created everything by his different energies.

Whether one is a god or demon, human, ghost, or celestial being, anyone who serves the Supreme Lord with devotion is blessed. Virtuous conduct or extensive education does not suffice in giving pleasure to the Supreme Lord. Neither will austerity, charity, sacrifice, cleanliness or vows. The Lord can only be satisfied by sincere and pure devotion, everything else is external

Therefore, devote yourself to the service of the omnipresent Supreme Lord and consider him as dear to you as your own self. Serving the Supreme Lord and perceiving his presence everywhere is the supreme welfare for people in this world.

Prahlada's friends all accepted and followed his teachings and not the lessons their teachers gave them. When their teachers noticed that all the students were becoming devoted to the Supreme Lord they fearfully went to see Hiranyakashipu. On hearing this, Hiranyakashipu became enraged and harshly scolded Prahlada although he did not deserve to be punished.

Prahlada was humble and restrained and he stood before Hiranyakashipu with his palms together in respect. But Hiranyakashipu hissed like a snake that had been trodden on as he said to Prahlada, You are foolish and insolent and a curse in my family. Today I shall dispatch you to the abode of Yamaraja, the lord of death because you have stubbornly disobeyed my commands. The entire universe trembles in fear of me

when I am angry. Whose strength did you rely on to fearlessly and foolishly violate my commands?

Prahlada said, Not only you and I, but everyone, whether animate or inanimate, higher or lower, including Brahma obtains their strength from the Supreme Lord. The Supreme Lord controls everything. He is time. He is the strength of our mind and senses. He is the greatest of all the living beings. It is his power that creates, preserves and then destroys this entire material world.

You should abandon this impious behaviour. Treat everyone equally and do not consider anyone your friend or your enemy. Your only enemy is your uncontrolled mind. There have been many people before you that arrogantly regarded themselves as victorious over their enemies in all directions, even though they had failed to conquer their own mind and senses. But those who have conquered their mind and senses have no enemies within this world.

Hiranyakashipu said, You obviously want to die since you are arrogantly boasting and talking nonsense. You are a foolish scoundrel. You speak of a Supreme Lord who controls all, but where is he if he is someone other than me? If he is omnipresent then why can't I see him in this pillar? Let me see your Lord protect you now, because you are boasting so much that I am going to cut off your head.

Hiranyakashipu was enraged and repeatedly abused his son with sharp words. He jumped up with his sword in hand and hit the pillar. Immediately there was a terrible noise that sounded like the universe itself had been split apart. It was so loud it could be heard in the celestial realms and Brahma and the gods thought the universe was about to end.

When Hiranyakashipu heard the sound he was amazed. No one in the palace could understand where the noise had come from and they all

became afraid. The Supreme Lord wanted to show that the words of his servants are true, and so he demonstrated his omnipresence by appearing from the pillar.

He showed himself in the form of half man and half lion. Hiranyakashipu was astonished to see the form coming out of the pillar and he couldn't tell what sort of creature it was. In his amazement he said, It is neither man nor beast, what is this creature that is half human and half lion?

Hiranyakashipu looked at the frightening form of Lord Narasimha. He had furious eyes of molten gold, lethal teeth and his glossy mane caused his face to appear enormous. He brandished his tongue around like a sharp sword and looked around with a terrible frown. His ears were rigid on the top of his head and his open jaws and nostrils resembled a gaping cavern. His neck was short and thick. His chest was wide and his waist was thin. Looking like lunar rays, white hairs covered his body. His arms with their deadly claws stretched in all directions.

Hiranyakashipu thought to himself, Maybe this is the plan of Hari, the master of illusion, to try and kill me. But it is futile because no-one can defeat me. Saying this, Hiranyakashipu armed himself with a club and rushed toward Lord Narasimha with a roar. When Hiranyakashipu attacked Lord Narasimha, he became invisible within Lord Narasimha's effulgence. There was nothing surprising in the disappearance of the personified darkness into the effulgence of the light incarnate.

Hiranyakashipu furiously attacked Lord Narasimha with his club. But like Garuda seizing a snake the Lord seized Hiranyakashipu. Lord Narasimha then let Hiranyakashipu escape from his grasp like Garuda playing with his prey. The gods who were watching the fight were disturbed when they saw this.

Hiranyakashipu thought the Lord had released him because he was afraid of his strength. He armed himself with sword and his shield and furiously attacked the Lord again. Hiranyakashipu moved as swiftly as a hawk brandishing his sword and shield, Lord Narasimha let out a loud piercing laugh seized Hiranyakashipu.

Lord Narasimha captured him as easily as a snake captures a mouse. While Hiranyakashipu limbs were thrashing around as he tried to escape, Lord Narasimha placed him on his thighs and pierced him with his fingernails. Lord Narasimha's fierce and angry eyes were difficult to look at. His mouth was wide open as he licked the blood from his mane and lips. He looked like a lion wearing a garland of the entrails of an elephant he has just killed.

He tore out Hiranyakashipu's heart and then threw his body aside. Then he turned to the thousands of Hiranyakashipu's soldiers who had assembled there and killed them all with just his fingernails. Lord Narasimha shook his mane and scattered the clouds. His fierce and glaring eyes outshone the radiance of the stars and the oceans became turbulent from his breathing. Lord Narasimha sat down on Hiranyakashipu's throne, his appearance was so fearsome that no one dared go near him.

When the gods and their wives heard that Hiranyakashipu, who had terrified the entire universe, had been slain they became joyful and in appreciation they rained flowers on Lord Narasimha. The gods, the sages, the residents of the celestial planets, and many others assembled near Lord Narasimha and with folded palms hands they all praised the Lord.

Brahma said, I bow before the unlimited Lord and offer you homage. You create, preserve and destroy the entire universe without undergoing any change yourself. Shiva said, My Lord, at the closing of the era

you should display your rage. Hiranyakashipu's son Pahlada has approached you, please protect him.

Indra said, Due to the demoniac activities of Hiranyakashipu our hearts were overcome with darkness. But our hearts are really your residence. Those of us who are devoted to serving you do not care even for liberation from suffering so of what use is material prosperity?

The gods and others present were all very afraid of the angry and fearsome form of Lord Narasimha and so they could not go forward to stand before him. Lord Brahma said to Pahlada, You should go forward and pacify Lord Narasimha, he is still enraged at your father.

The child slowly moved toward Lord Narasimha and prostrated his body on the ground before him. Seeing the boy fallen at his feet, Lord Narasimha felt great compassion for him and he placed his hand on Pahlada's head and thereby removed his fear.

Because of the touch of Lord Narasimha, Pahlada was completely purified, there were tears in his eyes and he was overcome with joy. With his mind concentrated on Lord Narasimha, Pahlada praised him with a voice choked with emotion. I have been born in a family of demons, so how can I offer prayers to you? Brahma and the gods were unable to please you with their words, so how can you be pleased with the words of someone like me?

I do not think that wealth, noble birth, austerity, great learning, intelligence, strength or beauty will satisfy the Supreme Lord. The Supreme Lord is only pleased by devotion. A person who possesses all the brahminical qualifications but has no devotion to the Lord, is not as fortunate as the low class person who has surrendered their body, mind and words to serving the Lord. Those who are devoted to the Supreme Lord purify their entire family lineage, unlike a person who is respected by society.

The Lord does not require anything from anyone. When someone offers him something it benefits the person who is making the offering because the Lord is independent. So I should not consider myself unfit to offer prayers to you. However unqualified I may be, I will be purified by offering prayers to the Lord to the best of my ability.

Lord Narasimha, now that Hiranyakashipu is dead, please give up your anger. Even a pious person is happy when a snake or scorpion is killed. Everyone is now joyful because the tyrant Hiranyakashipu is dead. I am not afraid of your present form, not your fearsome appearance, your angry eyes and sharp teeth or your garland of intestines or your blood-soaked mane. I am not afraid of your roar that scares even the elephants or your sharp nails.

I am however, frightened of the prospect of repeated birth and death in this material world. Bound by my past actions I was born into a family of demons, when will you be pleased to summon me to your lotus feet, the only source of refuge for the soul.

In this world a parent is not the protector of a child and medicine is not the remedy for suffering. Those how are not favoured with your grace can do nothing to improve their situation. Whatever they do to relieve their suffering is a temporary solution. Everyone within this material world is searching for pleasure, but it is like a mirage in the desert. There is none to be found.

O Supreme Lord, without offering service to you by praying, offering all actions to you, singing your glories, offering homage to you, always remembering you and hearing about your wonderful qualities, one cannot achieve freedom from suffering.

The prayers of Prahlada appeased Lord Narasimha and he was no longer angry. Lord Narasimha said, Prahlada my blessings to you, for you have pleased me. I am the bestower of all benedictions and you

should ask for whatever you desire. Anyone who has pleased me does not need to worry about suffering any further affliction. Therefore the wise always try to please me, because I am the giver of all benedictions.

Prahlada considered any material benedictions to be obstacles to spiritual fulfilment and so he smiled and said, Please do not tempt me with material pleasures, for I have been born into a family of demons and so I am attached to material enjoyments. I do not want to be attached to material things because I desire liberation from birth and death.

Anyone who accepts worldly gains as reward for serving you, is a merchant who wishes to profit from their service. But I am your servant who has no desire for profit, and you are my master who requires nothing and is independent. It is not necessary for you to give me anything at all. However, if you would like to give me a blessing, then I would only ask that you destroy all my material desires.

Lord Narasimha said, Although you do not want any material benefits, I instruct you to rule over your father's kingdom. Even while you are living within the material world, you should always think of me. Anyone who remembers me and my activities will eventually be liberated from material life. After saying this, the Supreme Lord disappeared.

Anyone who hears this story of Lord Narasimha and Prahlada will certainly reach the spiritual realm and be liberated from all suffering.

Chapter 17 – Gajendra the Elephant

King Pariksit said, Would you please describe how Gajendra, the king of the elephants was attacked by a crocodile and saved by the Supreme Lord Hari?

Suka Goswami said, There is a place with a mountain named Trikuta. This mountain is surrounded by an ocean of milk and is very beautiful.

The mountain has three peaks, made of gold, silver and iron. The mountain is decorated with jewels and fine trees and plants. There are waterfalls on the mountain which create a wonderful sound and a soothing, fresh atmosphere. The base of the mountain is washed by waves of milk and there are emeralds on all the shores of the ocean.

The gods who live on the heavenly planets go to this mountain for leisure and maintain beautiful gardens in the valleys of the mountain. These gardens are full of trees with fruits and flowers and many varieties of singing birds. There are lakes and rivers with crystal clear water and many beaches covered with jewels.

There is a large lake which is full of golden lotus flowers. It is surrounded by many varieties of beautiful flowers and decorated with lovely swans and other birds. Gajendra, the leader of the elephants lived in the forest in one of these valleys. Accompanied by his female elephants he would go to the lake to drink and bathe.

Surrounded by the other elephants in his herd, the females and the young elephants, Gajendra went into the lake and bathed himself and drank the water. Like a human who is ignorant of spiritual knowledge and therefore too attached to the members of their family, Gajendra played in the water with his female elephants and his children. He sprayed them all with water from his trunk not aware of any impending danger.

While Gajendra was bathing in the lake he was attacked by a crocodile. The crocodile bit Gajendra on the leg and although Gajendra was strong, he could not free himself from the crocodile's grip. The female elephants saw that Gajendra was trapped and they began to cry. None of the other elephants could rescue Gajendra from his predicament because the crocodile was too strong.

The crocodile would try to pull Gajendra into the lake and Gajendra would try and pull the crocodile onto the land. The crocodile and the elephant fought with each other for a thousand years in this way. Because of the long fight, Gajendra's physical and mental strength was greatly weakened. But the crocodile was a creature of the water and so he increased in strength as the battle went on.

When Gajendra realised that he was completely in the grip of the crocodile and unable to save himself, he realised his life was in danger. He considered the situation thoroughly and thought to himself, The other elephants, my wives, my children and my friends were unable to save me from my dangerous position. None of them can do anything to help me. It is destiny that has caused me to be attacked by this crocodile. The only solution is for me to seek the protection of the Supreme Lord, who is the refuge of everyone.

Anyone who is being pursued by death should seek shelter of the Supreme Lord for even death feels in fear of him. I will surrender to the most powerful supreme person who is the actual shelter of everyone. Then Gajendra concentrated his mind on the Supreme Lord and chanted a mantra he had previously learnt.

Gajendra chanted, I offer my respect and obeisance to the Supreme Lord. He is the original person and the cause of all existence and should be worshipped by everyone. The Supreme Lord is the cause of this entire universe and the sustainer of all things. He is completely independent. I surrender to that supreme person. The Supreme Lord is both the

original cause and the ultimate conclusion. He transcends everything. May the Supreme Lord protect me.

My shelter is that supreme person who even great sages who perfectly execute their vows, look upon everyone equally and are compassionate to all living beings, desire to see. The Supreme Lord has no material qualities. He incarnates in the form of a human being to fulfil his purpose. May the Lord give me protection.

Let me offer respect to the Supreme Lord who is self-luminous and enlightens the soul. He is the witness and controller of all. He gives unlimited bliss and is the Lord of the spiritual world. He is the origin and controller of the material energy. He is the supreme controller and the observer of everything.

This material world is like a reflection of him. You are the cause of everything yet you have no cause. Since I have sought his protection he will surely deliver me from my perilous circumstances. Because he is so merciful, he is always trying to deliver me.

May the supremely merciful Lord grant me the benediction of liberating me from my materialistic existence. I offer my respects to the Supreme Lord who is the greatest of all personalities, unlimited, the origin of everything and complete and perfect. I seek refuge in the Supreme Lord who is the creator of the universe, he possesses unlimited energy and the protector of all those who surrender to him.

