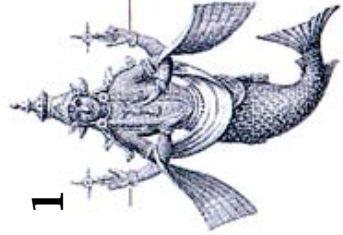
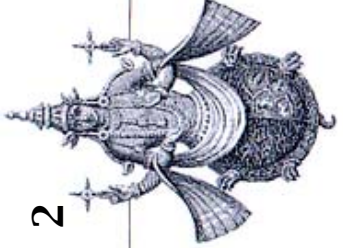


The Incarnations of Vishnu



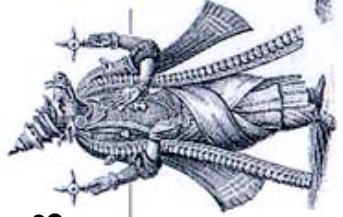
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MATSYA
THE FISH



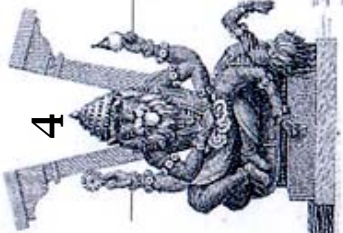
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KURMA
THE TURTLE



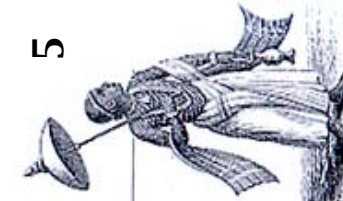
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VARAHA
THE BOAR



4

NARASIMHA, HALF-
MAN HALF-LION



5

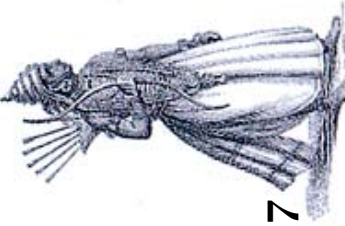
VAMANA
THE DWARF

PARASHURAMA



6

RAMA



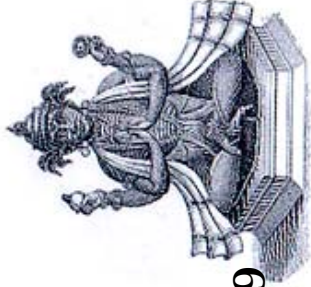
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KRISHNA



