

## THE VISHNU PURANA

The Vishnu Purana has twenty-three thousand shlokas divided into six major sections or amshas.

Maitreya and Parashara

Once the sage Maitreya came to the sage Parashara and wanted to know about the creation of the universe. And this is what Parashara told him.

In the beginning the universe was full of water. But in that water there emerged a huge egg (anda) that was round like a water-bubble. The egg became bigger and bigger and inside the egg there was Vishnu. This egg was called Brahmanda. And inside Brahmanda there were the mountains and the land, the oceans and the seas, the gods, demons and humans and the stars. On all sides, the egg was surrounded by water, fire, wind, the sky and the elements. Inside the egg, Vishnu adopted the form of Brahma and proceeded to create the universe. When the universe is to be destroyed, it is Vishnu again who adopts the form of Shiva and performs the act of destruction. Let us therefore salute the great god Vishnu.

There are four yugas or eras. These are called krita (or satya), treta, dvapara and kali. Krita era consists of four thousand years, treta of three thousand, dvapara of two thousand and kali of one thousand. All the four eras thus pass in ten thousand. And when all the four eras have passed one thousand times each, that is merely one day for Brahma. I hope you are good at elementary arithmetic. How many human years are equal to one of Brahma's days ? Ten thousand times one thousand. That is, ten million years. During each of Brahma's days, the sages the gods and the kings are destroyed and recreated fourteen times. Each of these cycles is called a manvantara. But at the end of Brahma's day, there comes the final destruction. The world is burn. Brahma sleeps throughout his night, for ten million human years. Thereafter, there is creation once again.

Parashara said, "Maitreya, let me tell you about how Brahma performed the act of creation."

Brahma is merely part of Narayana. And Narayana is Vishnu. Nara means water and ayana means resting-place. When the earlier creation was destroyed, the world was full of water and Vishnu slept on the water. That is the reason why he is called Narayana. Narayana saw that there was water all around and desired to create the world. He, therefore, adopted the form of a boar (varaha) and went all the way down to the underworld. There the earth saluted him and asked him to rescue her from the underworld. Upon hearing the earth's request, Vishnu in his form of a boar began to roar. He used his tusks to lift up the earth from the underworld. Then he carefully placed the earth on the waters. The earth floated on the oceans like a huge boat. Vishnu levelled out the earth and placed the mountains in their proper places. The earth was divided into seven regions or dvipas.

After that came the question of creating the beings. There were four types of beings that Brahma created through the powers of his mind. The first were the demons or asuras, they came out of Brahma's thighs. Next came the gods or devas, they emerged from Brahma's mouth. From Brahma's sides there were created the ancestors or pitris. And the humans came out the last. Many other things were created.

After that Brahma was both hungry and angry. The demons of hunger took form and wanted to eat up Brahma, their creator. There were some among them who did not want to eat their creator, but wanted to protect (raksha) him. They came to be known as rakshas. And those who wanted to eat him came to be known as yakshas. When Brahma saw these undesirable creatures, the hairs on his head fell off and grew up and stood up again. From these hairs were born the snakes. The gandharvas were born. They were known as gandharvas because they sing.

Many other things were created. From Brahma's age were created the birds, from his chest sheep and from his mouth goats. From his stomach and sides there came out cattle and from his feet horses, elephants, deer and camels. Plants sprouted

from the hair on Brahma's body.

There were four classes of humans that were created, the brahmanas, the kshatriyas, the vaishyas and the shudras. The brahmanas came out of Brahma's mouth, the kshatriyas from his chest, the vaishyas from his thighs and the shudras from his feet.

Lakshmi

Brahma also wanted to create a son who would be just like him. When he thought of this, a son appeared on his lap. But the child kept on crying (rud) and thus came to be known as Rudra. He was crying because he did not have a name. The crying stopped when Brahma gave him the name of Rudra from the word for crying. The child, however, began to cry once more and did not stop until he was given another name. This happened seven times. And so Rudra also has the names of Bhava, Sarva, Mahesha, Pashupati, Bhima, Ugra and Mahadeva. Rudra's wife was called Sati. She gave up her life because of what her father Daksha had done and was born again as Uma, the daughter of Himalaya and Menaka. Mahadeva married Uma yet again.

There was a sage called Durvasa who was descended from Mahadeva. Once upon a time, Durvasa was wandering around the world. And in the hands of a pretty woman he saw a beautiful and fragrant garland. Durvasa wanted the woman to give him the garland, which she gladly did. Durvasa placed the garland on his head and continued to roam around the world. Who should he then run into but Indra, the king of the gods? There were other gods with Indra and Indra was seated on his elephant, Airavata. Durvasa picked up the garland and threw it at Indra. Having caught the garland, Indra placed it on the head of his elephant. Airavata must have been surprised at the pleasant smell that was coming from his head. For he raised his trunk to get a better sniff. And in the process, the garland fell off his head and onto the ground.

Durvasa was very angry. He thought that Indra had insulted him. He had not even bothered to thank Durvasa for the garland. And instead of placing the garland on his own head, he had seen it fit to place the garland on the head of an elephant. From which place it had fallen off onto the ground. Durvasa therefore got ready to curse Indra. By then, Indra had realized his mistake. He got off the elephant, fell at Durvasa's feet and begged that he might be forgiven. But Durvasa was not like the other sages; he refused to be pacified. And so he cursed Indra. What was the curse? That Lakshmi should disappear from Indra's abode. Lakshmi, you may know, is the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

When Indra returned to where he lived in Amaravati, he found the place to be dreary and dilapidated. Lakshmi had left. The plants were dying. The sages were not performing sacrifices. People had become selfish. It was not simply Amaravati that had become like this. Indra ruled over all the three worlds. And in all the three worlds this was precisely what had happened.

The demons never liked the gods and were forever trying to fight with them. They now discovered that the gods were less powerful and less well protected. So they attacked the gods and gave them a good thrashing. What were the poor gods to do? They elected the god Agni as their leader and fled to Brahma for refuge and help. Brahma told them that he was unable to help them himself; they should seek help from Vishnu. On the northern shores of the great ocean the gods assembled and began to pray.

How could Vishnu ignore such prayers? He manifested himself before the gods and gave them the following advice. The gods should meet the demons and have a temporary truce. Both sides should get together and prepare to churn the great ocean. Before the churning, herbs were to be thrown into the ocean. The mountain Mandara was to be used as the churner and the great snake Vasuki as the rope for churning. It was expected that amrita ( a drink that made one immortal) would come out of the ocean as a result of the churning. And the gods should promise the demons that this amrita would be equally shared out among the two sides stronger. But the promise of the amrita would make sure that the demons took part in the churning. This was nothing but an empty promise. Vishnu hastened to assure the

gods that he would ensure that the demons got none of the amrita.

This the demons did not know, they gladly agreed to the churning. Herbs were hurled into the ocean and the churning began. The gods grasped Vasuki's tail and the demons its head. In fact, it was Vishnu who asked the demons to grasp the head of the snake. Flames and smoke belched out of the mouth of the snake and made the demons suffer. The gases that came out of the snake's mouth went up into the sky and formed clouds. These clouds were driven towards the tail and poured down as soothing rain on the gods who had grasped the tail. On what was the huge mountain Mandara to be balanced? The solution was again provided by Vishnu. Vishnu adopted the form of a gigantic turtle on which the mountain could be placed.

Thus the churning went on. And wonderful were the things that emerged out of the ocean as a result of the churning. The first to come out was the cow Surabhi, worshipped by the gods. Next the goddess Varuni emerged. Followed by the fragrant tree known as parijata. Out came the apsaras (dancers of heaven). And the moon, which Mahadeva accepted as an adornment for his head. There were bad things as well. The poison that came out was accepted by the snakes. And dressed all in white, the god Dhanvantari came out with the pot of amrita in his hands. At the sight of the amrita, the gods, the demons and the sages were delighted. But there was more to come. There emerged a lotus flower with the shining form of the goddess Lakshmi. She held another lotus in her hand.