At this point, the Supreme Lord arrived riding on the back of Garuda. The Supreme Lord saw that Gajendra was in difficulty and he pulled him and the crocodile out of the water. Then he cut the crocodile's head off with his sudarsana disc and saved Gajendra.

The gods praised the Lord's actions and showered flowers from the heavens on Gajendra and the Lord. Gajendra had been touched by the Supreme Lord, so he was liberated from all material ignorance. The

Lord then got back on his carrier Garuda and he took Gajendra with him back to his spiritual abode.

Anyone who hears this story of the Lord delivering Gajendra will be unaffected by the corruptions of Kali yuga and they will never have bad dreams.

Chapter 18 – The Churning of the Milk Ocean

King Pariksit said, Could you please describe why Lord Vishnu churned the ocean of milk? Why did he appear as a tortoise and hold up Mandara Mountain? What was obtained from churning the ocean of milk? Would you please describe all these activities of the Lord?

Suka Goswami said, When the sage Durvasa cursed Indra to be bereft of all his prosperity, all the worlds were also deprived of their wealth and sacrifices and rituals couldn't be performed. Then their enemies attacked the gods and many of them died. The gods were afflicted on one side by fighting their enemies and on the other by the curse of Durvasa

Lord Indra and the gods could not find any solution to their problems. So they all went to see Lord Brahma and informed him of all the events. Brahma could understand that the gods were lacking power and consequently the universe was suffering. So Lord Brahma focused his mind on the Supreme Lord. Encouraged by his remembrance of the Lord, Brahma said to the gods, All of us should go and seek the shelter of the Supreme Lord. He is affectionate and kind to the gods, so he will surely bring us the good fortune we desire.

Then Brahma and the gods went beyond the darkness of the material world to the abode of the Supreme Lord. Although Brahma could not see the Lord, he began to offer prayers and said, We bow down before the unchanging, infinite Supreme Lord. You are the original cause of everything. You are incomprehensible and indescribable. You are the supreme unlimited truth. Let us all offer our respects unto the Supreme Lord who transcends the darkness of this material world. Although he is invisible to material vision, he is present everywhere.

Let us all bow down and worship the Supreme Lord who controls everyone and who treats everyone equally. No one can overcome his illusory energy which confounds everyone and causes them to forget the real wealth of their soul. All living beings are created by him and the entire material world rests at his feet. May that Supreme Lord be pleased with us and show us his favour.

Water generates and maintains all life and is the semen of the Supreme Lord. The moon is the mind of the Supreme Lord. May he be satisfied with us. Fire is the mouth of the Supreme Lord. May that supremely powerful Lord bestow his grace on us. The sun is the eye of the Supreme Lord. May that supremely opulent Lord be pleased with us.

All living beings gain their strength and breath of life from the air. The air comes from the life force of the Supreme Lord. May that Supreme Lord be pleased with us. From his mercy the gods came forth, from his anger Shiva originated and Brahma was produced from the intelligence of the Lord. The Vedic hymns came from the pores of his skin. Let that all powerful Lord be pleased with us.

Piety came from his chest and impiety from his back. The Veda and the brahmins were created from his mouth, the monarchy from his arms. The merchants came from his thighs and from his feet the workers are born. May that Supreme Lord bestow his grace on it.

Let us offer our reverence unto that Supreme Lord who is completely self satisfied. He is the controller of the world but detached from this material world. O Supreme Lord, please reveal your smiling face to us. Any actions dedicated to the Supreme Lord are never futile. Performing activities for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord automatically benefits everyone just as pouring water on the roots of a tree also nourishes all the branches and leaves. Let us all offer our homage unto the Supreme Lord.

Because Brahma had worshipped him, the Supreme Lord appeared before all the gods. He was as radiant as thousands of suns rising simultaneously. When Brahma and the other gods saw the form of the Lord they all offered their respect by immediately falling to the ground.

Brahma said, O Lord, because you have appeared before us we have all become joyful. Lord, you witness everything and nothing is unknown to you, so you are aware of the purpose for which we have come. We are all merely sparks illuminated by the fire of you my Lord. Please advise us what will be beneficial to the brahmins and gods.

The gods stood before him with folded hands. The Supreme Lord understood why the gods had approached him and in a voice like a rumbling cloud he said, Please listen carefully to what I say for it is for your benefit. For the time being you are not prosperous, therefore you should make a truce with your enemies. If the goal is important sometimes it is necessary to make an alliance even with your enemies.

You should try to produce a nectar that will give you immortality by drinking it. To make this nectar you should put vegetables, grass and herbs into the ocean of milk. Then you should churn the milk ocean with Mandara mountain as the churning rod and the great serpent Vasuki as the rope. Although the demons will help in this endeavour, it will be the gods who will gain the nectar.

You should be tolerant and agree to whatever the demons propose. There will be various things that will be generated from the churning. When these other things are produced from churning the ocean you should not be greedy to have these things.

After giving the gods this advice the Supreme Lord disappeared. Then the gods went to see King Bali the leader of the demons. After flattering King Bali, Indra suggested the proposal of the Supreme Lord and Bali and his associates all agreed to Indra's plan.

Then the gods and the demons made a truce and cooperated to churn the milk ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality. They used their combined strength to uproot Mandara mountain and carry it toward the ocean of milk. They carried the mountain for a long distance and became very tired. They dropped the mountain and it shattered both the gods and the demons.

They were all discouraged, and the omniscient Supreme Lord appeared there on Garuda. The Lord glanced over the injured gods and demons and restored them to life. Then the Lord lifted Mandara mountain and placed it on Garuda's back and took it to the ocean of milk. Garuda then unloaded the mountain next to the ocean and left.

They invited Vasuki, the king of the snakes and offered him a share of the nectar in exchange for his help in churning the ocean. Then they wound him around the mountain and holding the snake, the gods and demons began to churn the ocean of milk. They used Mandara mountain as a churning rod, but the mountain had no support and so it sank into the ocean.

The Supreme Lord then assumed the form of a giant tortoise and entered the ocean and lifted the mountain. With the mountain resting on the tortoise's back they all began to churn the ocean again. As they rotated Mandara mountain on his back, the giant tortoise enjoyed the mountain scratching his back. The gods and demons worked with great strength to churn the ocean.

When despite all their efforts no nectar came from the ocean, the Supreme Lord began to churn the ocean. The entire ocean became turbulent and the fish and aquatic animals were all afraid. When the ocean was being churned, it produced a poison. As the poison spread in all directions, the gods went to ask Shiva for protection. The gods respectfully offered prayers to Shiva and said, O greatest among the gods,

please save us from this terrible poison which is burning the entire universe.

Seeing that all the living beings were suffering and being disturbed by the poison Shiva felt great compassion for them. He said, All these living beings are in terrible danger because of the poison which has come from the ocean of milk. I must protect them. Most people are deluded by the illusory power of the Supreme Lord and so they are hostile to one another. Anyone who is compassionate toward others will please the Supreme Lord. When the Supreme Lord is pleased everyone is pleased. Therefore let me drink this poison and save everyone.

Then Lord Shiva took all the poison in his palm and drank it for the good of all living beings. The poison caused a blue line to appear around Lord Shiva's neck. The sages consider this line a beautiful ornament on Shiva's body. Pious and compassionate people are afflicted when other people suffer and they will accept suffering for themselves to alleviate the suffering of others. This constitutes the highest worship of the Supreme Lord. Everyone who heard of Shiva's actions praised his deed. The poison that leaked from Shiva's hand was consumed by scorpions, snakes and other animals with poisonous bites.

After Lord Shiva drank the poison the gods and demons resumed their churning of the ocean. The churning produced a cow known as surabhi, the cow of plenty. The cow produced abundant milk, butter and ghee. Since these items are necessary for the performance of sacrifices which enable one to progress spiritually, the great sages accepted the cow.

Next a horse named Uccaihsrava was generated from the ocean. Bali wanted this horse so Indra did not claim it since the Lord had previously advised him not to. After that, the king of elephants named Airavata was produced from the ocean. The elephant was white with four tusks.

After that the Kaustubha jewel came out of the ocean. Lord Vishnu desired this precious stone as an ornament for his chest. Next came the celestial patijata tree, this tree will produce anything the petitioner desires.

Thereafter the beautifully dressed inhabitants of heaven known as the Apsaras came out of the ocean. After that the goddess of fortune appeared from the ocean illuminating all directions with her radiance. Because of her beauty, grace, youth and complexion, everyone desired her. Indra arranged a seat for her and the sacred rivers personified brought her water in golden pots.

The personified earth brought her all the herbs needed for installing the deity. The cows contributed their milk, yoghurt, ghee, urine and dung, and spring personified brought her fresh fruit and flowers. The sages then performed the ceremony of installation of the deity, the Gandharvas of the heavenly planets sang heavenly melodies and the celestial women danced and sang.

The personified clouds beat drums, blew conch-shells and played flutes. Next the elephants bathed the goddess of fortune with sacred Ganges water, while the brahmins sang hymns. While she was being bathed the beautiful goddess sat with a lotus flower in her hand. The ocean brought her a yellow silk cloth for her dress and the god of the ocean Varuna offered her flower garlands laden with intoxicated bumblebees.

The progenitor, Vishvakarma, gave her beautiful ornaments and the Goddess of learning, Sarasvati brought her a necklace. Lord Brahma offered her a lotus flower and the residents of Naga gave her earrings. The Goddess of fortune's bashful smile enhanced her beauty as she walked among everyone holding a garland of lotus flowers surrounded by bumblebees. Her waist was very thin and her symmetrical breasts were smeared with sandalwood and kunkuma. Her movement was like

a golden creeper as she walked around and her ankle bells softly jingling.

She was looking among all the gods, demons and enlightened sages for a partner endowed with all the virtuous qualities. But she could not find anyone who was without faults. As the goddess examined all those who were assembled there, she thought to herself, There are some people who possess great austerity but they still cannot control their anger. Some people possess great wisdom but are not above attachment and others cannot control their desires. How can someone who is under the control of something else be a ruler?

There are some people who are virtuous but lack compassion for other living beings. There are some people who are renounced but this is not enough for liberation. There are some who are powerful but they have no power to control time. I can find no one who is completely free from the contamination of the modes of material nature. Someone may have a long life but still engage in misconduct. Someone may have good behaviour but not live long. Someone may have all good qualifications but still not be devoted to the Supreme Lord.

After due consideration the goddess of fortune accepted the Supreme Lord Mukunda as her partner because he has all the virtuous qualities. Then the goddess of fortune approached the Supreme Lord and placed the garland of lotus flowers around his neck and shyly stood next to him. The goddess of fortune is the embodiment of prosperity and the source of all wealth and riches. The residents of the celestial planets played their musical instruments and danced and sang. Brahma and the gods showered flowers.

The next to appear from the churning of the ocean was Varuni, the goddess of wine. The demons accepted her. After that a wonderful man appeared from the ocean of milk. His arms were long and muscular, he had a blackish complexion and was youthful. He wore garlands of flow-

ers and was adorned with many ornaments. He was dressed in yellow with polished pearl earrings. He had shiny, curly hair and wore many bracelets and came bearing a jug of nectar. He was a direct portion of Lord Vishnu known as Dhanvantari who revealed the science of medicine, ayurveda.

When the greedy demons saw the jug of nectar they forcibly snatched the jug from him. The gods were dejected at seeing the jug taken away by the demons and they sought refuge of the Supreme Lord. The Lord said to them, Don't worry, I will use my power of illusion to create conflict among the demons and start a fight between them, and in this way ensure the nectar will be available to you.

The demons began to fight among themselves about who would drink the nectar first. Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a very beautiful woman, Mohini. She had a complexion which resembled a blue lotus. She had fine cheeks, an upturned nose and earrings in her ears. She had large, firm breasts and a thin waist. She wore a garland of mallika flowers in her hair and a necklace on her attractive neck. Her arms were decorated with the finest jewellery and she wore a sparkling cloth.

As demons were arguing amongst themselves over the nectar, they noticed Mohini coming towards them. As she approached them, she smiled coyly and glanced at the demons. The demons were all overcome with lustful desire for her.

The demons said, Look at the youthful and graceful form of this exquisitely beautiful woman. All the demons approached her and said, You have such beautiful lotus petal eyes. Who are you and why have you come here? We are losing our composure simply by looking at your shapely thighs. O beautiful lady, we are fighting over this jug of nectar, would you please help us resolve our disagreement?

The Supreme Lord in the form of a beautiful woman smiled at them and said, Why do you have confidence in my opinion? Wise men are never infatuated by women. When the demons heard this they all laughed and gave her the jug of nectar. Mohini said, If you all agree to abide with whatever I decide, whether right or wrong, only then will I agree to apportion the nectar among you.

The demons immediately agreed to her condition to accept whatever she decided. Then the gods and the demons fasted and bathed. They performed various sacrifices and rituals. They put on new clothes and adorned themselves with ornaments. Then they all sat facing toward the east.

The area was filled with the fragrance of incense, decorated with flowers and lit up with lamps. Mohini entered covered in a beautiful silk garment and carrying the jug of nectar. Her ankle bells tinkled as she slowly walked and her beauty captivated the attention of the gods and demons.

Mohini had decided that giving nectar to the demons would be like giving it to snakes because demons are disorderly and by nature. So she did not give the demons any of the nectar. Mohini made the demons and gods sit in separate lines. She gave the demons only charming words and looks, and gave the nectar of immortality to the gods.

The demons had agreed to abide by whatever Mohini decided. So they did not protest when she gave the nectar to the gods. They did not want to fight with Mohini or upset their attraction for her. So they respected her decision and did not say anything which might displease her.

Although the demons and the gods shared the same place, the same time, the same cause, the same objective and activity, they did not achieve the same result. The gods achieved the nectar because they had

sought the protection of the Supreme Lord and so they received his benediction while the demons did not.

