
Ten Incarnations (Avatara) of Lord Viṣṇu

विष्णुः

Narrates Krishna to Arjuna in Gita :

Whenever Dharma, or the situation of law and order, is endangered on this world, I incarnate onto this world to re establish Dharma, law and order, and to protect the Sadhus or saints and to destroy the evil elements of the society.

Throughout ages, Lord Vishnu, has incarnated in various life forms through different yugas (ages or eons) in situations where Dharma was in danger, because of certain dushta (evil) elements in the world. In mythology, there ten documented instances of incarnation of Lord Vishnu. These incarnations are termed as the avatars of Lord Vishnu. We will learn each avatar of Lord Vishnu and why the lord was compelled to land on the earth.

- 1. Masta Avatara (Lord Vishnu in a fish form)*
- 2. Kurma Avatara (Lord Vishnu as a tortoise)*
- 3. Varaha Avatara (Lord Vishnu as a boar)*
- 4. Narasima Avatara (Lord Vishny as Narasimha)*
- 5. Vamana Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Vamana)*
- 6. Parusarama Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Paruasrama)*
- 7. Krshna Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Krshna)*
- 8. Rama Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Rama)*
- 9. Buddha Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Buddha)*
- 10. Kalki Avatara (Lord Vishnu as Kalaki)*

Avatara 1 – Matsya(fish) Avatara

A long long time ago, there lived a king named (Satyavrata) Manu. He was very great, noble and wise King. One day, he was riding his horse near a river. He stopped by a river to quench his thirst. He cupped his hands with water and when he was going to have his last handful; he saw a fish in his palm. When he was about to return it to the water, the little fish begged, ‘Hey Manu! take me home and save me from the larger fish’.



King Manu was surprised. He said, “Ok little fish, I will take you my palace”. He took it to his palace and placed it in an earthen bowl filled with water.

When the fish grew too big for the bowl, Manu took it to a nearby stream so the fish could have more space to swim around. Soon the fish outgrew the stream and so Manu placed it in the Ganga, the biggest of rivers, but there was a day when the fish was too big even for the Ganga!

By now Manu was sure that this was no ordinary fish. Manu asked the fish , “Who are you? You are not an ordinary fish. You will need bigger placed to live. Let me drop you in to the ocean”. Suddenly, the fish spoke, “Hey Manu! listen carefully and do exactly as I say!! A flood such as you have never seen will soon cover the earth. Build yourself a sturdy boat and take with you the seeds of every plant and each kind of animal and the saptha (seven) rishis. I shall protect you when the time comes.” Manu obeyed the fish’s order and then returned back home and immediately set out to work as instructed

by the fish.

In the mean time, a demon (asura) Hayagriva stole the Vedas (the first holy scripture of the world) from Brahma, and hid at the bottom of the oceans. The Vedas are very important for the next cycle of creation. Then, the fish went to the bottom of ocean. He killed Hayagriva and saved the Vedas.

By this time, Manu was ready with a big boat. The Fish then went back to Manu. The Great King Manu steered the boat. First, he tied it to the horn of the Fish by using Vasuki, the King of serpents, as the rope. As the Fish told, it rained day after day and night after night till there was nothing to be seen but water everywhere covering the whole earth. This was the great flood (Pralaya, big deluge or dissolution). The Fish surged forward into the water with the boat following it. Manu was really thankful to the fish who was helping him.

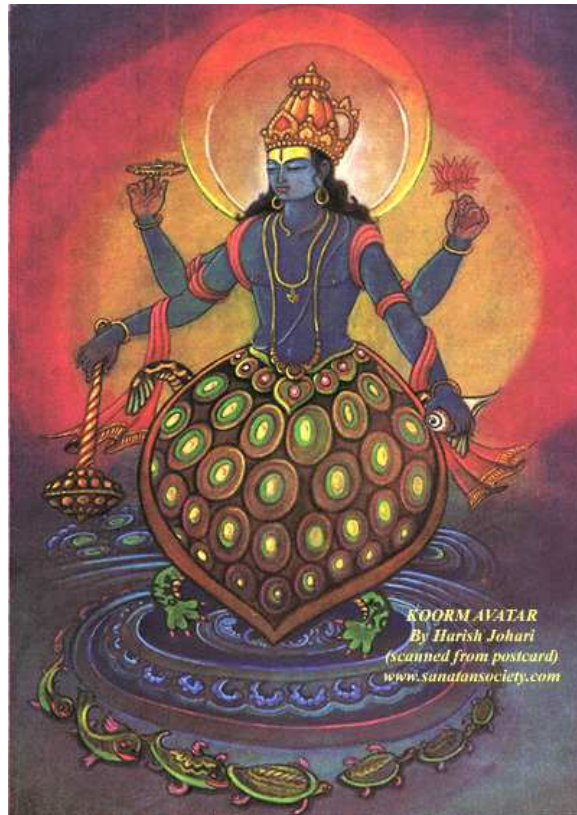


The Fish was none other than Lord Vishnu. He came to protect mankind and the Earth.

