

# Book Two: The World

## 1. Priyavrata distributes the continents

*Maitreya:*

You've told me all about the creation of the universe in answer to my question, holy guru. <sup>1</sup>

But there's an aspect of creation you've recounted, best of sages, about which I'd like to hear some more. <sup>2</sup>

Svāyaṃbhava had two sons, Priyavrata and Uttānapāda. Regarding these, you mentioned that Uttānapāda's son was Dhruva, <sup>3</sup>

But you've said nothing about Priyavrata's descendants, brahmin. I'd like to hear about them, if it pleases you to tell me. <sup>4</sup>

*Parāśara:*

Priyavrata married the daughter of Kardama. They had ten sons and two daughters, Samrāj and Kukṣi. <sup>5</sup>

The sons of Priyavrata were said to be wise, brave, gracious and dear to their father. Listen while I tell you the names by which they're known: <sup>6</sup>

Āgnīdhra, Agnibāhu, Vapuṣmant, Dyutimant, Medhas, Medhātithi, Bhavya, Savana and Putra. <sup>7</sup>

Jyotiṣmant, the 'Shining One', was tenth among them and was as brilliant as his name suggests, but all of Priyavrata's sons were famed for strength and courage. <sup>8</sup>

Three—namely, Medhas, Agnibāhu and Putra—were devoted to yoga. Remembering their former lives, these fortunate men didn't set their hearts on sovereignty. <sup>9</sup>

They remained ever selfless in all matters, sage, and performed sacrifices in accordance with propriety, not thinking of reward. *10*

Priyavrata divided the world into seven continents, best of sages, and gave one to each of his other seven great sons, Maitreya. *11*

Āgnīdhra received Jambūdvīpa from his father, fortunate seer. To Medhātithi, he gave another continent, Plakṣadvīpa. *12*

Vapuṣmant was anointed king of Śālmala, and holy Priyavrata made Jyotiṣmant king of Kuśadvīpa. *13*

Priyavrata also appointed Dyutimant as king of Krauñcadvīpa and made Bhavya lord over Śākadvīpa. *14*

That holy one made Savana king of Puṣkara. Āgnīdhra, who was king of Jambūdvīpa, best of sages, had nine sons, equal to the patriarchs: *15*

Nābhi, Kimpuruṣa, Harivarṣa, Ilāvṛta, Ramya, Hiraṇvant was the sixth, along with Kuru and Bhadrāśva. The other was Ketumāla, a king of virtuous conduct. *16*

### Āgnīdhra divides Jambūdvīpa

Hear how Āgnīdhra divided Jambūdvīpa among his sons, brahmin: Nābhi was given the southern region of Himāhva by his father. *17*

Āgnīdhra gave Hemakūṭa to Kimpuruṣa. The third region, Naiṣadha, he gave to Harivarṣa. *18*

He gave the region centred on Mount Meru to Ilāvṛta, and the lands around Mount Nīla his father gave to Ramya. *19*

Hiraṇvant was given the region to the north of that, known as Śveta. *20*

The lands to the north of Śṛṅgavant he gave to Kuru, and he gave the region that lies east of Meru to Bhadrāśva. *21*

The region of Gandhamādana he gave to Ketumāla. This is how that king divided the regions among his sons. *22*

After that sovereign had enthroned his sons in each of these, Maitreya, he retired to the most auspicious site of Śālagrāma to undertake austerities. *23*

In the eight regions given to Kimpuruṣa and the others, great sage, achievement was spontaneous and happiness was effortless. *24*

They were free from misfortune and the woes of age and death. There was no distinction between vice and virtue, or between best, worst and middling. *25*

These eight regions never knew the cycle of ages. The region of Himāhvaya was ruled by the great Nābhi. With his queen, Merudevī, he had a brilliant son, Ṛṣabha. *26*

Ṛṣabha himself had a hundred sons, of whom Bharata was the eldest. Having ruled wisely and performed varied sacrifices, *27*

King Ṛṣabha placed his son heroic Bharata upon the throne, then that fortunate man retired to the ashram of Pulaha to undertake austerities. *28*

Following the prescription for those who retire to the forest, that resolute king duly performed austerities and instituted sacrifices. *29*

Wasted by his practices, he grew thin, his veins distended. Naked Ṛṣabha placed a pebble in his mouth and took the path of heroes. *30*

## **The kings of Bhārata**

Because this region was given to Bharata by his father when he retired to the forest, it's known throughout the threefold worlds as Bhārata. *31*

Bharata had a most virtuous son, Sumati. After Bharata had successfully completed the required sacrifices, he bestowed the kingdom on his son. *32*

King Bharata, who delighted in the practice of yoga, sage, passed responsibility to his son and drew his final breath at Śālagrāma. *33*

In time, he was reborn a brahmin in a brilliant line of ascetics. I'll recount his exploits for you later, Maitreya. *34*

Brilliant Sumati had a son, Indradyumna. His son was Parameṣṭhin, and his son was Pratihāra. *35*

He had a son named Pratiharta. His son was Bhuva. Next came Udḡītha. King Prastāva was his son. *36*

Then came Pṛthu, followed by Nakta. Nakta's son was Gaya. Nara was the son of Gaya. He had a son, Virāj. *37*

His son was heroic Dhīmant. Then came Mahānta, whose son was Manasyu. *38*

Then came Tvaṣṭṛ. Tvaṣṭṛ's son was Viraja, and his son was Raja. His son was Śatajit, who had a hundred sons, sage. *39*

Of these, Viśvagjyoti was the eldest. They all contributed to the growth of the population and shone like ornaments in the ninefold region of Bhārata. 40

In former times, their descendants had possession of the land of Bhārata for seventy-one cycles of the ages, each consisting of the Kṛta, Tretā and the others. 41

This was the period of creation under Manu Svāyaṃbhuva, who presided over the first Manvantara in the era known as Vārāha, sage, when this whole world was populated. 42

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

## 2. Jambūdvīpa, ‘Land of the Rose-Apple Tree’

*Maitreya:*

Brahmin, you’ve told me about creation during the period of Svāyaṃbhuva. Now I’d like to hear from you about the entire circle of the earth, 1

Including oceans, lands, regions, mountains, forests, lakes and the cities of the gods and other beings, sage, 2

As well as the dimensions, support, nature and state of each. It befits you, sage, to describe all this. 3

*Parāśara:*

Listen while I explain it all in brief, Maitreya, because I couldn’t give you all the details even in a hundred years. 4

Jambū, Plakṣa, Śālma, Kuśa, Krauñca and Śāka, with Puṣkara as the seventh, brahmin: 5

These are the continents surrounded by seven oceans, of saltwater, syrup, wine, ghee, whey, milk and water, respectively. 6

Jambūdvīpa is in the middle of these, and the golden mountain, Meru, is at the centre of that continent, Maitreya. 7

Mount Meru stands eighty-four thousand leagues in height. 8

It descends below the surface of the earth for a further sixteen thousand leagues, its summit is thirty-two thousand leagues across and the base of the mountain is fully sixteen thousand leagues wide. 9

The world resembles a lotus flower with Mount Meru as the seed head at its heart. 10

The mountain ranges Himavant, Hemakūṭa and Niṣadha are to the south of Meru, while Nīla, Śveta and Śṛṅgin lie northward. 11

The two ranges closest to the centre are one hundred thousand leagues in length, while each of the others is successively ten thousand leagues shorter. They are all two thousand leagues high and two thousand wide. 12

To the south of Meru, the first region is Bhārata, Kimpuruṣa is next, then comes another, Harivarṣa, brahmin. 13

To the north of Meru is the region Ramya, followed by Hiraṇmaya and the Northern Kurus, whose position mirrors that of Bhārata. 14

Each of these regions is nine thousand leagues wide, excellent brahmin, including Ilāvṛta, which has the towering golden mountain, Meru, at its centre. 15

From the four sides of Meru, Ilāvṛta extends nine thousand leagues in each direction, fortunate brahmin, and there are four mountains in this region. 16

Arranged like pillars around Mount Meru, each stands ten thousand leagues high. To the east is Mandara by name, to the south Gandhamādana, Vipula is on the western side and Supārśva is to the north. 17

On each of these stands a tree, eleven hundred leagues across—a *kadamba*, a *jambū*, a *pippala* and a *vaṭa*, respectively—like banners on a mountain top. 18

Jambūdvīpa is named for this *jambū*, a rose-apple tree, great sage, the fruits of which are as large as elephants. 19

When they fall down upon the mountain, they split open and their juices form a river, the Jambūnadī, from which the residents of that region drink. 20

As a result of drinking from the river, the people never sweat, smell bad, grow old or lose their senses, and their minds are always sharp. 21

When the mud on the riverbank, coming into contact with the juice, is dried by pleasant breezes, it becomes the kind of gold that's known as *jāmbūnada* and is used in making jewellery for the siddhas. 22

The region of Bhadrāśva lies east of Meru, Ketumāla is to the west, best of sages, and Ilāvṛta lies between them. 23

The Caitraratha forest is also east of Meru, and the forest of Gandhamādana is to the south. Similarly, Vaibhrāja is to the west and Nandana to the north. *24*

The four lakes of Aruṇoda, Mahābhadra, Asitoda and Mānasa are always enjoyed by deities. *25*

The mountain ranges Śītāmbha, Kumanda, Kurarin, Mālyavant, with Vaikaṅka as the foremost, extend eastwards from Meru. *26*

The Trikūṭa, Śísira, Pataṅga, Rucaka, Niṣadha and other ranges lie south. *27*  
Śikhivāsas, Savaiḍūya, Kapila, Gandhamādana, with Jārudhi as the main one, are to the west. *28*

Śaṅkhakūṭa, Ṛṣabha, Haṃsa, Nāga, Kālañjana and others lie northward. These are situated in the regions around Mount Meru, including Jaṭhara. *29*

On the summit of Mount Meru is Brahmā's wondrous city, fourteen thousand leagues across, Maitreya, and renowned throughout the heavens. *30*

On all sides of that city, at the four cardinal points and the four intermediate ones, are the famed and excellent cities of Indra and other world-protecting deities. *31*

Here, the River Gaṅgā, which flows across the foot of Viṣṇu, having first bathed the face of the moon, cascades from the heavens on every side of Brahmā's city. *32*

After it has descended there, it flows in four directions as the Sītā, Alakanandā, Cakṣu and Bhadrā rivers, respectively. *33*

The Sītā flows eastwards through the sky from mountain to mountain, then crosses the eastern region of Bhadrāśva to the ocean. *34*

Similarly, the Alakanandā flows south to Bhārata, before dividing into seven streams and entering the ocean, great sage. *35*

The Cakṣu flows west past all the mountain ranges and, having reached the western region of Ketumāla, there joins the ocean. *36*

Likewise, the Bhadrā crosses the northern mountain ranges and the land of Northern Kurus to reach the ocean in that direction, great sage. *37*

Meru stands amid the Nīla, Niṣadha, Mālyavant and Gandhamādana mountains, like the seed head at the centre of a lotus. *38*

The Bhāratas, Ketumālas, Bhadrāśvas and the Kurus, like the petals of the lotus-world, lie beyond the limits of the mountains. 39

Jaṭhara and Devakūṭa are two ranges that form a barrier extending north to south, meeting the Nīla and Niṣadha mountains. 40

Gandhamādana and Kailāsa stretch east and west, eighty leagues in width, from sea to sea. 41

The two ranges Niṣadha and Pāriyātra also form barriers to the west of Meru, as do those on the east. 42

Triśṅga and Jārudhi, two regional ranges in the north, also extend east and west from sea to sea. 43

Thus, I've described for you, best of sages, the mountain ranges of Jaṭhara and the rest, which, in pairs, form barriers on the sides of Meru. 44

The chains of mountains on each side of Meru that I've mentioned, such as Śītā, are exceedingly delightful, sage. The valleys found between these ranges, inhabited by siddhas and cāraṇas, are pleasant, as are the forests and the cities. 45

There the excellent sanctuaries of Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu, Agni, Sūrya and other deities, best of sages, are frequented by the foremost kiṃnaras. 46

Gandharvas, yakṣas, rākṣasas, Daityas and Dānavas disport themselves both day and night in those splendid valleys. 47

These regions are like heaven on earth and are the abode of the righteous, sage. Evildoers may not approach them, even after a hundred rebirths. 48

In the region of Bhadrāśva, Lord Viṣṇu dwells in the form of horse-headed Hayaśīras, brahmin. He takes the form of a boar in Ketumāla and a tortoise in Bhārata. 49

Govinda takes the form of a fish in the land of Kurus, but Janārdana of universal form is in fact everywhere, and Hari, the universal being, is master of all. 50

