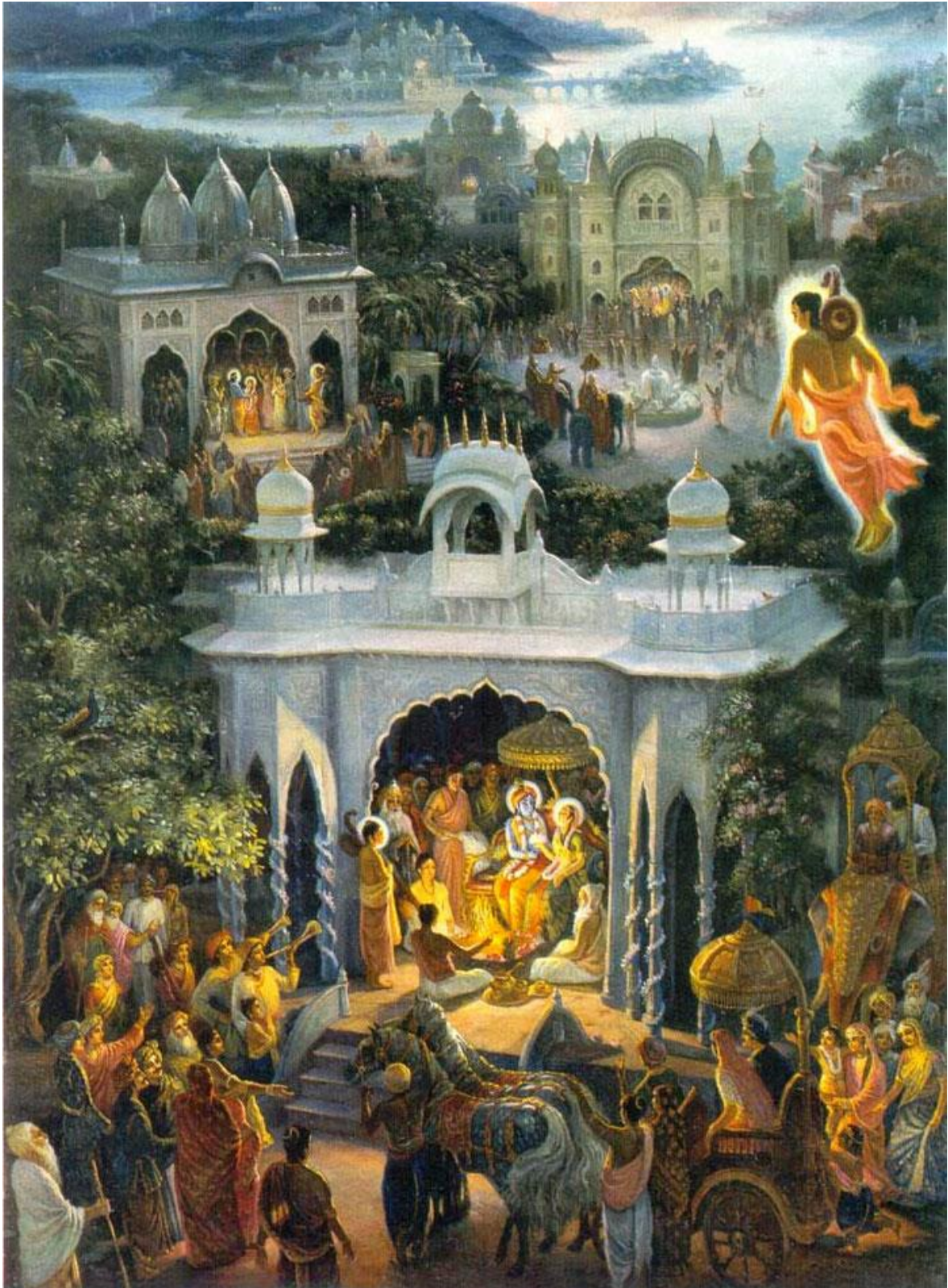


# *The Supremacy of Bhakti*



Selections from Tapasyānanda S. *Shrimad Bhāgavata: The Holy Book of God*. (Vol. 1 of 4) Madras: The President, Śrī Ramakrishna Math, 1980; [Sanskrit & translation]. Presented herein with permission of the Publishers. Illustrations and footnotes by the Series Editor.

