

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Matsya, the Lord's Fish Incarnation

This chapter describes the Supreme Personality of Godhead's incarnation as a fish, and it also describes the saving of Mahārāja Satyavrata from an inundation.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead expands Himself by *svāmśa* (His personal expansions) and *vibhinnāmśa* (His expansions as the living entities). As stated in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.8), *paritrāṇāya sādhūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*: the Supreme Personality of Godhead appears on this planet for the protection of the *sādhus*, or devotees, and for the destruction of the miscreants, or nondevotees. He especially descends to give protection to the cows, the *brāhmaṇas*, the demigods, the devotees and the Vedic system of religion. Thus He appears in various forms — sometimes as a fish, sometimes a boar, sometimes *Nṛsimhadeva*, sometimes *Vāmanadeva* and so on — but in any form or incarnation, although He comes within the atmosphere of the material modes of nature, He is unaffected. This is a sign of His supreme controlling power. Although He comes within the material atmosphere, *māyā* cannot touch Him. Therefore, no material qualities can be attributed to Him in any degree.

Once, at the end of the previous *kalpa*, a demon named *Hayagrīva* wanted to take the Vedic knowledge away from Lord *Brahmā* at the time of annihilation. Therefore the Supreme Personality of Godhead took the incarnation of a fish at the beginning of the period of *Svāyambhuva* *Manu* and saved the Vedas. During the reign of *Cākṣuṣa* *Manu* there was a king named *Satyavrata*, who was a great pious ruler. To save him, the Lord appeared as the fish incarnation for a second time. King *Satyavrata* later became the son of the sun-god and was known as *Śrāddhadeva*. He was established as *Manu* by the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

To receive the favor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, King *Satyavrata* engaged in the austerity of subsisting only by drinking water. Once, while performing this austerity on the bank of the *Kṛtamālā* River and offering oblations of water with the palm of his hand, he found a small fish. The fish appealed to the King for protection, asking the King to keep Him in a safe place. Although the King did not know that the small fish was the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, as a king he gave

shelter to the fish and kept Him in a water jug. The fish, being the Supreme Personality of Godhead, wanted to show His potency to King Satyavrata, and thus He immediately expanded His body in such a way that He could no longer be kept in the jug of water. The King then put the fish in a big well, but the well was also too small. Then the King put the fish in a lake, but the lake was also unsuitable. Finally the King put the fish in the sea, but even the sea could not accommodate Him. Thus the King understood that the fish was no one else but the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and he requested the Lord to describe His incarnation as a fish. The Personality of Godhead, being pleased with the King, informed him that within a week there would be an inundation throughout the universe and that the fish incarnation would protect the King, along with the ṛṣis, herbs, seeds and other living entities, in a boat, which would be attached to the fish's horn. After saying this, the Lord disappeared. King Satyavrata offered respectful obeisances to the Supreme Lord and continued to meditate upon Him. In due course of time, annihilation took place, and the King saw a boat coming near. After getting aboard with learned brāhmaṇas and saintly persons, he offered prayers to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart, and thus he taught Mahārāja Satyavrata and the saintly persons about Vedic knowledge from the core of the heart. King Satyavrata took his next birth as Vaivasvata Manu, who is mentioned in Bhagavad-gītā. Vivasvān manave prāha: the sun-god spoke the science of Bhagavad-gītā to his son Manu. Because of being the son of Vivasvān, this Manu is known as Vaivasvata Manu.

Text 1:

Mahārāja Parīkṣit said: The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari, is eternally situated in His transcendental position, yet He descends to this material world and manifests Himself in various incarnations. His first incarnation was that of a great fish. O most powerful Śukadeva Gosvāmī, I wish to hear from you the pastimes of that fish incarnation.

Texts 2-3:

What was the purpose for which the Supreme Personality of Godhead accepted the abominable form of a fish, exactly as an ordinary living being accepts different forms under the laws of karma? The form of a fish is certainly condemned and full of terrible pain. O my lord, what was the

purpose of this incarnation? Kindly explain this to us, for hearing about the pastimes of the Lord is auspicious for everyone.

Text 4:

Sūta Gosvāmī said: When Parīkṣit Mahārāja thus inquired from Śukadeva Gosvāmī, that most powerful saintly person began describing the pastimes of the Lord's incarnation as a fish.

Text 5:

Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: O King, for the sake of protecting the cows, brāhmaṇas, demigods, devotees, the Vedic literature, religious principles, and principles to fulfill the purpose of life, the Supreme Personality of Godhead accepts the forms of incarnations.

Text 6:

Like the air passing through different types of atmosphere, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, although appearing sometimes as a human being and sometimes as a lower animal, is always transcendental. Because He is above the material modes of nature, He is unaffected by higher and lower forms.

Text 7:

O King Parīkṣit, at the end of the past millennium, at the end of Brahmā's day, because Lord Brahmā sleeps during the night, annihilation took place, and the three worlds were covered by the water of the ocean.

Text 8:

At the end of Brahmā's day, when Brahmā felt sleepy and desired to lie down, the Vedas were emanating from his mouth, and the great demon named Hayagrīva stole the Vedic knowledge.

