

Book One: Creation

1. Maitreya asks Parāśara about the world

When Parāśara, that best of sages, had finished his morning rites, Maitreya bowed, saluted him and asked: *1*

‘I’ve studied all the Vedas with you, master, and all the legal texts and supplements in due order. *2*

Thanks to your generosity, none could say that I’m remiss in any of these works, great sage, not even my adversaries. *3*

You know virtue, fortunate seer, and now I’d like to hear about the origin of the world and how it will fare in future. *4*

What’s it made of, brahmin, and whence did all things, moving and unmoving, arise? How did the world end in earlier times and how will it end hereafter? *5*

What’s the nature of the elements? What’s the origin of gods and other beings? What’s the state of the oceans, earth and mountains? *6*

What’s the size and nature of the sun and other luminaries, best of sages? What about the families of gods and other beings, the Manus and Manvantaras? *7*

What about the aeons, how are they divided and apportioned into ages? How does each aeon end, and what traditions mark each age? I’d like to hear all this. *8*

What about the deeds of kings and heavenly seers, great sage? How did the branches of Vedic learning come about when Vyāsa had arranged them? *9*

What are the duties of the brahmins, the other orders and various life stages? I’d like to hear all this from you who pleased your father, Vasiṣṭha’s son. *10*

Turn your gracious mind to me, brahmin, so that I may learn this through your kindness, you great sage.’ 11

How Parāśara acquired the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*

Parāśara:

You’ve spoken well, Maitreya, and you know virtue. I recall an old account my grandsire, holy Vasiṣṭha, once told me. 12

When I learned my father had been eaten by a rākṣasa sent by Viśvāmitra, Maitreya, my fury knew no bounds. 13

I then began a major sacrifice to exterminate those demons, and hundreds of those night-ranging creatures were reduced to ashes. 14

But while I was destroying them, my grandsire, eminent Vasiṣṭha, counselled me: 15

‘Don’t be angry, my dear boy. Set aside your fury. The rākṣasas haven’t wronged your father. It was his destiny. 16

Only fools get angry, not the wise. Who is killed, dear boy, and who’s the killer, when a person merely suffers the outcomes of his actions? 17

Anger is the prime undoing of fame and penance, my dear, that people strive so hard to win. 18

Great seers always eschew anger, dear boy, as it blocks the way to heaven and to liberation. Don’t give in to fury. 19

Don’t burn these miserable night-ranging demons; they’ve done no harm. Call off this sacrifice of yours. Good people should be merciful.’ 20

Thus chastised by that great sage, my grandsire, I stopped the sacrifice at once, as I respected his opinion. 21

This pleased that best of sages, holy Vasiṣṭha. Just then, Pulastya, Brahmā’s son, appeared. 22

My grandsire welcomed him and offered him a seat. That noble being, Pulaha’s elder brother, spoke to me, Maitreya. 23

Pulastya:

‘Because you heed your grandsire’s words and show forbearance in the midst of great hostility, you’ll comprehend all sacred texts. 24

Even though you were enraged, you lucky man, you refrained from killing all my clan. I therefore grant you this great boon. ²⁵

You'll be the creator of a purāṇa, dear boy, and understand precisely the nature of divinity. ²⁶

Whether you lead a life of sacrifice or renunciation, blessed by me, your mind will be pure and unconfused, my dear.' ²⁷

Then my grandsire, holy Vasiṣṭha, confirmed that everything would happen just as Pulastya had foretold. ²⁸

Such was the conversation long ago with Vasiṣṭha and wise Pulastya that came to mind when you questioned me. ²⁹

I'll relate this whole purāṇa for you, Maitreya, seeing as you ask, so listen carefully. ³⁰

The world arose from Viṣṇu and depends on him. He maintains it, he destroys it—he *is* the world. ³¹

So ends Chapter One in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

2. Parāśara praises Viṣṇu; Creation

Parāśara:

I bow to Viṣṇu, unchanging, pure, eternal, supreme, always in universal form, all-conquering, ¹

Who is also Brahmā, Hari, Śiva, Vāsudeva, saviour and cause of creation, preservation and destruction of the world. ²

I bow to Viṣṇu whose form is one and many, gross and subtle, unseen and seen, the cause of liberation. ³

I bow to Viṣṇu, who is the world, its creator, keeper and destroyer, its root and highest spirit. ⁴

Having bowed to Viṣṇu, who is the base of everything, smaller than the smallest, yet abiding in all beings, imperishable, the highest spirit, ⁵

Who in the truest sense is unsullied wisdom, yet is falsely seen as having concrete form, ⁶

Who consumes the world, but is also lord of creation and preservation, master of the threefold realms, unborn, unageing and unchanging, ⁷

I'll tell you what was said in former times by Brahmā, my blessed lotus-born grandsire, when asked by Dakṣa and other leading sages. 8

They passed this tale to King Purukutsa by the river Narmadā. He related it to Sārasvata, who passed it on to me. 9

The highest, who is higher than the highest, the supreme spirit who abides in all, transcending colour, form, description and distinction, 10

Unfettered by decline, destruction, change, development or birth; of whom alone it can be said that he exists, 11

As he dwells (*vasati*) in all locations and everything abides in him, the wise refer to him as Vāsudeva. 12

He is the Absolute, supreme, eternal, unborn, undecaying, unchanging and universal being. Never to be abandoned, he is pure. 13

He is this whole world, Unseen (*avyakta*) and Seen (*vyakta*), existing in the form of Time (*kāla*) and Spirit (*puruṣa*). 14

The primary form of the highest Absolute is Spirit, brahmin, next are Seen and Unseen, with Time as the fourth. 15

The learned know the pure and highest state of Viṣṇu is superior to primal Matter (*pradhāna*), Spirit, the Seen and Time. 16

Matter, Spirit, the Seen and Time are in due proportion the cause of the existence of creation, preservation and destruction. 17

Viṣṇu is the Seen and Unseen, Time and Spirit. Understand his deeds are like the play of children. 18

The best of sages say that Matter makes the Unseen possible. This primordial stuff is subtle, eternal, existent and nonexistent. 19

It's durable, needs no other basis, is boundless, ageless, firm, beyond the reach of sound and touch and has no form attainable by these or other senses. 20

Consisting of three qualities—purity, passion and dullness—it is the origin of the world, but has no beginning, end or middle. Between each creation and dissolution, it is all-pervading. 21

The world is created

Those self-restrained individuals who understand the Vedas' words, wise sage, and who discourse on sacred topics, recite this verse about the origin of Matter: ²²

'There was neither day nor night, sky nor earth, light nor darkness or any other quality. There was just a single entity: the Absolute, beyond hearing, thought and other senses, composed of Matter and of Spirit.²¹ ²³

Those two forms exist apart from Viṣṇu's own state, brahmin. He has another that's known as Time, by which these two are joined or parted, brahmin. ²⁴

Because the Seen returns to primal elements at the dissolution of the world, that reabsorption is known as 'elemental'. ²⁵

In the form of Time, the lord lacks start or finish, brahmin, so these rounds of creation, preservation and dissolution never cease. ²⁶

At the time of dissolution, these three qualities are in balance, Spirit abides alone in Matter, Maitreya, and Viṣṇu exists in the form of Time. ²⁷

The highest Absolute, the supreme spirit in whom the world abides, all-pervading master of creation, supreme lord at the heart of all, ²⁸

Hari, having entered Matter and Spirit, then willingly agitates these changing and unchanging elements when the moment of creation is at hand. ²⁹

Just as scent excites the mind by proximity alone in the absence of all contact, in that same way, the supreme lord stirs the elements in his role as benefactor. ³⁰

The highest being is indeed the agitator, brahmin, and that which is agitated subsisting in the state of matter during its contraction and expansion. ³¹

Viṣṇu, highest lord of lords, is manifest in the form of things composed of atoms, and in the form of Brahmā and other beings. ³²

Then, at the moment of creation, from that equilibrium of qualities, overseen by Viṣṇu as a sentient being, sage, comes the property known as Greatness (*mābat*), which is produced by the appearance of those qualities, best of brahmins. ³³

1 *Rg Veda* (RV, 10.129.1–2).

Matter then surrounds the Greatness that arises. This Greatness is threefold—pure, passionate and dark—and is swathed in Matter, just as seeds are covered by a husk. *34*

From Greatness, threefold individuation arises: pure, passionate and elemental. *35*

It's the cause of elements and the senses as it consists of threefold qualities, great sage. Just as Greatness is enclosed by Matter, so Matter is enclosed by Greatness. *36*

Elemental individuation becomes productive and brings forth the subtle element of sound. From that arises space, characterised by that sensation. *37*

Elemental individuation envelops space, which has sound as its element. Space then becomes productive and gives rise to the element of touch. *38*

From that is born a mighty wind whose property is touch; and space, whose element is sound, envelops the element of touch. *39*

Wind then becomes productive and brings forth the element of form, and light, whose quality is form, arises from the wind. *40*

Then wind, whose element is touch, envelops light, whose element is form, and light then becomes productive, bringing forth the element of taste. *41*

Next arise the waters, which are the source of taste, and the waters, whose element is taste, envelop light, whose element is form. *42*

The waters then become productive, bringing forth the element of scent. From that arises solid earth, whose quality is that sensation. *43*

As each of these phenomena has its own subtle element, they are considered in terms of their elemental natures, but the subtle elements, lacking distinctive qualities, are known as 'indistinct'. *44*

Being indistinct, they lack qualities such as terror, peace or dullness. This is the elemental creation that arises from individuation and is marked itself by dullness. *45*

They say the organs of the senses arise from individuation marked by passion, and the ten senses themselves, with mind as the eleventh, arise from individuation marked by purity. Accordingly, the senses are thought to be pure. *46*

The skin, eye, nose and tongue, with ear as the fifth, brahmin, combine with the intellect to experience sound and other sensations. *47*

The functions of the organs of excretion and reproduction, the hands, the feet and voice, Maitreya, are said to be evacuation, production, movement and communication. *48*

Space, wind, light, water and earth combine with each of their respective qualities of sound and so on, brahmin. *49*

These now exhibit terror, peace or dullness, so are said to be ‘distinct’. *50*

Possessing energy of different kinds, but existing independently and not combining, these are incapable of creation unless completely unified. *51*

Having combined with one another, blending together, they become a single mass and achieve a perfect unity. *52*

Overseen by Spirit, with the Unseen element’s assent, the factors beginning with Greatness and ending with the distinctive elements form an egg. *53*

This egg increases slowly like a bubble on the water. Consisting of the elements, wise sage, and resting on the waters, it is the natural and excellent abode of Viṣṇu when he takes the form of Brahmā. *54*

There, Viṣṇu, universal lord, whose form is unmanifest, abides in the manifest form of Brahmā. *55*

Meru and the other mountain ranges are the inner and outer membranes of the egg, and the waters inside it are the oceans. *56*

The mountains, lands and oceans, heavenly bodies, the threefold worlds, gods and demigods and humankind, brahmin, are all inside that egg. *57*

The egg is wrapped in water, fire, wind and space and other elements, and by the individuation that is their source. Each layer is ten times greater than the one within, and the whole is covered by Greatness, the origin of the elements. *58*

The Greatness, together with the others, is enveloped by the Unseen, brahmin. The egg is covered by these seven natural layers, like a coconut with an inner kernel and an outer husk. *59*

Delighting in the quality of activity, the lord of all, Hari himself, becoming Brahmā, sets about creation of the world. *60*

Lord Viṣṇu, imbued with purity, whose prowess is immeasurable, preserves the world through every age until each aeon ends. *61*

Filled with the quality of dullness, at the end of every aeon, Janārdana takes the wrathful form of Rudra, Maitreya, and devours the universe. *62*

When he has consumed it all and reduced the world to a single ocean, the highest lord reclines on his couch, the serpent's lap. 63

When he wakes, in Brahmā's form, he creates the world once more. 64

The one Lord Janārdana is known as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva when carrying out creation, preservation and destruction of the world. 65

Lord Viṣṇu, the creator, creates himself. He is both protector and protected. He is the destroyer who destroys himself at the aeon's end. 66

Earth, water, light, wind and space, all the senses and the mind that together make the world: these are known as Spirit. 67

Since this alone is the universal, eternal governor of all creation, it's also the agent that abides in all the elements, from which arise the creation, preservation and destruction of the world. 68

He alone is creation and creator. He alone is preserver and preserved. In the form of Brahmā and the others, Viṣṇu, whose forms are endless, is the foremost, desirable bestower of desires. 69

So ends Chapter Two in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

3. The divisions of time

Maitreya:

How are we to understand that Brahmā is the agent of creation and the rest when he's free from qualities, measureless, pure and perfect? 1

Parāśara:

Not all essential powers of beings are in the realm of comprehension. Powers including creativity are aspects of Brahmā's essential nature, just as heat is fire's aspect, best of sages. 2

You must therefore understand the function of the lord at the moment of creation. He manifests as Brahmā, also known as Nārāyaṇa, the grandsire of the world. 3

By convention, Brahmā is said to be arisen, wise one, even though he is eternal. 4

He's thought to live a hundred of his own years, a period called a *para*, half of which is one *parārdha*. 5

As I told you, blameless one, time is a form of Viṣṇu. Now understand how time applies to the measurement of Brahmā's lifespan, ⁶

And to those of other beings, moving and unmoving, best of sages, and to the earth and mountains, seas and all the rest. ⁷

Fifteen *nimeṣas* or blinks of the eye are said to make a *kāṣṭhā*, best of sages. Thirty *kāṣṭhās* make one *kalā*, and thirty *kalās* make a *mubūrta*, as a rule. ⁸

Thirty *mubūrtas* make one day and night for mortals. A month has thirty days and nights, divided into fortnights. ⁹

Six months make an *ayana*, and two *ayanas*, south and north, comprise a year.² The southern one is the deities' night-time; the northern one, their day. ¹⁰

Each cycle of four ages—the Kṛta, Tretā and the others—lasts twelve thousand divine years. Now hear from me how they're divided. ¹¹

Those who understand the past have said the Kṛta and other ages last for four, three, two and one thousand divine years, respectively. ¹²

The period before each age is called a 'dawn'. Each dawn lasts as many centuries as the following age has millennia. The time that follows every age is called a 'dusk' and is of the same duration. ¹³

The time between each dawn and dusk is called an age or *yuga*, known by the names of Kṛta, Tretā and the others, best of sages. ¹⁴

The Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali together make one fourfold cycle, sage. They say a thousand cycles make just one day for Brahmā. ¹⁵

In each of Brahmā's days, brahmin, fourteen Manus reign. Now you'll hear about the length of each of these. ¹⁶

In the reign of every Manu, seven seers, deities, their king, a Manu himself and the sovereigns who are his progeny are created and absorbed again. ¹⁷

Each period is somewhat longer than seventy-one times the total years in each cycle of four ages. Called a Manvantara, it lasts for the duration of the Manu, gods and others, best of sages. ¹⁸

It's thought to be as long as eight hundred and fifty-two thousand divine years. ¹⁹

² The two *ayanas* are periods during which the sun is south or north of the celestial equator.

This, brahmin, is a total of three hundred and sixty-seven million and twenty thousand years for mortals, best of sages. 20

That's exactly the length of time, brahmin, for which each Manvantara endures. 21

Fourteen Manvantaras are thought to be the length of one of Brahmā's days, from which its name, one *brahma*, is derived. At the conclusion of each day, the universe is destroyed. 22

At that time, the threefold worlds—earth, space and all the rest—are consumed by fire. The inhabitants of the realm of Maharloka, oppressed by heat, retreat to Janaloka. 23

When all three worlds have been reduced to a single ocean, Brahmā, none other than Nārāyaṇa himself, reclines upon his serpent-couch, having grown in strength by consuming the universe. 24

Ascetics who dwell in Janaloka meditate on Brahmā all through the night, which lasts as long as a *brahma* day. When the night is done, he creates the world again. 25

In the same way that Brahmā has his years, he has one hundred of his years. One hundred make a *para*, the lifespan of that great deity. 26

One-half of Brahmā's *para*—a *parārdha*—has passed already, purest sage. The final aeon of that *parārdha* was the period known as Padma. 27

This aeon called Vārāha, brahmin, is the first of the second *parārdha*, which has now begun. 28

So ends Chapter Three in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

4. Brahmā creates the world anew

Maitreya:

Tell me, great sage, how Lord Brahmā, known as Nārāyaṇa, created all the beings when the aeon first began. 1

Parāśara:

Hear from me how Brahmā, Lord Nārāyaṇa himself and heavenly master of all progenitors, made the world. 2

At the end of the previous aeon, Lord Brahmā, filled with purity, having slept all through the night, awoke and saw the world, bereft of living things, was empty. ³

Nārāyaṇa—supreme, unimaginable, universal master—is the beginning-less lord and all-creator in the form of Brahmā. ⁴

In this regard, they sing a verse about Nārāyaṇa in the heavenly form of Brahmā, the creation and destruction of the world: ⁵

‘The waters were known as Nāra, as they were Nara’s sons. As these were the deity’s first abode (*ayana*), he is known as Nārāyaṇa, “whose home was water”.’³ ⁶

When the world still lay below the single ocean, the progenitor and lord, knowing that the earth was in its waters, after consideration, desired to raise it. ⁷

Just as he had taken the forms of tortoise, fish and others in earlier ages, he now took another form: the boar. ⁸

The changeless, universal, supreme progenitor took that form, which embodied all the Vedas and the sacrifice, for the preservation of the world. ⁹

Praised by Sanaka and other perfect sages who sheltered in Janaloka, he entered the waters, being the foundation of the spiritual and material worlds. ¹⁰

When the goddess Earth saw that he had reached the lower realm of Pātāla, bowing with deep devotion, she praised him. ¹¹

The Earth:

I bow to you who are everything, and who bear the conch and discus. Lift me up from here right now as you’ve done before. ¹²

You raised me in the past, and I consist of you, Janārdana, as does the sky and all that is. ¹³

I bow to you, the essence of the highest Spirit. Spirit’s essence, to you I bow. I bow to you, primal Matter, the Seen and Time itself. ¹⁴

You are creator of every being, you are protector and destroyer of creation and the other phases, Lord, when you take the forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and of Rudra. ¹⁵

³ This quotation is found in *Manu Smṛti* (1.10).

When you've consumed the world and it lies beneath the single ocean, you sleep, Govinda, while the wise ones contemplate you. 16

As no-one knows your ultimate form, the deities worship whichever form you take. 17

Revering you as the highest Absolute, those who yearn for liberation reach it. Who will reach perfection if they do not worship Vāsudeva? 18

All that can be grasped by mind, by eye or other senses and all that can be known by mind are surely forms of you. 19

I'm made of you, you are my foundation and creator, I depend on you. That's why the whole world calls me Mādhavī.⁴ 20

Be victorious! You are all knowledge. Be victorious! You are unchanging and enduring. Be victorious! You are unending. Be victorious! You are Unseen. Be victorious! You are the Seen, Lord. You are the highest supreme, you are everything. Be victorious! You are the purest lord of sacrifices. 21

You *are* the sacrifice. You are the cry of *vaṣaṭ*. You are the syllable *Oṃ*. You are the sacrificial fires. You are the Vedas and their supplements. Hari, you are the spirit of the sacrifice. 22

You are the sun and other heavenly bodies, the planets, stars and all the constellations, the formed and formless, the visible and invisible, the highest spirit. 23

You are all that I have said, highest Lord, and all that I've left unsaid just now. I bow to you again. To you I bow again and again. 24

Varāha the Boar raises the Earth and the ascetics praise him

Parāśara:

While the Earth was praising him like this, the glorious bearer of the world, whose voice resounded like the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*, bellowed loudly. 25

The mighty boar then raised the earth with just one tusk. His eyes like full-blown lotuses and his body dark as lily leaves, he rose from the lower regions, towering like Mount Nīla. 26

4 The female counterpart of Mādhava, a patronymic of Kṛṣṇa.

The water from his dive, driven by the breath he breathed as he emerged, washed away the sins of Sanandana and the other sages sheltering in Janaloka, leaving them in a purer state. 27

Thundering unceasingly, the waters rushed down to the lower realm, trampled by his hooves. The accomplished seers in Janaloka, blasted by the wind whipped up by his breath, were scattered in all directions. 28

The sages, who landed in the bristles on the back of that mighty boar, praised him as he rose, bearing the earth aloft, his belly wet, as he shook his body, which was the very Vedas. 29

Sanandana and the others in Janaloka, their hearts all filled with joy, bowing with humility, praised that bearer of the earth, whose gaze was steady: 30

‘Be victorious, Keśava, highest lord of lords! You, Lord, are the bearer of the mace and conch, sword and discus. You, Lord, are the cause of creation, preservation and destruction of the world. There is no state superior to yours. 31

Your legs are the form of the Vedas, your tusks the sacrificial post, your teeth the offerings, your mouth the altar, your tongue the fire, the hairs on your body the blades of sacrificial grass. You, Lord, are indeed the spirit of the sacrifice. 32

Your two eyes are day and night, your head the highest Absolute, the universal state, great being. The bristles of your mane are all the Vedic hymns, Lord, your nose the offerings, 33

Your snout the ladle, your deep grunt the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*, your body the pavilion, your joints the rituals and your two ears the *iṣṭa* and *pūrta* rites conducted for oneself and others, God. Favour us, eternal Lord. 34

We know you paced the world in just three strides, and that you are endless, but are present at the origin. You are imperishable and your form is universal. We know that you are the highest lord of all. Favour us, protector of all moving and unmoving things. 35

This whole world rests on the tip of your tusk, protector, like a muddy lotus leaf that sticks to you when diving in a lily pond. 36

Your might is unequalled, your body fills the space between earth and heaven and your light pervades the world. Lord, abide for the good of every being. 37

You are indeed the single highest goal, there is no other, universal Lord. Your greatness fills the universe of moving and unmoving things. 38

This visible world is your body when you take the form of knowledge, but those who aren't ascetics cannot see the world correctly. 39

Those unwise beings who see this world, which is in nature knowledge, as an object with reality sink in an ocean of delusion. 40

But pure-hearted beings who understand true knowledge, highest Lord, see this world as your own form comprising knowledge itself. 41

Favour us! You are all and at the heart of all. Raise the earth to make the worlds! You are beyond all measure. Lotus-eyed deity, gratify us! 42

You are filled with goodness, Lord. Raise up this earth, Lord Govinda, to make the worlds. Lotus-eyed deity, gratify us! 43

May your act of creation benefit the worlds. We bow to you. Lotus-eyed deity, gratify us! 44

Parāśara:

While the sages were praising him with these words, the highest spirit, bearer of the earth, raised the world and set it down at once amid that mighty ocean. 45

The earth floated on the surface of the water like some great vessel, and because it was so broad it didn't sink. 46

Then the lord, who has no start but is the origin of all, spread the earth and heaped up mountains on its surface place by place. 47

He whose wishes are never thwarted used his unfailing power to create again on the surface of the earth all the mountains burned at the end of the previous aeon. 48

He divided the earth into regions, remade the seven continents in the same manner, and laid out four spheres, beginning with the land, as he had before.⁵ 49

Divine Lord Hari, in the form of four-faced Brahmā, swathed in energy, then created all other things. 50

5 The four spheres are the earth, sky, heaven and Maharloka, the sphere of the sages.

Brahmā is, however, just the instrumental cause in the creation of that which is created, since all this arises from primal matter. *51*

Apart from this single instrumental cause, no other cause is needed. One substance becomes another from its own inherent tendency, excellent ascetic. *52*

So ends Chapter Four in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

5. Brahmā creates living beings

Maitreya:

How did that divine being create the gods, sages, ancestral spirits, Dānavas, humankind, animals, plants and all the rest that live on land, in air or water? *1*

What are the qualities, form and nature of the world that Brahmā made at the beginning of creation? Describe all this in detail, brahmin. *2*

Parāśara:

Listen carefully, Maitreya, and I'll tell you how the divine lord created the gods and all. *3*

While contemplating creation, as at the start of every previous aeon, there appeared a creation preceded by ignorance and consisting of darkness. *4*

Fivefold ignorance—darkness, error, delusion, gloom and blindness—arose from that great being. *5*

This creation, which sprang from his meditation, is the fivefold world of plants, in which there is no perception.⁶ Outer sensations and inner emotions are absent, and objects are veiled and static. *6*

Because immobile things were created first, this is called foundational creation. *7*

Seeing this was not enough, Brahmā thought about creating more. *8*

While he was contemplating, the creation of animals took place. This is known as the Tiryaksrotas creation, because animals have horizontal (*tiryak*) digestive tracts (*srotas*). *9*

⁶ The five kinds of plants are trees, shrubs, vines, herbs and grasses.