From Skandha I, Chapter 5

## Narada diagnosing the cause of Vyasa's unrest (1-11)

1 Being seated comfortably, the far-famed Devarshi<sup>1</sup> Nārada, who constantly moves about the world singing the Lord's name on his Vīnā, addressed Vyasa with a smile. *Nārada said:* 2 O son of Parāśara! O high-souled one! Is your good self happy in mind and body? 3-4 For composing the Mahabharata, a unique and encyclopaedic work dealing with all the four Purusharthas (ultimate values of life<sup>2</sup>), you must be considered as one with the mastery of Dharma in its practical and theoretical aspects. You have also completely mastered the eternal Veda and propagated it among your disciples. Still how is it that you look like one frustrated and grieving? *Vyasa said:* 5 I am aware that I have all those excellences you have referred to. Still I feel no joy or satisfaction within. The cause of it is not very clear to me. You are the son of Brahma and possessed of infinite knowledge. Deign to find out and tell me the cause of my sorrow. 6 You are endowed with the knowledge of the subtlest and the most secret of all things. For, you have achieved the devout and intimate communion with the Supreme Divine, the controller of the whole universe in its manifestation and dissolution — who by an act of His will creates, sustains and dissolves all the worlds and yet is non-attached. 7 You travel all the world over like the sun itself and like the air penetrate everything. You can get into the hearts of all and be the witness of all their thoughts. So deign to look into the state of my mind and find out what my sin of omission is; for I have accomplished all that man can accomplish by the study and practice of the truth revealed by the Vedas, and by the observance of the rules of virtuous and austere living.

*Nārada said in reply:* 8 You have not adequately described the unsullied glory of the Supreme Lord. I consider as imperfect all those philosophies which fail to

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<sup>1</sup> Devarshi (Sk.) [from *deva* divine being + *rishi* sage] A divine or godlike sage; a son of dharma or yoga. A class of sages, such as Atri; those human sages who through striving, aspiration, and self-conquest attain a divine nature while on earth. — Cf. *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

<sup>2</sup> In Hinduism, the purusharthas are the canonical four ends or aims of human life. These goals are, from lowest to highest:

Kāma:	sensual pleasure or love;
Artha:	wealth;
Dharma:	righteousness or morality;
Moksha:	liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

Historically, the first three goals were articulated first (Sk. trivarga), and the fourth goal, moksha, later (Sk. chaturvarga). In living tradition, the notion of the four purusharthas represents an holistic approach to the satisfaction of man's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

There is a popular correspondence between the four purusharthas, the four stages of life (Sk. āśrama): Brahmacharya [student life], Grihastha [household life], Vanaprastha [retired life] and Sannyasa [renunciation]. — Cf. Wikipedia; also cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FOOTNOTES TO "THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAYANANDA SARASWATI SWAMI") II p. 118

please the Lord because of their lack of devotional exuberance, which alone can give full satisfaction to Him. <sup>9</sup> You have not expounded the greatness of Vasudeva<sup>1</sup> with that exhaustiveness with which you have treated the Vedic rites and the four-fold end of human life, consisting of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha (Virtue, Wealth, Desire and Liberation). <sup>10</sup> Works of pure literary artistry, that nowhere describe the sanctifying glory of the Lord, are eschewed by the holy spiritual Swans (Paramahansas<sup>2</sup>) who are ever accustomed to sport in the Mānasa lake of Satchidananda<sup>3</sup> alone. They discard such compositions, considering them only as dirty mud puddles fit for the bath of the crows of sensual worldlings. <sup>11</sup> Literary compositions, which are characterised by the presence of words indicating divine attributes and glory, destroy the sins and evil tendencies of people even if there are mistakes in every one of their lines. Holy men hear the exposition of such texts, and themselves expound and sing them.

