



## THE GARUDA PURANA

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*Aum Namoh Narayanayah*

The Garuda Purana is a sattvika purana. The others in this group are Vishnu Purana, Narada Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Padma Purana and Varaha Purana.

The Garuda Purana has nineteen thousand shlokas. It is a medium-sized Purana. The Skanda Purana, for example, has eighty-one thousand shlokas; whereas the Markandeya Purana only nine thousand. The thousand shlokas of the Garuda Purana are divided into two parts, a purva khanda (first part) and an 'uttara' khanda (subsequent part). Each khanda has several chapters (adhyaya). The purva khanda is much longer; it has two hundred and thirty-four chapters. The Uttara khanda has only forty-five.

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## **Suta and the Other Sages**

Suta was a very learned sage. He was very well-versed in the Puranas and in the shastras (sacred texts). He was also devoted to Vishnu.

Perhaps it is best to clear up a little bit of confusion about Suta. The word Suta is not really a name. The sutas were a class of people, born of Brahmana mothers and Kshatriya fathers. As you probably know, in those days, society was divided into four classes or Varnas. The first two were Brahmanas and kshatriyas. It was the duty of Brahmanas and kshatriyas. It was the duty of Brahmanas to pray and study the sacred texts, apart from assisting in religious rites. It was the duty of kshatriyas to bear arms and protect the world.

The sutas were neither Brahmanas nor kshatriyas, they were cross-breeds. Their duties were to look after horses and act as charioteers.

Vedavyasa taught the Puranas to one of his disciples name Romaharshana or Lomaharshana. He was thus named because the hair (roma) on his body (roma) was thrilled (harshana) when he heard the Puranas from his teacher. It was Romaharshana who related the stories of the Puranas to everyone else. The Bhagavata Purana says the Romaharashana had a son named Suta and it was this son who related the story of that particular Purana to the other sages. On the other hand, Romaharshana himself belonged to the suta class, so that he too could be addressed as Suta. From reading the Garuda Purana, one does get the impression that it is Romaharshana himself who is relating the story, and not his son.

To come back to the point, Romaharshana came to a forest known as naimisharanya. He sat there and contemplated the mysteries of the Lord Vishnu.

Several other rishis (sages) led by Shounaka also came to the forest. They told Romaharshana, Sage, you know everything. Who is the god of all gods? Who is to be worshipped? What does one meditate on? Who destroys evil? How did the world come to be created? What is dhrama (righteousness)? Tell us all these things and more.

I will, replied Romaharshana. I will recite to you the Garuda Purana. Many years ago, this Purana was told to the sage Kashyapa by the great bird Garuda himself. I learnt it from my teacher Vyasadeva. But first let me list for you the twenty-two avatars of Vishnu.

The first incarnation was a young boy (kumara). In this form, Vishnu adopted celibacy (brahmacharya) and performed difficult tapasya (meditation).

The second incarnation was as a boar (varaha). In this form, Vishnu rescued the earth from the underworld.

The third incarnation was as a great sage (devarshi). In this form, Vishnu spread the knowledge of several texts (tantras).

The fourth incarnation was as two sages named Nara and Narayana.

The fifth incarnation was as the great sage Kaila. Kapila taught his disciple Asuri the wonderful philosophy known as samkhya yoga.

The sixth incarnation was as the age Dattatreya, the son of Atri and Anasuya.

The seventh incarnation took place in the manvantra known as svayambhuva. Vishnu was born as the son of Ruchi and Akuti and performed many yajnas (sacrifices).

In the eighth incarnation, Vishnu was born as the son of Nabhi and Meru. His name was Urukrama. He taught everyone the righteous way of life.

In the ninth incarnation, Vishnu became the king Prithu and restored foodgrains and herbs to the earth.

The tenth of Vishnu's incarnations was as a fish (matsya). He saved Vaivasvata Manu from the flood that enveloped the world.

In the eleventh incarnation, Vishnu adopted the form of a turtle (kurma). This was to help out the gods (devas) and demons (asuras) in the churning of the ocean (samudra manthana).

The twelfth incarnation was as Dhanvantari, physician of the gods and the originator of medicine.

The thirteenth was mohini avatara. In this form, Vishnu adopted the body of a beautiful woman so as to charm and rob the asuras of the amrita (a life-giving drink).

In the fourteenth incarnation, Vishnu became narasimha, a being who was half-man and half-lion. He killed the evil asura Hiranyakashipu as narasimha.

The fifteenth incarnation witnessed Vishnu's adoption of the form of dwarf (vamana). This was to hoodwink the asura Vali and restore the gods to heaven.

In the sixteenth incarnation, Vishnu became Parashurama, killed all the kshatriyas in the world twenty-one times.

The seventeenth incarnation was as Vedavyasa, the son of Parashara and Satyavati. Vedavyasa divided the Vedas.

Vishnu's eighteen incarnation was as the sage Narada. The nineteenth incarnation was Rama and the twentieth was Krishna. In the twenty-first incarnation, Vishnu became Buddha, the originator of Buddhism. The twenty-second incarnation is yet to come Vishnu will be come. Vishnu will be born as Kalki so as to destroy evil in the world and restore righteousness. There have been several other incarnations of Vishnu. But the ones mentioned above are the major ones.

### **The Background to the Purana**

Romaharshana next related how the Garuda Purana had originated. He once went to the hermitage known as vadrikashrama and met Vedavyasa there. He worshipped Vedavyasa and asked the sage to tell him about the true nature of Vishnu.

I will, said Vedavyasa, I will tell you the Garuda Purana. I, Narada, Daksha, Bhrigu and several other sages had once gone to Brahma's residence in brahmaloka to pay our respects. We asked Brahma to relate to us the best form of knowledge.

Garuda was the king of the birds. He pleased Vishnu through tapsaya and Vishnu appeared before Garuda. What boon do you wish for? he asked Garuda.

Please grant me the boon that I may be your carrier (vahana), answered Garuda. Grant me the boon that I may be able to prevail over all snakes. And finally grant me the boon that I may know everything so as to be able to compose a Purana.

This boon was granted and Garuda composed the Garuda Purana. He then taught it to the sage Kashyapa. And Vishnu himself recited the Purana to Brahma, Shiva and the other gods. Vedavyasa learnt the Purana from Brahma and taught it to Romaharshana. It was this Purana that Romaharshana was now reciting.

### **Creation**

In the beginning there was nothing. Only the divine essence (brahman) was everywhere. The brahman is the origin of the universe. It has no beginning and no end. Before creation, there was nothing except the brahman. The universe was immersed in water.

Then in the water a golden egg (anda) appeared. Vishnu was inside the egg. He had adopted a physical form so as to create. From Vishnu was created Brahma, the one with four faces. All that was created Brahma. The one with four faces. All that was created was inside the egg. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. But it is the same brahma which adopts these different forms. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are not really separate entities.

At first, Brahma created four types of beings. These are devas (gods), asuras (demons), pitris (ancestors) and manavas (humans). The gods are stronger during the day and the demons are stronger at night. Later, Brahma created two other types of beings. These were the rakshasas (demons) and yakshas (demi-gods). He also created the gandharvas (singers of heaven).

Snakes were created from Brahma's hair, sheep from the chest, goats from the mouth, cows from the stomach, and horses, elephants, donkeys and camels from the feet. The hair on Brahma's body became herbs. The brahmanas emerged from Brahma's mouth and the kshatriyas from his arms. The third of the four classes consists of vaishyas. Agriculture and trade are the duties of vaishyas. The vaishyas came out of Brahma's thighs. The last of the four classes consists of shudras. It is the duty of shudras to serve the other three classes. The shudras emerged from Brahma's feet. The four Vedas came out of Brahma's four mouths.

Brahma first created sons through his mental powers. Their names were Dharma, Rudra, Manu, Sanaka, Sanatana, Bhrigu, Sanatkumar, Ruchi, Shuddha, Marichi, Atri, Angira, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vashishtha and Narada. Then Daksha was created from Brahma's right thumb and Daksha's wife from Brahma's left thumb, Daksha and his wife had several daughters. From his own body Brahma also created a man named Svayambhuva Manu and a woman named Shatarupa. Manu and Shatarupa had two sons named Priyavrata and Uttanapada and three daughters named Prasuti, Akuti and Devahuti. The sage Kashyapa was born from Brahma. He married thirteen of Daksha's daughters. Their names were Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kala, Anayu, Muni, Kadru, Prabha, Ira, Krodha, Vinata, Surabhi and Khaga. The sons of Aditi were the adityas or gods and the sons of Diti were the daityas or demons. Two of Diti's sons were Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. Danu's sons were the danavas or demons. Vinata had two sons, Aruna and Garuda, the same Garuda who composed the Garuda Purana. Kadru's sons were the snakes. Kroudha's sons were the pishachas (cannibalistic demons). Surabhi gave birth to cows and buffaloes. Ira was the mother of all trees and bushes. Kahaga gave birth to rakshasas and yakshas and muni to apsaras (dancers of heaven).

### Praying

The Garuda Purana now has several sections on techniques of praying to Surya (the sun god), Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) and Vishnu. The mantras (incantations) that are to be used are described. For example, if you wanted to pray to Vishnu, you could say the following.

I pray to you, Lord Vishnu. Take your sudarshana chakra (a bladed discus) and protect my east. I seek your protection my south. I salute you. Take your sounanda hala (a plough) and protect my west. O louts-eyes, you alone are my refuge. Take your shatana mushala (a club and protect my north.

I pray to you, Lord Vishnu. Take your khadga (sword) and charma (shield) and protect my northcast. Your are the killer of all demons, grant me my desire. Take our panchajanya (a couch-shell) and anudvadoha (a lotus) and protect my north-west. Your body is divine. Take your chandramasa khadga (a sword) and protect my south-east. I salute you. Take your shrivatsa (Vishnu's necklace) and protect my south-west. Ascend. O Lord, on Garuda and protect me from the top. You are invincible. I bow down before you. Also protect me in the underworld.

All these prayers and mantras help. But the best prayer of all is to recite Vishnu's thousand names.

### Vishnu's Thousand Names

The following are the thousand names of Vishnu. For convenience, let us list them out in a hundred groups of ten each.

(1) Vasudeva, Mahavishu , Vamana, Vasava, Vasu, Balachandranibha, Bala, Balabhadra, Valadhipa, Valibandhanakrit.

(2) Vedhah, Varenya, Vedavit, Kavi, Vedakarta, Vedarupa, Vedya, Vedaparipluta, Vedangavetta, Vedesha.

(3) Baladhara, Balardana, Avikara, Varesha, Varada, Varunadhipa, Viraha Vrihat, Vira, Vandita.

(4) Parameshvara, Atma, Paramatma, Pratyagatma, Viyat, Para, Padmanabha, Padmanikdhi, Padmahasta, Gadadhara.

(5) Parama, Parabhuta, Purushottama, Ishvara, Padmajangha, Pundarika, Padmamaladhara, Priya, Padmaksha, Padmagarbha.