They're called beasts and other names, are generally dull by nature, unwitting, have bad habits and mistake ignorance for knowledge. *10*

Self-centred, proud and subject to twenty-eight faults, yet all have feelings and interact with one another. *11*

Brahmā thought that this was insufficient and, while contemplating, a further creation took place: the third, Ūrdhvasrotas, blessed with goodness, appeared above (*ūrdhva*) in the heavenly sphere. *12*

Those born of the Ūrdhvasrotas creation are said to know much happiness and joy; they're not immune from outer sensations or inner emotions, but are awake to both. *13*

Filled with contentment, this third creation is called divine, and Brahmā was pleased with all the work that he had done. *14*

Knowing that the first and following creative acts were not enough, he then thought another feat of excellent creation would suffice. *15*

While contemplating, as his mind was set on truth, the creation known as Arvāksrotas appeared from the Unseen element, and this he thought sufficient. *16*

Because these creatures have vertical (*arvāk*) digestive tracts, they're called Arvāksrotas. Although they are most gifted, they're still subject to dullness and excessive energy. *17*

They therefore suffer from much pain and are always forced to act. They also have sensations and emotions. This, then, is humanity and Brahmā thought this was sufficient. *18*

Six stages of creation have been explained here, best of sages. The first was the creation from the element of Greatness, that of Brahmā. *19*

The second was the elemental creation of rudimentary factors. The third was the subsequent creation of the senses. *20*

These are the primary creations and are preceded by intellect. The foundational creation was the fourth, so called because unmoving things provide a basis. *21*

The fifth is called Tiryaksrotas or animal creation. Next came divine creation, the sixth, or Urdhvasrotas. *22*

Then came Arvāksrotas, the creation of humanity, the seventh. *23*

The eighth is Anugraha, marked by purity and dullness. These are the five secondary creations. The primary ones are three in number. 24

The primary and secondary events, with Kaumāra as the ninth, are known as the nine creations of Brahmā, the creative lord. 25

These primary and secondary creations, proceeding from the universal lord, are the root cause of the universe. What further do you wish to hear? 26

Maitreya:

You've described in brief the creation of the deities and the rest, master, but I'd like to hear more details from you, best of sages. 27

Parāśara:

Beings are shaped by their previous actions, good and bad. They can't escape this fact, even when they're burned at the end of time. 28

When Brahmā made the world, there arose four kinds of creatures, from static things to deities and others, brahmin—all products of his mind. 29

Desiring to produce the fourfold creation of gods, demigods, ancestral spirits and humankind, he combined these four within himself. 30

Thus, merged within his mind, Brahmā, lord of creation, became completely filled with dullness. Then, desiring to begin creation, from his thighs the demigods arose at first. 31

Brahmā cast off that body of dullness, Maitreya, and, once abandoned, it became the night. 32

Still filled with that creative urge and taking on another body, Brahmā was pleased, brahmin, and the deities, imbued with purity, appeared from his mouth. 33

That body was also shed by Brahmā and became the day that's filled with light. That's why demigods are strong by night and deities are strong by day. 34

Brahmā then took another body imbued with purity and, thinking of himself as sire, the ancestors of humankind appeared. 35

After the lord had made the ancestors, he cast off that body as well and, being abandoned, it became the dusk. 36

He then took another form imbued with energy, best of brahmins, and humankind, which abounds in vigour, was born. 37

At that very moment, the creative lord cast off that form, and it became the glimmer known as dawn. 38

That's why folk are more active at the break of day and the ancestors more powerful at dusk, Maitreya. 39

Night and day, dawn and dusk—these four are bodies of Lord Brahmā imbued with threefold qualities of dullness, purity and energy. 40

Brahmā then took another form infused with energy, and hunger was born from him, with the anger it engenders. 41

Then in darkness filled with hunger, Lord Brahmā created beings, hairy monsters, who rushed towards him. 42

Those who cried, 'Don't do this, Lord. Protect us! (*rakṣyatām*)', became the demons known as rākṣasas. Others cried, 'We want to eat!', and they became the yakṣas because they needed food (*jakṣaṇa*). 43

When Brahmā beheld these awful beings, the hairs dropped from his head, but having fallen, they climbed up again. 44

Because they slipped (*sarpaṇa*) from his scalp, they became the serpents (*sarpa*), and because they left (*bhīna*) his head behind, they're also known as snakes (*abhi*). The enraged creator of the world then brought forth flesh-eating *bhūta*-spirits, red in colour, furious and terrifying. 45

While he meditated, the gandharvas arose from his body at that time, brahmin, so-called as they were born while drinking speech (*gandharva*). 46

After Lord Brahmā had made these beings, spurred by the energy of that endeavour, he then produced other beings at will, and with that energy made the birds. 47

The lord of creation made sheep from his chest, goats from his mouth and cattle from his belly and flanks. 48

From his feet came elephants and horses, donkeys, wild oxen, deer, camels, mules, antelopes and beasts of other kinds. 49

Those plants that bring forth fruit and roots arose from the hairs of his head. Having made all the plants and animals at the onset of the aeon, best of brahmins, Brahmā employed them in sacrifices at the beginning of the Tretā age. 50

Cattle, goats, buffalo,⁷ sheep, horses, mules and donkeys—these they call domestic animals. Now learn about wild animals from me: 51

Those with claws or cloven hooves, elephants, monkeys, birds are fifth, those that live in water sixth, and those that creep and crawl are the seventh kind. 52

The Gāyatrī metre, the *R̥g Veda*, the Trivṛtsāma, the Rathantara and, of the sacrifices, the Agniṣṭoma, arose from Brahmā's eastern mouth. 53

The *Yajur Veda*, the Triṣṭubh metre, the Pañcadaśa hymns, the Bṛhatsāman and the Uktha issued from his southern mouth. 54

The *Sāma Veda*, the Jagatī metre, the Saptadaśa hymns, the Vairūpa and the Atirātra sacrifice issued from his western mouth. 55

The Ekaviṃśa hymns, the *Atharva Veda*, the Āptoryāma, the Anuṣṭubh metre and the Vairāja issued from his northern mouth. 56

Creatures great and small arose from his limbs after the lord of creation made the gods, demigods, ancestors and humankind. 57

At the beginning of the aeon, the universal grandsire made the yakṣas, piśācas, gandharvas and hosts of apsarasas, 58

Naras, kiṃnaras and rākṣasas, birds, animals of village and forest, snakes—everything in the world, changing and unchanging, moving and unmoving. 59

Lord Brahmā, original creator, made all this. The roles all these beings had filled in previous aeons, they undertook once more, being made again. 60

Cruel and kind, harsh and gentle, right and wrong, true and false—beings undertook and delighted in the roles they were assigned. 61

The lord creator made the differences among the objects of the senses, beings, bodies and their functions. 62

He gave names and forms to all the creatures and fixed the range of tasks for gods and other beings in the beginning, following the Vedas' words. 63

He provided names and fitting roles to all the sages in accordance with the Vedas. 64

7 Most manuscripts clearly give *puruṣa* ('people') at this point, a word that does not fit well. I have diverged from the Critical Edition and used *mahiṣa* ('buffalo'), as attested by several other manuscripts. Wilson has 'hog'.

Just as varied signs of every season appear in turn, so, too, are the characteristics of each age. *65*

Thus, Brahmā undertakes creation once more at the start of every aeon, filled with the power of creative urges and driven by the energies of those to be created. *66*

So ends Chapter Five in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

6. Human society

Maitreya:

You've mentioned the Arvāksrotas creation, the origin of humankind, brahmin, but tell me in more detail how Brahmā accomplished this. *1*

Tell me how he made the four communities, the *varṇas*, with their respective qualities, great sage, as well as the duties of the brahmins and the others. *2*

Parāśara:

When Brahmā wished to create the world, while contemplating purity, best of brahmins, beings invested with that quality first issued from his mouth. *3*

From Brahmā's chest came others filled with energy, and from his thighs came beings with both energy and dullness. *4*

Brahmā brought forth others from his feet, best of brahmins, all overcome by dullness. These comprise the four communities. *5*

Brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras arose from his mouth, chest, thighs and feet, best of brahmins. *6*

Brahmā did this so that sacrifices could be undertaken, blessed sage, and these four orders are the perfect means for doing so. *7*

Deities are sustained by sacrifices, and folk are nourished when the gods send rain. Sacrifices are the source of welfare—you understand this, dharma. *8*

Sacrifice is carried out by pious men delighting in their duties and pure in their behaviour as they walk the path of virtue. *9*

By means of sacrifice, men reach heaven or liberation by adhering to their duties, sage, or else they'll reach a realm where they'll be happy, brahmin. *10*

People blessed with perfect faith and filled with virtue were made in four communities by Brahmā, best of sages. *11*

Residing happily where they wished, they were free from troubles, pure of heart, blameless and virtuous in all their actions. *12*

When Hari in pure form dwelled within them, perfect knowledge filled their stainless minds and, on this account, they saw that state called Viṣṇu. *13*

Then Hari's aspect known as Time caused wickedness to come among them. It was frightening but petty, of little substance, *14*

Misconduct's seed, born of greed and darkness. It took the form of anger and other negative emotions and impeded their success. *15*

Then innate perfection, consisting of eight accomplishments, spontaneous satisfaction and the others, arose no more to the same extent among them. *16*

While all were weakened and evil grew apace, they were beset by strife, defeat and suffering. *17*

Seeking refuge in the forests, in the mountains and on water, there they built their strongholds, towns and cities. *18*

They duly made their dwellings in those cities and elsewhere, wise sage, to shelter from the cold, the heat and other troubles. *19*

Warding off the cold and other elements, folk adopted manual labour as their livelihood. *20*

Rice, barley, wheat, millet, sesame, foxtail millet, sorghum, ditch millet, peas, *21*

Beans, black and brown lentils, cowpeas, horse gram, pigeon peas, chickpeas and hemp—these are the seventeen crops they grew, sage. *22*

Fourteen plants, both cultivated and wild, are suitable for sacrifice: *23*

Rice, barley, beans, wheat, millet, sesame, with foxtail millet as the seventh and horse gram as the eighth, barnyard millet, *24*

Wild rice, wild sesame, mallow and bamboo seeds are mentioned, sage, along with corn. *25*

These fourteen, wild and cultivated, are used in the performance of the sacrifice, and yet it is the sacrifice that enables them to grow. *26*

These plants and sacrifice are humanity's first foundation. That's why the wise who understand both causes and effects perform these rites. *27*

Daily performance of the sacrifice benefits humanity, best of sages, and cleanses all impurities from those who do so. *28*

The seed of evil sown by Time grew in some men's hearts, wise sage, and their thoughts began to wander from the sacrifice. 29

Making light of Vedic discourse, the Vedas and the rites, they opposed the sacrificial act. 30

These wicked, devious miscreants mocked the Vedas and blocked the path of sacrificial action. 31

After the lord of creation had established people in the livelihoods prepared for them, he laid down limits suited to the status and the qualities 32

Of each order and stage of life, best guardian of duty, and also their responsibilities. He also made the heavenly realms for each community who adhered perfectly to their obligations. 33

The realm for brahmins who carry out the sacrifice is that of Brahmā. The realm for kṣatriyas who never retreat in battle is Indra's. 34

The realm for vaiśyas who delight in duty is the Maruts', while that for sūdras who rejoice in service is the gandharvas'. 35

The realm for those who lived in their guru's home is that of the eighty-one thousand sages who never shed their semen. 36

The realm for those who retire to the forest is that of the Seven Sages. The progenitors' realm is for householders, and Brahmā's is for renunciants. 37

The immortal realm for ascetics is the highest state of Viṣṇu. 38

Those ascetics who always contemplate the Absolute alone achieve this, the highest realm perceived by the wise. 39

After every dissolution, the moon, the sun and planets are all re-created, but those who contemplate the mantra of twelve syllables, even now, need never be reborn.⁸ 40

The hell realms of Tāmistra, Andhatāmistra, Mahāraurava, Raurava, Asīpatravana, Ghora, Kālasūtra and Avīci 41

Are said to wait for those who insult the Vedas, obstruct the sacrifice or shirk their communal duties. 42

So ends Chapter Six in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

8 The 12-syllable mantra *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*.

7. The first patriarchs

Parāśara:

While Brahmā was engaged in contemplation, his mind-born progeny arose. These conscious beings, whose forms and senses came from Brahmā's body, appeared from the limbs of that wise deity. *1*

All the creatures I've described, from gods to static objects, occupy a world infused with threefold qualities. *2*

All creatures, moving and unmoving, were created in this way. *3*

But as these beings, arising from that wise deity, failed to multiply, he then brought forth more sons from his own mind in the image of himself: *4*

Bhṛgu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Aṅgiras, Marīci, Dakṣa, Atri and Vasiṣṭha. *5*

These are the nine mind-born sons of Brahmā named in the purāṇas. *6*

Sanandana and the others whom Brahmā brought forth earlier had neither worldly ties nor an urge for procreation. *7*

All had perfect knowledge and were therefore free from envy and desire, but as they showed indifference to the creation of the world, a terrible fury, able to burn the universe, arose in that great deity. *8*

All three worlds were set ablaze in a ring of fire sparked by Brahmā's anger, sage. *9*

From his forehead, furrowed with burning fury, sprang wrathful Rudra, blazing like the midday sun, his vast form half-man, half-woman. *10*

Brahmā ordered Rudra to divide himself, then withdrew from sight. *11*

Thus, addressed by Brahmā, Rudra split his male and female halves apart, then divided his male half eleven ways. *12*

Some forms were pleasant, some hideous, some mild and others fierce. That lordly being then split his female half in many forms, both black and white. *13*

Brahmā then manifested himself as Manu, Lord Svāyambhuva, brahmin, the patriarch of humanity. *14*

That divine and lordly Manu took to wife the woman Śatarupā, who was purified of sins through penance. *15*

With him, divine Śatarūpa bore two sons, Priyavrata and Uttānapāda, and two daughters, named Prasūti and Ākūti, endowed with beauty, nobility and virtue—you know this, dharma. ¹⁶

Svāyaṃbhuva gave Prasūti to Dakṣa and Ākūti to Ruci in those far-off times. The patriarch Ruci accepted Ākūti, and they had a son called Sacrifice and a daughter, Recompense, who became a couple, blessed sage.⁹ ¹⁷

Sacrifice and Recompense had twelve sons, known as the divine Yāmas in the age of Manu Svāyaṃbhuva. ¹⁸

Similarly, Dakṣa had twenty-four daughters with Prasūti. Listen carefully to their names: ¹⁹

Faith, Fortune, Constance, Contentment, Comfort, Prudence, Ritual, Intellect, Modesty, Beauty, Peace and Felicity, with Fame as the thirteenth. ²⁰

The lord Virtue took these daughters of Dakṣa as his wives.¹⁰ The eleven remaining younger fair-eyed daughters were: ²¹

Renown, Truth, Increase, Memory, Joy, Patience, Humility, Kindness, Energy, Svāhā and Svadhā.¹¹ ²²

Bhṛgu, Bhava, Marīci, the sage Aṅgiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, the excellent seer Kratu, ²³

Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Vahni and Pitara—these seers duly wedded Renown and her sisters, best of sages. ²⁴

The sons of Virtue were as follows: Faith bore Desire, Fortune Pride, Constance a son, Restraint. Contentment bore Satisfaction and Comfort Greed, ²⁵

Prudence bore Knowledge and Ritual bore Correction, Conduct and Decency. Intellect bore Understanding, Modesty Propriety, the son of Beauty was Resolve, Peace bore Security, ²⁶

Felicity bore Happiness and Fame Glory. Such were the sons of Virtue. With Desire, Love gave birth to Rapture, the grandson of Virtue. ²⁷

9 In the following passage, I have diverged from the usual practice of leaving proper names in the original Sanskrit and have translated them into English, as I believe the author wanted them to be understood at a semantic level.

10 The relationships of Virtue and Vice (see below) are not immediately clear in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Other sources suggest they are sons of Brahmā. Whatever the case, in this context, they play the role of patriarchs of humankind.

11 *Svāhā* and *svadhā* are auspicious syllables uttered during a sacrifice.

Vice's wife was Violence. They gave birth to a son, Falsehood, and a daughter, Deceit, who became a couple and bore two sons, Fear and the hell realm Naraka. 28

Their two daughters, Delusion and Pain, became their brothers' wives. Fear and Delusion gave birth to Death, who carries off all beings. 29

Pain and Fear had a son, Suffering. The children of Death were Disease, Decrepitude, Sorrow, Avidity and Anger. 30

These all knew pain and were marked by vice. None had a wife, a son or retained his semen. 31

Such are the terrible forms of Viṣṇu, best sage's son. They went forth as the eternal causes of destruction in this world. 32

Dakṣa, Marīci, Atri, Bhṛgu and the other patriarchs, blessed sage, are the eternal causes of creation here. 33

The Manus and their sons, brave protectors of the earth, are heroes who rejoice in the path of truth and are the ever-present causes of the preservation of the world. 34

Maitreya:

Tell me, brahmin, what is the nature of this perpetual process of creation, preservation and destruction? 35

Parāśara:

Lord Madhusūdana, who is beyond conception, in all three varied forms, brings about the never-ending cycle of creation, preservation and destruction. 36

The destruction of all beings is fourfold, brahmin: occasional, foundational, continual and perpetual. 37

Occasional or Brāhmic destruction takes place when the universal lord is sleeping. In foundational destruction, the world is broken into fundamental elements. 38

Continual destruction is said to be that of the ascetic who, through spiritual knowledge, abides in the Supreme. Perpetual destruction is the unrelenting death, day and night, of every being ever born. 39

The production of fundamental elements is thought to be foundational creation. The creation that follows the intermediate destruction of the world is called ephemeral. 40

The creation in which beings are born each day is called perpetual creation by those who understand the meaning of purāṇas, best of sages. 41

That's how Lord Viṣṇu, creator of beings abiding in all bodies, undertakes creation, preservation and destruction. 42

The powers of Viṣṇu to create, preserve and to destroy, Maitreya, are always present in all bodies, day and night. 43

One who transcends this great threefold power consisting of all qualities, brahmin, proceeds to the highest state, never to return. 44

So ends Chapter Seven in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

8. The eight forms of Rudra

Parāśara:

I've described for you the creation undertaken by Brahmā that has the quality of dullness, great sage. Now I'll speak about the creation of Rudra. Listen while I explain. 1

While Brahmā was meditating at the beginning of the aeon, a son, his equal, manifested in his lap, a boy of ruddy complexion. 2

He ran about while wailing loudly (*rudan*), best of brahmins. When Brahmā asked the weeping child why he wept, 'I want a name!' was his reply. 3

The lord of creation answered, 'Deity, your name is Rudra, but do not cry. Be firm!' But even after Brahmā had spoken, the child cried out another seven times. 4

Each time the lord gave him another name. To each of these eight aspects the lord assigned stations, wives and sons. 5

The universal grandsire gave him all these names, brahmin: Bhava, Śarva, Īśāna, Paśupati, Bhīma, Ugra and Mahādeva. 6

He gave these names, then fixed a place for each: the sun, water, earth, wind, fire, air, the consecrated brahmin and the moon—these are the eight stations in order. 7

Suvarcalā, Uṣā, Vikeśī, Śivā, Svāhā and Diśas, Dikṣā and Rohiṇī— 8

These are the respective wives of the sun and other forms, which are known by the names of Rudra and the others, best of men. Next, you'll hear from me about their offspring, blessed sage. 9

Their descendants filled this world: 10

The sons in order were tardy Saturn, brilliant Venus, ruddy Mars, Manojava, Skanda, Svarga, Saṃtāna and wise Mercury. 11

In the form of Rudra, he took Satī as his wife. She later sacrificed her body when enraged by Dakṣa. 12

Satī was reborn the daughter of the mountain-deity Himālaya and Menā, best of brahmins, and, as peerless Umā, Lord Śiva married her again. 13

The divine sons Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ were born to the sage Bhṛgu and Renown, as was Śrī, the consort of Nārāyaṇa, god of gods. 14