## Supremacy of Bhakti (12-22)

<sup>12</sup> Knowledge, characterised by purity, does not shine with dazzling brilliance, if it is devoid of the fervour of devotion to the Supreme Being. What then to speak of mere Karma (works) with motive or even without it, if the same is not dedicated to the Lord! <sup>13</sup> Therefore, O high-souled one! You who are endowed with unerring insight, famed for your holiness; ever devoted to truth, and established in sacred vows — do, through Samadhi (concentrated absorption), recall the memories of those wonderful deeds of the sportive Lord and expound the same for the salvation of all mankind. <sup>14</sup> If this is not done, man, with his eyes, speech and other senses occupied entirely with unspiritual concerns, will fall into the extremely dangerous situation created by the attraction of these sense objects, and will, like a boat caught in a storm, be tossed about this way and that, without any firm anchorage to steady it. <sup>15</sup> It has indeed been a great transgression on your part to have declared the desire-motivated ritualistic rites of the Vedas as Dharma to the materially-minded and sense-bound man. For, established on the strength of your declaration, in the faith that Vedic ritualism is Dharma, they will not heed to their deprecation in other Sastras<sup>4</sup> or even in your own works. <sup>16</sup> Only rare souls who have attained to the highest purity of being, can take to the life of absolute renunciation (prescribed in the Upanishads) and realize the supernal bliss of the Infinite. Therefore reveal for

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<sup>1</sup> v.s. “The Glory of Karma blended with Bhakti.”

<sup>2</sup> “Paramahansa — the same as the [other four successive stages of life]; but the ascetic wears the sacred thread, and his hair and beard are quite long. This is the highest of all these orders. A Paramahansa who shows himself worthy is on the very threshold of becoming a *Dikshita* [initiate].” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FOOT-NOTES TO “THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAYANANDA SARASWATI SWAMI”) II p. 118

<sup>3</sup> Sachchidananda or *saccidananda* (Sk.) [from *sat* reality + *chit* pure consciousness + *ananda* bliss] Abstract being, abstract consciousness, abstract bliss; the state of the cosmic spiritual hierarchy, Brahman or the Second Logos, the Absolute of our cosmic hierarchy. Subba Row wrote that the Logos is described as sachchidananda because as *sat* it is the efflux of Parabrahman, as *chit* it contains within itself the whole law of cosmic evolution, as *ananda* it is the abode of impersonal bliss and the highest happiness possible for a person who has become a *Jīvanmukta* — a freed monad, when union with the cosmic Logos is attained. Cf. *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

<sup>4</sup> Sastra (Sk.) [from the verbal root *sas* to direct, bid, instruct] An order, precept, rule, advice; any instrument of teaching; any book or treatise, especially religious or scientific; any sacred scripture or composition of supposedly divine authority such as the Vedas. — Cf. *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