He is the foundation of everything, Maitreya, and lies at the heart of all. 51

The other eight regions beginning with Kimpuruṣa are free from pain, fatigue, anxiety, hunger, calamities and other woes, great sage. 52

Their inhabitants are healthy, fearless, free from suffering and live for ten or twelve millennia. 53

The rain god Indra has no need to provide showers in those regions as there is sufficient water on the ground, nor are they subject to the cycles of the ages, Kṛta, Tretā and the others. 54

In each of these regions are seven mountain ranges, best of brahmins, where hundreds upon hundreds of rivers rise. 55

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

### 3. The land of Bhārata

*Parāśara:*

The region north of the ocean and south of the Himālaya, known as Bhārata, is inhabited by Bharata's descendants. 1

Nine thousand leagues across, great sage, it's where those who reach heaven or liberation do their deeds. 2

Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Śuktimant, Ṛkṣparvata, Vindhya and Pāriyātra are the seven mountain ranges. 3

From this region one may ascend to heaven or win liberation, sage, but folk are also born as animals or descend to hell. 4

From Bhārata, heaven, liberation, somewhere in between or an end are possible. No other region is given to the deeds of mortals. 5

Listen to the nine divisions of the land of Bhārata: Indradvīpa, Kaśeru, Tāmraparṇa, Gabhastimant, 6

Nāgadvīpa, Saumya, Gāndharva and Vāruṇa. The ninth of these is Dvīpa, surrounded by the ocean. 7

Dvīpa is a thousand leagues from north to south. At the eastern edge of Bhārata are the Kirātas and in the west the Yavanas. 8

In the centre are brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras, engaged in their respective occupations of sacrifice, warfare, commerce and service. 9

The Śatadrū, Candrabhāga and other rivers flow from the foot of the Himālaya. Others, most importantly the Vedasmṛti, arise in the Pāriyātra ranges, sage. 10

The Narmadā, Surasā and others flow from the Vindhya mountains, while the Tāpī, Payoṣṇī and Nīrvindhya are the major rivers issuing from the R̥kṣa ranges. 11

The Godāvārī, Bhīmarathī, Kṛṣṇavenī and other streams that arise at the foot of the Sahya mountains assuage the sins of people and their fears. 12

The Kṛtamālā and Tāmraparṇī are the largest rivers flowing from the Malaya ranges. The Trisāmā, Cāryakulyā and others arise in the Mahendra mountains. 13

The R̥ṣikulyā, Kumārā and others flow from the foot of the Śaktimant ranges.<sup>1</sup> There are thousands of other streams besides, both great and small. 14

The Kuru, Pāñcāla and other peoples inhabit the central districts. The easterners include the residents of Kāmarūpa. 15

Puṇḍras, Kaliṅgas, Magadhas and others live in the southern reaches. To the west are the Saurāṣṭras, Śūras, Bhīras and Arbudas. 16

The Kārūṣas and Mālavas inhabit the Pāriyātra mountains. The Sauvīras, Saindhavas, Hūṇas, Sālvas and the inhabitants of Śākala, 17

The Madras, Rāmas, Ambaṣṭhas, Pārasīkas and others drink the waters of these rivers and reside permanently in their vicinity, enjoying great prosperity. These rivers are populated by peoples, affluent and happy. 18

Here in the region of Bhārata, the fourfold ages of Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali are experienced, great sage, but nowhere else. 19

Ascetics perform austerities, the devout conduct sacrifices and make donations with piety, all for the sake of the next world. 20

In Jambūdvīpa, people always worship Viṣṇu, the spirit of the sacrifice and practice itself, with such rituals, but on other continents, he's revered in other ways. 21

Furthermore, in all of Jambūdvīpa, Bhārata is the perfect region, great sage, because it alone is fit for sacrificial action, the others being set on pleasure. 22

A being is reborn in Jambūdvīpa in human form, best of sages, from merit won in a thousand thousand lifetimes. 23

1 The critical edition lists the river R̥ṣikulyā twice. I have followed the Gītā Press edition, which gives 'Cāryakulyā' in the place of the first occurrence of R̥ṣikulyā.

The deities themselves have sung this song: ‘More fortunate than the gods are those who live in Bhārata, the land that leads to heaven and beyond. 24

Dedicating all their practice, never thinking of reward, to Viṣṇu, the highest spirit, and having reached that land of sacrificial action, they go forth unstained to liberation. 25

We do not know where we’ll be born when the karma that gave us heaven has expired. Fortunate indeed are those who are born in Bhārata with all their senses sharp.’ 26

I’ve described in brief to you, Maitreya, the land of Jambūdvīpa, with its nine regions, one hundred thousand leagues across. 27

Jambūdvīpa is ringed by an ocean of salty water, Maitreya, as wide as the land it girds. 28

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

## 4. Plakṣadvīpa and the other continents

*Parāśara:*

Just as the land called Jambūdvīpa is ringed by an ocean of salty water, that ocean is surrounded by the land of Plakṣadvīpa, the ‘Land of the Pipal Tree’. 1

Jambūdvīpa is one hundred thousand leagues across, brahmin, and Plakṣadvīpa is said to be twice as wide again. 2

Medhātithi, lord of Plakṣadvīpa, had seven sons, the eldest of whom was Śāntabhaya, followed by Śīśira, 3

Sukhodaya, Ānanda, Śiva and Kṣemaka, with Dhruva as the seventh among them. All became rulers of Plakṣadvīpa. 4

The region named for its sovereign Śāntabhaya is the first, followed by Śīśira, Sukhada, Ānanda, Śiva, Kṣemaka and Dhruva. 5

The borders of each region are formed by seven ranges. Listen to their names, best of sages: 6

Gomeda, Candra, Nārada, Dundubhi, Somaka and Sumanas, with Mount Vaibhāja as the seventh. 7

In these pleasant ranges and the regions dwell blameless inhabitants, always in the company of deities and *gandharvas*. 8

In these locales are auspicious settlements whose residents enjoy long lives, free from pain and illness, always living happily. 9

The seven regions each have a river flowing to the sea. I'll tell you all their names, as hearing them will wash away your sins: 10

Anutaptā, Śikhī, Vipāśā, Tridivā, Kramu and Amṛtā, with Sukṛtā as the seventh—such are the rivers found there. 11

I've told you about the mountains and the major rivers, but there are thousands of lesser chains and streams from which the inhabitants always delight in drinking. 12

In those seven regions, lifespans never shrink or grow, brahmin, as the cycle of four ages is unknown. 13

There, it's always like the Tretā age, great sage. The inhabitants of the five continents between Plakṣadvīpa and Śākadvīpa, brahmin, 14

Live healthy lives for five millennia. On these five continents, occupations are determined by one's community and stage of life. 15

There are four orders in Plakṣadvīpa; listen while I name them for you: 16

The Āryakas, Kuraras, Vivimśas and Bhāvins are like our brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. 17

There's one huge tree in the middle of Plakṣadvīpa, best of sages, as big as the *jambū*, called the *plakṣa* or pipal, hence its name. 18

All the communities there, beginning with the Āryakas, worship Lord Hari, the universal creator of the world and master of all, in the form of Soma the Moon. 19

Plakṣadvīpa is girt by a circular sea of syrup, as wide as the continent itself. 20

## Śālmadvīpa, 'Land of the Cottonwood Tree'

I've briefly described the land of Plakṣadvīpa for you, Maitreya. Now you'll hear about Śālmala from me. 21

The lord of Śālmala is the hero Vapuṣmant. Listen to the names of his sons, which are also the names of the seven regions: 22

Śveta, Harita, Jīmūta, Rohita, Vaidyuta, Mānasa and Suprabha, great sage. 23

The sea of syrup is ringed by the land of Śālmala, twice as wide as the sea itself. 24

This continent also has seven ranges, the source of jewels, which divide the regions, in addition to seven rivers: 25

Kumuda, Unnata, Balāhaka is the third, Mount Droṇa the great source of healing plants is fourth, 26

Kaṅka is the fifth, Maḥiṣa the sixth and Kukudmant the seventh splendid mountain. Now you'll hear the rivers' names from me: 27

Yonī, Toyā, Viṭṭṣṇā, Candrā, Śuklā and Vimocanī, with Nivṛtti as the seventh—all of which are thought to wash away one's sins. 28

Śveta, Harita, Jīmūta, Rohita, Vaidyuta, Mānasa and especially the lovely Suprabha are the seven regions. There are also four communities. 29

Those who inhabit Śālmala, great sage, are the Kapilas, Aruṇas, Pītās and Kṛṣṇas,<sup>2</sup> like our brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. 30

The pious population worships everlasting Viṣṇu, heart of all who constitutes the sacrifice, in the form of Vāyu, god of winds, with finest sacrifices. 31

Here in this very pleasant land, whose denizens enjoy the company of gods, there is a great *sālmali*, a cottonwood tree, bestowing perfect bliss. 32

Śālmala is ringed by a sea of wine as wide as the land itself. 33

This sea of wine is ringed by the land of Kuśadvīpa, twice as wide as Śālmala. 34

## **Kuśadvīpa, 'Land of Kuśa-Grass'**

In Kuśadvīpa, King Jyotiṣmant had seven sons. Listen to their names: 35

Udbhida, Veṇumant, Svairatha, Lambana, Dhṛti, Prabhākara and Kapila. These are also the names of the seven regions there. 36

In that land, people dwell with deities, Daityas, Dānavas, gandharvas, yakṣas, kimpuruṣas and the rest. 37

Here are also four communities, each devoted to their duties: Damins, Śuṣmins, Snehas and Mandehas, great sage, 38

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2 The names of the four communities of Śālmala literally mean 'brown', 'red', 'yellow' and 'black'.

Corresponding to our brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. 39

Because they undertake prescribed responsibilities, and in order to escape their earthly tasks, there on Kuśadvīpa, while worshipping Janārdana in the form of Brahmā, they abandon deeds that would otherwise result in further tedious duties.<sup>3</sup> 40

Vidruma, Hemaśaila, Dyutimant, Puṣpavant, Kuśeśaya and Hari, with Mount Mandata as the seventh— 41

These are the seven ranges that divide the regions of that land, great sage. Now listen to the names of the seven streams in turn: 42

Dhūtapāpā, Śivā, Pavitrā, Saṃmati, Vidyudambhā, Mahī and Sarvapāpaharā, 43

In addition, there are thousands of lesser streams and mountains. Kuśadvīpa is thought to be named for a clump of *kuśa*-grass that grows there. 44

It's ringed by a sea of ghee as wide as the land itself. That sea is then enclosed within the land of Krauñcadvīpa. 45

## **Krauñcadvīpa, 'Land of Cranes'**

Now you'll hear about that other continent, Krauñcadvīpa, fortunate sage, twice as wide as Kuśadvīpa. 46

On Krauñcadvīpa, King Dyutimant had seven great sons, after whom he named its regions: 47

Kuśāla, Manuga, Uṣṇa, Pīvara, Andhakāraka, Muni and Dundubhi—such were his seven sons, sage. 48

There are also pleasant mountain ranges between each region, inhabited by gods and gandharvas. Listen to their names: 49

Krauñca, Vāmana, Andhakāraka is the third, the fourth is jewel-bearing Svāhinī, which resembles a horse, Divāvṛt is the fifth, then comes Puṇḍarikavant, 50

And then the great mountain Dundubhi. Just as each land is twice as wide as the one before it, each of these mountains is twice as high as the preceding one. 51

3 That is, they are released from further rebirths.

In all these pleasant regions, and in the ranges that divide them, dwell communities free from worry and attended by hosts of deities. 52

Their Puṣkaras, Puṣkalas, Dhanyas and Tiṣyas, great sage, are like our brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. 53

Now, Maitreya, you'll hear about the seven major rivers from which they drink, but there are also smaller rivers by the hundred: 54

Gaurī, Kumudvatī, Saṃdhyā, Rātri, Manojavā, Khyāti and Puṇḍarikā are the seven rivers of those regions. 55

Here, too, Lord Janārdana is worshipped by the Puṣkaras and other orders in the form of Rūdra, with offerings made in sacrifices. 56

Krauñcadvīpa is ringed all round by a sea of whey as wide as the land itself. 57

This sea is surrounded by Śākadvīpa, sage, which is twice as wide as Krauñcadvīpa. 58

### Śākadvīpa, 'Land of the Teak Tree'

Bhavya, the overlord of Śākadvīpa, had seven sons, to whom he gave the regions of his land: 59

Jalada, Kumāra, Sukumāra, Mañcaka, Kusumoda and Sumodāki, with Mahādruma as the seventh. 60

The seven regions, all named after these seven sons, are divided by seven ranges: 61

The first is Udayagiri, then Jaladhāra, Raivataka, Śyāma, Ambhogiri, Āmbikeya and delightful Kesarī, that excellent mountain, brahmin. 62