(6) Parjanya, Padmasamsthita, Aparas, Paramartha, Paratpara, Prabhu, Pandita, Panditapavirta, Pappardaka, Shuddha.

(7) Prakasharupa, Pavitra, Parirakshaka, Pipasavarjita, Padya, Purusha, Prakriti, Pradhana, Prithivipadama, Priyaprada.

(8) Sarvesha, Sarvaga, Sarva, Sarvavid, Sarvada, Para, Sarvajagaddhama, Sarvadarshi, Sarvabhrit, Sarvanugrahakrit.

(9) Deva, Sarvabhutahridisthita, Sarvapa, Sarvapujya, Sarvadevanamaskrita, Sarvajaganmula, Sakala, Nishkala, Anala, Sarvagopta.

(10) Sarvanishtha, Sarvakaranakarana, Sarvadhyyeya, Sarvamitra, Sarvadevasvarupadhrik, Sarvadhyyaksha, Suradhyyaksha, Surasurnamaskrita, Dushtaghataka, Asurantka.

(11) Satyapala, Sannabha, Siddhesha, Siddhavadata, Siddhasadhya, Siddhasiddha, Hridishvara, Jagaccharanya, Shreye, Kshema.

(12) Shubhakrit, Shobhana, Soumya, Satya, Satyastha, Satyaparakrama, Satyasankalpa, Satyavit, Satyada, Dharma,

(13) Dharmi, Karmi, Sarvakarmavivarjita, Karmakarta, Karma, Kriya, Karya, Shripati, Nripati, Shriman.

(14) Sarvapativarjita, Devapati, Vrishnipati, Hiranyagarbhapati, Tripurantapati, Pashupati, Vasupati, Indrapati, Varunapati, Vanaspatipati.

(15) Anilapati, Analapati, Yamapati, Kuberapati, Nakshatrapati, Oshadhipati, Vrikshapati, Nagapati, Arkapati, Dakshapati.

(16) Sukritapati, Nripapati, Gandharvapati, Asupati, Uttama, Parvatapati, Nadipati, Devapati, Shreshtha, Kapilapati.

(17) Latapati, Virudhpati, Munipati, Suryapati, Chandrapati, Shukrapati, Grahapati, Rakshasapati, Kinnarapati, Dvijapati.

(18) Saritpati, Samudrapati, Sarovarapati, Bhutapati, Vetalapati, Kushmandapati, Pakshipati, Pashupati, Mahatma, Mangala.

(19) Meya, Mandara, Mandareshvara, Meru, Mata, Pramana, Madhava, Manovarjita, Maladhara, Mahadeva.

(20) Mahadevapujita, Mahashanta, Mahabhaga, Madhusudana, Mahavirya, Mahaprana, Markandeyaprandita, Mayada, Mayatma, Mayabaddha.

(21) Mayavivarjita, Munistuta, Muni, Maitra, Mahanasa, Mahahanu, Mahavahu, Mahadanta, Maranavivarjita, Mahavaktra.

(22) Mahakaya, Mahodara, Mahapaka, Mahagriva, Mahamani, Mahamanah, Mahamati, Mahakiriti, Maharupa, Mahasura.

(23) Madhu, Mahadeva, Maheshvara, Makhejya, Makharupi, Mananiya, Makheshvara, Mahavata, Mahabhaga, Mahesha,



(24) Atitamanusha, Manava, Manu, Manavapriyamkara, Mriga, Mrigapujya, Mrigapati, Buddhapati, Brihaspatipati, Shanaishcharapati.

(25) Rahupati, Ketupati, Lakshmana, Lakshana, Lamboustha, Lalita, Alamkarayukta, Chandancharchita, Rasojjvaladvaktra, Pushpopashobhita.

(26) Rama, Ramapati, Sabharya, Parameshvara, Ratnada, Ratnaharta, Rupi, Rupavivarjita, Maharupa, Ugrarupa.

(27) Soumyarupa, Nilameghanibha, Shuddha, Kalameghanibha, Dhumravarna, Pitavarna, Nanarupa, Avarnaka, Virupa, Rupada.

(28) Shuklavarna, Sarvavarna, Survarna, Svarnamekhala, Suvarnapradata, Suvarnamsha, Suvarnapriya, Suvarnadhya, Suparni, Mahaparna.

(29) Suparnakarana, Vainateya, Aditya, Adi, Adikara, Shiva, Mahatkarana, Puranakarana, Buddhikarana, Manahkarana.

(30) Chittakarana, Ahamkarakarana, Bhutakarana, Vibhavasukarana, Akashakarana, Prithivikarana, Andakarana, Prakritikarana, Dehakarana, Chakshuhkarana.

(31) Shrotrakarana, Tvakakarana, Jihvakarana, Ghranakarana, Hastadvayakarana, Padadvayakarana, Vakyakarana, Payukarana, Indrakarana, Kuberakarana.

(32) Yamakarana, Ishanakarana, Yakshakarana, Rakshasakarana, Bhushanakarana, Dharmakarana, Jantukarana, Vasukarana, Paramakarana, Manukarana

(33) Pakshikarana, Munikarana, Shreshthakarana, Yogikakarana, Siddhaganakarana, Yakshaganakarana, Kinnaraganakarana, Gandharvaganakarana, Nadakarana, Nadikarana.

(34) Samudrakarana, Vrikshaganakarana, Virudhakarana, Lokakarana, Patalakarana, Devakarana, Sarpaganakarana, Mangalakarana, Pashuganakarana, Sarvakarana.

(35) Dehatma, Indriyatma, Atma, Buddhi, Manatma, Ahankaratma, Chetatma, Jagradatma, Svapnatma, Paratma.

(36) Pradhanatma, Paramatma, Akashatma, Jalatma, Prithvyatma, Rasatma, Gandhatma, Rumatma, Paratma, Shabdatma.

(37) Vagatma, Sparshatma, Purushatma, Shrotratma, Rudratma, Tvagatma, Jihvatma, Ghranatma, Hastatma, Padatma.

(38) Upasthatma, Payvatma, Indratma, Brahmatma, Dakshatma, Satyatma, Ishtma, Roudratma, Mokshavid, Yati.



(39) Yatnavan, Yatna, Charmi, Khadgi, Asurantaka, Haripravrtanashila, Yatihitarata, Yatirupi, Yogi, Yogidhyeya.

(40) Hari, Shiti, Samvit, Medha, Kala, Ushma, Varsha, Mati, Samvatsara, Mokshakara.

(41) Mohapradhvamsaka, Dushtamohakarta, Vadavamukha, Samvartaka, Kalakarta, Goutama, Bhrigu, Angira, Atri, Vashishta.

(42) Pulaha, Pulastya, Kutas, Yajnavalkya, Devala, Vyasa, Parashara, Sharmada, Gangeya, Hrishiksha.

(43) Vrihacchrava, Keshava, Kleshahanta, Sukarna, Karnavarjita, Narayana, Mahabhaga, Pranapati, Apanapati, Vyanapati.

(44) Udanapati, Samanapati, Shabdapati, Sparshapati, Rupapati, Kshapati, Adya, Khadgapani, Halayudha, Chakrapani.

(45) Kundali, Shrivatsanka, Prakriti, Koustubhagriva, Pitambaradhara, Sumukha, Durmukha, Mukhavivarjita, Ananta, Anantarupa.

(46) Sunakha, Surasundara Sukalapa, Vibhu, Jisnu, Bharjishnu, Ishudhi, Hiranyakashipuhanta, Hiranyaksavimardaka, Putananihanta.

(47) Bhaskarantavinashana, Keshidalana, Mushtikavimardaka, Kamsadanavabhetta, Chanurapramardaka, Arishtanihanta, Akrurapriya, Krurarupa, Akrurapriyavandita, Bhagaha.

(48) Bhagavan, Bhanu, Bhagavata, Uddhava, Uddhavesha, Uddhavachintita, Chakradhrika, Chanchala, Ahankara, Mati.

(49) Chalachalavivarjita, Chitta, Gagana, Prithivi, Jala, Vayu, Chakshuh, Shrotra, Jihva, Ghrana,

(50) Vak, Pani, Pada, Jaghana, Payu, Upastha, Shankara, Kharva, Kshantida, Kshantikrit.

(51) Nara, Bhaktapriya, Bharta, Bhaktiman, Kirtida, Bhadktivardhana, Bhaktastuta, Bhaktapara, Kirtivardhana, Kirti.

(52) Kirti, Dipti, Kshama, Kanti, Bhakti, Daya, Dana, Data, Karta, Devadevapriya.

(53) Shuchi, Shuchiman, Sukhada, Moksha, Kama, Artha, Sahasrapat, Sahasrashirsha, Vaidya, Mokshadvara.

(54) Prajadvara, Sahasranta, Sahasrakara, Shukra, Sukriti, Sugriva, Koustubha, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Hayagriva.

(55) Shukara, Matsya, Parashurama, Prahlada, Vli, Sharanya, Nitya, Buddha, Mukta, Sharirabhrit.

(56) Kharadushanahanta, Ravanapramardana, Sitapati, Vardhishnu, Bharata, Kumbhanihanta, Indrajinnihanta, Kumbhakarnapramardana, Narantakantaka, Shambarari.

(57) Devantakavinashana, Dushtasuranihanta, Narakanihanta, Trishirshavinashana, Yamalarjunabhette, Tapohitkara Vадitра, Vadya, Varaparada, Sara.

(58) Sarapriya, Soura, Kalahanta, Nikrintana, Agasti, Devala, Narada, Naradapriya, Prana, Apana.

(59) Vyana, Rajah, Sattva, Tamah, Sharat, Udana, Samana, Bheshaja, Bhiskata, Kutastha.

(60) Svaccharupa, Sarvadehavivarjita, Chakshurindriyahina, Vagindriyavivirjita, Hastendriyavihina, Payuvihina, Padadvayavivarjita, Upasthavihina, Mahatapovivarita, Prabodhavihina.

(61) Buddhivivarjita, Chetovihina, Pranavivirjita, Apanavihina, Vyanavivarjita, Udanavihina, Samanavivarjita, Akashavihina, Vayuparivarjita, Agnivivihina.

(62) Udakavivarjita, Prithivivihina, Shabdavivarjita, Sparshavihina, Sarvrupavivarjita, Ragavigata, Shokarahita, Vachovarjita, Aghaparivarjita, Rajovivarjita.

(63) Shadavikararahita, Kamavarjita, Krodhaparivarjita, Lobhavigta, Dambhavivarjita, Suksha, Susuksha, Sthulatsthulatara, Visharada, Baladyaksha.

(64) Sarvakshobhaka, Sarvadyaksha, Arbhaka, Prakritikshobhaka, Mahatkshobhaka, Bhutakshobhaka, Bddihikshobhaka, Indriyakshobhaka, Vishayakshobhaka, Brahmakshobhaka.

