

Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta

by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī

- ① Vairāgye
- ② Jñāna
- ③ bhajane.
- ④ Vaikunthe.

Part 4

Vaikuntha- The Spiritual Kingdom

Thus they worship
their favorite forms
in places where He
resides

TEXT 151

te cāsyaiṅ pradeśeṣu
tādrśeṣu purādiṣu
tathaiṅ tādrśam nātham
bhajantas tanvate sukham

Thus (tathaiṅ) they worship (te bhajantah) their favorite forms of the Lord (tādrśam nātham) in the places where He resides (asya eva pradeśeṣu)—His opulent cities and other abodes (tādrśeṣu purādiṣu)—and expand the ocean of happiness (tanvate sukham).

The Vaikuntha kingdom has many confidential areas, including cities like Lord Rāmacandra's Ayodhyā.

Devotees who, while living in the material world, worshiped the Supreme Lord as residing in some particular abode go to a similar abode in Vaikuṅṭha, where they continue to worship Him with the entourage and paraphernalia that attracted them.

The almighty Personality of Godhead is present in Vaikuṅṭha as Nārāyaṇa, seated in His excellent palaces on the best of thrones, but to all His surrendered devotees He displays whatever aspects of Himself they love with special affection.

We should never think that Lord Nārāyaṇa's display of multiple forms to various devotees is illusory; there is no influence of the illusory material energy in Vaikuṅṭha, and the Lord is capable of doing whatever He wants.

The special abodes like Ayodhyā that are manifest within Vaikuṅṭha are not separate worlds but special displays of spiritual variety arranged to expand unlimitedly the Lord's glories and the ecstasy of His devotees.

By devotees
without prāṇiṣṭhā
are ready to serve any
form

TEXT 152

ye caikatara-rūpasya
prīti-niṣṭhā bhavanti na
aviśeṣa-grahās tasya
yat-kiñcid-rūpa-sevakāḥ

Devotees (ye) not exclusively attracted (na prīti-niṣṭhā bhavanti) to one form of the Lord (ekatara-rūpasya), those whose affection is not focused on a single appearance of His (tasya aviśeṣa-grahāḥ), are ready to serve Him in any form (yat-kiñcid-rūpa-sevakāḥ).

Some devotees are attracted to all of the Supreme Lord's appearances.

Those devotees achieve the Lord of Vaikunṭha in His generic form.

Other devotees are attracted to serving two, three, or several particular forms.

TEXT 153

ye ca lakṣmī-pater aṣṭā-
kṣarādi-manu-tatparāḥ
te hi sarve sva-dehānte
vaikuṅṭham imam āśritāḥ

Some devotees
dedicated themselves to
aṣṭākṣara & other such mantras
to worship Lakṣmīpati → attained
this Vaikuṅṭha

Some devotees (ye ca) dedicated themselves to (tatparāḥ) the eight-syllable mantra or some other mantra (aṣṭākṣarādi-manu) for the husband of Lakṣmī (lakṣmī-pateh), and when those devotees left their material bodies (sva-dehānte) they all obtained the shelter of this Vaikuṅṭha (te hi sarve vaikuṅṭham imam āśritāḥ).

Devotees of Nārāyaṇa can realize His association by chanting His mantra of five, eight, or twelve syllables.

Śrī Parāśara Ṛṣi states in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (1.6.40):

gatvā gatvā nivartante
candra-sūryādayo grahāḥ
adyāpi na nivartante
dvādaśākṣara-cintakāḥ

“Even the moon, sun, and other planets (candra-sūryādayo grahāḥ) are created and destroyed again and again (gatvā gatvā nivartante). But persons who have meditated on the twelve-syllable mantra (dvādaśākṣara-cintakāḥ) have never had to return, even till the present day (adyāpi na nivartante).”

Since all of Lord Nārāyaṇa's mantras call upon His holy names, the twelve-syllable mantra mentioned here refers indirectly to all the Lord's mantras, not just the mantra of twelve syllables, as effective means for achieving
Vaikuṇṭha.

Devotees who worship the Lord perfectly with any of His mantras attain His shelter in the next life.

And among the sheltered devotees, those who worship the Lord as the
supreme controller reach Him in Vaikuṇṭha.

TEXT 154

yathā-kāmaṁ sukhaṁ prāpuḥ
sarvato 'py adhikaṁ sukhāt
teṣāṁ sva-sva-rasānaikyāt
tāratamye 'pi tulyatā

All devotees
feel that their
bliss is superior to all
others. ↓
... even though there is a
hierarchy of tastes, there is also
equality

All the devotees in Vaikuntha (teṣāṁ) enjoy the particular happiness (sukhaṁ prāpuḥ) for which they aspired (yathā-kāmaṁ) and feel it greater than all others (sarvato 'py adhikaṁ sukhāt). This creates a hierarchy of tastes (sva-sva-rasa anaikyāt tāratamye api), but within it a simultaneous equality (tulyatā).