Whatever is done for the sake of one's own body and enjoyment is temporary and unreal. But when these activities are done for the sake of the Supreme Lord they become real and permanent, just as water poured on the root of a tree will benefit the entire tree.

After the Supreme Lord had finished giving the nectar to the gods, Garuda transported him back to his own abode. The demons were angry that the gods had received the nectar and they raised their weapons and attacked the gods. The gods had renewed strength from drinking the nectar and they retaliated to defend themselves.

On the shore of the ocean of milk, a ferocious battle began. Both sides were extremely hostile to the other and they fought one another with swords, arrows and many other types of weapons. Some of them fought while riding on camels, others on elephants. Some were on donkeys, and some on monkeys or tigers. Some soldiers were riding on the back of eagles or hawks. Some were on buffaloes and rhinoceroses. Mounted on various animals, the armies fought each other.

The commander of the demoniac army was King Bali. He rode on an aircraft of illusion, it had a variety of weapons and it was sometimes visible and sometimes invisible. Bali sat in his celestial chariot under a decorated umbrella, and with his generals all around him he looked as brilliant as the rising moon.

Bali and his generals roared like lions and loudly sounded their conchshells. Indra, the leader of the gods was seated on Airavata the elephant. He was surrounded by the gods who were seated on various beautifully decorated chariots.

The gods and demons stood before one another and reproached one another with words that pierced the heart. Then they began to fight

one another in pairs. They all desired victory and they attacked one another with great strength and thrashed one another with their sharp arrows, swords and lances. The battlefield became strewn with severed arms, legs and heads, still decorated with ornaments and holding their various weapons.

Bali attacked Indra with his arrows, but Indra cut Bali's arrows down with his own. Bali was enraged and took up other weapons. He attacked Indra with a lance, a javelin, a sword and a barbed missile, but Indra cut them all to pieces.

Bali then became invisible and an illusory mountain appeared above the gods and its burning trees and sharp rocks fell onto the gods. Snakes, scorpions and other poisonous creatures as well as lions, tigers and elephants all fell from the mountain crushing the gods below.

Hundreds of naked demonesses appeared carrying tridents and screaming, Stab them and cut them down! Then rumbling clouds appeared and with thunderous noise they rained hot burning coals on the gods. Bali created a great fire which began burning all the soldiers of the gods. This was followed by giant waves and whirlpools flooding down on the gods.

The soldiers of the gods were overwhelmed by the magical illusions created by the invisible demon soldiers. When the gods could not fight against the activities and illusions of the demons they all meditated on the Supreme Lord who immediately appeared. The Supreme Lord came riding on Garuda, wearing yellow garments and the Kaustubha jewel on his chest. He wore a brilliant helmet and earrings and held eight weapons in his hands.

The moment the Supreme Lord appeared on the battlefield, the illusions created by the demons were overcome, just as the calamities in

a dream stop when someone awakens. The mere remembrance of the Supreme Lord one can free one from all troubles.

The demon Kalanemi saw that the Lord had arrived on the battlefield, and fiercely hurled his javelin at Garuda. The Supreme Lord casually caught the trident and used it to kill Kalanemi. Then two demons named Mali and Sumali attacked the Lord and he chopped off their heads with his disc.

Because of the presence of the Supreme Lord, the gods recovered their minds and their senses from the illusions of the demons, and they began to fight back and beat the demons. Indra took up his thunderbolt to kill Bali and all the demons were desolate and they cried 'Alas, Alas'.

Indra released his thunderbolt weapon and Bali and his aircraft fell to the ground. Like lions killing deer, all the gods began killing the demons. When Brahma saw that the demons would soon be totally obliterated, he sent the divine sage Narada to restrain them.

Narada said, By seeking refuge of the Supreme Lord, he gave you the nectar. You have what you want and you stop this fighting. The gods respected the words of Narada, and so they ceased their hostilities and returned to their celestial abodes.

The survivors still on the battlefield took Bali to his spiritual teacher Sukra and he resuscitated Bali using his knowledge of restoring life. Defeated by Indra and deprived of his opulence and his life, Bali was brought back to life by Sukra and his followers. Because of this, Bali became Sukra's disciple and served him faithfully and offering Sukra everything he desired.

Sukra was satisfied with Bali's service and because Sukra wanted to conquer the celestial realm of Indra, he made Bali perform a sacrifice that would enable him to achieve his desire. After the sacrificial fire was worshipped with offerings of ghee, a chariot covered with gold plates

emerged from the fire. It was drawn by four horses and was adorned with a banner with the emblem of a lion. There was also a divine bow and two quivers of inexhaustible arrows. Bali's grandfather Prahlada gave him a garland of flowers that never fade and Sukra gave him a conch-shell.

Bali offered respects to Sukra, the brahmins and Prahlada. Then he took his weapons, mounted his chariot and along with his soldiers, he departed for the opulent kingdom of Indra. King Bali and his soldiers attacked Indra's capital terrifying all the women who resided there.

Indra understood the consequences of Bali's strength and his intention to conquer the city, so he went to see his spiritual teacher Brhaspati and said, Bali is attacking the city with such remarkable power that I do not think anyone has the ability to defeat him. How has he gained such formidable strength, skill and courage?

Brhaspati said, Bali gained his irresistible strength by becoming a disciple of the mighty brahmin Sukra. You will not be able to defeat him because he is endowed with a superior spiritual strength. To oppose him is as useless as a human being opposing death. Therefore you should leave the celestial realm and go where your enemies cannot find you while you wait for the favourable situation of your enemy to be reversed. At present Bali is flourishing because of the brahminical power invested in him, but in the future he will insult the brahmins and meet his demise.

Lord Indra and the other gods accepted the advice of Brhaspati and left the celestial realm. Then Bali entered Indra's city and took control of the entire universe.

Chapter 19 – Lord Vamanadeva and King Bali

When the mother of the gods, Aditi, learned that the gods had left the celestial realm she began to weep. She approached her husband Kasyapa and said, O beloved husband, our enemies have taken over the celestial realms. The gods have been exiled and deprived of their wealth, their power and even their residence. Kindly think of a way to help my sons recover what they have lost.

Kasyapa smiled and said to Aditi, The illusory energy of Lord Vishnu is powerfully strong. It captures everyone with love for this world. What is the meaning of this physical body when the soul transcends it? It is illusion which is the cause of attachment to bodily relationships of husband or son. You should worship the Supreme Lord who resides in the heart of all creatures. He is magnanimous toward those who are distressed and can grant all your desires. It is my conviction that devotion to the Supreme Lord never fails.

Aditi said, Please tell me what rules I should follow so the Lord will fulfil my desires. What is the best method for worshipping the Supreme Lord so that he will be quickly satisfied and rescue me and my sons from our suffering. Kasyapa said, For the first 12 days of the bright moon in the month of February/March you should drink only milk.

You should worship the Supreme Lord with devotion. On the day of the dark moon you should smear your body with dirt that was dug up by a wild boar. Then you should bathe in the river while chanting this mantra: O goddess, you were lifted from the lower regions of the universe by the Supreme Lord in the form of a boar. I respectfully bow before you. Please wash away my sins.

After completing your daily rituals, with a controlled mind you should worship the Supreme Lord. You may worship him on an altar, or in the form of the sun, water, fire and the spiritual teacher. You should chant the following prayers: I offer my respects to the Supreme Lord who is residing in everyone's heart and he is the witness of all.

He is very subtle and not manifest. I offer my respects again and again to the Supreme Lord. His body is dark like an emerald and he wears yellow garments. He is the one who confers blessings and is worshipped by all the gods and the goddess of good fortune. He can fulfil everyone's desire. Therefore, those who are thoughtful worship the dust of his feet as the source of all good fortune. O Supreme Lord, please show me your benedictions.

You should worship the Supreme Lord by chanting these mantras and offering him water, flowers, incense and other items with faith and devotion. You should chant 'Om namo bhagavate vasudevaya' and offer him the finest rice cooked in milk with ghee and raw sugar. You should silently chant the mantra 108 times and offer praise to the Lord.

You should observe strict celibacy for the length of the vow. You should bathe every morning and then perform all these activities each day. For twelve days, you should drink only milk and worship Lord Vishnu by performing all these duties. During the length of the vow you should not talk unnecessarily, you should show non-violence to all living beings and depend on the Lord.

You should distribute food offered to the Lord to everyone including the poor. From the first day to the last day, you should continue worship of the Lord by singing prayers and chanting mantras and reading the scriptures. In this way you should worship the Lord. You should follow this vow and strictly observe these principles. By doing this you will please the Supreme Lord and all your desires will be fulfilled.

After being instructed by her husband, Aditi faithfully observed the vow for 12 days. Aditi focused her attention on the Supreme Lord and controlled her mind and senses. When she had completed the vow, the Supreme Lord appeared before her. He was dressed in yellow garments and holding a conch-shell, disc and club. When she saw the Lord, Aditi was overwhelmed with joy and she lay prostrate before him on the ground. She stood up and with folded palms and a faltering voice she began to offer prayers to the Lord.

Aditi said, O Lord of sacrifices, hearing your name bestows blessings on everyone. O supreme controller, you are the shelter of the afflicted and distressed. Please give us your benedictions. My Lord I bow down before you, the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. If you are satisfied, all things become possible. If you are pleased, one can easily achieve unequalled prosperity, spiritual knowledge or a lifetime in the celestial realm. To grant benedictions like vanquishing one's enemies is insignificant in comparison.

The Supreme Lord said, O mother of the gods, I understand your desire, you want to restore the wealth and position of your sons who have been expelled from their home in the celestial realm. But right now your rivals are protected by brahmins and so they are invincible. To use power against them now will be unfavourable.

But despite this, I have been very pleased by your observance of this vow, so I must think of some way to help you, for worship of me should not be futile. So I will agree to become your son and in this way protect your sons. But you must keep this secret and not tell anyone.

After saying this, the Lord disappeared. Aditi considered herself very successful and she approached her husband. Kasyapa's insight was infallible and in his yogic trance could understand that the Lord had entered within him and so he transferred that energy into the womb of Aditi.

In due course of time, the Supreme Lord appeared from the womb of Aditi. He was wearing yellow garments and he held the conch-shell, club, disc and lotus in his four hands. His complexion was dark and he wore bracelets, a helmet, a belt and ankle bells. He was decorated with a garland of flowers and the Kaustubha jewel hung around his neck. His radiance dispelled the darkness in Kasyapa's home.

Happiness pervaded everywhere. Joy reigned among the gods, brahmins, cows, hills and mountains. The gods showered flowers on Aditi's home while dancing and singing their praises of the Lord. That original body of the Lord complete with ornaments and weapons then disappeared, and while everyone looked on, he transformed himself into a dwarf brahmin boy, Vamana.

Seeing the transformation of the Lord the sages were delighted and they performed all the relevant rituals. The sun-god chanted the gayatri mantra, Brhaspati gave him a sacred thread and Kasyapa offered him a cord of straw for his belt. The earth goddess gave him a deerskin, the moon god offered him a brahmins staff, Aditi gave him a cloth for a garment and the king of heaven gave him an umbrella. Brahma offered him a waterpot, the seven sages donated kusa grass and goddess Sarasvati offered him a string of meditation beads.

Vamana learnt that King Bali was conducting a sacrificial ceremony, he went to see him. He looked just like a brahmin boy with a straw belt, a sacred thread, a deerskin garment and matted hair. King Bali was delighted to see Vamana and he welcomed him by offering him a seat and washing his feet.

King Bali said, Welcome to you brahmin. I offer you my respects. What can we do for you? Because of your presence our family has been purified. By the touch of your feet the earth is blessed. It seems that you have come to ask me for something. Allow me to give you whatever you desire.

Vamana was satisfied with the pleasing words of King Bali and he said, You are a glorious king because you are guided by the brahmins and your exalted grandfather Prahlada. The words you speak are true and they bring honour to your family and ancestors. Indeed, all the members of your family have been generous. They have always given charity to brahmins, and kept the promises they made to a brahmin.

The reputation of your noble family lineage is untarnished. I seek a gift of three paces of land, measured by my footsteps. Although you are a generous ruler and can give me anything I want, I do not want to ask for more. A brahmin should only accept charity according to his needs otherwise he will become contaminated.

King Bali said, Your words are commendable, but you are only a boy. I can give you an entire continent but you have only asked for three steps of land, this is not very intelligent. You have approached me for charity and you should not have to return to ask for more. So you should ask me for as much land as you will need to maintain your livelihood.

Vamana said, It is not possible for a person who lacks self control to find satisfaction. If I am not satisfied with three steps of land, then I would not be satisfied with an entire continent. It is best to be satisfied with whatever one receives by destiny. Dissatisfaction about wealth and pleasure is the cause of bondage in this world.

Anyone who is content with what they acquire by destiny is eligible for liberation. A brahmin who is satisfied with whatever is easily obtainable increases their spiritual enlightenment, but the spiritual illumination of a dissatisfied brahmin decreases like a fire that has water poured on it. So I will only request three steps of land because I will achieve my goal with that amount and I will be satisfied to receive only what I need.

King Bali laughed and said, Very well, you can take as much as you desire. But Sukra, King Bali's adviser knew the Lord's plan and he said to

Bali, This brahmin in the form of a dwarf is Lord Vishnu himself impersonating a human child. He was born to Kasyapa and Aditi with the goal of securing the interests of the gods.

You should not promise him land, he will take your land, wealth, power and fame from you and give it to your enemy Lord Indra. You have foolishly promised to give him three paces of land, but he will assume his cosmic form and with these steps he will occupy the entire universe and you will be left with no means of maintaining yourself. With his first step he will take the earth, with his second step he will expand to take the celestial realm. There will be nowhere left for him to place his third step.

There is no way you can keep your promise to him, so you will be forced to reside in hell. You should not give charity if it endangers your ability to maintain yourself. Without a livelihood one cannot give any charity or perform sacrifices and religious practices.

