

VIṢṢU.

1) *General information.* Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara are the Lords of creation, sustenance and extermination of this perishable universe. These trimūrtis (three figures) also are perishable. It is said, that one day of Brahmā will constitute thousand four-fold (catur) yugas and that during the life of Brahmā, fourteen Indras will fall down from heaven and die. This is a Brahmā age. The ages of two Brahmās constitute the age of one Viṣṇu. At the end of the age Viṣṇu also will perish. The age of Śiva is double the age of Viṣṇu. Śiva also will perish at the end of his age. (Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 5).

When everything perishes there comes the deluge (the great flood). After that, for one hundred and twenty Brahmā years the universe will be desolate and void. In that deep eternal silence, Viṣṇu will be seen sleeping on a banyan leaf on the surface of water. That is the beginning of the next great age. In this stage, Bāla-mukunda is the name of Mahāviṣṇu. As he remains on Nāra or water he will be called Nārāyaṇa also.

The name Viṣṇu means he who possesses the habit of Vyāpana (To pervade). While Viṣṇu, who has the power to spread his control over everything in whatever condition, lies on the banyan-leaf. From his navel, a lotus-stalk grows up, and on the top of the stalk, in the lotus flower, Brahmā comes into being. Brahmā does penance before Viṣṇu and extols him. Mahāviṣṇu confers on Brahmā the power of creation of the subjects. That Brahmā perishes along with the deluge and in his place another Brahmā is born. Thus in the life-time of Viṣṇu two Brahmās come into being and perish.

2) *Beginning.* In days of yore, when Viṣṇu was lying on the banyan leaf as Bāla Mukunda, he began to think "Who am I? Who created me? Why? What have I to perform?" - and soon an ethereal voice was heard, "I am everything. Except me, there is nothing eternal." From behind the voice Mahādevī appeared, and said "Look Viṣṇu. What is there to wonder at? Whenever the universe is subject to creation, sustenance and extermination, you have taken origin by the glory of the Almighty. The Almighty or the omnipotence is beyond attributes. But we are all subjected to attributes. Your foremost attribute is Sattva (goodness - purity) Brahmā whose main attribute is the attribute of rajas (activity - passions), will originate from your navel. From the middle of the brows of that Brahmā, Śiva will be born, whose main attribute is Tamas (inertia darkness). Brahmā, by the power of Tapas (penance) will acquire the power of creation and build the world. You will be the sustainer of that world. Śiva will destroy the same world. I am Devī Māyā (Illusion - personified as the wife of Brahman), the great power depending on you for the purpose of creation." After hearing these words of Devī, Viṣṇu went into meditation and deep sleep of contemplation.

3) *Avatāras (Incarnations).* When injustice and lawlessness abound in the universe, Viṣṇu will incarnate in the world in various forms and shapes, and will drive away injustice and will reinstate righteousness. The basis and the indeclinable semen virile of all the incarnations, is this spirit of the universe. All Devas, all human beings and all animals are created from a portion of this soul of the universe, which in itself is a portion. Brahmā, first incarnated as Sanatkumāra and lived the life of a Brahmin student of chaste abstinence. The second

incarnation was connected with the creation of the earth. It was the incarnation as a hog to redeem the earth which was immersed in the world of Rasātala. The third incarnation was taken to create the sages and hermits. The Supreme God incarnated as the deva-hermit, Nārada and taught Pañcarātra, the Vaiṣṇava-śāstra explaining the ways of observing Karmans. Fourthly, Viṣṇu took the incarnation of Nara-Nārāyaṇas (two hermits) and performed tapas (penance), difficult to do. The fifth incarnation was that of Kapila who taught his disciple Āsuri, a Brahmin, Sāṅkhya (one of the six systems of Indian philosophy dealing with evolution). The next incarnation was taken, according to the request of Atri, as his son under the name Dattātreya. Seventhly he took incarnation as Yajña, the son born to Prajāpati Ruci, by his wife Ākūti with the groups of devas (gods) such as Yāmas and others to sustain the Manvantara (age of Manu) of Svāyambhuva. The eighth incarnation was as the son of Bhagavān Nābhi by his wife Meru, and the ninth was, as the inner soul of Prithu, according to the request of the sages and hermits, with a view to change the earth to such a state that medicinal herbs may grow in plenty everywhere. The tenth was, as Matsya (Fish) in Cākṣuṣa Manvantara deluge; the eleventh, as turtle, to lift up the mountain Mandara; the twelfth as Dhanvantari, and the thirteenth was as Mohinī (Charming woman). The fourteenth was that of Man-lion, the fifteenth was that of Vāmana, the sixteenth that of Paraśurāma, the seventeenth, that of Vyāsa, the eighteenth, that of Śrī Rāma and the nineteenth was that of Rāma and the twentieth that of Kṛṣṇa in the dynasty of Vṛṣṇi. The twentyfirst was as Buddha in the beginning of the age of Kali. The twenty second incarnation was in the name of Kalki as the son of the Brahmin Viṣṇu-yaśas. Each incarnation is explained in places where that word occurs. See under Avatāra.

The avatāras of Mahāviṣṇu are numerous. Thousands and thousands of incarnations originate from Mahāviṣṇu as streams flow from a lake which overflows at all times. Hermits, Manus, Devas, Sons of Manus, Prajāpatis, all these are marks and portions of Mahāviṣṇu.

(Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Bāla Kāṇḍa, Sarga 15; Agni Purāṇa, Chapter 5; Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa, Sarga 40; Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 83; Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 1; M.B. Śānti Parva, Chapter 121; Agni Purāṇa, Chapter 12; Bhāgavata, Skandha 10; Bhāgavata, Skandha 5; Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 272; Vana Parva, Chapter 149; Śānti Parva, Chapter 339).

4) *Family life.* Vaikuṇṭha is the dwelling place of Mahāviṣṇu. Mahālakṣmī is the prominent wife. It is seen in Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 9, that besides Lakṣmīdevī, Gaṅgā Devī and Sarasvatī also were the wives of Viṣṇu. Lakṣmīdevī has taken several incarnations. Once she took birth from Khyāti, the wife of hermit Bhṛgu. At this birth Dhātā and Vidhātā were her brothers. On another occasion, she arose from a lotus-flower which grew up from the sea of Milk. (To know more about the wives Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī, see under Gaṅgā).

There is none to be mentioned as the legitimate son of Mahāviṣṇu. But Brahmā is the first that could be imagined as the son of Viṣṇu. Besides, Mahāviṣṇu once created a bright son, by his mind. That son was named