Maitreya:

It's said that glorious Śrī arose from the waters at the churning of the nectar of immortality. How can you now say that she was born to Bhṛgu and Renown? 15

Parāśara praises Lakṣmī

Parāśara:

Śrī, the mother of the universe, is eternal and never leaves the side of Viṣṇu, best of brahmins. Just as Viṣṇu is everywhere, so indeed is she. 16

Viṣṇu is meaning and she is word. She is policy and Hari is principle. Viṣṇu is perception and she is intellect. He is virtue and she is conduct. 17

Viṣṇu is creator and she is creation. Śrī is earth and Hari is support. The lord is satisfaction and Lakṣmī is eternal contentment, Maitreya. 18

Śrī is inclination and the lord is desire. He is sacrifice and she, the fee. The goddess is the oblation of clarified butter and Janārdana, the prayer that accompanies it. 19

Lakṣmī is the pavilion for the sacrificer's wives, sage, and Madhusūdana, the pavilion for the men of the family. Lakṣmī is the altar and Hari is the sacrificial post. Śrī is the kindling and the lord is the sacred grass. 20

The lord takes the form of the Sāma Veda and the lotus-throned goddess is the chanting. Lakṣmī is the invocation *svāhā*, and Vāsudeva, master of the universe, is the fire that consumes the offering. 21

Lord Viṣṇu is Śiva and Lakṣmī is Gaurī, his wife, best of brahmins. Keśava is the sun and lotus-throned Śrī its brilliance, Maitreya. 22

Viṣṇu is the host of ancestral spirits and Padmā is the invocation *svadhā*, which provides their eternal sustenance. Śrī is heaven and Viṣṇu, the universal lord, is boundless space. ²³

Śrī's husband is the hare-marked moon and Śrī its ever-present loveliness. Lakṣmī is the firmness that girds the world and Hari is the all-pervading wind. ²⁴

Govinda is the ocean and Śrī its shore, wise brahmin. Indrāṇī, wife of Indra, is a form of Lakṣmī, and the king of gods is Madhusūdana. ²⁵

Viṣṇu who bears the discus is Yama himself, the lord of the underworld, and the lotus-throned Śrī is Yama's wife, Dhūmorṇā. Śrī is wealth and her husband is the deity Kubera, lord of riches. ²⁶

Fortunate Lakṣmī is Gaurī and Keśava is Varuṇa, god of oceans. Śrī is the army of the gods and Hari its commander, best of brahmins. ²⁷

Viṣṇu who wields the mace is support and Lakṣmī is power, best of brahmins. Lakṣmī is the unit of time known as *kāṣṭhā* and he is the *nimeṣa*. He is the *muhūrta* and she the *kalā*.¹² ²⁸

Lakṣmī is light and Hari, lord of all, the shining sun. Śrī, the mother of the world, takes the form of a vine and Viṣṇu, the tree it clings to. ²⁹

Śrī is night and the god who bears the mace and discus is the day. Wish-granting Viṣṇu is the groom and she who dwells in the lotus grove his bride. ³⁰

The lord takes the form of all masculine rivers and Śrī the feminine ones. Lotus-eyed Viṣṇu is the banner and lotus-throned Śrī the pennant. ³¹

Lakṣmī is yearning and supreme Nārāyaṇa, master of the world, is greed. Lakṣmī is love and Govinda is sex—you understand this, dharma. ³²

Why say more when it can be said so simply? ³³

All things masculine among the animals, gods and humankind are Lord Hari, while everything feminine is Lakṣmī, Maitreya. There is nothing apart from them. ³⁴

So ends Chapter Eight in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

¹² See *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.3.8.

9. The sage Durvāsas curses Indra; Churning of the ocean

Parāśara:

Now listen to this account of Śrī, about whom you asked me, Maitreya, as I heard it from the seer Marīci. *1*

The sage Durvāsas, a partial manifestation of Śiva, was wandering this world when he saw a female vidyādhara holding a divine garland. *2*

The perfume of the garland's *santānaka* flowers filled the forest, brahmin, and the scent brought great delight to those who roamed there. *3*

That brahmin, who held vows of holy craziness, saw the splendid garland and asked the fair-hipped vidyādhara woman to give it to him. *4*

At his request, the slender, wide-eyed vidyādhari bowed graciously and handed him the flowers. *5*

That wild brahmin took the garland and placed it on his head, Maitreya, as he wandered through the world. *6*

One day, Durvāsas beheld the deity Indra, overlord of the threefold worlds, Śaci's husband, approaching on his raging elephant Airāvata, accompanied by the other gods. *7*

The sage took the garland, along with its frenzied bees, from his head and, like a madman, tossed it to the king of gods. *8*

Indra caught the garland and placed it on the elephant's brow, where it shone like the river Gaṅgā, Jahnu's daughter, on the summit of Mount Kailāsa. *9*

The elephant, whose eyes were blinded by intoxication, was attracted by the scent and sniffed the garland with its trunk but tossed it to the ground. *10*

The best of sages, holy Durvāsas, was enraged, Maitreya, and angrily addressed the king of gods: *11*

Durvāsas:

Your heart has been corrupted by the intoxication of your power. You're worse than arrogant, Indra. The garland that I gave you is the dwelling place of Śrī, but you didn't really like it. *12*

You didn't thank me with a bow. You didn't place it on your head, your cheeks aglow with pleasure. *13*

Because you shunned the garland that I offered you, fool, you'll lose your sovereignty over all three worlds. 14

You clearly think that I'm like other brahmins, Indra, and in doing so, you arrogantly insult me. 15

Because you tossed the garland that I gave you to the ground, the threefold worlds will lose their splendour. 16

This whole world of moving and unmoving things fears me when I'm angry, but you, king of gods, full of pride, disrespect me. 17

Parāśara:

Mighty Indra quickly climbed down from the elephant's back and apologised to the unstained seer Durvāsas. 18

Being appeased, that best of sages then replied to the god of a thousand eyes, who bowed respectfully before him: 19

Durvāsas:

Unlike other sages, I'm neither kind nor patient, mighty Indra. Remember that I'm Durvāsas! 20

You've been flattered by sages such as Gautama for no good reason. Remember that I'm Durvāsas, the very essence of impatience! 21

Because Vasiṣṭha and other sweet-natured seers loudly sang your praises, you've grown proud and disrespect me. 22

My matted locks are a blazing mass and my brow is deeply furrowed. Seeing me, who in all three worlds isn't fearful? 23

Why waste words, god of a hundred sacrifices? I won't accept any further semblance of respect you try to show me. 24

Parāśara:

So saying, the brahmin left, and Indra, king of gods, mounted on Airāvata, returned to his city of Amarāvati. 25

From that moment, brahmin, all three worlds, along with mighty Indra, lost their splendour, Maitreya, and grew wretched. Herbs and other plant life withered, 26

Sacrifices ceased, ascetics gave up penance and folk no longer turned their minds to charity or other virtues. 27

All the people suffered, their senses overcome by greed, best of brahmins, and they began to covet trifles. 28

Where vitality exists, one also finds prosperity, as they follow one another. Where is vitality for those who lose prosperity? Without vitality, where are virtues? 29

Without virtues, where are people's strength, courage and other noble sentiments? Bereft of strength and courage, a person will be shunned by everyone, and a man rejected will lose his mind. 30

When all three worlds thus lost prosperity and vitality, the Daityas and the Dānavas made war against the deities. 31

Overcome by greed, and without wellbeing and energy themselves, the Daityas fought against the gods who also lacked those qualities. 32

After they'd been worsted by the demons, Indra and the thirteen deities led by Agni sought protection from Brahmā, the fortunate grandsire of the world. 33

The gods relayed all this to Brahmā. 'Go to Viṣṇu for protection, lord of high and low,' he said, 'for he's the scourge of demigods. 34

He's the lord who has no cause, and origin of creation, preservation and destruction of the world. Viṣṇu is lord of all progenitors, unending and unconquerable. 35

He's the cause of unborn primal matter and of spirit, which are transformed by his energy. Viṣṇu, who eases the pain of those who bow before him, will restore your splendour.' 36

Brahmā praises Viṣṇu

Parāśara:

Having thus addressed them, Brahmā, universal grandsire, set off with all the gods for the Milky Ocean's northern shore. 37

Arriving with the thirteen deities, Brahmā gratified Hari, lord of high and low, with these words that pleased him: 38

Brahmā:

I bow to the universal lord of all, unending, unarising, unchanging, the abode and foundation of the world, invisible, indivisible, 39

Nārāyaṇa, smallest of the small, largest of the large, including all the world and all things in it, 40

In whom all things abide, from whom all things including me arise, the deity who is all things, higher than the highest, 41

Who is beyond the highest spirit, who takes the form of the Supreme itself, and on whom ascetics who yearn for liberation meditate as the source of freedom. 42

May the lord beyond vitality and other basic qualities, purest of the pure, primal spirit, favour us. 43

May that pure being, Hari, whose power lies beyond the passage of time that's made of *kalās*, *kāṣṭhās*, *nimeṣas* and so on, favour us. 44

May Viṣṇu, known as the pure supreme lord because of his favours, and who is at the heart of all embodied beings, favour us. 45

May Hari, the cause and the effect, the cause of the cause itself, and the effect of the effect itself, favour us. 46

Who himself is also the effect, which is the effect of the effect of the effect, and who has become the effect of that effect, I bow to him.¹³ 47

Who is the cause of the cause, and the cause of the cause of that cause, and is the cause of all these causes—I bow to that lord of gods. 48

The enjoyer and the enjoyed, the creator and the creation, the deed and the doer—I bow to that highest state. 49

That highest state of Viṣṇu consists of purest understanding and is unending, unborn, undying, undecaying, unmanifest and unchanging. 50

I bow to that highest state of Viṣṇu, which is neither gross nor subtle, but lies beyond description and is forever pure. 51

The power to create all things abides in one ten-thousandth part of one ten-thousandth part of that being in the form of the Absolute supreme. I bow to that undecaying entity. 52

Neither gods, nor sages, nor I, nor Śiva know that state that is the ultimate condition of the highest lord, Viṣṇu. 53

13 The solution to this riddle is as follows: according to the commentator, the six effects referred to here in order are primal substance (*prakṛti*), Greatness (*mahat*), individuation (*abamkāra*), the primal elements (*bhūta*), the cosmic egg and progenitors Brahmā, Dakṣa and the others. The idea is that Viṣṇu is all these.

That indestructible state, which ever-striving ascetics perceive in the syllable *Om*, and which is the destroyer of both merit and demerit, is the highest state of Viṣṇu that should be contemplated. 54

That is the highest state of Viṣṇu, the deity whose powers are at the heart of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and before whom nothing else existed. 55

Universal Lord who is at the heart of everything, who is everything, the everlasting refuge of everything—favour us, your devotees, Viṣṇu, and reveal yourself. 56

Parāśara:

Hearing Brahmā's supplication, the thirteen deities also bowed and said, 'Favour us and reveal yourself. 57

We bow down to that highest state of yours, which even Brahmā cannot comprehend. You are the domicile of the world, all-pervasive and imperishable.' 58

After Brahmā and the gods had spoken, all the heavenly sages, led by Bṛhaspati, said: 59

'The primal sacrifice, primal and praiseworthy spirit, born before the first of beings: we bow to him, creator of the world's creator, beyond description. 60

Lord, you are the master of all that's been and all that is to be, you embody the sacrifice and are undying; favour all those who bow to you and show yourself to us. 61

Here is Brahmā, and here is three-eyed Śiva accompanied by the Rudras. Pūṣan is here with all the Ādityas, as is Agni and the fire gods. 62

These are the Aśvins and Vasus, and these, the hosts of Maruts. All the Sādhyas are here as well. These are the gods and this, their sovereign, Indra. 63

Routed by the Daitya army, they bow deeply, protector. All these hosts of gods have come for your protection.' 64

Parāśara:

Thus praised, Maitreya, the holy bearer of conch and discus, the highest lord, appeared before them. 65

Beholding the bearer of these weapons of incomparable appearance, a mass of splendour and magnificence, 66

Having first bowed down, the reverent deities' eyes were filled with anxious tears and, led by Brahmā, grandsire of the world, they praised lotus-eyed Viṣṇu. *67*

The deities:

We bow to you again and again, lord of all. You are Brahmā and Śiva, who wields the bow Pināka. You are Indra, Agni, purifying Wind, Varuṇa, Savitṛ and Yama. You are the Vasus, Maruts, Sādhyas and the hosts of Viśvedevas. *68*

You, Lord, are indeed this host of deities that has come before you, creator of the world, because you are everywhere. *69*

You are the sacrifice, the cry of *vaśat*, the syllable *Om*, lord of creation, knowledge and knower. You are at the heart of everything, and all the world consists of you. *70*

Defeated by the Daityas, we're miserable and come to you for refuge, Viṣṇu, so favour us. You are at the heart of everything. Please defend us with your might. *71*

Until a being comes to you for refuge, dispeller of all impurities, they'll have pain and longing, delusion and unhappiness. *72*

You are grace itself, so be gracious to us, your devotees. With power arising from all your energy, protector, protect us. *73*

Churning of the Ocean of Milk

Parāśara:

Thus praised by the reverent immortals, Lord Hari, creator of the universe, whose eyes were filled with grace, addressed them: *74*

The Lord:

I'll restore your energy, deities, and tell you what to do. *75*

In collaboration with the Daityas, cast every kind of healing herb into the Milky Ocean, take the sacred mountain Mandara as your churning-stick and the nāga Vāsuki as the cord with which to turn it. Then, with my help, you deities will churn forth the nectar of immortality. *76*

First speak kindly to the Daityas in this regard, and tell them they'll receive an equal portion from this shared labour. *77*

By drinking nectar from the churning of the ocean, they'll gain power and immortality. *78*

But I'll ensure your enemies, you thirteen deathless gods, receive no nectar and gain nothing from their efforts. *79*

Parāśara:

Thus addressed by Viṣṇu, god of gods, all the deities made a compact with the Daityas and set about the churning of the nectar. *80*

The deities, Daityas and Dānavas gathered varied herbs and cast them on the waters of the Milky Ocean, pure and splendid like the clouds in autumn. *81*

Taking Mount Mandara as their churning-stick and using Vāsuki as the cord, they then began to churn the nectar vigorously, Maitreya. *82*

Viṣṇu sent the assembled gods to the tail of Vāsuki, and the Daityas to the fore part of that serpent's body. *83*

Scorched by fiery blasts from Vāsuki's hood, best of sages, all the Daityas lost their vigour and grew weak. *84*

But the deities at the serpent's tail were refreshed by rain that fell from clouds whipped up by gusts of breath from Vāsuki's maw. *85*

In the middle of the Milky Ocean, Lord Hari himself in the form of a tortoise served as a support for Mount Mandara as it turned, great sage. *86*

Taking a second form among the gods, the bearer of the mace and discus drew on that serpent king and, in yet another form, he did the same among the Daityas. *87*

Keśava ascended to the mountain top in third gigantic form, Maitreya, invisible to both gods and Daityas. *88*

With one portion of his energy, Hari sustained the serpent king and, with another, reinforced the deities. *89*

As the gods and Dānavas churned the ocean, there first arose the sacred cow Surabhi, source of all milk, worshipped by the deities. *90*

Both gods and Dānavas were delighted, sage, their minds held captive and their eyes agleam. *91*

When next the goddess of wine, Vāruṇī, arose, her eyes rolling with drunkenness, the siddhas in the heavens asked themselves, 'What's this?!' *92*

From the Milky Ocean as it turned, there then appeared the Pārijāta tree, filling all the worlds with perfume and delighting the deities' womenfolk. 93

And next a marvellous host of apsaras, endowed with beauty, nobility and virtue, Maitreya, emerged from the Milky Ocean. 94

The cool-rayed moon that next came forth was seized by Śiva, and the nāgas took the poison arising from the ocean. 95

Finally, the gods' physician, the white-clad deity Dhanvantari himself, appeared with a jar of nectar. 96

The hearts of all those Daityas and Dānavas were filled at once with joy and they exulted, Maitreya, along with all the sages. 97

From the milk then arose the goddess Śrī, radiant with beauty, standing on an open lotus, with another in her hand. 98

Great sages filled with joy then praised her with the paean called *Śrī-sūkta*. 99

Gandharvas with Viśvāvasu at their head sang before her, brahmin, as hosts of *apsaras* led by Ghṛtācī danced. 100

Gaṅgā and the other rivers came forward to bathe her with their waters. The guardian elephants of four quarters brought pure water in golden vessels and poured it on the goddess, sovereign of all the worlds. 101

The Milky Ocean, appearing as a deity, offered her a garland of fresh waterlilies, and the gods' own artificer, Viśvakarman, crafted jewellery to adorn her. 102

Clad in heavenly wreathes and garments, bathed and wearing jewels, Śrī pressed herself to Hari's bosom while all the gods looked on. 103

The deities, observed by Lakṣmī as she clung to Hari's bosom, Maitreya, attained at once the highest state of bliss. 104

But the Daityas led by Vipracitti, shunned by Viṣṇu and ignored by Lakṣmī, blessed sage, descended into deep despair. 105

Those mighty Daityas, brahmin, then seized the pitcher with the nectar from the hands of Dhanvantari. 106

But Viṣṇu, appearing in a female form, tricked them with an apparition. Seizing back the pitcher from the demons, he returned it to the gods. 107

Indra and the hosts of gods then drank that nectar, but the Daityas, wielding weapons, assailed them without mercy. 108

As the mighty gods had drunk the draft, they destroyed the demon army, which was scattered in all directions and fled to the lower realm of Pātāla. 109

Then the deities, filled with joy, bowed to Viṣṇu, bearer of the discus, conch and mace, and ruled once more the realm of Triviṣṭapa. 110

The sun of shining brilliance resumed his usual course, best of sages, and the other luminaries proceeded on their proper paths. 111

The lovely light of sacred fires blazed brightly, and the minds of every being turned once more to virtue. 112

All three worlds now prospered, best of brahmins, and mighty Indra, chief of thirteen deities, regained his splendour. 113

Seated on his lion throne, Indra, having gained again the threefold worlds and ruling over the gods once more, praised the goddess who holds a lotus in her hand. 114

Indra praises Lakṣmī

Indra:

I bow to you, Śrī, mother of the world, born from a lotus, with eyes like wakeful waterlilies, pressed to Viṣṇu's bosom. 115

You are success personified. You are the cries of *svadhā* and *svābhā*. You are the nectar that purifies the world. You are the twilight at dawn and dusk, prosperity, faith and wisdom. You are Sarasvatī, the deity of speech. 116

You are knowledge of the sacrifice, knowledge that is great and secret, fairest goddess, and the knowledge of the self that yields the prize of liberation. 117

You are logic, the threefold Vedas, the professions and the art of governance. This world is filled with all your forms, both mild and wrathful, goddess. 118

Who, apart from you, goddess, dwells in the bosom of the god of gods, the embodiment of all the sacrifice, the object of ascetics' meditation, the bearer of the mace? 119

Bereft of you, all three worlds were on the brink of ruin, goddess, but now you've rescued them. 120

Whenever you are looking on, goddess of good fortune, men will always have a wife, sons, a house, companions, sustenance, money and all the rest. 121

Health, power, victory and happiness, goddess, aren't hard to find for those on whom you cast your gaze. 122

You are the mother of every being and Hari god of gods their sire. You and Viṣṇu, mother, pervade this world of moving and unmoving things. 123

Don't forsake our storehouse, byre, our home, our goods, our bodies or our wives—you, who confers purity on everything. 124

Don't forsake my sons, my circle of companions, my cattle or adornments—you, whose place is in the bosom of lordly Viṣṇu. 125

Those whom you reject, stainless goddess, are bereft at once of goodness, truth and purity and of the virtues like morality and the rest. 126

Under your gaze, even the wicked are filled at once with every wished-for quality, including morality, and their kinsfolk prosper. 127

Under your gaze, goddess, a person becomes praiseworthy, virtuous, wealthy, noble, wise, courageous and victorious. 128

But when you, supporter of the world, beloved of Viṣṇu, turn your face away, a person's entire store of virtues starting with morality is lost at once. 129

Even the tongue of Brahmā can't describe your virtues. Favour us, lotus-eyed goddess, and never forsake us. 130

Parāśara:

Śrī, abiding in all beings, thus praised, was perfectly delighted, brahmin, and replied to Indra, deity of a hundred sacrifices, while all the other gods attended. 131

Śrī:

Indra, king of gods, your song has pleased me. Ask for anything you desire, for I am here to grant your wish. 132

Indra:

If you'll grant my wish, goddess, and if I'm worthy of such a favour, then never forsake this threefold world. Let this be my first request. 133

Never forsake the person who lauds you with this song, ocean-born goddess. Let this be my second wish. 134

Śrī:

I'll not forsake the threefold worlds, Indra, chief of thirteen gods. I grant this favour as I'm pleased with the adoration of your song. 135

Likewise, I'll never turn my back on one who lauds me with this paean at dawn and dusk. 136

Parāśara:

That's how the blessed goddess Śrī, pleased with Indra's song of praise, Maitreya, granted two wishes to the king of gods in former times. 137

Śrī was originally born the daughter of Bhṛgu and Khyāti and arose again from the ocean when the gods and demons churned the nectar. 138

When Janārdana, master of the world and god of gods, manifests on earth, Śrī arises as his consort. 139

Later, when Hari was born the son of Aditi in the form of a dwarf, Śrī was born as Padmā, and when he was born as Paraśurāma, Bhṛgu's scion, she was born as Dharaṇī. 140

When he appeared as Rāma, scion of Raghu, she was Sītā. When he was Kṛṣṇa, she was Rukmiṇī, and during the other manifestations of Viṣṇu, she was always his companion. 141

When he appears as a deity, she also takes a heavenly form, and when he appears in mortal form, she always does the same; Śrī adopts a form to complement that of Viṣṇu. 142

Prosperity will never wane for three generations in the house of one who hears or recites this account of Lakṣmī's birth. 143

Misfortune, the source of woe, sage, never falls on homes in which this song of Śrī is sung. 144

This is the answer to your question, brahmin, as to how Śrī, previously born as Bhṛgu's daughter Satī, arose from the Milky Ocean. 145

Calamity will never visit those who recite this song in praise of Lakṣmī daily, as it's the key to all good fortune, and originated with the deities led by Indra. 146

So ends Chapter Nine in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāna.