On that continent is a giant *śāka*—teak—enjoyed by siddhas and gandharvas. The touch of the breeze that passes through its leaves yields excellent refreshment. 63

There are pleasant settlements wherein dwell the four communities, and auspicious rivers that wash away all sins: 64

Sukumārī, Kumārī, Nalinī, Veṇukā, Ikṣu and Dhenukā, with Gabhastī as the seventh. 65

There are also tens of thousands of lesser streams, great sage, and myriad mountains. 66

The residents of Jalada and other regions descend from heaven to the earth to drink from these very rivers and, having done so, are refreshed. *67*

Virtue is never lacking in these seven lands, nor are the inhabitants jealous of one another, nor do they transgress the boundaries of propriety. *68*

The Magas, Māgadhas, Mānasas and Mandagas are the four communities. The Magas are in general like our brahmins, the Māgadhas our kṣatriyas, the Mānasas our vaiśyas and the Mandagas śūdras. *69*

In Śākadvīpa, the communities I mentioned worship Viṣṇu in the form of Sūrya the Sun, sage, with perfect rituals, while holding themselves in check. *70*

Śākadvīpa is ringed by a sea of milk as wide as the land itself, Maitreya, as if by a bracelet. *71*

### **Puṣkara, ‘Land of the Banyan Tree’**

The sea of milk is girt by the land called Puṣkara, brahmin, which is twice as wide as Śākadvīpa. *72*

On Puṣkara, King Savana had but a pair of sons, Mahāvīra and Dhātika, and he named the regions of the continent after them: one Mahāvīra, the other Dhātakī. *73*

The land has a single range of mountains dividing the regions, known as Mānasottara, blessed sage, which rings the centre of the continent like a bangle. *74*

This circular range, fifty thousand leagues in height and fifty thousand wide, *75*

Forms a ring in the middle of Puṣkara and divides the island down its centre, sage, being located in such a way that it separates the regions. *76*

Thus, each region, as well as the range itself, is shaped like a bracelet. *77*

This continent’s inhabitants live for ten millennia, free from sorrow and disease, knowing neither enmity nor passion. *78*

They have no concept of worse or better, nor are there killers or killed, brahmin, nor is there jealousy, envy, anger, greed or malice. *79*

The region of Mahāvīra lies beyond the Mānasottara range, while the Dhātakī region, inhabited by deities, Daityas and the rest, lies within it. *80*

Ideas of right and wrong remain unknown in the land called Puṣkara, nor are there rivers or other ranges in this land of just two regions. 81

All its people resemble deities, 82

And need not follow the codes of practice otherwise prescribed for every order and stage of life, but are free from the need to practise virtue. The threefold Vedas, governance, trade and servitude are equally unknown. 83

These two regions are like the highest heaven on earth, Maitreya, and seasons are always pleasant, sage, as Puṣkara, Dhātakī and Mahāvīra are free from the woes of age and sickness. 84

The banyan tree that grows on Puṣkara is the preferred abode of Brahmā. There he dwells while worshipped by gods and demigods alike. 85

Puṣkara is ringed by a sea of fresh water as wide as the land itself. 86

Each of the seven continents is thus surrounded by an ocean, and each continent and ocean is twice as wide as the one that it encloses. 87

The volume of all these oceans is unchanging, and is never more or less, 88

But just as water in a cauldron seems to rise when it begins to seethe, best of sages, so, too, the waters of the oceans rise with the waxing of the moon. 89

The waters rise and fall without changing in their volume, in response to the rising and setting of the moon during the light and darker fortnights. 90

A tidal range of five hundred and ten inches has been observed in these oceans, great sage.<sup>4</sup> 91

On the continent of Puṣkara, all inhabitants partake of food of sixfold flavours, brahmin, which arises of its own accord. 92

Beyond the ocean of fresh water is the land at the end of the world. It's twice as wide as the ocean within it, but this realm, made of gold, is quite bereft of life. 93

The Lokāloka mountain range is ten thousand leagues in length and ten thousand high. 94

The space beyond the range is cloaked in utter darkness, and beyond the darkness everything lies within the shell of the cosmic egg. 95

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4 Wilson notes drily: 'Although the Hindus seem to have had a notion of the cause of the tides, they were not very accurate observers of the effect' (1961: 166).

This universe, including the outer shell, the lands, the seas and ranges, sage, is five hundred million leagues across. <sup>96</sup>

It's the mother and the nursemaid of every host of beings, Maitreya, and foundation of all the worlds. <sup>97</sup>

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

## 5. The lower realms; The serpent Śeṣa

*Parāśara:*

I've described the upper realms for you, brahmin, which rise for seventy thousand leagues, they say. <sup>1</sup>

Each of the lower realms descends ten thousand leagues: Atala, Vitala, Nitala, Gabhastimat, Mahākhyā and Sutala, best of sages, with the foremost one, Pātāla, as the seventh. <sup>2</sup>

Those realms, whose surfaces are white, black, brown, yellow, sand, stone and gold, are beautified with gracious mansions. <sup>3</sup>

Clans of Dānavas and Daityas dwell there in the hundreds, great sage, as well as tribes of mighty nāgas. <sup>4</sup>

Nārada, who had visited the lower realms, declared amid the gods' assembly that the underworlds were even more magnificent than those above: <sup>5</sup>

'What can compare with Pātāla, where the nāgas wear jewellery made with lovely gems that shine so brightly? <sup>6</sup>

Who wouldn't delight in Pātāla, ornamented here and there by Dānava and Daitya girls? Even a liberated being would revel in it.' <sup>7</sup>

The rays of the sun shed light, not heat, by day, and at night the moon is bright yet isn't cool. <sup>8</sup>

Danu's offspring never notice time is passing, addicted as they are to entertainments, delighting there in food and drink and other pleasures. <sup>9</sup>

There are forests, rivers, lovely lakes and lily-pools where the pleasant air resounds with calls of koel cocks. <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Just as the rays of the sun are hot, the rays of the moon are said to be cooling.

There are brilliant decorations, rarest scents and lotions, brahmin, and the sounds of lute and pipe, clarion and tabour. *11*

These and other noble pleasures are enjoyed by Dānavas, Daityas and nāgas who inhabit Pātāla. *12*

## **The serpent Śeṣa**

Below the lower realms lies the darker form of Viṣṇu known as Śeṣa, whose qualities even Dānavas and Daityas can't describe. *13*

The siddhas call him Ananta ('Endless'), and the gods and heavenly sages worship him. He has a thousand heads and bears the swastika, the purest transcendental mark. *14*

On his hood myriad jewels shine forth in all directions as he robs the demons of their power, to benefit the world. *15*

His eyes are always glowing with excitement, he sports a single earring, a diadem and a garland, and blazes like a hill of silver flames. *16*

Clad in blue and wild with bliss, Śeṣa wears a pearly necklace and rears up like cloud-capped Kailāsa with the river Gaṅgā flowing down its flanks. *17*

Wielding mace and ploughshare in his hands, he's attended by the goddess Vāruṇī, who embodies his own splendour. *18*

At the end of every aeon, Rudra, who's one with Saṃkarṣaṇa,<sup>6</sup> ablaze with fire and venom, emerges from the mouths of Śeṣa to devour the threefold worlds. *19*

Wearing this whole universe as a crown upon his head, Śeṣa rests beneath Pātāla while all the deities worship him. *20*

Even the thirteen gods themselves cannot describe or grasp his splendour, strength, form or nature. *21*

Who can speak of the might of one who wears the universe, glowing in the brilliance of his jewelled hood, as if it were a garland? *22*

When Ananta yawns and flashes his eyes with fury, the earth, mountains, waters and forests tremble. *23*

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6 Saṃkarṣaṇa is Kṛṣṇa's elder brother, also known as Baladeva, Balarāma and Balabhadra. Elsewhere, Śeṣa himself, as opposed to Rudra, is said to be a form of Baladeva (see 5.18.36).

Gandharvas, apsarases, siddhas, kiṃnaras, nāgas and cāraṇas never reach the end of praising his qualities. That's why he's called imperishable endless one. 24

Sandal powder, ground at the hands of nāga women, is always carried by his breath and scents the air in all directions. 25

Having worshipped Śeṣa, the ancient sage named Garga gained true knowledge of astrology and all the benefits to be gained from understanding omens. 26

With his serpent strength, he bears the world upon his head, while wearing realms of gods and demigods and mortals like a garland. 27

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

## 6. The hell realms

*Parāśara:*

Now hear about the hell realms, brahmin, which lie beneath the earth and oceans, and into which the wicked fall, great sage. 1

Raurava, Sūkara, Rodha, Tāla, Viśasana, Mahājvāla, Taptakumbha, Lavaṇa, Vilohita, 2

Rudhirāmbhas, Vaitaraṇī, Kṛmiśa, Kṛmibhojana, Asipatravana, Kṛṣṇa, Lālābhakṣa, Dāruṇa, 3

Pūyavaha, Pāpa, Vahnijvāla, Adhaḥśiras, Saṃdaṃśa, Kṛṣṇasūtra, Tamas, Avīci, 4

Śvabhojana, Apratiṣṭha and another called Avīci—these are just the first few hells of dreadful suffering, but there are others. 5

Those who delight in wickedness fall into Yama's realm, filled with fearsome fires and weapons. 6

A dishonest witness who lies because of partiality and one who utters any other falsehood goes to Raurava, 'Fearful'. 7

One who performs abortions, best of sages, or kills his guru or a cow goes to the hell of Rodha, 'Suppression', as does the strangler. 8

One who drinks liquor, kills a brahmin or steals another's gold goes to Sūraka, 'Swine', along with his accomplices. 9

One who kills a kṣatriya or a vaiśya goes to Tāla, the 'Palm Tree', as does one who violates his guru's marriage bed. One who molests his sister or kills a royal emissary goes to Taptakumbha, the 'Heated Cauldron'. *10*

Purveyors of virtuous women, prison guards and horsetraders fall into Taptaloha, 'Red-Hot Iron', as does one who forsakes his devotees. *11*

A man who violates his daughter or daughter-in-law is cast into Mahājvāla, the 'Great Inferno', as is the lowly wretch who disrespects or scorns his gurus. *12*

One who reviles or sells the Vedas, brahmin, or has improper sexual contacts goes to Lavaṇa, the 'Salty Hell'. *13*

The thief and he who crosses moral boundaries fall into Vimoha, 'Confusion'. *14*

One who despises deities, brahmins or his father and one who damages any gemstone go to Kṛmibhakṣa, 'Worms-for-Food'. The practitioner of black magic goes to Kṛmiśa, 'Insect Hell'. *15*

The wretch who eats before his father, deities or guests goes to frightful Lālābhakṣa, 'Saliva-for-Food', while arrow-makers go to Vedhaka, 'Piercing'. *16*

Those who manufacture missiles with barbs, swords or other weapons fall into the terrible hell of Viśasana, 'Vivisection'. *17*

One who accepts improper gifts goes to Adhomukha, 'Upside-Down', as do those who sacrifice to unworthy beings or point at constellations. *18*

Headstrong men and those who gorge on delicacies alone end up in Pūyavaha, 'River of Pus'. *19*

A brahmin selling cochineal, or meat, or wine, or sesame or salt goes to that same hell realm, brahmin. *20*

Those who feed cats, chickens, goats, horses, pigs or birds, best of brahmins, also go to the 'River of Pus'. *21*

Actors, fishermen, those who marry bastards, poisoners, informers, men who prostitute their wives, brahmins who have sex on days of abstinence, *22*

Arsonists, those who murder friends, fortune tellers and those who sacrifice for rustics fall into Rudhirāndha, the 'Well of Blood', as do those purveying soma. *23*

All those who destroy a beehive or a village go to Vaitaraṇī, ‘Hard-to-Cross’. *24*

Trespassers and those obsessed by wealth or youth go to Kṛṣṇa, the ‘Black Hell’, as do debauchees and liars. *25*

Those who cut down trees for no good purpose go to Asipatravana, the ‘Sword-Leaf Forest’, while shepherds and deer-hunters fall into Vahnijvāla, the ‘Blazing Fire’. *26*

The potter who fires a kiln, brahmin, goes to that same end. *27*

One who breaks his vows descends to torment in Saṃdaṃśa, the ‘Hell of Pincers’, as does one who shirks the duties of his stage of life. *28*

Students of religion who ejaculate while napping and those who learn the scriptures from their children fall into Śvabhōjana, ‘Dogs-for-Food’. *29*

These and others are among the hundreds and thousands of hell realms where evildoers are cooked and otherwise tormented. *30*

Just as these and other misdeeds number in the myriad, there are myriad hell realms to be suffered by the guilty. *31*

