

Chapter 30. The Bhagavatha Path

The Lord's incarnations are endless

The sage Suka adjusted himself in his seat and began. “The supreme sovereign Lord, manifesting as Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara through the prompting of primal desire (*moha*), is engaged in creating, fostering, and destroying the worlds. In what is thus created, there is always the principle of dualism. There is difference and disparity between one and another. If these differences and disparities are harmonised wisely, the world will have happiness and peace. On the other hand, if living beings behave wrongly, the world will be sunk in anxiety, misery and confusion. When these arise, the Lord assumes appropriate forms and affords necessary protection and correction. He sets right the damaged world, removes the evil forces that caused the damage, and instructs mankind in the science of fostering the right and the good.

Lord incarnates as a boar and rescues Earth

“It isn't possible to limit God's freedom in assuming forms. He adopts endless forms to manifest Himself in the world and saves it. His incarnation is in conformity with the need of the crisis at the time. When the Earth moaned under the injustice of Hiranyaksha, He had to appear as a boar, taking form and equipped with attributes, though in essence, He is without form and attribute. The will of God is mysterious; it cannot be explained by categories or as consequences. It is above and beyond human reasoning and imagination. It can be comprehended only by those who have known Him, and not by those who have acquired scholarship or sharp intellect. The cause and the consequence are integrally related.

“One day, when Brahma was resting on His seat, a boar as small as one's thumb-tip fell from His nose! Brahma, who had assumed the human form in sportive exuberance, knew the why and wherefore of everything, but He pretended not to and looked upon the tiny boar with astonishment. Meanwhile, it developed faster and faster into greater and greater size, like a frog, rat, and cat, and into the proportions of a monstrous elephant in rut. Brahma smiled to Himself at its antics. Very soon, the boar grew so huge that it seemed to cover both earth and sky. It slid into the sea and emerged from it with goddess Earth (who had hidden herself under the waters through humiliation) borne aloft safe and secure, on its tusks.

“But a cry came from behind. ‘You wretched swine! Where are you fleeing to? Stop where you are.’ The boar paid no heed to the cry; He moved on as if He hadn't heard it. Then, Hiranyaksha, the evil-minded ogre-chief, confronted It like a terrible monster and challenged It to overcome his might. A mortal combat ensued between the two. Witnessing the frightful thrusts and counterthrusts, goddess Earth shivered in fear, but the boar consoled Her saying, ‘O goddess, don't be frightened. I'll end this ogre's life immediately. I'll ensure your safety and peace in a moment.’ Soon, the boar became terrible to behold. The goddess was greatly agitated with the encounter. The boar fell upon Hiranyaksha with overwhelming might, and the goddess closed Her eyes in sheer terror, unable to bear the sight of the boar's devastating form. The duel was fought with indescribable fury, but in the end, Hiranyaksha was torn to pieces and cast upon the ground.

“Thus, the Lord assumed various forms according to the needs of the situation, the forms best suited for the destruction of the wicked, evil-minded ogres (*danavas*), for the protection of the good and godly, and for the

preservation of the scriptures that reveal the truth, the *Vedas*. In this manner, the Lord incarnated as a fish, tortoise, man-lion, and dwarf (Matsya, Kurma, Narasimha, and Vamana). Of all the incarnations, the most supreme and most blissful is the Krishna form. Still, you must realise that the chief purpose of all incarnations is the preservation of *dharma* (justice, righteousness, morality, virtue).

Creation is my task, my mission, my sacrifice

“Those who instruct must gauge the qualifications of the learners to receive the lesson. It would be vain effort to try to communicate the highest knowledge to a person belonging to the lowest level, for they can’t comprehend it. So too, if instructions for the lower levels are given to those of the higher levels, they will derive no satisfaction from that teaching. To make this clear, I’ll tell you about a discussion that ensued once between Brahma and Narada. Listen carefully.”