10. Descendants of the first patriarchs and Dakṣa's daughters

Maitreya:

You've told me everything I asked about, great sage, but tell me more about creation. How did Bhṛgu beget offspring, for a start? 1

Parāśara:

Just as Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī was born to Bhṛgu and Khyāti, they also had two sons, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ.¹⁴ 2

Two daughters of great Mount Meru, Āyati and Niyati, became the wives of Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ, and each one bore a son, 3

Prāṇa and Mṛkaṇḍu, respectively. The sage Mārkaṇḍeya was descended from the latter. Mṛkaṇḍu also had a son named Vedaśiras, but now you'll hear about the son of Prāṇa: 4

Prāṇa's son was Dyutimant, and his son was Rājavant, fortunate sage. The lengthy lineage of Bhārgavas were his descendants. 5

Marīci's wife, Saṃbhūti, bore Paurṇamāsa, and Virajas and Parvata were that great being's two sons. 6

I'll tell you more about them when I describe this lineage in more detail, brahmin. Aṅgiras's wife, Smṛti, bore daughters, Sinīvālī, Kuhū, Rākā and Anumati.¹⁵ 7

Atri's wife, Anasūyā, had three pure sons, Soma, Durvāsas and the ascetic Dattātreyā. 8

Pulastya's wife, Prīti, had a son Dattoli, who, in Svāyaṃbhuva's reign, was previously born as Agastya. 9

Kardama, Arvarīvant and Sahiṣṇu were the three sons born to Kṣamā, wife of the patriarch Pulaha. 10

Kratu's wife, Sannati, gave birth to sixty thousand Vālakhilya sages who retained their semen, and were no bigger than your thumb, but each had the energy of the blazing sun. 11

14 Bhṛgu, Marīci, Aṅgiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu, mentioned in these following verses, are all the 'mind-born' sons of Brahmā.

15 These are phases of the moon.

Vasiṣṭha's seven sons were born to Ūrjā: 12

Rajas, Gotra, Ūrdhvaḃāhu, Savana, Anagha, Sutapas and Śukra, all of whom were stainless sages. 13

Brahmā's first-born son, the fire god Agni, also known as Abhimānin, had three sons of brilliant energy with Svāhā, brahmin: 14

Pāvaka, Pavamāna and Śuci who lived on water. 15

Together they had another forty-five descendants. Along with their father and his three sons, they were known together as the Vahnaya fire gods. 16

They say the Vahnayas are forty-nine in all. 17

These patriarchs whom I've described to you, brought forth by Brahmā, include both Agniṣvāttas who maintained no sacrificial fires, and the Barhiṣads, who did. 18

Svadhā bore the Vahnayas two daughters, Menā and Dhāriṇī, brahmin, both ascetics who expounded on the Vedas. 19

These two were blessed with highest knowledge and every noble virtue. 20

Recalling this account of Dakṣa's daughters' offspring, a faithful person never remains childless. 21

So ends Chapter Ten in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

11. The birth of Dhruva

Parāśara:

I've spoken of Priyavrata and Uttānapāda, Manu Svāyaṃbhuva's noble and heroic sons. 1

One of these, Uttānapāda, had a favourite wife, Suruci, who had a son, Uttama, on whom his father doted, brahmin. 2

King Uttānapāda had a second wife, Sunīti, whom he didn't love so deeply, but she also bore a son, named Dhruva. 3

The king was seated on his throne one day when Dhruva saw his brother Uttama nestled in his father's lap and tried to climb up too. 4

Because Uttama's mother, Suruci, was watching, the king discouraged Dhruva, although the lad had come to him so eagerly. 5

When Suruci saw her rival's son clambering on his father's lap where Uttama was sitting, she spoke these words to him: 6

‘Why hanker after things you cannot have, dear child? Don't you know that you were born from another mother, not from me? You want a thing that's just for Uttama, who's special. 7

It's true that you're a prince also, but you are not my child. 8

This throne is just for princes like Uttama, my son. Don't trouble yourself on its account. 9

Why have such hopes for things that cannot be, as if you were my boy? Don't you understand Sunīti is your mother?' 10

Parāśara:

After Dhruva heard what Uttama's mother said, brahmin, the angry child then left his father and retreated to his mother's chambers. 11

When Sunīti saw her furious son, his lower lip atremble, Maitreya, she placed him on her lap and spoke these words to him: 12

Sunīti:

Who's made you angry, darling boy? Who's upset you? Who offends your father by hurting your feelings so? 13

Parāśara:

Hearing this, Dhruva told his mother all that proud Suruci had said in the presence of the king. 14

When her son relayed all this, heavy-hearted Sunīti groaned, her eyes ablaze with angry sighs. The miserable woman made this reply: 15

Sunīti:

What Suruci said is true. You're not so privileged, my son. The rivals of more fortunate folk would never speak like that, dear boy. 16

Don't be upset, my love. Who can undo the deeds of previous lives, and who can hold you to account for deeds as yet undone? 17

One who's blessed with a royal throne and umbrella, excellent horses and fine elephants—these are his alone. Remember this and calm yourself, my boy. 18

On account of merit earned in former lifetimes, the king takes great delight (*suruci*) in Suruci, but others like me who are not so lucky are his wives in name alone. 19

Her son Uttama is blessed with heaps of merit, but you, my son, Dhruva, were not born to privilege. 20

But don't be sad, my boy. The wise are always happy with their lot. 21

If you're really pained by what Suruci said, then try to win some merit, which will bring you all rewards. 22

Be polite, virtuous, friendly and kind to animals, for just as water flows downhill, good fortune comes to those who earn it. 23

Dhruva:

Mother, the words you've spoken to comfort me find no place within my heart, which was broken by her insults. 24

I'll strive to reach that highest, peerless state, honoured by all the worlds. 25

Suruci is the royal favourite and, although I'm not her son, you'll see my glory, mother, even though I lay inside your womb. 26

She bore my brother Uttama in her belly, so let him have the throne our father gave him. That's how matters ought to be. 27

I don't desire a place that's promised to another. Through my efforts, mother, I want a state that even father hasn't reached. 28

Dhruva is instructed by the sages

Parāśara:

So saying, Dhruva left his mother's rooms and left the city for a grove beyond the walls. 29

There he saw the Seven Sages, who'd arrived before him, seated on their deer-skin cloaks spread upon the ground. 30

The prince duly greeted them, bowed respectfully and, while stooping with humility, addressed them. 31

Dhruva:

Best of sages, know me to be Uttānapāda's son, born to Sunīti. I've come to you because I'm disenchanted with the world. 32

The sages:

Prince, you're just a boy of four or five. There cannot yet be any reason for your disillusion. ³³

You've no cause for worry while your royal father lives. We can't foresee that you will want for anything, dear boy. ³⁴

You don't look sick. What's causing your unhappiness? If there's a problem, you should tell us. ³⁵

Parāśara:

Dhruva then repeated Surūci's words and, hearing this, the sages said to one another, ³⁶

'Aha! Even though he's just a child, he's got real warrior spirit. His irritation at his mother's rival's words hasn't left his heart. ³⁷

Come, come, you warrior's son. Tell us, if you like, what you plan to do on account of disenchantment. ³⁸

Tell us what we can do to help. You're clearly very bright, and we see you have something that you want to say.' ³⁹

Dhruva:

I don't want riches or a kingdom, best of brahmins. I only want to know that state that none has reached before. ⁴⁰

Tell me, best of sages, what I must do to reach that situation, which is superior to all others. ⁴¹

Marīci:

That foremost state cannot be reached by those who do not praise Govinda. You must therefore venerate the everlasting one. ⁴²

Atri:

One with whom Janārdana, highest of the high, the primal spirit, is pleased, will reach the everlasting state. I speak the truth. ⁴³

Aṅgiras:

Worship eternal, changeless Govinda, within whom all this world abides, if you wish to reach that highest situation. ⁴⁴

Pulastya:

A person who has venerated Hari, the highest Absolute, the supreme abode, who is both supreme and Absolute, reaches liberation, even though it's difficult to attain. 45

Kratu:

Janārdana is the spirit of the sacrifice when a ritual is performed, and the highest spirit reached through yoga practice. When he is pleased, what is unattainable? 46

Pulaha:

After Indra praised the universal lord, he attained the highest state of sovereignty. You must also worship Viṣṇu, lord of sacrifices, you who are loyal to your vows. 47

Vasiṣṭha:

When Viṣṇu is venerated, you'll obtain your heart's desires, dear boy, even that state that is higher than the highest in all three worlds. 48

Dhruva:

As I bow before you, you've told me that the deity must be worshipped. Now tell me which prayer I should offer to gratify that being, 49

And tell me how to venerate the greatest lord, kind and gracious sages. 50

The sages:

Prince, you deserve to hear from us exactly how the praise of Viṣṇu is undertaken by those who are devoted to it. 51

First, you should rid your mind of all external worries. Next, you should fix your thoughts on the god in whom the world abides. 52

When your mind is focused on that single entity, conscious of the fact that you consist of the deity and holding yourself firm, prince, you should then recite this mantra that you'll hear from us: 53

'Om. I bow to Vāsudeva, who takes the forms of Brahmā born from the golden egg, Spirit, Matter and the Unseen element, and whose essential nature is pure knowledge.' 54

Because Manu, Lord Svāyaṃbhava, your grandsire, recited this mantra in former times, Janārdana was gratified by him. 55

The deity granted him all the wealth that he desired, unequalled in all three worlds. You should also please Govinda with continual recitation of this mantra. 56

So ends Chapter Eleven in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

12. The trials of Dhruva

Parāśara:

Hearing this, Maitreya, the prince bowed deeply to the sages and departed from the forest. 1

Thinking what he had to do, brahmin, Dhruva proceeded to the sacred ford called Madhu on the Yamunā River's banks. 2

It's known in all the world as Madhu's Forest, because a Daitya of that name had once resided there. 3

It's where Śatrughna slew Madhu's son, the mighty rākṣasa Lavaṇa, and built the city known as Madhurā. 4

At that sacred ford, which removes all sins, Dhruva undertook austerities in Hari's presence, god of gods. 5

As instructed by Marīci and the other sages, Dhruva contemplated Viṣṇu, lord of all the deities, abiding in his heart. 6

While Dhruva set his mind on nothing else, brahmin, Lord Hari, who occupies all creation, pervaded Dhruva's being. 7

With Viṣṇu dwelling in his ascetic heart, Maitreya, the earth, support of all creation, could no longer bear its burden. 8

When Dhruva stood on his left foot, half the world sank beneath him, and when he stood on his right foot, the other half then sank as well. 9

When he stood on just one toe, brahmin, the whole world with all its mountains shook. 10

The rivers and oceans trembled, great sage, and the gods were deeply troubled. 11

The deities known as Yāmas were most alarmed, Maitreya, and, having consulted Indra, set out to disrupt Dhruva's meditation. 12

The anxious Kūṣmāṇḍa demigods, taking various forms and accompanied by their king, great sage, also tried to break his concentration. 13

They created an illusion of Sunīti Dhruva's mother, who stood in tears before him, weeping piteously, 14

'Son, son, stop this cruel penance at the cost of your body. I only conceived you by persevering with much hope. 15

Don't forsake me—miserable, alone and vulnerable—because of something that my rival said, my dear. You're my refuge and I have no other. 16

You're only five years old, and these are terrible austerities. Turn your mind away from this foolish, fruitless whim. 17

Now's the time for toys, and later you can go to school. Then comes the age for lots of fun. Only after that comes penance. 18

Now's the time for toys for a child like you, son, but you're wasting it in austerities. How could you enjoy such self-destruction? 19

Your first duty is to be nice to me. Life's a series of stages and of duties. Don't follow this delusion. Stop this nonsense. 20

If you don't give up austerities now, my dear, I'll kill myself before your very eyes!' 21

Parāśara:

But Dhruva's mind was fixed on Viṣṇu, and, even though his eyes were open, he didn't see her tearful lamentations. 22

'Son, son! Frightful demons wielding weapons are gathering in this awful forest. We must flee at once!' 23

With these words, she ran away and, at that very moment, rākṣasas appeared, holding frightful weapons and belching wreaths of flame. 24

Those night-ranging demons roared their terrible roars before the prince and waved their glinting weapons. 25

Jackals by the hundred with flaming maws howled to terrify the boy, but he remained most perfectly absorbed in yoga. 26

'Kill him, kill him! Chop him up, chop him up! Eat him, eat him!' cried those demons of the night. 27

Rākṣasas with heads of lions, camels and crocodiles made all sorts of cries to frighten that young prince. 28

But neither demons, roars, nor jackals, nor the weapons impinged on Dhruva's senses, as his mind was fixed on Govinda alone. 29

With singular concentration, the prince perceived nothing other than Viṣṇu himself abiding in his heart. 30

When all these phantoms disappeared, the deities, alarmed by failure, grew even more concerned. 31

Worried by Dhruva's austerities, they went in a group to Hari, the beginningless and endless origin of the world and refuge of all tormented beings who seek it. 32

The deities:

God of gods, protector of the world, highest lord and ultimate spirit: we're worried by Dhruva's austerities and have come for your protection. 33

Just as the hare-marked moon waxes day by day, so do his austerities increase his power, Lord. 34

We fear the practices of Uttānapāda's son and come to you for refuge, Janārdana. Please make him stop. 35

We do not understand his purpose—to be like Indra or the sun? Does he want to be the equal of the god of wealth, the lord of oceans or the moon? 36

Favour us, Lord, take this thorn from our hearts and cause Uttānapāda's son to abandon his austerities. 37

The Lord:

Dhruva has no desire to be like Indra, the sun, Kubera or Varuṇa, gods, and I'll grant his wish in full. 38

Return to your own realms at leisure, gods, but do not worry, as I'll cause that boy whose heart is set on austerities to desist. 39

Parāśara:

Thus addressed by the god of gods, the thirteen deities bowed and set out for their respective realms, led by Indra, deity of a hundred sacrifices. 40

Then Lord Hari, heart of all, pleased that Dhruva was absorbed in him, appearing to the boy in four-armed form, spoke these words: 41

The Glorious Lord:

Well done, son of Uttānapāda! I'm pleased with your austerities, and I've come to grant your wish. Ask for anything you desire, as you've upheld your vows. 42

I'm pleased with you because your mind is set on me alone, excluding other matters. You may therefore ask your dearest wish. 43

Dhruva praises Viṣṇu*Parāśara:*

Hearing these words spoken by the god of gods, the boy opened his eyes and beheld Hari before him, just as he'd perceived him in his meditation. 44

Seeing the imperishable being with discus, conch, mace, bow and brilliant sword, and wearing a diadem on his head, Dhruva pressed his forehead to the ground. 45

The hairs on the prince's limbs arose at once and, filled with awe, he set his heart on praising the god of gods. 46

'What should I say to praise him? What words can express my adoration?' Such thoughts filled Dhruva's mind as he took refuge in the deity. 47

Dhruva:

Lord, if you're truly pleased with my austerities, then grant my wish: I only want to praise you. 48

But how can a child like me adore you, Lord, whose state is unknown even to Brahmā and to those who comprehend the Vedas? 49

This heart of mine is filled with faith in you, highest Lord, and is ready to worship at your feet; only grant me wisdom to do so. 50

Parāśara:

With the tip of his conch shell, the universal Lord Govinda touched the son of Uttānapāda, best of brahmins, whose palms were joined respectfully. 51

The prince's face began at once to shine and, bowing with devotion, he praised the eternal basis of all creation. 52

Dhruva:

I bow to him who takes the form of earth, water, fire, wind, sky, mind, intellect, primal elements and matter. 53

I bow to him whose form is pure, subtle and all-pervading; the spirit which transcends elemental substance; the spirit at the heart of every quality; 54

The eternal one who lies beyond creation, starting with the earth, the sense-objects starting with scent, the senses starting with intellect and spirit as well as matter. 55

I take refuge in that pure form of yours, which is the Absolute, creation itself, supreme Lord, and master of the universe. 56

I bow to that changeless form contemplated by ascetics and known as the Absolute because of its greatness and because it shapes the world—you who are at the heart of everything. 57

The all-pervasive being with a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet extends ten inches beyond the furthest limit of the universe. 58

You, supreme spirit, are all that was and all that is to be. From you arise Virāj, Svarāj, Samrāj, and from you arises Adhipūruṣa.¹⁶ 59

You extend above, below and beyond the universe. All this is born from you, as is all that has existed and all that's still to come. 60

This whole world is in you when you take this form. The sacrifice with all the offerings, the clarified butter spotted with curds and both kinds of sacrificial animals arose from you. 61

The *Ṛg* and *Sāma Vedas* arose from you, the Vedic metres were born from you, and from you the *Yajur Veda* came. From you arose the horses and those animals which have no teeth in their upper jaw.¹⁷ 62

Cattle arose from you, and from you arose the goats, the sheep and deer. From your mouth arose the brahmins, and from your arms the kṣatriyas. 63

16 Authorities vary on the meaning of these four aspects of Viṣṣu. Wilson glosses them as follows: 1) Brahmānda, the material universe; 2) Brahmā the creator; 3) Manu, the ruler of the period; and 4) the supreme or abiding period (Wilson 1961: 78, fn. 3).

17 The front part of the upper jaw of cows, sheep, goats, camels, buffalo and deer is a modified dental pad.

The vaiśyas were born from your thighs, and the śūdras from your feet. The sun arose from your eyes, the wind from your breath and the moon from your mind. 64

Breath was born from your inner channel and fire arose from your mouth. From your navel came the sky, and heaven was born from your head. The ten directions arose from your ears, the earth was born of your feet. All this arose from you! 65

Just as a mighty banyan tree is inherent in a tiny seed, at the time of its destruction, all the world inheres in you in that same way. 66

Just as a banyan sprouts from that seed and grows both tall and wide, so, too, does the world that you emit. 67

Just as a banana palm has no reality distinct from its trunk and leaves, in the same way, protector, Lord, you are no different from the universe that is seen to abide in you. 68

Unified consciousness, the source of joy, dwells as one with all within you, but the individual origins of pain and pleasure do not exist in you, as you are free from all these qualities. 69

I bow to you, both one and many, the essence of all beings. I bow to you, the cause of primary elements and the heart of all creation. 70

You are the Seen, Matter and Spirit. You are perceived as indestructible and as Virāj, Samrāj and Svarāj in the hearts of men. 71

You consist of all and exist in all. You *are* all. All this is a form of you and comes from you yet is separate from you. I bow to you at the heart of all. 72

You form the nature of everything, Lord of all, because you abide in all creation. But what's the use of saying this, when you know all that's in my heart? 73

You who are at the heart of everything, Lord of all creation, origin of all beings, you consist of everything and know the desire of every heart. 74

My heart's desire has been fulfilled by you, protector, as the austerities I undertook succeeded when I saw you, universal Lord. 75

Dhruva's wish

The Glorious Lord:

Your austerities have succeeded as you've beheld me, Dhruva, and the sight of me is never fruitless, prince. *76*

Make a wish, therefore, in accord with your heart's desire, as everything is possible for those to whom I manifest. *77*

Dhruva:

Lord, master of all creation, you abide in the heart of everything. Lord, how could my heart's desire remain unknown to you? *78*

Nevertheless, Lord of gods, I'll describe to you the single thing, most difficult to attain, that my stubborn heart desires. *79*

What, on the other hand, is difficult to attain when you are pleased, creator of the universe? With your blessing even mighty Indra enjoys the threefold worlds. *80*

On account of her arrogance, my mother's rival shouted that the royal throne was unsuited to a child born from another woman's womb. *81*

By your grace, I ask you, Lord, for that state, supporter of the world, higher than the highest of all, which endures forever. *82*

The Glorious Lord:

You will attain the state that you requested as you pleased me previously in another life, my boy. *83*

In former times, you were a brahmin whose mind was ever set on me alone. You served your mother and your father and did your duty. *84*

In time, you befriended a certain prince who partook in all those youthful pastimes and cut a dashing, handsome figure. *85*

Through your friendship with him, you saw his rare wealth and formed a wish to be a prince yourself. *86*

Then, in accordance with that desire, Dhruva, you were duly born a royal son in the lofty house of Uttānapāda. *87*

But birth in the lineage of Svāyambhuva, which for others is a blessing, *88*

Was not so good for you, my boy, which pleases me, as those who worship me will win liberation without delay. *89*

What's a place in heaven to one whose heart is set on me, my son? In a place above the threefold worlds, with my blessing, you will surely be the pivot of all the stars and planets, ⁹⁰

Beyond the sun and moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and the other luminaries, the stars, ⁹¹

And the Seven Sages without exception, as well as the deities in their celestial carriages. I'll give you, Dhruva, a station above all these.¹⁸ ⁹²

Some gods endure for all four ages, some for a Manvantara, but I'll give you the lifespan of one whole aeon. ⁹³

Your mother, Sunīti, will also become a brilliant star always dwelling in a mansion by your side. ⁹⁴

All those who praise you with deep devotion at dawn and dusk will win great merit. ⁹⁵

Parāśara:

So it was in former times that Janārdana, protector of the world and god of gods, granted Dhruva's wish, and this wise sage is now forever fixed (*dhruvam*) in that position. ⁹⁶

Seeing Dhruva's greatness, pride and wealth, Uśanas, preceptor of gods and demigods, sang these verses: ⁹⁷

'Ah! Such was the power of his austerities. Ah! Such was the reward of his great penance, that Dhruva stands above the Seven Sages. ⁹⁸

And this is Dhruva's mother, Sunīti, also called Sūnṛtā. Who on earth can describe her majesty? ⁹⁹

She who carried Dhruva in her womb now occupies a lofty station, resort of all three worlds, and attains the highest state of Viṣṇu.' ¹⁰⁰

Those who always honour Dhruva's rise to heaven will be free from all misdeeds, while dwelling with joy in paradise. ¹⁰¹

Such a being will never slip from his place in heaven or on earth and, filled with every happiness, will lead a long and joyous life. ¹⁰²

So ends Chapter Twelve in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

18 The Seven Sages are the stars of Ursa Major. Dhruva, whose name means 'fixed' or 'stationary', became the Pole Star.

13. Dhruva's descendants

Parāśara:

Dhruva had two sons, Śiṣṭi and Bhavya. Bhavya's son was Śaṃbhu. Śiṣṭi had five pure sons with his wife, Succhā: 1

Ripu, Ripuñjaya, Vipra, Vṛkala and Vṛkatejas. Ripu's son with his wife, Bṛhatī, was the glorious Cākṣusa. 2

Cākṣusa had a son, Manu, with his wife, Puṣkariṇī, a descendant of Varuṇa and daughter of the great patriarch Vīraṇa. 3

Manu had ten mighty sons with his wife, Naḍvalā, peerless ascetic, daughter of the patriarch Vairāja. 4

Kuru, Puru, Śatadyumna, Tapasvin, Satyavant, Śuci, Agniṣṭut, Atirātra and Sudyumna—these nine, with mighty Abhimanyu as the tenth, were born to Naḍvalā. 5

Kuru's wife, Āgneyī, had six brilliant sons: Aṅga, Sumanas, Khyāti, Kratu, Aṅgiras and Śibi. 6

Aṅga's wife, Sunīthā, had one son, Vena, whose right hand was massaged by the sages to bring forth a son. 7

When Vena's hand was massaged, sage, a son named Vainya arose from it, and became the king called Pṛthu. 8

It was he, in former times, who milked the earth for the benefit of his subjects. 9

Maitreya:

Why did seers massage Vena's hand, best of sages, leading to heroic Pṛthu's birth? 10

Parāśara:

A girl named Sunīthā, first-born daughter of Mṛtyu ('Death'), was given in marriage to Aṅga and then gave birth to Vena. 11

This son of Mṛtyu's daughter, Maitreya, born under his grandsire's evil sway, was wicked by his nature. 12

When Vena was anointed king by the best of sages, he proclaimed to the all world, 13

‘There shall be neither sacrifice, nor offerings, nor sacrificial gifts, for who apart from me, lord of the sacrifice and king, is fit to enjoy these rituals?’ 14

The sages came before the king, Maitreya, and, having paid respects, tried to soothe him with these words: 15

The sages:

Come, come, your majesty, listen to what we say to you for the benefit of your kingdom, your own wellbeing and for the greatest good of all your subjects. 16

We will worship Hari, the lord of gods and master of all sacrifices, with a ritual of long duration. May you enjoy good fortune! A portion of the fruit of that event will come to you. 17

Viṣṇu, spirit of the sacrifice, will be gratified by the ritual we conduct, sire, and will grant your every wish. 18

In those kingdoms where Hari, lord of sacrifices, is honoured with oblations, he grants those kings fulfillment of all desires, your majesty. 19

Vena:

Who is superior to me, and who is honoured apart from me? Who is this being known as Hari, whom you regard as lord of rites? 20

Brahmā, Janārdana, Śiva, Indra, Vāyu, Yama, the Sun, Agni, consumer of the offerings, Varuṇa, Dhātṛ, Pūṣan, the Earth and the Moon, who brings the night; 21

These and other deities, who both curse and bless, all abide in the person of the king. The king embodies all these gods. 22

Knowing this, you’ll do as I command. There shall be no sacrifice, brahmins, no gifts or offerings. 23

Just as women’s highest duty is to serve their husbands, brahmins, your duty is to carry out my wishes. 24

The sages:

Great king, command us to continue with the sacrifice so virtue won’t decline, as all the world depends on sacrificial offerings. 25

Parāśara:

Even though the best of sages gave Vena this advice and implored him many times, the wicked king ignored them. ²⁶

Then all the seers, filled with anger and indignation, said to one another, ‘This wicked ruler must be killed. He must be killed. ²⁷

Any wretch who denigrates the spirit of the sacrifice, the lord divine, who has no start or end, is unfit to rule the earth.’ ²⁸

So saying, the host of sages beat the king to death with *kuśa*-grass that had been purified with mantras, but as he’d insulted Viṣṇu, he was dead already. ²⁹

The sages later saw great clouds of dust billowing in all directions, brahmin. ‘What’s that?’ they asked the folk nearby. ³⁰

‘Now the kingdom has no king,’ they said, ‘those who suffer have turned to theft and are seizing others’ goods. ³¹

The clouds of dust you see, good sages, are raised by thieves who rush about while stealing people’s things.’ ³²

After consulting one another, all the sages tightly squeezed the dead king’s thigh to bring forth progeny, as he had died without a son. ³³

As they did so, a dwarfish man with flattened features, looking like a blackened stump, appeared from it.¹⁹ ³⁴

This being then asked the brahmins what he should do, to which they said, ‘Sit down—*niṣīda*.’ That’s why he’s called Niṣāda. ³⁵

His descendants are Niṣādas who inhabit the Vindhya mountains and are noted for their deeds of cruelty, tiger of a sage.²⁰ ³⁶

By these means, King Vena’s misdeeds were expunged, as Niṣādas came to shoulder them. ³⁷

Ṙṥthu saves the world

Those best of sages then began to squeeze the king’s right hand. ³⁸

19 I am following Wilson (1961) here. The word *kbarvāṭa* (‘flattened’) has presented great difficulties for commentators and scribes throughout the centuries. Wilson’s translation seems logical but is unattested.

20 Notably hunting, which is considered cruel.

And as they did so, Vena's son, the mighty ruler known as Pṛthu, appeared. His body blazed with its own light, shining like a second Agni. 39

At that moment, the primeval bow called Ājagava descended from the sky, along with heavenly shafts and armour. 40

Beings everywhere rejoiced at Pṛthu's birth. 41

Because Vena brought forth such a noble son, he was rescued from the hell realm known as Put by mighty Pṛthu and rose to heaven.²¹ 42

The Oceans and the Rivers came from all directions, bringing jewels and water for Pṛthu's consecration. 43

Lord Brahmā, grandsire of the world, the deities accompanied by Aṅgiras's descendants and beings mobile and immobile gathered from all sides for Vena's son's anointing. 44

When Brahmā saw that Pṛthu's right hand bore the discus mark, he recognised him as Viṣṇu's partial manifestation and was overjoyed. 45

(This sign of Viṣṇu marks the hand of every universal sovereign. Even the thirteen deities cannot thwart the rule of such a being.) 46

Pṛthu, Vena's mighty shining son, was anointed universal ruler in a rite performed by experts. 47

He gratified the subjects who'd been slighted by his father and, because of their affection (*anurāga*), the title 'king' (*rājan*) came into use. 48

The waters solidified for him when he went to cross the ocean, the mountains opened paths for him and his banner was never torn. 49

The earth untouched by ploughs bore crops, food appeared with just a thought, cows fulfilled each wish and honey dripped from every hollow. 50

As soon as Pṛthu was born, at the glorious sacrifice held by Brahmā, grandsire of the world, a wise bard (*sūta*) arose at the pressing (*sūti*) of the soma on the day that rite was held.²² 51

At that same great sacrifice, a gifted panegyrist was born, and the best of sages then addressed him and that bard: 52

21 This playful etymology suggests that the word for son, *putra*, means 'one who rescues (his father) from hell' (*put-trā*).

22 The *sūta* is the bard by whom, according to tradition, many works of Sanskrit literature are narrated. This etymology seeks to derive his name from the pressing of soma.

‘Praise this king, Pṛthu, the mighty son of Vena, for it’s your special role and he’s a worthy subject for your acclaim.’ 53

With folded palms, they then replied to all those brahmins, ‘The king was only born today, and his exploits are as yet unknown. 54

We haven’t witnessed his qualities, and his fame is yet to spread. Say which virtues should be eulogised.’ 55

The sages:

Praise this mighty universal sovereign for the deeds he will perform, and for his future qualities. 56

Parāśara:

Hearing this, King Pṛthu, filled with joy, exclaimed, ‘Because a person is commended for good qualities, the bard and the panegyrist will acclaim my virtues. 57

I shall therefore diligently practise all those virtues commended in their paean, 58

And I’ll avoid those things they say are best avoided.’ Such was the resolution of the king. 59

Then the sweet-voiced bard and panegyrist composed this paean in praise of Pṛthu’s future deeds, Vena’s sagacious son: 60

‘Truthful, generous and honest, this prudent king is patient with his allies, but remains the doughty bane of foe. 61

He knows virtue and is grateful, kind and gently spoken, bestowing honour where it’s due and undertaking sacrifices. He’s devout and cherishes the good. 62

This king fairly metes out justice to friend and foe alike.’ 63

Pṛthu then held in his heart the virtues thus praised by the bard and the panegyrist, and always acted in accordance with their words. 64

He then performed various major sacrifices, accompanied by generous donations, while protecting all the world. 65

In the absence of a ruler, plant life had perished, and the people, beset by hunger, approached the king. Asked by Pṛthu why they came, they replied as follows: 66

The subjects:

Your most excellent majesty, without a king, the Earth withheld all vegetation and, as a result, the entire population is heading to destruction, Lord of men. *67*

You provide subsistence and are our support; you are regarded as protector of the people. Give us, your famine-stricken subjects, some vegetables to live on. *68*

Parāśara:

The furious king took up the heavenly bow called Ājagava and some arrows, and set off searching for the Earth. *69*

But the Earth took the appearance of a cow and, filled with fear, she fled to Brahmā's heaven and other divine realms. *70*

Wherever that heavenly support of all creation went, there she saw the son of Vena with his weapon at the ready. *71*

The trembling Earth cried out to Pṛthu of great prowess, hoping to be spared his arrows. *72*

The Earth:

You're endeavouring to slay me, sire, but don't you know it's a dire sin to kill a female? *73*

Pṛthu:

When the death of a single evildoer yields security for many, then that death is meritorious. *74*

The Earth:

If you kill me for your subjects' sake, who'll support them, best of sovereigns? *75*

Pṛthu:

Having slain you with these arrows, Earth, who turned your back on my commands, I'll support my subjects through the power of my yoga. *76*

Parāśara:

At this, the Earth grew even more afraid, her every limb atremble, and, bowing down, she made the king this offer. *77*

The Earth:

All undertakings will succeed if proper steps are taken. I'll therefore tell you what to do, if only you are willing. 78

If your majesty desires, with my milk, I shall restore the vegetation that I'd allowed to wither. 79

For the welfare of your subjects, virtue's best defender, bestow on me a calf so I, affectionate mother that I am, may bring forth milk for him. 80

Level the surface of the world so I may cause my milk, which will become the source of finest vegetation, to flow in all directions. 81

Parāśara:

With his bow-tip, Vena's son then dragged the mountains by the hundreds and the thousands into massive heaps. 82

(Before he did so, the surface of the world was rough and undivided into villages or towns. 83

There were no crops of grain, nor cattle-rearing, nor ploughing, nor paths for merchants. All these began with Vena's son, Maitreya.) 84

The king deemed all the level places of the world fit for his subjects' habitations. 85

Before this time, people lived on roots and berries, but life grew hard when all the vegetation died. 86

Ṛṥthu gave the Earth a calf, which was in fact Lord Manu Svāyaṁbhuvā. From his desire to benefit his subjects, King Ṛṥthu then milked all kinds of grain from the Earth into his own two hands. 87

The people thrived on that nutrition, my dear, as they do today and always will. 88

Ṛṥthu gave the Earth the gift of life, and so became her father. That's why the Earth, support of every living thing, is known as Ṛṥthivī, 'Ṛṥthu's daughter'. 89

The deities, sages, Daityas, rākṣasas, mountains, gandharvas, nāgas, yakṣas, ancestral spirits and trees 90

All took a bowl and received some milk, sage. Each had their own specific calf and milker, the source of their vitality.²³ 91

This Earth—supporter, creator, bearer and nurturer of the world—was born from Viṣṇu’s sole. 92

Such was Pṛthu’s prowess, Vena’s mighty son, born to rule the world in former times, and who was known as *rājā* because he pleased (*rañjana*) his subjects. 93

One who tells this tale of Pṛthu’s birth will never endure the consequence of any sin. 94

This account of Pṛthu’s noble origin and prowess will always drive away the evil dreams of all who hear it. 95

So ends Chapter Thirteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

14. Pṛthu’s descendants

Parāśara:

Pṛthu had two heroic sons, Antardhi and Vādin. Antardhana’s wife, Śikhaṇḍinī, had a son, Havirdhāna. 1

Havirdhāna had six sons with his wife, Dhiṣaṇā, a descendant of Agni. They were Prācīnabarhis, Śukra, Gaya, Kṛṣṇa, Vṛja and Ajina. 2

Havirdhāna’s son holy Prācīnabarhis was an important patriarch and mighty ruler who caused the human race to multiply. 3

It was said that he placed sacrificial *kuśa*-grass (*barhis*) on the ground with its tips pointing east (*prācīna*), sage, and that’s why that mighty king was known in the world as Prācīnabarhis. 4

At the conclusion of severe austerities, Prācīnabarhis married Savarṇā, the daughter of the Ocean. 5

The Ocean’s daughter, Savarṇā, bore the king ten sons known as the Pracetasas, who mastered the science of archery. 6

Together they practised virtue and undertook great austerities, living in the waters of the ocean for ten thousand years. 7

23 As the original text is opaque here, I am guided by the commentary.

Maitreya:

Please explain, great sage, why the noble Pracetasas undertook austerities below the ocean's waters. 8

Parāśara:

Respecting the command of the lord of creation, Brahmā, their noble-minded father, Prācīnabarhis, told the Pracetasas that they needed progeny. 9

Prācīnabarhis:

Brahmā, god of gods, commanded me to raise the population, sons, and I've agreed to do so. 10

Therefore, to please me, sons, spare no effort in this regard and duly follow Brahmā's orders, which deserve respect. 11

Parāśara:

Hearing their father's words, those princes all agreed, sage, but asked a further question. 12

The Pracetasas:

Father, tell us exactly what we must do to raise the population. 13

Their father:

By worshipping Viṣṇu, who grants all wishes, a mortal will surely attain his goal. As there is no other way, what else can I tell you? 14

To raise the population, you must therefore worship Hari, Govinda, lord of all creation, if you want success. 15

The beginningless lord, the highest spirit, should always be revered by one who yearns for virtue, wealth, love or liberation. 16

In the beginning, Brahmā worshipped Hari, then made the world. When you've praised the everlasting lord, you'll raise the population. 17

Parāśara:

After Prācīnabarhis spoke, his ten sons, the Pracetasas, dived into the Milky Ocean, where they resolutely undertook austerities. 18

For ten thousand years, their minds were set on Nārāyaṇa, best of sages, the universal lord and refuge of the world. 19

There they remained, meditating solely on the deity and praising Hari, who grants the wishes of all who worship him. 20

Maitreya:

Repeat for me the wondrous song of praise the Pracetasas sang for Viṣṇu while they lived in the ocean's waters, best of sages. 21

Parāśara:

Now listen to the paean sung by the Pracetasas, Maitreya, who were in truth composed of Govinda, while living underwater long ago. 22

The Pracetasas praise Viṣṇu

The Pracetasas:

We bow to him whose eternal glory is the subject of all speech, the start and finish, the highest universal lord, 23

Who is primal light, incomparable, indivisible, unending and unlimited; the origin of all that moves and all that's static. 24

We bow to the formless one whose initial form is day, then night and twilight; the highest lord, who is Time itself. 25

We bow to him who, as the moon, is imbibed each day by gods and ancestors in the form of nectar, and is the life of all. 26

We bow to him who, as the sun, dispels the dark, burns bright, illuminates the sky with his own rays and is the source of heat and cold and rain. 27

We bow to him who, as the earth, is imbued with firmness, supports the world, is the realm of sound and all sensations and is all-pervading. 28

We bow with joy to blessed Hari in the form of water, which is the universal womb and seed of every living being. 29

We bow to Viṣṇu in the form of fire, which is the mouth of all the gods and ancestors, and which consumes the *havya* and *kavya* offerings. 30

We bow to the lord in the form of wind, existing in the body in five different modes, constant source of motion, whose origin is the sky. 31

We bow to him in the form of air, which constitutes the space between all beings and is endless, pure and formless. 32

We bow to the creator Kṛṣṇa, in the form of sensations such as sound, who is always the ultimate object of all the senses. 33

We bow to Hari, who in the form of senses always apprehends their objects, changing and unchanging, the root of understanding. 34

We bow to him in the form of intellect, at the heart of all, who carries to the mind that which the senses apprehend. 35

We bow to the endless being in whom all things abide, from whom all things arise, in whom all things dissolve, who is marked by primal nature. 36

We bow to that deity whose own form is the highest primal spirit, who is pure and has no qualities, but is misperceived to have them. 37

We bow to that supreme state of Viṣṇu, the highest Absolute, changeless, unborn, pure, unqualified and unsullied. 38

That state has neither length, coarseness, fineness, peer, affection, splendour, shape, passion nor movement. 39

It lies beyond space, touch, smell, taste, eyes and ears. It's unmoving, having neither voice, nor hands, nor mind. 40

It has neither name, lineage, comfort, glory, cause, fear, doubt, sleep nor waking. 41

Without passion, sound, death, decline or limit, nothing exists before or after Viṣṇu's highest state. 42

We bow to that state which has the quality of highest supremacy, which is in all beings but depends on none, and which exists beyond the range of tongue and eye. 43

Parāśara:

Thus praising Viṣṇu while contemplating him, the Pracetasas undertook austerities on the ocean floor for ten thousand years. 44

Lord Hari, complexioned like a fully opened azure lotus petal, was gratified and appeared before them underwater. 45

Seeing Viṣṇu mounted on Garuḍa, king of birds, the Pracetasas fell down before him, bowing their heads in reverence. 46

The lord then said to them, 'Ask for anything you desire, as I'm inclined to favour you and have come to grant your wish.' 47

The Pracetas, bowing before the wish-granting lord, reported that their father had instructed them to raise the population. 48

The deity allowed the boon they requested, then withdrew from sight. The Pracetas then left behind the waters of the ocean. 49

So ends Chapter Fourteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

15. The Pracetas, Māriṣā, the Ādityas and Prahlāda

Parāśara:

While the Pracetas were undertaking their austerities, the unprotected earth was overgrown with vegetation and the people suffered. 1

The winds had ceased to blow, the sky was filled with clouds and for ten thousand years folk could do no work. 2

The Pracetas, emerging from the ocean, saw all this and were enraged. From their mouths blew wind and fire born of their anger. 3

The wind uprooted trees and dried them out. The terrible fire then burned them, consuming all the vegetation. 4

Seeing the ruin of the forests with so little left behind, Soma, the regal deity of the moon, approached the patriarchs and said, 5

‘Don’t be angry, your majesties, and listen to my words. I’ll make a deal with you about these trees. 6

Because I’m able to foresee the future, with my light I raised this precious girl, the fair-faced daughter of the forest. 7

Māriṣā by name, she is indeed the offspring of the trees. Why don’t you marry this lucky girl, as she will doubtless bring about the increase of your race? 8

Māriṣā will bear a son with half your splendour and half of mine, and he’ll become the prudent patriarch known as Dakṣa. 9

Endowed with a part of me and blessed with your energy, he’ll blaze like fire, causing humanity to thrive. 10

Kaṇḍu and Pramlocā

In former times, there was a sage named Kaṇḍu, an outstanding Vedic expert, who undertook extreme austerities on the Gomatī River's pleasant banks. *11*

To distract him, Indra, king of gods, engaged a lovely apsaras named Pramlocā, and the sweetly smiling woman succeeded in diverting that sagacious man. *12*

Distracted by Pramlocā, Kaṇḍu lived with her for a hundred years or more in a valley on Mount Mandara's slopes, his heart engrossed in sensual pleasures. *13*

One day, Pramlocā said to that fortunate sage, 'I want to return to heaven. Look kindly on me, brahmin, and grant that I may leave.' *14*

After she had spoken, the sage, whose heart was ever set on her, replied, 'Just stay a few more days, my dear.' *15*

Thus addressed by that great sage, the slender girl spent another century enjoying herself with him. *16*

'Please permit me, master, to return to the realm of the thirteen gods,' she begged the sage, but again he begged her to remain. *17*

When another hundred years had passed, that fair-faced girl said with a bright and loving smile, 'Brahmin, I'm going back to heaven.' *18*

Hearing this, the sage embraced the apsaras with almond eyes. 'Stay a while,' said he, 'as you'll be gone so long, and your eyebrows are so lovely.' *19*

Fearing the sage's curse, fair-hipped Pramlocā stayed with him for another two hundred years or so. *20*

Again and again, the slender girl told the lucky sage that she was leaving for the home of Indra, king of gods, but he always talked her out of it. *21*

Still fearing the sage's curse, the respectful woman spoke sweetly and stayed with him, because she understood the pain of separation that lovers feel. *22*

While the best of sages enjoyed himself with Pramlocā by day and night, his love for her was constantly renewed and his heart was filled with passion. *23*

One day, the sage was hurrying from his hut and, as he did so, the splendid woman asked where he was going. *24*

‘The day is done, my dear, so I must perform my twilight rituals,’ he replied, ‘otherwise an essential rite will be neglected.’ 25

With a laugh, the cheerful girl replied to him, ‘You know all about virtue, but is just one day really done for you?’ 26

One day for you appears to last for many years, brahmin. Who wouldn’t be amazed by this? Please explain your meaning.’ 27

The sage:

This morning you came to this lovely riverbank, my dear. I saw you there, so slender, and you came back to my ashram. 28

Now it’s dusk and the day is done. Why are you laughing? Tell me truly. 29

Pramlocā:

It’s true I came at dawn, brahmin—there is no doubt of that. But many hundred years have passed since then! 30

Soma:

Then the brahmin, filled with consternation, asked the girl with almond eyes, ‘Tell me, timid one, how long have we been enjoying ourselves together?’ 31

Pramlocā:

Nine hundred and seven years, six months and three days. 32

The sage:

Is this the truth or some kind of joke, you lovely timid girl? I thought we’d spent a single day together. 33

Pramlocā:

How could I mislead you, brahmin, especially as you, a sage on virtue’s path, inquired of me. 34

Soma:

When the sage heard her explanation, princes, he cursed himself and cried, ‘Shame on me! Shame on me!’ 35

The sage:

‘My austerities have been wasted, my store of Vedic knowledge lost, and my judgement’s been impaired. Someone must have sent this woman to distract me. 36

I’d conquered my own impulses and was about to grasp the Absolute, which lies beyond the sixfold waves of pain. Curse that greatest evil, desire, which robbed me of my resolution! 37