8

BUDDHA



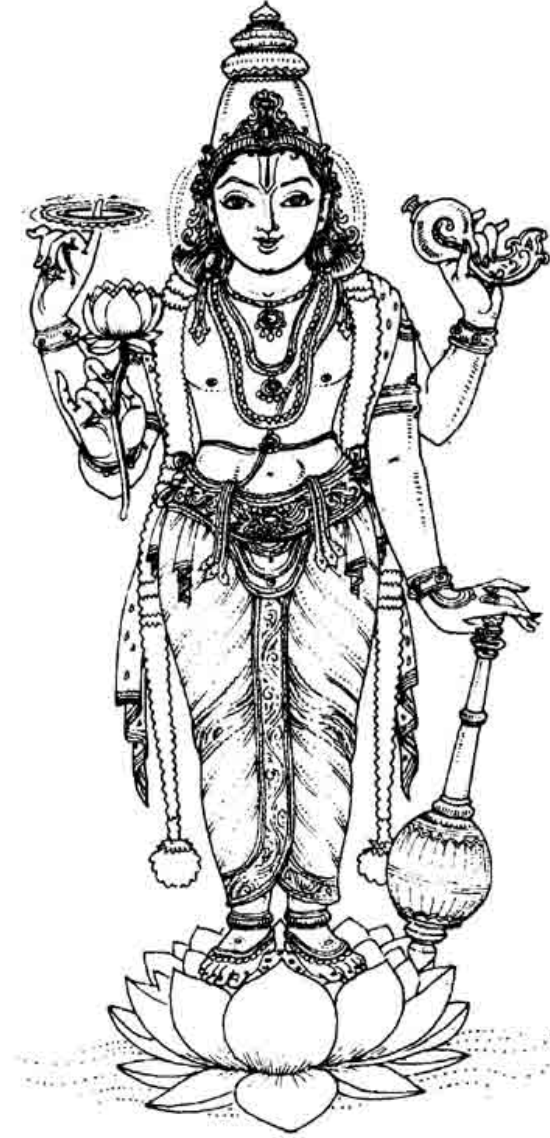
9

KALKI
THE HORSE



10

Lesson 6 Vishnu - The Preserver



Vishnu standing on the lotus

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

ID: _____ PERIOD: _____

Vishnu, although one of the holy trinity of which each is equal to the other, holds the highest status amongst the three, due to the nature of his function. He is the most adored and exalted deity in *Sanatana Dharam*, as of today and believed to be the lord supreme himself. The name Vishnu is taken from the word *Vish* which means to spread in all directions and therefore he comprises the entire Universe which is ever expanding. This conception of the expanding universe seems to be known to the early Aryans as it has been mentioned before as Brahma's name is also attributed to the word *Bish* or Vish, as both Brahma and Vishnu represent the same aspect.

Vishnu is called *Narayana* meaning the one who dwells in water. *Nara* means water and *ayan* is the place of dwelling. Life is supposed to have come out of water and to sustain it water is an absolute necessity. Therefore *Narayana* is an absolute necessity as the main one of the Holy Trinity.

He is the one, that must take form when *adharm* plays havoc with creation especially for the human race or the *devtas*, and then he appears in the midst of creation in any form suitable to the purpose of that time, to bring back humanity to the path of *dharm* or duty. The almighty is supposed to have sixteen *Kalas* and Vishnu can come with as many as required for that particular period. The supreme soul does not descend on earth but a part complete in itself descend on earth.

Vishnu has no children of his own as all creation is his child. The other two gods of the trinity have children born of them and called their sons and daughters but Vishnu and his consort Laxmi look after all living beings and have enough to do without having any offspring of their own. Vishnu is also particular in granting boon and has never given a boon to an *asur* (the evil one) while Brahma and Shiva are very liberal in bestowing boon to all who pleases them, without much thought to the consequences and consequently get even themselves into trouble. As mentioned before they have to run up to Vishnu for help. In fact, all Vishnu's incarnations are indirectly due to the doings of Brahma and Shiva.

Praise and hymns addressed to Vishnu are in plenty in the Hindu scriptures. He is deeply loved in all his incarnations on earth as he comes face to face with humanity itself. The *Bhagwat Purana* mentions twenty-two or even 39 *avtars*, but the accepted ones are ten.

SYMBOLISMS IN VISHNU

- a. ANANTA
- b. ANANDA
- c. BLUE COMPLEXION
- d. CHAKRA OR DISCUS
- e. SHANKHA OR CONCH
- f. GADA OR MACE
- g. BOW & ARROWS
- h. ARMLETS
- i. TILAKA
- j. EARRINGS
- k. KAUSTUBHA
- l. FLOWER GARLAND
- m. CROWN
- n. GARUDA HIS VEHICLE
- o. STANDING ON THE LOTUS

eclipse them every year.

Once when *Narad* muni became arrogant due to his being so near to *Narayana*, Vishnu created an imaginary Kingdom in which the most beautiful daughter of the king was having her *Swaymver*. Narad fell in love with the princess as soon as he was there and asked Vishnu to give him his face and Vishnu gave him a monkey's face and the poor chap became the laughing stock of the entire gathering. Vishnu at his handsome best was chosen by the Princess. This annoyed *Narad* no end until Vishnu explained everything to him and told him that as Vishnu had many faces as there are species on the earth he had not cheated him. He also told him not to be arrogant as he loved everyone the same and no one was dearer to him than the other.