↓
subjective

↓
objective perspective

Whatever happiness a devotee may have felt from worshiping the Supreme Lord in the material world expands without limit when he achieves entrance into Vaikuṅṭha.

In other words, even though all devotees in Vaikuṅṭha share the same basic spiritual nature, they feel varieties of pleasure. Different devotees relish various qualities of ecstasy in their hearing, chanting, and worshiping, and the ecstasy of one devotee may be greater than that of another.

Still, each devotee in Vaikuṅṭha is satisfied with his own devotional service.

Whatever his rasa, when it develops to full maturity he fully tastes the ecstasy natural to it.

This point has already been discussed, and later it will be made even more clear.

Similar to existence
of equality & hierarchy
is seen in
the avatars also

yathā dharāmbana-ratna-bhūtā nārāyaṇo 'sau sa naro 'tha dattaḥ
śrī-jāmadagnyaḥ kapilādayo 'pi ye kautukāc ca pratimā-sarūpāḥ

ye svarga-lokādiṣu viṣṇu-yajñeś- varādayo 'mī bhavataiva dr̥ṣṭāḥ
matsyo 'tha kūrmaś ca mahā-varāhaḥ śrīman-nṛsimho nanu vāmanaś ca

anye 'vatārāś ca tathaiva teṣāṃ praty-ekam ihābhidhayā prabhedāḥ
te sac-cid-ānanda-ghanā hi sarve nānātva-bhājo 'pi sadaika-rūpāḥ

In the Lord's own appearances on earth, He shows similar varieties and equality. The Lord's own forms are the shelter and the treasure of the earth (yathā dharāmbana-ratna-bhūtā). Among them are Nara-Nārāyaṇa, and Dattātreya (nārāyaṇo 'sau sa naro 'tha dattaḥ), and Parāśara the son of Jamadagni, and Kapila (śrī-jāmadagnyaḥ kapilādayo 'pi). There are those who playfully assume the appearance of Deities (ye kautukāc ca pratimā-sarūpāḥ), and those, such as Viṣṇu and Yajñeśvara (viṣṇu-yajñeś- varādayo amī), whom you have seen on Svargaloka and other higher planets (ye svarga-lokādiṣu bhavataiva dr̥ṣṭāḥ). There are such various incarnations as Matsya, Kūrma, Mahā-varāha (matsyo 'tha kūrmaś ca mahā-varāhaḥ), Śrīman Nrsimha, and Vāmana (śrīman-nṛsimho nanu vāmanaś ca). Each of these forms of the Lord (anye 'vatārāś ca) has its own activities and names (tathaiva teṣāṃ praty-ekam ihābhidhayā prabhedāḥ), yet all of them (te sarve) are full in eternity, knowledge, and bliss (sac-cid-ānanda-ghanā hi). Though manifesting variety (nānātva-bhājo 'pi), in substance they are eternally one (sadā eka-rūpāḥ).

Liberated devotees of the Supreme Lord can display varieties of personalities within the basic oneness of spiritual existence because they are empowered by the Lord, who shares with them His inconceivable ability to be simultaneously one and many.

God is one, but He displays Himself with infinite variety.

He has His original form as Kṛṣṇa in Goloka and His expansion as Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṅṭha, plus innumerable other expansions in the spiritual and material worlds

Counted among the avatāras He displays in the material realm are His Deity forms.

In different corners of the universe, He appears as innumerable Deities, each with its own form and personality, like Śrī Saṅkaraṣaṇa in Ilāvṛta-varṣa, Śrī Jagannātha in Puruṣottama-kṣetra, and Śrī Raṅganātha in Raṅga-purī, to mention just a few.

In the heavenly planets He appears in expansions such as Vāmana, Viṣṇu, and Yajñeśvara.

Throughout the material worlds, He descends in many incarnations, some famous like Lord Matsya and Lord Kūrma, others lesser known, like Lord Hayagrīva and Lord Haṁsa.

The activities, names, and forms of these avatāras are manifold, but they are all one Personality of Godhead, complete in unadulterated eternity, knowledge, and bliss.

As stated in the Mahā-saṁhitā:

eka mūrti
bahū mūrtiḥ

tasya sarvāvatāreṣu
na viśeṣo 'sti kaścana
dehi-deha-vibhedaś ca
na pare vidyate kvacit

sarve 'vatārā vyāptāś ca
sarve sūksmāś ca tattvataḥ
aiśvarya-yogād bhagavān
krīḍaty eṣa janārdanaḥ

“There is no difference between (na viśeṣaḥ asti kaścana) any of the incarnations of the Lord (tasya sarva avatāreṣu), and no difference between His body and His soul (dehi-deha-vibhedaś ca na pare vidyate kvacit). In truth (tattvataḥ), all the incarnations (sarve avatārā) are all-pervasive (vyāptāś ca) and infinitely subtle (sarve sūksmāś ca). Thus plays (krīḍaty) the Supreme Person Janārdana (eṣa bhagavān janārdanaḥ), making use of His opulent powers (aiśvarya-yogād).”