The sages began to chant hymns in front of her. The gandharvas sang, the apsaras danced. Rivers like the Ganga arrived so the Lakshmi could have a bath. There are eight elephants who protect the eight directions. These elephants took clear water from golden vessels and bathed the goddess. The ocean gave her a garland of lotus flowers which would not fade. Vishvakarma provided the jewels. Thus bathed, dressed, jewelled and garlanded, Lakshmi embraced Vishnu. Since the demons did not like Vishnu, this meant that Lakshmi had forsaken the demons. And Lakshmi smiled upon the gods. The demons did manage to get hold of the pot of amrita. But Vishnu adopted a female form to trick the demons of the amrita and give it to the gods.

The gods drank the amrita and attacked the demons with swords. The amrita had made the gods strong and the demons were not match for them. Their armies scattered and they fled into the underworld. The gods were delighted. They bowed before Vishnu and continued to rule over heaven. The sun went back to its old path across the sky. So did the stars. Indra ascended his throne and ruled over the three worlds, after having prayed to Lakshmi.

Parashara told Maitreya. "Indra's prayers pleased Lakshmi and she agreed to grant him boons". The first boon that Indra asked for was that Lakshmi should never leave the three worlds. And the second boon was that Lakshmi should never turn away from anyone who prayed to Lakshmi using the same prayer that Indra had used.

### The Story of Dhruva

From Brahma's body was created Manu. All humans are descended from Manu's son and daughters. This is the reason for their being called manava. Manu had two righteous and brave sons known as Priyavrata and Uttanapada. Uttanapada had two wives, Suruchi's son was Dhruva. King Uttanapada was fonder of Suruchi than of Suniti and liked Uttama much more than he liked Dhruva.

One day, Dhruva found that Uttama was sitting on his father's lap on the throne. Naturally, Dhruva also wanted to climb onto his father's lap. But Suruchi scolded him saying that he should not aspire to that which was Uttama's. He should always remember that the throne was meant for Uttama and not for Dhruva.

Dhruva was angry. He went running to his mother. And he told his mother what had happened. Suniti consoled him and told him that men suffer or prosper depending on what they had done in their past lives. If one has done good deeds in an earlier life, one becomes a king, has an umbrella held over one's head and rides excellent horses and elephants in this life. Suruchi and Uttama must have performed many

good deeds in their earlier lives. And Suniti and Dhruva must have performed many evil deeds in their earlier lives. This was not something to be unhappy about. Wise men were satisfied with what they got. If Dhruva was really upset at what Suruchi had said, he should stop being unhappy and should instead spend his time on being good, religious, righteous and selfless.

Suniti's words convinced Dhruva. He said, "Mother, your words have given me peace. I will try to achieve the highest position of all. True, the king loves Suruchi and true, I am not Suruchi's son. But I am your son and I will show you what I can do. Let Uttama have his throne. I do not wish for something that is someone else's. Through my own work I will achieve a place that not even my father has achieved."

Dhruva said this and went out of the house. There was a forest not very far away. And in the forest he met seven sages. He bowed before them and said, "I am Dhruva, the son of Uttanapada and Suniti. I am unhappy and so I have come before you."

The sages were surprised. "Prince," they said, "You are only four or five years old. You have nothing to be unhappy about, you have nothing to worry about. Your father is a king and he is still alive. Nor do you seem to be ill. Why then are you unhappy?"

Dhruva told them the reason for his unhappiness. He said that he desired neither wealth nor kingdoms. He simply wanted to go to a place where no one had ever been before. The sages advised him to pray to Vishnu. They also taught him the mantra that was to be used for praying to Vishnu.

Dhruva made his way to the banks of the river Yamuna. This was the region that was known as Madhavana, because the daitya (demon) Madhu had ruled over it. Rama's brother Shatrughna had defeated Madhu's son Lavana and built the city of Mathura here. Here it was that Dhruva prayed. He prayed so hard that even the gods were disturbed. They did their best to break this tapasya of Dhruva's. The rakshasas appeared to attack him with many weapons. Jackals howled around him. Ghosts threatened him. But Dhruva was undisturbed. He thought only of Vishnu. And saw nothing but Vishnu.

The gods were worried because they thought that Dhruva was praying so that he might obtain the power to defeat them. Perhaps he wanted to become Indra, or the sun, or Kubera, Varuna or Soma. They went to Vishnu and asked him to stop Dhruva's tapasya. Vishnu reassured the gods. He knew that these were not the things that Dhruva wanted.

Vishnu appeared before Dhruva and offered him a boon. The boy opened his eyes and saw Vishnu standing before him. He wanted the boon that he should always feel like praying to Vishnu. In fact, he did not really want a boon at all. He had seen Vishnu with his own eyes and there was nothing more that he desired. Vishnu was however so pleased that he persisted in granting Dhruva some boon. Dhruva then wanted the boon that he might attain a place that was on top the entire world.

Vishnu told him that he would grant what Dhruva desired. He also told Dhruva that in an earlier life Dhruva had been a brahmana who was devoted to Vishnu. But the brahmana's friend had been a wealthy and beautiful prince. Having got a boon from Vishnu, the brahmana had desired that in his next life he might be born a prince. That was the reason why he had been born as Dhruva, the son of King Uttanapada.

But since Dhruva no longer wanted kingdoms or wealth, Vishnu would place him in the middle of the sky so that all the stars would revolve around him. His mother Suniti would also be placed in the sky near him.

Have you seen Dhruva in the sky? Of course you have. Near the seven sages who form the constellation of the Great Bear. Dhruva is nothing but the Pole Star.

The Kings Vena and Prithu

Some generations further down from Dhruva, there was a king called Vena. Vena was not a good king at all. He announced that there would be no sacrifices on earth.

There was absolutely no reason for praying to Vishnu, wasn't king Vena superior to even Vishnu? The sages tried to persuade the King to change his ways, but Vena was not in a mood to listen.

The sages therefore decided that Vena should die. They chanted mantras over a straw and killed Vena with the straw. The problem however was that who would rule the kingdom in Vena's place? Vena did not have any children. The sages then began to knead the dead king's thighs. After the kneading, a dwarf who looked like a short pillar came out of the thighs.

"What shall I do?", asked the dwarf.

"Sit," said the sages and the dwarf came to be called nishada from the word for sitting. Later, the sons of Nishada came to live in the Vindhya mountains.

The sages then began to knead the dead body's right hand. And a shining man came out because of the kneading. This was Prithu. As he was born, a divine bow, arrows and armour fell on him from the skies. Everyone was happy at Prithu's birth. Even Vena no longer had to go to the hell that one has to go to if one does not have a son. The rivers and the oceans arrived with water and jewels for Prithu's coronation. The gods and Brahma arrived to bathe Prithu before the coronation. Brahma noticed that Prithu had the mark of a chakra (Vishnu's weapon) on his right hand. This was a good men, because it meant that Prithu was descended from Vishnu. Only kings whom even the gods cannot rival have this sign on their hands.

Prithu was crowned. He was a powerful king. The waters of the ocean trembled when he passed and the mountains made a path for him. His flag was never lowered. The earth yielded crops without any ploughing. The cows gave a lot of milk and the flowers were full of honey. As soon as he was born, Prithu arranged for a sacrifice (yajna). From this sacrifice were born the sutas and the magadhas, who chanted songs in Prithu's praise.

