

CHAPTER FOUR

The Four Categories of Universal Annihilation

This chapter discusses the four kinds of annihilation (constant, occasional, material and final) and the chanting of the holy name of Lord Hari, which is the only means of stopping the cycle of material life.

One thousand cycles of four ages constitute one day of Brahmā, and each day of Brahmā, called a kalpa, contains within it the lifetimes of fourteen Manus. The duration of Brahmā's night is the same as that of his day. During his night Brahmā sleeps, and the three planetary systems meet destruction; this is the naimittika, or occasional, annihilation. When Brahmā's life span of one hundred years is finished, there occurs the prākṛtika, or total material, annihilation. At that time the seven elements of material nature, beginning with the mahat, and the entire universal egg composed of them are destroyed. When a person achieves knowledge of the Absolute, he understands factual reality. He perceives the entire created universe as separate from the Absolute and therefore unreal. That is called the ātyantika, or final, annihilation (liberation). At every moment time invisibly transforms the bodies of all created beings and all other manifestations of matter. This process of transformation causes the living entity to undergo the constant annihilation of birth and death. Those possessed of subtle vision state that all creatures, including Brahmā himself, are always subject to generation and annihilation. Material life means subjugation to birth and death, or generation and annihilation. The only boat suitable for crossing the ocean of material existence, which is otherwise impossible to cross, is the boat of submissive hearing of the nectarean pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: My dear King, I have already described to you the measurements of time, beginning from the smallest fraction measured by the movement of a single atom up to the total life span of Lord Brahmā. I have also discussed the measurement of the different millennia of universal history. Now hear about the time of Brahmā's day and the process of annihilation.

Text 2:

One thousand cycles of four ages constitute a single day of Brahmā, known as a kalpa. In that period, O King, fourteen Manus come and go.

Text 3:

After one day of Brahmā, annihilation occurs during his night, which is of the same duration. At that time all the three planetary systems are subject to destruction.

Text 4:

This is called the naimittika, or occasional, annihilation, during which the original creator, Lord Nārāyaṇa, lies down upon the bed of Ananta Śeṣa and absorbs the entire universe within Himself while Lord Brahmā sleeps.

Text 5:

When the two halves of the lifetime of Lord Brahmā, the most elevated created being, are complete, the seven basic elements of creation are annihilated.

Text 6:

O King, upon the annihilation of the material elements, the universal egg, comprising the elemental amalgamation of creation, is confronted with destruction.

Text 7:

As annihilation approaches, O King, there will be no rain upon the earth for one hundred years. Drought will lead to famine, and the starving populace will literally consume one another. The inhabitants of the earth, bewildered by the force of time, will gradually be destroyed.

Text 8:

The sun in its annihilating form will drink up with its terrible rays all the water of the ocean, of living bodies and of the earth itself. But the devastating sun will not give any rain in return.

Text 9:

Next the great fire of annihilation will flare up from the mouth of Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa. Carried by the mighty force of the wind, this fire will burn throughout the universe, scorching the lifeless cosmic shell.

Text 10:

Burned from all sides — from above by the blazing sun and from below by the fire of Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa — the universal sphere will glow like a burning ball of cow dung.

Text 11:

A great and terrible wind of destruction will begin to blow for more than one hundred years, and the sky, covered with dust, will turn gray.

Text 12:

After that, O King, groups of multicolored clouds will gather, roaring terribly with thunder, and will pour down floods of rain for one hundred years.

Text 13:

At that time, the shell of the universe will fill up with water, forming a single cosmic ocean.

Text 14:

As the entire universe is flooded, the water will rob the earth of its unique quality of fragrance, and the element earth, deprived of its distinguishing quality, will be dissolved.

Texts 15-19:

The element fire then seizes the taste from the element water, which, deprived of its unique quality, taste, merges into fire. Air seizes the form inherent in fire, and then fire, deprived of form, merges into air. The element ether seizes the quality of air, namely touch, and that air enters into ether. Then, O King, false ego in ignorance seizes sound, the quality of ether, after which ether merges into false ego. False ego in the mode of passion takes hold of the senses, and false ego in the mode of goodness absorbs the demigods. Then the total mahat-tattva seizes false ego along with its various functions, and that mahat is seized by the three basic modes of nature — goodness, passion and ignorance. My dear King Parīkṣit, these modes are further overtaken by the original unmanifest form of nature, impelled by time. That unmanifest nature is not subject to the six kinds of transformation caused by the influence of time. Rather, it has no beginning and no end. It is the unmanifest, eternal and infallible cause of creation.

Texts 20-21:

In the unmanifest stage of material nature, called *pradhāna*, there is no expression of words, no mind and no manifestation of the subtle elements beginning from the *mahat*, nor are there the modes of goodness, passion and ignorance. There is no life air or intelligence, nor any senses or demigods. There is no definite arrangement of planetary systems, nor are there present the different stages of consciousness — sleep, wakefulness and deep sleep. There is no ether, water, earth, air, fire or sun. The situation is just like that of complete sleep, or of voidness. Indeed, it is indescribable. Authorities in spiritual science explain, however, that since *pradhāna* is the original substance, it is the actual basis of material creation.