After the flood (Pralaya) stopped, and earth was back as normal, the Lord Vishnu (the fish) instructed Manu, “Manu! let the animals freely roam the earth. Sow seeds so plants could grow again”.

Soon, the whole world was back to normal. The lands were green and the plants and trees were growing. The animals started roaming the forests, the birds were flying. Life was starting new. During the flood (pralaya), the Lord Vishnu incarnated (arrived) in the form of fish. Hence, the name Matsya Avatara. Matsya means Fish and Avatar means incarnation.

Kurma Avtar - The Tortoise Incarnation #2



Though Devas and Asuras were cousins, then to they were at war with one another very often. In one such war the gods were on the verge of defeat. They were helpless and their forces were dead in large numbers. So they went to Brahma and pleaded for help.

Brahma meditated for a while and then said, " Let's take refuge in Lord Vishnu. He always helps those who have faith in him."

Lord Vishnu after listening the whole problem advised them, "You will have to strive hard and obtain the nectar of immortality by churning the ocean and that is the way out for you."

Hearing the advice Indra asked lord Vishnu that how could they churn a Ocean? Vishnu replied, " You must cast all kinds of plants, grasses, herbs & creepers into the ocean of milk. Then churn the ocean using using Mount Mandara as a churn- dasher & Vasuki (king of serpents) as a rope for turning it."



But one more question arose that how can the devtas move mount Mandara. Lord Vishnu said, " Take help of Asuras and use them to achieve your end, and REMEMBER you must be careful, however, not to covet any of the things that come out of the ocean and to give vent to anger if any of those things are forcibly taken away by asuras."

"But what about the nectar, if the Asuras took away that also from us then?" asked the devtas. Lord Vishnu assured them that Asuras will not get the nectar. Convinced Brahma returned to his abode while Indra & the devtas went to meet BALI (King of

Asuras).

Seeing Indra unarmed and helpless the Asuras ran towards him but Bali shouted, "No, let's wait. Perhaps the devtas have come with a proposal that might be worth our while." Bali received Indra & the devtas with respect. Indra told Bali about their mission of arrival and requested them (Asuras) to forget the fight and work altogether to achieve the task.

Bali & His chiefs favored the proposal and peace was declared between them and they (Asuras) suggested that let's not waste time and begin the task immediately.

Mount Mandara was needed as a churning rod. The strong warriors made efforts with their hordes in uprooting the mountain and carrying it to the ocean. But they barely had covered half the distance and they got tired and the mighty mountain fell, crushing large numbers of Devtas & Asuras under it. Seeing this Indra prayed to Lord Vishnu for his help.

Lord Vishnu came on Garuda (His mount) to save the Devtas. Lord Vishnu brought the mountain to the ocean with the help of Garuda. When the mountain was placed in the ocean Vasuki came at the scene to play his role. Lord Vishnu addressed him by saying, "Play your role & you shall receive your share of the nectar. The jagged surface of the Mount Mandara will not hurt you at all."

Reassured Vasuki rounded himself around the mountain. The gods held the Vasuki at its mouth's end and the demons at its tail and with full of joyous anticipation Devtas & asuras started churning the ocean. But their joy soon turned into despair, as the heavy Mount Mandara, which had nothing to support it, sank into the ocean.

Lifting it out was a great problem. The gods requested Vishnu once again for help and Vishnu said, "Well, I'll take the form of a tortoise and hold the mountain on my back until the ocean is fully churned and nectar is obtained." Vishnu became a tortoise and held the mountain on his back.



As the churning proceeded fourteen magnificent treasures emerged from the ocean* see at the bottom.

The churning began but the Forceful churning first threw up the deadly poison HALAHAL, which was the concentrate of the impurities of the ocean. Its poisonous fumes choked the Devtas & Asuras.



Frightened out their wits few Devtas ran to Lord Shiva at Mount Kailash for help. God assured them that they need not to fear as he will drink the poison. Lord Shiva collected the poison and swallowed it.

Once all the poison was removed from the ocean the devtas & Asuras again began churning the ocean. As they continued churning many precious things rose to the surface, but not the nectar. At last there came out Dhanvantari with a pot of nectar in his hand.

Seeing this the Asuras ran towards Dhanvantari & snatched the pot of nectar from him and their was a great rivalry between the asuras to take possession of the pot of nectar. Devtas watched this in dismay. But remembering Lord Vishnu's command that they should not quarrel over whatever comes out of the ocean, they made no move. Vishnu became very pleased with devtas. He told Devtas, " Do not be dejected. The greed of nectar has already divided the Asuras and now I shall charm them with my powers & give you the nectar."

Vishnu took the form of Mohini (the most beautiful women) and approached the asuras. The asuras forgot about the nectar as they were enamoured by the glances of Mohini. They were prepared to do anything she said. Vishnu, in the form of Mohini, said to them, "You must do as I ask you to do." So infatuated were the Asuras that they entrusted the jar of nectar to her.