But there had been a short period between Vena's death and Prithu's birth when there had been no king on the land. The land does not flourish in the absence of a king. The herbs disappeared from the earth and people were hungry. These people went to Prithu and begged him to restore the herbs. To obtain the herbs, Prithu took up his bow and arrow and began to chase the earth. The earth adopted the form of cow and started to run. But wherever the earth went, Prithu followed. Finally, Prithu caught up with the earth and the earth restored whatever few herbs were left. To ensure tha the earth returned to normalcy and once again became fertile. Prithu levelled out the mountains with his bow. In the earlier creation, there had been no cities, villages, grains, animal husbandry, agriculture or trade.

It was because of Prithu that all this became possible. This is the reason why the earth is called prithivi.

The Prachetas

Among Prithu's descendants was a king called Prachinvarhi who married the daughter of the ocean, Savarna. Ten sons, the Prachetas, were born of this marriage. They performed very difficult tapasya (meditation) for ten thousand years under the ocean.

Maitreya asked Parashara, "Why did the Prachetas perform difficult tapasya for ten thousand years?" And this was Parashara's answer.

Brahma had asked Prachinvarhi to ensure that the world became full of people and Prachinvarhi passed on the task to his sons. But the Prachetas did not know how to go about this task. Their father told them to pray to Vishnu, for didn't Vishnu offer the solution to all problems? It was after paying to Vishnu that Brahma had created the universe at the beginning of the original creation. On hearing their father's instructions, the Prachetas prayed for ten thousand years.

When the ten thousand years were over, Vishnu appeared before them on the top of his transport Garuda. He offered them a boon and the Prachetas requested that they might be able to people the world. Having obtained the desired boon, the

Prachetas emerged from the ocean and found that in their absence, the earth had been covered with trees. No winds could blow. In their anger, the Prachetas created wind and fire from their mouths. The wind uprooted the trees and the fire burnt them. All the trees began to be destroyed.

Soma, king of the trees, could not bear this to happen. He rushed to the Prachetas and tried to appease them. There was a beautiful woman called Marisha who had been born from the tree and whom Soma had brought up. Soma offered Marisha in marriage to the Prachetas. He promised them that the son who would be born, Daksha, would people the world. Soma also told the Prachetas the story of Marisha's birth.

Many years ago, there used to be a sage called Kandou. This sage was performing difficult tapasya on the banks of the river Gomati. To disturb him, Indra sent an apsara (dancer of heaven) named Pramlocha. Kandou fell in love with her, married her and lived with her for more than a hundred years in a valley in the mountain Mandara. When more than a hundred years had passed, the apsara wished to return to heaven. But Kandou said, "Stay for some more time." Pramlocha again stayed there for some more than a hundred years and wished to return to heaven after these hundred years had passed. But Kandou again said, "Stay for some more time." And this went on and on.

After many years had passed, Kandou regained his senses. He said, "Wife, one whole day is over. It is now evening. Let me say my prayers."

"One day," exclaimed Pramlocha. "Are you not aware that nine hundred and eighty-seven years, six months and three days have passed since you married me?"

This made Kandou realize what had happened. He went back to his tapasya and allowed Pramlocha to return to heaven. On her way towards heaven, Pramlocha wiped her sweat on the leaves of trees. She was bearing a baby and the baby came out with the sweat and was left with the trees. It was this baby who grew up and became Marisha.

In an earlier life, Marisha had been married to a king. But the king had died when Marisha had been very young. The young widow had prayed to Vishnu and Vishnu had agreed to grant her a boon. The widow had desired the boon that she might have a son like Brahma and that she might have good husbands in several lives. Vishnu had promised her that she would have a son like Brahma and that she would have several good husbands in the same life. That is why Marisha was now simultaneously married to the ten Prachetas.

Daksha was then born. The same Daksha who had earlier been the son of Brahma. Daksha had sixty daughters. Ten of them were married to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa, twenty-seven to Chandra, four to Arishtanemi, two to Angirasa and two to Krishasha. The thirteen daughters who were married to Kashyapa were Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kala, Arishta, Surasa, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodhavasha, Ira, Kadru and Muni.

Kashyapa and Diti had two brave sons¾ Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Hiranyakashipu's sons were Anuhlada, Hlada, Prahlada and Sanhlada.

#### The Story of Prahlada

Hiranyakashipu had received a boon from Brahma. On the strength of this boon, he conquered the three worlds. He drove out Indra from heaven and assumed the title of Indra. He also assumed the titles of Savita, Vayu, Agni, Varuna, Soma, Kubera and Yama. The gods fled from heaven (svarga) and roamed around the world in human forms. Everyone had to worship Hiranyakashipu, the king of the daityas (the sons of Diti). Hiranyakashipu lived in a magnificent palace made of crystal. There the apsaras danced. And Hiranyakashipu indulged in drinking wine.

Young Prahlada had been sent away to study with his guru (teacher). On a vacation he came home with his teacher and Hiranyakashipu naturally wanted to find out what his son had learnt.



"I have learnt to pray to Vishnu," said Prahlada.

Hiranyakashipu was furious. "Why have you taught him this nonsense?," he demanded of the guru.

"I have not," replied the teacher "This is not what I have taught him. He is saying this of his own accord.

"Dear son," asked Hiranyakashipu, "who has taught this rubbish?"

"The teacher of all teachers, Lord Vishnu," came the reply.

"Who is this Vishnu?," asked Hiranyakashipu.

"The Lord of my heart," said Prahlada.

"Lord of your heart. How can you have a Lord other than me?"

"He is not only my Lord, he is yours as well," replied Prahlada. "Lord of everyone."

"Take him away," said the angry Hiranyakashipu. "Send him back to the teacher. Let him unlearn all this."

Prahlada went back to his guru's home and studied there for many ears. He was then again brought back before Hiranyakashipu.

"Son," asked Hiranyakashipu, "what did you study?"

"To pray to Vishnu," was the reply.

"Kill my evil son," said Hiranyakashipu. "There is nothing to be gained by his remaining alive. He is a disgrace to my family."

On hearing these words, hundreds and thousands of daityas attacked Prahlada with all sorts of weapons. But because Prahlada was protected by Vishnu, the weapons could do him no harm. Hiranyakashipu then let loose many poisonous snakes on Prahlada. But because Prahlada had Vishnu's protection, the fangs of the snakes could not penetrate his skin. Hiranyakashipu then asked many elephants to kill Prahlada with their tusks. The elephants threw down Prahlada on the ground and gored him with their tusks. But Prahlada thought of Vishnu and the tusks broke on his breast. On the orders of Hiranyakashipu, the daityas next lit a fire. Prahlada was put into the fire, but the flames could do nothing to him. On witnessing all this, Hiranyakashipu's priests requested him to take Prahlada out of the fire. "Don't worry," they said, "We will give him a proper education."

Prahlada went back to his guru. But whenever he could find the time, he began to teach the sons of the daityas. He taught them to pray to Vishnu.

This was reported to Hiranyakashipu, who instructed the cooks to poison Prahlada's food. The cooks did as they were told. But because Prahlada thought of Vishnu, the poison had no effect. The priests tried to persuade Prahlada once more. But to no avail. The priests then created a demon. The demon was like the flames of a fire. It dug up the earth with its feet. And attacked Prahlada with a huge trishula (trident). But the trishula struck Prahlada's chest and broke into many pieces. This frustrated the demon and it turned around and began to attack the priests instead. The priests ran here and there, but were all killed by the demon.

This made Prahlada very unhappy. "Lord Vishnu, teacher of all the worlds, creator of all the worlds," he prayed. "Please restore these priests back to life." And as soon as Prahlada touched the dead bodies, the priests came back to life. The priests went back to Hiranyakashipu and told him what had happened.

Prahlada was taken to Hiranyakashipu once more. "What gives you these powers?," asked Hiranyakashipu.