Those who perform actions contrary to the duties of their order or their stage of life, whether in thought or word or deed, all go to hell. *32*

Those condemned to hell look up at gods in heaven, then hang their heads, while gods look down on all those suffering beings. *33*

Immobile things, insects, fish, birds, animals, humans, sages, the thirteen great deities and liberated beings— *34*

Each successive stage is a thousand times as good as the one before, fortunate sage. All beings must pass through these until attaining liberation. *35*

There are as many beings in heaven as there are in hell, and the evildoer who neglects atonement will surely finish there. *36*

## **Meditation on Viṣṇu as atonement**

After consideration, the greatest sages pronounced atonements fit for every sin. *37*

Svāyaṃbhava and other experts in such matters proclaimed dire punishments for major crimes and lesser ones for minor sins. *38*

But setting one's heart on Kṛṣṇa is superior to every other penitence, including austerity and sacrifice. 39

For one who rues a deed he's done, remembering Hari is alone the best atonement. 40

One who sets his heart on Nārāyaṇa morning, noon and night, and at dawn and dusk, is at once absolved of all his sins. 41

Recalling Viṣṇu, all accumulated sins are shed and one reaches liberation. For such a person, even heaven is accounted an impediment. 42

For one whose heart is set on Vāsudeva while praying, sacrificing or worshipping, Maitreya, even rewards including sovereignty over gods become an obstacle. 43

'On one hand is ascent to highest heaven whence one must fall to earth again; on the other, one may pray to Vāsudeva'—such is the excellent seed that leads to liberation. 44

Hence, a person recalling Viṣṇu day and night avoids the realms of hell, sage, and is pure, as all his sins are swept away. 45

Heaven is that which delights the mind, and hell its opposite, best of brahmins, and deeds both good and bad are simply forms of those two realms. 46

Because a single thing may cause both pain and pleasure, rage and envy, where is its essential nature? 47

That which renders pleasure now gives rise to future pain. That which makes us angry now may later bring us peace. 48

Nothing is in essence painful or enjoyable; only responses in our minds are marked by such sensations. 49

Knowledge alone is the highest Absolute, but knowledge also binds us. This whole world consists of that, to which nothing is superior. 50

Understand that knowing and not knowing are both aspects of knowledge, Maitreya. 51

I've thus described the universe for you, brahmin, with its lower realms and hells. 52

The oceans, mountains, regions, lands and rivers have all been described in brief. What would you like to hear of next? 53

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

## 7. The upper spheres; The power of Viṣṇu

*Maitreya:*

You have indeed described all this to me, brahmin, but now I wish to hear about Bhuvanloka, sage, and the other upper realms. <sup>1</sup>

I'd also like to hear in detail about the nature of the planets and their dimensions, blessed seer. Kindly answer these questions of mine. <sup>2</sup>

*Parāśara:*

The region touched by rays of sun and moon is the earthly realm, with its rivers, seas and mountains. <sup>3</sup>

The realm of the sky is the same shape and size as that of the earth, brahmin. <sup>4</sup>

The sun is a hundred thousand leagues above the earth, Maitreya, and the moon is an equal distance above the sun. <sup>5</sup>

All the lunar mansions lie a hundred thousand leagues beyond the moon. <sup>6</sup>

Prudent Mercury lies two hundred thousand leagues above the lunar mansions, brahmin, and hasty Venus is that same distance beyond Mercury. <sup>7</sup>

Glowing Mars lies just as far beyond Venus, and Jupiter, the deities' own ministrant, is two hundred thousand leagues beyond that planet. <sup>8</sup>

Saturn, the Sun's own son, is two hundred thousand leagues beyond Jupiter, and the Seven Sages are another hundred thousand beyond that. <sup>7 9</sup>

One hundred thousand leagues above the Seven Sages is Dhruva, the Pole Star, the hub around which the wheel of heavenly bodies turns. <sup>10</sup>

I've described the threefold spheres in terms of elevation, sage. This earthly sphere is the Bhūloka, where rewards of sacrifice are won, as this is where the rituals are performed. <sup>11</sup>

Ten million leagues above Dhruva is Maharloka, where sages live for an aeon—that's why it's called 'Unmoving'. <sup>12</sup>

Twenty million leagues higher is Janaloka, Maitreya, where Sanandana and Brahmā's other pure-minded sons are said to live. <sup>13</sup>

Four times higher than Janaloka is Tapoloka, the sphere of austerities, inhabited by the Vairāja gods, whom fire cannot burn. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Seven Sages are major stars of Ursa Major.

Six times higher than Tapoloka is Satyaloka, the sphere of truth, whose denizens never die again. This is thought to be the realm of Brahmā. <sup>15</sup>

Anywhere that can be reached on foot is defined as earth, or Bhūrloka, whose dimensions I described before. <sup>16</sup>

The region between the earth and sun, inhabited by siddhas and other sages, is the Bhuvarloka, the second sphere that I described, best of sages. <sup>17</sup>

The space between the sun and Dhruva, fourteen hundred thousand leagues across, is called Svarloka by those who contemplate these realms. <sup>18</sup>

These three spheres are transitory, Maitreya, but the outer ones of Janaloka, Tapaloka and Satyaloka are enduring. <sup>19</sup>

Between the transitory and enduring spheres lies Maharloka. At the end of every aeon it's vacated, but not entirely destroyed. <sup>20</sup>

I've told you about these seven spheres, Maitreya, the seven lower realms and the dimensions of the universe. <sup>21</sup>

These are enclosed above, below and on all sides by the shell of the cosmic egg, just as the wood-apple's outer rind conceals the seed within. <sup>22</sup>

The cosmic egg is surrounded by water ten times as wide as the egg itself, and the water is ringed by fire. <sup>23</sup>

The fire is surrounded by wind, Maitreya, and the wind by space. Space is surrounded by the fundamental elements, and they are enclosed within *mahat*, the elemental principle of Greatness. Each of these seven layers is ten times larger than the one within, Maitreya. <sup>24</sup>

*Mahat* is enclosed within primal Matter, which is infinite, endless and immeasurable. <sup>25</sup>

Because it's thus, it's the underlying cause of all phenomena. This, sage, is supreme *prakṛti*, primal Substance. <sup>26</sup>

There are millions and tens of millions and quadrillions of cosmic eggs identical to this one. <sup>27</sup>

Just as fire is latent in wood, and oil is latent in a sesame seed, so, too, all-pervasive *pṛaṇs*, elemental Spirit, is inherent in Matter in the form of self-manifesting consciousness. <sup>28</sup>

## The power of Viṣṇu

Both Matter and Spirit are mutually dependent, wise sage, and are enveloped by the power of Viṣṇu, which is at the heart of all creation. 29

That power is the cause of their separation and their interdependence, sage. It's also the cause of their initial stirring at the moment of creation. 30

Just as wind raises ripples by the hundred on the surface of the water, in that same way the power of Viṣṇu agitates both Matter and Spirit. 31

A tree, consisting of roots, trunk, branches and so on, grows from a seed in the beginning, which releases other seeds. 32

These grow into further trees, which share its character, nature and ultimate origin, sage. 33

In the same way, *mahat* and the other elemental phenomena arise in the beginning from this Unseen principle. These phenomena then give rise to gods and other beings, who have sons, and those sons have offspring of their own. 34

Just as the growth of a new tree from a seed does not diminish the parent plant, in the same way, the creation of beings has no effect on the primal elements. 35

As a combination of space, time and other factors influences a tree's growth, Lord Hari, though himself unchanging, is the cause of everything. 36

The root, stalk, leaf, shoot, stem, bud, flower, sap, ear, 37

Chaff and further grains are all latent in a single grain of rice, best of sages, and appear when the conditions for growth arise. 38

Similarly, the gods and other beings, engaged in their own activities, arise when they encounter Viṣṇu's energy. 39

Viṣṇu is the supreme Absolute from whom all this arises. The world abides in him and is absorbed in him. 40

The Absolute is the supreme abode of Viṣṇu, a state beyond existence and nonexistence. Viṣṇu is one with this whole world of moving and unmoving things. 41

He is the manifest form of both the root and the nature of the world. He *is* the world. In him the world concludes, on him the world relies. 42

He performs the sacrifice. He is the sacrifice that's offered. He is the sacrificial outcome. He is the ladle and utensils with which it's carried out. Nothing is apart from Hari! <sup>43</sup>

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

## 8. The movement of the sun; Time; The heavenly paths

*Parāśara:*

I've described the nature of the cosmic egg to you, sage of rigid vows. Now hear about the size and nature of the sun and other bodies.<sup>8 1</sup>

The carriage of the sun is nine thousand leagues in length, best of sages, and its shaft is twice as long again. <sup>2</sup>

The axle is more than fifteen million and seven hundred thousand leagues in length, to which a wheel is fixed. <sup>3</sup>

This eternal wheel, with three hubs, six fellys and five spokes, forms a year, and on it rests the entire cycle of time. <sup>4</sup>

The carriage's second axle is forty-five thousand and five hundred leagues in length, wise sage. <sup>5</sup>

The two halves of the yoke are the same length as the two axles, respectively. The carriage's shorter axle and the shorter half of the yoke rest on the Pole Star. The longer axle, to which the wheel is fixed, rests on Mount Mānasa.<sup>9 6</sup>

The carriage's seven horses are the Vedic metres. Listen to their names: Gāyatrī, Bṛhatī, Uṣṇih, Jagatī, Triṣṭubh, Anuṣṭubh and Pañkti. These are said to be the horses of the sun. <sup>7</sup>

Indra's city lies on the eastern side of Mount Mānasottara, Yama's city lies southward, Varuṇa's to the west and Soma's to the north. Listen to their names: <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter presents several unique challenges. Beautiful and fanciful imagery (four-sided Mount Meru, the daylight filling the ocean, and so on) is intermixed with verifiable astronomical observation, but even much of that is expressed in mythological terms. Some verses simply remain obscure.

<sup>9</sup> In a long footnote, Wilson states: 'The contrivance is commonly compared to an oil mill, and was probably suggested by that machine as constructed in India' (1961: 179, n.5). See also: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oil\_Mill\_India.jpg.

Mighty Indra's city is called Vasvokasārā, Yama's is Saṃyamanī, that of Varuṇā, lord of waters, is Sukhā and Soma's is Vibhāvarī. 9

During its southern passage, the lordly sun flies like an arrow, Maitreya, attended by the wheel of stars. 10

The sun is the cause of the difference between day and night. This divine vehicle is the highest resort for ascetics who've transcended worldly woes. 11

The sun is always overhead at midday on one continent, Maitreya, while on the others, it is midnight. 12

It always rises and sets at opposing cardinal and intermediate points on the horizon, Maitreya. 13

Those who see the sun appear think that it is rising, and when it disappears from sight, they believe that it is setting. 14

In fact, it doesn't rise or set, and what we call its rising and its setting are merely its appearance and disappearance. 15

When the sun is directly over mighty Indra's city, for example, it illuminates three cities and two intermediate points of the compass. When it's located above one of the intermediate points, it shines on three other points and two cities. 16

When the sun has risen, its rays, growing ever stronger, become hotter until midday, after which they weaken as it nears its setting place. 17

The directions of east (*pūrva*, 'before') and west (*apara*, 'after') are named for the rising and the setting of the sun. The distance it shines towards the east is the same as the distance it shines westwards and on both sides. 18

(The only exception is the palace of Brahmā on the summit of divine Mount Meru, where the rays of the sun that reach that edifice are outshone by the city's brilliance and are driven back.) 19

As a result, there's always a distinction between day and night in northern parts, since Meru stands northward of the continents and other regions. 20

In the evening when the sun has set, its brilliance enters fire, and that's why fire is brighter in the night. 21

During the day, one-quarter of fire's brilliance joins the sun, brahmin, and, resulting from this union, the sun shines even brighter. 22

These two forms of brightness, the light and heat of the sun and fire, are strengthened during day and night, respectively, as they merge with one another. <sup>23</sup>

When the sun is above the horizon, night enters the waters, filling them with darkness, and, after it has set, daylight fills the waters, imbuing them with light. <sup>24</sup>

The ocean appears dark by day because it absorbs the night. Daylight imbues the waters when the sun goes down, and that's why the ocean is brighter at night: it's filled with light. <sup>25</sup>

When the sun is in the middle of Puṣkara, the time taken to transit for one lunar mansion—one-thirtieth part of the circumference of the celestial globe—is one *mubūrta*. <sup>26</sup>

Turning as if on the edge of a potter's wheel, the sun brings day, brahmin, freeing the world from night. <sup>27</sup>

During its passage to the north of the celestial equator, the sun first traverses Capricorn, then Aquarius and Pisces, brahmin, moving from one house to the next. <sup>28</sup>