Your wealth should be divided to achieve the five goals of religion, success, upkeep, pleasure and providing for family members. Then you will live happily in this world. You must say no to this request for charity. Although it is not honest, lying is justified to save one's own life, when one is joking, in earning one's livelihood, protecting cows or brahmins or when protecting someone from their enemies.

After King Bali listened to the advice of his spiritual teacher he was silent while he considered the situation and then he said, What you have said is true, one should not give charity that endangers their livelihood. But Prahlada is my grandfather. How can I break my promise to give this land out of greed for money? I must fulfil my promise. I cannot cheat a brahmin. There is nothing more irreligious than dishonesty. The earth has said, I can bear many heavy burdens, with the exception of liars.

I am not afraid of hell, poverty, suffering, loss of my status or even death, but I am very much afraid of cheating a brahmin. If one must leave everything behind when they die, then why not please the brahmin by giving him the riches while one is alive? There have been many great personalities throughout history who have been willing to sacrifice their lives for the benefit of the people. So why not give up other less important things like land?

It is common for men to give up their lives on the battlefield, but it is rare that one gets the opportunity to give his wealth in charity to a sage. Therefore I must give this brahmin whatever he wants. All the saintly people worship Lord Vishnu under all circumstances. If as you say this is Lord Vishnu, whether he has come here to bless me or punish me, I must give him what he asks for.

Then Sukracarya cursed his disciple King Bali and said, You think you are wise but you have become so impertinent that you are disregarding my advice. Very soon you will be deprived of your wealth and prosperity!

Although he was cursed in this way by his own spiritual teacher, King Bali did not waver and he gave Vamana the land he had promised. All the gods showered flowers on Bali and praised him singing, What a difficult thing he has done. He knew Lord Vishnu was on the side of his enemy but still he gave away the entire universe in charity.

Then Vamana began to expand himself until he covered the earth and all the heavens. With his first step he covered the entire surface of the earth and the sky. With his second step, Vamana, he covered the celestial realm. There was nothing left that remained where he could place his third step.

When the followers of King Bali saw that he had lost everything to Vamana they were angry and said, This Vamana is not a brahmin but the

master of illusion, Lord Vishnu. He has taken the body of a brahmin to deceive us and achieve the goals of gods. King Bali is always honest and generous toward the brahmins. As our duty to our master King Bali, we must kill Vamana.

After speaking in this way the followers of King Bali took up their weapons. Aggravated by anger they moved toward Vamana brandishing their weapons. The followers of Lord Vishnu saw them violently advancing and they laughed and attacked them with their own weapons. When King Bali saw that his soldiers were being killed he said, Listen to me! Put down your weapons and stop fighting. The Lord was previously on our side but no longer. None of our efforts can conquer the Supreme Lord.

Time was on our side but now it is against us. No one can defeat time, which is the power of the Supreme Lord. When we were favoured by destiny we defeated Lord Vishnu's followers. But now those same followers are defeating us. We must wait until the time is again favourable for us. Following the orders of King Bali, all his followers stopped fighting. Then King Bali was arrested by Garuda and tied with ropes.

Vamana said to King Bali, You have promised me three steps of land, but in two steps I have occupied the entire universe. Where shall I place my third step? You have been unable to fulfil your promise, so you must reside in the hellish regions. Anyone who does not give a beggar what he has promised must endure a hellish condition of life. You were proud of your wealth and position and you promised me land, but you failed to keep your promise. So your promise was a lie and now you must reside in a hellish situation.

Despite his awkward position King Bali was unperturbed and he said, If you think that my promise is false, I will remedy this. You may place your third step on my head. I consider punishment by you to be glori-

ous. You are in the guise of our enemy but are in fact our greatest friend. We were blinded by our opulence and you gave us the correct vision.

My position as the king of the celestial realm has caused my ignorance. You have given me a great benediction by taking away my wealth. Wealth and position deludes even a wise and self controlled person and causes them to forget the nature of the soul.

Then Brahma spoke to Lord Vamana and said, O benefactor and master of all living beings, god of the gods, please release Bali because he does not deserve any further punishment. He gave you everything he owned, all his land and wealth. He has even offered his body to you. If someone sincerely offers you even a little water he gains liberation. Without duplicity Bali has given you everything in the universe, so how can you deserve punishment?

Vamana said, I take away the wealth of a person I am especially kind to because wealth causes a person to become foolish and proud. Although he was deprived of his wealth and kingdom, arrested by his enemies and cursed by his spiritual teacher, he did not abandon honesty and he kept his promise. I will award him the position of king of the celestial realm during the reign of Savarni Manu. Until then, Bali will reside with his friends and relatives on Sutala, a place where there is no physical or mental weariness.

Hearing this, Bali's eyes filled with tears and in a faltering voice he said, How wonderful it is that by attempting to offer respect to you, I have achieved something that has never been achieved even by the gods. Then King Bali offered his respects to the Lord and left for Sutala. Vamana then returned all the land to Indra and reinstated him in his position and Indra regained his rule of the celestial realm.

Whoever hears this story of Lord Vamana wipes away all their karmic reactions.

Chapter 20 – Matsya, the Lord’s Fish Incarnation

King Pariksit said, Suka Goswami, I would like to hear the story of the Lord assuming the form of a fish. Why did the Supreme Lord accept the form of a fish, a lowly species whose existence must be intolerable? Would you please explain his activities because hearing them is favourable for everyone.

Suka Goswami said, The Supreme Lord accepts different forms in his incarnations in order to protect the brahmins, the cows, the enlightened souls, the Vedic literature and the principles of righteousness. Whatever form the Supreme Lord takes, he transcends the mode of material nature and so is unaffected by the status of those forms. At the end of Lord Brahma’s day, when he was tired and preparing to rest, Hayagriva stole the Vedic knowledge from Brahma. The Supreme Lord took the form of a fish to rescue the Vedic knowledge.

One day, a king named Satyavrata sat at the edge of the river performing worship by offering palmfuls of water, a small fish appeared in the water in his hands. After the King threw the fish back into the river, he heard a small voice say, O King, why are you throwing a helpless fish like me into the river when I am afraid of the other fish who will eat me. Please protect me.

The compassionate king put the fish in a water jar and took it home with him. But during the night the fish became so large that he filled the pot and he said to the king, It is difficult for me to move within this water jug, please find me a more spacious residence.

So the king took the fish out of the water-pot and put him in a larger pot. But within moments the fish had grown too big for the pot and

said, My dear king, this pot is unsuitable for me. You have given me your protection. Please find me a more spacious residence.

The king threw the fish into a lake, but soon the fish had grown to a size that was larger than the lake. The fish said, This lake does not accommodate me, please find me a more permanent reservoir of water. The king took the fish to larger and larger bodies of water until eventually he threw the enormous fish into the ocean. When the fish was thrown into the ocean he said to the king, You should not throw me in here, there are powerful aquatic animals in the ocean who will eat me.

At these words from the fish, the king was confused and he said to the fish, Who are you? I have never heard of a fish like you. In one day you have grown to a size of a hundred miles. You must surely be the Supreme Lord Narayana who has come in the form of a fish to show your grace to all living beings. I bow down to you for you are the supreme master and the ultimate destination. All the activities you perform in your various incarnations are for the benefit of all living beings. Would you please tell me the reason you have appeared in this form of a fish?

The Supreme Lord replied, On the seventh day from today the entire universe will be submerged within the ocean of devastation. At that time I will send a large boat to you. To prepare for that time, please collect all types of herbs and seeds. Then along with the seven sages and all types of living beings you should get on that boat.

You will all travel on the flooded ocean without fear and with no illumination other than the effulgence of the seven sages. When the boat is tossed by strong gales I will be near to you. Use the serpent Vasuki to attach the boat to my horn. I will drag the boat with you and the seven sages on board until the night of Lord Brahma comes to an end.

After saying this to the king the Supreme Lord disappeared. The king waited for the time the Lord had spoken about. The king began to meditate on the Supreme Lord Vishnu. He saw how huge clouds began to rain and incessantly fill the ocean. The ocean overflowed its boundaries and inundated the entire earth. Remembering what the Lord had said to him, he collected the herbs and creepers and boarded the boat with the sages.

The sages said to the king, Please meditate on the Supreme Lord Keshava, for he will save us from this danger and set things right. While the king meditated on the Supreme Lord, a large golden fish appeared. The fish was millions of miles long and had one large horn. The king fastened the boat to that horn using the great serpent Vasuki as a rope the way the Lord had advised him previously. Then the king began to offer prayers to the Lord.

The king said, From the beginning of time, ignorance about the nature of the soul has been the cause of the material bondage that causes so much suffering. The living beings in the material world perform many activities in an attempt to be enjoy pleasure, but their activities bring them only grief. May the Supreme Lord cut the hard knot of attachment to material pleasure from the core of my heart.

By serving and adoring the Supreme Lord, one can be purified of all material contamination and revive their original blissful character. Those who are blind may accept someone who is equally blind for a leader, and those who do not know the goal of life may accept a teacher who is lacking in knowledge.

We seek you as our teacher, for you are self-illuminating like the sun. A spiritually ignorant teacher instructs his students in creating wealth and satisfying the senses and thus the students continue in the darkness of illusion. But you give eternal knowledge and with this knowledge a person will easily achieve their spiritual goal.

You are the dearest friend of everyone. You are the supreme ruler and teacher, the bestower of spiritual wisdom. People captured by lust and greed cannot see you, even though you are there within their heart. When the King had finished praying, the Lord in the form of a fish explained the highest truth to the king. The Supreme Lord then explained the instructions of the Vedic literature and the analytical spiritual science.

While he was sitting in the boat the king listened to the Supreme Lord explain all the Vedic literature regarding self realisation. Therefore the king and the seven sages had no doubts remaining about the true nature of the soul and the eternal truth. At the end of the inundation of the earth, the Supreme Lord delivered the Vedic literature to Lord Brahma when he awoke from his sleep.

This story of King Satyavrata and the fish incarnation of the Supreme Lord Vishnu is a spiritual story. Anyone who hears it is freed from karmic reactions to their deeds. Anyone who narrates this story will have all their desires fulfilled and will return to the spiritual world.

Chapter 21 – The Supreme Person

King Pariksit said, Would you please describe the qualities and activities of Krishna, the supreme personality of God?

Suka Goswami said, At one time, the earth was burdened by a large number of arrogant kings. Therefore Krishna appeared on the earth as the son of Vasudeva in order to relieve the earth's burden.

Krishna's father Vasudeva and his mother Devaki were riding home on a chariot after their wedding. Devaki's brother Kamsa was driving the chariot. While Kamsa was driving he heard a voice say to him, O foolish one, you are transporting her, but her eighth child will kill you!

When Kamsa heard this he seized Devaki by her hair and drew his sword ready to kill her. Vasudeva said, Kamsa, you are a man of many fine qualities and are admired by the brave. How can you kill your own sister on her wedding day? Death is unavoidable for everyone, whether it is today or in a hundred years.

When the body dies the soul receives another body according to their karma. If we act in an evil way in this lifetime we will have to suffer in the next lifetime. So it is in our own interests not to harm any other living beings, because if we do we will have to suffer a karmic reaction in the future. Devaki is your younger sister so she deserves to be protected. You are compassionate toward those who are helpless, so you should not kill her.

But Kamsa was determined and not persuaded by Vasudeva's advice. Observing that Kamsa still intended to kill Devaki, he tried to persuade him through other means. Vasudeva could see his wife's life was in danger and to avoid the immediate threat he said, Kamsa it is not Devaki who will kill you, so you have no reason to be afraid of her. It is her son who will do so. I will hand all her sons over to you.

Kamsa was pacified by Vasudeva's promise and he desisted from killing Devaki. After some time had passed, Devaki gave birth to a son named Kirtiman. With great difficulty, Vasudeva delivered his son to Kamsa. On seeing Vasudeva intended to keep his promise and give him the child, Kamsa was pleased. He said, Vasudeva, let this child be returned, there is no fear from your first child. My death has been ordained from your eighth child.

Taking his son with him, Vasudeva returned home, but he was uneasy because he distrusted Kamsa. Meantime the great sage Narada approached Kamsa and told him that soon all the impious people on earth would be killed and Kamsa became afraid. So he imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki and bound them with chains. As each of their sons was born, Kamsa would kill the child.

Kamsa had killed six sons of Devaki, and then a portion of Vishnu known as Ananta, became Devaki's seventh child entering her womb causing her both joy and sorrow. The Lord commanded Yogamaya and said, O Devi, go to the land of Vrndavana where Rohini and the other wives of Vasudeva are living in seclusion out of fear of Kamsa. Within Devaki's womb is my partial manifestation known as Shesha. Take him from Devaki's womb and transfer him to Rohini's womb. I will then be born as Devaki's son, and you will be born as Yasoda and Nanda's daughter.

At the transfer of Shesha into the womb of Rohini, all the citizens cried, O Devaki has lost her child. Then the Supreme Lord entered the womb of Devaki. Because the Supreme Lord was within her womb, Devaki's radiance brightened the whole prison house.

Kamsa thought, Devaki has never looked so radiant, the Supreme Lord who is within Devaki's womb will kill me. But Devaki is my sister and she is pregnant and killing her now would destroy my reputation. So Kamsa decided to wait until the child was born and then kill the child.

Some time later, at an auspicious time, the Supreme Lord appeared like the full moon rising in the East. Vasudeva's eyes were wide in amazement when he saw his son. The child's eyes were like lotuses and he held different weapons in his four hands. The Srivatsa mark was on his chest and the Kaustubha jewel was around his neck. His complexion was as beautiful as a monsoon cloud and ornaments adorned his body.