(65) Sarvakarvivarjita, Nirakara, Nirnimitta, Niratanka, Nirashraya, Pushkaradvipa, Jagadishvara, Murari, Mukunda, Shouri.

(66) Rudrakshobhaka, Chakshuradyagamyā, Kurma, Shrotragamyā, Tvagagamyā, Jibvagrahya, Ghranendriyagamyā, Vagargrahya, Hastadvayagamyā, Padagamyā.

(67) Manohagrahya, Buddhyagrahya, Hari, Chetograhya, Ahambuddhigrahya, Shankhapani, Avyaya, Gadapani, Krishna, Sharngapani.

(68) Jnanamurti, Parantapa, Tapasvi, Jnanagamyā, Jnani, Jnanavid, Jneya, Jneyahina, Jnapti, Bhava.

(69) Bhavya, Chaitanyarupadhrik, Bhavakra, Bhavana, Bhavanashana, Govinda, Gopati, Gopa, Gopala, Gopati.

(70) Sarvagopisukhaprada, Gomati, Godhara, Upendra, Nrisimha, Shouri, Janardana, Araneya, Vrihadhanu, Trikala.

(71) Vrihaddipta, Damodara, Kalajna, Kalavarjita, Trisandhya, Dvpara, Treta, Prajadvara, Trivikrama, Vikrama.

(72) Dandahasta, Ekadandi, Tridandadhrik, Sama, Bheda, Upaya, Samarupi, Samaga, Samaveda, Atharva.

(73) Sukrita, Sukharupadhrik, Atharvavedavid, Atharvacharya, Rigrupi, Rigveda, Rigvedapratishthita, Yajurvedta, Yajurveda, Ekapat.

(74) Vahupat, Supat, Sahasrapat, Chatuspat, Dvipat, Smriti, Nyaya, Yama, Yami, Sannyasi.

(75) Chaturashrama, Brahmachari, Grihastha, Bhikshuka, Vanaprastha, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, Varna.

(76) Shilada, Shilasampanna, Duhshilaparivarjita, Moksha, Adhyatmasamavishta, Stuti, Stota, Pujaka, Pujya, Vakakarana.

(77) Vachya, Vachaka, Vetta, Vyakarana, Vakya, Vakyavit, Vakyagamy, Tirthavasa, Tirtha, Tirthi.

(78) Tirthavit, Tirthadibhuta, Samkhya, Nirukta, Adhidaivata, Pranava, Pranavesha, Pranavapravandita, Pranaalakshya, Gayatri.

(79) Gadadhara, Shalagramanivsi, Shalagrama, Jalshayi, Yogashayi, Sheshashayi, Kusheshava, Karya, Mahibharta, Karana,

(80) Prithividhara, Prajapati, Shashvata, Kamy, Kamayita, Virat, Pusha, Samrat, Svarga, Rathastha.

(81) Sarathi, Rathi, Dhani, Dhanaprada, Dhanya, Arjunapriya, Arjuna, Bhima, Parakrama, Durvishaha.

(82) Sarvashastravisharada, Saravata, Mahabhishma, Parijatahara, Amritapradata, Kshiroda, Kshira, Indratmaja, Indratmajagopta, Govardhanadhara.

(83) Kamsanashana, Rastipa, Hastinashana, Prasanna, Shipivishta, Sarvalokartinashana, Mudra, Mudrakara, Sarvamudravivarjita, Dehi.

(84) Dehasthita, Dehaniyamaka, Shrota, Shrotaniyanta, Shrotavya, Shravana, Tvakasthita, Sparshayita, Sprishya, Sparshana,

- (85) Chakshuhstha, Rupadrashta, Drishya, Chakshurniyanta, Jihvastha, Rasajna, Niyamaka, Ghranastha, Ghrata, Ghranendriyaniamaka
- (86) Vakastha, Vakta, Vaktavya, Vachana, Pranistha, Shilpakrit, Shilpa, Hastadvayaniamaka, Padavya, Ganta.
- (87) Gantavya, Gamana, Padadvayanianta, Padyabhak, Visargakrit, Visarganianta, Upasthastha, Sukha, Upasthanianta, Anandakara.
- (88) Shatrughna, Kartavirya, Dattatreya, Alarkahita, Kartaviryanikrintana, Kalanemi, Mahanemi, Megha, Meghapati, Annaprada.
- (89) Annarupi, Annada, Annapravartka, Dhumakrit, Dhumarupa, Devakiputra, Uttama, Devakinandana, Nanda, Rohinipriya.
- (90) Vasudevapriya, Vasudevasuta, Dundubhi, Hasarupa, Hamsarupa, Pushpahasa, Attahasa, Attahasapriya, Kshara, Sarvadyaksha.
- (91) Akshara, Achyuta, Satyasha, Satyapriya, Vara, Rukminipati, Rukminiabha, Punyashloka, Vishruta, Vrishakapi.
- (92) Guhya, Mangala, Budha, Rahu, Ketu, Graha, Grahaya, Gajendramukhamelaka, Grahavinianta, Gramani.
- (93) Rakshaka, Kinnara, Siddha, Chandaha, Svachchanda, Vishvarupa, Vishalaksha, Daityasuhana, Anatarupa, Bhutastha.
- (94) Devadanavasamsthita, Sushuptistha, Sushupti, Sthana, Sthananta, Jagatstha, Jagarta, Jagarita, Svapnastha, Svapnavit.
- (95) Swapna, Sthanastha, Sustha, Jagratasvapna, Sushuptivihina, Chaturthaka, Vijnana, Chaitrarupa, Jiva, Jivayita.
- (96) Bhuvanadhipati, Bhuvananiyamaka, Patalavasi, Patala, Sarvajvaravinashana, Paramanandarupi, Sulabha, Dharmapravrtaka, Durlabha, Pranayamapara.
- (97) Pratyahara, Dharaka, Pratyaharakara, Prabha, Kanti, Archih, Agrahya, Goura, Sarva, Shuchi.
- (98) Abhishtuta, Vashatkara, Vashat, Voushat, Svadha, Svaha, Rati, Pakta, Nandayita, Bhokta.
- (99) Boddha, Bhavayita, Jnanatma, Uhatma, Bhuma, Sarveshvareshvara, Nadi, Nandi, Nandisha, Bharata.
- (100) Tarunashana, Chidruga, Shripati, Chakravartiraja, Sarvadevesha, Pushkara, Pushkaradyaksha, Janaka, Janya, Nirakara.

A few of the names are repeated more than once. But the total number of names is certainly close to a thousand. Those who recite these thousand names of Vishnu attain their hearts' desire. Brahmanas are able to go and live with Vishnu. Kshatriyas win battles. Vaishyas become wealthy. And Shudras are never unhappy.

### **Snake-bites**

There is a mantra named praneshvara that cures snake-bites.

If a person is bitten by a snake, the consequences depend on where the incident took place. For example, it is impossible for a person who is bitten in a river to live. If a snake bites a person in a cremation ground, a termite hill, a mountain, a well or a hole in a tree, and it is found that the bite mark has three lines on it. The person is sure to die. Bites under the armpits, the waist, the throat, the forehead, the ears, the stomach, the mouth, the arms and the back are impossible to cure. And if a soldier or a beggar is seen at the time of the snake-bite, that is a sure of death.

In all other cases, the praneshvara mantra helps to cure snake-bites. A lotus flower with eight petals is to be drawn and the words of the incantation are to be written on each of the petals. This is then placed on the bitten person's body and he is bathed. It helps if the victim is given warm ghrita (clarified butter) to drink. In fact, if the incantation is chanted and a lump of sugar is simultaneously flung into a house all snakes give that house a miss.

Details of several other mantras follow.

### **Shalagrama**

Do you know what a shalagrama is? It is a representation of Vishnu, made out of stone. A story in the Brahmavaivarta Purana says that Vishnu was cursed that he would become a stone on the banks of the Gandaki river. The Garuda Purana now describes different types of shalagrama images. All such images are sacred. And if one touches any of these images, the sins committed in many earlier lives are forgiven.

A shalagrama that has the marks of shankha (conch-shell), chakra, gada (mace) and padma (lotus) is called keshava. That must be the precise order in which the marks are there on the image. If the order becomes chakra, shankha, padma and gada, the image is called madhava. Narayana has the order padma, gada, chakra and shankha. With an order gada, padma, shankha and chakra one has govinda. A Vishnu image will have the order padma, shankha, chakra and gada. Shankha padma, gada and chakra is madhusudana and gada, chakra, shankha and padma is trivikrama.

There can be many other permutations also. The order chakra, gada, padma and shankha leads to the image of vamaana. And chakra, padma, shankha and gada is the image shridhara, Hrishiksha has padma, gada, shankha and chakra. You can recognise a padmanabha image by the order padma, chakra, gada, and shankha. Shankha, chakra, gada and padma is damodara, while chakra, shankha, gada and padma is vasudeva.

Sankarshana has the order shankha, padma, chakra and gada. Shankha, gada, padma and chakra is pradyumna. Aniruddha has the order gada, shankha, padma and chakra. A purushottama image is known by the order padma, shankha, gada and chakra. Gada, shankha, chakra and padma is adhokshaja, while padma, gada, shankha and chakra, is nrisimha. An a?yuta image has the order padma, chakra, shankha and gada. The order shankha, chakra, shankha and gada. The order shankha, chakra, padma and gada is for the image janardana. An upendra hs the order gada, chakra, padma and shankha. Chakra, padma, gada, and shankha signifies hari. And finally, shrikrishna has the order gada, padma, chakra and shankha.

### Building Houses

Before a house is built, there has to be a ceremony for laying the foundation stone. Thirty two gods have to be worshipped on the occasion. Their names are Ishana, Parjanya, Jayanta, Indra, Surya, Satya Bhrigu, Akasha, Vayu, Pusha, Vitatha, Grahanakshatra, Yama, Gandharva, Brigu, Raja, Mriga, the Pitris, Doubarika, Sugriva, Pushpadanta, Ganadhpa, Asura, Shesha, Pada, Roga, Ahimukhya, Bhallata, Soma, Sarpa, Aditi and Diti. These gods are to be worshipped outside the premises of the house. Inside the premises of the house one worships the four gods Apah, Savitra, Jaya and Rudra.

A temple should be built in front of the house, Gates and doors and places for performing sacrifices should be towards the east. The north is reserved for a storehouse. The pond can be towards the west and the guesthouse will be to the south.

Calculate the area of the house by multiplying the length with the breadth. Multiply the area by eight and divide by sixty-four. Or simply, divide the area by eight. The remainder determines the sort of life that the owner of the house is going to live. You can also divide the area of the house by five. The remainder now determines how the owner of the house is going to die. The height of a door should be exactly double its width. Preferably, a house should have eight doors.

## **Temples**

Temples should be constructed so as to have one spire, three spires, or five spires.

