



Out of the twenty-four avatars of Lord Vishnu that are given importance in Bhagavat Purana, ten are considered most important. These are: Matsya (Fish), Kurma or Kachhapa (Tortoise), Varaha (Hog), Vamana (Dwarf), Narasimha (Man-Lion), Parashu Rama (Rama with an Axe), Rama (the delighter of hearts), Bala Rama (Rama endowed with Might), Krishna (the Source of attraction and charm), and Buddha (the Enlightened).

We will now continue to explore these ten most important incarnations of the Lord Vishnu, along with their mystic implications for the spiritual movement in the life of an aspirant.

Varaha (Hog) Avatara



While Brahma was involved in his work of creation, the earth became submerged in waters and sank deep beneath the ocean. In despair, Brahma called out in prayer to Lord Vishnu for help in overcoming this problem.

Suddenly a tiny Boar cub no larger than a thumb emerged from Brahma's nostrils. Standing up before his eyes, the Boar instantly grew to the size of a mighty elephant. To the amazement of Brahma and his sons, that massive Boar raised his ferocious white tusks, emitted a resounding roar, and then playfully plunged into the ocean waters. Soon the Divine Boar located the submerged earth and began sportively to lift it up on the tip of his tusk.

His efforts were challenged by Hiranyaksha, the first *asura* (demon). This formidable enemy tried to bar the way of the Divine Boar (Varaha Avatara) with his great mace, but that incarnation of Lord Vishnu effortlessly struck him down and killed him in the ocean waters. Then Varaha rose up victoriously and gently placed the earth on the surface of the ocean. Having done so, amidst great songs of praise, the Divine Boar quickly vanished.



The Divine Boar or Varaha Avatara represents a mighty spiritual force that manifests in the unconscious mind of an evolving aspirant. When an aspirant generates pure impressions by the practice of meditation and devotion, that Varaha is born to overcome the obstacles in the waters of the unconscious and bring forth the wisdom that has long been cramped by the presence of negative impressions.

How does it do so? With the amazing and furiously single-minded concentration characteristic of a giant pig, that force ignores everything else and charges against its target of ignorance with resounding force.

In this process, with blind or piggish one-pointedness, the Divine force conquers Hiranyaksha—the “demon with golden eyes.” Hiranyaksha represents the mind that is focused primarily upon the material values of life, ignoring the ethical and spiritual. When that limitation of mind is vanquished, the ethical and spiritual values (*dharma* and *Moksha*) blossom and become predominant in the mind of an aspirant.

Vamana (Dwarf) Avatara

Bali was a demon king who survived the war between the gods and demons after the churning of the ocean. Despite the fact that the demons did not receive nectar, they still gained immense power under the leadership of Bali, and the gods were under great pressure. To make himself even more powerful, Bali began to perform a special religious sacrifice that

would make him the unchallenged ruler of the three worlds. To stop Bali from performing that sacrifice and rob him of his power, Lord Vishnu manifested as Vamana Avatara, the Dwarf incarnation.

One day, while Bali was involved in the sacrificial ritual, Vamana entered the royal hall where the sacrifice was in progress. Everyone present was dazzled by the splendor of Vamana—small in stature but most beautiful.

When Bali saw him, he immediately welcomed Vamana and said, “Oh *brahmin*, adorations to you! Ask whatever you want—gold, jewels, food, horses, elephants, chariots, villages—and I will give it to you.”

Vamana praised Bali and said, “All I want is your promise that you will give me whatever I ask. And what I ask is only the land that can be covered by three of my steps.”

Bali laughed and said, “You are like a child. Why should you ask me only for three steps of land when I can give you kingdoms?” To this Vamana replied, “Oh king, no one can become contented by possessions. So, why should I ask for more than I need. All I need is land that can be covered by my three steps.”

When Bali was about to agree, his Guru, Shukracharya, cautioned him, “Do not grant this request. This dwarf is not an ordinary person. He is Lord Vishnu, who has come in that form to trick you.” But Bali replied, “If he is Lord Vishnu, let Him take away all that I have. I will not turn back from my words.” “Well then,” responded Guru Shukracharya, “may all your prosperity be taken away.”

Bali persisted, however, and assured Vamana that he would keep his promise. The moment Vamana heard this, he assumed a gigantic, Cosmic form. When the demons saw such a gigantic personality before them, they were terrified. Then that Cosmic form of Vishnu with one step measured the earth and all that is below the earth, while His body covered the sky. His second step measured all the subtler worlds. Thus all the universe was measured by His two steps. After Lord Vishnu robbed Bali of all he had, He placed Bali in fetters. Seeing this, the demons ran away to the netherworld, and there was a great outcry. Then Lord Vishnu, in Cosmic form, said, “Oh demon, I asked you for three steps of land. So far I have received only two. What about My third step?”