Text 22:

This is the annihilation called *prākṛtika*, during which the energies belonging to the Supreme Person and His unmanifest material nature, disassembled by the force of time, are deprived of their potencies and merge together totally.

Text 23:

It is the Absolute Truth alone who manifests in the forms of intelligence, the senses and the objects of sense perception, and who is their ultimate basis. Whatever has a beginning and an end is insubstantial because of being an object perceived by limited senses and because of being nondifferent from its own cause.

Text 24:

A lamp, the eye that views by the light of that lamp, and the visible form that is viewed are all basically nondifferent from the element fire. In the same way, intelligence, the senses and sense perceptions have no existence separate from the supreme reality, although that Absolute Truth remains totally distinct from them.

Text 25:

The three states of intelligence are called waking consciousness, sleep and deep sleep. But, my dear King, the variegated experiences created for the pure living entity by these different states are nothing more than illusion.

Text 26:

Just as clouds in the sky come into being and are then dispersed by the amalgamation and dissolution of their constituent elements, this material universe is created and destroyed within the Absolute Truth by the amalgamation and dissolution of its elemental, constituent parts.

Text 27:

My dear King, it is stated [in the Vedānta-sūtra] that the ingredient cause that constitutes any manifested product in this universe can be perceived as a separate reality, just as the threads that make up a cloth can be perceived separately from their product.

Text 28:

Anything experienced in terms of general cause and specific effect must be an illusion, because such causes and effects exist only relative to each other. Indeed, whatever has a beginning and an end is unreal.

Text 29:

Although perceived, the transformation of even a single atom of material nature has no ultimate definition without reference to the Supreme Soul. To be accepted as factually existing, something must possess the same quality as pure spirit — eternal, unchanging existence.

Text 30:

There is no material duality in the Absolute Truth. The duality perceived by an ignorant person is like the difference between the sky contained in an empty pot and the sky outside the pot, or the difference between the reflection of the sun in water and the sun itself in the sky, or the difference between the vital air within one living body and that within another body.

Text 31:

According to their different purposes, men utilize gold in various ways, and gold is therefore perceived in various forms. In the same way, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is inaccessible to material senses, is described in various terms, both ordinary and Vedic, by different types of men.

Text 32:

Although a cloud is a product of the sun and is also made visible by the sun, it nevertheless creates darkness for the viewing eye, which is another partial expansion of the sun. Similarly, material false ego, a particular product of the Absolute Truth made visible by the Absolute Truth, obstructs the individual soul, another partial expansion of the Absolute Truth, from realizing the Absolute Truth.

Text 33:

When the cloud originally produced from the sun is torn apart, the eye can see the actual form of the sun. Similarly, when the spirit soul destroys his material covering of false ego by inquiring into the transcendental science, he regains his original spiritual awareness.

Text 34:

My dear Parīkṣit, when the illusory false ego that binds the soul has been cut off with the sword of discriminating knowledge and one has developed realization of Lord Acyuta, the Supreme Soul, this is called the ātyantika, or ultimate, annihilation of material existence.

Text 35:

Experts in the subtle workings of nature, O subduer of the enemy, have declared that there are continuous processes of creation and annihilation that all created beings, beginning with Brahmā, constantly undergo.

Text 36:

All material entities undergo transformation and are constantly and swiftly eroded by the mighty currents of time. The various stages of existence that material things exhibit are the perpetual causes of their generation and annihilation.

Text 37:

These stages of existence created by beginningless and endless time, the impersonal representative of the Supreme Lord, are not visible, just as the infinitesimal momentary changes of position of the planets in the sky cannot be directly seen.

Text 38:

In this way the progress of time is described in terms of the four kinds of annihilation — continuous, occasional, elemental and final.

Text 39:

O best of the Kurus, I have related to you these narrations of the pastimes of Lord Nārāyaṇa, the creator of this world and the ultimate reservoir of all existence, presenting them to you only in brief summary. Even Lord Brahmā himself would be incapable of describing them entirely.

Text 40:

For a person who is suffering in the fire of countless miseries and who desires to cross the insurmountable ocean of material existence, there is no suitable boat except that of cultivating devotion to the transcendental taste for the narrations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead's pastimes.

Text 41:

Long ago this essential anthology of all the Purāṇas was spoken by the infallible Lord Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi to Nārada, who then repeated it to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vedavyāsa.

Text 42:

My dear Mahārāja Parīkṣit, that great personality Śrīla Vyāsadeva taught me this same scripture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, which is equal in stature to the four Vedas.

Text 43:

O best of the Kurus, the same Sūta Gosvāmī who is sitting before us will speak this Bhāgavatam to the sages assembled in the great sacrifice at Naimiṣāraṇya. This he will do when questioned by the members of the assembly, headed by Śaunaka.