All my vows, which would have yielded Vedic knowledge, have been stolen by a tryst that leads to hell.’ 38

Uttering these curses, the sage, who apprehended virtue, shouted at the apsaras, who sat nearby: 39

‘Get out, you wicked woman. You distracted me by making love, just as the king of gods intended. 40

I should burn you to ashes with the fire of my anger. On the other hand, like virtuous people, we took the seven steps of marriage and lived together as a couple. 41

You’ve done no wrong. Why should I be angry with you? It’s my own fault because I couldn’t curb my senses. 42

You wanted Indra’s favour and disrupted my austerities. Shame on you! You’re a bundle of distractions best avoided!’ 43

Soma:

While that sagacious brahmin abused the girl with the lovely waist, she began to sweat and tremble. 44

The poor lass shook as sweat rolled down her slender limbs. ‘Get out! Get out!’ the best of sages shouted angrily. 45

Thus abused by Kaṇḍu, the sky-going apsaras fled the ashram and, as she flew, the forest’s tender branches brushed away her perspiration. 46

As she passed from tree to tree, the delicate shoots that grew on each brushed against her sweaty limbs. 47

The child within her womb, which she’d conceived with Kaṇḍu, emerged from her limbs in the form of droplets, such as attend excitement. 48

The trees collected all the drops, and the wind combined them in a single body. I nurtured that body with my rays, and in this way the infant slowly grew. 49

That baby, begotten among the branches, became this fair-faced girl, Māriṣā. The trees now offer her to you, so set aside your anger. 50

Māriṣā, child of Kaṇḍu, brought forth by trees, is also daughter of the wind, of Pramlocā and of me, the Moon. 51

When holy Kaṇḍu's austerities had been reduced to nothing, best of princes, he retired to the lofty mountain known as Puruṣottama, abode of Viṣṇu. 52

There, the great ascetic stood, his arms above his head, praising Hari and reciting a prayer that encompasses the furthest reaches of the Absolute, princes, his heart set on the deity alone. 53

The Pracetasas:

We'd like to hear that sage's brilliant song of praise, which reached the Absolute's outer limits, which Kaṇḍu sang to worship heavenly Keśava. 54

Soma:

Viṣṇu is beyond the furthest limit, further than the furthest, higher than the highest and is the form of the utmost destination. He is the furthest reach of the Absolute, he is beyond the furthest limit, highest of the high, furthest of the far. 55

He is the cause of the universe and that cause's cause. He is that cause's cause, and the cause of the highest cause. Thus, in every act, in every form of action and of agent, he protects the universe. 56

He is the Absolute, the lord and the Absolute that is everything. He is the Absolute, Acyuta, unfailing father of creation. He is the changeless Absolute, Viṣṇu, eternal and unborn, free from all beginnings and all endings. 57

Just as the highest spirit, the Absolute, is imperishable, unborn and everlasting, so may all my passions and other faults be overcome. 58

Māriṣā's former life

Soma:

Reciting this excellent song of praise, known as the 'Prayer of the Supreme Absolute', Kaṇḍu worshipped Keśava and reached the highest goal. 59

Now I'll tell you who Māriṣā was in her previous life, because the significance of her deeds in this account will benefit you. 60

In earlier times, outstanding princes, she was a fortunate queen. After her husband's death and being childless, she gratified Lord Viṣṇu with her devotion. 61

Worshipped by her, Viṣṇu, appearing to that splendid woman, said, 'Make a wish.' She then revealed her heart's desire: 62

'Widowed at a tender age, Lord, my birth has been in vain. Father of creation, I was born amid misfortune and futility. 63

May I therefore have a worthy husband in every birth. Similarly, by your mercy, may I have a son who's equal to the patriarchs. 64

May I have both wealth and beauty, may I be agreeable in the sight of all, Viṣṇu, and may I not be issued from a womb.' 65

Soma:

After she had spoken, Hṛṣīkeśa, chief of gods, highest lord and wish-bestower, lifted up the deeply bowing woman and addressed these words to her: 66

The Lord:

'In a single lifetime, you will have ten husbands, heroic and renowned for noble deeds. 67

And you, splendid woman, will have a mighty son, courageous, strong and blessed with the qualities of a patriarch. 68

He will be the founder of many lineages on this earth, and his progeny will fill the threefold worlds. 69

You will not be issued from a womb, but will be a virtuous woman endowed with beauty, nobility and other wished-for qualities, and, by my grace, you'll delight the hearts of men.' 70

Having spoken to that girl with almond eyes, the lord withdrew from sight and she was born Māriṣā and will be a helpmeet for you, royal princes. 71

Parāśara:

In accord with Soma's orders, the Pracetasas shed their anger and accepted Māriṣā from the forest as their spouse. 72

With the ten Pracetasas, Māriṣā gave birth to Dakṣa, that mighty patriarch, who was born as Brahmā's son in a previous life. 73

This fortunate Dakṣa brought forth sons for the peopling of the world, wise sage, and to provide himself with offspring. 74

Obeying Brahmā's orders, Dakṣa established moving and unmoving things, creatures with two feet and those with four, to further procreation. 75

Dakṣa brought forth fifty women with his mental power, gave ten to Dharma, thirteen to Kaśyapa and twenty-seven to the Moon, all of whom were charged with regulating time.²⁴ 76

These women then gave rise to gods, Daityas, nāgas, cattle, birds, gandharvas, apsarases, Dānavas and the rest. 77

Since then, Maitreya, all creatures have been born of sexual union. The offspring of beings who arose before that time were born of willpower, sight or touch, or were brought forth by the various extreme austerities of those who undertook them. 78

Maitreya:

I'd heard before that Dakṣa had been born from the thumb of Brahmā's right hand, sage. How could he be born a second time as the son of the Pracetasas? 79

This grave doubt weighs on my mind, brahmin, because Dakṣa was Soma's grandson, but at the same time was his father-in-law! 80

Parāśara:

Beings are always subject to both birth and death, you best of sages. The wise are not confused by this, nor are those endowed with special insight. 81

Dakṣa and the other patriarchs exist in every era, foremost seer, and they also cease to be. This should not perplex the wise. 82

24 These are the 27 lunar mansions through which the moon passes each year.

In former times, there was no concept of young or old among them, best of brahmins. The severity of their austerities and their power were the only standards of comparison. 83

Maitreya:

Brahmin, describe to me in detail the origin of the deities, Dānavas, gandharvas, nāgas and rākṣasas. 84

Parāśara:

In former times, Brahmā, the self-arisen deity, commanded Dakṣa to bring forth living things, wise sage. Listen to how he did so. 85

Dakṣa created living beings before—including deities, sages, gandharvas, demigods and nāgas—with his mental energy. 86

But the beings that creative lord brought forth did not increase in number, and, after much reflection, 87

Desiring the procreation of varied kinds of offspring, he determined sexual union should become the normal means of reproduction. Accordingly, he wedded Asiknī, the daughter of the patriarch Vīraṇa, who had undertaken dire austerities and was a great supporter of the world. 88

Following this, the mighty patriarch Dakṣa had five thousand sons with her to raise the population. 89

Seeing these sons were keen on procreation, brahmin, Nārada, that heavenly sage, appeared to them and spoke these honeyed words. 90

Nārada:

You mighty Haryaśvas will have progeny—your wishes have been noted—but hear what I have to say: 91

It's a pity that you're so naive and do not know the limits of the earth—above, below or on all sides. How will you populate it otherwise? 92

Only when the upper, lower and sideward paths have all been cleared will you innocents behold the limits of the world. 93

Parāśara:

Hearing this, the Haryaśvas set off in all directions, but to this day they've not returned, just as rivers don't flow backwards from the sea. 94

After they had disappeared, holy Dakṣa, son of the Pracetasas, had another thousand sons with Vīraṇa's daughter. 95

These, the Śabalāśvas, also intent on procreation, brahmin, were dispatched by Nārada with the same instructions as before. 96

'This sage has spoken truly,' they said to one another. 'We should doubtless take the paths our brothers took. 97

Once we know the limits of the world, we'll be able to populate it.' 98

Off they went in all directions along those very paths, but to this day they've not returned, just as rivers don't flow backwards from the sea. 99

Ever since that time, one brother who searches for another is lost, brahmin, and that's why a prudent brother never does so. 100

When the great patriarch Dakṣa learned those sons had disappeared as well, he was furious and cursed Nārada. 101

But still wishing to populate the earth, Maitreya, Dakṣa had sixty daughters with Vīraṇa's daughter, so we heard. 102

He gave ten girls to Dharma, thirteen to Kaśyapa, twenty-seven to Soma and four to Ariṣṭanemi, 103

Two to Bahuputra, two to Aṅgiras and two to wise Kṛśāśva. Listen while I tell you all their names: 104

Arundhatī, Vasu, Jāmī, Lambā, Bhānu, Marutvatī, Saṃkalpā, Muhūrtā, Sādhyā and Viśvā: these ten were the wives of Dharma. Now listen while I tell you of their progeny. 105

Viśvā gave birth to the divine Viśvedevas, Sādhyā bore the Sādhyas, Marutvatī bore the Maruts, the Vasus are regarded as the progeny of Vasu.²⁵106

Bhānu bore the Bhānus (the Suns), and Muhūrtā bore the Muhūrtas (the Moments). Lambā bore Ghoṣa (Sound), and Nāgavīthī was born of Jāmī. 107

All the region of the earth was born from Arundhatī. Saṃkalpā gave birth to Saṃkalpa (Resolve), which is at the heart of everything. 108

I'll now describe in detail the deities called the Eight Vasus, led by Jyotis (Light), filled with radiance and energy: 109

25 The Vasus are a class of elemental deities and divine personifications of various natural phenomena. In the following verses, I have given their names in English where appropriate.

Āpa (Water), Dhruva (Pole Star), Soma (Moon), Dhara (Earth), Anila (Wind), Anala (Fire), Pratyūṣa (Dawn) and Prabhāsa (Splendour): this is how the Vasus are recalled by name. 110

Āpa's sons were Vaitaṇḍa, Śrama (Toil), Śrānta (Fatigue) and Adhuni. Dhruva's son was holy Kāla (Time), who impels the world. 111

Soma's son was holy Varcas (Power), whose son was Varcasvin (Energy). 112

Dhara's sons with his wife, Manoharā (Attraction), were Draviṇas (Offerings), Hutahavyavaha (Sacrificial Fire), Śísira (Cold), Prāṇa (Breath) and Ramaṇa (Pleasure). 113

Anila's wife was Śívā. Her sons were Purojava and Avijñātagati. These were the sons she bore with Anila. 114

Agni's son Kumāra was born in a clump of reeds. Śākha, Viśākha and Naigameya were his younger brothers. 115

The son of the Kṛttikās (the Pleiades) was Kārttikeya, the god of war. 116

They called Pratyūṣa's son the sage Devala. Devala had two wise and patient sons. 117

Bṛhaspati's sister, the brilliant celibate woman Yogasiddhā, traversed the whole world without attachment, and became the wife of Prabhāsa, the eighth Vasu. 118

Yogasiddhā gave birth to the fortunate patriarch Viśvakarman, the inventor of a thousand arts and craftsman of the thirteen gods. 119

He was creator of every ornament and foremost artisan who made the carriages for all the gods. Humankind depends on skills perfected by that great being. 120

His sons were Ajaikapād, Ahirbudhnya, Tvaṣṭṛ and wise Rudra. Tvaṣṭṛ's own son was the great ascetic Viśvarūpa. 121

Hara, Bahurūpa, Tryambaka, Aparājita, Vṛṣākapi, Śaṃbhu, Kapardin, Raivata, 122

Mṛgavyādha, Śarva and Kapālin: these, great sage, are said to be the eleven Rudras, lords of the threefold worlds. 123

A total of one hundred Rudras of immeasurable energy are mentioned. 124

The origin of the Āditya deities

I'll now tell you, knower of virtue, about the offspring of Aditi, Diti, Danu, Ariṣṭā, Surasā, Svasā, Surabhi, Vinatā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Irā, Kadru and Muni.²⁶ 125

In the previous Manvantara, there were twelve excellent celestial beings known as the Tuṣitas. When the beginning of the Vaivasvata Manvantara was approaching, 126

And the period of the previous glorious Manu, Cākṣuṣa, was drawing to a close, having come together, the assembled Tuṣitas conferred with one another: 127

‘Come quickly, fellow deities. If we enter Aditi’s womb and are born in the next Manvantara, it will be to our advantage.’ 128

So saying, they were born in the period of Manu Vaivasvata as the sons of Mārīca Kaśyapa and Aditi, Dakṣa’s daughter. 129

As such, Viṣṇu, mighty Indra, Āryaman, Dhātṛ, Tvaṣṭṛ, Pūṣan, 130

Vivasvat, Savitṛ, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aṃśa and Bhaga are recognised as the twelve magnificent sons of Aditi, the Ādityas. 131

Those who had previously been the divine Tuṣitas in the Cākṣuṣa Manvantara are the twelve Ādityas in the current Vaivasvata period. 132

The twenty-seven daughters of Dakṣa who are described as the faithful wives of Soma, and whose energy was beyond measure, also brought forth brilliant offspring. 133

The wives of Ariṣṭanemi bore sixteen children. 134

The daughters of prudent Bahuputra are remembered as the four lightning deities, the Vidyuts. 135

The patron deities of Vedic verses, the excellent Ṛces, honoured by brahminical sages, were born to Aṅgiras. 136

The sons of the godly sage Kṛśāśva were the Devapraharaṇas, patron gods of heavenly weapons. 137

26 These are Dakṣa’s thirteen daughters, who married Kaśyapa.

These thirty-three divine hosts are born again of their own volition at the end of a thousand ages, my dear, but even they are said to be ever subject to birth and death. *138*

Just as the sun rises and sets in this world, Maitreya, these hosts of deities are born again in every aeon. *139*

The origin of the Daitya Prahlāda

We've heard that Kaśyapa had two sons with Diti, Hiranyaśipu and Hiranyākṣa. *140*

Diti also had a daughter, Siṃhikā, who married Vipracitti. *141*

Hiranyaśipu had four outstanding sons, Anuhlāda, Hlāda, virtuous Prahlāda and brave Saṃhlāda, who increased the lineage of the Daityas, Diti's offspring. *142*

Among them, great Prahlāda looked on all things with equanimity and was perfectly devoted to Janārdana. *143*

In former times, the Daitya king lit a fire and heaped it round Prahlāda, brahmin, but the flames did him no harm, as Vāsudeva dwelt in his heart. *144*

When that wise child, bound up with ropes, shivered at the bottom of the sea, the whole world trembled. *145*

The Daitya king hurled several weapons at Prahlāda, but he was never harmed, his body firm as a mountain and his heart set on eternal Viṣṇu. *146*

Mighty serpent-lords, sent by the Daitya king, their jaws ablaze with flames and venom, couldn't kill him. *147*

Even mountain ranges were piled upon his body, but, recalling the highest spirit, he didn't die, protected by the thought of Viṣṇu. *148*

The Daitya king, the denizen of heaven, cast that prudent boy down from a lofty palace, but the Earth embraced him before he hit the ground. *149*

The king of Daityas sent a wind to scorch his body, but it was baffled as Prahlāda's heart was always set on Madhusūdana. *150*

The raging guardian elephants of the quarters sent by the Daitya king broke their tusks on Prahlāda's broad chest, which robbed them of their arrogance. *151*

With all their spells the king's own priests could not destroy Prahāda then, as his heart was fixed on Govinda. 152

The thousand phantoms set on him by Śambara the sorcerer were rendered harmless by Kṛṣṇa's discus. 153

The poison known as *bālābala* administered by the chefs of the Daitya king had no effect on wise and selfless Prahāda. 154

His mind was equally well-disposed to every creature in this world, he treated others as he would himself, filled with the virtue of benevolence. 155

He was the soul of virtue, a brilliant font of purity, truth and other qualities, ever standing as a paragon for all good people. 156

So ends Chapter Fifteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

16. Maitreya asks about Prahāda

Maitreya:

You've described the origin of humanity, great sage, and everlasting Viṣṇu, the universal cause. 1

But who's this excellent Daitya, Prahāda, whom you mentioned and who didn't die when burned with fire or struck by weapons? 2

The whole earth shook when he lay beneath the ocean, even though he was tied with bonds, and the firm ground trembled when he moved his limbs. 3

Buried under mountains in former times, he didn't die. You've said so much about the greatness of this prudent being. 4

I want to hear about the peerless power of that devotee of Viṣṇu, sage, and about the deeds of this being of immeasurable energy. 5

Why did the sons of Diti attack him with weapons, sage, and why was he, intent on virtue, cast into the sea? 6

Why was he crushed by mountains and bitten by great serpents? Why cast from heights and thrown into a fire? 7

Why was he made a target for the tusks of guardian elephants, and why did great demons send a wind to scorch him? 8

Why did the Daitya's gurus perform those rituals, sage, and why did Śambara loose a thousand phantoms at him? 9

Why did the Daitya's chefs administer the virulent poison *hālābala* to dispatch that great and prudent being, which he rendered harmless? *10*

I want to hear all about the deeds of noble Prahlāda, blessed sage, which demonstrate his special virtue. *11*

No wonder the Daityas didn't kill him, for who can harm a person whose heart is set on Viṣṇu? *12*

He was bent on virtue and always lauded Keśava, but Daityas, his own kinsfolk, showed him extreme antipathy. *13*

A pious, fortunate and selfless devotee of Viṣṇu—why was he attacked by Diti's sons? You must explain all this to me. *14*

Noble beings would never strike a virtuous foe like him, filled as he was with goodness, let alone a person born among one's allies. *15*

You must therefore describe all this in detail, best of sages, as I want to hear about the deeds of this Daitya prince. *16*

So ends Chapter Sixteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

17. Prahlāda instructs the Daitya boys

Parāśara:

Listen carefully, Maitreya, to the deeds of the great and prudent Prahlāda, whose actions were always noble. *1*

In former days, Diti's son, brave Hiraṇyakaśipu, received a boon from Brahmā and brought all three worlds under his control. *2*

The Daitya usurped the authority of Indra, and then assumed the functions of the Sun, Wind, Fire, Varuṇa, lord of waters, the Moon, *3*

Kubera, lord of riches, and Yama, ruler of the underworld. That demon then partook of every portion of the sacrifice. *4*

The gods fled heaven, fearing him, best of sages, and wandered the world in human form. *5*

After the Daitya conquered all three worlds, he grew arrogant because of his universal sovereignty, and, while gandharvas sang his praises, he indulged his favourite senses. *6*

All the siddhas, gandharvas and nāgas waited on mighty Hiranyakaśipu, who loved to drink. 7

In the presence of the Daitya lord, joyful siddhas provided music, some sang, while others cried, ‘Be victorious!’ 8

Apsarases danced in that delightful crystal palace in the clouds, where the demon, filled with pleasure, spent time drinking. 9

Hiranyakaśipu had a gifted son, Prahlāda by name, a lad who studied subjects suited to young children in his guru’s home. 10

One day, that pious youth, accompanied by his teacher, came before the Daitya lord, his drunken father. 11

When Prahlāda bowed to touch Hiranyakaśipu’s feet, his father lifted up this child of boundless energy and spoke these words. 12

Hiranyakaśipu:

Recite for me, dear boy, your favourite verse that you’ve carefully learned to date. 13

Prahlāda:

Listen well, dear father, and as you command, I’ll diligently recite the most important thing that occupies my heart: 14

‘I bow to him who has no start, no middle and no ending; who is unborn, unageing, undying and unchanging; destroyer and maintainer of the universe; the cause of every cause.’ 15

Parāśara:

Hearing this, the eyes of the Daitya king grew red with fury. He glared at his son’s guru and berated him, his bud-like lower lip alive with rage. 16

Hiranyakaśipu:

Brahmin, what insulting nonsense in praise of my arch rival have you taught this boy, you fool? 17

The guru:

Your anger is misplaced, my lord, as your son didn’t learn this from me. 18

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Who taught you this, Prahlāda? Tell me, boy, because your guru says it wasn't him. 19

Prahlāda:

Viṣṇu, teacher of all the world, is fixed within my heart, father. Apart from him, the highest spirit, what remains to be taught by anyone? 20

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Who's this Viṣṇu you prattle on about before me, silly boy? I'm the lord of the threefold worlds! 21

Prahlāda:

Ascetics may contemplate his highest state, but it cannot be described. From him arises everything, and he *is* everything. He is Viṣṇu, the highest lord. 22

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

How can anyone be called the 'highest lord' while I am here, you foolish boy? If you want to die, just mention him again. 23

Prahlāda:

Viṣṇu, the Absolute, is creator, disposer and highest lord, not just of me and all the world, but of you as well, father. Be merciful to me. What use is anger? 24

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Which evil being has occupied the heart of this foolish child? He's talking nonsense as if possessed. 25

Prahlāda:

Viṣṇu not only occupies my heart but fills all three worlds. He's the universal being who enjoins me, you, father, and other beings to undertake all actions. 26

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Take this wicked boy away and punish him in his teacher's home. Who's encouraged this stupid child to falsely praise my enemy? 27

Parāśara:

After the king had spoken thus, the Daityas took Prahlāda to his teacher's home, where he kept up his schooling, while serving his guru diligently. 28

Some time later, the demon king summoned Prahlāda again. 'Sing something for me, son,' he said to him. 29

Prahlāda:

May Viṣṇu, from whom both matter and spirit arise, from whom this world of moving and unmoving things ensues, and who is the cause of everything, show mercy to us all. 30

Prahlāda's torments begin

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Kill this wicked child—his life is worthless! Because he'll bring ruin on his family, he's like a glowing ember in a house. 31

Parāśara:

At the king's command, hundreds of thousands of Daityas, weapons in hand, prepared to kill the boy. 32

Prahlāda:

Just as Viṣṇu occupies your swords, as well as you and me, you Daityas, by this same truth, may all your weapons be rendered harmless! 33

Parāśara:

Even though the Daityas in their hundreds struck him with their awful weapons, Prahlāda felt not the slightest pain and was continually restored. 34

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

You foolish child, don't praise our rivals! You'll have nought to fear from me if you renounce these stupid thoughts. 35

Prahlāda:

When the everlasting lord, who dispels all anxiety, abides within my heart, what fear have I? Calling him to mind, father, all concerns of birth, old age and death are gone. 36

Hiraṇyakasīpu:

Come, serpents! With your jaws that spew those venomous flames, dispatch at once this ill-mannered wretch. 37

Parāśara:

At the king's command, Takṣaka and other sly poisonous snakes struck Prahāda's every limb. 38

But his mind was fixed on Kṛṣṇa, and even when those mighty snakes assailed him, unaware of his own body and filled with bliss, he recalled the deity. 39

The serpents:

Our fangs have snapped and our crest jewels cracked, our hoods are sore and our hearts all tremble, but we've made not the slightest mark on this child's skin. Assign some other task to us, your majesty. 40

Hiraṇyakasīpu:

Come, you guardian elephants of the quarters with your massive tusks. Strike down this boy who's been seduced by enemies. One's progeny can cause one's own destruction, just like a fire that burns the forest where it was kindled. 41

Parāśara:

The elephants of the quarters, towering like great mountain peaks, threw Prahāda to the ground and gored him with their tusks. 42

Because his mind was set on Govinda, their tusks broke into a thousand pieces when they touched his chest. The boy then addressed his father: 43

Prahāda:

These elephants' tusks with tips as hard as diamonds snapped, not because of my own strength, but because I remembered Janārdana, the great destroyer of death and sin. 44

Hiraṇyakasīpu:

Get those elephants out of here! Light a fire, you demons, and Vāyu, fan the flames to burn this wretch! 45

Parāśara:

At their lord's command, the Dānavas covered the son of the demon king with a towering pile of kindling and lit a fire to burn him. 46

Prahlāda:

Father, this wind-fanned fire can do no harm, as all around on every side I see cooling prospects spread with lotuses. 47

Parāśara:

The brahmin sons of Bhārgava, those wise and eloquent priests, praised their patron, the Daitya king, with soothing words: 48

The priests:

Sire, don't be angry with this boy, your son, because your fury will bear fruit among the gathered hosts of gods. 49

We'll be your son's instructors, and we'll teach him to destroy your rivals. 50

Childhood is a time of many errors, Daitya king. Don't be angry with the boy. 51

If, after our instruction, he still cleaves to Hari's cause, we'll then take steps to bring about his downfall. In this we will not fail. 52

Parāśara:

After the priests of the Daitya king petitioned him with these words, he ordered the demons to pull his son out of the fire. 53

Later, residing in his guru's home, during breaks between his teacher's lessons, Prahlāda often gave instruction to the other demon boys. 54

Prahlāda:

Listen, Daityas, Diti's grandsons, while I speak about the highest goal. Nothing else is worthy of consideration or desire. 55

Every living being experiences birth, childhood and youth, and then in time old age will surely come. 56

After that, you sons of the Daitya lord, a creature faces death, as you and I all clearly see. 57

Each being who dies will be reborn, and according to our sacred texts it must be thus, but there is no existence without a cause. 58

As long as pregnancy results in birth, the pain of every new existence will be felt. *59*

People foolishly believe that the end of thirst and hunger, and the absence of cold and other irritations, will lead to happiness, but these are in truth merely further forms of pain. *60*

Just as those with aching limbs seek comfort when they stretch, even a slap enlivens those whose minds have wandered. *61*

How ill-matched are the physical body, a mass of phlegm and other humours, and sought-for qualities such as beauty and a pleasant scent. *62*

The fool who delights in a body composed of blood and muscle, pus and faeces, urine, sinews, bones and marrow will surely go to hell. *63*

Fire gives comfort when one is cold, water when thirsty and food when hungry, but in other circumstances, they have the opposite effect. *64*

As long as you persist with marriage, sons of Daityas, such miseries will weigh upon your hearts. *65*

As many relatives as a being holds dear, so many painful arrows will pierce his heart. *66*

Wherever a person journeys, he always worries that his goods at home are lost or burned or stolen. *67*

Birth is attended by great pain and, for the dying, there are the awful torments under Yama's rod. Then comes the pain of passing through another womb. *68*

If you conclude there's little pleasure in the embryonic state, then you must admit that this whole world consists of woe. *69*

I'll therefore speak truthfully to you: here in the abode of suffering, the ocean of existence, Viṣṇu is your only refuge. *70*

Do not think: 'We're only boys, and the embodied being that inhabits our physical form is everlasting. Birth, youth and old age are the way of the body, not the soul.' *71*

Or: 'While I'm a boy, I'll do as I wish, but when I become a youth I'll strive for some improvement.' Or: 'I'm a young man now, but I'll do something to benefit my soul when I'm older.' *72*

Or: 'Now I'm old, those things I should have done are out of reach. I didn't do them then when I was able; how can I do them now I'm slowing down?' *73*

One whose mind is always filled with such vain thoughts will not improve himself, even though he yearns to do so. *74*

Children love their toys; young people seek out sensual pleasures, but before they know it, relentless age creeps up on them. *75*

A discerning being should always strive to improve himself while young, without regard to boyhood, youth, old age or other states. *76*

This, then, is what I have to tell you. If you believe that it is true, then out of your affection for me, remember Viṣṇu, who will free you from the bonds of life. *77*

What's so hard about remembering him? When called to mind, he blesses you, so think about him day and night and all your sins will be forgiven. *78*

Let your love and thoughts both day and night be on him who dwells within all creatures, and in doing so you'll leave your woes behind. *79*

As threefold suffering afflicts the world, which wise person would be angry with other creatures deserving of our pity? *80*

If other beings enjoy good fortune, but I'm powerless to enjoy it too, I should be as happy as they, since my misfortune results from anger I expressed before. *81*

As beings bound by hatred feel anger in their hearts, the wise should pity them because they're filled with great delusion. *82*

I've described the ideas of those who perceive the deity and creation as distinct from one another. Now listen, if you demon boys are willing, to a summary of the other view. *83*

This whole world is but an aspect of universal Viṣṇu. The wise see everything as one and as no different from themselves. *84*

Casting off our demonic natures, let us—you and I together—strive to gain the highest bliss. *85*

This bliss will never be undone by fire, the sun, the moon, Vāyu, Parjanya, Varuṇa, the siddhas, rākṣasas, *86*

Yakṣas, Daitya kings, nāgas, kiṃnaras, humans, animals, afflictions born of our own natures, *87*

Fevers, eye diseases, dysentery, diseases of the spleen and other illnesses, anger, envy, greed, passion, avarice or any other thing. *88*

Nothing can rob us of this joy, as it's the everlasting, purest state attained by one who sets his heart on stainless Keśava. 89

I beseech you, Daityas, to give up satisfaction. Be equally disposed in every situation, because equanimity is a form of worship of unfailing Viṣṇu. 90

When Viṣṇu is gratified, what in this world is out of reach? Virtue, wealth and pleasure will all mean nought to you. 91

Great is the reward you'll surely win if you seek refuge beneath the everlasting tree of knowledge. 92

So ends Chapter Seventeen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

18. Prahlāda instructs his gurus

Parāśara:

When the Dānavas saw what Prahlāda was doing, fearing the Daitya lord, they informed Hiraṇyakaśipu, who called his cooks at once and addressed them thus. 1

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Come, cooks. Because this perverse and wicked son of mine is leading other boys astray, you must poison him at once. 2

Without his knowledge, poison his food with *bālāhala*. This wretch must die as soon as possible! 3

Parāśara:

Just as his mighty father ordered, the cooks administered that poison to noble Prahlāda. 4

But Prahlāda sanctified the virulent *bālāhala* by reciting the name of imperishable Viṣṇu, Maitreya, as he swallowed it with his food. 5

Prahlāda consumed that poison with no ill effects and, remaining calm, he digested the terrible dose rendered harmless by Viṣṇu's name. 6

Seeing that Prahlāda had consumed it, the fearful cooks came before the Daitya lord and, falling at his feet, reported what had happened. 7

The cooks:

Daitya king, your son, Prahlāda, was able to digest the terrible poison that we fed him with his other food. 8

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Hurry! Hurry! Come at once, you Daitya priests. Create an apparition to destroy him without delay! 9

Parāśara:

But the household priests then came to Prahlāda, spoke soothingly to him and gave him this advice: 10

The priests:

You were born in Brahmā's lineage, renowned in all three worlds, as the son of the Daitya king, Hiraṇyakaśipu. May you live long! 11

What good to you are other gods? What good is this so-called imperishable being or anyone else, when your father is the refuge of all the worlds, as you will be one day? 12

Don't venerate our enemy. One's father is the highest guru, so they say. 13

Prahlāda:

'What you lucky priests have said is true: this great lineage of Marīci is praised in all three worlds, and no-one would say otherwise. 14

My father has performed prodigious feats throughout the universe. I understand all this and certainly it is true. 15

One's father is indeed the highest guru. I've not the slightest doubt about your words. 16

One's father is indeed a guru to be honoured with devotion. I know in my heart that I must never offend against this principle. 17

But when you ask things like, "What good is this imperishable being?", who can say that you're correct? Your questions make no sense.' 18

So saying, Prahlāda fell silent in deference to the priests, but added with a laugh, 'What good is this imperishable being? An excellent question indeed! 19

I repeat: an excellent question! I salute you! What good is this imperishable being? Again: an excellent question! I salute you, gurus. Hear what this everlasting being means to me. I hope this won't upset you. 20

Virtue, wealth, love and liberation are said to be the goals of life. Your questions about the deity from whom these four arise make no sense to me. 21

Marīci, Dakṣa and the other sages learned virtue from this eternal being. Similarly, others acquired wealth, yet others, love. 22

Some, understanding his true nature through spiritual insight, meditation or realisation, won liberation once their bonds to life were all undone. 23

Worship of Hari is the singular root cause of prosperity, influence, greatness, knowledge, progeny, activity and liberation. 24

Since virtue, wealth, love and liberation all result from praising him, brahmins, how could you doubt the good of this imperishable being? 25

Why say more, respected gurus? Tell me if I'm right or not, as my ability to discriminate is weak.' 26

The priests:

We saved you from being burnt alive, you foolish child, thinking that you'd stop this nonsense, but we failed to see how unwise you were. 27

If you do not follow our advice and free yourself from the grip of folly, ignorant boy, we'll conjure up an apparition to destroy you. 28

Prahlāda:

Who is saved or killed by whom? This whole world of moving and unmoving things destroys and saves itself. 29

Parāśara:

After Prahlāda had spoken thus, the priests of the Daitya king were furious and conjured up an awful apparition. Her mouth ablaze with rings of fire, 30

She scorched the earth with the touch of her feet. With her spear, that raging phantom struck Prahlāda on the chest. 31

But when the flaming weapon reached the young boy's heart, it burst into a hundred shards and fell upon the ground. 32

The heart in which unflinching Hari dwells could resist the thunderbolt of Indra, to say nothing of a spear. 33

The apparition set upon the sinless boy by the wicked Daitya priests now struck out at them and vanished in an instant. 34

Seeing the priests scorched by the ghoul, the noble child ran towards them crying, ‘Eternal Kṛṣṇa, save them!’ 35

Prahlāda:

You pervade most everything, Janārdana, and are the form and author of the world. Save these priests from this spell-born fire, so difficult to endure. 36

Since you are Viṣṇu, guru of the world who abides in all, spare these priests. 37

As I meditate on you, universal and eternal Viṣṇu, and even though I think they’ve sided with my enemy, spare these brahmins’ lives. 38

If I regard as friendly those who came to kill me, fed me poison, tried to burn me, sent elephants to crush me and snakes to bite me, 39

And if I’m free from sin, then, by that same truth, spare the lives of these demon priests today. 40

Parāśara:

After Prahlāda spoke these words, all the afflicted brahmins rose unharmed and addressed him with respect. 41

The priests:

May you lead a long and stainless life, dear boy, imbued with strength and courage, and be blessed with sons and grandsons, wealth and power. 42

Parāśara:

So saying, the priests approached the Daitya king to tell him what had happened, sage. 43

So ends Chapter Eighteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

19. Prahlāda’s torments continue

Parāśara:

When Hiraṇyakaśipu heard that the phantom had been foiled, he summoned his son to ask about the origin of his strength. 1

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Your endurance is amazing, Prahlāda. How do you do it? Is it the result of some mantra or were you born with it? 2

Parāśara:

Questioned by Hiranyakaśipu, the Daitya boy Prahlāda fell at his father's feet and gave him this reply: 3

'My strength does not arise from a mantra or anything else, father, nor was I born with it, but it's common to all who hold in their hearts the everlasting deity. 4

A being who wishes no harm on others, as he wouldn't wish it on himself, father, will undergo no harm, as harm will have no cause. 5

The harm one brings upon another by word or thought or deed becomes the seed of one's next birth and will result in pain. 6

I wish no harm on anyone, nor do I act or speak unkindly, thinking Keśava exists in every being, as he does in me. 7

As my mind is well disposed to everything, how can I experience bodily or mental suffering sent by heaven or by earth? 8

Knowing that Hari is at the heart of all, the wise should show unwavering devotion towards all beings.' 9

Parāśara:

Hearing his son say this, the face of the Daitya king, who was standing on the palace roof, grew black with fury as he cried out to his demon minions: 10

'Throw this wicked child off the roof—it's a hundred leagues above the ground! Drop him on that mountain so his body's smashed upon the rocks.' 11

The Daitya servants threw the boy from the palace roof, but after they had done so and even as he fell, Prahlāda still held Hari in his heart. 12

As he reached the ground, the Earth, supporter of the world, caught him as he fell, filled as he was with devotion to Keśava, protector of the universe. 13

Seeing Prahlāda unharmed and without a single broken bone, Hiranyakaśipu spoke to Śambara, his most powerful sorcerer: 14

'We can't kill this wretched child, but you know magic, so you can do it!' 15

Śambara:

I'll kill him, Daitya king. Just watch the power of my spells. Behold these thousand apparitions, and here are another million! 16

Parāśara:

Then the wicked demon Śambara, desiring Prahāda's ruin, loosed the apparitions upon the child who was equally kind to all. 17

But Prahāda mastered his thoughts, Maitreya, and, free from anger even towards the sorcerer, he contemplated Viṣṇu, Madhu's nemesis. 18

The brilliant discus, Sudarśana, wreathed in flames and summoned by the lord, appeared to save the boy. 19

The speeding weapon destroyed each and every one of the thousand apparitions raised by Śambara, to defend the child. 20

The Daitya king then addressed the drying wind, 'I order you to kill this wicked child at once.' 21

'So be it,' replied the raging wind as it filled the boy. Cold and harsh, the undaunted wind strove to dry his body. 22

The Daitya lad, knowing he'd been beset by wind, set his heart on mighty Viṣṇu, foundation of the world. 23

Furious Janārdana, abiding in Prahāda's heart, imbibed the wind and caused it to be still. 24

When all the apparitions had departed and the wind was overcome, wise Prahāda then returned to his guru's home. 25

Each day, his teacher taught the boy good governance as devised for rulers by the sage Uśanas, so that they might govern well. 26

When Prahāda's guru judged that he had mastered all these texts, he informed Hiranyakaśipu that his son was now well-schooled. 27

The master:

I've taught your son, Prahāda, the science of governance, Daitya king, and now he truly understands the principles of Uśanas, Bhrgu's scion. 28

Hiranyakaśipu:

How should a king behave towards his friends and foe, Prahāda? What should he do in the three times of decrease, increase and stability? How should he treat those neutral parties? 29

How should he behave towards his councillors and ministers, those responsible for affairs inside the palace and outside it, informants and his citizens, those whom he suspects and those he trusts? 30

Relationships that one should seek or shun, the means of handling strongholds, forest tribes and thorny issues—describe in detail ways to manage each of these, Prahlāda. 31

Tell me this and other things you’ve learned, as I’d like to hear your thoughts. 32

Parāśara:

Prahlāda bowed at his father’s feet, wearing respect like an ornament, and, standing before the Daitya king, he spoke with folded palms. 33

Prahlāda instructs his father

Prablāda:

My guru taught all this to me, no doubt, and I’ve taken it all in, but I do not think that it’s correct. 34

He described conciliation, generosity, subversion and aggression as strategies for dealing with one’s allies and with others. 35

But I see neither friend nor foe—don’t be angry, father—you’re a strong-armed warrior yourself, but if there’s nothing to be achieved, why bother with the means? 36

As Govinda is at the heart of all creation, the universal lord and highest being who incorporates the world, father, why speak of friend and enemy? 37

Because Lord Viṣṇu is in you, in me and every other thing, what’s the difference between my friend and him I call my enemy? 38

What use are boring talks on dubious subjects based on ignorance, father, when we should strive for virtue? 39

The idea of what forms knowledge arises from our ignorance, father, and a lack of understanding, demon king. Does not a child mistake a firefly for a fire? 40

Action that doesn’t lead to bondage is true knowledge that sets us free. All other action is wasted effort; all other knowledge merely artful cleverness. 41

I therefore hold that all of this is vain. Now listen to the highest goal. Bowing at your feet, blessed monarch, I’ll describe it. 42

Who doesn't worry about sovereignty? Who doesn't hanker after wealth? People may have both in the life that follows this. 43

Everyone strives for greatness, fortunate king, but fate, not effort, will determine their success. 44

Even fools, cowards, the undiscerning and those who know nought of governance, lord, win kingdoms because of fate. 45

One who desires the greatest glory should therefore strive for virtue, and one who yearns for liberation should aspire to equanimity. 46

Deities, mortals, animals, birds, plants and creeping creatures are all forms of everlasting Viṣṇu, yet all seem to stand apart from him. 47

One who understands all this perceives the world of moving and unmoving things as no different from himself, and as one with Viṣṇu, whose form is universal. 48

When this is understood, the beginningless lord, the imperishable supreme master, is pleased and, when he's pleased, all afflictions cease. 49

Parāśara:

Hearing this, Hiraṇyakaśipu leapt from his throne in a rage and kicked his son in the chest. 50

The impetuous king seemed to blaze with anger and wrung his hands together as if he intended to destroy the entire world as he spoke. 51

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

Come, Vipracitti! Come, Rāhu! Come, Bali! Bind this boy with serpent-ropes and throw him in the ocean. Don't delay! 52

If not, all this world, including Dānavas and Daityas, will start to follow this stubborn fool's ideas. 53

We've tried everything to stop him, but the wicked child keeps singing praises of our foe. Getting rid of evildoers is a social service! 54

Parāśara:

The Daityas then quickly bound Prahlāda with serpent-ropes and, with their master's orders foremost in their minds, they cast him in the sea. 55

But when Prahlāda hit the water, the ocean was set in motion and threw up a towering wave, causing floods in all directions. 56

Seeing the whole world inundated, great sage, Hiraṇyakaśipu addressed the Daityas. 57

Hiraṇyakaśipu:

‘Cover this wicked child in the ocean, Varuṇa’s realm, with all the rocks you Daityas find. Don’t leave a single gap. 58

Fire didn’t burn him; weapons, serpents, poison, wind and magic all failed to harm him. 59

Neither apparitions, nor falling from a height, nor elephants of the quarters could destroy this evil-minded child, but there’s no point in allowing him to live. 60

Let’s keep him in the water under heaps of rocks for a thousand years—that should finish off the wretch!’ 61

The Daityas and the Dānavas then piled mountains on Prahlāda underwater, raising a heap that soared a thousand leagues. 62

But at the time of his daily rites, from below the heap of rocks on the ocean floor, wise Prahlāda intently worshipped Viṣṇu who never fails. 63

Prahlāda praises Viṣṇu

Prahlāda:

I bow to you, lotus-eyed deity. I bow to you, supreme being. I bow to you, heart of the world. I bow to you, wielder of the flaming discus. 64

I bow to the deity of the pious, patron of the cattle and of brahmins, benefactor of the world. To Kṛṣṇa and to Govinda, I bow and bow again. 65

In the form of Brahmā, you create the world. While it endures, you keep it. At the aeon’s end, you take the form of Rudra. I bow to you, deity of threefold forms. 66

Gods, yakṣas, demigods, siddhas, nāgas, gandharvas, kiṃnaras, piśācas, rākṣasas, humans and animals, 67

Birds, inanimate things, ants and crawling creatures, earth, water, fire, sky, wind, sound, touch, taste, 68

Form, smell, mind, intellect, ego, time and the qualities known as *guṇas*—you are the highest sense of these, as well as being all of these, eternal Viṣṇu. 69

You are knowledge and you are ignorance, truth and falsehood, poison and nectar, the practice of rites and contemplation. You are the rituals determined by the Vedas. *70*

You are the beneficiary of all these acts and the means of their achievement. You are all this, Viṣṇu, and the result of every ritual. *71*

Your presence, Lord, which manifests power and virtue, is in me, in others, in all beings and all the worlds. *72*

Ascetics contemplate you, and those who offer sacrifices sacrifice to you. You alone enjoy oblations intended for gods and spirits, as you are one with them. *73*

Everything's encompassed in your great form, imperishable Lord, from which is born your subtle form, this world and other subtle forms, the fundamental elements and that which is known as the subtlest essence of them all. *74*

The form that is the highest goal beyond description of gross or subtle, something that surpasses thought, is also a form of yours. I bow to you in the form of the highest spirit. *75*

You who are at the heart of everything, I bow to your other form, the universal power in every being, abode of threefold *guṇas*, Lord of gods. *76*

I praise that supreme and heavenly power that lies beyond the reach of words and is not encompassed by the mind, but is perceptible to the wisdom of the wise. *77*

Om! May I always bow to Vāsudeva, Lord. Nothing is distinct from him, but he's distinct from everything. *78*

I bow to him. I bow to him. I bow to that great being who has neither name nor form, and who alone is understood by the fact of his existence. *79*

I bow to that great being whose earthly forms are worshipped by the denizens of heaven, being blind to his supreme form. *80*

I bow to him who dwells in all, the lord who sees both good and evil, Viṣṇu, the universal witness and supreme master. *81*

Let us all bow down to Viṣṇu, who is no different from this world. May we all regard him as the first in every realm. May that imperishable being be favourable to me. *82*

May Hari, the universe's warp and weft, known as the everlasting deity and support of all creation, be favourable to me. 83

Om! I bow to Viṣṇu. I bow again and again to him in whom all this exists, from whom all this arises, who is all this, yet stands apart from it. 84

Because that eternal being pervades all things, I am him. All this is born from me, I am all this, all this is in me, the everlasting being. 85

I myself am indestructible and eternal, I'm the abode of the heart of the heart of everything. I'm the one called *brahman*, the Absolute, the highest being at the start and at the end. 86