After it has passed through these three, the sun reaches the point of the equinox, making day and night of equal length. <sup>29</sup>

The nights become thereafter shorter as the days grow longer. <sup>30</sup>

Then when the sun reaches the end of Gemini, it takes a different course, and, reaching the sign of Cancer, begins its southern passage. <sup>31</sup>

Just as the outer edge of the potter's wheel moves more quickly, the sun hastens during this passage. <sup>32</sup>

On account of its speed, it proceeds as quickly as the wind and traverses a great distance in but little time. <sup>33</sup>

Because of its haste, while on its southern passage, the sun takes twelve *mubūrtas* to traverse an extent equivalent to thirteen and a half lunar mansions during the day, brahmin, but during the night it takes eighteen *mubūrtas* to travel the same distance. <sup>34</sup>

Just as a point near the centre of a potter's wheel moves more slowly, so does the sun during its northern passage. <sup>35</sup>

For this reason, it traverses less space in longer time. When the sun reaches the end of its northern path, the length of the days is again eighteen *mubūrtas*. 36

Here, too, the sun is in the sky for a longer time. 37

Its path is as long as thirteen and a half mansions during the day, and the same distance is traversed in twelve *mubūrtas* at night. 38

Just as a lump of clay at the centre of a potter's wheel turns more slowly still, this is the case with Dhruva, which stands at the celestial pole. 39

And just as the hub of a potter's wheel turns on the spot, Maitreya, so it is with that star. 40

The relative length of day and night is a function of the length of the arc traversed by the sun between the points at which it rises and sets—that is, the length of time it appears in the sky. 41

When, during its journey, the daytime passage of the sun is long, the nights are short, and when its passage is long at night, the days are short. 42

The actual course of the sun is the same in either case, brahmin, because all signs of the zodiac appear to pass overhead in one day and night. 43

Six signs pass at night and the other six by day. 44

The length or shortness of a day is the result of the variation in the width of the signs of the zodiac, and, similarly, the length or shortness of the night is determined by the measure of the signs during that time. 45

The long and short durations of day and night are the result of the width of the signs. During its northern passage, the sun moves more quickly at night and slower by day. 46

During its southern passage, the opposite is the case. 47

The night is called *uṣā*, and the day is known as *vyuṣṭi*. The interval between day and night is called *sandhyā*, 'twilight'. 48

When the cruel and pitiless twilit hours arrive, terrible *rākṣasas* known as *mandeḥas* attempt to swallow the sun. 49

Brahmā, lord of creation, pronounced a curse on these *rākṣasas*, Maitreya, such that they must die each day, but their bodies aren't destroyed. 50

As a result, there's a frightful daily struggle between the sun and them. That's why eminent brahmins sprinkle water at such times, great sage, 51

While chanting the syllable *Om*, consecrated with the Gāyatrī mantra. This water becomes thunderbolts and destroys those wicked beings. 52

The first offering, accompanied by mantras, made into the sacred fire each morning causes the brilliant light-giving sun of a thousand rays to shine. 53

The syllable *Om* is Lord Viṣṇu, essence of the threefold Vedas and sovereign of each form of speech. By reciting it, those rākṣasas meet their doom. 54

The sun is the highest aspect of Viṣṇu, whose brilliance never fades. The syllable *Om* is expressive of the sun and causes it to move. 55

The light brought forth by *Om* begins to blaze and incinerates all those wicked *mandeḥas*. 56

That's why the *sandhyā* twilight rituals must never be neglected. One who fails to perform them at that time is guilty of murdering the sun. 57

Protected by the brahmins and the Vālakhilya sages, the lordly sun then journeys on its way for the welfare of the world. 58

## Divisions of time

Fifteen *nimeṣas* or 'blinks of the eye' make one *kāṣṭhā*. Thirty *kāṣṭhās* make one *kalā*. Thirty *kalās* make a *mubūrta*, and thirty *mubūrtas*, one day and night. 59

The periods into which a day is divided may be longer or shorter, as the days progress, but twilight always lasts one *mubūrta*. Even though the days are long or short, its duration stays the same. 60

The first three *mubūrtas* after sunrise are called morning, one-fifth part of the day. 61

The three *mubūrtas* after morning are the forenoon, and the three *mubūrtas* after forenoon are midday. 62

Following midday comes the afternoon. The wise consider that this also lasts for three *mubūrtas*. 63

When the afternoon is over, the next period is called the evening. In this manner, a day lasts for fifteen *mubūrtas* and consists of periods of three *mubūrtas* each. 64

But only at the equinox does the day actually last for fifteen *mubūrtas*. 65

The days grow longer or shorter according to the sun's southern or northern passage, when the day swallows part of the night or the night swallows part of the day. <sup>66</sup>

The equinoxes occur in mid-autumn and mid-spring, and, when the sun reaches Libra and Aries, then night and day are equal. <sup>67</sup>

When the sun enters Cancer, it begins its southern passage. Its northern passage starts when it enters Capricorn. <sup>68</sup>

As I said, thirty *mubūrtas* make one day and night. Fifteen days and nights are called a half-month, brahmin. <sup>69</sup>

Two half-months make a month and two months make a season. There are three seasons during each passage or *ayana* and two passages a year. <sup>70</sup>

There are five kinds of years, made up of four kinds of months. The aggregate of all these divisions of time is called a *yuga* or a cycle. <sup>71</sup>

The first year is the *saṃvatsara*, the second is *parivatsara*, *idvatsara* is the third and the fourth is the *anuvatsara*, with *vatsara* as the fifth. These five make one cycle. <sup>72</sup>

The mountain to the north of Śveta is known as Śṛṅgavant, so called as it has three peaks (*śṛṅga*): <sup>73</sup>

A southern, a northern and a central one. The central peak is also called the equinoctial summit, because the sun reaches this point at the equinoxes in the middle of autumn and spring, when it first enters Aries and Libra, Maitreya. <sup>74</sup>

At such times, the sun, dispeller of the darkness, makes day and night of equal length, both being fifteen *mubūrtas*. <sup>75</sup>

When the sun is in the first segment of the lunar mansion of Kṛttikā, and the moon stands in the fourth segment of Viśākhā, sage, <sup>76</sup>

Or when the sun is in the third segment of Viśākhā and the moon is at the head of Kṛttikā, <sup>77</sup>

It's known as the time of the auspicious equinox, when self-restrained individuals make offerings to the deities, <sup>78</sup>

Brahmins and ancestors, for at this time, donations give rise to an opening to the gods. One fulfils one's obligations by making offerings at the equinox and at the following times: <sup>79</sup>

During the day, night, half-month, *kalā*, *kāṣṭhā* and *kṣaṇa* of the full moon, new moon, the day of its first appearance, the first day of the first quarter, the actual day of full moon and one day before that. 80

The sun's northern passage occupies the months of Tapas, Tapasya, Madhu, Mādhava, Śukra and Śuci. Nabhas, Nabhasya, Iṣa, Ūrja, Sahas and Sahasya constitute its southern passage. 81

I've already told you about Mount Lokāloka, where the four guardians of the world, firm in their vows, reside: 82

Kardama's two sons Sudhāman and Śaṅkhapād, brahmin, as well as Hiranyaroman, with Ketumant as the fourth. 83

Indifferent to extremes, free from pride, vigilant and unencumbered, these global guardians dwell on that mountain, facing the four directions. 84

### **The path of the ancestors**

North of Canopus and south of Aries, beyond the path of Vaiśvānara, lies Pitṛyāna, the path of ancestral spirits. 85

There reside great sages who maintain the sacred fires and eulogise the Vedas that began the process of creation, intent upon their priestly duties. The path of sages who cause the creation of the world lies southward. 86

In every age, they reestablish Vedic tradition, which has been interrupted, with its lineages, austerities, social limits and oral teachings. 87

The sages of the east are born in residences of the west, and the sages of the west are born in eastern mansions. 88

Alternating in this way, they remain upon this path until the destruction of the world. Their path lies southward of the sun and will endure as long as the moon and stars. 89

### **The path of gods**

North of Aries and Taurus, south of the Great Bear and north of the sun lies the path of gods. 90

There reside the chaste and stainless siddhas, who have no thought of progeny, and have therefore conquered death. 91

Eighty-eight thousand ascetics, retaining their semen, reside on the northern path of the sun until the world is destroyed. 92

Because they're free of greed and have renounced all sexual union, and because they abjure the creation of life, which is characterised by love and hate, *93*

And further, because they're free from desire and misapprehension of sound and other sensations—for all these reasons, they're purified and immortal. *94*

This deathless state persists until the destruction of the world, and they're said to be free from death while the threefold worlds endure. *95*

The results of wicked acts like brahminicide, brahmin, and of auspicious ones like the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, will endure until universal dissolution. *96*

At such a time, Maitreya, all that lies between the Pole Star and the earth will be destroyed. *97*

## **The realm of Viṣṇu**

North of the Great Bear and extending as far as the Pole Star is the third division of the sky, Viṣṇu's brilliant, heavenly realm. *98*

This is the highest state for self-controlled ascetics who've washed away the stains of sin, brahmin, and for whom vice and virtue are no more. *99*

When ideas of 'good' and 'evil' cease and the cause of further birth is gone—when they attain all this, they grieve no more; that's Viṣṇu's highest state. *100*

Where Dharma, Dhruva and other witnesses of the world abide, blazing in their union with the majesty that imbues the god—that's Viṣṇu's highest state. *101*

The warp and weft of all creation, of all moving and unmoving things and of all that will arise in future, Maitreya—that's Viṣṇu's highest state. *102*

That which the wise regard as the great heavenly eye and that which appear as knowledge and discernment—that's Viṣṇu's highest state. *103*

Brilliant Dhruva himself, serving as the axis of the heavens, is located there. All the heavenly luminaries depend on him, brahmin, as do water-yielding clouds. *104*

Rain is born in them, and all creation, including deities and the other beings, great sage, are nourished and refreshed by rain. *105*

The gods who consume the offerings are sustained by oblations of butter, and they send rain for the further sustenance of the world. 106

Such is the third portion of the sky, the pure abode of Viṣṇu, foundation of the threefold worlds and source of rain. 107

## **The origin of the Gaṅgā**

Hence arises the river Gaṅgā, brahmin, which removes all sins and is itself suffused with lotions washed from the limbs of the deities' wives. 108

Her torrents, which flow from the nail of the big toe of Viṣṇu's lotus-like left foot, are devoutly borne by Dhruva on his head by day and night. 109

Downstream, the Seven Sages, intent on breath control, their matted locks swept along by her wreath-like waves, stand amid her waters. 110

The disk of the hare-marked moon, washed by her spreading currents, acquires still greater loveliness as her waters remove its stain. 111

Descending from the moon, she cascades upon Mount Meru's summit, and, to purify the world, flows forth in four directions. 112

In the forms of Sītā, Alakanandā, Cakṣu and Bhadrā, she's a fourfold stream in one, according to the path she takes. 113

Śiva kindly bore the southern branch of Alakanandā on his head for more than a hundred years. 114

Emerging from the deity's mass of matted locks, she bathed the shattered bones of Sagara's wicked sons and raised them up to heaven. 115

The sins of those who bathe in her are instantly expunged, and they taste good fortune as they never have before. 116

Ancestors, offered her waters by faithful sons, are nourished for three years, Maitreya—a feat of no mean achievement. 117

Worshipping Viṣṇu, lord of sacrifice and highest spirit, with great rituals on her banks, kings and brahmins reap supreme rewards in this world and the next. 118

Cleansed of sin by bathing in her waters, ascetics and those whose minds are set on Keśava reach ultimate extinction. 119

When heard, desired, seen or touched, imbibed or bathed in, or praised each day, she purifies all beings. 120

Those who summon her by name—‘Gaṅgā! Gaṅgā!’—even at a distance of a hundred leagues, are cleansed of all the deeds they’ve done in three previous lives. *121*

The place whence Gaṅgā flows to purify the worlds is the third division of the sky, the supreme abode of Viṣṇu. *122*

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

## 9. The source of rain

*Parāśara:*

Lord Hari takes the astral form of a dolphin, Śiśumāra, in the heavens, with Dhruva standing on his tail. *1*

Dhruva, turning, sets the moon, the sun and planets in motion. The constellations follow them, spinning like a wheel. *2*

The sun, moon, stars, constellations and planets are all tied to Dhruva with bonds of wind. *3*

Nārāyaṇa, refuge of the worlds, who exists in the heavens in astral form, is Śiśumāra’s foundation and is himself located at its heart. *4*

Dhruva, son of Uttānapāda, worshipping the universal lord, won a place on Śiśumāra’s tail. *5*