Text 9:

Understanding the acts of the great demon Hayagrīva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari, who is full of all opulences, assumed the form of a fish and saved the Vedas by killing the demon.

Text 10:

During the Cākṣuṣa-manvantara there was a great king named Satyavrata who was a great devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Satyavrata performed austerities by subsisting only on water.

Text 11:

In this [the present] millennium King Satyavrata later became the son of Vivasvān, the king of the sun planet, and was known as Śrāddhadeva. By the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he was given the post of Manu.

Text 12:

One day while King Satyavrata was performing austerities by offering water on the bank of the river Kṛtamālā, a small fish appeared in the water in his palms.

Text 13:

Satyavrata, the King of Draviḍadeśa, threw the fish into the water of the river along with the water in his palm, O King Parīkṣit, descendant of Bharata.

Text 14:

With an appealing voice, the poor small fish said to King Satyavrata, who was very merciful: My dear King, protector of the poor, why are you throwing Me in the water of the river, where there are other aquatics who can kill Me? I am very much afraid of them.

Text 15:

To please himself, King Satyavrata, not knowing that the fish was the Supreme Personality of Godhead, decided with great pleasure to give the fish protection.

Text 16:

The merciful King, being moved by the pitiable words of the fish, placed the fish in a water jug and brought Him to his own residence.

Text 17:

But in one night that fish grew so much that He could not move His body comfortably in the water of the pot. He then spoke to the King as follows.

Text 18:

O My dear King, I do not like living in this waterpot with such great difficulty. Therefore, please find some better reservoir of water where I can live comfortably.

Text 19:

Then, taking the fish out of the waterpot, the King threw Him in a large well. But within a moment the fish developed to the length of three cubits.

Text 20:

The fish then said: My dear King, this reservoir of water is not fit for My happy residence. Please give Me a more extensive pool of water, for I have taken shelter of you.

Text 21:

O Mahārāja Parīkṣit, the King took the fish from the well and threw Him in a lake, but the fish then assumed a gigantic form exceeding the extent of the water.

Text 22:

The fish then said: O King, I am a large aquatic, and this water is not at all suitable for Me. Now kindly find some way to save Me. It would be better to put Me in the water of a lake that will never reduce.

Text 23:

When thus requested, King Satyavrata took the fish to the largest reservoir of water. But when that also proved insufficient, the King at last threw the gigantic fish into the ocean.

Text 24:

While being thrown in the ocean, the fish said to King Satyavrata: O hero, in this water there are very powerful and dangerous sharks that will eat Me. Therefore you should not throw Me in this place.

Text 25:

After hearing these sweet words from the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the form of a fish, the King, being bewildered, asked Him: Who are You, sir? You simply bewilder us.

Text 26:

My Lord, in one day You have expanded Yourself for hundreds of miles, covering the water of the river and the ocean. Before this I had never seen or heard of such an aquatic animal.

Text 27:

My Lord, You are certainly the inexhaustible Supreme Personality of Godhead, Nārāyaṇa, Śrī Hari. It is to show Your mercy to the living entities that You have now assumed the form of an aquatic.

Text 28:

O my Lord, master of creation, maintenance and annihilation, O best of enjoyers, Lord Viṣṇu, You are the leader and destination of surrendered devotees like us. Therefore let me offer my respectful obeisances unto You.

Text 29:

All Your pastimes and incarnations certainly appear for the welfare of all living entities. Therefore, my Lord, I wish to know the purpose for which You have assumed this form of a fish.

Text 30:

O my Lord, possessing eyes like the petals of a lotus, the worship of the demigods, who are in the bodily concept of life, is fruitless in all respects. But because You are the supreme friend and dearest Supersoul of everyone, worship of Your lotus feet is never useless. You have therefore manifested Your form as a fish.

Text 31:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: When King Satyavrata spoke in this way, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who at the end of the yuga had assumed the form of a fish to benefit His devotee and enjoy His pastimes in the water of inundation, responded as follows.

Text 32:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: O King, who can subdue your enemies, on the seventh day from today the three worlds — Bhūḥ, Bhuvaḥ and Svaḥ — will all merge into the water of inundation.

Text 33:

When all the three worlds merge into the water, a large boat sent by Me will appear before you.

Texts 34-35:

Thereafter, O King, you shall collect all types of herbs and seeds and load them on that great boat. Then, accompanied by the seven ṛṣis and surrounded by all kinds of living entities, you shall get aboard that boat, and without moroseness you shall easily travel with your companions on the ocean of inundation, the only illumination being the effulgence of the great ṛṣis.

Text 36:

Then, as the boat is tossed about by the powerful winds, attach the vessel to My horn by means of the great serpent Vāsuki, for I shall be present by your side.

Text 37:

Pulling the boat, with you and all the ṛṣis in it, O King, I shall travel in the water of devastation until the night of Lord Brahmā's slumber is over.

Text 38:

You will be thoroughly advised and favored by Me, and because of your inquiries, everything about My glories, which are known as param brahma, will be manifest within your heart. Thus you will know everything about Me.

