

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), 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 begin 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.

Matsya (Fish) Āvatara

Once at the end of an ancient kalpa (time cycle), Brahma the creator lay down to rest. As he dozed off, Brahma spoke out the Vedas, which normally are kept in his mind as a secret.

Immediately the demon Hayagriva, who was standing nearby waiting for that opportunity, immediately caught hold of the Vedas and stole them. Appalled by what Hayagriva had done, Lord Vishnu resolved to incarnate upon the earth to remedy the situation.

Thus, one day when Sage Satyavrata was practicing austerity by the banks of a river, a little fish was inadvertently collected in his cupped hands with the water he was offering for libations. The Royal Sage immediately threw the fish back into the river, but to his surprise the fish spoke to him, saying, “I am a small fish, and am always afraid of bigger fish who might swallow me. O Sage, protect me.” Feeling compassionate towards the little fish, Sage Satyavrata picked it up in his hands, placed it in a small jar, and took it to his hermitage with great affection.

In just one night the fish became bigger and could not be contained in the small jar. So the Sage moved him to a bucketful of water, but quickly he grew so large that he had to be moved to a pond, and then to a deeper pool. As the fish continued to grow and ask the Sage for help, Satyavrata moved him to a still larger pool, to a lake, and then to the Ganges River, until he finally placed the fish lovingly in the ocean.

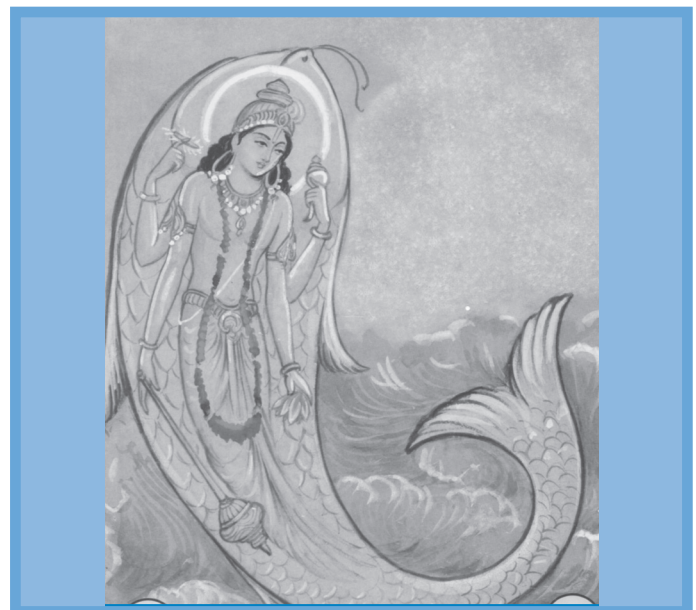
As the gigantic fish entered the ocean he smilingly said, “O valiant Sage, you have sustained me and protected me, and therefore, I am going to do the same for you. Very soon this entire creation is going to be destroyed, for the time of *pralaya* (universal deluge) is coming and all will be submerged and perish under water. You, however,

must protect the essence of the world so that it can be created again afterwards.

Therefore, when *pralaya* begins, a huge ship sent by me will come to you. Place every type of seed in that boat, samples of all plant and animal life, representatives of all living creatures. Then, carrying that essence of creation, you and the *Saptarshis* (the seven Sages) should protect yourselves from the elements by staying inside the boat. I will then appear, and you will recognize me by the horn on my head. Tie the boat to my horn using the great serpent Vasuki as a rope, and I will lead you and your boat through the dark seas. At that time, due to the Enlightenment within your heart, you will experience Me as *Brahman*, the Absolute Self.”

Following these instructions, the Sage gathered the specimens that would serve as the essence of a new creation. Soon the torrential rains came, and all objects and beings began to be engulfed by the turbulent, gigantic waves of *pralaya*. But then, as Matsya Avatara had promised, the boat appeared and Satyavrata, the seven Sages, and the plants and animals went aboard.

When that magnificent golden Fish appeared, Satyavrata tied the boat to his mighty horn, and the Fish began navigating through the turbulent waters. While thus sporting in the ocean, Matsya Avatara taught the Sages in the boat an entire



Purana, giving the highest insight into wisdom, devotion and action.

When the waters of deluge finally receded, Brahma awoke and Lord Vishnu, having destroyed the demon Hayagriva, restored the Vedas to Brahma. Then King Satyavrata, graced with Enlightenment, became the Manu of the next time cycle (*kalpa*) and, as such, the progenitor of the human race.



This allegorical story, as you can see, is very similar to the story in the Bible of the great flood and Noah's Ark, in which a pair of each type of living being was protected so that the earth could be populated again. Whether or not it reflects an actual geographical development of great floods in ancient times, the story has a profound spiritual message.

Brahma represents the purified mind that glows with the knowledge that you are *Brahman*, you are one with God, you are not a limited personality. Brahma's falling asleep implies your coming under the influence of *avidya* (ignorance), represented by Hayagriva. That demon of ignorance has stolen the knowledge possessed by the pure mind and it must be recovered.

When you begin to practice meditation and *samadhi* (super-consciousness), a mystic spiritual insight (*antardrishti*) unfolds within. This is when the Divine Self incarnates within your personality as Matsya Avatara. That insight at first is like a small fish wiggling in a small environment. However, if you nourish that insight, it will rapidly outgrows the environment in which it was placed—like the fish moving from the jar to the pond, to the lake, to the River Ganges and, finally, to the ocean.

That mystical insight outgrows the family in which you were born, the society to which you belong, the country in which you are a citizen. It allows you to outstep all the concepts, thoughts,

and mental barriers that condition your mind. As all limitations of mind are transcended, that insight blooms into intuition, which in turn flourishes into the highest awareness of Cosmic Consciousness.

Protecting the seeds of creation during the deluge, in which the world is as if drawn into a state of dissolution, refers to the movement in the undifferentiated and dark region of the unconscious where the seeds exist in the form of subtle impressions. There the Divine Insight begins to work a process of renewal and overhauling in a level far beyond the conscious spheres of life.

Through the practice of meditation and *samadhi*, the impure impressions (*ashubha samskaras*) based on ego-consciousness are replaced by pure impressions (*shubha samskaras*)—the seeds of the transformed and elevated personality in the making.

When those sublime impressions are carried in the boat of the purified mind, which is tied to the horn of intuitive vision, the soul is led across the ocean of the world-process to the Bliss of Enlightenment.