Janārdana, witness of the world, is Śiśumāra’s support. Śiśumāra supports Dhruva, and Dhruva supports the sun. *6*

The sun supports the universe, including gods and demigods and mortals. *7*

Listen carefully how this happens, brahmin. Eight months each year, the sun draws up water, the essence of existence. Falling showers then nourish crops on which the world relies. *8*

The sun takes water from the earth with drying rays and releases it to the moon. The moon directs this water through aerial channels to the clouds composed of smoke and fire and wind. *9*

Because the rains don’t fall (*bhraśyanti*) at once, clouds are known as *abhra*. Water held in clouds descends when stirred by wind, unsullied and purified by passing time, Maitreya. *10*

The lordly sun draws water from four sources, sage: from rivers, oceans, earth and living things. 11

Taking water from the Gaṅgā flowing through the sky, the sun bears it immediately to earth by means of rays, without the need for clouds. 12

A mortal touched by water of this kind is cleansed of the stain of his misdeeds, best of brahmins, and doesn't go to hell, as it's thought to be divine ablution. 13

Rain that falls while the sun appears in a cloudless sky is the water of aerial Gaṅgā, and is borne to earth on sunbeams. 14

That which falls when the sun is seen in Kṛttikā or other odd-numbered lunar mansions is also from the Gaṅgā, but is scattered by the elephants that guard the four directions. 15

That which falls when the sun is in the even-numbered mansions is dispersed by the sun itself, borne at once to earth by rays. 16

In all these cases, rain is highly auspicious and cleanses people of their sins, brahmin, as the waters of airborne Gaṅgā provide divine ablution, sage. 17

Rain falling from the clouds nourishes every kind of plant, brahmin, and is nectar for living beings. 18

Rain leads plants to full maturity, brahmin, thanks to which, ripe crops appear for humankind. 19

Relying on these, men who have regard for scripture perform the proper rites each day, and nourish the gods thereby. 20

In this way, the sacrifices, the Vedas, the communities with brahmins as the first, all the assembled deities and herds of beasts all depend on rain. 21

Rain brings food, best of brahmins, and the sun gives rise to rain. 22

Dhruva is the sun's support, best of brahmins, as Śísumāra is of Dhruva, while Śísumāra depends on Nārāyaṇa. 23

At Śísumāra's heart is Nārāyaṇa, support of every being, primal and eternal. 24

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

## 10. The carriage of the sun

*Parāśara:*

The sun proceeds through one hundred and eighty degrees on its passage between its ascending and descending nodes. *1*

Deities, Ādityas and sages ride the carriage of the sun, along with gandharvas, apsarasas, yakṣas, nāgas and rākṣasas.<sup>10</sup> *2*

Dhātṛ, Kṛtasthalā, Pulastya, Vāsuki, the yakṣa Rathakṛt and Heti, with Tumburu as the seventh— *3*

These seven always ride on the sun's carriage during Caitra, also known as Madhu, Maitreya, and preside over this month. *4*

Aryaman, Pulaha, Rathaujas, Puñjikasthalā, Praheti, Kacchanīra and Nārada ride the sun's carriage during Mādhava. *5*

Now hear about the month of Śuci: *6*

Mitra, Atri, Takṣaka, the rākṣasa Pauruṣeya, Menakā, Hāhā and Rathasvana ride the carriage at that time, Maitreya. *7*

In the month of Śukra, also known as Āṣāḍha, Varuṇa, Vasiṣṭha, Rambhā, Sahajanyā, Huhū, Ratha and Rathacitra ride it. *8*

Indra, Viśvāvasu, Srotas, Elāpatra, Aṅgiras, Pramlocā and Sarpa ride the sun's carriage in the month of Nabhas. *9*

During Bhādrapada, it's the turn of Vivasvat, Ugrasena, Bhṛgu, Āpūraṇa, Umlocā, Śāṅkhapāla and Vyāghra. *10*

In the month of Āśvin, Pūṣan, Suruci, Vāta, Gautama, Dhanamjaya, Suṣeṇa and Ghṛtācī ride it. *11*

Viśvāvasu, Bharadvāja, Parjanya, Airāvata, Viśvācī, Senajit and Cāpi preside over the month of Kārttika. *12*

Aṃśu, Kaśyapa, Tārṣya, Mahāpadma, Urvaśī, Citrasena and Vidyut preside over Mārgaśīrṣa. *13*

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10 Each month, seven beings—roughly one from each category—take up residence on the disk or carriage of the sun. In the following passage, the poet gives the names of each set of beings in an order determined by the metre. Their identities can be found in the index or any standard reference work, such as Monier-Williams (1899).

Kratu, Bhaga, Urṇāyu, Sphūrja, Karkoṭaka, Ariṣṭanemi and the excellent apsaras Pūrvacitti— 14

These seven ride the solar disk in the month of Pauṣa to ensure the world is properly lit, and they are its outstanding overseers. 15

Tvaṣṭṛ, Jamadagni, Kambala, Tilottamā, Brahmāpeta and Ṛtajit, with Dhṛtarāṣṭra as the seventh— 16

In the month of Māgha, these seven ride the sun, Maitreya. Now you'll hear about those who ride its carriage in the month of Phālguna: 17

Viṣṇu, Aśvatara, Rambhā, Sūryavarcas, Satyajit, Viśvāmitra and the rākṣasa Yañjopeta, great sage. 18

During these months, Maitreya, these groups of seven beings occupy the solar disk, brahmin, strengthened by the power of Viṣṇu. 19

The sages praise the sun, gandharvas sing before it, apsaras dance while rākṣasas attend it. 20

The nāgas guide the carriage and yakṣas hold the reins. 21

The Vālakhilya sages surround it on all sides. 22

Each cohort residing on the solar disk, great sage, brings heat and cold and showers of rain in season. 23

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

## 11. The sun's energy

*Maitreya:*

Master, I've listened to your description of the groups of seven beings who occupy the solar disk, bringing heat and cold and so on. 1

You've spoken of the role of gandharvas, nāgas, rākṣasas, sages, Vālakhilyas and apsaras, guru, 2

As well as yakṣas on the carriage of the sun, all of whom are held by Viṣṇu's power. But you've said nothing, sage, of the function of the sun itself. 3

If these seven beings cause heat and cold and rain, then what role has the sun in this regard? I thought you said it sends down showers. 4

Why do folk contend the sun first rises, passes overhead, then sets, if these are but the work of seven beings? 5

*Parāśara:*

Listen, Maitreya, and I'll answer your question as to how the sun alone is superior to the seven. 6

Viṣṇu's threefold power, known as the *Ṛg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma Vedas*, warms the world and dispels its sins. 7

This power is Viṣṇu and is actively engaged in the upkeep of the world. In the form of the threefold Veda, brahmin, it dwells within the sun. 8

Month by month, wherever the sun abides, Viṣṇu's peerless threefold energy determines its condition. 9

*Ṛg Vedic* verses light the world each morning, the *Yajur* does at noon and the *Sāma Veda*, including the *Bṛhadrathantara*, illuminates the world at sunset. 10

These three Vedas are all aspects of the lord. His energy always dwells within the sun and determines its condition. 11

This threefold energy of the Divine is not confined to the sun alone, as Brahṁā, the highest spirit, and Rudra also share its nature. 12

At the onset of creation, this energy is Brahṁā in the form of the *Ṛg Veda*. While the world endures, it's Viṣṇu as the *Yajur* and, at its dissolution, it's Rudra as the *Sāma Veda*. That's why the recitation of the latter is considered inauspicious. 13

Thus, Viṣṇu's pure and threefold power invests the sun, even while the seven beings occupy it. 14

Filled with power, the sun shines brightly, and with its rays it banishes the darkness from all the worlds. 15

The sages praise the sun, the gandharvas sing before it and apsarases dance while rākṣasas attend it. 16

The nāgas guide its carriage, yakṣas hold the reins and Vālahkilya seers surround it on all sides.<sup>11</sup> 17

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11 The two verses, 2.11.16–17, are repeated in slightly different form from the previous chapter, 2.10.20–22.

The sun itself neither sets nor rises, but is ever filled with Viṣṇu's power. The seven beings are all Viṣṇu, but are at once distinct from him. 18

Just like a man who nears a mirror perceives his own reflection in it, 19

In that same way, the power of Viṣṇu never leaves the sun, but month by month abides there, brahmin. 20

The lordly sun brings night and day and, ever moving, brahmin, wheels above the ancestors and gods and men. 21

The solar ray called Suṣumṇa nourishes the moon, but when it wanes, the deities imbibe its nectarine disk. 22

Finally, the ancestors drink up the last two slivers of the moon, and thus both gods and ancestors are nurtured by the sun. 23

With its rays, the sun draws moisture from the earth, which falls as rain to prosper beings and nourish crops. 24

Thus, the lordly sun delights all beings and gives new strength to ancestors, gods and humankind. 25

Satisfying the gods each fortnight and the ancestors each month, the sun provides perpetual nourishment for mortals, Maitreya. 26

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

## 12. The moon and planets

*Parāśara:*

The three-wheeled carriage of the moon is drawn by horses, ten in number, white as jasmine, harnessed left and right. 1

With that swift carriage, it traverses lunar mansions on the way, ruled by Dhruva, when the reins are loosed or drawn back, just like the sun. 2

As with the horses of the sun, the moon's own steeds, born of water, are harnessed together and draw its chariot for an aeon, best of sages. 3

When the moon, drunk up by gods, has been reduced to just one sliver, the blazing sun replenishes it with a ray, Maitreya. 4

The deities reduce the moon, who makes the night, by stages as it wanes, but the water-stealing sun restores it day by day. 5

The deities drink nectar, which gathers while it waxes, Maitreya, and with this nectar as their sustenance, they, too, become immortal. 6

All thirty-six thousand, three hundred and thirty-three gods drink from the night-making moon. 7

When two slivers alone remain, the moon draws near the sun and abides (*vasati*) in a ray of light called Amā, hence this phase is known as Amāvāsyā. 8

During that day and night, the moon first enters the waters and, after dwelling among the plants, draws closer to the sun. 9

One who cuts a plant while the moon is in that state, or causes a single leaf to fall, is guilty of brahminicide. 10

When just one-fifteenth of the moon remains, a host of ancestors attend it in the afternoon. 11

And from this moon of two mere slivers, sage, they drink the auspicious nectar of immortality until just one remains. 12

Having drunk the finest nectar shed by the moon's own rays at the phase of Amāvāsyā, the ancestors—these Saumyas, Barhiṣads and Agniṣvāttas—are sustained all month and are satisfied. 13

Thus, the waxing moon sustains the gods and, when it wanes, it succours ancestors and plants with cooling drops of nectar. 14

By bringing forth both plants and herbs, the cool-rayed moon quickens man and beast and creeping things, refreshing them with light. 15

## **The planets and stars**

The chariot of Mercury, the moon's own son, composed of wind and fire, is drawn by eight bay horses, swift as wind itself. 16

The great chariot of pure Venus, with fender, floor, bench and banner, is drawn by horses born of earth. 17

Eight golden horses, ruby-red and fire-born, draw the chariot of Mars, glorious and huge. 18

Jupiter rides throughout the year from one star sign to another in a chariot made of gold, drawn by eight steeds, swift and white. 19

Sluggish Saturn moves at leisure on a chariot yoked to dappled horses born of air. 20

Eight steeds, black as bees and hitched together, draw the dusky carriage of Svarbhānu, demon of eclipses; they never rest, Maitreya. 21

At times, this demon, also known as Rāhu, leaves the sun to hide the moon, then from the moon he blocks the sun again to bring eclipses. 22

Likewise, the carriage of the shadow-planet Ketu is drawn by horses, eight in number, swift as wind and dark as the smoke of burning straw, or red as cochineal. 23

I've described to you the chariots of nine planets, lucky sage, all bound to Dhruva by bonds of air. 24

The planets, mansions and constellations, all tied to Dhruva, circle in their proper orbits, restricted by these ties, Maitreya. 25

For every star, there is a bond and, as they move, the Pole Star rotates with them. 26

Just as workers pressing oil turn the wheel by pacing round it, similarly, the stars revolve, all bound with aerial bonds. 27

The stars turn like a disk of fire driven by a wheel of wind. Because it carries (*vahati*) the stars, this force is called Pravaha. 28

The constellation where Dhruva stands is Śiśumāra, as I mentioned. Now I'll tell you, best of sages, about its stars as well. 29

If you see it in the evening, you're freed from misdeeds done by day. As many stars are seen in Śiśumāra in the heavens, that's how many years you'll live, or maybe more. 30

Uttānapāda is thought to be its upper jaw, the lower one is Yajña, while Dharma is standing at its head. 31