the benefit of the common man, who is subject to the Gunas of Prakriti and thereby has forgotten his higher nature, the spiritual activities of the Supreme Being through His cosmic manifestations. <sup>17</sup> A man who has abandoned his Swadharma<sup>1</sup> for pursuing the path of devotion to Hari, even if he fails to attain perfection in that path immediately, does not sustain any fall. (For he evolves still higher even after a temporary pause). Nothing inauspicious befalls him anywhere, anytime. But, pray, what spiritual exaltation has been attained by people who merely follow the rules of Swadharma (duty) untouched by devotion? <sup>18</sup> The truly wise man should therefore strive for what is not achievable in this transmigratory cycle which carries one from world to world. For, fast-moving Time naturally brings about enjoyments of sense objects as also sufferings in different lives, without any one's efforts for the same. <sup>19</sup> O dear one! A person devoted to the Lord is never caught up in this repetitive process of Samsara like one devoted to the Vedic rites and desire-prompted activities. For whoever comes to be attracted by the Lord, who is all bliss, is constantly attached to Him by the joyous memory of His service, and never feels inclined to leave the same lured by worldly enjoyments. <sup>20</sup> The Lord who is both the material and efficient cause of this universe, its sustenance and dissolution, may be considered as this universe itself from the causal point of view. (For the effect is non-different from the cause which subsists in and through the changing effects.) But yet the Lord is distinct from it in another sense. (For, through all the cosmic process, He, being the Spirit, continues to be the same, unaffected by the transformations of the universe, unlike causal substances of a material nature; and besides, He subsists independent of the effect-universe, as the cause remains, even if the whole of this effect-universe is sublated.<sup>2</sup>) All these are truths well known to you. I have spoken briefly about them, only to draw your attention towards them. <sup>21</sup> O Sage of true insight! Know your immortal self to be a part of that Supreme Being born in this world for the good of mankind. So for the spiritual edification of men, describe at length the story of all the great divine Incarnations, including yourself. <sup>22</sup> Great men have established that the supreme, imperishable consummation of all spiritual disciplines — be it austerities, scriptural study, sacrifices, Japa, gifts or discrimination — consists in the development of keen interest in contemplation and exposition of the glories and attributes of the most Exalted Being.

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<sup>1</sup> Rule of true life and way of being, *i.e.*, acceptance of higher duty and purpose of being. (BG) — ED. PHIL.

<sup>2</sup> Removed. — ED. PHIL.

## Antecedents of Narada (23-31)

23 In my previous birth in an earlier Kalpa (cycle of time) I was born as the son of a maid-servant in a community of Vedic ritualists. I was, therefore, from boyhood engaged in attending on Yogis who gathered at the place for the Chaturmasya<sup>1</sup> (the retreat during the rainy season). 24 Those holy men, though even-minded in their outlook, were mightily pleased with my services, especially seeing how I, though a mere boy, was devoid of all fickleness and boyish playfulness, was disciplined and brief-spoken, and attended on them with dedication and understanding of their needs. 25 Permitted by these holy men, I once partook of the remnants of the food left by them. Being purified in mind by this act, I developed a taste for the devotional life which these holy men followed. 26 By their blessing I was able to hear every day their attractive recitals of Sri Krishna's life and actions. Hearing every syllable of those recitals with faith and attention, I developed the feeling of delight in the Lord, whose glories are charming to contemplate. 27 After I developed this delight in the Lord, my mind would never disengage itself from Him of endearing glory. In this mental state I experienced that the whole of the universe in its subtle as well as gross condition is generated by His power of Maya in Himself from whom my entity, the Jīva, too, has no separate existence. 28 Listening continuously all through the spring and the rainy season, at the three Sandhyas of the day,<sup>2</sup> to the recitals of the Lord's sanctifying glory by these holy men, there sprang up in me that powerful devotion which obliterates all traces of Tamas and Rajas. 29-30 When dispersing after the Chaturmasya period, the kind-hearted and merciful holy men imparted to me the transcendent knowledge of the Supreme Divine (*Jnanam guhyatamam*<sup>3</sup>), which He himself had revealed to them. For, though a boy, they found in me a fit recipient, as I was loving, humble, sinless, attentive, self-controlled and obedient. 31 By that knowledge I was enabled to obtain the grace of the Maya of Vasudeva, the omniscient and omnipotent Lord, by which the Jīva attains to His being.

## The Glory of Karma blended with Bhakti (32-40)

32 O holy men! What is implied by this story of mine is that Karma (work) dedicated to the Supreme Person, who is the master of the worlds and the all-comprehending Being, tends to destroy the threefold misery of man. 33-34 (It may be asked how Karma, which is the cause of bondage, can liberate man.) See how ingredients like ghee, which cause disease in men when taken by themselves, do not do so when they are medicated with curative herbs. So also even though Karma is a cause of bondage for man preoccupied with it (through the generation of new tendencies), the same Karma, when dedicated to the

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<sup>1</sup> During the rainy season in India (July to October), there are certain rules and regulations to decrease personal enjoyment and increase remembrance of the Lord. — ED. PHIL.

