

## **PRINCIPLES IN THE INCARNATIONS OF LORD VISHNU: AN OUTLOOK**

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### Introduction:

Knowledge is of two types as our reverend sages have noted: Jnanam and Vijnanam. Jnanam is Self-knowledge and Vijnanam is knowledge relating to objects and things. Understanding is the greater way than meditation and this helps a person to know all subjects and objects.

We have four vedas namely Rig-veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda and Atharva-veda. History and Mythology form the fifth one. The word VEDA is from the root VID – to know. So the word Veda means to have full knowledge. In this view let's get back to review our knowledge about Dharma and the Dashavataras that depict a lot of awareness in a reader as to how and why these happened!!! I shall discuss the first three of Dashavataras for the acquaintance which rejuvenates our familiarity with these sacred narrations.

### Extensive study:

Upanishad says, **“If you protect Dharma, Dharma will protect you.”** This is a powerful instruction, which is timeless and still holds good in today's world.

Dharma means different things to different people. It is widely used in many teachings and religious instructions. It is difficult to translate in English because it has multiple meanings, and used in different contexts to denote different concepts.. In a general sense, it means law or moral instructions. However, it is not just this law or that law, but encompasses all laws, duties, responsibilities, moral percepts, principles, beliefs, codes of conduct and religious practices which are conducive to an orderly life and an orderly world in the cosmic order of things. In short, it is the operating system of God's creation, which ensures the order and regularity of all movements, mechanisms, laws and processes and keeps things in their respective places.

The great learned sages brought down knowledge into two parts. One is Jnanam and the other is Vijnanam. The Jnanam is Self-knowledge and on the other hand Vijnanam is Knowledge relating to objects and things. Understanding a topic of study is indeed greater than meditation and through this exclusive way, one can know the subjects and objects in clarity.

The four Vedas play a vital role as different ways of knowledge. The word 'Veda' is derived from the root VID -to know. Therefore, Veda means to know something in full. The four Vedas are Rig-veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda and Atharva-veda. History and Mythology form the fifth one. We get History, Mythology, Grammar, Mathematics, logic, ethics, etymology, science of

elements, astronomy, arts, heaven, earth, air, space, water, fire, gods, men, animals, birds, grass, trees, worms, truth, untruth good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, philosophy, food and drink, this world and the other etc.

To begin with ...The first and foremost of Dashavataras is MATSYA. It is half Human and half fish depiction of Lord Vishnu. Matsya is listed as the first incarnation of the Dashavatara, the ten principal avataras of Lord Vishnu. As per the descriptions in Rigveda, Mastya means Maccha, which means fish.

The Fish incarnation is therefore numbered as the first incarnation representing **Brahma** and Narayana who create the world anew after dissolution. Manu means man, the thinker, the story seems to be a parable of the Ship of Sacrifice being the means for man's crossing the sea of his sins and troubles (duritas). Manu also known as Satyavrata or Shraddhadeva, son of Sun-god (Surya) and grandson of Kasyapa and Aditi. He is known as the ancestor of the human race and the first sacrificer.

The story goes thus.....one morning when he was brought some water to wash himself, Manu saw a fish coming into his hands. It spoke to him telling him to save it so that it would save him. When asked how and when, the fish told him that a flood would carry away all the creatures and from that he would be saved. Further asked how to save the fish, it replied that as they are small in size, fish devours fish, so it asked him to keep in a jar first and when it outgrew the jar, to dig a pit and keep in it. Then to the sea so that it will be beyond the destruction.

As done so, it became a large fish (ghasha). It told Manu that a flood would come in a particular year and asked him to build a ship by that time. When the flood rises, he would enter the ship and the fish would save him...meanwhile Manu desirous of offspring worshipped and performed a paka-sacrifice by offering waters clarified butter, sour milk and curds. Thence he got a daughter by name Ila. After the earth is flooded, the ship is tied with a rope to the horn of Matsya and by that means he passed swiftly up to yonder northern mountain.

The world was thus flooded, Manu, the seven Rishis and the fish could be seen. And, the fish diligently dragged the boat through the flood for many a long year and then, it towed the vessel towards the highest peak of the Himavatand told those on the vessel to tie it to the peak of the Himavat. And hearing the words of the fish they immediately tied the boat on that peak of the mountain and the high peak of the Himavat is still called by the name of Naubandhana (the harbour). Then the fish addressed the associated Rishis and told them that he was the Brahma, the Lord of all creatures; there is none greater than himself. Assuming the shape of a fish, he had saved all of them from this disaster. He further said that Manu will create (again) all beings-- gods, Asuras and men, all those divisions of creation which have the power of movement and which have it not. By practicing severe austerities, he will acquire this power, and with the blessings of God, illusion will have no power over him. So saying the fish vanished instantly. And Vaivaswata Manu himself became desirous of creating the world. In this work of creation illusion overtook him and he, therefore, practiced great asceticism. And endowed with ascetic merit, Manu, again set about his work of creating all beings in proper and exact order.

Similarly in Narada and Garuda Purana Hayagriva (a horse headed avatar-an asura steals the Vedas and Vishnu assumes the form of Matsya to destroy the demon and retrieve the stolen Vedas. Then, as the boat is tossed about by the powerful winds, attached to the vessel to a huge horn of the fish means of the great serpent Vāsuki. He further promised that he would pull the boat and travel in the water of devastation until the night of Lord Brahmā's slumber is over.