There are essentially five types of temples. Their names are Vairaja, Pushpaka, Kailasa, Malaka and Tripishtapa. The difference lies in the shapes. Vairaja is square, Pushpaka rectangular, Kailasa circular, Malaka oval and Tripishtaka octagonal. Of course, there may be many variations within these five basic types.

Near the gate of the temple should be a place where plays can be enacted. The priests should live at slight distance from the temple. It must always be ensured that the temple is surrounded with fruits, flowers, water and creepers.

## **Varnashrama Dharma**

Varnashrama dharma is characterised by the duties of the four classes and the four stages in life. The Brahman's duties are to perform religious sacrifices, donate alms, study and teach. Kshatriyas and vaishyas should also perform sacrifices, donate alms and study. But the primary duty of kshatriyas is to rule, while that of vaishyas is to practice agriculture. Shudras earn their living as artisans. Their duty is to serve the other three classes. In the first stage in life (brahmacharya), one is a student. One begs for a living and serves one's teacher. Next comes the householder stage (garhasthya). A householder should perform sacrifices, worship gods, donate alms and serve guests. In the forest-dwelling stage (vanaprastha), one goes to the forest and lives on fruits and roots. Such a person studies the Vedas and performs tapasya. The final phase is hermit hood (Sannyasa); a hermit seeks to attain yoga, the union of the atman (human soul) with the Brahman (divine essence).

A Brahmana who performs his duties well goes to a sacred place named prajapatya. A Kshatriya goes to indraloka, a vaishya to vayuloka and a shudra to gandharvaloka.

One should get up right at the stroke of dawn. After thinking of Vishnu. After thinking of Vishnu, it is time to have a bath. It is best to bathe in the morning. A sinner who does this is freed from all sins. There are however six types of baths and their names are brahma, agneya, vayavya, divya, varuna, and yougika. In a brahma bath one chants mantras while sprinkling water on one's body. To rub one's body with ashes is to have an agneya bath. To do the same with cowdung is to have a vayavya bath. Sunbathing means having a divya bath. In a varuna bath one bathes with water. And if one meditates on Vishnu, one can have a yougika bath, without doing anything else.



Teeth should always be brushed while facing the east.

### Donating Alms

Donating alms is the best form of dharma. A person who donates is blessed in this and later lives. Donating alms is known as dana.

There are four types of dana: nitya, naimittika, kamyā and vimāla. Nitya dana takes place when donations are made to brahmanas without expecting anything in return. When donations are made as penance or to take care of ill omens, that is known as naimittika dana. Kamyā dana takes place when donations are made to attain children, victory, or wealth. Vimāla dana consists of donations made simply for the sake of pleasing God.

A person who gives sugarcane, grain, cattle and land to brahmanas is not born again. The best article to donate is land.

A sinner who restrains others from donating alms is born as a bird in his next life.

### **Prayashchitta**

Prayashchitta is to make atonement for one's sins. The worst sin of all is to kill a brahmana. A sinner who does this should make a hut of dry grass and leaves and live in it for twelve years. Or he may fast himself to death or commit suicide by jumping off a cliff. Immolating oneself or drowning oneself are also acceptable forms of penance. Sometimes less severe types of punishment may be allowed such as, giving food to learned brahmanas. The three holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati have a place of confluence and that is a tirtha (place of pilgrimage). If one fasts for three days and nights and bathes at this tirtha, the sin of killing a brahmana is also pardoned. A brahmana who steals gold is beaten by the king with a club. He then lives in a grass hut for twelve years. A drinker has to perform the penance of drinking hot wine, followed by swallowing milk, clarified butter or the urine of a cow.

A person who happens to die at a tirtha obtains pardon for all his sins. A woman who burns herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre makes atonement for all the sins that her husband may have committed. A wife who serves her husband faithfully never commits in the first place.

### Geography

The earth is divided into seven regions (dvipas) whose names are Jambudvipa, Plakshadvipa, Shalmadvipa, Kushadvipa, Krounadvipa, Shakadvipa and Pushkaradvipa. The seven regions are surrounded by seven seas. The names of the seas are Lavana, Ikshu, Sura, Sarpi, Dadhi, Dugdha and Jala.

Jambudvīpa is divided into nine parts (varshas). Their names are Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Harivarsha, Ilavrita, Ramya, Hiranvana, Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumala. Nabhivarsha eventually came to be known as Bharatavarsha.

Ilavritavarsha is right in the centre of Jambudvīpa. And in the middle of Ilavritavarsha is Mount Sumeru, like the stem of a lotus flower. The mountain ranges Himalaya, Hemakuta and Nishada are to the south of Mount Sumeru and the mountain ranges Nila, Shveta and Shringavana are to the north of Mount Sumeru. Bhadrashvavarsha is the east of Sumeru, Hiranvanavarsha to the south-east, Kimpurushavarsha and Bharatavarsha to the south, Harivarsha to the south-west, Ketumalavarsha to the west, Ramyakavarsha to the north-west and Khruvarsha to the north.

Bharatavarsha itself is divided into nine parts. Eight of these parts are named Indradvīpa, Kasherumana, Tamravarna, Gabhastimana, Nagadvīpa, Kataha, Simhala and Varuna. The ninth part is named Sagaradvīpa and is surrounded by the ocean. To the east of Bharatavarsha live the kiratas, to the west the yavana, to the south the andhras and to the north the turushkas.

The seven main mountain ranges of Bharatavarsha are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Shuktimana, Riksha, Vindhya and Paribhadra.

The kingdoms which are in the centre of Bharatavarsha are named Panchala, Kuru, Matsya, Youdheya, Patacchara, Kunti and Shurasena, Padma, Suta, Magadha, Chedi, Kashaya, Videha and Koshala are kingdoms that are to the east. In the south-east are the kingdoms of Kalinga, Banga, Pundra, Anga, Vidarbha and Mulaka. The kingdoms of Pulinda, Ashmaka, Jimuta, Nayarashtra, Karnata, Kamboja, Ghata, Dakshinapatha, Ambashtha, Dravida, Lata, Strimukha, Shaka and Anarta are in the south-west. Toward the west are the kingdoms of Sindhu, Yavana, Mathura and Nishada. The kingdoms of Mandavya, Tushara, Mulika, Musha, Khasha, Mahakesha and Mahanada are in the north-west. And the kingdoms of Lambaka, Stana, Naga, Madra, Gandhara and Vahlīka are in the north. In the north-west are Tigarta, Nila, Kolabha, Abhishaha and Kashmira.

There are seven underworlds (patala) under the earth. Their names are Atala, Vitala, Nitala, Mahatala, Sutala, Patala and Gabhastimata. The daityas and the bhujangas (snakes) live there.

## **Astronomy and Astrology**

The sun's (surya) chariot is drawn by seven horses. Their names are Gayatri, Vrihati, Ushnika, Jagati, Trishtupa, Anushtapa and Pamkti. The moon's (chandra) chariot is drawn by ten horses and the horses are completely white.

There are twenty-seven nakshatras (stars) in the sky. Their names are Ashvini, Bharani, Krittika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Ardra, Punarvasu, Pushya, Ashlesha, Magha, Purvafalguni, Uttarafalguni, Hasta, Chitra, Savti, Vishakha, Anuradha, Jyeshtha, Mula, Purvashada, Uttarashada, Shravana, Dhanishtha, Shatabhisha, Purvabhadrapada, Uttarabhadrapada and Revati.

It is auspicious to begin a journey when Ashvini, Anuradha, Revati, Mrigashira, Mula, Punarvasu, Pushya, Hasta or Jyeshtha is in the sky. New clothes should be worn when Hasta, Chitra, Svati, Vishakha, Anuradha, Uttarafalguni, Uttarashada, Uttarabhadrapada, Ashvini, Rohini, Pushya, Dhanishtha, or Punarvasu is in the sky. Wells and ponds are to be dug when Krittika, Bharani, Ashlesha, Magha, Mula, Vishakha, Purvafalguni, Purvashada or Purvabhadrapada is in the sky. These nakshatras are also auspicious for harvesting crops or for building temples. Sowing of seeds should take place when Revati, Ashvini, Chitra, Svati, Hasta, Punarvasu, Anuradha, Mrigashita or Jyeshtha is in the sky. These stars are also auspicious for building boats. Coronations are to be fixed when Rohini, Ardra, Pushya, Dhanishtha, Uttarafalguni, Uttarashada, Uttarabhadrapada, Shatabhisha or Shravana is in the sky.

A tithi is a lunar day. The fourth (chaturthi). Sixth (shashthi), eighth (ashtami), ninth (navami), twelfth (dvadashi), fourteenth (chaturdashi) lunar days and the day of the new moon (amavasya) and the day of the full moon (purnima) are inauspicious. Nothing important should be begun on such days. Never travel on the following days-shashthi in the months of Vaishakha and Shravana, ashtami in the months of Ashvina and Ashada, chaturthi in the months of Jyaishta and Falguna, dvadashi in the months of Magha and Kartika, dashmi (the tenth lunar day) in the month of Agrahayana and Bhadra and chaturdashi in the months of Pousha and Chaitra.

There are twelve signs of the Zodiac (rashi). Their names are Mesha (Aries), Vrisha (Taurus), Mithuna, (Gemini), Karkata (Cancer), Simha (Leo), Kanya (Virgo), Tula (Libra, Vrishchika (Scorpio), Dhanu (Saggitarius), Makara (Capricorn), Kumbha (Aquarius) and Mina (Pisces).

The sign under which a person is born is known as janma rashi. Consider the position of the moon in relation to the janma rashi. If the moon is in the jama rashi itself, the person will always be satisfied. The janma rashi is known as the first house. The next rashi is the second house and so on and so forth until one has the twelfth house. If the moon is in the second house, the person will be poor. A moon in the third house signifies honour shown by the king, in the fourth house quarrels, in the fifth house marriage, in the sixth house wealth, in the seventh house honour, in the eighth house threat to life, in the ninth house riches, in the tenth house success, in the eleventh house victory and in the twelfth house certain death.

The following conjunctions of planets bode well. Shukra (Venus) and Chandra in the first house; Chandra, Budha (Mercury), Shukra and Brihaspati (Jupiter) in the second house; Mangala (Mars), Shani (Saturn) and Surya in the third house; Budha in the fourth house; Shukra, Brihaspati Chandra and Ketu (no real counterpart in English, sometimes identified with Pluto) in the fifth house; Shani, Surya and Mangala in the sixth house; Brihaspati and Chandra in the seventh house; Budha and Shukra in the eighth house; Brihaspati in the ninth house; Surya, Shani and Chandra in the tenth house; and Budha and Shukra in the twelfth house. All planets are good in the eleventh house.

A Leo bride should be married to a Capricorn groom, An Aries bride to a Virgo groom, a Libra bride to a Pisces groom, an Aquarius bride to a Cancer groom, A Saggitarius bride to a Taurus groom, a Gemini bride to a Scorpio groom. Such marriages bring happiness.