<sup>2</sup> Hindu ritual at the "junctions" (sandhyas) of the day — dawn, noon, and sunset — during which the Sāvitrī Gāyatrī is repeated. — Cf. Wikipedia

<sup>3</sup> Inner knowledge, *i.e.*, occult, esoteric. — ED. PHIL.

Lord, becomes a potent power to destroy all tendencies and takes him Godward. <sup>35</sup> Whatever work man performs in dedication to, and for the pleasure of, the Supreme Lord, such Karma goes to generate knowledge (Jnana) combined with Bhakti. <sup>36</sup> When work is done according to the teaching of the Lord (as contained in the Gita, for example), His names and excellences are always remembered simultaneously with Karma. <sup>37-38</sup> Salutations to the Supreme Lord Vasudeva!<sup>1</sup> Salutations to Him (Vasudeva) who manifests as the triad of Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sankarshana! He will attain the intuition of the Supreme Spirit, who offers all his actions as sacrifice unto Him, the Lord of Sacrifice — the formless Being who is described in the above fourfold form in the texts dealing with worship. <sup>39</sup> O holy sage! Knowing that I have carried out His injunctions, He has blessed me with knowledge, divine powers, and wholehearted devotion to Him. <sup>40</sup> O you who are the master of scriptures! Engage yourself in the description of His unique glories, which alone can satisfy the questionings of spiritual aspirants. Proclaim that there is no other panacea for the woes with which men are stricken again and again in this worldly existence.



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<sup>1</sup> *Vasudeva, the first form of fourfold spirit.* Of the four forms of the Lord regarded as Chaturatmaka, the first is Vasudeva. This name signifies that the Lord is immanent in everything in creation and bears within Himself everything in the Cosmos. He is omnipotent. He is resplendent. He remains unmoved in any condition, in any circumstance, while being present in every limb and every cell. He is known also as Angirasa — the One who is present in every Anga (limb) in the form of the circulating blood and imparts vitality to it. As the rasa (vital essence), He is described as Raso vai Sah (the elan vital). Thus, everything is permeated by God and there is nothing outside Him.

*Sankarshana, Aniruddha, Pradyumna.* The second name is Sankarshana. Sankarshana is the One, who at the time of Pralaya (the Great Dissolution), absorbs within Himself the entire Cosmos. He is the One who ends all sorrow and confers all happiness. The Sankarshana principle is the one, which removes misery and confers joy. Sankarshana should not be regarded merely as Balarama, the son of Revathi (the elder wife of Vasudeva). Sankarshana represents the Divine attribute of eliminating grief and giving happiness, removing mental agitation and conferring peace, destroying weakness of spirit and instilling fortitude. This is no ordinary attribute. It is a Divine quality, which is present in every human being.

*Aniruddha,* the third, refers to one who has a unique quality. He confers this quality — Sampada (wealth) — on whoever prays to Him. He is the Lord who confers both material and spiritual benefits on those who adore Him. In this aspect, He shines through His effulgence. This illumination is not derived from outside. He Himself is the source of His light and also the light that illumines everything. This principle of Aniruddha is essential for every human being.

The fourth name is *Pradyumna.* He represents the invincible Divine power, which cannot be overcome by anyone. He has no equal. He is His own example. He is His own law. There is no one below Him or above Him because He is even in those below Him. The Pradyumna principle is all pervading and omnipresent.