At its heart sits Nārāyaṇa, the Aśvins are its two front feet, with Varuṇa and Āryaman behind them. 32

Saṃvatsara is at Śiśumāra's penis, with Mitra at its anus. 33

At its tail are Agni, Mahendra, Kaśyapa and Dhruva—Śiśumāra's quartet of stars, which never set. 34

## **The universal nature of Viṣṇu**

I've described the nature of the earth, the planets, continents, seas and mountains, 35

And lands and rivers, as well as those who dwell there. Now listen while I summarise all this once more. 36

From the waters, Viṣṇu's body, arose the world in lotus form, brahmin, replete with seas and ranges. 37

The stars are Viṣṇu, as are the worlds, the forests, lands and mountains, as are streams and oceans. He is all that is and all that isn't, best of brahmins. 38

Because the lord is knowledge, and is all forms but has no substance, understand that distinctive forms of mountains, oceans, earth and so on give rise to a misconception. 39

When knowledge is pure, natural, complete, independent of action and free from faults, then the distinction between manifold substances, which are the fruits of the tree of longing, is no more. 40

What is substance? Where is an entity without beginning, middle or end, and eternally uniform? Where is the reality of that which proceeds again to a state of otherness and doesn't stay the same, brahmin? 41

Clay is shaped into a pot; the pot is broken into pieces; the pieces ground to dust; the dust reduced to atoms. This is clearly seen by folk whose notions are informed by personal experience. But tell me, what is substance? 42

Therefore, except for truest knowledge, there is never anything anywhere, brahmin, that arises from such substances. This knowledge is uniform but appears manifold to those who perceive it as differentiated, as the result of the varied nature of their own actions. 43

Knowledge is pure, unblemished, painless, free from the influence of greed and other faults. It's uniform, ever one, supreme, the highest lord. It's Vāsudeva, other than whom no thing exists. 44

I've explained this verity to you: this knowledge is truth, all else is false and I've spoken of the mundane aspects of the world. 45

I've shown the sacrifice to you, the beasts, the fire, the ministrants, the soma, sacrificial liquor and the wish for heaven—all these and other aspects related to the rites—and all the worlds and pleasures that arise therefrom. 46

Driven by one's actions, a being moves alone among the worlds that I've described to you. Knowing Vāsudeva to be firm, unmoving and unchanging, one may still do his duty and, doing so, may enter the divine. 47

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

### 13. 'Foolish' Bharata

*Maitreya:*

Master, you've given me the perfect answer to my question on the nature of the earth, the oceans, rivers and the planets, 1

And the system of the threefold worlds, with Viṣṇu as their foundation. You've described to me the highest goal of life and knowledge, because of their significance. 2

As you said you'd speak about the deeds of Bharata the king, please do so now. 3

King Bharata dwelled at Sālagrāma, intent on yoga, his heart ever set on Vāsudeva. 4

With the power of that sacred place and his unbroken thoughts of Hari, why was he not liberated, but reborn a brahmin? 5

Please tell me what that illustrious being achieved when, driven by his previous karma, he was born again in that community. 6

*Parāśara:*

In Sālagrāma, that pious king reposed for many long years, Maitreya, his heart fixed on the lord. 7

He was the best of worthy men. While shunning harm, he clung to virtue, having reached perfection in the mastery of his mind. 8

The names 'Viṣṇu', 'Yajñeśa', 'Acyuta', 'Govinda', 'Mādhava', 'Ananta', 'Keśava', 'Kṛṣṇa' and 'Hṛṣīkeśa' were the only words he ever uttered. 9

He spoke no others, Maitreya, even in his dreams, and thought of nothing but these names and their significance. 10

Accepting gifts of kindling, flowers and *kuśa*-grass so he could worship the divine, he shunned all other action, unattached, intent on his austerities and yoga. 11

One day, he reached a mighty river to purify himself and, having bathed, undertook the rites that follow such ablutions. 12

And to that sacred bathing place there came from the woods a pregnant doe, thirsting for some water, brahmin. 13

But while she drank, she heard the roaring of a lion, which frightens every living thing. 14

The startled doe leapt from the water to the shore, but the violence of her movement forced the infant from her womb, and it fell into the river. 15

Carried by the current and sinking beneath the waves, the miscarried fawn was fetched up by the king. 16

With the pain of her miscarriage and the violence of her leap, Maitreya, the doe fell down and died. 17

Seeing that its dam had perished, the ascetic king took up the fawn and bore it to his ashram. 18

Every day he fed that fawn, sage, and, nurtured by the king, it grew and grew. 19

The young deer grazed on grass in thickets near the ashram, but even when it strayed afar, the fear of tigers drove it back. 20

Having wandered out at dawn and returning in the dusk, it could be found as usual in the thatched byre of Bharata's retreat. 21

The king was always worried when the deer strayed near and far, brahmin, and thought of nothing else. 22

Free from his kingdom and his sons and free from all his kinsfolk, he now became possessive of that fawn in high degree. 23

'Perhaps it's fallen prey to wolves or tigers or been taken by a lion'—such were his worries when the deer was gone for long. 24

'This fawn, dotting the earth with hoofprints, 25

Has brought me joy since the day that he arrived. But where is he now? He loves to scratch my arm with his antler tip. I'll be so happy when he's safely home from roaming in the forest. 26

With his young teeth, he's nibbled off the tips of *kuśa*-grass so they resemble brahmin boys who chant the *Sāma Veda*.' 27

Such worries filled the sage's mind when the fawn was overdue, but his face would shine with pleasure whenever it was near. 28

The king, who shunned his kingdom, pleasures, wealth and kin, now lost his peace of mind as his heart was filled with worry. 29

That mind, once firm, began to wander and grew distant when the fawn strayed far from home. 30

In time, the sovereign's death drew near, and that young deer watched over him, just like a tearful son who sees his sire's demise. 31

As he drew his final breath, the king beheld the deer and, being still obsessed with it, he thought of nothing else. 32

In that state of mind when the time of death arrived, the king was born a deer in the expansive forest of Jambūmārga, but he could still recall his former life. 33

Because of this ability and troubled by saṃsāra, best of brahmins, the fawn now left his mother and returned to Sālagrāma. 34

Living on dry grass and leaves, he atoned for deeds that caused his birth in the body of a deer. 35

He perished there but was born a brahmin in a pure and lofty family of virtuous ascetics, yet still recalled his previous existence. 36

Having mastered every branch of learning and knowing the true purport of all the sacred texts, he saw that *ātman*, the Self, Maitreya, lay beyond *prakṛti*, matter. 37

Knowing well the nature of the Self, that wise man viewed all creatures, deities and the rest as essentially the same, great sage. 38

But once invested with the sacred thread, he took no part in Vedic recitation as instructed by his elders, nor witnessed any sacrifice, nor studied any text. 39

Whenever he was spoken to, he'd answer with some foolish quip and, like some country bumpkin, his speech was un-Sanskritic. 40

This brahmin failed to groom himself, his clothes were vile, saliva dribbled down his chin and all the townsfolk shunned him. 41

'Praise does great harm to those of self-restraint whose wealth is yoga. Such ascetics, despised by folk, should seek success through practice. 42

Ascetics must therefore train without offending the virtue of the wise. Whenever folk abuse them, let them walk away.' 43

Recalling these words of Brahmā, born of the golden egg, that prudent being appeared to others to be a foolish madman. 44

He ate half-ripe barley, raw beans and other greens, as well as forest seeds and berries—whatever came to his fair hand at any time. 45

When his father passed away, his brothers, cousins and other kin sent him to the fields to work, with little food to succour him. 46

Though he seemed a simpleton, his limbs proved tough while labouring, and so he helped out other folk, receiving food as wages. 47

Now, the chamberlain of the king of Sauvira thought this man a fool who just effected the appearance of a brahmin, but who could provide free labour. 48

The king, riding in his palanquin, wished to visit Kapila's retreat, that best of sages, on the banks of the Ikṣumatī River, brahmin. 49

He sought to ask that learned sage, who understood the dharma of liberation, about the best course for humankind in this world of suffering. 50

The brahmin, along with others who, at the chamberlain's command, had been pressed into service, now bore the royal carriage. 51

Forced to work, the brahmin, who alone had grasped all understanding, recalled his previous existence and bore the palanquin, desiring to atone for past misdeeds. 52

His eyes fixed solely on the pole, the wisest of the wise just stumbled on, while all the others walked in step. 53

Seeing that the palanquin was moving so unevenly, the king called out, 'What's going on? You bearers should all walk in step!' 54

But noting no improvement, the king then laughed and cried aloud, 'What now? You're still all out of kilter!' 55

Hearing the sovereign's new complaint, the carriers replied, 'There's a fellow here who's much too slow.' 56

*The king:*

How can you be tired? You haven't borne my palanquin that far. Can't you take the weight? You look strong enough to me. 57

*The brahmin:*

It isn't me who's weak, nor me who bears your palanquin. It isn't me who is fatigued, nor me who takes its weight, your majesty. 58

*The king:*

I see myself that you are strong, and even now you bear my carriage. Everyone is subject to fatigue when shouldering a burden. 59

*The brahmin:*

Please state exactly what you see in me, your majesty, as only then is it possible to speak of strong and weak. 60

You just said I'm carrying your palanquin, but that is not the case. Please listen while I explain. 61

My feet are on the ground, and they support my shins. My shins uphold my thighs, and they in turn hold up my belly. 62

My belly supports my chest, my arms and shoulders. As my shoulders bear this palanquin, how can you say the load is mine alone? 63

The body sitting on the chair is defined as 'you', but it's not right to say that you are there and I am here. 64

Both you and I and all the others are composed of elements, your majesty, and this mass of elements becomes a body, determined by the *guṇas*, the stream of qualities. 65

These qualities—namely, purity and the others—are subject to one's karma, sire. And karma, accumulated in ignorance, affects all beings without exception. 66

The Self—the *ātman*—is pure and indestructible, tranquil, lacking qualities and transcends materiality. It does not wax or wane but is the same in every being. 67

Since it's beyond decay and growth, your majesty, on what grounds say you that I am strong? 68

This palanquin is borne on shoulders that depend on earth and feet, on shins and thighs, on hips and bellies and the rest, and so this weight is shared by all, including you. 69

Similarly, sire, it's not just other entities that bear your carriage, as mountains, trees and houses all rest upon the earth as well. 70

If people's natures were unlike or differed for given reasons, your majesty, then I'd agree this load was borne by one or other person. 71

But the stuff that forms this chair comprises you and me and other things and is composed of elements that are moulded by a sense of self. 72

*Parāśara:*

Having spoken, the brahmin bore the palanquin in silence, but the king climbed down and hastened to touch his feet. 73

*The king:*

I salute you, brahmin! Forget about the palanquin. I have a favour to ask of you. Pray tell me who you really are, appearing here in such disreputable form? 74

Why are you like this and why have you come? Tell me all, wise man. I wish to hear the reason. 75

*The brahmin:*

Listen well, your majesty, but I cannot tell you who I am. The act of going anywhere is for the sake of some experience. 76

Pain and pleasure are the source of everybody and all else. A living thing assumes a body to undergo the karmic fruit of vice and virtue. 77

Since vice and virtue are the cause of everything for every being, sire, why ask about the reason that I'm here? 78

*The king:*

Vice and virtue are indeed the cause of all events, and beings appear in place to suffer their effects. 79

But this is what I'd like to hear: Why claim you cannot tell me who you are? 80

How can it be impossible for one to describe himself? The word 'I' can't harm you, brahmin. 81

*The brahmin:*

It's true the word can do no harm, but the very term betrays the fault of seeing a 'self' in something that is without it. 82

The tongue, the teeth, the lips and palate utter this word 'I', your majesty. Yet none of these is 'I', as they are just the means by which the sound is made. 83

If speech itself just forms this word by means of these same organs, it's wrong to claim that speech is 'I'. 84

Since a person's body is made of many parts—the head, the hands and all the rest—to which of these does 'I' apply, your majesty? 85

If another man is different from me, best of kings, then it may be said that 'I am this' and 'He's the other'. 86

But when a single primal spirit—*puruṣ*—pervades all bodies, it's vain to ask the questions, 'Who are you?' and 'Who am I?' 87

You're the king and this the palanquin. We're the bearers who attend you and this your realm—but none of this is really true, your majesty. 88

The palanquin on which you ride was made of wood from certain trees. To which does 'tree' apply, your majesty, or is it 'wood'? 89

When you're seated on the palanquin, none would say the king is riding on a tree or on a piece of timber. 90

The palanquin is an assembly of wood, created in the process of manufacture. Can you see a distinction between the wood and the palanquin, best of kings? 91

Similarly, consider now the separate existence of an umbrella's ribs. Whence does the umbrella arise? With this in mind, the same idea applies to you and me. 92