Once Vishnu's consort Laxmi left him in anger and went to her father the ocean and he became very poor and distraught and moved heaven and earth to get her back.

Review Questions:

Answer the following questions in your notebook.

1. How can preservation be more important than creation?
2. What is the meaning of the word Narayana? How is that connected with evolution? Is there any connection with Genesis 1:2?
3. Does Vishnu need to come in the form of an animal if he is going to help mankind? Why come in different forms?
4. Why would Hindus consider Buddha an Avatar of Vishnu? Can Jesus, Muhammad or Guru Nanak be an Avatar of Vishnu? Why? Why not?
5. Are all his incarnations (Avatars) happening in this current yuga (cycle) which is 4.32 million years? Will he incarnate in other cycles which are yet to come?
6. Did Vishnu cheat Narad muni when he gave him a monkey's face instead of a beautiful face? What does this tell about Vishnu when he kept for himself the best?
7. How can a god become poor and bankrupt and ask humans to pay for his debt? What does this portray about god's supreme power and authority?

a. Cosmic energy **b.** ocean & endless bliss **c.** infinity **d.** dharma **e.** origin of existence
f. removal of ignorance **g.** illusion & senses **h.** storehouse of actions **i.** holy mud
j. extreme opposites - good and bad **k.** where Laxmi resides **l.** victory
m. supreme god, **n.** wings of speech **o.** grounded on the supreme power.

Vishnu is prominent as the Preserver of the universe. Vishnu's restoring, shielding and conserving powers have been apparent in the world in a sequence of ten mortal incarnations known as Avatars. The avatars appear in order to balance the effect of good and evil upon the earth. It is believed that nine avatars have already descended, three in non human form, one in hybrid form and five in human form. Of the ten universally recognized avatars, nine have already appeared whereas the tenth is yet to appear. These ten avatars are also known by the name of *Dasha Avatar of Vishnu*.

All the Avatars are mortal form of Vishnu, who himself is eternal, consistent and undeniable. The Dasha Avatar of Vishnu are briefly discussed here (see page 8 for illustrations):

Matsya Avatar - Vishnu in the form of Fish

The first avatar, Matsya, was taken by Vishnu at the end of the Satyuga, when a flood destroyed the world. Through this avatar, he saved humanity and the sacred Veda text from the flood.

Kurma Avatar - Vishnu in the form of Turtle

The second avatar, Kurma, was taken in the Satyuga to help the Devas and to obtain the amrit (nectar) of immortality which was also sought after by the Asuras (demons). He helped in creating the world by giving support of his back through this avatar.

Varaha Avatar - Vishnu in the form of Boar

The third avatar, Varaha, was taken at the end of the last flood in the Satyuga, when Bhoomi Devi (Earth Mother) sank to the bottom of the ocean. Vishnu, in the form of varaha, dived into the ocean and raised the goddess out of the ocean, supported by his two tusks.

Narsimha Avatar - Vishnu in the form of Half - Man and Half - Lion

The fourth Avatar, Narsimha, was taken in the Satyuga to kill a tyrant demon king. Narsimha is the only avatar which was Hybrid in form being half human and half animal.

Vamana Avatar - Vishnu in the form of a Dwarf

The fifth avatar, Vamana, appeared in the Tretayuga in order to destroy Bali, the king of demons. He came during a huge ceremony conducted by the king and cleverly asked for just three feet of land, measured by his own small feet. Vamana covered whole of the earth and the heaven, subduing Bali into his feet.

Parshurama Avatar - Vishnu in the form of a Brahmin

The sixth avatar, Parshurama, appeared in the Tretayuga to destroy the warrior caste. When the kings of the earth became despotic and started to harm people and saints in the forest, Vishnu incarnated as Parshurama and destroyed all the kings who were harassing the people.