Realising the child was the Supreme Lord Vishnu, Vasudeva bowed before him and said, How fortunate I am to see you directly, you are the Supreme Lord who exists beyond the material nature. You are the omnipresent soul within the hearts of everyone and the witness of all. How gracious it is that you have descended into my household to protect the world. Hearing the prediction of your birth in my house, the cruel Kamsa has killed all your elder brothers. When he learns of your birth, he will rush here with weapons drawn to try and kill you.

Devaki was very afraid of Kamsa and she said, O Lord, do not let the evil Kamsa know of your birth. I am afraid he will kill you. Withdraw this four handed form so it won't be seen.

The Supreme Lord said, I have shown you this form so you will believe that I am the Supreme Lord Vishnu. If I had appeared as an ordinary child you would not have known that I had been born. If you are afraid of Kamsa, then take me to Vrndavana and return with Yogamaya who has been born there. Then the Lord stopped speaking and as Devaki desired, he turned himself into ordinary human baby.

Around the same time Yogamaya had taken birth as the daughter of Yasoda and Nanda in the village of Vrndavana. Vasudeva carried the child through the palace and by the Lord's power all the guards were asleep and the locked doors opened as he approached. Vasudeva was able to carry the child to Nanda and Yasoda's house in Vrndavana.

Arriving at the house, Vasudeva found all the villagers asleep. Placing his son on Yasoda's bed, he took her daughter back to the prison house. Vasudeva put the female child on Devaki's bed and replaced his chains. Yasoda knew she had given birth but was so exhausted she did not know the sex of the baby.

The guards at the palace woke when they heard the baby crying. They informed Kamsa that Devaki's child had been born and Kamsa hurriedly got out of bed, with his hair dishevelled he rushed to Devaki's room.

Devaki begged him, Please don't kill this baby girl, it is dishonourable to kill a female. Impelled by destiny you have killed so many of my beautiful babies. Devaki was crying and embracing her daughter and begging him to spare her child. But Kamsa snatched the child from Devaki's arms.

He seized the baby's legs and tried to smash her against the stone wall. The goddess rose up in the air and freed herself from his grip. She had eight arms and each hand was holding a weapon. She wielded a bow, a spear, arrows, a shield, a sword, a conch-shell, a disc and a club. She was adorned with garlands of fresh flowers and jewelled ornaments. She said, Foolish man! What will you achieve by killing me? Your nemesis has already been born elsewhere so do not kill any more innocent babies.

Kamsa was astonished to see the goddess and he then freed Devaki and Vasudeva from their chains and said, O sister, O brother in law, regretably I have killed so many of your sons. Like a cannibal who preys on his own children, I have killed so many of your children.

Although your sons have been killed by me, please do not grieve for them. Everyone suffers and enjoys the results of their own karma. If one is in the bodily conception they consider the soul to be killed and there-

fore they must suffer joy and sorrow. Sainly people are compassionate, so please forgive me for the barbarity of my actions. Then Kamsa fell at their feet with tears of remorse rolling down his cheeks. When Devaki and Vasudeva saw that Kamsa was sincerely sorry for what he had done, they were both relieved of their anger.

The next day Kamsa summoned his ministers and told them everything that had happened. The ministers said, O King Kamsa, we must kill all the children in the surrounding area that have been born in the last few weeks. Because Kamsa was afraid of death, he agreed to their proposal and hired the terrible infant-killer Putana to slay the babies.

Putana began visiting the towns and villages doing her evil work. Using her black magic Putana could transform herself into any form she desired. She adopted the form of a beautiful woman and went to the village of Vrndavana where Yasoda and Nanda lived. She was dressed very beautifully and her hair was decorated with flowers. She had beautiful earrings and she smiled sweetly at everyone.

She roamed around in search of babies and in Yasoda and Nanda's house she found the child Krishna sleeping in his crib. Putana took the baby on her lap intending to kill him. Although Putana was very cruel, she looked like an affectionate mother. Yasoda and Rohini had seen her, but they were overwhelmed by her beauty and they did not stop her.

Taking Krishna on her lap, Putana put her breast, which was covered in deadly poison, into his mouth. Krishna, the supreme person, was enraged and seized her breast and sucked out both the poison and Putana's life. She screamed, Let me go! Stop. Leave me! She wailed loudly and her eyes bulged and her arms and legs thrashed wildly. As Putana screamed loudly the earth trembled. Putana was killed and when she died she reverted into her original and gigantic form of a demon.

Some time later, Gargamuni, the priest of the Yadu dynasty came to Vrndavana to see Nanda. Nanda received him warmly and offered him a comfortable seat. Nanda said, You are a saintly brahmin and you are aware of astrological knowledge. Using this knowledge you can understand what someone has done in their past life and also what effect it will have on their present life. Would you please perform the purification rituals for my two sons?

Gargamuni said, I am widely known as the Yadu family's priest. People will assume your son is the child of Devaki if I perform his purification rituals. Kamsa will learn of this and try and kill your son.

Nanda Maharaja said, Then please perform the ceremony in secret so no one learns of it, not even the residents of our village. Gargamuni agreed to Nanda's request and performed the rituals in private.

Gargamuni said, The son of Rohini will be called Rama, because he will bring joy to everyone. He will also be called Bala because of his great strength. They will call him Sankarsana because he will bring the different branches of the Yadu family together. Your other son has assumed three different colours in different ages – white, red and yellow – and in this form he appears with a dark complexion.

He has many names and forms according to his qualities and deeds he will perform. I know of these but the common people do not. This child will delight all the residents of the village and bring prosperity to you all. Because of him you will easily overcome all dangers. Therefore you should take great care and attention in raising this child. In his qualities, prowess and splendour, this child is comparable to Narayana. Gargamuni then left for his own home. Nanda thought himself blessed with these children and was delighted by the words of Gargamuni.

Soon the brothers Rama and Krishna began to crawl on their hands and knees and playfully moved around the village. They were captivat-

ed by the tinkling sound of ankle bells and would follow people thinking they were their mothers. But then after a short distance they would return to their mothers as if they were afraid. Rama and Krishna would catch the tails of the calves and they would drag them back and forth. The women of the village would watch them and laugh, forgetting their household work.

Soon Rama and Krishna began to walk and play with the other children of the village. All the ladies of the village were attracted by Krishna's mischievous childish activities. They would talk about it so his mother Yasoda could overhear and say, Sometimes Krishna comes to our houses and steals the milk and tasty curds and eats and drinks them. He feeds some to the monkeys until the monkeys are so full they refuse more. If we hang the curd and butter in a high place where Krishna and Balarama will not be able to reach it, they construct bricks and planks to climb on so they can get to it.

But now this naughty boy and expert thief is sitting here before us looking like a very good boy. After speaking in this way, all the women would look at Krishna sitting there and his eyes would be so fearful that he was in trouble, no one would scold him.

One day when Krishna was playing with his friends, the other children came to his mother Yasoda and complained that Krishna had been eating dirt. Yasoda picked up Krishna to scold him and said, Krishna why have you eaten dirt? Krishna replied, Mother, my friends are lying. I have not eaten dirt. If you do not believe me, then look inside my mouth. Yasoda said, Open your mouth so I can see for myself.

When Krishna opened his mouth Mother Yasoda saw the entire universe within his mouth. She saw everything that was mobile and immobile, she saw the vast reaches of space and all the galaxies. She saw the elements, the senses and the modes of nature and she also saw herself

and the village of Vrndavana. When Yasoda saw all these things along with herself and the village, she was struck by fear and disbelief.

Yasoda thought to herself, Is this a dream or a delusion of my mind or some yogic feat of my child? I will take refuge of the Supreme Lord who is beyond human comprehension and who is the basis of the entire universe. Krishna had shown Yasoda the truth about her son, but by his power he then forgot her vision and was immersed in maternal affection for her son and she took him on her lap. The Supreme Lord is glorified in all the Vedic literature, but Yasoda simply looked upon him as her child.

One day Mother Yasoda was engaged in churning butter. While she was working Krishna approached her, wanting to drink her breast milk so he grabbed the churning rod to stop it. Yasoda stopped her work and took Krishna on her lap and was affectionately feeding him when she saw that the milk she was heating on the stove was about to overflow. She left Krishna to attend to the stove although he had not finished drinking her milk.

Krishna was indignant and with tears in his eyes he hit the butter churning pot with a stone and broke it. Then he took the freshly churned butter from the pot and hid in the next room to eat it. When Yasoda came back after attending to the milk on the stove, she saw the broken pot. Seeing that Krishna had disappeared, she assumed Krishna had broken the pot and run away.

Krishna was in the next room feeding the stolen butter to the monkeys. He was furtively glancing around him, worried he might be caught in the act. Yasoda saw him and stealthily crept up behind him. Seeing his mother coming toward him carrying a stick, he ran away as if he was afraid. Yasoda began to chase Krishna but couldn't catch him. Even the greatest of yogis cannot capture the Supreme Lord by penance and meditation, but Yasoda pursued him thinking he was her son.

Although Yasoda's hair became loosened and she was slowed by her large hips, she managed to capture her son. When he was caught by his mother, he was crying and rubbing his eyes with his hands smudging the black ointment around his eyes all over his face. When Yasoda saw that Krishna was afraid she threw away the stick and decided to tie him with rope as a punishment.

Yasoda thought Krishna was an ordinary child and so she tried to tie him to the mortar which was used to grind the spices. While tying him, she found that the rope was too short by a length of about two fingers, so she brought another rope and joined it to the first rope. Although she had added another rope it was also too short by a distance of two fingers.

She tied another piece and the same thing happened, she kept adding more rope until she had used all the rope in her house, but it was always too short to bind Krishna to the mortar. Yasoda's friends were watching and laughing and Yasoda joined in the laughing but she was astonished that the ropes were always too short.

Krishna saw that his mother was perspiring and the flowers were falling from her loosened hair and although he controls the entire creation, he graciously allowed his mother to bind him. He who no one can control agreed to be bound by the love of his mother. After Yasoda had tied Krishna to the wooden mortar, she returned to her household chores.

Meanwhile, Krishna saw two arjuna trees growing in the yard who had been the sons of the god Kuvera in a previous lifetime. In their last life, their names were Nalakubara and Manigriva and they lived a luxurious life. But because of their conceited actions they had been cursed by Narada to become trees.

These two sons used to wander in their heavenly garden always intoxicated and enjoying themselves with young girls. At one time Nara-

da appeared in that garden and saw them intoxicated. The girls were ashamed of being naked before the saint Narada and quickly dressed themselves. But Nalakubara and Manigriva didn't care that Narada was present and remained naked before him.

Seeing them naked and intoxicated Narada decided to show favour to them. He said, There is nothing in the world that can delude someone as much as the arrogance that comes from being wealthy. If someone is wealthy but has no spiritual knowledge they will waste their wealth in enjoying wine, women and gambling. Those who are proud of their wealth and material prosperity are benefited by becoming poor.

A person who must suffer poverty is forced to perform austerity because they do not have the money to buy anything. They are always in need of food and shelter so they are never proud of their position. Thus they are cured of pride arising from ignorance. Because these two men are unable to voluntarily control themselves and have become proud and arrogant due to their wealth, I will cure them of their ignorance.

Since they are so intoxicated they are not aware of their nudity, they deserve to become trees, naked and immobile. This will be a suitable punishment for them but I will allow them to retain the memory of their offence while they are trees. After they have spent 100 years in the body of a tree they will be able to personally see the Supreme Lord and consequently they will regain their status in the celestial realm.

In this way Nalakubara and Manigriva became the two arjuna trees growing near the house of Nanda. To prove the truth of the words of Narada, Krishna dragged the mortar to where the two arjuna trees were growing. As he crawled between the two trees the mortar he was tied to became lodged between the trees. Krishna tugged the mortar tied around his stomach between the two trees and the trees were violently uprooted and they fell crashing to the ground.

Two golden people came from the trees. They placed the palms of their hands together, bowed their heads and said, O Krishna, the Supreme Lord in human form. Your power is incomprehensible and you are the primeval person. You are the controller of all, the master of the life force, body, and senses of all living beings.

We bow down before you. The sage Narada has blessed us since his curse allowed us to see you. May we now return to our home? We pray that from this moment onward we will only speak of your activities, our ears will only hear of your splendour, our hands do your work, and minds always be absorbed in thoughts of you.

Krishna, who is the controller of everyone, was still tied to the mortar. Smiling he said to them, Narada is compassionate and although he cursed you, the result is to your benefit. You may both return to your homes. Your desire to develop devotion to me will be fulfilled. Then Nalakubara and Manigriva bowed to Krishna and returned to their home.

When they heard the arjuna trees fall, all the men of the village went to see what had happened. They saw the trees fallen on the ground but couldn't understand why they had fallen over. All the boys said to them, Krishna did this. When Krishna crawled between the trees the mortar went between the trees and Krishna pulled the mortar which caused the trees to fall down. The cowherd men couldn't believe that a small child could have uprooted the trees. When Nanda saw Krishna tied to the mortar with ropes, he smiled and untied him.

Sometimes the ladies in the village would encourage Krishna to dance for them. Sometimes he would sing very loudly when they asked him to. Although he is the supreme controller of all the worlds, he would dance and sing as if he was their puppet. Sometimes Yasoda or the other ladies in the village would order Krishna to fetch things for them and

he would bring them the things they asked for. These activities of Krishna show how much he submits to the desires of those who love him.

It wasn't long before Krishna and Balarama became old enough to take care of the calves. One day Krishna wanted to eat his breakfast in the forest. He woke all the other cowherd boys and herding their cows in front of them, they all started out from Vrndavana.

The boys would play many games. Sometimes they would steal each other's belongings and throw them out of reach. When the boy who owned it would try and get it back another boy near it would throw it still further away. When the boy who owned it would cry, all the other boys would laugh and return it to him.

Sometimes they would play their flutes and their bugles. Sometimes they would imitate the birds by following their shadows on the ground. Sometimes they would play with monkeys and imitate them by pulling faces and climbing in the trees. In this way the boys would play with Krishna.