At Badarikāśrama Lord Nārāyaṇa appears with His younger brother, Nara, as the son of Dharma and acts as guru for the performers of austerities.

In Text 155 the word ādi (kapilādayaḥ) implies other incarnations, including Vyāsadeva and Dhanvantari, and in Text 156 the word ādi (svarga-lokādiṣu) implies additional appearance places of the Lord on Maharloka, on Satyaloka, and in the universal coverings formed of earth and other elements.

In Text 156 the second use of the word ādi (viṣṇu-yajñeśvarādayaḥ) alludes to Lord Mahāpuruṣa on Brahmaloḥka and to the forms of the Lord, such as Varāha, worshiped in the coverings of the universe.

Gopa-kumāra has seen many of these forms of the Supreme Lord.

The form of Śrī Vāmana mentioned separately here is different from the four-armed Lord Viṣṇu who is the presiding Deity on Svargaloka.

As we learn from the Purānas, several incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu appear more than once, at different times and under different circumstances.

It is known, for example, that Matsya, the greatest of fish, appeared once at the end of a cycle of yugas to save the Vedas during the devastating flood of the universe and appeared once more, during a partial flood of the lower part of the universe, to show His mercy to Satyavrata Muni.

There are also two Lord Kūrmas.

One held Mandara Mountain on His back while nectar was being churned from the Milk Ocean, and the other always holds up the earth.

Similarly, there are at least five Lord Varāhas.

The first appeared from Brahmā's nostril at the beginning of creation, lifted the earth, deposited her on the Garbha Ocean, and then disappeared.

The second saved the earth from a partial flood of devastation, killed Hiranyākṣa, and went to Svargaloka.

The third, the embodiment of Vedic sacrifice, taught the methods of sacrifice, lifted the earth, spoke to her the Varāha Purāṇa, and disappeared by His mystic power.

The fourth took the earth and made her even by grinding down the excessively large mountains with His sharp tusks.

The earth then assumed the form of His consort Varāhī, enjoyed with Him, and gave birth to two sons.

That Lord Varāha finally disappeared by merging into the form of Lord Nṛsimha.

And yet a fifth Varāhadeva perpetually holds up the earth from below.

Lord Nṛsimha also made several different appearances, as we know from such sources as the Bṛhat-sahasra-nāma-stotra.

One Nrsimha defeated all the celestial mothers, another ripped apart Hiranyakaśipu, and yet another assumed the form of an ordinary cat.

There were also two appearances of Vāmanadeva to trick two different asuras, Dhundhu and Bali, and there were two appearances each of Lord Hayagrīva and Lord Hamsa.

TEXT 158

nānātvam eṣām ca kadāpi māyikaṁ
na jīva-nānātvam iva pratiyatām
tac cid-vilāsātmaka-śakti-darśitaṁ
nānā-vidhopāsaka-citra-bhāvajam

The difference
in the water is
rel.
The difference is a manifestation
of energy underlying the matter.
Diff. form is born out of
the mood of the
worshiper

The differences between them (eṣām nānātvam) should never be perceived (kadāpi na pratiyatām) to be illusory (māyikaṁ), any more than the plurality of the conditioned souls (jīva-nānātvam iva). Rather, the differences between the Lord's own forms (tad) are displays of the energies (śakti-darśitaṁ) that underly His spiritual pastimes (cid-vilāsātmaka). The differences are born of the various moods of His various worshipers (nānā-vidha-upāsaka-citra-bhāvajam).

Someone might argue that only by illusion can a single being appear as many, but the verse at hand explains the truth.

As we know from the teachings of Vedānta, the jīva souls are real, and they are factually distinct from the Supreme Soul and from one another.

The differences between the individual jīvas and the Paramātmā, and the differences among the jīvas themselves, are not illusions created by Māyā.

Nor does one jīva appear divided into many souls simply by false designations, nor does the one Supreme Truth reflect itself into many small images, jīvas who have no real existence of their own.

The jīvas are real and their differences are real. In the same way, all the forms of Godhead are real manifestations of His pure spiritual essence, displayed by His personal energies.

The Personality of Godhead is a vast ocean of many different moods of loving exchange.

His various devotees respond to His various pastimes by developing individual varieties of ecstasy, and the Lord reciprocates with these ecstasies by showing Himself in different ways.

His devotees are concerned with Him alone, and therefore whenever a devotee becomes extremely anxious to see Him in a particular form, the Lord at once shows that form to the devotee.

These appearances of the Lord, although apparently ad hoc, are in fact eternal, real, and all-pervading.

By displaying His pastime incarnations the Supreme Lord fulfills the hankerings in the hearts of all pure devotees.

Were He to fail to do so, His most significant glory—unlimited kindness to His surrendered servants—would be lost.

If any form in which the Lord appears were to prove noneternal, unreal, or less than all-pervading, the devotees worshiping that form would be disappointed, and great harm would come to their spiritual lives.

Therefore none of the Lord's incarnations allow Themselves to be affected by the illusory influence of Māyā.

All Incarnations are:

a) eternal

b) real

c) all pervading-