Text 39:

After thus instructing the King, the Supreme Personality of Godhead immediately disappeared. Then King Satyavrata began to wait for that time of which the Lord had instructed.

Text 40:

After spreading kuśa with its tips pointing east, the saintly King, himself facing the northeast, sat down on the grass and began to meditate upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu, who had assumed the form of a fish.

Text 41:

Thereafter, gigantic clouds pouring incessant water swelled the ocean more and more. Thus the ocean began to overflow onto the land and inundate the entire world.

Text 42:

As Satyavrata remembered the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he saw a boat coming near him. Thus he collected herbs and creepers, and, accompanied by saintly brāhmaṇas, he got aboard the boat.

Text 43:

The saintly brāhmaṇas, being pleased with the King, said to him: O King, please meditate upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Keśava. He will save us from this impending danger and arrange for our well-being.

Text 44:

Then, while the King constantly meditated upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead, a large golden fish appeared in the ocean of inundation. The fish had one horn and was eight million miles long.

Text 45:

Following the instructions formerly given by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the King anchored the boat to the fish's horn, using the serpent Vāsuki as a rope. Thus being satisfied, he began offering prayers to the Lord.

Text 46:

The King said: By the grace of the Lord, those who have lost their self-knowledge since time immemorial, and who because of this ignorance are involved in a material, conditional life full of miseries, obtain the chance to meet the Lord's devotee. I accept that Supreme Personality of Godhead as the supreme spiritual master.

Text 47:

In hopes of becoming happy in this material world, the foolish conditioned soul performs fruitive activities that result only in suffering. But by rendering service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one becomes free from such false desires for happiness. May my supreme spiritual master cut the knot of false desires from the core of my heart.

Text 48:

One who wants to be free of material entanglement should take to the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and give up the contamination of ignorance, involving pious and impious activities. Thus one regains his original identity, just as a block of gold or silver sheds all dirt and becomes purified when treated with fire. May that inexhaustible Supreme Personality of Godhead become our spiritual master, for He is the original spiritual master of all other spiritual masters.

Text 49:

Neither all the demigods, nor the so-called gurus nor all other people, either independently or together, can offer mercy that equals even one ten-thousandth of Yours. Therefore I wish to take shelter of Your lotus feet.

Text 50:

As a blind man, being unable to see, accepts another blind man as his leader, people who do not know the goal of life accept someone as a guru who is a rascal and a fool. But we are interested in self-realization. Therefore we accept You, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as our spiritual master, for You are able to see in all directions and are omniscient like the sun.

Text 51:

A materialistic so-called guru instructs his materialistic disciples about economic development and sense gratification, and because of such instructions the foolish disciples continue in the materialistic existence of ignorance. But Your Lordship gives knowledge that is eternal, and the intelligent person receiving such knowledge is quickly situated in his original constitutional position.

Text 52:

My Lord, You are the supreme well-wishing friend of everyone, the dearest friend, the controller, the Supersoul, the supreme instructor and the giver of supreme knowledge and the fulfillment of all desires. But although You are within the heart, the foolish, because of lusty desires in the heart, cannot understand You.

Text 53:

O Supreme Lord, for self-realization I surrender unto You, who are worshiped by the demigods as the supreme controller of everything. By Your instructions, exposing life's purpose, kindly cut the knot from the core of my heart and let me know the destination of my life.

Text 54:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: When Satyavrata had thus prayed to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who had assumed the form of a fish, the Lord, while moving in the water of inundation, explained to him the Absolute Truth.

Text 55:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead thus explained to King Satyavrata the spiritual science known as sāṅkhya-yoga, the science by which one distinguishes between matter and spirit [in other words, bhakti-yoga], along with the instructions contained in the Purāṇas [the old histories] and the saṁhitās. The Lord explained Himself in all these literatures.

Text 56:

While sitting in the boat, King Satyavrata, accompanied by the great saintly persons, listened to the instructions of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in regard to self-realization. These instructions were all from the eternal Vedic literature [brahma]. Thus the King and sages had no doubt about the Absolute Truth.

Text 57:

At the end of the last inundation [during the period of Svāyambhuva Manu] the Supreme Personality of Godhead killed the demon named Hayagrīva and delivered all the Vedic literatures to Lord Brahmā when Lord Brahmā awakened from sleeping.

Text 58:

King Satyavrata was illuminated with all Vedic knowledge by the mercy of Lord Viṣṇu, and in this period he has now taken birth as Vaivasvata Manu, the son of the sun-god.

Text 59:

This story concerning the great King Satyavrata and the fish incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu, is a great transcendental

narration. Anyone who hears it is delivered from the reactions of sinful life.

Text 60:

One who narrates this description of the Matsya incarnation and King Satyavrata will certainly have all his ambitions fulfilled, and he will undoubtedly return home, back to Godhead.

Text 61:

I offer my respectful obeisances unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who pretended to be a gigantic fish, who restored the Vedic literature to Lord Brahmā when Lord Brahmā awakened from sleep, and who explained the essence of Vedic literature to King Satyavrata and the great saintly persons.