"There are not my powers," replied Prahlada. "There are the powers of Vishnu."

On hearing Vishnu's name, Hiranyakashipu became angry once again. He instructed his servants to take Prahlada to the top of the place and throw him down so that his bones might break on the rocks below. The servants did as they were told. But Prahlada thought of Vishnu as he fell, and nothing happened to him. Hiranyakashipu then called Shambarasura. This was an asura who was well versed in the use of maya, the technique of creating illusions and hallucinations.

Shambarasura used maya to create illusions around Prahlada. But Prahlada kept thinking of Vishnu. And Vishnu's weapon, the sudarshana chakra, came and destroyed all the maya. Hiranyakashipu then asked the wind to dry up Prahlada's body. But this too failed. And Prahlada returned to the home of his teacher.

The teacher taught him the things that a king should know. These precepts of royal policy had been laid down a long time ago by Shukracharya. They taught one the rules for dealing with one's enemies and one's friends.

When his education had been completed, Prahlada was brought again before Hiranyakashipu. "Son," said Hiranyakashipu, "show me what you have learnt. How will you deal with your enemies?"

"What enemies?," asked Prahlada. "Vishnu is in me, Vishnu is in my friends and Vishnu is in my enemies. If Vishnu is everywhere, how can there be enemies? I see friends everywhere, Gods, humans, birds, animals, trees and snakes are all full of the same Vishnu. Therefore, one should look upon the whole world as one looks upon oneself."

Hiranyakashipu became mad with anger. He got up from his throne and kicked his son on the chest. He told his soldiers to tie Prahlada in nooses of snakes and throw him into the sea. They were then to throw down mountains on the sea so that Prahlada got crushed. This is precisely what the daityas did. But Prahlada kept on praying to Vishnu. He forgot all about himself and thought only of Vishnu. Prahlada became like Vishnu himself and the nooses of snakes fell away from his body. Prahlada removed the mountains that had been thrown down by the daityas and emerged from the water. He prayed to Vishnu and Vishnu appeared before him.

"What boon do you desire, Prahlada?," asked Vishnu.

"That I may be forever faithful to you."

"Granted," said Vishnu. "What else do you want?"

"That my father's sins be forgiven."

"Granted," said Vishnu.

Prahlada returned to Hiranyakashipu and the father relented and embraced his son. Eventually, Vishnu adopted the form of a man-lion (nrisimha) and killed Hiranyakashipu. Prahlada became the king of the daityas and he ruled well and wisely. He had many sons and grandsons. One of Prahlada's sons was Virochana and Virochana's son was Vali.

I have told you that the Vishnu Purana has six major sections. This where the first section ends.

Priyavrata and Bharata

Maitreya told Parashara, "Sage, I have learnt that Manu had two sons, Priyavrata and Uttanapada. You have already told me about Uttanapada's son Dhruva. But what about Priyavrata?" And this was Parashara's reply. And this was Parashara's reply.

Priyavrata married the daughter of Kardama and had ten sons. Their names were Agnidhra, Agnivahu, Vapushmana, Dyutimana, Medha, Medhatiithi, Bhavya, Savana, Putra and Jyotishmana. Medha, Agnivahu and Putra were not interested in becoming kings, they became sages. The world is divided into seven regions or



dvipas. Priyavrata gave each of the remaining seven sons a dvipa to rule over. Agnidhra got Jambudvipa, Vapushmana, Shalmalidvipa, Dyuti mana Krounchadvipa, Medhatithi Plakshadvipa, Bhavya Shakadvipa, Savana Pushkaradvipa and Joytishmana Kushadvipa. King Agnidhra had nine sons, Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Ilavrita, Ramya, Shashtha, Hiranvana, Hari, Kuru and Bhadrashva. Jambudvipa was divided up by Agnidhra among these sons. Nabhi got the region that was to eventually become Bharatavarsha. Nabhi had a son called Rishabha. Rishabha had a hundred sons, the eldest of whom was Bharata. It is after Bharata that the country was called Bharatavarsha.

### Some Geography

You have already been told that the world is divided into seven dvipas, Jambu, Shalmali, Krouncha, Palksha, Shaka, Pushkara and Kusha. The seven dvipas are surrounded by seven oceans. Their names are Lavana, Ikshu, Sura, Sarpi, Dadhi, Dugdha and Jala. Jambudvipa is right in the middle. And in the middle of Jambudvipa is the golden-hued Mount Meru. If the earth were to be a lotus flower, Mount Meru would be the stamen.

To the south of Mount Meru lies first Bharatavarsha, then Kimpurushavarsha and eventually Harivarsha. To the north lies first Ramyaka, then Hiranmaya and eventually the northern part of Kuruvarsha. Mount Meru is actually in Ilavritavarsha. And on four sides of Mount Meru are four mountains. To the east is Mandras, to the south Gandhamadna, to the west Vipula and to the north Suparshva. These mountains have a lot of jambu or jamun trees. That is why the region is known as Jambudvipa. There are four beautiful lakes around Mount Meru. Their names are Arunoda, Mahabhadra, Asitoda and Namasa. On the peak of Mount Meru is Brahma's famous city.

The river Ganga originates from the feet of Lord Vishnu. It flows around the moon and then falls on Brahma's city. It then divides into four rivers, Sita, Alakanada, Chakshu and Bhadra. Sita flows eastwards, Alakanada southwards into Bharatavarsha, Chakshu westwards and Bhadra northwards. In Bharatavarsha, Alakananda divides into seven rivers.

The region around Mount Meru is regarded as a svarga on earth. Here live the gods, goddesses, gandharvas, yakshas, rakshasas, daityas and danavas. Only the righteous people can go there, the sinners are not permitted to enter.

The sons of Bharata live in Bharatavarsha. There are seven major mountains in Bharatavarsha and their names are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Shuktimana, Riksha, Vindhya and Paripatra. To the east of Bharatavarsha live the kirtas or hunters and to the west live the yavanas. The rivers Shatadru and Chandrabhaga flow out of the Himalayas, the main rivers mentioned in the Vedas from Mount Paripatra and the rivers Narmada and Surasa from Mount Vindhya.

Jambudvipa is surrounded by the ocean named Lavana. The people of Jambudvipa worship Vishnu. In other dvipas, other gods are worshipped. Bharatavarsha is the best part of Jambudvipa.

There are seven underworlds (patala) on earth. Their names are Atala, Vitala, Nitala, Gabhastimata, Mahatala, Sutala and Patala. Here live the danavas, daityas, yakshas and nagas. Narada once went on a trip to patala and discovered that patala was more beautiful than svaraga. It was a place full of jewels. During the day, the sun only provided light, but no heat. And during the night, the moonbeams provided light, but no cold. Patala was full of rivers, forests and lakes. The inhabitants of patala wore beautiful clothes, rubbed scented paste on their bodies and loved music. At the bottom of patala was Vishnu in the form of a thousand-headed snake. This snake was known as Shesha.

Under the earth and the water are several hells (naraka). They form the kingdom that Yama rules over. There are different narakas for different types of sinners. Those who lie and bear false witness go to Rourava. Those who kill cows go to Rodha. Those who drink, kill brahmanas or steal gold go to Shukara. Those who kill kshatriyas or vaishyas go to Tala. Those who treat their teachers' wives badly go to Taptakunda. Those who kill messengers or sell women or horses go to Taptalouha.

Those who treat their daughters and daughters-in-law badly go to Mahajvala. Those who show disrespect to their seniors or those who criticize the Vedas go to Lavana. Thieves go to Vimohana. Those who criticize good things, Vedas or brahmanas and those who hate their fathers go to Krimibhaksha.