“Brahma once addressed Narada, ‘O my mind-projected son! Creation is My task, the way in which I fulfil My mission, My sacrifice (*tapas*). I will, and creation happens. But I lay down certain rules and modes for each species and if they are properly adhered to, the wheel will turn aright in *dharma*. Instead if they neglect the modes and rules and toil for the satisfaction of their own wishes, along crooked and misleading paths, they will have to suffer various miseries.

“Day and night are willed by Me. The rulers of living beings are parts of Me. The urge that people have to increase and multiply is the reflection of My will. Sometimes, when the created worlds have to be sustained, I myself assume name and form, initiate the eras of Manu, and provide the Earth with appropriate divine personalities and sages, who set examples to be followed and indicate the paths for progress.

“I also end the unlimited increase of beings, when it happens. For this, I take on the form of Rudra. I create the bad in order to highlight and promote the good, and in order to protect the good, I set certain limits, both to the good and the bad, for they would otherwise stray into wrong ways and inflict great harm.

I am the inner core of every being

“I am immanent in every being. People forget Me, who is within and without them. I am the inner core of every being, but they are not aware of this. So they are tempted to believe the objective world to be real and true, and they pursue objective pleasures and fall into grief and pain. On the other hand, if they concentrate all attention on Me alone, believing that the Lord has willed everything and everyone, I bless them and reveal to them the truth that they are I and I am they. Thousands have been blessed thus. They are the seekers, the aspirants, the great souls, the sages, the divinely inspired, the manifestations of the Divine, the guides who show the path. They have acquired the experience that truth is *dharma*.

I am the cause of all causes

“I shall tell you about some of them, listen. Sagara, Ikshvaku, Prachinabarhi, Rubhu, Druva, King Raghur, Yayathi, Mandhata, Alarka, Sathadhanva, Dilipa, Khali, Bhishma, Sibi, Pippalada, Saraswatha, Vibhishana, Hanuman, Muchukunda, Janaka, Satha-rupa, Prahlada, and many royal sages (*rajarshis*), highest sages (*brahmarshis*), princes, nobles—all these can be grouped under one category: the Godly (*Bhagavathas*). They all yearn for the chance to listen to the glories of God. They have all been blessed, regardless of cast, age, status, or sex. Among them are women, *brahmins*, workers (*sudras*), and outcasts (*chandalas*).

“I am the Cause of all causes. I am eternal. I am Existence-knowledge-bliss (*Satchidananda*). I am also Hari and Hara, for I transform Myself into these manifestations as occasion arises. Creation, the universe, is but the projection of My Will; it has no basic reality. My son, I declared this truth to you as a result of My deep love toward you. Others won’t be able to grasp the mystery of this creation. What I have just revealed to you is known as concise *Bhagavatha*.

God, the godly, and their interrelation

“Bhagavatha connotes three sections of knowledge:

- (1) The glory and majesty of the Incarnations of God,
- (2) The Names of those who are fully devoted to God,
- (3) The intimate relationship between God and the Godly.

Where these three are found together, there we have the *Bhagavatha*. All that is visible is not beyond or outside God. Therefore, to put it succinctly, everything is *Bhagavatha*! Everything is worthy of being honoured so.’

To escape delusion, be ever fixed in God

“While Brahma was teaching Narada, with great joy, Narada asked Him a question, in amazement and anxious yearning. ‘Lord, as directed by you, I’m engaged without intermission in singing the glory of God and enabling the world to derive bliss therefrom. But this insidious and powerful delusion (*maya*) may overpower me at any moment, plunge me into wrong, and create obstacles in the path of my mission. How I can escape this calamity? Kindly instruct me, show me this additional sign of your parental affection.’

“Brahma laughed at this question. ‘Son! Your words seem childish. The clouds of delusion cannot darken the inner consciousness of those who revel in the glory and majesty of God, who know and make known that God is the master of illusion and the wielder of the operative forces that both delude and destroy delusion, who are engaged in good deeds executed with faith and devotion, and who endeavour ever to maintain truth and righteousness. Therefore, move fearlessly all over the three worlds with the lute (*veena*) in your hands, singing in adoration of God. Listening to the recital and elaboration of the mystery of God and the godly, the inhabitants of the worlds will save themselves from the cycle of birth and death.