So ends Chapter Nineteen in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

20. Prahlāda achieves liberation

Parāśara:

Thus contemplating Viṣṇu as unified with himself, brahmin, Prahlāda felt that he'd achieved the highest state of oneness with that eternal being. 1

He forgot himself and knew of nothing else while thinking, 'I am indeed the unchanging, unending, highest spirit.' 2

As the result of Prahlāda's practice of cultivating the deity and being cleansed in time of all his sins, eternal Viṣṇu, knowledge itself, filled his unsullied heart. 3

When the Daitya Prahlāda, now one with Viṣṇu through the power of his practice, moved his limbs, Maitreya, those serpent-bonds all snapped at once. 4

The boundless undulating ocean, with its surging hosts of monsters, was agitated, and all the world with mountains, groves and forests began to quake. 5

Casting off the rocks the Daityas heaped on him, wise Prahlāda rose from the ocean depths. 6

Beholding the world, the sky and everything else, he remembered who he was once more. 7

Wise Prahlāda, firm and focused, sang further praises of the highest being who has no start, his body, voice and mind restrained. 8

Prahlāda:

Om! I bow to you, highest of all goals, gross and subtle, perishable and imperishable, visible and invisible, who transcends division, lord of all, free from faults, 9

Bestower of qualities, source of qualities, free from qualities, abiding in qualities, formed and formless, gross and subtle, distinct and indistinct. 10

You are fearsome and benign, knowledge and ignorance, eternal Lord, you are existence and nonexistence, and the cause of both, 11

Permanent and impermanent, you are manifold elements and the unstained dwelling place of elements non-manifold. You are one and you are many. I bow to you, Vāsudeva, the primary cause of everything, 12

Gross and subtle, evident and manifest. You are all creation and yet distinct from it. Everything arises from you, yet you are distinct from the cause of everything. I bow to you, the highest being. 13

Parāśara:

While Prahlāda sang this praise, his mind on Viṣṇu, Lord Hari appeared before him, clad in yellow robes. 14

Seeing him, Prahlāda was thrown into confusion, brahmin. He stood up and stammered repeatedly, 'I bow to Viṣṇu!' 15

Prahlāda:

Lord, you take away the pain we feel. Be merciful to me, Keśava. Purify me further, eternal god, by looking down on me. 16

The Lord:

I'm pleased with your unwavering devotion, Prahlāda. You may ask for anything you desire. 17

Prahlāda:

Master, in whichever of myriad wombs I am reborn, may I always have undying faith in you. 18

May that constant joy the undiscerning find in objects of the senses never leave my heart while contemplating you. 19

The Lord:

You are indeed my devotee, Prahlāda, and will be so in future. Now ask for something else that you desire. 20

Prahlāda:

As I was intent on praising you, my father was enraged. Lord, forgive the sins that he's committed. 21

Weapons struck my body, I was thrown into a fire, I was bitten by his serpents and my food was laced with poison, 22

I was bound and cast into the ocean where mountains were heaped upon me. These and other wicked deeds my father has committed. 23

All this he did as I, your devotee, had angered him, so by your mercy, Lord, set my father free at once. 24

The Lord:

By my mercy all will be as you desire, Prahlāda. I grant you yet another boon, so make a wish, you demon boy. 25

Prahlāda:

Now you've granted me my wishes, I've done all I had to do, Lord. By your mercy, may my devotion never waver. 26

What are virtue, wealth or love to one with freedom in his hands and whose faith in you, the root of all the worlds, is firm? 27

The Lord:

Since your steady heart is filled with faith in me, you'll reach final liberation with my blessing. 28

Parāśara:

So saying, Viṣṇu withdrew from sight before Prahlāda's eyes, Maitreya. The lad then approached his sire and paid homage at his feet. 29

Hiraṇyakaśipu kissed Prahlāda's forehead and embraced the boy who had endured so much. 'You're alive, my son!' he cried as tears were glistening in his eyes, brahmin. 30

That great demon, now regretful, showed affection to his son, and Prahlāda, who knew virtue, duly served his guru and his father. 31

After Hiranyakaśipu was destroyed by Viṣṇu in the form of Narasiṃha, Maitreya, Prahlāda became the Daityas' lord. ³²

Having attained the glory of sovereignty through his pure deeds, brahmin, he had many sons and grandsons, and enjoyed great supremacy. ³³

When Prahlāda shed his worldly duties and transcended notions of good and evil, while contemplating the lord intently, he finally accomplished liberation. ³⁴

Such was the power of the prudent Daitya, Prahlāda, devotee of the lord, Maitreya, about whom you questioned me. ³⁵

The sins of one who hears the deeds of this great being are washed away at once. ³⁶

Hearing or narrating this account will free a man from misdeeds done by day or night, Maitreya. ³⁷

Reciting it when the moon is full or new, or on the eighth or twelfth day of the lunar month, brahmin, confers the same reward as the donation of a cow. ³⁸

Just as Hari shielded Prahlāda in his trials, he'll protect a person who listens to this tale. ³⁹

So ends Chapter Twenty in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

21. Kaśyapa's descendants and the origin of the Maruts

Parāśara:

The sons of Prahlāda's brother Saṃhlāda were Āyusmant, Śibi and Bāṣkala. Prahlāda's son was Virocana, and Virocana's son was Bali.²⁷ ¹

Bali had one hundred sons, great sage, of whom Bāṇa was the eldest. The sons of Hiranyakaśipu's brother Hiranyākṣa were all mighty beings: ²

Jharjhara, Śakuni, Bhūtasamtāpana, strong-armed Mahānābha and also Kālanābha. ³

²⁷ This chapter returns to the account of the sage Kaśyapa's descendants. The Daityas Hiranyakaśipu and Hiranyākṣa were Kaśyapa's sons with his second wife, Diti. The offspring of Kaśyapa's other wives are given below. I have added some names to improve clarity.

The sons of Kaśyapa's third wife, Danu, were Dvimūrdhan, Śaṃkara, Ayomukha, Śaṅkuśīras, Kāpila, Śambara, ⁴

Strong-armed Ekacakra, mighty Tāraka, Svarbhānu, Vṛṣaparvan and powerful Puloma. ⁵

These, along with heroic Vipracitti, were the famous sons of Danu. ⁶

Prabhā was the daughter of Svarbhānu. Śarmiṣṭhā was the daughter of Vṛṣaparvan, as were Upadānavī and Hayaśīras—all renowned and brilliant women. ⁷

Danu's son Vaiśvānara had two daughters, Pulomā and Kālakā, both of whom were highly fortunate and married Mārīci. ⁸

These two had sixty thousand sons with Mārīci, the excellent Dānavas known as the Paulomas and Kālakeyas. ⁹

Other mighty, fearsome and pitiless sons were born to Vipracitti and Siṃhikā: ¹⁰

Tryaṃśa, powerful Śalya, Nabha the strong, Vātāpi, Namuci, Ilvala, Khasṛma, ¹¹

Andhaka, Naraka, Kālanābha, heroic Svarbhānu and the great demon Vaktrayodhin. ¹²

These were the best of the Dānavas who swelled the lineage of Danu and whose sons and grandsons numbered in the hundreds and thousands. ¹³

The Nivātakavacas, purified through austere penances, also arose in the family of the Daitya Prahlāda. ¹⁴

The six daughters of Kaśyapa's fourth wife, Tāmrā, renowned as mighty beings, were Śukī, Śyenī, Bhāsī, Sugrīvī, Śuci and Gṛdhrikā. ¹⁵

Śukī gave rise to parrots, Ulūkī to crows, the natural enemies of owls, while Śyenī gave rise to hawks, Bhāsī to kites and Gṛdhri to vultures. ¹⁶

Śuci brought forth waterbirds, and Sugrīvī gave rise to horses, camels and donkeys. All these are known as the lineage of Tāmrā. ¹⁷

Kaśyapa's fifth wife, Vinatā, bore two sons, famed Garuḍa and Aruṇa. Fair-winged Garuḍa, foremost of flying creatures, was the merciless devourer of serpents. ¹⁸

His sixth wife, Surasā, gave rise to a thousand great many-headed snakes of boundless energy, brahmin, which coursed the sky. ¹⁹

His seventh wife, Kadru, gave rise to the Kādravas, another thousand mighty serpents subject to fair-winged Garuḍa, brahmin, similarly many-headed. ²⁰

Chief among these were Śeṣa, Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Śaṅkaśveta, Mahāpadma and both Kambala and Aśvatara, ²¹

Elāputra, Nāga, Karkoṭaka and Dhanamjaya—these and many other serpents full of venom. ²²

You also need to know about the host descended from Kaśyapa's eighth wife, Krodhavaśā: whether born on land, flying on the wing or living in water, all were pitiless carnivores with sharp teeth. ²³

His ninth wife, Surabhi, gave rise to cattle and buffalo, and Irā to varieties of trees and vines, grass and creepers everywhere. ²⁴

His tenth wife brought forth yakṣas and rākṣasas; his eleventh, Muni, bore apsarasas; and his twelfth, Ariṣṭā, gave birth to the great gandharvas. ²⁵

These, then, are the renowned descendants of Kaśyapa, both moving and unmoving, whose sons and grandsons number in the hundreds of thousands. ²⁶

This creation took place in the second Manvantara, known as Svārociṣa, brahmin. In the present Manvantara, the Vaivasvata, while Brahmā was engaged in the great sacrifice initiated by Varuṇa, ²⁷

The so-called Prajāsarga or 'progeny creation' took place. In the age before this, Brahmā brought forth the Seven Sages from his mind. ²⁸

Now he brought them to the world as his own sons, and he himself became the grandsire of the gandharvas, serpents, deities and Dānavas, best of sages. ²⁹

Diti, who later lost her sons,²⁸ pleased Kaśyapa, and that foremost of ascetics, being fully gratified, then granted her a wish. ³⁰

She asked him for a son of boundless power, one capable of slaying Indra. ³¹

That foremost sage allowed his wife her wish, and, having done so, Kaśyapa calmly said to her, ³²

²⁸ Diti's sons were the demons known as Daityas, who were annihilated by the deities. Diti now sought revenge.

‘Your son will conquer Indra if you’re pure and steadfast and bear the infant in your womb for a hundred years with perfect love.’ 33

Having addressed that heavenly woman, sagacious Kāśyapa departed, and Diti, filled with faultless purity, then conceived a child. 34

Mighty Indra, king of gods, knowing that the child was destined to destroy him, respectfully approached the woman to wait upon her. 35

Indra, chastiser of the demon Pāka, remained in Diti’s presence while waiting for a chance to thwart her, and, in the ninety-ninth year, the self-possessed deity saw an opportunity. 36

Diti lay down to sleep one day, but forgot to wash her feet, and Indra entered her womb. 37

With his vajra in his hand, he cut the mighty foetus into seven pieces. Sliced by Indra’s weapon, the infant wailed most piteously. 38

‘Don’t cry! *Mā rodīḥ!*’ Indra said repeatedly, and, even though the foetus was already cut in seven, the deity’s anger grew. 39

Indra, scourge of enemies, then used his vajra to cut each piece into seven more. These became in time the speeding deities of the wind. 40

Because mighty Indra said *mā rodīḥ*, they were called the Maruts, forty-nine in all, deity-companions to the bearer of the vajra. 41

So ends Chapter Twenty-One in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

22. Brahmā appoints sovereigns; Nature of the Absolute

Parāśara:

When Pṛthu had been anointed sovereign of the earth by the foremost sages, Brahmā, grandsire of the world, bestowed the other sovereignties in order. 1

To Soma he gave sovereignty over the stars, planets, brahmins, all plant life, as well as sacrifices and austerities. 2

He gave Vaiśravaṇa sovereignty over kings, and Varuṇa over waters. He made Viṣṇu lord of Ādityas and shining Agni lord of Vasus. 3

He made Dakṣa lord of patriarchs, Indra lord of Maruts and Prahlāda lord of Daityas and Dānavas. 4

He caused Yama, king of justice, to be anointed lord of *pitṛs*, the ancestral spirits, and made Airāvata lord of all the elephant kings. 5

He made Garuḍa king of birds, Indra king of gods, Uccaiḥśravas lord of horses and Vṛṣabha king of cattle. 6

He made Śeṣa lord of serpent kings, the lion the king of beasts and caused the sacred fig to be anointed king of forest trees. 7

Having thus shared out sovereignties, Brahmā, lord of patriarchs, immediately appointed guardians for each direction. 8

He caused the king Sudhanvan, son of the patriarch Vairāja, to be anointed guardian-king of the east. 9

The son of the patriarch Kardama, Śaṅkhaḥpada by name, was anointed king of the south. 10

He had the great immortal Ketumant, son of Rajas, anointed king of the west. 11

Hiranyaroman, son of the patriarch Parjanya, was anointed doughty king of the north. 12

Even today, this whole world with its forests and seven continents is protected by these beings, realm by realm, in accord with virtue. 13

All these and other sovereigns, invested with authority for the preservation of the world by mighty Viṣṇu, best of sages, 14

As well as those to come in future and lords of creation in times gone by, are aspects of Viṣṇu, who himself is all creation, best of brahmins. 15

Kings of gods and kings of Daityas, lords of Dānavas and flesh-eating demons, 16

Lords of beasts and winged creatures, and lords of humankind and snakes and nāgas, 17

Lords of trees and mountains and planets, those of the present, past and future—all these arise as aspects of Viṣṇu, who is all creation. 18

None other than Hari, lord of all, wise sage, has the power to preserve the world. 19

He creates this universe and, once it's made, he is the everlasting being who preserves it. In the form of the destroyer, he destroys it, filled in turn with energy, purity and the other quality, darkness. 20

Four aspects of Viṣṇu

Janārdana appears in four aspects during the creation of the world, another four during its preservation and yet another four during final dissolution. ²¹

During creation, one aspect is Brahmā, the manifest form of the unmanifest being. The second is the patriarch Marīci and the others. ²²

Time is the third aspect, and all other creatures are the fourth. Thus, he exists in four aspects during the creation of the world, having the quality of energy. ²³

In one aspect, Viṣṇu preserves creation; in another, he manifests as Manu and the patriarchs; and in yet another takes the form of Time. ²⁴

Manifesting in yet another aspect within all creatures, he comprises all the world. Taking on the quality of purity, he becomes *puruṣottama*, the highest spirit of the universe. ²⁵

Assuming the quality of darkness at the time of dissolution, the birthless lord manifests one aspect in the form of Rudra. ²⁶

Another aspect of Viṣṇu exists in the forms of Agni, Yama and the other gods. The third appears in the form of Time, and yet another is all creatures. ²⁷

Thus, this great deity exists in four aspects during the destruction of the world. This set of four aspects is called *sārvakālikī*, ‘universal dissolution’, brahmin. ²⁸

Brahmā, Dakṣa and the other patriarchs, Time and other creatures—these are manifestations of Hari’s power and are the cause of the creation of the world. ²⁹

Viṣṇu is Manu and the progenitors, Time and other beings, brahmin. These are also manifestations of his power, and he himself is the cause of the preservation of the world. ³⁰

Rudra, Time, Yama, the other deities and all creatures are the fourfold manifestations of Janārdana’s power for the destruction of the universe. ³¹

At the beginning of the world, in the middle period and until its final dissolution, brahmin, the processes of creation are undertaken by the arranger Viṣṇu through the agency of Marīci, the patriarchs and other living creatures. ³²

In the beginning, Brahmā creates the world, then Marīci and the foremost patriarchs bring forth progeny unhindered, as do other creatures. ³³

But Brahmā cannot undertake creation without Time, brahmin, nor can the patriarchs or any other beings. 34

Thus, these four aspects of Viṣṇu, god of gods, Maitreya, are essential for creation and destruction of the world. 35

Anything brought forth by a living being, brahmin, is entirely Hari's body. 36

Whatever destroys a creature, whether moving or unmoving, anywhere, Maitreya, is the destructive form of Janārdana, who brings an end to all. 37

Janārdana is creator of the world, preserver, the world itself, its destroyer and universal lord. 38

He exists in threefold forms during its creation, preservation and destruction, acting in accord with each of these three qualities, but his ultimate state is a higher one beyond all these. 39

That fourfold form of the highest spirit consists of true knowledge, is all-pervading, unequalled and is comprehended by Viṣṇu himself alone. 40

The nature of the Absolute

Maitreya:

Sage, duly describe for me the four forms of the Absolute, which is called the highest state. 41

Parāśara:

The way to reach a goal is called the means, Maitreya, and that which one desires to reach is the goal itself. 42

For an ascetic who yearns for liberation, breath control and other practices are the means, and his goal is the highest Absolute, from which there's no return. 43

The knowledge on which ascetics rely for achieving liberation is discrimination. This, sage, is the first aspect of the Absolute as knowledge. 44

The second aspect of the Absolute is the knowledge of causes, great sage, as it pertains to ascetics whose goal is liberation from all suffering. 45

Knowledge of the inseparability and non-duality of both goal and means I call the third aspect. 46

Knowledge that overcomes distinctions between the first three aspects, great sage, and reveals the true form of the Self, 47

Which is free from action, inexpressible, omnipresent, unequalled, has self-understanding as its object and simply exists without characteristics, *48*

Which is tranquil, fearless, pure, difficult to comprehend and independent—that is called the highest state of Viṣṇu in the form of knowledge. *49*

Those ascetics who achieve absorption in that state by dispelling ignorance will never take root in worldly existence, brahmin, unlike seeds sown in a ploughed field. *50*

Such is the nature of the pure, eternal, universal, undecaying, faultless supreme state called Viṣṇu. *51*

The ascetic who reaches that highest Absolute knows no return. Transcending concepts of vice and virtue, he is free from suffering and is completely pure. *52*

Two states of the Absolute abide in all creation: one with form and the other without. One may perish, the other is eternal. *53*

The eternal is the highest Absolute, while the perishable form is all this world. Just as moonlight spreads in all directions though the moon itself stands still, so, too, does the power of the highest Absolute fill all the world. *54*

In that same regard, just as the intensity of light depends on distance from its source, Maitreya, the power of the Absolute is likewise. *55*

Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are the primary forms of the Absolute and are imbued with its power. Next come the lesser deities, Maitreya, and then Dakṣa and the other patriarchs, *56*

After these come humankind, cattle, wild beasts, birds and things that creep, each inferior to the one before, finally followed by trees and shrubs and all the others. *57*

Thus, this whole world, although imperishable and eternal, best of sages, appears and disappears as if subject to birth and death. *58*

Viṣṇu, who comprises all power, is the highest form of the Absolute. This is the form on which ascetics first meditate at the beginning of their practices. *59*

Perfect identity with the deity arises in an untroubled heart, fully one with the divine, which itself is dependent on the divine, sage, and which is endowed with the seed of the divine. *60*

Viṣṇu is superior to all those with power. He is identical with the Absolute and is the Absolute in form. Hari consists entirely of the Absolute, blessed sage. 61

This whole world without exception is imbued with him, sage. It arises from him, abides in him and is indeed identical with him. 62

Viṣṇu comprises all that's perishable and imperishable. He is the lord who bears this whole world of spirit and matter in the form of his ornaments and his weapons. 63

Maitreya:

Kindly explain how Lord Viṣṇu thus upholds the world. 64

Parāśara:

Having bowed down to mighty Viṣṇu, who's beyond all measure, I'll relate to you what the sage Vasiṣṭha once told me. 65

Lord Hari wears the unblemished essence of the world, free from stains and qualities, as the Kaustubha jewel on his breast. 66

Eternal Viṣṇu wears all primal matter in the whorl of hair, Śrīvatsa, on his chest. Primal intellect abides in Mādhava as his mace. 67

The lord bears twofold individuation, consisting of the elements and the senses, in the form of his conch and bow. 68

Viṣṇu carries primal mind, fickle and swifter than the wind, in the form of the discus he holds in his hand. 69

The garland of fundamental elements, consisting of the elements themselves and their causes, is the fivefold wreath of victory, Vaijayantī, worn by the mace-bearing deity, brahmin. 70

Janārdana bears all the faculties of perception and action in the form of his many arrows. 71

The excellent sword of surpassing brilliance borne by the unfailing deity is knowledge: this is wisdom that may be sheathed in ignorance. 72

In this way, primal spirit, matter, intellect, individuation, the elements, mind, all the senses, knowledge, ignorance and all the world, Maitreya, abide in Hṛṣīkeśa. 73

Hari, who is formless and consists of illusion, adopts this form with weapons and adornments for the benefit of all living beings. 74

The supreme lotus-eyed deity carries primal matter with its permutations, spirit and the universe. 75

That which is knowledge and that which is ignorance, that which exists and that which does not—all this abides in eternal Madhusūdāna, lord of all creation, Maitreya. 76

The lord, boundless and eternal Hari, appears in the form of time consisting of subseconds, seconds, minutes, days, seasons, half-years and years. 77

The lord upholds the seven realms of earth, sky, heaven, Mahar, Jana, Tapas and Satya, best of sages. 78

Hari's form is the essence of the world, he is firstborn of all firstborn, foundation of all knowledge and stands alone. 79

The lord, master of all, who has neither end nor body, abides in the manifold forms of creation as gods, mortals, beasts and others. 80

The *R̥g*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva Vedas*, the histories, the lesser Vedic texts and the declarations of the *Upaniṣads*, 81

The Vedic supplements, *Manu* and other legal texts, lyrics, treatises, narratives, any texts for recital, 82

Poetry, speech and song are all the body of great Viṣṇu in the form of sound. 83

All things with and without form, here and elsewhere, are his body. 84

‘I am Hari. All this is Janārdana. There is no cause or effect other than him’—one whose mind is set on this will never be subjected to repeated rebirths. 85

Such is the first part of this purāṇa, brahmin, which I've accurately recalled for you. Hearing this, you'll be freed from all misdeeds. 86

A person acquires as much merit from listening to this, Maitreya, as from bathing in Puṣkara Lake on the full-moon day in the month of Kārttika for twelve consecutive years. 87

To a person who hears this, the wish-granting gods bestow the status of a deity, sage, ancestral spirit, gandharva, yakṣa and the rest. 88

So ends Chapter Twenty-Two in Book One of the glorious Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

End of Book One.

This text is taken from *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa: Ancient Annals of the God with Lotus Eyes*, translated from the Sanskrit by McComas Taylor, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/VP.2021.01