Those who eat before their fathers, gods or guests go to Lalabhaksha. Those who make arrows go to Vedhaka. Those who make swords go to Vishasana. Astrologers go to Adhomukha. Fathers who eat sweets without offering them to their children and brahmanas who sell meat, milk or salt to go to Puyavaha. This is also the naraka that is reserved for brahmanas who keep cats, hens, goats, dogs, pigs or birds to make a living. Brahmanas who make a living as actors or fishermen and poisoners and arsonists go to the naraka known as Rudhirandha. Those who destroy villages go to Vaitarani. The unclean go to the naraka known as Krishna. Those who destroy forests for no reason go to Asipatravana. Those who make a living by keeping sheep or those who kill deer go to Vanhijvala. Fathers who study under their sons go to Shvabhojana. Those who oppose the law of the four classes go to Niraya.

Apart from these narakas, there are thousands of others. Apart from the sins mentioned earlier, there are thousands of other sins. In the narakas, sinners suffer for their sins. They are hung upside down. Once they have spent the time in naraka and have paid for their sins, they are born again. Depending on how they have behaved, people are born as trees, creepers, worms, fish, birds, animals, human religious people or gods. A sinner does not however have to go to naraka if he repents for his sins. And the best way to repent is to think of Vishnu.

#### Some Astronomy

Many miles above the earth is the world of the sun. Then come the several worlds of the moon, the Stars, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the saptarshis (the Great Bear constellation) and Dhruva respectively. Dhruva is the centre of all the stars. Above it is Janaloka, where Brahma's sons live. Gods live in Tapoloka, above Janaloka. Satyaloka is still higher up. It is divided into Brahmaloaka and Vaikunthaloka, abodes of Brahma and Vishnu respectively.

The inhabitants of Dhruvaloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka and Satyaloka are not destroyed at the end of each cycle of creation. But the inhabitants of the other three lokas are destroyed. The first of these lokas is of course the earth or bhurloka. The second is bhuvarloka, where live the sages, the region between the earth and the sun. And the third is svaroka, the region from the sun to Dhruva. There are thus seven lokas in all.

Actually, the universe consists of fourteen regions, the seven lokas and seven patalas. A loka or a patala is called a bhuvana and there are fourteen such buvanas in the universe. The first of these lokas is of course the earth or bhurloka. The second is bhuvarloka, where live the sages, the region between the earth and the sun. And the third is svaroka, the region from the sun to Dhruva. There are thus seven lokas in all.

Actually, the universe consists of fourteen regions, the seven lokas and seven patalas. A loka or a patala is called a bhuvana and there are fourteen such burvanas in the universe. The bhuvanans are surrounded by darkness on all sides. Around the darkness is water. And around the water is fire. Beyond the fire is the wind and beyond the wind there is the sky.

#### The Story of Jadabharata

Many years ago there used to live a king named Bharata. He was the son of Rishabha and used to live in a place known as Shalagrama. He thought of Vishnu all the time, even in his dreams and he had given up all thought of violence.

Once Bharata had gone to bathe in a river. A deer had also come to drink water there. While the deer was drinking water, there was the terrible roar of a lion. The deer gave a frightened leap and gave an untimely birth. The baby fell into the river. The mother deer died as a result of the leap. But Bharata rescued the baby deer from the water and brought it home to his ashrama (hermitage). Every day, the king

fed the baby and slowly, the deer grew bigger. It wandered around the hermitage. Sometimes it even wandered out, but returned quickly as it was frightened of tigers. Asit grew older, the deer would leave the ashrama in the mornings and return in the evenings.

Bharata grew attached to the deer and forgot everything else. He had given up his kingdom, his sons, and his friends and forgotten them all. But he could not forget the deer. If the deer was late in returning to the ashrama, he would worry that it might have been eaten up by a wolf or a tiger or a lion. He would be happy only when the deer returned. And because Bharata thought about the deer so much, he forgot to think of Vishnu.

Many years passed. Bharata died watching the deer and thinking of it. Since he thought of the deer while dying, he was born as a deer in his next life. The only difference was that he was born as a jatismara deer, that is, a deer that remembered the incidents of its past life. As a deer, Bharata left his mother and came again to Shalagrama because he remembered his old place. He lived on dry leaves and dry grass and eventually died. He was reborn as a jatismara brahmana. In this life he was truly learned, well versed in all the shastras.

Since he had attained the supreme knowledge, he saw no point in reading the Vedas or in doing work. He kept to himself and spoke little, only when he had to. His body was dirty, his clothes were filthy and he never cleaned his teeth. Because of this, people treated him badly. But since interaction with people was an obstacle to attaining supreme knowledge. Bharata kept up this pretence of being slightly mad. He moved so little that he came to be known as Jababharata. He ate whatever was available to him. And when his father died, his brothers, nephews and friends, gave him only dirty food to eat. Since he was strong and stout, they used him in their farming work.

The sage Kapila had an ashrama on the banks of the river Ikshumati. One day, the King of Soubira wanted to go there on a palanquin to learn words of wisdom from the sage. The servant of the king looked for palanquin-bearers who would carry the palanquin free of charge and found Bharata. So Bharata bore the palanquin along with the other bearers. But he walked slowly while the other bearers walked fast. The result was that the palanquin did not move smoothly. When scolded, the other bearers naturally blamed Bharata for this difficulty.

"What is wrong?" Asked the king of Bharata, "Haven't you borne the palanquin only for a little while? How is it that you are tired? Can't you bear a little burden? You look quite strong to me."

Bharata's answer was this. "Who am I and who are you? What you have seen is only my body and your body. I am not my body and nor are you your body. Our atman or souls are what we really are. My atman is not strong or tired, nor is it carrying your palanquin upon its shoulders."

Having said this, Bharata was quiet again. But the king got down from the palanquin and fell at his feet. He wanted to know who Bharata really was, for such words of wisdom do not come from an ordinary man. Bharata then told him the truth about the atman, which is never destroyed and takes up different bodies from one life to another. This is the jivatman. In addition, there is the paramatman, which is Vishnu and is everywhere. There is no difference between the jivatman and the paramatman and the person who has realized this is truly wise. To think that the jivatman is different from the paramatman is to suffer from maya or illusion.

Bharata also told the king a story. Many years ago Brahma had a son known as Ribhu. Ribhu was very learned and his disciple was Nidagha, the son of Pulastya. The teacher and the pupil used to live in the banks of the river Devika, near a city known as Viranagara, but Ribhu realized that Nidagha was still not ready for the supreme knowledge. So he sent the pupil to live in the city, although he continued to live in the forest.

One day, Ribhu decided to pay Nidagha a visit to see how the disciple was getting on. After Ribhu had washed his hands and feet, Nidagha offered him food. "Please eat," he said.

"What have you got to eat?" asked Ribhu. "Is it clean food?"

"I have rice and cereals and fruit and sweets." Replied Nidagha.

"That is unclean food," said the teacher. "Make me rice pudding, curds and wine."

Nidagha asked his wife to prepare the desired food. The food was prepared and Ribhu had his fill.

"Are you content now?" asked Nidagha. "Where are you going and why did you come here?"

Ribhu replied as follows. "Those who are hungry become content on eating food. I was not hungry, so the question of my being content after eating does not arise. Why ask me a silly question? The body feels hungry, I do not. I am not the body. You asked me where I was going and why did I come here. These are meaningless questions. My atman is everywhere, it cannot go or come. I am not really what you see. Nor are you what I see. I did not care at all about what you gave me to eat. I said all that just to see what you would say. Since all food is made of the same elements, it all tastes alike. Learn this, for this is true knowledge."

Thereupon, Nidagha bowed down before Ribhu and said that his illusions have now been destroyed.