What one can understand behind this is if you abide in Dharma, Dharma will abide in you and becomes your armor. If you live righteously, the world will be on your side because the world also depends upon Dharma only for its order and regularity. Dharma and Karma are interrelated. They mutually reinforce each other. If you do good, good will be returned to you. If you indulge in evil actions, you will be responsible for their consequences. Thus, the principle of karma is guided upon earth by the force of Dharma only, and through Karma we practice and preserve the light of Dharma.

The second of Dashavatara is Kurmaavatara. Kurma means Tortoise. Vishnu took the form of a turtle to help Devas and Asuras. In this incarnation Lord Vishnu is associated with the myth of the churning of the ocean of milk. The Gods and Asuras (demons) cooperated in the churning to obtain Amrita, the nectar (elixir) of immortality. Lord Vishnu knew the truth that if Danavas became immortal it would cause massive damage to the human race as they would overpower the Devas. The victory of the Danavas meant a decline of goodness and peace. So to save the humankind Lord Vishnu took the avatar of Kurma.

In the ongoing battle between the Gods (Devas) and Asuras (Demons), on one occasion the Gods lose all their strength due to a curse by the short-tempered Sage Durvasa. The sage had once presented a garland of flowers to Indra, king of Gods, who carelessly gave it away to his elephant which trampled it. The worried devatas approached Lord Vishnu for help. Vishnu suggested the devatas and asuras to churn the ocean of milk after adding medicines into the ocean. Further he suggested Mt.Mandara could be used as a churning stick. A share of the nectar of immortality that would come out of the churning was offered to the asuras if they helped the devas in lifting the mountain. Serpent Vasuki was used as a rope to churn the ocean. While doing so the asuras unable to know the trick played by devas took the head end of the serpent and the poison slowly made them weak. While this process was on the mountain was sinking and then Lord Vishnu took the form of turtle KURMA and kept the mountain afloat. As soon as the bowl of Amrita, the nectar of immortality was out, the asuras grabbed it. Then again Lord Vishnu took the form of an Apsara, a beautiful maiden and seduced the asuras. She was to distribute the nectar and all should abide by her order of distribution. As soon as she served the devatas she disappeared thus totally by deceiving the asuras and making them weak once again.

The third avatar of Lord Vishnu is Varaha. It is a wild boar which saved Mother earth from the clutches of a demon -named Hiranyakasha.. Brahma, the creator, Shiva, the destroyer and the Lord Vishnu the savior all the time are called as three male deities or as Trimurti. And mainly Lord Vishnu took several forms of avatars whenever the universe was in turmoil. But each of the avatars had the same purpose of restoring of Dharma or Righteousness and to save the planet and the good people from the hands of evils, demons or asuras.

One has to have a glimpse of the story that happened at the abode of Lord Vishnu. Vaikunta was guarded by Jaya and Vijaya, two staunch guards of Lord Vishnu who felt it is their privilege to take care Him. At the same time they felt Lord's time was precious and could not be wasted.

Once Brahma's four sons came to meet Lord Vishnu when he was resting and were stopped by the guards. In turn they were cursed by the sons of Brahma to be born as humans on earth. Though Lord Vishnu apologized on their behalf, given curse couldn't be taken back. So Vishnu told his guards to face death at his hands inhuman forms to get rid of their curse. Thus they were born as Hiranyakashayap and Hiranyaksha.

Hiranyaksha, being a great devotee of Lord Brahma, worshipped him for years and took a boon that no God, human, asura, devta, animal or a beast would kill him. With this immortality his powers grew on the earth and mother earth trembled with fear at his actions. Devatas were harrassed and Indra's palace was also invaded. All the devatas took refuge in the mountain ranges. Hiranyaksha grabbed mother earth and submerged in the Pataalok. Mother Earth sank to the bottom of the ocean. Manu and his wife Shatarupa were worried about their life in the world and next at this juncture and pleaded Lord Brahma to find a solution. Since he had granted Hiranyaksha a boon, Lord Brahma thought of taking the help of Lord Vishnu.

As Brahma meditated to Lord Vishnu, a tiny Boar fell from his nostrils. Slowly it grew to the size of a large mountain. It was Lord Vishnu and he promised to lift the Earth from the clutches of Hiranyaksha. While taking the boon from Lord Brahma, he had forgotten mention boar as an animal. With a terrifying roar, Lord Vishnu took a mighty leap into the air and tore the clouds with its hoofs and dived to the bed of the ocean in search of Mother Earth and discovered Bhoomidevi (Mother Earth). Later in a fierce battle Lord Vishnu in the form of Wild Boar killed Hiranyaksha before sunset as according to the suggestions of Lord Brahma and saved Earth from harm.

The ethics and morals play a vital role in everyone's life and one has to learn out of these first three avataras of Lord Vishnu is how to begin a new life of hope when a calamity comes, how to solve a problem to make good regain its position and how to uphold the good to bring peace in the world. We have four aims of human life namely Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma becomes the foundation for all the three. It is upon Dharma one has to build life and achieve the other three aims. God protects Dharma as it protects all others. It is the wheel that moves all other wheels in creation. The Chakra with which Vishnu preserves and protects the world is but Dharma Chakra only. In the hands of Shiva it becomes the three pronged Trishul and the Wheel of Time (Kala Chakra). In Brahman it manifests as Brahma Wheel.

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