### **Physiognomy**

It is important to be able to tell the nature of men and women by their physical characteristics. This is physiognomy.

A man who will be king will have soft feet which do not sweat. The toes will be even and no veins will be seen on his legs. A man who will be king is known also by round thighs and very little body hair. Each pore on his body will have only one hair in it.

A man who will be poor is known by rough nails on his toes. Veins will be seen on his face. The toes will be dry and he will flat-footed. He will also have three hairs in each of his pores.

A person with two hairs in each of his pores in each of his pores becomes a learned man.

Person with spindly thighs always suffer from ill health.

Lines can be seen on a man's forehead. The number of such lines determines how long he is going to live. A person with three lines lives for sixty years, one with two lines for forty years and a person with one line for twenty years. If a single line extends right across the forehead, the person will die at a very young age. But if three lines extend right across the forehead, the person will live for a hundred years.

A woman with a round face brings prosperity to her household. A woman with round eyes becomes a widow and suffers for life. Large eyes and red lips mean that the woman will always be happy. If there are many lines on a woman's palm, she will always suffer. But if there are few lines on a woman's palm, she will always be poor. If you see the sign of a chakra on woman's palm, she will become either the wife or the mother of a king. A woman with bright eyes has good fortune, one with shining teeth gets good food to eat and one with glowing skin gets excellent beds to sleep on.

A man with a long nose is fortunate. A man with a bent nose is a thief and a man with a nose bent to the right is cruel. A man who has sneezes one at a time is strong. You will know a man who is always content by the fact that he has many sneezes at a time. A person who speaks in a nasal tone lives to an old age. Eyes like a cat's eyes indicate a sinner. Cross-eyed men are cruel. A man with symmetric eyebrows is poor. If a man cries but the tears cannot be seen, that man is sure to be unfortunate.

Look at the life line on a woman's palm. If the line is thick, she will have many sons. But if the life is thin, she will have many daughters. Those whose life lines are split into many parts do not live for a long. But those whose life lines are long and unbroken live to a ripe old age.

This science of physiognomy is known as samudrika shastra.

### **Jewels**

A long time back, there used to be a demon named Balasura. He defeated Indra and the other gods. Balasura was invincible. Not knowing what to do, the gods arranged a yajna. They then went to Balasura and ask him for his body so that it might be offered as a sacrifice at the yajna. The demon was generous and he was not going to refuse a request. He gave his body to the gods.

The gods ascended a vimana (space vehicle) and were travelling through the sky with Balasura's body. But the vimana was moving so fast that Balasura's body fell off. It broke into many parts which got scattered throughout the earth. Wherever a part of the body fell, earth, mountain or garden, that place became a source of jewels and precious stones.

There are many types of jewels. Some of the more important ones are vajra (diamond), mukta (pearl), mani, padmaraga (ruby), marakata, (emerald), indranila, (sapphire), vaidurya, pushparaga (topaz), karketana, pulaka, rudhira, sfatika (crystal) and pravala (coral).

Vajra or hiraka was formed from Balasura's bones. Diamonds can be of many colors, coppery, milky-white, blue, golden, yellow and dark. Red and yellow diamonds should be worn only by a king, not by anyone else. A multi-colored and round diamond should not be worn indiscriminately. It can cause great suffering, and due precautions have to be taken before such a diamond is worn as adornment. Even Indra takes care before wearing such a diamond. A hexagonal diamond is extremely rare and brings good fortune. A diamond is valuable because it can cut and mark any other object. But a diamond cannot be cut or marked except by another diamond.

Muktas (pearls) can be obtained from eight different places from elephants, clouds, boars, conch-shells, fishes, snakes, oysters and bamboos. But oysters are the most common source. Pearls got from bamboos, elephants, fishes, conch-shells and boars are not at all bright. Balasura's teeth fell into the ocean. There the teeth entered the bodies of oysters and became the seeds for pearls. A pearl which weights half a tola (weight) is worth 1305 coins. There are several other grades for pearls, the worths being 800, 783, 325, 200, 110, 100, 97, 40, 30, 14, 11 and 9 coins respectively. If you need to polish a pearl, put it inside the stomach of fish. Cover the fish with clay and roast it. The pearl should then be taken out and washed with milk, wine and water. It will become bright and shining. What happens if one suspects that a pearl is not genuine? It should be kept in saline water for a night and then dried. If its colour does not fade, it is a genuine pearl.

Balasura's blood fell into a river. In fact, at first it had not fallen into the river at all, but was retained by the sun. But Ravana, king of Lanka, once decided to attack the sun. And in the process, the sun dropped Balasura's blood into a river which came to be known as Ravanaganga. This blood became rubies (padmaraga). Rubies are red. Some of them may be tinged with a little bit of black or blue. A good quality ruby should never be worn with a bad quality ruby. The wearer of a good quality ruby is protected from all misfortunes.

The king of the snakes is Vasuki. Vasuki accepted the bile (pitta) that came out of Balasura's body. The snake was traversing the sky when he was suddenly attacked by Garuda. Garuda too wanted to possess the bile. While the two were fighting, the bile fell into the valley of a mountain. This bile gave birth to marakatas (emeralds).

Emeralds are generally green in color. The herbs which grow in emerald mines are cures for sorts of poison. A true emerald never fades in color.

Balasura's eyes fell on the shores of the ocean. And these eyes became indranila jewels (sapphires). Sapphires are tinged with blue. A sapphire should never be flung into a fire. The person who does this deed suffers great misfortune. A special sort of sapphire is known as mahanila. It is dark blue in color and if it is kept immersed in milk, the milk turns blue in color.

Balasura roared before he died. This roar echoed in a mountain range named Vidura. And from the roar was born a gem known as vaidurya, so called because it can be found on the mountain Vidura. Vaiduryas are green or blue in color.

Balasura's skin fell on the Himalayas. This skin was the origin of pushparaga (topaz). A pushparaga is light yellow in colour. But if a topaz is also tinged with red, it is known as kourandaka. And if a topaz is slightly tinged with blue, it is known as somanaka. A woman who does not have son will give birth to one if she wears a topaz.

Another type of jewel is named karketana. It originated from Balasura's nails. These nails fell into a bed of lotuses and there created this gem. Karketana can be of many colors, red, milky-white, yellow, copper-colored and blue. His jewel becomes brighter if it is wrapped in gold leaf and burnt in a fire. Karketana is a good jewel to wear if one wants to stay healthy or prolong one's life.

Several other jewels were created from other parts of Balasura's anatomy.

### **Tirthas**

A tirtha is a place of pilgrimage and what can be a better place of pilgrimage than the holy river Ganga? All places along the Ganga are sacred. But holiest of all are Haridvara, Prayaga and Gangasagra. A sinner who bathes in Prayaga is forgiven all his sins.

Varanasi is also a great tirtha, since Vishnu and Shiva are always present there. Kurukshetra is a wonderful place for donating alms. Other famous tirthas are Prabhasa, Dvaraka, Sarasvati and Kedara. There continue to be arguments about which is a great place of pilgrimage and which is not. This is slightly pointless. A tirtha is a place where one meditates on the brahman. One does not necessarily have to go to a geographical place known as a tirtha to do this. It can be done in one's own house which then becomes a tirtha.

But amongst the geographical places known as tirthas, Gaya is justly famous.



Many years ago, there used to be a demon named Gayasura. This asura began to perform such difficult tapasya that the gods felt oppressed. They went to Vishnu and wanted to know what they might do about Gayasura. Vishnu promised the gods that he would take care of the problem.

Gayasura had gone to collect some lotus flowers for his prayers. After his exertions he felt tired and lay down to sleep. Along came Vishnu and killed Gayasura with a mace. This happened in the land known as Kikata. And that part of Kikata where Gayasura's body fell came to be known as Gaya. It is a sacred place where it is auspicious to perform shraddha (funeral) ceremonies.

Four methods of salvation are earmarked for humans. The first is knowledge of the brahman, the second a shraddha ceremony at Gaya, the third is death in a cowshed and the fourth is dwelling on the plains of Kurukshetra.

There is a story about a merchant named Vishala. The merchant had gone to Gaya and had performed a ceremony for his late ancestors. In his next life, the merchant was born as a prince, also named Vishala. One day, Vishala saw a white being, a red being and a black being in the sky.

Who are you?, he asked the beings.

The white being replied. I am your father. Because you performed a ceremony for me in Gaya. I now live in heaven. The red being is my father, your grandfather. He had committed the sin of killing a brahmana. But because of your ceremony, he too lives in heaven. The black being is my grandfather, your great-grandfather. He had committed the sin of killing a sage. But thanks to your ceremony, he too lives in heaven. You have freed us all through your action.

Manvantaras

Each manvantara is an era and each such era is ruled over by a Manu.

The first Manu was Svayambhuva.

The second Manu was Svarochisha.

The third Manu was Uttama.

The fourth Manu was Tamasa.

The fifth Manu was Raivata.

The sixth Manu was Chakshusha.

The seventh Manu is Vaivasvata. This is the manvantara that is going on now. The remaining seven Manus will come in the future.

The eighth Manu will be Savarni.

The ninth Manu will be Dakshasavarni.

The tenth Manu will be Brahmasavarni.

The eleventh Manu will be Dharmasavarni.

The twelfth Manu will be Rudrasavarni.

The thirteenth Manu will be Rouchya.

The fourteenth Manu will be Indrasavarni.

This will bring us to the end of the kalpa (cycle) and the world will be destroyed.

## **Ruchi**

There used to be a sage named Ruchi. He was not interested in worldly pursuits and he spent his time wandering around the earth. He never married, never had a house and only meditated and travelled.

His ancestors came to see him. Ruchi, they said, Why aren't you getting married? It is your duty to get married and have sons. Unless you have a son, we will continue to be in hell. Nor will you be able to attain heaven through meditation alone.

I have no desire to get married, replied Ruchi. That only ties one down and brings unhappiness. The atman gets tainted because of bonds of attachment.

It is true that the atman needs to be purified. Retorted the ancestors. But you are not going about it in the proper way. Detachment from material interests do not mean that one should not get married or become a householder. That would be an avoidance of the issue. Go and get married and have children so that neither you nor we have to go to hell.

Ruchi agreed to do what his ancestors had asked him to do. But he had a problem. Who would agree to marry a poor old man like him? He thought that he might pray to Brahma so that a solution might be found. He spent a hundred years on such tapasya and at the end of a hundred years, Brahma appeared before him. On hearing Ruchi's request, Brahma asked him to pray to his ancestors. They would find a solution to his problem. Pleased with Ruchi's prayers, the ancestors produced an apsara named Pramlocha.

Pramlocha told Ruchi, I have a daughter named Manini. Please marry her.

Ruchi married Manini and they had many children.

### Marriages and Cross-breeds

The bride and the groom must not have any blood ties with each other, upto the ninth generation on the father's side and upto the seventh generation on the mother's side. Brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas should never get married to shudras.