After one thousand years had passed, Ribhu came again to Nidagha. And he found that Nidagha now lived outside the city, eating grass and straw. He didn't mix with other people and had become frail and thin. Ribhu again gave him a lesson on true knowledge, which does not distinguish between all things and paramatman.

And Bharata said that this was the knowledge that the king should learn. The sky sometimes looks blue and sometimes white, but it is the same sky. These who suffer from illusions look upon different atmans separately. But they are truly all part of the same atman. There is nothing in the world except this atman and all of us are parts of the same atman.

This is the end of the second section of the Vishnu Purana.

#### The Manvantaras

The manvantara is a cycle of creation and destruction. A Manu rules over each such manvantara. There have been six manvantaras till now and the names of the respective Manus were Svayambhuva, Svarochasha, Uttami, Tamasa, Raivata and Chakshusha. Vaivasvata, the son of the sun, rules over the present and seventh manvantara. Each manvantara has its own gods and rishis. The gods of the present manvantara are the adityas, the vasus and the rudra and Purandara holds the title of Indra, the king of the gods. The names of the seven rishis of the present manvantara are Vashistha, Kashyapa, Atri, Jamadagni, Goutama, Vishvamitra and Bharadvaja.

These were the seven manvantaras that have passed. But there are seven manvantaras yet to come.

Vishvakarma had a daughter named Samjna who was married to Surya, the sun. Their children were called Manu, Yama and Yami. After some time, Samjna found that she could no longer bear the energy of her husband. So she created a woman known as Chhaya who looked exactly like her. She left Chhaya to look after her husband and went off to meditate in a forest. Surya did not know that this was Chhaya and not Samjna. Surya and Chhaya had two sons called Shanaishchara and Savarni Manu and a daughter called Tapati.

One day, for some reason, Chhaya became very angry and cursed Yama. Both Yama and Surya then understood that this woman could not be Yama's mother Samjna and must be someone else. Chhaya told them what had happened. And Surya learnt that Samjna was performing tapasya in a forest in the form of a mare. Surya himself adopted the form of a horse and joined his wife. As horses, they had

three sons, the two Ashvins and Revanata.

Surya wanted to bring Samjna back to his home. The problem however was Surya's energy, which Samjna could not stand. Therefore, Vishvakarma sliced off Surya's energy and the sliced off part fell on the earth. With this energy Vishvakarma made Vishnu's chakra, Rudra's trishula, Kubera's palanquin, Kartikeya's spear and other weapons of the other gods.

As mentioned earlier, Surya and Chhaya had a son called Savarni Manu. This would be the Manu in the eighth manvantara and Indra would then be Vali, the son of Virochana. The ninth Manu would be Dakshasavarni, the tenth Brahasavarni, the eleventh Dharmasavarni, the twelfth Savarna, the thirteenth Rouchya and the fourteenth Bhoutya. At the end of each four cycle of yugas, the Vedas are destroyed and in each satya yuga, the respective Manu rewrites the sacred shastras. In each manvantara, Manu, the seven rishis, Indra the gods and the kings are created afresh. Fourteen manvantaras make a kalpa comes Brahma's night. During that night, Vishnu in his form of Brahma sleeps on the waters that are everywhere.

#### Vedavyasa

In each age, Vishnu in his form of Vedavyasa, divided the Vedas. In every dvapara yuga, this is done. The present manvantara is the Vaivasvata manvantara and in this manvantara, the Vedas have already been divided twenty-eight times. The names of these twenty-eight Vedavyases were Svayambhu, Prajapati, Ushana, Brihaspati, Savita, Mrityu, Indra, Vashishtha, Sarasvata, Tridhama, Trivisha, Bharadvaja, Antariksha, Vapri, Trayaruna, Dhananjaya, Kritanjaya, Rinajya, Bharadvaja, Goutama, Haryatma, Vena, Trinavindu, Riksha, Shaktri, Parashara, Jatukarna and Krishna Dvaipayana. The Vishnu Purana says that the next Vedavyasa will be Drona's son Ashvatthama. As you may know from the Mahabharata, Ashvatthama is immortal.

The essence of brahman and the four Vedas is captured in the word Om. Brahman is everywhere, but appears to different people in different forms.

The four Vedas, Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva, together have one lakh shlokas. It is from the Vedas that the ten famous sacrifices (yajnas) originate. When Krishna Dvaipayana Vedavyasa sought to divide the four Vedas, he first gathered around him four disciples who were learned in the Vedas. Paila was taught the Rig Veda, Vaishampayana the Yajur Veda, Jaimini the Sama Veda and Sumantu the Atharva Veda. Krishna Dvaipayana taught the Puranas to his discipline Romaharshana.

#### Yajnavalka

Once upon a time, the famous rishis decided that they would have a gathering. They also decided that whoever did not come to this gathering, would after a period of seven days commit the crime of killing a brahmana. All the sages came to this gathering, but Vaishampayana did not. After seven days, Vaishampayana stepped on his nephew and killed him by mistake. This was a terrible sin and had to be atoned for.

Vaishampayana had divided the Yajur Veda into twenty-seven parts and had distributed these parts among various disciples. One of these disciples was Yajnavalka. Vaishampayana called his disciples together and said, "I have committed the crime of killing a brahmana. Please arrange for a sacrifice so that I might atone for this sin."

On hearing this Yajnavalka said, "There is no need to bother about these other disciplines. They do not have much power. I will arrange for the sacrifice myself."

This made Vaishampayana angry. "You have insulted the other disciples, Yajnavalka," he said. "Return to me what I have taught you. I do not need a disciple like you."

Yajnavalka replied, "I said what I did because I respected you. But since you have misunderstood, I too do not require a teacher like you. Here is what I have learnt. I am returning it."

Yajnavalka then vomited out the Yajur Veda and the other disciplines ate it up in the form of birds. That is why this branch of the Yajur Veda is called the Taittiriya after the name of the bird Tittira.

But Yajnavalka still wanted to learn the Yajur Veda. So he began to pray to the sun. The sun finally appeared to him in the form of a horse and taught him those branches of the Yajur Veda which even Vaishampayana did not know.

#### The Puranas

Now the Vishnu Purana describes what the Puranas are and how they came to written. It says that the original text Purana Samhita was taught by Vedavyasa to his disciple Romaharshana (also called Lomaharshana). Romaharshana had six disciples, Sumati, Agnivarchah, Mitrayu, Shamshapayana, Akritavrana and Savarni. Each of these disciples composed a Purana on the basis of the Purana Samhita. It was on the basis of these that the Vishnu Purana had written. It was written after the Padma Purana and is devoted to the glory of Lord Vishnu.

There are fourteen types of knowledge (vidya). These are the four Vedas, the six Vedangas, Mimamsa, Nyaya, the Puranas and the Dharmashastras. To this one might add four further forms of knowledge, Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, music and Arthashastra. There are three types of rishis, brahmarshis, devarshis and rajarshis.

#### Yama

When people die, they come under the control of Yama and Yama sends them to different narakas. When they have atoned for their sins, they are reborn. Maitreya wanted to know if there was any way in which men could avoid going to Yama after death.

Parashara told him that Nakula had asked the same question of his grandfather Bhishma. And Bhishma had told him that he used to have a brahmana friend from Kalinga. This friend had learned words of wisdom from a jatismara sage. The sage had told Bhishma's friend of a conversation that had once taken place between Yama and Yama's servant.

Yama told his servant, "Do not touch those who are devoted to Vishnu. I am the lord of all the others except these. I am not really independent, I work under the supervision of Vishnu. He is also capable of punishing me. Even the gods worship the lotus-like feet of Vishnu. Stay away from the devotees of Vishnu."

"How does one become a devotee of Vishnu?" asked the servant.