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Mohini then said to the Asuras that," I will do so if you don't question my actions." Not knowing who she really was they agreed to her proposal. She then instructed ,"Go and take bath & assemble in a row, Asuras in one row & devtas in the other row."

When they had all assembled Mohini began to serve the nectar to the gods first. The demons thought, "Mohini would be displeased unnecessarily if we object to it."

Mohini kept the asuras under her spell and she finished the pot of nectar by giving the whole nectar to the devtas. Then she assumed her original form, The form of Lord Vishnu. Asuras were surprised to see this as they had been deceived and there was no nectar left for the Asuras. After finishing his task Lord Vishnu flew away on his Garuda.

The furious Asuras declared war with the devtas. The Devta- Asura war on the seashore was a terrible one but Devtas who had drank the nectar of immortality fought with the asuras and drove them away.

In this way Lord Vishnu revived the lost glory of those who were gentle and sought refuge in him and punished those who were aggressive and had no faith in him.

Avatara 3 - Varaha Avatara



Now is the time to learn about the third incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Long long ago, there lived a demon named Hiranyaksha. He was such a giant that the earth trembled when he walked and the sky cracked when he shouted. He wanted to take control of the heaven. So he started to harass (hassle) the gods. The Gods fearing Hiranyaksha's attack; took shelter in the caves of the mountain ranges on the earth. When cruel Hiranyaksha came to know that the Gods were hiding on the earth, he invaded the earth too.

Neither gods nor human could kill Hiranyaksha. It is because he had got awarded a boon that neither beast nor man nor god could kill him. Hiranyaksha wanted to destroy the earth. So he snatched away the earth and drowned it into the ocean. Mother Earth sank to the bottom of the ocean.

Frightened gods and humans started praising the supreme god, Lord Vishnu. He appeared before them as a tiny Boar. He knew that Hiranyaksha can not be killed by either human or gods. That is why he took the form of Boar.

The Boar (Lord Vishnu in form a boar) grew and grew till it became the size of a large mountain. Emitting a terrifying roar, it took one mighty leap into the air and tore the clouds with its hoofs and dived to the ocean bed in search of Mother earth. It dug his tusk into the ocean bed and lifted Mother Earth onto it, and began rising towards the surface.

Meanwhile Hiranyaksha rushed to the seashore after hearing the terrifying roar. He saw the lord Vishnu carrying the earth. He rushed towards him with a mace in his hand. He shouted, "You fake! Where are you carrying away the earth I conquered? Stop or I'll crush your head with this mace!"



Hiranyaksha challenged Lord Vishnu in the Boar form to fight with him but Vishnu ignored all his warnings and continued rising to the surface. Seeing this Hiranyaksha gave a chase (ran after), but the boar didn't even look back. Hiranyaksha said, "Wait! You impostor (cheat)! I know you can defeat all with your magic power of Yoga but at present you are near me and without the magic power. So you're sure to be defeated." The boar escaped to put the earth at a safe place and paid no attention to the furious (angry) Hiranyaksha.

Hiranyaksha became very angry and shouted, "How can you run away like a coward? Return me my earth, if you love life." The earth was already frightened but seeing Hiranyaksha it began to tremble more. The boar brought the earth over the surface of the ocean and placed Bhoomidevi (Mother Earth) gently on it and blessed her, "May you support yourself in keeping with the divine order."

He then turned to face Hiranyaksha. The demon threw his mace at the boar but the boar stepped aside and raised his mace. They fought for a long time with their maces.

When Brahma got a chance to warn Vishnu, he said "You've only an hour before the sunset. Destroy the demon before it is dark so that he gets no opportunity (chance) to use black magic." (Demons get great black magic powers after dark!!) Hearing Brahma's words Hiranyaksha hurled (threw) his mace towards Lord Vishnu who pushed it away. Having lost the mace, the demon began hitting out with his fists on the chest of the boar. The boar hit the demon hard on his face with his fist and tossed him in the air.

Hiranyaksha fell over his head and died on the spot. After the fierce battle was over, Lord Vishnu returned Manu his earth back and the gods their heaven. The Gods were delighted (very happy) to get their heavens back and Manu lived to rule the earth for a long time.

In this way, Lord Vishnu (Varaha Bhagwan) slew (killed) the Demon Hiranyaksha and brought the Earth in her proper orbit.

Fill in the blanks

1. ----- is the third avatara (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu

(a) Kurma (b) Varaha (c) Krishna (d) Rama

2. ----- is the second avatara (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu

(a) Kurma (b) Varaha (c) Krishna (d) Rama

3. ----- is the second avatara (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu

(a) Kurma (b) Varaha (c) Krishna (d) Matsya

4. Lord Vishnu incarnated as Varaha and killed

(a) Earth (b) Heaven (c) None of these (d) Earth & Heaven

Color the Picture