A brahmana groom can be married to a brahmana, kshatriya or vaishya bride. A kshatriya groom is allowed to marry a kshatriya or a vaishya bride. A vaishya groom should only marry a vaishya bride and a shudra groom should only marry a shudra bride.

There are many types of marriage. In a brahma marriage, the groom is invited and is given a bejewelled bride. A son born of such an union rescues from hell twenty-one generations of his ancestors on both his father's side and his mother's side.

A daivya marriage takes place when a daughter is given to the priest of yajna.

The next form of marriage is arya. In this, two cows are accepted from the groom as bride-price and the bride is then handed over together with these cows. A son born of a daivya marriage rescues from hell fourteen generations of his ancestors on both his father's side and his mother's side. This compares with a mere six generations for an arya marriage.

Six generations is all that are rescued from a son born of a prajapatya marriage as well. In such a marriage, a bride is handed over to a groom with the words. Together the two of you perform dharma,

An asura marriage takes place when a bride-price is accepted for the bride.

When the bride and the groom fall in love with each other and get married, that is called a gandharva form of marriage.

In the rakshasa form of marriage, a bride is kidnapped by the groom and married. But the bride must be willing. If the bride is unwilling and is abducted and married by the groom through trickery, that is the paishacha form of marriage.

Brahma, daivya, arya and prajapatya marriages are recommended for brahmanas. Gandharva and rakshasa marriages are recommended for kshatriyas, asura marriages for vaishyas and paishacha marriages for shudras. At the time of marriage, a brahmana bride will only hold the groom's hand. But a kshatriya bride will in addition hold an arrow in her hand. And a vaishya bride will hold a horsewhip in her hand.

A woman is looked after by her father when she is young, by her husband when she is a woman and by her son when she is an old lady.

Despite injunctions to the contrary, Brahmana grooms have got married to kshatriya, vaishya and shudra women. This has led to the birth of cross-breeds. The son of a brahmana father and a kshatriya mother is called a murddhabhishikta, the son of a brahmana father and a vaishya mother an ambashtha, the son of a brahmana father and a shudra mother a nishada.

The son of a kshatriya father and a vaishya mother is called a mahishya, the son of a kshatriya father and a shudra mother an ugra.

The son of a vaishya father and a shudra mother is a karana.

The offspring of a brahmana mother is called suta if the father is a kshatriya, vaideha if the father is a vaishya and chandala if the father is a shudra. The offspring of a kshatriya mother is called magadha if the father is a vaishya and kshatta if the father is a shudra. The offspring of a vaishya mother and a shudra father is called ayogava.

### **Rebirth**

After having paid for some of his sins in naraka (hell), a sinner is born again to pay for whatever has still not been accounted for.

The killer of a brahmana is first born as a dog, then progressively as a camel, a donkey, a frog and an owl. A stealer of gold is born as a worm or as an insect. The killer of a brahmana may also have tuberculosis, while the stealer of gold may have misshapen teeth. A person who steals food starves in his next life. A liar becomes dumb in his next life. A stealer of oil is born as a cockroach and a stealer of green vegetables as a peacock.

If you steal fragrant substances, you will be born as a mole and if you steal foodgrains, you will be born as a rat.

A stealer of fruits is born as monkey, a stealer of animal as a goat, a stealer of milk as a crow, a stealer of meat as a vulture and a stealer of salt gets only torn clothes to wear in his next life. Each receives in accordance with what each deserves.

### **The King**

The king must conquer his enemies and rule his kingdom well according to the dictates of dharma.

A maker of garlands plucks flowers from a tree, but he never uproots the tree or destroys it. In the same fashion, the king will tax his subjects. But the rate of taxation should not be so high as to pauperise his subjects. The king will worship Vishnu and serve the cause of cattle and Brahmanas. He must not squander away his wealth on idle pursuits.

The king must treat his subjects as his own children. He must choose priests, ministers and servants who are wise, good and faithful. Otherwise, the kingdom is sure to go to rack and ruin. The king must not get disturbed if there is danger. He must face up to adversity with fortitude and placidity. The danger will pass. The moon vanishes during an eclipse, but does it not appear again?

A king should never lie. And he should never treat his servants insolently. Servants are not happy if they are scolded all the time. There are six traits that one looks for in a king. These are initiative, bravery, patience, intelligence, strength and valour.

Extreme care must be taken to ensure that the right individuals are employed as ministers, guards, priests and physicians.

## **Vratas**

A vrata is a special religious rite, performed in a specific month, when a specific nakshatra is in the sky or on a particular tithi.

For example, on pratipada (the first day of the lunar fortnight), one can fast and pray to the god of fire and the god of wealth. This grants prosperity. On the second day of the lunar fortnight (dvitiya), one prays to Yama, Lakshmi and Vishnu for wealth. The third day of the lunar fortnight (tritiya) is for Shiva and Parvati and the fifth day of the lunar fortnight (panchami) for Vishnu. On the sixth day of the lunar fortnight (shashithi) one prays to Kartikeya and Surya and on the seventh day of the lunar fortnight (saptami) to Surya. The tenth day of the lunar fortnight (dashami) is earmarked for Yama and Chandra and the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight (ekadashi) is earmarked for praying to the sages. The twelfth day of the lunar fortnight (dvadashi) is earmarked for Vishnu, the thirteenth (trayodashi) for the god of love and the fourteenth (chanturdashi) for Shiva.

Shuklapaksha is the fortnight in which the moon waxes and krishnapaksha is the fortnight in which the moon wanes. There are thus two of each tithi in every month, one is shuklapaksha and the other in krishnapaksha.

The god of love is Ananga and one particular vrata is called ananga trayodashi. As the name implies, this consists of praying to the god of love on trayodashi tithi. But the prayers are held only in shuklapaksha and the vrata continues for one whole year. It yields wives, children, good health and fortune.

Another vrata which gives good fortune is called akhanda dvadashi. In the month of Agrahayana, throughout all of shuklapaksha, one lives only on the five products (pancha gavya) that are obtained from cows. These are cow's milk, curds made from cow's milk, clarified butter made from cow's milk, cow's urine and cowdung. Then one fasts on dvadashi tithi and worships Vishnu. For the subsequent three months, alms are donated to brahmanas. This completes the vrata.

Another well-known vrata is called bhishmapanchaka. This is begun in the month of Kartika, on ekadasi tithi in shuklapaksha. First the ancestors are worshipped, then Vishnu's image is bathed and worshipped. The prayers continue from ekadashi to purnima. The first day, offerings of flowers are placed on the image's feet; the second, on the thighs; the third day, on the navel; the fourth day, on the shoulders; and the fifth and final day, on the head. Throughout the five days the devotee has to sleep on the floor. He eats cowdung on the first day. Cow's urine is drunk on the second day. Milk is partaken on the third day, curd on the fourth day and pancha gavya on the fifth day. If a devotee successfully competes this vrata, all his desires are satisfied.

Perhaps the famous of vratas is shivaratri vrata. The occasion is the chaturdashi in krishnapaksha that comes between the months of Magha and Falguna. The devotee fasts during the day and stays awake at night.

There is a story about shivaratri. There used to be a king of the nishadas named Sundarasena. Sundarasena took his dog with him and went to the forest for a hunt. But he met with no success, there were no animals that could be found. Both master and dog were hungry and thirsty. They had no food, nor did they have any water to drink. They entered a grove inside the forest and stayed there. There is a tree named bilva that is sacred to Shiva. In the grove there happened to be a bilva tree and there was a shiva linga (image of Shiva), right under the tree. Sundarasena did not of course know this. But when he entered the grove, the bilva tree shook and some leaves fell down on top of the shiva linga. An arrow fell down from Sundarasena's hand. And when he stooped to pick it up, his hand brushed against the linga. Remember that Sundarasena had fasted because he had neither food nor water.

Sundarasena returned home and in due course he died. Yama's messengers arrived to take Sundarasena to naraka. But Shiva's companions also arrived and they would not permit Sundarasena to be taken to naraka. The nishada had prayed to Shiva on shivaratri day, even if he had done it involuntarily. Sundarasena and his dog were taken to Shiva and lived there happily ever after. Such are the virtues of shivaratri vrata. Another vrata is on ekadashi tithi. This involves simple fasting. Kings like Mandhata observed ekadashi vrata and went on to conquer the world. Amongst the several other vratas that the Garuda purana lists, one might mention budhashtami vrata. This observed on ashtami tithi if the day also happens to be a Wednesday (budhavara). There is a story in connection with this vrata. There used to be a brahmana named Vira who lived in the city of Pataliputra. His wife was Ramabha, his son Koushika and his daughter Vijaya. Vira had a bull named Dhanapala. Koushika had taken the bull to bathe in the Ganga, when some cowherds came and stole the bull. Koushika looked everywhere for Dhanapala, but could not find him. He was joined in his search by Vijaya. Brother and sister searched all over the place in vain. The search made them thirsty and they went to drink water in a pond. There they met some women who observing religious rites in connection with a vrata. We are hungry, said Koushika and Vijaya, Please give us some foods to eat. Wait a little while, replied the women. We are observing budhashtami vrata. Why don't you also perform the rites? Koushika and Vijaya observed the vrata. After they had eaten, they began to return home. Suddenly they were met by the cowherds who said that they were sorry that they had stolen the bull. Dhanapala was restored. Later on, Vijaya was married to Yama. Koushika became the king of Ayodhya. Vijaya discovered from her husband Yama that her parents were suffering in naraka. She performed budhashtami vrata again and her parents went straight to heaven. All the good fortune that Vira and his family enjoyed was due to the vrata.

Dynasties: Next the solar and lunar dynasties are described. The solar dynasty owes its origin to Surya, son of Aditi. Surya's son was Manu and Manu's son was Ikshvaku. In this line was born Rama of Ramayana fame. There are no stories about the kings of the solar dynasty in the Garuda Purana. It is merely a long list of names. So let us skip the list altogether. If one wants to know about the solar dynasty, it is better to read one of the other Puranas. Brahma's son was Atri and Atri's son was Chandra. The lunar dynasty owes its origin to Chandra's son Budha. In this line were born the Kauravas and the Yadavas. But again there are no stories about the kings of the lunar dynasty in the Garuda Purana. We therefore skip this long list of names as well. The Garuda Purana then briefly summarise the stories of the Ramayana, the Harivamsha and the Mahabharata.