From Skandha I, Chapter 6

## The after-story of Narada (1-14)

Suta<sup>1</sup> continued: 1 O holy men! Hearing thus about the origin and doings of the divine sage Nārada, Vyasa, the son of Satyavati, addressed him again. *Vyasa said:* 2 When those mendicant sages had dispersed after their Chaturmasya, what did you, a mere boy at that time, do? 3 O offspring of Brahma! What did you do for the rest of your life in that body? And at the end, how did you abandon the body? 4 O divine sage! How is it that your memory about the events of a past age was not effaced? Is not Time the obliterator of everything? *Nārada said in reply:* 5 After the wandering monks who instructed me had departed, what I did was this: 6 My mother — an ignorant woman and a mere servant maid — was bound with strong cords of love to me, her only son and one without any help in the world except herself. 7 Though desirous of my protection and welfare, she was incapable of protecting even herself, because she was not a free person. See! The whole world is without any freedom. It is like a puppet in the hands of the Lord. 8 I, who was then only five years old and utterly ignorant of the broad world, of the time, place and conditions of life, continued to stay in that settlement of Vedists, bound to my mother by cords of love. 9 One day, when she went out of the house at night to milk the cow, that poor and pitiable woman was bitten fatally by a serpent on her leg, prompted as it were by the God of Death himself. 10 Considering this as a blessing (in disguise) bestowed on me by the Lord who knows what is good for devotees, I started from that place in a northerly direction. 11-14 Passing through prosperous countries with towns, villages, dairy farms, and mines; through agricultural regions, villages situated in plains and mountain valleys; through groves of flowering trees, jungles and forests; through mountain ranges strewn with trees rent asunder by roaming elephant herds and endowed with plentiful mineral wealth; and by the side of freshwater lakes resounding with the cooings of birds and the humming of bees hovering over the expanses of lotuses and water lilies — I at last reached a dense and extensive forest region that was impenetrable and forbidding by the wild and thick growth of reeds, bamboos and varieties of trees, and providing a playground for serpents, owls, jackals and other fierce wild animals.

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, Suta Goswami. Cf. “The Bhagavatam takes the form of a story being told by a great rishi known as Suta Goswami, to a host of assembled sages, who ask him questions in regard to the various avatars, or descents of Vishnu within the mortal world. Suta Goswami then relates the Bhagavatam as he has heard it from another sage, called Shukadeva. The language of the Purāna closely resembles Vedic which may indicate an early dating or a variety of other possible reasons to resemble the archaic texts.” — Wikipedia

## The Divine Vision of Narada and after (15-29)

15 Hungry and thirsty, tired in body and limbs as I was, I refreshed myself by bathing and drinking at the forest stream. 16 In that solitary forest, without any trace of human being, I sat under a banyan tree, and began to meditate on the Supreme Being immanent in oneself, as instructed by my teachers. 17 Little by little Sri Hari revealed Himself in my heart, as I meditated on His lotus-feet with a mind rendered still by devotion, and eyes brimming with tears born of the intensity of aspiration. 18 With horripilation all over the body generated by intense love, with mind freed from all woes and steeped in bliss, I was merged in Samadhi in which the dichotomy of the seer and the seen disappears: 19 When the form of the Lord, which thrills the mind and destroys all sorrows, suddenly disappeared from my vision, I got up from my seat, most distressed in mind. 20 Eager to have His vision once again, I concentrated my mind in the heart but I could not regain the vision any more, and I became anguished with frustration. 21 While I was thus striving again in that solitary place, to assuage my grief as it were, the Lord, who is beyond all words, spoke the following words in a voice that was both sweet and powerful: 22 In this birth of yours, alas! you are not eligible to have My vision. I cannot be seen by Yogis who are not completely free from all passions of the heart. 23 O sinless one! My form was revealed to you just once to increase your longing for it. One who has a longing for Me, gradually abandons all other desires from his heart. 24 Abandoning this impure body of yours, you will become an attendant of mine, as your mind has been firmly established in Me through that service of holy men though for a short period. 25 Nothing can distract your intellect that has been established in Me. By My blessing this conviction and recollection of yours shall not be obliterated even in such cosmic catastrophies like dissolution and creation.