While the boys were enjoying games in the forest a demon named Agha who had been sent by Kamsa arrived in the forest. Agha took on the body of a gigantic snake as large as a mountain. Disguising himself this way he intended to swallow Krishna and his friends whole. He opened his mouth with his lower lip laying on the ground, and his mouth resembled a big cave in a mountain. When the boys saw the snake they thought it was part of the scenery of Vrndavana.

Laughing loudly the boys entered the mouth of the snake. The snake didn't close his mouth because he was waiting for Krishna to enter his mouth. Krishna knew that the snake was a demon and when he saw that the boys had walked into its mouth he hesitated and seemed to be unsure of what to do to save them. After a short time, Krishna also en-

tered between the jaws of the demon. Then Krishna enlarged himself within the snake's throat and suffocated the demon.

Having saved the boys and killing the demon Agha, Krishna brought them to the sandy bank of the river and said, This river is an excellent place for us to play. The sand on the river bank is clean and soft and there are lotus flowers and many birds and bees making wonderful sounds. Let us all sit down and eat our lunch here and the calves can come and eat the grass and drink water from the river.

The boys sat circled around Krishna who sat in the centre. They resembled the petals of a lotus surrounding the centre. They all brought out their lunches and began to eat, sharing their lunches with each other. They were all joking with one another and laughing.

While the boys were enjoying their lunch the calves wandered away into the forest to eat the grass there. When the cowherd boys noticed that the calves had gone they were all afraid they had lost them. Krishna said, You should all keep eating. I will go and find the calves and bring them back.

Carrying a morsel of food in his hand, Krishna went to look for the calves. Meanwhile the god Brahma had been watching Krishna when he killed the demon Agha and was amazed. While Krishna was away in the forest, Brahma took all the calves and the cowherd boys away. When Krishna couldn't find the calves he returned to the riverbank and couldn't see the cowherd boys.

Understanding what Brahma had done Krishna expanded himself into their exact forms and returned to Vrndavana. Then Krishna went into each cowherd boy's house and acted just like each boy. Their mothers thought they were bathing and feeding their sons but they were actually personally serving Krishna. The mothers of Vrndavana had motherly

affection for Krishna and in this way they could express that affection for him.

In this way Krishna had become the cowherd boys and the calves and he continued in this way for one year. When Brahma returned after only a moment of his time, one year had passed in Vrndavana. Brahma saw that Krishna was playing with his friends and tending the calves just as he had been doing when Brahma left.

Brahma was confused because he knew that the calves and the cowherd boys had been taken by him and they were still sleeping under his mystic spell. Yet here were the exact same boys and calves still playing with Krishna after one whole year. He could not understand where the boys and calves had come from.

Brahma was contemplating this for a long time, but he couldn't understand which of the boys and calves were the real ones. Because Brahma had tried to confuse the Supreme Lord, it was Brahma who ended up being confused. While Brahma was looking at the boys and the calves he saw that they had a dark complexion like a monsoon cloud and they were wearing yellow silk clothing.

They all had four arms and were holding a conch-shell, disc, club and lotus flower in their four hands. They wore helmets and were decorated with beautiful ornaments. They had bracelets on their arms and the Kaustubha jewel hung around their necks.

Brahma saw that all living beings were worshipping them. In his amazement at the sight, Brahma was stunned and fell silent. He could not even see. Krishna could understand what had happened to Brahma and he removed the veil of his illusory power. Brahma's vision was restored and he opened his eyes and saw the universe as well as himself.

Then Brahma saw that the Supreme Lord was playing the part of a child in a family of cowherds. He saw him standing alone with a morsel of

food in his hand, looking this way and that as he searched for the calves and his friends. After he saw all of this, Brahma bowed down at Krishna's feet. With tears in his eyes, and his voice choked with emotion, Brahma began to offer prayers to Krishna.

Brahma said, I offer my respect to the Supreme Lord. You are the son of the cowherd Nanda and your body is decorated with garlands of forest flowers. You hold a stick for herding cattle and a buffalo horn and a flute. You are holding a morsel of food in your hand. I cannot comprehend this form you have revealed to me which is not composed of material elements. Those people who live very simply and listen to descriptions of your qualities and activities are able to capture you even though you are invincible.

Devotion to you is the most beneficial path for everyone. Those who try to achieve only knowledge will achieve trouble, just as an empty husk of rice gives only trouble to those who thresh it. In the past, many people have offered all their activities to you and engaged in hearing and singing about you. They have all come to understand you and reached the supreme destination.

Anyone who sincerely leads their life with the aim of self-realisation and is detached while enduring the reactions of their past actions will be entitled to receive your mercy and be liberated from the material world.

O Lord, I have been foolish and impertinent. I tried to place you in illusion to display my power, but compared to you, I am like a spark emanating from a bonfire. Would you please excuse my ignorant behaviour? I thought that my power was independent of you. Is a mother offended when her fetus kicks her? Is there anything that exists outside of you? You are the supreme master and creator.

O Supreme Lord, no one is capable of knowing the extent of your incarnations and forms you take in this world. No one can understand your infinite powers. Because of your power this entire temporary dreamlike world appears to be real. You are the one self within the hearts of all, the original person, eternal and imperishable. You are free from impurity and infallible.

Being bound to matter or liberated from matter both come from ignorance. When one understands that the soul is beyond all such designations, bondage and liberation are meaningless, just as day and night are meaningless in the sphere of the sun.

Only the ignorant think that you are a manifestation of the illusory material energy. Such foolish people think that the soul is the physical body and something to be looked for in the outside world. If you show someone even the slightest mercy they can understand you, but that is not true for anyone else. No matter how long they study the Vedas they cannot understand you.

My Lord, I therefore pray that in this birth or the next and in whatever species I am born I will be able to serve you. The residents of Vrndavana have the highest blessing because they are friends of the eternal and perfect Lord who is the embodiment of bliss.

As long as people are not devoted to you, their worldly attachments are like thieves and chains and their homes are prisons. There are people who are certain they know everything about you. Others may think that way, but I consider your glories to far above the horizon of my body, mind and words.

After he had offered his prayers, Brahma bowed down to the Lord and then returned to the celestial realm. The Supreme Lord then took the calves to the riverbank where they had been before. Although a year

had passed, for the cowherd boys covered by the power of illusion it seemed only a moment.

His cowherd companions said, You were very quick, we haven't had time to eat any of our lunch. Come and sit with us and eat your meal. Then Krishna finished eating his lunch with his friends. As they all returned to the village all the boys sang, Today Krishna saved us by killing the great snake.

Anyone who hears these stories of Krishna's childhood activities with his friends will attain all their desires.

In this way, the Supreme Lord wandered around Vrndavana with his friends. One day, without Balarama accompanying them, Krishna and his friends went to the Yamuna river. It was a very hot day and because the cows and cowherd boys were very thirsty they drank from the river, but they didn't realise the river had been poisoned. Because of drinking the poisoned water, they all became unconscious. Lord Krishna glanced at them and brought them all back to life.

Krishna could understand that a serpent called Kaliya was living in the river and poisoning the water. He wanted to kill the serpent and purify the river. So Krishna jumped into the river and began splashing around. The serpent Kaliya could understand that someone was trespassing in his river and he approached Krishna and bit him on the chest.

Then he coiled his body around Krishna. When the cowherd boys saw this they became so anxious they fell to the ground unconscious. At that time, many bad omens arose in Vrndavana and the residents of the village were afraid because his elder brother Balarama had not accompanied Krishna that day. So they all ran to try and find Krishna.

The people of Vrndavana followed Krishna's footprints leading to the Yamuna river. When they reached the river they saw Krishna wrapped within the coils of the serpent not moving and the other boys were un-

conscious by the side of the river. All the residents of Vrndavana felt the greatest despair. Krishna stayed motionless for some time and then he stopped acting like he was mortal and threw off the serpent's bond.

The serpent became very angry and raised his hoods. He was breathing poison from his flared nostrils. The serpent Kaliya licked his lips and stared at Krishna with poisonous and fiery eyes. Krishna circled the serpent playing with him. After tiring the serpent by circling him, Krishna then climbed onto Kaliya's head and began to dance.

Whenever one of Kaliya's 101 heads would not bow down, Krishna would kick it down. This caused the serpent to spit blood and poison from his mouth and nostrils. Whenever one of Kaliya's heads would rise in anger, Krishna would dance on it and force it into submission. Broken and defeated by Krishna's dancing, the serpent Kaliya remembered the Supreme Lord and mentally sought his protection.

Seeing that Kaliya was defeated by the Lord, Kaliya's wives came forward in anxiety and approached the Lord. Kaliya's wives said to Krishna, Kaliya has committed many offences so your punishment is fair. You always treat friends and enemies equally and any punishment you give will eventually bring a beneficial result. Your punishment is actually merciful because it purifies the recipient. We think our husband must have undertaken great penances or shown compassion to all living beings for you to be pleased with him and favour him in this way.

We cannot understand what virtuous actions he must have taken to receive the highest blessing of the touch of your lotus feet. To achieve this same blessing the goddess of fortune executed difficult austerities for a long time. Anyone who gains the dust from your feet does not desire dominion over the celestial realm or the entire world, nor mystic powers or even liberation from birth and death. You are present within everyone's heart but you are also indiscernible.

You are time, you are beyond the universe and also immanent within it. Please let us offer you our homage. A single offence of a servant should be forgiven by the master. Forgive the ignorance of our husband Kaliya because he did not recognise who you are. Show compassion for us and be merciful to our husband. Our husband is close to death, please spare him and return our husband to us.

After hearing the prayers of wives of the serpent, Krishna allowed the serpent to escape. Kaliya's senses were slowly restored and he said, Because I was born as a serpent, I am dominated by the qualities of envy, ignorance and anger. I think the body is the self, so it is difficult to give up the qualities associated with this serpent body. Being overcome by your power of illusion how can I become free of it by myself? You are omniscient and the only cause that can relieve us of illusion, therefore you should punish me or show me grace as you see fit.

Krishna said, You cannot stay in this river. You and your wives should go and live in the ocean where you will not disturb anyone. Then Kaliya and his wives worshipped Krishna with flowers, fine clothing, valuable gems and fragrances. Then they left and went to the ocean and the Yamuna river became free of poison.

Krishna came out of the lake wearing his new clothes and decorated with his jewellery. When the residents of Vrndavana saw him they were revived as if they had regained their life, and they all embraced him affectionately. Then Krishna and his family and friends returned to Vrndavana.

One day Krishna and his brother Balarama saw that the people of Vrndavana were busy arranging a sacrifice to the god Indra. Krishna said to his father, What is everyone doing father? What is the meaning of all this activity? Are you preparing for a sacrifice? Who is the sacrifice being offered to and what will it achieve? Would you please tell me all about this?

Krishna's father Nanda said, We are preparing to offer a sacrifice to Indra who controls the rain. The clouds are Indra's manifested form in the world and they provide the rain which nourishes all living beings. So we worship Indra by offering him grain and other items which are produced from the rain in this traditional religious ceremony.

When Krishna heard this from his father he wanted to make Indra angry so he said, A living being is born according to their past deeds, and dies through the power of their karma. Karma causes our pleasure and pain, anxiety and fear and our blessings. All the living beings must suffer or enjoy the karmic results of their own actions. Why should we worship Indra if he does not have the power to alter the destined results of our own actions.

All people follow their own nature. So everyone should dutifully perform the work and activities corresponding to their nature. It is work that is actually sustaining us. The brahmin sustains their existence by studying and teaching the Vedas and the kings maintain themselves by administration of the society. The merchants support themselves by trade and agriculture and the workers support themselves by serving others. The merchants engage in farming, trade and cow protection. Our village consists of merchants engaged in protecting the cows and dairy farming.

It is the cows, the forest and the hills which are the source of our sustenance. Therefore, we should arrange paraphernalia to offer a sacrifice for the pleasure of the cows and Govardhana Hill. Let us cook a variety of foods with our milk products for this sacrifice. Let the brahmins arrange a proper sacrifice of the food and we will pay them with cows and food.

Then we should distribute all the food to everyone, including all the lower class people and also low animals like dogs. We should feed the cows on sumptuous grass and offer items to Govardhana Hill. This is

my idea of the sacrifice we should perform. If you think this is a good idea we should do this. A sacrifice like this will be very pleasing to the cows, Govardhana Hill, the brahmins and also to me.

Krishna wanted to crush Indra's pride so he suggested this to his father. Nanda and the other cowherd men of Vrndavana agreed to Krishna's idea. The people of Vrndavana performed the sacrifice just as Krishna had suggested and then returned to their village.

When Indra found out that his sacrifice had not been performed, he was angry with the residents of Vrndavana. Indra said, These people of the village of Vrndavana are very proud. They have taken the advice of the human being Krishna and disregarded the gods.

The boy Krishna thinks he is very wise, but he is only a proud, foolish and talkative child. These people have become too prosperous and it has made them arrogant. I will send destructive clouds to destroy their animals, their village and their pride.

Then Indra released his clouds and they poured torrential rain on the village of Vrndavana. The clouds roared with thunder as they threw down bolts of lightning and poured hailstones on the village. The downpour was incessant and the earth was flooded. The people and animals of Vrndavana were distressed and they approached Krishna for protection. They said, Krishna, please protect us all from Indra's anger. Please save us.

Krishna thought to himself, Indra is responsible for this downpour, his affluence has caused him to be proud and think he is the supreme ruler of the world. I will destroy his ignorance and also his pride.

Then with one hand Krishna lifted Govardhana Hill into the air and effortlessly held it over his head as if it was a mushroom. He said to the residents of the village, You and your cows may all take shelter under this hill. There is no need to be afraid that Govardhana will fall from

my hand or be scared of the wind and rain because you will be safe under here.