Rama Avatar - Vishnu in the form of the King

The seventh avatar, Rama, the prince and king of Ayodhya, appeared in the Tretayuga, to rescue Sita with his loyal servant Hanuman and his brother, Lakshmana, and killed the demon Ravana. Rama became one of the most popular gods in the Hindu religion.

Krishna Avatar - Vishnu in the form of a Cowherd's Boy

The eighth avatar, Krishna, along with his brother Balarama, appeared in the Dwaparyuga to kill the demon king, Kansa. Krishna conveyed the message of love and humanity to the world. Krishna told the epic poem Bhagavad Gita to the warrior Arjuna in which he acclaimed: *"Whenever Dharma, or the situation of law and order, is endangered on this world, I incarnate onto this world to re establish Dharma, law and order, and to protect the Sadhus or saints and to destroy the evil elements of the society."*

Buddha Avatar - Vishnu in the Form of Buddha

The ninth avatar, Mahavira Buddha, appeared in the Kalyuga, to teach the lesson of following a middle path in life. "**Buddha**" means "*the enlightened one*." He taught that all sorrow comes from attachments and desires, so it's better to curb all attachments in order to remain happy.

Kalki Avatar - Vishnu in the form of Horse

The tenth Avatar, Kalki, ("Eternity", or "time", or "The Destroyer of foulness"), is yet to appear on the earth. And it is expected to appear at the end of Kali Yuga, the time period in which we currently exist, which will end in the year 428,899 CE.

Vishnu is portrayed as dark in color, or one can easily say bluish, red or yellow in his incarnations during the various *yugs*. He is usually depicted as sleeping over the waves of the ocean reclining on the coils of the *Sheshnag* or standing on the lotus or waves of the ocean. He is usually shown with four hands, each holding his four chief attributes. He is shown as wearing a yellow robe tied like a beautiful *dhoti* (sarong) on the lower limbs and a *aang vastra* thrown round

his neck with both ends falling straight down his body. Another yellow scarf acts as a belt holding the *dhoti* at the waist. The *dhoti* is tied in a way that it forms a long flair coming down in front of both legs. He wears a *vayjanti mala* (necklace) with pearls, rubies, emeralds, sapphire and diamonds, and he wears the large beautiful diamond known as *Kaustube* which had come out of the ocean when it was churned. A crown made of gold and earrings in the shape of a crocodile known as *Makerakati Kundal*. Across his chest is the holdy (yellow) thread called *Yagyapaveela*. He also has a bow name *Skarnaga*.

In the Upanishads Vishnu Himself described the meaning of the symbols which he holds in his hands. He says that He holds the conch in one of the lower hands as a symbol of creative energy, the discus in one of the upper hands is the symbol of the mind representing dispensation and liberation. The lotus in the right lower hand represents *maya* (illusion) that envelopes the world. In the lower left hand is the mace which devotes strength and is also a symbol of ancient knowledge. But sometimes Vishnu is depicted with only two hands—the right held up with the *Sudarshan chakar* the destroyer of evil, and in the left hand held down is the conch.

Vishnu's consort is Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and beauty, and she opens the gate to all resources that are required by Vishnu to run the universe.

She became his consort as she chose him and came straight to his side as soon as she came out of the ocean when it was churned. But then Vishnu is also attributed as being the husband of Bhoo-devi (mother earth) and even in some scriptures even Saraswati and Ganga are mentioned as his wives. This actually points to the "Oneness of Brahma and Vishnu."

Vishnu led a very colorful life while mingling with the *devtas* and humans. When the churning of the Ocean was taking place and the *asurs* were to be denied the *amrit*, He took the form of a beautiful woman named *Mohini* lured the *asurs* and made them wait while the *devtas* were quickly given the *amrit*. Of course one *asur* named *Rahu* sensed the deception and was served the *amrit* as he went and sat between the sun and the moon. They pointed him out to Vishnu who cut him in two with his discus but he had taken a few drops of the *amrit* already and became immortal and thus became two - *Rahu* and *Ketu* who now come and trouble the sun and the moon and