Man, woman, cow, horse, elephant, bird and tree—such names are commonly assigned to things, which, we must understand, arise because of karma. 93

The primal spirit is neither god, nor man, nor beast, nor tree. These differences are merely in the shape of forms, your majesty, caused by prior actions. 94

That entity which folk call 'king', that which is the 'soldier of the king' and similarly all else, sire, lack their own reality, yet arise in our conceptions. 95

What entity, subject to varied changes, isn't known by other names in time, your majesty? 96

You're the king of all your realm, your father's son, your rival's foe, the husband of your wife and father of your son, sire. Who should I say you truly are? 97

Are you this head, or does this head belong to you? What about your belly? Are you your feet and so on, sire, or are they yours? 98

You seem to be apart from all these component limbs. Now that you are better informed, sire, please contemplate the question ‘Who am I?’ 99

Seeing the truth has been established in this way, how can I speak of ‘I’, sire, which is the mere result of a process of differentiation? 100

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

## 14. Bharata teaches the highest goal

*Parāśara:*

Hearing the brahmin’s words imbued with such significance, the king bowed down with deep respect and spoke to him as follows. 1

*The king:*

The words you’ve uttered, sir, contain the highest truth, but hearing them, the patterns of my mind are troubled. 2

This understanding of discrimination, present in all beings, as you’ve shown, brahmin, is the greatest principle that transcends the mundane world. 3

‘I don’t carry the palanquin.’ ‘The palanquin doesn’t rest on me.’ ‘The body that supports it is different from me.’ 4

‘The actions of all beings are determined by their karma as driven by the *guṇas*.’ ‘The *guṇas* are preeminent.’ What do such statements mean to me? 5

You understand the highest truth, but when I heard what you have said, my mind, though yearning for such knowledge, is perplexed. 6

I’ve just set out to meet that sage of greatest fortune, Kapila, fully prepared to ask him what is best. 7

But in the meantime, because of words that you have spoken, my mind, which hankers after highest truth, is drawn to you. 8

The sage Kapila is an aspect of Lord Viṣṇu, the universal being, manifesting in the world to free it from delusion. 9

Surely, it’s the lord himself who came here as you spoke, from his desire for our wellbeing. 10

As I bow before you, brahmin, teach me about the highest good, for you’re an ocean filled with waves of wisdom. 11

*The brahmin:*

Your majesty, you ask what's best, but not about the highest goal. Something may be one, great king, but may not be the other. 12

Having worshipped all the gods, a man may wish for wealth, prosperity, sons or sovereignty. Fulfilling that desire then counts as 'best' for him. 13

Some think that acts of sacrifice are best, because they lead to heavenly realms. But 'best' is often found when no specific goal is wanted. 14

Those disciplined in yoga, sire, should always contemplate the Self, as that is best for them. This union is best for one who holds as ultimate the highest spirit. 15

Things by hundreds and by thousands may be considered 'best', but they are not the highest goal in life, so listen to me now: 16

How can wealth be the highest goal if sacrificed for virtue? Why spend money just to satisfy desire? 17

While a son is said to be the highest goal, the term may be applied to something else, your majesty. A son may be another person's highest goal, as his father was once *his* father's deepest wish. 18

Thus, in this world of moving and unmoving things, there's no single highest goal, as all these goals have causes. 19

If winning a kingdom was said to be the highest, then such goals would exist at times and at others cease to be. 20

If you think the highest goal is sacrifice effected by the *Rg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma Vedas*, then listen to what I say. 21

If a thing is formed from clay as its raw material, the finished product, following the nature of that substance, is also made of clay, your majesty. 22

Similarly, a rite performed with perishable materials, like kindling, butter and *kuśa*-grass, will only yield impermanent results. 23

The wise understand that the highest goal is permanent, but this would certainly not be true if it depended on impermanent materials. 24

You may think the highest goal is ritual action, from which no reward is wanted, as it leads to liberation, but the highest goal is no mere means of achieving things. 25

Meditation on the Self is said to be the meaning of the highest goal, your majesty, but this divides the Self from others. The highest goal yields no such divisions. 26

The highest goal is said to be the union of the spirit and oneself, but this is also false because one kind of substance cannot become another. 27

All these are said to be ‘the best’, sire, but now I’ll briefly tell you, a guardian of the world, what truly is the highest goal. 28

It is the Self: unitary, pervading, constant, pure, unqualified, immaterial, free from birth and ageing and the rest, universal and unchanging, 29

Comprising highest wisdom and unyoked to falsehood, name or lineage in the past, the present or the future, your majesty. 30

The form of knowledge that exists as one in each and every body is the highest goal; the dualists’ view is incorrect. 31

Just as a single current of air is divided into notes on passing through the body of a flute, 32

The unity of this great spirit is divided into varied forms under the sway of external factors. When the difference between the deities and the rest is removed, no distinction between high and low remains. 33

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

## 15. Ṛbhu’s discourse on the highest truth

*Parāśara:*

After he had spoken, the brahmin then imparted to the silent king, still deep in thought, this account of nonduality. 1

*The brahmin:*

Listen, tiger of a king, to what was sung in former times by Ṛbhu, who led the brahmin Nidāgha to enlightenment. 2

Ṛbhu by name, Lord Brahmā’s son, understood the nature of reality, sire, on account of his noble origin. 3

In former times, Ṛbhu had a disciple, Pulastya’s scion Nidāgha, to whom he taught all knowledge with greatest joy. 4

When Nidāgha grasped reality, sire, Ṛbhu thought that he was free from false notions of dichotomy. 5

Pulastya lived in the rich and pleasant city known as Vīranagara on the banks of the Devikā River. 6

Ṛbhu's disciple Nidāgha, now a yoga expert, sire, resided in a grove outside the city long ago. 7

One thousand divine years later, Ṛbhu approached that city to visit him. 8

After the midday rituals, Ṛbhu came to Nidāgha's door unrecognised, where his disciple welcomed him hospitably and showed him in. 9

Ṛbhu washed his hands and feet and accepted a place to sit. That best of brahmins Nidāgha then invited his guest to dine. 10

*Ṛbhu:*

Tell me, best of brahmins, what food you have at home, because I find no pleasure in inferior cuisine. 11

*Nidāgha:*

We have cakes of *saktu*, *yāvaka* and *vāṭya* barley in the house. You're welcome to have whichever of these appeals to you, best of brahmins, as you wish. 12

*Ṛbhu:*

These are all inferior foods, brahmin. Bring me something sweet, like *saṃnyāva* cakes, rice pudding or dishes made with curds and treacle. 13

*Nidāgha:*

Hey, wife! Use the best we have at home to make something sweet to please our visitor's palate. 14

*The brahmin:*

Thus addressed by Nidāgha, his wife, in deference to her husband's words, made some sweets for Ṛbhu. 15

Nidāgha, bowing politely, then addressed the sage, your majesty, while the latter ate the sweets that he'd requested. 16

*Nidāgha:*

Are you really satisfied? Do you like the food? Is your mind well-pleased with it, brahmin? 17

Where are you residing, and where do you plan to travel? Tell me the reason for your visit, brahmin. 18

*Ṛbbu:*

A hungry person knows satisfaction once he's eaten, brahmin. As I've finished, why ask if I am satisfied? 19

Hunger arises when the element of earth has been digested. When the body loses moisture, folk get thirsty. 20

Because I'm not subject to thirst or hunger, even though they're said to be the natural condition of the body, brahmin, and because I'm free from the cause of hunger, I'm always satisfied. 21

Mental wellbeing and contentment are both natural states of mind, brahmin, but the spirit—*pums*—is untouched by these. Ask your questions of one whose mind is prone to them. 22

You asked me where I live, where I'm going and why I've come. Listen to my answers to these three questions. 23

Since this spirit is everywhere and pervasive like the sky, how can questions such as 'Why?' and 'Whence?' and 'Whither?' be meaningful? 24

I neither come nor go, nor do I reside in a particular place. You're not you, others are not themselves and I'm not me. 25

If you want to know why I chose between sweet and unsweet food, then listen to my explanation, best of brahmins. 26

What is sweet or bland to one who eats the food, best of brahmins? Sweet food loses its appeal when you don't desire it. 27

Tasteless food is still delicious to a man who's hungry, but what food tastes as good at first, halfway through and at the end? 28

Just as houses made from mud are strengthened when plastered with the same material, similarly, this body, composed of earthy elements, is strengthened with particles of the same. 29

Barley, wheat, lentils, butter, oil, milk, yoghurt, sugar, fruit and the others all consist of atoms. 30

When you've therefore understood this false distinction between bland and tasty, then your mind will be impartial, and impartiality leads to liberation. 31

*The brahmin:*

Hearing these words of great import, your majesty, fortunate Nidāgha threw himself to the floor and said, 32

'Please have mercy! Tell me who you really are, now that you've come to help me, brahmin. Hearing what you've said, my confusion is dispelled.' 33

*Ṛbhū:*

I'm your teacher, Ṛbhū, and I came to teach you, brahmin, but now I've imparted the highest truth, I'll set out again. 34

Understand that all this world is one and undivided and is just a form of the highest spirit known as Vāsudeva. 35

*The brahmin:*

After Ṛbhū had spoken thus, Nidāgha bowed with reverence and worshipped him with deepest faith. Then the sage departed and wandered of his own accord. 36

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

## 16. Ṛbhū's discourse continues

*The brahmin:*

When another thousand years had passed, your majesty, Ṛbhū returned to that same place to teach Nidāgha again. 1

The sage beheld Nidāgha outside the city as the king was entering with a mighty army. 2

Fortunate Nidāgha, returning from the forest with firewood and *kuśa*-grass, stood apart from the pressing crowd, wracked by pangs of hunger. 3

Seeing Nidāgha, Ṛbhū approached unrecognised and greeted him: 'Brahmin, why are you standing here alone?' 4

*Nidāgha:*

Greetings, brahmin! This crowd is here to see the king return to our fair city. That's why I'm here as well. 5

*Ṛbbu:*

Which is the king and which are his attendants? Tell me, best of brahmins, because I think you must be wise. 6

*Nidāgha:*

The king is mounted on that sacred raging elephant, towering like a mountain peak, and the others are his attendants. 7

*Ṛbbu:*

You've shown me the elephant and the king together but haven't said which features may distinguish them. 8

Therefore, fortunate brahmin, describe for me the difference between these two, because I wish to know which one is which. 9

*Nidāgha:*

The elephant is the one below, brahmin, and the one on top is king. One is being carried by the other. Who doesn't understand this, brahmin? 10

*Ṛbbu:*

Kindly tell me, brahmin, so I can comprehend: what's meant by the word 'below', and what's the meaning of 'on top'? 11

*The brahmin:*

Hearing this, Nidāgha suddenly leapt on Ṛbbu's back and cried, 'Listen and I'll tell you. 12

I'm on top of you, just like the king, and, like the elephant, you're below. I'm giving you this demonstration, brahmin, to help you understand.' 13

*Ṛbbu:*

If you are like the king and I am like the elephant, kindly tell me, best of brahmins, which of us am I and which is you? 14

*The brahmin:*

Hearing this, Nidāgha reverently clasped the sage's feet and said, 'You must be Ṛbbu, my holy teacher! 15

None other than my master has a mind so perfectly impressed by the unity of all things. That's why I guess that you're my guru, finally returned.' 16

*Ṛbhu:*

I am indeed your guru, Nidāgha, and Ṛbhu is my name. Having received your homage in former times, I've returned to teach you further. 17

I therefore give you this instruction, wise brahmin, which in brief consists of the essence of the highest truth: all this is one. 18

*The brahmin:*

After that wise guru Ṛbhu had spoken thus to Nidāgha, he set out and, following his instruction, Nidāgha also came to realise the unity of everything. 19

He saw no distinction between himself and other creatures, brahmin, and so that twice-born sage reached final liberation. 20

Similarly, you, understanding virtue, should look upon yourself, your friends and foe as one, your majesty, while realising that the Self—the *ātman*—is all-pervading. 21

Just as the sky looks white or blue or another colour, the single Self appears divided to those whose perception is imperfect. 22

That single entity, all that's in this world, is unfailing Viṣṇu. Aside from him, there's nothing. He is me, and he is you, and he is all of this. Abandon the delusion that the Self is still divided! 23

*Parāśara:*

Thus addressed by the brahmin, that excellent king, perceiving the highest truth, now cast off all distinctions and the brahmin who recalled his former lives won freedom from rebirth. 24

A pure-minded individual who tells or hears this pithy tale of Bharata and the king while filled with true devotion will not mistake the nature of the Self, and will be fit for freedom from *samsāra*. 25

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

*End of Book Two.*

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