Bali replied, “Oh Lord, You are the adorable one, worshipped by all the gods. I am not afraid of losing

all that I had. My words can never become false. If I have said I will give You three steps, I am going to give them. Let Your third step be placed right on my head.”

Brahma the Creator then prayed to Lord Vishnu. “Oh Lord,” he said, “this Bali does not deserve to be punished. He has kept his mind in balance even when he is deprived of all he owns, and he has a devoted heart.”

“Indeed,” replied Lord Vishnu, “Bali has proven himself to be the best devotee. Now I place My foot on his head and I will keep him under My protection.”

Vishnu then told Bali, “Go with your demon followers to Sutar Loka, where you will be well protected by Me, and I will be always present before you in your palace. There you will have all the enjoyments that you want.”



The demon king, Bali, represents the ego principle or sense of individuality. That ego is ever involved in a *yajna* (sacrifice) to satisfy its urge for increasing enjoyments and power. Like Bali, most individuals perform actions impelled by desire (*sakamya karma*), striving to possess more and more. How much more? There is no limit. One wants to see the whole universe enfolded by *ahamta* and *mamata*, I-ness and mine-ness. If your ego were to develop that mighty power to dominate the world, the godly qualities within you would be completely stifled, and the demoniac qualities would become predominant.

In the realm of *sakamya karma*, people work for wealth, material success, fame—for things that are going to pass away—but they do not work for realizing the Absolute Self. Everything is done for the sake of the ego rather than for the sake of the Self.

Sakamya karma also implies doing good deeds with the desire of attaining a heavenly reward. Those who perform actions with this in mind forget that when you have exhausted the karma that afforded you heavenly enjoyments, you have to incarnate again and again.

For the most part, this entire world with all its activities is Bali’s ritual sacrifice. Due to delusion of the intellect, the majority of people do not see anything wrong in living and dying in the pursuit of their perishable goals. Therefore, they continue to incarnate again and again, following the path of *pravritti* (the path of

repeated embodiments) rather than striving to break the cycles of birth and death by following the path of *nivritti* (the path leading to Liberation).

To put an end to that *yajna* of Bali within you, Lord Vishnu must incarnate within your personality as Vamana Avatara. Vamana symbolizes a profound spiritual humility that leads to the insight that “ego is not me.” The moment that humility arises, ego’s movement towards externalization is stopped. Ego—the little “I” in you—begins to enjoy adopting a project of its own effacement.

Spiritual humility appears at first like a small dwarf. It speaks softly, acts tenderly. In a *rajasic* world where you are expected to be assertive, imposing, competitive, and crafty as a fox, that humility may even appear weak and feeble. However, don’t be fooled. That dwarf has the power to outstep the universe in just a few simple steps!

When people looked at Mahatma Gandhi, he appeared quite small and unassuming. However, the sublime humility in him worked such wonders that it created tremors in the heart of the British Empire. What could not be achieved by a thousand soldiers, Mahatma Gandhi was able to achieve through the strength of humility.

When that advanced spirit of humility develops within you, you have gained the mystical insight by which you can transcend the three planes of your existence: the physical, astral (mind, intellect, and senses) and the causal (unconscious) planes. These three planes operate within you in the waking, dream and deep sleep states of consciousness. When you transcend all three, you experience *turiya*, the transcendental.

When Vamana is born within your heart, you outstep *mala* (gross impurities) with the first step, and *vikshepa* (distraction of mind) with the second step. With the third step, *avarana* (veiling of the truth) is removed. But to take that final, third step, there must be absolute surrender to God. That surrender is symbolized by Bali’s request that Lord Vishnu place His foot right on his head.

Thus, the Divine Incarnation suggests the infinite power of spiritual humility, which robs the ego of its universe, but at the same time, confers on the soul the infinite expansion of the Self, which

can measure the universe, and yet can remain much beyond the world of manifestations.

In advanced *samadhi*, the illumined consciousness steps beyond the world like child’s play. The joy that one experiences by surrendering oneself to God is much greater than all the possessions, powers, and attainments in this world of relativity. As an ego-personality, you want to get the whole world, but you get very little. When the Divine Dwarf is born within your personality, you want only little, but you get all.

When Vamana robs Bali of all he possesses, it is a blessed development for an aspirant. If you are offering all your actions to the Lord within you, if you are coming closer to God, you are going to be deprived of all sense of possession. The very ego in you is going to dissolve. That is what Lord Jesus meant when he said, “Blessed are the poor, for they shall enter the kingdom of God.” To become poor from a spiritual point of view is not ordinary poverty. To become poor means to experience the state of profound fullness implied by the Vedantic statement: “Nothing exists; nothing belongs to me. Immortal Self am I, ever Free!”