## Medicine

Many chapters on ayurveda (medicine) follow Dhanvantari was the originator of ayurveda and he taught it to the sage Sushruta. It is these teachings that the Garuda Purana reproduces. There are five steps to any medical treatment. The first is called nidana. This means the diagnosis of a disease before the symptoms have become manifest. This spills over into purvarupa. This is the stage when the early symptoms of the disease begin to appear. Next is rupa. In this stage all the symptoms appear. The fourth stage is upashaya. This involves the treatment of the disease through medicine, diet and other activities. The final stage of treatment is samprapti. This is the recovery stage. There are many different types of fever (jvara). Fever may be accompanied by hiccups, vomiting, eruptions on the skin, loss of appetite, laziness and sleepiness. Other symptoms are headaches, bodyaches, fainting fits, insomnia, delirium, sweating and thirst. This is really the nidana part of fever and depending on the symptoms, different types of fever with their causes are discussed. There follow sections on the nidana of pleurisy, tuberculosis, heart problems, cirrhosis, stomach problems, piles, leprosy, worms, rheumatism and other ailments. What are the medicines to be used? That naturally depends on the disease, its causes and on the season. More importantly, it depends on whether the disease is due to a problem with kafa (phlegm), pitta (bile) or vayu (wind), or a combination of all three. A doctor's manual follows, with the medicines for different diseases. Amongst the ingredients which are used for making medicines are are priyangu (black mustard seed), godhuma (wheat), pippali (pepper), madhu (honey), bilva (a fruit), eranda (castor-oil), sarshapa (mustard), padma patra (lotus leaves), kaksharah (a lentil popularly known as khesari), palanka (spinach), dadimba (pomegranate), keshara (saffron), matulung (a sort of lemon), haritaki (myrobalan), panasa (jackfruit), draksha (grapes), kharjura (dates), ardraka (ginger), maricha (black pepper), himgu (asafoetida), saindhava (rock-salt), ghrita (clarified butter), tita taila (oil of sesamum), ikshu (sugarcane), guda (molasses), takra (buttermilk), yashtimadhu (licorice), trifala (a mixture of three myrobalans), ashvagandha (the physalis flexuosa plant), nila (indigo), yavakshara (nitrate of potash), sharkara (sugar), haridra (turmeric), lashuna (garlic), rasajana (a collirium), musta (fenugreek), shirisha (mimosa), ila (cardamon), chandana (sandalwood), devadaru ( a sort of pine tree), hastidanta (ivory), laksha (lac), palasha (the tree butea frondosa), tambula (betel leaf ) and lavana (salt).

There is a herb named punarnava. When pushya nakshatra is in the sky, this herb should be crushed and drunk with water. This ensures that snakes avoid the house.

Another way to take care of snakes is to make an image of Garuda with the teeth of a bear. If this is worn, snakes never come near the wearer. The root of the shalmali tree can also be crushed and drunk with water if snakes are to be repelled. But this must also be done when pushya nakshatra is in the sky. The root of the lajjaluka (the sensitive plant mimosa pudica) can be gathered when pushya nakshatra is in the sky. The root is then crushed to extract the juice and the juice is smeared on the hands. This ensures that one can catch snakes without any fear. If despite this, a snake bites a person, the juice of the mahakala creeper will take care of the poison.

### Talismans

A kavacha or talisman also has great utility in preventing illnesses. One of the most powerful of talismans is the vishnu kavacha. This should be worn with the following prayer.

I am praying to the great Lord Janardana and wearing this talisman so that I am protected against all forms of illness. Let Vishnu protect my front, Krishna my back, Hari my head and Janardana my heart. Let Hrishiksha protect my mind. Keshava my tongue, Vasudeva my eyes and Sankarshana my ears. Let Pradyumna protect my nose. Aniruddha my skin, Vanamali my cheeks and Shrivatsa my lower portions. May Vishnu's chakra protect my left and may Vishnu's gada protect my right. Let Garuda help me in all my endeavours.

Varaha will protect me in the water, van?ana in danger, narasimha in the forest and keshava everywhere. The Lord Hiranyagarbha will give me gold and the Lord Kapila will give me metals. Vishnu will protect me from all my enemies. He will draw away my sins. He will rule my mind and grant me wisdom and knowledge.

I have meditated on Vishnu and am putting on this talisman. I can now fearlessly travel on earth, the elements cannot conquer me. The gods are with me. I am protected against rakshasa, pishachas, difficult roads, forests and drowning. I am protected against theft, lightning, snake-bite and illness.

The mantras that go into the talisman have to be preserved with great secrecy.

### Horses and Elephants

The art of taking care of horses is known as ashvayurveda and the art of taking care of elephants is known as gajayurveda.

There are four types of horses *uttama*, *madhyama*, *kanishtha* and *adhama*. An *uttama* horse is four handlengths high and seven and a half handlengths long. A *madhyama* horse is three and a half handlengths high and six handlengths long. A *kanishtha* horse is three handlengths high and less than six handlengths long (but more than five handlengths). An *adhama* horse is two handlengths high and five handlengths long. *Adhama* horses are to be avoided.

A horse that will live long is known by its short ears. If mustard, clarified butter, sesamum, asafoetida and a piece of wood are tied in a small piece of cloth around the horse's neck, its general welfare is ensured. Castor-oil, turmeric, garlic and rocksalt; mashed and mixed together into a paste make a very effective remedy for wounds on the horse's body. If a horse is too thin, the juice of meat can be added to its diet. Milk can also be added, particularly when the horse is recovering from an illness.

Whatever medicines are used for horses can also be used for elephants. But the dosage for elephants must be four times the dosage used for horses. If an elephant is ill, feeding brahmanas and donating jewels and cows ensure quick recovery. It also helps to tie a garland around the elephant's tusk and throw at it mustard seed over which incantations have been chanted.

### **Funeral Ceremonies**

The Garuda Purana is often recited at funeral (*shraddha*) ceremonies. The reason is that it has all the mantras that are to be chanted at such ceremonies. If the rites are performed according to these incantations, the ancestors are freed from all sins. On the occasion of the ceremony, *pindas* (oblations) are offered to the dead ancestors. And the rite has to be repeated exactly one year after the date of death.

### **Yugas**

There are four yugs (eras). These are *satyayuga*, *tretayuga*, *dvaparayuga* and *kaliyuga*.

In *satyayuga*, *dharma* reigns supreme. There is pity for other living beings, donation of alms and meditation. Brahmanas are revered and it is said that *dharma* has four legs in *satyayuga*. These four legs are truthfulness, donation of alms, meditation and pity. Men live for four thousand years in this era.

The next era is *tretayuga*. The brahmanas are overthrown in their supremacy by the *kshatriyas* and it is the *kshatriyas* who flourish and prosper. The *vaishyas* and the *shudras* continue to revere the brahmanas. But *dharma* has only three legs, since there is no longer any *tapasya*.

Truthfulness, donation of alms and pity continue to exist. People are devoted to Vishnu and do perform yajnas. In this era, men live for a thousand years.

Next comes dvaparayuga. Now dharma has only two legs. Men live only for four hundred years. But the brahmanas and the kshatriyas continue to thrive. To bring the minds of men back to the path of dharma, a Vedavyasa is born in every dvaparayuga. He divides the Vedas and teaches men the eighteen forms of knowledge (ashtadasha vidya). These are the Puranas, the dharma, shastras (sacred texts), the four Vedas, nyaya, ( doctrine), mimamsa (philosophy), ayurveda (medicine) arthashastra (political economy), gandharva shastra (singing), dhanurveda (the art of fighting) and shadanga (six schools of philosophy).

The last of the four eras is kaliyuga, when dharma has only one leg left to stand on. People become cruel and evil. Envy, dissatisfaction, pride and violence are to be found everywhere. People are addicted to lying, killing and sleeping. The Vedas are no longer revered and robbers take over the cities. The kings themselves become robbers. The Brahmanas stop observing vratas and become worse than shudras. Wealth is acquired through unethical means. Wives do not obey their husbands. No one worship Vishnu. There is only one virtue of kaliyuga. Since there is evil all around, even a little bit of devotion to the cause of dharma pays handsome dividends. All that one has to do to attain immense punya is to chant Krishna's name.

### **True Knowledge**

Unhappiness comes from the sense of I and mine. As long as these feelings are there, true knowledge is impossible. Eliminating these individualisms of 'I' and 'me' means the elimination of one's ego. If one thinks of ignorance as a tree, the seed and the trunk of the tree are formed by the ego. Houses and land are the tree's branches, wives and sons smaller branches and material wealth the tree's leaves. Papa and punya are the tree's flowers, and happiness and unhappiness fruits. People get tired of the hurly burly of life and seek comfort under the tree's shade. But these are transient comfort and transient happiness. True happiness and true comfort come when one recognises that the tree itself is an illusion. Those who are learned chop down the tree with the axe of knowledge. It is such people who can unite with the brahman and it is such people who become truly free. As long as one is ignorant, one confuses the physical being (jiva) with the soul (atman). What really is knowledge? The place where one lives is a house – make it home with love and compassion. That which provides nourishment is food. And that which removes ignorance is knowledge. All else is useless. Home is one's shrine, home is one's heaven.

A person seeking true knowledge meditates as follows.

I am not the physical body. I am the shining brahman. I have no birth or death. I am the shining brahman. I have no connection with the earth and whatever is in it. I am the shining brahman. I am independent of the air, the sky and the five elements. I am the shining brahman. I have no place of habitation, but I am everywhere. I am the shining brahman. I cannot be smelt. I am the shining brahman. I cannot be touched. I am the shining brahman. I cannot speak or hear. I am the shining brahman. I have no senses. I am the shining brahman. I have no breath of life. I am the shining brahman. I am beyond all ignorance. I am the shining brahman. I am always pure, always happy and all-knowing.

Those who can realize this knowledge are freed from all worldly ties. It is only the ignorant who continue to be born again and again on earth.

Yoga is the union of the atman with the brahman. Before this union can be achieved, the intelligence, the mind and the senses have to be controlled and concentrated on meditating on the brahman. There are six techniques of yoga. These are known as pranayama, japa, pratyahara, dhyana, dharana and samadhi. Pranayama is the control over breath, while japa is the repeated chanting of a mantra or Vishnu's name. Pratyahara is control over one's senses. Dhyana is meditation on an object. The object of meditation can be the brahman or even an image of Vishnu's . When dhyana is continuous and focused, it becomes dharana. Samadhi is the final stage. This happens when the object of meditation is seen everywhere. There is a complete sense of union between and the atman and the brahman.

There is a tremendous sense of freedom when this knowledge is attained. One feels as if one had been asleep earlier. It is realized that the atman has nothing to do with the happiness or unhappiness in a worldly life. A fire without smoke burns brighter. Once the smoke of illusions is taken away, the atman shines brighter. This sort of knowledge is far far superior to whatever punya may be acquired through a thousand yajnas.

This is the end of the purva khanda of the Garuda Purana.

Suta and the Other Sages

The sages became slightly confused. They said, Romaharshana, remove our confusion. We get the impression that once a person dies, the atman regains a new physical body and is born again. And that this happens immediately. We also get the impression that once a person dies, he is first taken to Yama and made to suffer for his sins. It is only after this that the atman is born again.

Which of the above two is correct?

Romaharshana replied, Let me relate to you the conversation that took place between Garuda and Vishnu. That will remove your doubt.