“ ‘Activity and deeds resulting from them (*karma*) are binding because they have consequences that must be suffered or enjoyed. But deeds of service are free from this handicap. Be ever fixed in the thought of God. There is no other means than this to turn the mind away from sensory pursuits and objective activities.’ ”

The Lord is immanent as well as transcendent

Suka said, “O Parikshith! Since this supreme wisdom can be communicated only to those who have reached a high level of purity and understanding, Brahma taught only Narada. And Narada continued, as advised, to sing and adore God through his songs—the Lord who is immanent as well as transcendent. He didn’t ignore or discard the teaching that Brahma gave him. You are also qualified to receive this sacred lesson; that is why I, who am inaccessible, have spontaneously come direct to you, to describe the *Bhagavatha*. I am no ordinary minstrel. I never approach a person who hasn’t earned the right to listen to me. Imagine the height that Narada must have reached, to acquire the qualification needed for instruction in the attributes of the attributeless God!”

While Suka was thus gravely assessing him, Parikshith interceded, “Master! You said that the ancient four-faced sovereign Brahma directed Narada to sing the *Bhagavatha*. To whom did Narada tell it? Who are those highly favoured people? Tell me about them in detail.”

Suka replied, “O King, why do you yield to hurry? Be courageous and controlled. I’ll tell you everything in its own time. Be calm and collected.”

The King explained, “Master! Pardon me. I’m not excited at all. I only yearn to fix my mind at the last moment of my life on the charming smile that dances on the lips of Lord Krishna, to drink deep the nectar of the Lotus Feet of the Lord at that moment. I have no other desire. If I am unable to establish in my mind the captivating picture of the Lord at the moment of death, I will have to be born again as one of the 84,000 species of living beings, won’t I? Since that calamity shouldn’t happen, and since I must remember the Dispenser of Life-Breath with my last breath, make my life worthwhile by telling me the divine characteristics and the divine activities of the Lord.”

No distinction between God, His name, and attributes

Suka laughed. “King, how can the mind be established at the lotus feet of the Lord if the ears listen to the characteristics and activities of the Lord? What is your opinion on this point? Tell me.”

Parikshith said, “Master, I believe that there is no distinction between God, His name, and His attributes —is that correct? When the story of the Lord is told and listened to, the name of the Lord and the attributes enter the heart through the ears and disperse the darkness of ignorance, right? When the lion enters the forest, the timid jackals flee with their tails between their legs, don’t they? The sincere listener will certainly fix their mind on what they heard through the ear. While listening rapturously to the ravishing attributes of the Lord with the captivating smile, the mind will be so attached to the sweetness derived thereby that it can no longer be attracted by low and vulgar objects, right? The ear and the mind will both act in unison then. That alone will yield bliss (*ananda*).”

The king thus enthusiastically extolled the benefits of listening intently to the activities and majesty of the Lord.

Suka interrupted his exultation. “O King! The mind has inconstancy as its very nature. How can it give up its nature and attach itself to the feet of the Lord? Isn’t it an impossible feat?” Suka was attempting to gauge the feelings that filled Parikshith’s mind.

Parikshith smiled and replied, “Master, I’ll answer, if you kindly permit me and direct me to do so. The bee will hover around the flower, humming and droning, until it settles down to drink the nectar from it. Once it has entered the flower and tasted the nectar, it will hover, hum, and drone no more. It will have no extraneous thought to disturb its bliss. It will become so intoxicated with bliss that it won’t heed its own safety, for when the petals close and the flower folds, it allows itself to be imprisoned inside. Similarly, when once the mind settles on the lotus feet of that embodiment of beauty and goodness, it can never more crave anything except the nectar of the lotus feet.”