26 Bodiless but yet manifesting Himself as sound through Akasha, that Great Being, the Lord of all, now stopped, having said this much. And I, who was thus the object of Divine mercy, bowed my head in salutation before that Being whose transcendent greatness surpasses everything great by human standards. 27 Eschewing pride, jealousy and other passions of the heart, I bided the approach of the end of my life's span, engaging myself meanwhile in loudly proclaiming the names of the Infinite Being without any sense of shame, in constantly remembering the sanctifying and mysterious doings of the Lord, and in wandering from place to place free from sorrow and joy in all situations of life. 28 O holy one! To me whose pure mind was thus steeped in the contemplation of Krishna, excluding all worldly desires, death came all of a sudden one day, like a streak of lightning appearing in the sky. 29 When that Bhagavati-tanu, the divine body of Suddha-sattva<sup>1</sup> fit for the service of the Lord, was generated in me, my body of the gross material elements fell dead on the exhaustion of that quantum of my Karma responsible for the previous embodiment (*prarabdha karma*).

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<sup>1</sup> "A substance not subject to the qualities of matter; a luminiferous and (to us) invisible substance, of which the bodies of the Gods and highest Dhyānis are formed. Philosophically, *Suddha Sattva* is a conscious state of spiritual Ego-ship rather than any essence." — *Theosophical Glossary*



## Transformation of Narada (30-39)

30 At the end of the creative cycle when everything was withdrawn into the causal condition and the Supreme Narayana lay floating in cosmic slumber on the Causal Waters, I too was withdrawn into Him through Brahma, the demiurge, who sought rest in Him at the end of his creative duties. 31 After the lapse of a thousand divine years, Brahma woke up and again started the creative activity, when, out of Brahman, I too, emerged along with the Rishis like Marīchi and Atri. 32 I, who am devoted to the uncompromising observance of the vow of continence, have been endowed by Mahavishnu's<sup>1</sup> grace with the power to go about unobstructed everywhere within the three worlds<sup>2</sup> as also beyond it to the transcendental realm.

33 Playing on this Vīnā, given by the Lord Himself and possessing the power of automatically producing the various musical notes, I go about the world singing in tune the excellences of the Lord. 34 When His excellences are sung, He, the supremely holy Lord of endearing fame and sanctifying feet, makes His presence felt in my heart, as if promptly responding to a call by one's name. 35 The description of the Lord's deeds and attributes is the one means, a veritable boat, to cross the ocean of Samsara for those who are rendered miserable by the desire for sense objects. 36 Men who are constantly pestered by passions like lust and greed, are never pacified so effectively and readily by Yogic disciplines like Yama and Niyama, as by the service of the Lord. 37 In reply to your questions, I have narrated to you all the secrets about my origin and my deeds, for your satisfaction and edification.

Suta said: 38 After conversing thus with Vyasa, the sage Nārada, who was free from all self-centred plans and poses, moved on from there, singing the Lord's name to the accompaniment of his Vīnā. 39 Blessed is this divine sage Nārada! For singing to the accompaniment of his Vīnā about the excellences of the Lord, he himself is ever inebriated with divine love, and he enlivens with joy the hearts of beings distressed by the woes of the world.



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<sup>1</sup> Mahavishnu or *Mahavisnu* (Sk.) Great Vishnu; a title of Vishnu. Source of the Avatāras of Vishnu. See also Bīja. — Cf. *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "These three worlds are the three planes of being, the terrestrial, astral and the spiritual." (*Voice of the Silence*, frag. III notes 27 & 34 to vs. 288 & 306, pp. 66 & 71; pp. 94 & 95 in *glos.* of Chinese & Centenary eds.). Also cf. "The ['Creative, Formative, and Material'] Worlds are all subject to Rulers or Regents — Rishis and Pitris with the Hindus, Angels with the Jews and Christians, Gods, with the Ancients in general." *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 99; [Commentary on Stanza IV.5a.]