Yama replied, "Those who do not deviate from what is laid down from their class, those who make no distinction between friends and enemies, those who are thieves, those who are non-violent and those whose hearts are pure and free of anger, these are the devotees of Vishnu. They think of Vishnu all the time. And because they think of Vishnu all the time, they are of pleasing appearance. When Vishnu is in one's heart, one commits no sins. Do not go near such people. For the strength of Vishnu's chakra is such that your or mine powers would immediately be destroyed."

#### The Four Classes and the Four Stages

The most important way of following Vishnu is to follow the law of the four classes (varna) and the law of the four stages (ashrama) as laid down in the shastras (sacred texts)

The four classes are brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. It is the duty of the brahmana to give alms, worship the gods through sacrifices and study the Vedas. They should treat all living beings well and not harm anyone. The most important wealth a brahmana can have is the friendship of others. A kshatriya should donate to brahmanas, study and perform sacrifices to Vishnu. But his most important duty is to bear arms to protect the earth. The king's duties are to punish the evil and protect the good. The vaishyas are to do animal husbandry, trade and agriculture. In addition, they should study, donate alms and perform sacrifices. The



shudra's duty is to serve the other classes. If it is impossible to make a living through this, the shudra may make a living through trade or handicrafts.

Common duties of all four classes are kindness, cleanliness, hard work, truthfulness, friendship and the capacity to bear hardship. If for some reason a brahmana cannot make a living through the methods that have been laid down, he can take up arms and perform the duties of kshatriya. Or he can take up agriculture, animal husbandry or trade. A kshatriya can also take up agriculture, animal husbandry or trade. But a brahmana or a kshatriya should never take up the duties of a shudra. This is permitted only in times of great danger or if there is absolutely no other way out. Everyone should ensure that the duties of the four classes do not get mixed up.

The first of the ashramas is brahmacharya (celibate studenthood). After he has been invested with his sacred thread, a son should be sent to his teacher's house to learn the Vedas. There he will lead a clean life and pay attention to the rituals. He will serve his guru and study the Vedas. In the morning and the evening he will pray to the sun and the fire and bow to his teacher after the prayers are over. The disciple (shishya) will sit only after the guru sits, he will walk only after the guru walks. He will never oppose his guru. When the guru asks him to, he will sit down and study the Vedas. Every morning, the shishya will bring water and flowers for his guru. Eventually, the shishya will have learnt the Vedas and attained knowledge. He will then pay the guru the price of the knowledge (dakshina), take the guru's permission and prepare to step into the next ashrama, that of garhasthya (householder stage).

This is the time to get married and choose a proper living. Such a person has to serve gods through sacrifices, guests through food, rishis through reading the Vedas, Brahma through having children and the entire world through truthfulness. In many ways, a garhasthya ashrama is superior to the others. The brahmanas and those who follow brahmacharya may have to through alms. It is the person in garhasthya ashrama who provides them this. When guests arrive, the householder will offer whatever he can in the nature of food, seats and beds. If a guest goes away dissatisfied, he takes away the householder's punya (store of merits) and leaves his sins with the householder. A guest is never to be refused.

After a person has lived a full life as a householder, he may proceed to the forest-dweller stage, vanaprastha. He can take his wife with him or leave her in the care of his son. He will live in the forest on fruits and roots and leaves, he will sleep on the ground and he will not cut his hair or shave his beard. He will worship the gods, tend to guests and give alms to those who need them. His main duty is meditation.

The final ashrama is that of sannyasa. A person is ready to enter this when he can give up his sons, wife and all material possessions. To him all living beings will be friends and he will not harm any living being. He will live alone and perform yoga (exercises that unite man with God). He will never stay in a village more than one night at the time and in a city for more than five nights at a time. A sannyasi or hermit will beg for his food. But he will come to a house for alms only after he is sure that everyone in the house has eaten.

## Rituals

There are some rituals to be followed when a son is born and some others to be followed when a funeral ceremony (shraddha) is to be held. The father gives a name to the son after the tenth day of birth. There are eight types of marriage. Their names are Brahman, Daivya, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paishacha. For each varna or class, specific forms of marriage are prescribed.

There are some rituals that are laid down for a householder. Every day he must worship gods, cows, brahmanas, sages and elderly teachers. He should never steal, never lie and never utter what is unpleasant to others' faults. He should not be envious of other people's property. Nor should he associate himself with those who are evil. He should never enter a burning house or climb to the very top of a tree. He should cover his mouth when yawning. He should be careful of stepping on the shadows of gods and flags and those who should be worshipped. One should not live in a house alone, nor should one go to a forest alone. One should avoid going near wild beasts.

A good householder does not leave his house before bowing to a religious object, a flower, a jewel, clarified butter or a respected person. When he travels at night or goes to a forest, he carries a stick in his hand. He always wears sandals and uses an umbrella when it rains or when the sun is out. He is a friend to all beings. He always tells the truth. But when the truth harms other people, he keeps quiet.

Several rituals have to be followed when a son or daughter gets married, when a new house is to be entered, when a son is to be named or when a new-born baby is to be first seen.

When someone dies, the dead body is to be bathed and garlanded. The dead body must always be burnt outside the village. For a brahmana the shraddha ceremony takes place after ten days, for a kshatriya after twelve days, for a vaishya after fifteen days and for a shudra after a month. At a funeral ceremony an odd number of brahmanas must be fed. If ordinary food is given to brahmanas at a funeral, the ancestors remain satisfied for a month. But they are satisfied for two months if fish is given, for three months if rabbit is given. For four months in the case of the meat of birds, for five months with pork, for six months with mutton, for seven months with venison, for eight months if a special sort of deer meat is given, for nine months with gayal meat, for ten months with lamb, for eleven months with beef, and forever with the meat of a vardhinasa bird. The best place to perform a shraddha is Gaya.

#### Mayamoha

Many years ago there was a war between the devas and the asuras that lasted for a year. At the end of the war, some daityas named Hrada defeated the devas. The devas fled to the northern shores of an ocean and there began to pray to Vishnu. Vishnu appeared before the devas and created for them a being called Mayamoha out of his own body. Led by Mayamoha, the devas went to fight with the asuras.

The asuras were performing tapasya on the banks of the river Narmada. Mayamoha appeared before them dressed in leaves and with a shaven head. He told them that the best way to attain what the asuras desired was through the religion preached by Mayamoha. The asuras were persuaded by Mayamoha to leave the path of the Vedas. The asuras who adopted this new religion came to be known as arhats. They began to criticize the Vedas and the devas. Others criticized yajnas and brahmanas.

The asuras were thus dislodged from the righteous path and the devas attacked them afresh. This time the devas could defeat the asuras, since the asuras had lost the power of their religion.

#### Shatadhanu and Shaivya

Many years ago there used to be a king known as Shatadhanu. His wife Shaivya was a religious woman. Together, they used to pray to Vishnu, on the banks of the river Bhagirathi. They were not interested in other things. One day a fraudulent teacher came to them. Shatadhanu spoke to this person, but Shaivya did not. Some years later, Shatadhanu died and Shaivya also died with him on the funeral pyre.

Because he had spoken to the false teacher, Shatadhanu was born as a dog in his next life. And Shaivya was born as a jatimara daughter to the king of Kashi. When the king of Kashi wished to get his daughter married off, Shaivya refused. She had learnt that her husband had been born as a dog and was living in the city of Visisha. So she went there and met the dog. She gave it good food to eat. The dog merely wagged its tail. At this, Shaivya felt ashamed and tried to remind the dog of its earlier life.

Finally the dog did remember its earlier life and this made it very sad. It left the city and climbed a mountain peak. From there it threw itself down on the desert and died. This time it was born as a jackal and again Shaivya met the jackal in the mountain named Kolahal. She reminded the jackal of its earlier life. Thus reminded, the jackal died in the forest and was born as a wolf. Shaivya met the wolf and reminded it of its earlier life. When the wolf died, it was born as a vulture. Shaivya went to meet it. This time, after the death of the vulture, Shatadhanu was born as a

crow. The crow was next born as a peacock. Shaivya made friends with the peacock.