The residents of Vrndavana all went underneath the hill and there was plenty of space for the village and their cows and possessions. While the residents of Vrndavana all looked on, Krishna held the hill aloft for seven days without moving. When Indra saw this he was amazed. His pride was destroyed and he stopped the torrential storm of his clouds.

Seeing that the storm had stopped Krishna said to the village, You may all go home now. The wind and rain have stopped and the floods have subsided. There is no need to be afraid any more. The residents of the village loaded up their possessions in their wagons and went out from underneath the hill. They all watched as Lord Krishna put the hill back in its original location.

All the cowherd men who witnessed Krishna lifting Govardhana hill were amazed at his feat and confused how he could accomplish such a thing. They went to Nanda and said, The deeds of this boy are miraculous. How is it that he is living among such humble people as us? He is only 7 years old and yet he lifts a hill as easily as an elephant would lift a lotus flower.

When he was a baby he sucked the breast of the witch Putana along with her life. Another time when he was only a small child and his mother had tied him to a mortar, he dragged the mortar between two arjuna trees and uprooted them. He also subdued the serpent Kaliya and survived his poison. We cannot understand all these things about your son.

Nanda said, When Krishna was a baby, the brahmin priest Gargamuni spoke to me about Krishna and said, According to the ages, your son Krishna appears in three different colours, white, red and yellow. Now he has appeared in a blackish colour. Your son has many names and

forms according to his qualities and activities. I can understand this, but most people do not understand these things. This son of yours is as good as Narayana, so you should not be surprised by his amazing activities.

Gargamuni told me this, so I can only assume that Krishna is a partial manifestation of Lord Narayana. The cowherd men became joyful hearing Nanda's words and their confusion was dispelled.

Lord Indra was ashamed of himself and he approached Krishna with folded hands and said, You are the supreme controller of the entire universe. You destroy the pride of those who think they are masters of this world. You punish those who deserve it, to educate them. I was absorbed in pride because of my controlling power and so I have offended you. Please forgive me for this.

May my consciousness never again be corrupted in this way. You come to this world to punish those who are a burden on the earth and to protect those who are your faithful servants. When my sacrifice was suspended I was very angry and I tried to destroy Vrndavana with a fierce storm. You mercifully destroyed my pride by crushing my attempt.

Krishna smiled at Indra and said, Indra, you were intoxicated with your power as the king of the celestial realms, so I stopped the sacrifice which was meant for you. I did this for your welfare so you would remember me. Those who are engrossed in material power and prosperity are unable to perceive me. In order to bless them I take away their prosperity. You may return to your home and rule without pride or arrogance.

Sometime after this, it was autumn in Vrndavana and the nights were filled with the scent of jasmine blossoms. Krishna's mind was absorbed with matters of the heart. When Krishna saw the reddish full moon rise and illuminate the forest in its cooling rays, he played his flute to steal the hearts of the gopis with beautiful eyes. Hearing the melody of Kr-

ishna's flute, the gopis of Vrndavana were captivated and they went to meet him.

As the flute began to play, some of the gopis were milking cows, some were cooking, but they all abandoned their activities to go and meet Krishna. Although they were obstructed by their husbands and relatives who all tried to stop them, they refused to stay because Krishna had stolen their hearts. Some of the gopis couldn't get out of their houses so they closed their eyes and absorbed their minds on Krishna. Their karma was burnt to ashes by the intense feeling of separation from him.

When the gopis arrived to see Krishna, he said to them, Welcome to you all. How can I please you? Is everything alright in Vrndavana? Why have you all come here? There are creatures of the night lurking about so you should not stay here and instead return to your homes. Your families will be worried about you if they cannot find you and you shouldn't cause them to worry. You have seen how beautiful the forest is, with its flowers illuminated by the moonlight, now you can return to your homes to look after your husbands and your children.

The perfection of a woman's religious duty is to look after her husband and his relatives and take care of her children and in this way she can achieve the celestial realms. When the gopis heard Krishna speaking in this way, they became despondent. With their faces cast down and tears in their eyes, they scratched the ground with their toe-nails and stood silently disheartened by their distress.

Then the gopis wiped their tears away and said to him, You should not say these unkind things to us. Please do not reject us. We have renounced all material enjoyment to serve you, so please reciprocate with us. You have given us wise advice about our religious duty and of course it is good to care for our husbands and families.

But this advice should be directed toward you because you are the innermost soul of all living beings and their most beloved and faithful friend. Please be compassionate toward us and do not dismiss us. We were previously content with our home and family, but now you have captured our hearts and minds and our feet refuse to move. We cannot return to Vrndavana because now we only desire to serve you and for this we have left our families and our homes.

Krishna laughed when he heard the gopi's pitiful words. Although he is always satisfied in his own self, he gracefully satisfied their desires and went to the bank of the Yamuna river and embraced them. Having received such personal favour from Krishna the gopis became proud thinking themselves superior to others. When Krishna saw this had happened to them he disappeared to destroy their pride.

When Krishna disappeared the gopis were very sad at losing him. Singing loudly they searched for him in the Vrndavana forest. They became like madwomen and even asked the trees if they had seen him. When they couldn't find Krishna anywhere, the gopis came back to the bank of the Yamuna river and sat down together to sing about him.

They said, O Krishna, it is because you were born in Vrndavana that is has such splendour. Our lives depend on you, and we have searched for you in all directions. Please reveal yourself to us. You have protected us from death many times, so why are you abandoning us now? You are not really the son of Yasoda, you are the innermost soul in the hearts of all. Your voice is like nectar and your words are enchanting.

Descriptions of your qualities and activities sustain the wise and bring prosperity to anyone who hears them. Your laugh, tender gaze and secret exchanges all touch our hearts. During the day when you wander in the forest and we cannot see you, each moment is like an era to us. When you return in the evening we curse the creator for giving us eyelids that blink and deprive us for even a moment the joy of seeing you.

The gopis cried and lamented in this way, they wanted to see Krishna and they wept loudly because they could not find him. In the midst of this, a smiling Krishna arrived and the gopis sprung to their feet as if the life force had animated their limbs. The gopis and Krishna returned to the bank of the Yamuna.

Although they were very glad to see him, they spoke as if they were somewhat angry with him and said, Some people show favour only to those who love them in return, while others show favour to everyone. But there are people who do not show favour to anyone. Can you explain why this is so?

Krishna said, People who show love for others only to achieve their own purpose are selfish and not true friends. People who love others who do not return their love are the true friends, they are like parents and that kind of love is pure. Sometimes I do not respond to the love and devotion of living beings so they will continue to meditate on me just as someone who has lost their money then becomes solely focused on the wealth they no longer possess.

For my sake you have renounced the conventional decorum and the good opinion of society and your relatives. I disappeared from your view to enhance the intensity of your devotion to me. You have destroyed all material bonds to worship me. I am unable to repay you for your pure devoted service to me. Therefore, please let your own wonderful deeds be your reward.

Listening to the enchanting words of Krishna, the gopis forgot all their anxiety at being separated from him. On the bank of the Yamuna, the gopis joyfully linked their arms together and danced with Krishna. With the gopis arrayed in a circle and by his mystic power Krishna manifest as many forms as there were gopis and each gopi thought that he was dancing with only her.

The gopis and Krishna sang and danced together. Although completely satisfied within himself, Krishna assumed as many forms as there were gopis and joyfully danced with them. After the night had almost passed, Krishna advised the gopis to return to their homes they reluctantly agreed. Those who hear the story of Krishna's dancing with the gopis of Vrndavana will achieve intense devotion to the Lord.

Meanwhile, in the city of Mathura the great sage Narada had gone to see King Kamsa. He approached King Kamsa and said, Vasudeva and Devaki's 8th child was taken to live with Nanda and Yasoda, and his brother Balarama is the son of Vasudeva and Rohini. The daughter you tried to kill was really the child of Yasoda.

King Kamsa was enraged on hearing this and he was about to kill Vasudeva, but Narada reminded him that he was to be killed by the two sons of Vasudeva. So Kamsa refrained from killing him and had Vasudeva and Devaki placed in chains.

Then King Kamsa called for his ministers and said to them, The sons of Vasudeva, Balarama and Krishna are living in Vrndavana. There is a prophecy that these two boys will kill me. I will bring them to Mathura for a wrestling competition. I want you to build a wrestling arena with galleries for an audience and arrange for all the residents of the city to see the competition. Then make sure the elephant Kuvalayapida stands at the entrance to the wrestling ring and have him kill Balarama and Krishna.

After Kamsa had instructed his ministers, he called for Akrura and said to him, Go to the village of Nanda, there you will find the two brothers Balarama and Krishna. I want you to bring them here, along with Nanda and the other men of the village who should bring me tribute. I will have my elephant kill Krishna and Balarama and if they evade death that way, I will have my strongest wrestlers kill them.

The next morning Akrura mounted his chariot and departed for the village of Vrndavana. On his way he was filled with devotion to the Lord and thought to himself, I must have performed some virtuous acts because today I will be fortunate enough to see Krishna. Today my life has become successful because I will offer my respects to the Supreme Lord.

By his own desires, the Supreme Lord Vishnu has incarnated as a human being and soon my eyes will see him and their existence will be fulfilled. Although I have been sent by Kamsa, the Lord will not judge me to be his enemy. He is equal toward everyone and does not dislike anyone. But in whatever way one approaches him, he responds accordingly.

In this way Akrura was contemplating his meeting with Krishna on his journey and he reached the village of Vrndavana just as the sun was setting. Akrura saw Krishna and Balarama going to milk the cows. Krishna wore yellow garments and had a dark complexion, while Balarama wore blue and his complexion was white.

With his eyes full of tears and overcome by feelings of love, Akrura got down from his chariot and bowed before Krishna and Balarama. Krishna embraced him and Balarama grasped Akrura's hands and led him to their house. They welcomed him and offered him fine food. After Akrura had eaten Krishna said to him, Did you have a comfortable journey? Are all our friends and relatives well? What is the purpose of your visit? Akrura described the situation including Kamsa's hostility towards their family and gave them Kamsa's message.

Krishna and Balarama then told their father Nanda about Kamsa's orders. Nanda and the cowherd men gathered valuable gifts and yoked their wagons ready to depart for Mathura for the festival. The next day Akrura, Krishna and Balarama mounted the chariot and departed for the city of Mathura. Nanda and the cowherd men followed behind in

their wagons. They had brought many offerings for Kamsa including clay pots filled with milk products.

At the end of the day, Akrura's chariot reached a garden outside the city of Mathura and Akrura, Krishna, and Balarama met up with Nanda and the other cowherd men. Krishna said to Akrura, Take the chariot and enter Mathura. Then you should go home. We will rest here for a while and then we will go into the city.

Krishna, Balarama and the cowherd men spent the night in that garden. The next day the arrangements had been made for the wrestling festival. The residents of the city had all gathered to watch the wrestling matches. Nanda and the cowherd men presented their gifts to King Kamsa and took their seats in the wrestling arena.

Krishna and Balarama heard the drums playing at the wrestling arena and went there to see what was happening. They came to the entrance and saw the elephant Kuvalayapida and his keeper blocking their path. Krishna said, Make way and let us pass!

The elephant keeper provoked his elephant. The elephant charged at Krishna and tried to grab him with his trunk. Krishna slipped past him and hid himself between the elephant's legs. Catching hold of the elephant's tail, Krishna dragged him along the ground. Then Krishna went in front of the elephant, slapped him in the face and ran away. The elephant chased after Krishna, but every time it came close enough to touch him, Krishna made the elephant stumble and fall to the ground.

The elephant became enraged and provoked by his keeper he charged at Krishna again. Catching hold of his trunk, Krishna hurled it to the ground. He then pulled out its tusk and used it as a weapon to kill the elephant and his keeper. With tusk in hand, Krishna entered the wrestling arena. Then the wrestler Canura addressed Krishna and Balarama and said, Krishna and Balarama, hearing that you are both

well respected and skilled at wrestling, Kamsa has invited you here to witness your prowess.

Hearing what Canura said, Krishna welcomed it since he enjoyed wrestling. He said to Canura, we are boys and should wrestle against those who are equal in strength. Canura said, Neither of you have the strength of boys, you have just killed a powerful elephant so you should both wrestle with the strongest opponents and there is no injustice in that arrangement. You will wrestle against me and Balarama will be paired with Mustika.

With the pairs of fighters decided Krishna advanced toward Canura and Balarama toward Mustika. Wanting to conquer their opponents, they grabbed each other's hands and legs and tugged each other. They struck each other with fists, knees, and chest. They pulled their opponents around in circles, pushing them onto the ground. They lifted and carried each other and pinned each other to the ground.

Then Krishna seized Canura by his arms and whirled him around and around and then killed him by throwing him to the ground. Then Balarama struck Mustika with a blow from his palm and Mustika fell lifeless to the ground. Another wrestler ran forward and attacked Balarama, but he easily killed him as well. Krishna killed the wrestler Sala by kicking him in the head.

When the rest of the wrestlers saw the strongest fighters were all killed, they were afraid for their lives and ran away. Kamsa became enraged when the wrestlers fled and he yelled, Drive Vasudeva's two vicious sons from the city! Seize the property of the cowherd men and arrest the evil minded Nanda. As for Vasudeva, kill him along with my father Ugrasena and all the others who are on the side of our enemy!

As Kamsa ranted and boasted Krishna became enraged and he leapt onto the royal platform. Kamsa took up his sword and shield to protect

himself. But like Garuda seizing a snake, Krishna seized Kamsa by the hair and toppled his crown. Then he threw him into the wrestling arena, jumped on top of him and killed him. Then Krishna dragged Kamsa's dead body around the arena so everyone could see.

Kamsa's wives and relatives were desolate at his death. The grieving wives cried loudly and said, O dear husband, you perpetrated cruel and violent acts on those who were innocent. Anyone who harms other living beings can never achieve peace.

