



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), Nara-sinha (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.

Parashu-Rama Āvatara

Lord Vishnu then incarnated as Parashu-Rama (Rama who held an axe as his weapon). Though born a *brahmin*, as the son of princess Renuka and *brahmin* Sage Jamadagni, Parashu-Rama was physically strong, mentally tough and very aggressive by nature, and was raring to fight injustice, wherever he found it.

Once, when Parashu-Rama was away from the hermitage, the mighty king, Sahasrabahu, (also known as Kartavirya Arjuna) happened to come there with his people. Sage Jamadagni received them all with great courtesy. He then served them delicious food with the help of the wish-fulfilling Divine cow Kamadhenu—a gift from Lord Indra that could feed any number of people with extraordinary food within seconds.

Sahasrabahu was amazed by the powers of this Divine creature and immediately wanted to possess her for himself. Therefore, as he was leaving the ashram of Sage Jamadagni, he dragged away the cow and her calf forcefully.

Sahasrabahu had received a boon from Lord Dattatreya to be empowered with the strength of a thousand arms. Although initially working for positive developments in society, this mighty *kshatriya* warrior had become exceedingly arrogant and freely misused his power.

Coming to know of the injustice committed by Sahasrabahu, Parashu-Rama marched with his axe to the capital of the king, fought with his army, and finally killed the mighty Sahasrabahu himself. Then he returned the cow and calf to his father.

When the sons of the slain king saw that Parashu-Rama was away from home on a pil-

grimage, they ravaged the hermitage of Sage Jamadagni and brutally slaughtered the Sage in revenge for the killing of Sahasrabahu.

Learning of what happened to his father, Parashu-Rama flew into a rage and killed all the perpetrators of the crime. He then continued to destroy twenty-one generations of sinful *kshatriya* kings who had been inflicting untold hardships on society. In order to restore peace and tranquility on the earth, Parashu-Rama kept roaming with his axe to crush the growing despotism, oppression and cruelty let loose by the ruling class against weak and ordinary people.



Parashu-Rama's repeated slaying of the *kshatriyas* mystically implies that an aspirant should tirelessly strive to overhaul the unconscious, repeatedly destroying and sublimating the impure impressions that are based on *rajas*—impressions of egoism, externalization and multiplicity. Each time your mind is agitated or overcome by selfishness, greed, hate, or jealousy, *rajas* is at work.



Try to allow the spiritual force of Parashu-Rama's axe within you to mow down those weeds of *rajas*. They will grow again and again, and you must mow them down again and again. If you keep them under control, you will have a beautiful lawn flourishing within your mind! Divine impressions (*shubha samskaras*) will blossom and thrive.

Parashu-Rama's mission was to bring about harmony and order by forceful means. He was born during a time when *rajasic kshatriya* kings, kings who had developed immense pride and conceit, were predominant on the earth. Sahastrabahu himself, with his thousand arms, represents *vikshepa—rajasic* distraction of mind. With his crude expression of Divine power, Parashu-Rama eliminated an amazing number of those kings, not once, but over and over again, mowing them down like weeds that would eventually destroy the garden.

In an ideal society that is moving towards harmony, *brahminas* (saintly people who have philosophical insight) should be the leaders. *Kshatriyas* (politicians, soldiers, warriors) should always submit to *brahminas*. *Kshatriyas* have a wonderful place in society, but they must be guided by *sattwa* (purity of mind). If they are guided by their own whims, they become demoniac.

When saintly insight predominates, there will be prosperity, harmony and peace in the world. When force and might (*kshatriyas*) or money and wealth (*vaishyas*) predominate, there will be degradation.

In the evolution of an aspirant, Parashu-Rama symbolizes a forceful approach to disciplining the mind and senses, while Rama

symbolizes a more subtle and persuasive approach. Both approaches are necessary on the spiritual path, and an aspirant must develop a sensitive way of assessing which is more appropriate at any given moment. In general, however, the more you advance, the subtler is your handling of the inner obstacles to spiritual advancement.

By the time Lord Vishnu incarnated as Rama, the type of power that manifested in Parashu-Rama was no longer needed. What was needed was a higher movement of the spirit—fighting evil not by brute force, but with intelligence and goodness. The mission of Rama Avatara symbolizes this more sublime movement in which the intellect that is inclined to lesser values is cut down and a purified intellect (intuitional) emerges. The axe of intuitive intellect then fells the entire tree of the world-process, which has its roots in the causal ignorance (*avidya*).