King Janaka was performing an ashvamedha sacrifice. The peacock had a bath at the time of the sacrifice. When Shaivya reminded the peacock of its earlier life, it died. It was now born as the son of Janaka and Shaivya agreed to marry him. After Janaka died, his son became the ruler of the kingdom of Videha. In this life Shatadhanu performed many sacrifices and gave many alms. He had several sons and ruled the kingdom and the earth well. When he died, Shaivya again died on the funeral pyre with him. Husband and wife went to heaven.

The story illustrates the evils of speaking to fraudulent people who have given up the Vedas. One goes straight to naraka if one mixes with such people.

This is the end of the third section of the Vishnu Purana.

#### Dynasties

There were many great people in the line of Manu. The first in this line was Brahma. In the beginning of creation, Vishnu in his form of Brahman came out of brahmanda. From Brahma's fingers was born Daksha Prajapati. Daksha's daughter was Aditi, Aditi's son was Surya and Surya's son was Manu. Because Manu wanted a son, he prayed to the gods Mitra and Varuna. From the yajna that was done, a daughter named Ila came out. But Manu had really wanted a son. So, for a while, Ila became a son called Sudyumna.

Chandra's son was Budha. Sudyumna was one day wandering around Budha's ashrama as the girl Ila. Budha married her and they had a son called Pururava. After Pururava was born, Sudyumna performed sacrifices so as to become a man again. Once he became a man, he had three sons called Utkala, Gaya and Vinata.

In this dynasty there was a king called Marutta. Marutta performed a wonderful yajna. No such yajna has been performed ever since. Every article used in the ceremony was made of gold. Indra drank a lot of soma juice and was satisfied. So were the brahmanas. It was the gods who served the food.

Further down the family tree there was a king called Sharyati. Sharyati had a daughter named Sukanya. Sukanaya was married to the sage Chyavana. Sharyati also had a son named Anarta and Anarta had a son named Revata. Revata had one hundred sons, the eldest being Kakudmi. Kakudmi's daughter was Revati. Kakudmi did not know who to marry off this beautiful daughter to. He decided to go to Brahmaloaka to ask for Brahma's advice. When he reached Brahmaloaka, the gandharvas were singing and Kakudmi decided to listen to the songs for a while. When the songs were finished, he asked Brahma whom he should get Revati married to.

"What is your opinion?" ,asked Brahma.

Kakudmi named several kings who he thought might be good husbands for Revati. But Brahma told him that while he had been listening to the songs in Brahmaloaka, several thousand years had passed on earth. These kings and their sons and grandsons were all dead. In fact, Kakudmi's captial Kushasthali was now a city called Dvaraka. And Vishnu had been born as Baladeva there. There could be no better husband for Revati.

Kakudmi returned to earth and found that men were now much shorter than they used to be. He married Revati off to Baladeva. But Revati was very tall. So with his plough, Baladeva pulled Revati down to the right size.

#### Ikshvaku, Yuvanashva and Soubhari

Many happened to sneeze once. As a result of the sneeze, a son known as Ikshvaku came out of his nose. Ikshvaku's son was Vikukshi. Ikshvaku wished to perform a shradha ceremony and sent his son off to the forest to bring meat for the ceremony. Vikukshi killed many deer and felt hungry and tired. To satisfy his hunger he ate a rabbit and brought the other meat to his father, who then offered the meat to

Vashishtha who was looking after the ceremony.

"This meat is unclean," said the sage, "your son has already eaten the meat of a rabbit."

Ikshvaku banished Vikukshi, although Vikukshi did rule the kingdom after Ikshvaku died. Vikukshi had a very brave son called Paranjaya. The devas and the asuras once fought a terrible war and the devas could not defeat the asuras. The devas prayed to Vishnu and Vishnu told them that he would be born on earth as Paranjaya. Under Paranjaya's leadership, the devas would be able to defeat the asuras. So the gods came to Paranjaya and asked him to be their leader in this war. Paranjaya agreed to do this only if he could fight the war perched on Indra's shoulders. Indra adopted the form of a bull. Paranjaya fought the war seated on the bull. The demons were defeated. But from the word kakut, which means shoulder. Paranjaya hereafter came to be known as Kakutstha.

Among Kakutstha's descendants was a king called Yuvanashva. Yuvanashva did not have any son. He persuaded the sages to perform a yajna so that he might have a son. The ceremony finished at midnight and the sages kept the sacred waters of the yajna in a pot for the night. The intention was to give the sacred waters to Yuvanashva's wife to drink in the morning. Then she would have a strong son. But Yuvanashva felt very thirsty in the night. And without knowing that the waters in the pot was sacred, drank them by mistake. So a baby came into Yuvanashva's body and grew bigger and bigger. When the time came for the baby to be born, it burst out through the king's right side, although the king did not die. But the problem was, who would be a mother to the baby? Given the peculiar circumstances, Indra agreed to be the mother. He came and said, "Mam dhata," which means "I will be the nurse." The baby thus came to be known as Mandhata. Because Indra was rearing him, he became fully grown in a single day. He ruled the entire world from where the sun rises to where it sets.

During Mandhata's reign, a sage named Soubhari lived under the water for twelve years. He used to see the king of the fishes playing in the water with his children and grandchildren. This made Soubhari feel that he should also have children and grandchildren. But to do this, he needed to get married.

Mandhata had fifty daughters. Soubhari went to Mandhata and wanted one of these daughters in marriage. Mandhata did not like the look of Soubhari's diseased body. But at the same time, he was scared that he might be cursed if he refused. So he said that the custom of his family was that daughters married bridegrooms whom they chose and approved of. Soubhari realized that this was merely a ploy of Mandhata's to avoid giving a daughter in marriage to a diseased old man. Soubhari therefore requested that he might be given one chance to meet the daughters of Mandhata. If any one of them wished to marry him, only then would he marry. If all of them refused to marry him, he would go away and no more would be heard of the matter.

This seemed to be a reasonable enough request and Mandhata agreed. But Soubhari was a powerful sage. Before meeting the daughters, he transformed himself into a very handsome man. He was so handsome that all the daughters wished to marry him. The result was that Soubhari was married to all the fifty daughters and took them to his ashrama. He then called Vishvakarma and asked Vishvakarma to build separate palaces for the fifty wives. Each palace was to have a lake with lotuses and swans, each palace was to have a pleasure garden and beautiful beds, seats and jewels. Vishvakarma did as he had been instructed.

After some days, Mandhata wished to find out how his daughters were. He came to the ashrama and saw the beautiful palaces and pleasure gardens. He entered one of the palaces and met one of his daughters there. "How are you, daughter?", he asked.

"I live in a wonderful palace, father," the daughter replied. "Look at this pleasure garden, look at these beautiful birds and the gorgeous lake. I eat good food and wear nice clothes and jewels. I am very happy. The only complaint that I have is this. My husband spends all his time with me, he never leaves me. This means that he must be neglecting my sisters."

Mandhata came out of this palace and went into another. To his great surprise, the second daughter said exactly the same thing. In fact, this is what all the daughters said. For what had happened was that Soubhari had created fifty different forms of himself with the powers of his tapasya. Mandhata had never witnessed anything like this. He fell down at Soubhari's feet and begged for forgiveness.

Soubhari had a hundred and fifty sons to whom he got quite attached. But after some time he realized the dangers of such attachment. It had made him deviate from his path of tapasya. He realized the illusions he had been living with ever since he had seen the king of the fishes. He devoted the rest of his life to Vishnu.