Lord Krishna is the creator and destroyer of all the worlds. How can anyone who opposes him be happy. Krishna consoled Kamsa's widows and arranged for the funeral rituals.

Krishna then installed Ugrasena as the King and brought all his relatives back from the places they had escaped to in fear of persecution by Kamsa. Then Krishna and Balarama went to see Nanda and said, Dearest father, both of us have been nourished and cared for by you and Yasoda. Parents have more love for their children than they have for themselves. Those who care for children who have been abandoned by their relatives because they are unable to look after them are the real parents. You should all now go home to Vrndavana and we will come to visit soon.

Nanda hugged Krishna and Balarama and then he and the cowherd men returned to Vrndavana while Krishna and Balarama stayed on in Mathura with their father Vasudeva.

Some time after this, Krishna called for Uddhava. Uddhava was an adviser of the Yadu dynasty. He was intelligent and Krishna's dear friend. Krishna said to him, Uddhava would you please go to Vrndavana and give a message to my parents and also to the gopis. They are all completely devoted to me and so are overcome with grief because we are separated so I must console them.

At Krishna's request Uddhava departed for Vrndavana in his chariot and arrived at Nanda's home at sunset. After Uddhava had been properly welcomed and offered food and a comfortable seat, Nanda said to him, Tell me Uddhava, is Krishna well? Does he remember his parents and his friends, the cows and the forest and Govardhana? Will he come home, at least once, to visit his family and friends? When we remember his exploits, his smiles and talks we become neglectful of our duties. We are reminded of him whenever we see the river and the forest and all the places he played, and we cannot stop thinking about him.

As Nanda remembered Krishna he became overwhelmed with love and stopped speaking. Yasoda shed tears as she listened to Nanda speaking about Krishna. Seeing the love Nanda and Yasoda felt for Krishna, Uddhava said, You are both extremely fortunate and deserving of praise because you have such a deep love of the Supreme Lord, the creator of all the worlds.

If someone at the time of their death concentrates their mind on Krishna, they destroy all their karma and reach the highest goal. Both of you have the utmost devotion for him, the cause of everything in existence so what virtuous acts are left for you to perform?

It will not be long before Krishna will visit Vrndavana and bring joy to his family and friends. You should not be unhappy, just as fire is present in wood, Krishna resides in the hearts of everyone. He does not love or hate anyone or think anyone is superior or inferior, he is equal toward all. He is not bound by karma to force him to take birth, but of his own desire he comes to the world to enjoy his activities and protect the virtuous souls.

The next morning the people of Vrndavana noticed the chariot in front of Nanda's home and wondered who it belonged to. Just then Uddhava appeared in front of the house. The young gopis were amazed when they saw Krishna's servant Uddhava.

Uddhava was handsome, he was wearing yellow clothes and bore a striking resemblance to Krishna. The gopis said, Who is this man, where has he come from? He looks just like Krishna. The gopis all surrounded Uddhava and offered him a comfortable seat and they asked him about Krishna.

They said, You must be Krishna's servant who has sent you here to make his parents happy. There is nothing else in Vrndavana that he would value, but affection for family members is difficult to relinquish. Friendship for those who are not family is only maintained for personal benefit and when the benefit is gone, the friendship is also gone. Courtesans abandon a man with no money, students who have completed their studies abandon a teacher and citizens abandon an incompetent king.

Birds abandon a tree when they have eaten its fruit and guests leave a house once they have had their meal. We gave up our husbands, relatives and children for him but he is not grateful and has deserted us. So although we cannot stop thinking about him and talking about him, we should give up any friendship with him.

Hearing about Krishna is sweetness to the ears and anyone who enjoys that nectar will lose interest in their worldly life. We trusted him and thought his deceitful words were true. Now we would like to discuss something else instead of always talking about Krishna.

Uddhava consoled the gopis and said, You have all achieved the goals of human life and dedicated your hearts to the Supreme Lord, so you are sure to be worshipped by everyone. Devoted service to Krishna is achieved by giving charitable gifts, singing his names, practising vows and penance, studying the Vedic literature and other virtuous acts. You are all blessed because you have achieved pure devotion for the Lord which is difficult even for the renounced sages to achieve. You have re-

nounced attachment to your homes and families and by your separation from him you have demonstrated your pure love for him.

Krishna has asked me to deliver this message to you. He said, My dear gopis, we are never apart because I am the inner soul of everything. Just as the five elements of space, air, fire, water and earth pervade the entire world, I pervade the mind, life air and senses of every living being. The soul is distinct from matter and the objects of the senses are like the things one sees in a dream, so one should be vigilant and control their mind.

Control of the mind is the goal of the spiritual paths - the study of the Vedas, the practice of yoga, renunciation, austerity and honesty - just as all rivers end on reaching the ocean. It is to bring your minds to constantly focus on me that I have stayed away from you. Since you have dedicated your hearts and minds to me and are always thinking of me, we will be united again soon.

Hearing this message from Krishna, the gopis became very happy and they said to Uddhava, Does Krishna remember us or speak about us in his conversations? Does he remember those nights in the forest of Vrndavana when he danced with us? Will Krishna ever come back to see us and save us from the grief we feel from being separated from him?

The cows, the forest, the hills and rivers of Vrndavana all remind us of Krishna. We can never forget him, because our hearts have been stolen by his enchanting acts, magnanimous smile and poetic words. Uddhava was amazed by the devotion of the gopis and their constant absorption in thoughts of Krishna.

Uddhava said, These simple cowherd women have achieved the perfection of life, because they have achieved pure unmotivated love for the Supreme Lord Krishna. Even the great sages desire to achieve such love. The ladies of Vrndavana have given up the bonds of familial affection,

which are very difficult to renounce, to seek refuge at the lotus feet of Krishna. I would consider it the highest good fortune if I could be born as a blade of grass in Vrndavana, so the gopis will bless me with the dust of their feet.

Chapter 22 – The Age of Corruption

Suka Goswami said, The age of Kali commenced as soon as Lord Krishna left this world and returned to his abode. The age of Kali is characterised by disagreement and hypocrisy. Due to the influence of the age, piety, honesty, tolerance, truth, compassion and purity will all continuously deteriorate.

In the age of Kali, wealth will be accepted as an indication of someone's good qualities. The application of justice will depend on a person's power and influence. Marriages will be based on mutual attraction. Cheating will govern business transactions and someone will be accepted as a brahmin merely because they wear a sacred thread. Respectability will be judged on wealth, and skill in argument will be an indicator of scholarship.

A body of water will be accepted as a holy place and not going hungry will be considered the aim of life. Beauty will be judged on external grooming and spiritual principles will be followed only for fame and reputation. Anyone who can support a family will be accepted as capable and those who are insolent and outspoken will be considered honest.

The earth will become overpopulated and the human race will become corrupted. Political power will be gained by power and wealth. The greedy rulers will be no better than thieves and they will harass the citizens with excessive taxes. Due to the inadequacies of the rulers, the citizens will suffer excessive cold, heat, drought and rain. They will experience hunger, thirst, disease and excessive anxiety.

Through the corrupting influence of the age of Kali, all creatures will diminish in size and people will not follow the Vedic principles. True spiritual principles will be unknown within society and people will

earn their livelihood by theft, deceit and violence. Lord Vishnu descends to protect virtue and protect those who are devoted to him.

In the house of the brahmin Vishnuyasa, in the village of Sambhala, the Lord will incarnate as Kalki. He will traverse the earth on his horse Devadatta, and kill the thieves who pose as kings. When all the fraudulent kings have been destroyed, the residents of the Earth will be purified by the wind filled with the sacred fragrances from the Lord's body. This will bring the age of Kali to an end and the age of Truth (Satya yuga) will begin. The sequence of the four ages – Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali continues repeatedly on this earth.

King Pariksit said, Could you please explain how those who are living in the age of Kali can escape the corrupting influence of the age of Kali? Can you also please describe the different ages as well as their duration and qualities?

Suka Goswami said, The first age is the age of truth (Satya yuga) and the 4 principles of religion –honesty, compassion, austerity and charity are fully present in this age. In the age of truth, the people are contented, compassionate, dedicated to the welfare of all living beings, peaceful, tolerant and self-controlled.

In the Treta yuga one fourth part of each of the principles of religion are slowly destroyed by the four principles opposing religion – dishonesty, violence, discontent and hatred. The people of this age engage in religious rituals and austerities and regulate their sensual enjoyment.

In Dvapara yuga the religious principles diminish by half. The people study the Vedic literature and are materially prosperous. Greed, dishonesty, discontent and jealousy become prominent.

In the age of Kali only a quarter of the religious principles remain. Even that small amount will gradually diminish with the progression of the influence of the age of Kali. In the age of Kali the people are cru-

el, greedy and always fighting. Dishonesty, laziness, deception, anxiety, fear and poverty become prominent.

Due to the influence of the qualities of the age of Kali, humanity will be greedy, immoral, selfish and impoverished. The rulers will exploit the citizens, the impious will interpret the Vedic literature, the towns will be full of thieves and the brahmins will only be interested in satisfying their stomachs and genitals.

The merchants will be deceitful and earn money by any dishonourable occupation. Workers will withhold their service if their master has no wealth and masters will abandon a worker who is in distress and unable to work. Cows will be slaughtered when they can no longer give milk. Uncivilised people will earn money by wearing the clothes of a priest. Ignorant people will take an elevated seat in an assembly and dare to speak about religious principles.

People will always be in anxiety and their minds will be disturbed. They will be weakened by taxation and famine. People will fight each other over trifles. Men will stop protecting their parents, children and wives. They will be focused only on satisfying their sensual desires. The people will become heretical and stop worshipping the Supreme Lord.

Because of the age of Kali, everything is corrupted. Such corruption can be eliminated if one focuses their mind on the Supreme Lord. Anyone who hears the glories of the Lord, or offers respect to the Lord will have the pollution within their mind dispelled. Even if one engages in austerities, breath control, practices compassion, bathes in all the holy places and follows strict vows, they cannot achieve the same level of purity that can be achieved when the Supreme Lord appears within one's heart.

Therefore, you should try to establish the Supreme Lord within your heart. If you can maintain your concentration on the Lord, then at the

time of death you will reach the supreme destination. The age of Kali is rife with imperfections, there is one excellent quality of the age. It is possible to achieve liberation from the material world simply by chanting the name of Krishna.

Chapter 23 – King Pariksit Passes Away

Suka Goswami said, O King Pariksit, best of the Kurus, the stories of the activities of Lord Narayana, the creator of the universe and the shelter of all have now been briefly described to you. It is not possible to describe them in their entirety. Anyone who is suffering in this material world can be liberated by hearing the pastimes of the Supreme Lord.

Narada taught Vyasadeva this Bhagavatam, and Vyasadeva taught it to me. The sage Suta Goswami, who is now sitting before us in the audience, will in the future repeat this Bhagavatam when questioned by the sages in the sacred forest at Naimisha. This Bhagavatam has described the Supreme Lord in detail.

King Pariksit, you should now abandon the thought that you will die. Although your body has been born, the soul is never born. You existed before the birth of your body and you will not be destroyed when your body is destroyed. You are completely distinct from the physical body just as fire is completely distinct from its energy or fuel.

If one dreams that they see their head cut off, they can understand that their self is standing apart from the dream and witnessing the dream. In the same way, one can understand that their body is produced from material elements and the self is apart from the body and witnessing it.

The soul within the body is self-illuminating and distinct from the body. The soul is the foundation of the changing body just as space is the foundation of all changing things. The soul is eternal and all pervasive. Using logic and reason you should contemplate the self that is residing in your body. Your true self cannot be burnt by the snake-bird sent by the brahmin's curse.

King Pariksit, I have narrated the activities and qualities of the Supreme Lord and I have spoken on the topics you have asked me about. What else would you like to hear?

Pariksit approached Suka Goswami and bowed his head to the sage's feet. He folded his palms together and said, I have achieved the perfection of my life. I have been graciously favoured by a compassionate soul like you. It is not surprising that great souls like you are merciful to foolish materialistic people like me who are always suffering the problems of material life.

After hearing this Bhagavatam and the descriptions of the Supreme Lord I am not afraid of death or the snake-bird. I have been able to absorb myself in the absolute truth which you have revealed to me and which removes all fear and now my ignorance has been dispelled.

Pariksit then absorbed his mind in meditation on the Supreme Lord. The snake bird, who could take any kind of form, took the form of a brahmin and bit the King. The body of King Pariksit was burnt to ashes by the fire of the snake bird's poison. There was a loud cry of distress that resounded in all directions on the earth and in the heavens.

Chapter 24 – Conclusion

Suta Goswami said to the sages at Naimisha, My dear brahmins, I have narrated the glories of the Supreme Lord to you. His activities deserve to be praised. Reciting this Bhagavatam eradicates all unfavourable things and anyone who hears it is purified of material contamination. Anyone who worships this Bhagavatam by hearing it or chanting it will have all desirable things bestowed upon them.

This Bhagavatam constantly glorifies the Supreme Lord and his qualities and activities. I bow down before that eternal and unlimited Supreme Lord who creates, maintains and destroys the material world.

Let me also offer my respects to the great sage Suka Goswami, the son of Vyasadeva. He was initially immersed in the contentment of impersonal realisation, yet he became attracted by the activities and qualities of the supreme person which are described in this Bhagavatam.

The Bhagavatam is full of descriptions of the activities of the Supreme Lord, which give pleasure to saintly people. The aim of these descriptions is to produce devotion to the supreme person. The Bhagavatam contains the essence of all the Vedas.

Anyone who can appreciate its relishable mood will not require any other literature. This Bhagavatam describes the method for achieving freedom from karma. Anyone who sincerely tries to understand its message will be liberated from all suffering.

Let us all bow down to that supreme person. Chanting his holy name and offering him respect will free us from all misfortune.