Garuda's Questions

Garuda once went on a tour of the world. He went to heaven, to the earth and to the underworld. But his mind was not pacified, he was greatly depressed. Because all he saw everywhere was unhappiness. So he returned to vaikunthaloka, the place where Vishnu lives.

Vaikunthaloka was a very nice place. Vishnu's companions were handsome to look and wore pretty clothes. They rode on vimanas. The goddess Lakshmi was there with all her companions. Vishnu sat there on his throne. His visage was calm, his face was smiling and he had four arms.

Garuda bowed down before Vishnu.

How are you Garuda?, asked Vishnu. What are the places to which you have travelled?

I have travelled everywhere except to Yama's abode, replied Garuda. But I have many questions for which I want answers. Why are beings born on earth? And why do they die? What happens to the senses once people die? Where do men go after they die? Why is a shraddha ceremony performed? When the physical body dies, what happened to the papa or punya that the person had acquired? What exactly is death? Please tell me the answers to these questions.

Vishnu's Reply

Vishnu replied to some of these questions.

It is important to have a son so that the line may go on. A person who has no son goes to the hell punnama. That is why a son is called a putra. He rescues (trana) his father and his other ancestors from punnama naraka, the hell named put.

When a person dies, Yama's messengers (yamaduta) come to take him to Yama. Yama's messengers are terrible of appearance and they hold sticks and clubs in their hands. The atman leaves the dead physical body and adopts a very small form, as long as a finger. In this form, the dead person is taken to Yama's abode. The actions performed in one's life (karma) determine what is going to happen to a dead person thereafter. He is first sent to hell to serve out his sentence for the sins he has committed. Thereafter, he is born again. And what he is born as depends on the karma of the earlier life.

To take care of different types of sinners, there are different narakas.

The most important naraka is rourava, reserved for those who lie or bear false witness. The hell has a long expanse and is full of huge pits. These pits are full of burning coal. The sinner is let loose at one end of the hell and is made to walk to the other end. Naturally, he keeps falling into the pits and gets severely burnt. When he reaches the other end of the hell, he is released from rourava. He then goes to other hells if there are other sins to be accounted for.

Another hell is named maharourava. It is covered with burning sands. The fires that burn there are so bright that they hurt the sinner's eyes. The sinner's hands and feet are tied and he is thrown into the hell. There he burns. To compound his miseries, the hell is populated by fierce crows, vultures, wolves, mosquitoes and scorpions. These bite him and sting him and eat his flesh as he burns. After several years spent in maharourava, sinners are released.

Unlike rourava and maharourava, the hell named atishita is extremely cold. There is no light there and everything is in total darkness. The only heat that sinners can generate is by clinging on to each other's bodies. There are hailstorms which make the skin smart. And there is no food to eat. To satisfy their hunger, the sinners end up eating each other's flesh and blood and bones.

The hell named nikrintana is quite different. There sinners are tied to stakes and their bodies are sliced with sharp chakras. The slicing begins with the feet and then moved up the body to the head and then again starts with the feet. The tragic part of this is that the sinners do not die in the process. For as soon as a part of their body is join up again. Thus a sinner does not die, but continues to endure the misery. And so it continues for a thousand years before there is release.

A hell named apratishtha is a place where sinners are whirled round and round until they begin to vomit blood and their intestines come out of their mouths.

Asipatravana naraka is a huge expanse. The edges of the hell are extremely hot and there is a grove of trees in the centre. The centre is also cooler. The sinners are let loose at the edges and they suffer so much from the heat that they dash towards the centre. Asi means sword and patra is the blade of a sword. Vana is a forest. The hell is so named because the trees in the grove have leaves that are as sharp as the blades of swords. When sinners dash into the grove, their flesh is sliced with the leaves of the trees. And the grove is also full of fierce dogs which immediately eat up the torn flesh.



Next is the hell named taptakumbha. This has hot (tapa) pots (kumbha). The pots are full of boiling oil. The sinners are hung upside down inside these pots and roasted. And while they are being boiled in oil, vultures tear apart whatever portions of their bodies continue to be exposed.

There are many hells. But the seven major ones are the ones that have just been described rourava, maharourava, atishita, nikrintana, apratishtha, asipatravana and taptakumbha.

All the hells are located under the earth. The hells are so terrible that a single day there seems like a hundred years on earth. Imprisonment in any naraka is for a fixed term. When all these tenures in different hells are over, it is time for the sinner to be born again. And what he is born as is determined by the karma of his earlier life. The greater the sins he committed in his earlier life, the more inferior the form he is born as. And so the cycle of birth, atonement and rebirth continues.

Rewards for punya are received in heaven. But these rewards are not forever. Once the term is over, the person has to be reborn.

#### From Death to Cremation

When a person dies, his sons will first bathe the dead body and then clothe it in a single piece of cloth. The body is rubbed with sandalwood paste. The sons then perform a rite known as ekoddishtha. This gives the right to cremate the dead body. The rite can be performed at the place of death, the door of the house, the courtyard, the place where the dead body is resting, the cremation ground or on the funeral pyre itself.

The sons will carry sesamum, sacrificial grass (kusha), clarified butter and wood with them to the cremation ground. And on the way to the cremation ground, hymns to Yama will be sung.

At the shmashana (cremation ground), another religious rite is observed. A funeral pyre is made. The clothing that the dead person is wearing is torn into two. The body is draped with half and the remaining half is left in the shmashana for the ghost (preta). Oblations (pinda) are offered to the dead man and clarified butter is sprinkled on the corpse. The dead body is then placed on the funeral pyre with the head facing the south.

The fire is lit with the words, Great Lord Agni, take this person to heaven.



When the body is half-burnt, mantras are chanted and sesamum and clarified butter sprinkled on the funeral pyre. This is the time to start weeping for the dead. The ghost feels good if it hears these sounds of mourning.

After the body is completely burnt, the sons offer oblations to the dead and circle the funeral pyre. They then go to have a bath. And while they have their bath, they must continue to say good things about the dead person. Water is then taken in cupped palms and offered to the dead man. This is known as tarpana (gratification) and tarpana is performed once, thrice or ten times. The wet clothes are changed after the tarpana is over.

One must not sorrow over the dead person after the tarpana and after the dead body has been burnt. Such mourning merely makes the ghost (preta) get attached to its earlier life, and serves no purpose. If necessary, learned men can be called to discourse on the transience of the physical body and the inevitability of death. This gives comfort. On returning home from the cremation ground, sacred objects must be touched first of all.

A child under two years of age is not cremated. The dead body is buried.

A wife can immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. This brings great punya. She spends as many years in heaven as there are hairs on her body. She even rescues her husband from hell, no matter what sins her husband may have committed. The husband joins the wife in heaven. This sort of immolation is always recommended except when the woman happens to be pregnant. So says the Garuda Purana.

There are some cases where cremation ceremonies are not to be performed, nor are the dead offered pinda or tarpana. Such people have to suffer in hell. These are instances of deaths rising from wild animals, fire, cholera, poison, snake-bites, lightning, or outright suicides. Funeral ceremonies performed in such cases do more harm than good. A special religious rite has to be arranged for such deaths. This is known as narayanavali. It is only if this is done that the dead person does not have to go to hell. In the case of snake-bite leading to death, the golden image of a snake has to be given to a brahman along with a cow. Then the dead body is covered with palasha leaves and other sacred objects. Then it is burnt. This rite is known as sarpavali.

#### One Year After Death

Vishnu continued with the recital of funeral rites.

After the dead body has been burnt, there is a ten-day period of mourning and impurity for the sons. This is known as ashoucha. During this period, the sons must bathe three times a day and must not eat any meat. They have to sleep on the floor. All studying and all donations of alms are forbidden. The combing of hair is not permitted. Food is to be eaten from clay vessels or placed on leaves. No other vessels are to be used. On one of those ten days, they must also fast throughout the day.

Every day, a pinda must be offered to the dead person. The same article must be offered each day. Water must also be offered. After the tenth pinda is offered on the tenth day, it is time for the sons to get themselves purified. They must go outside the village to get their hair cut, their beards shaved and their nails clipped. Thereafter, a brahmana purifies himself by touching water, a kshatriya by touching any animal that is used as a carrier, a vaishya by touching a bridle and a shudra by touching a stick. Heads of those who observe ashoucha and offer pinda are shaved off.

But only those who are younger than the dead person get their heads shaved. This seems slightly confusing. We have been talking of sons observing ashoucha and offering pinda. They must be younger than the dead person. The answer is that people other than sons are also entitled to observe ashoucha and offer pinda. Such people are known as sapindas of the dead man. Who are these sapindasa? That will be explained later.

Why is the pinda at all offered? Each day's pinda offerings are divided into four parts. The first part is appropriated by Yama's messengers. The second part is used by the preta to survive. The remaining two parts are used by the preta to reconstruct a body by means of which he can travel to Yama's abode. The first day's share makes the head. The second day's share makes the ears, the eyes and the nose. And so on and so forth until on the tenth day, the body is complete.

On the eleventh day, a shraddha ceremony is held. This is the first (adya) funeral ceremony, so it is known as adya shraddha. A bull (vrisha) should be donated on that day, in which case, the ceremony is known as vrishotsarga. Whatever objects were dear to the dead man are to be donated on the eleventh day. Brahmanas are invited and fed as this satisfies the preta.

For a period of one year, every month, on the date of death, a shraddha ceremony continues to be held. Then a final shraddha ceremony known as varshika shraddha is held. All of these ceremonies are accompanied by the offering of pindas. For a period of one year, a lamp is also lit outside the house for the sake of the preta.

Why is this period of one year important? The adya shraddha takes place on the eleventh day. Then on the thirteen day, Yama's messengers come for the preta. The preta now has a body, thanks to the pindas offered on the first ten days. Yama's messengers grab this body and begin to drag it towards Yama's abode. But the way is long and it takes three hundred and forty-eight days for the journey to be completed. The journey starts on the thirteenth day after death. Therefore, it is almost a year after death when the preta finally reaches Yama's abode. During his long journey, the preta gets no food or water. It lives on whatever offerings are made to it in the form of pindas. It also repents whatever sins it has committed on earth, because the time for reckoning is now near.

There are sixteen cities that have to be passed on the way to Yama's abode. Their names are Yamyā, Sourī, Nagendra, Gandharva, Shailagama, Krouncha, Krura, Vichitra, Vahvapada, Duhkada, Nankranda, Sutapta, Roudra, Payovarshana, Shitadhya, Vahubhiti. In between the cities named Vichitra and Vahvapada, the river Vaitarani has to be crossed. This is a terrible river and its currents are made of blood. There are boats for crossing the river. But only those who have donated cows on earth are allowed to cross by means of the boats. The others are dragged through the current and their flesh torn to shreds by fierce birds.

When the preta finally reaches Yama's abode, he is taken before Yama. Yama holds a danda (rod) in one hand and a pasha (noose) in the other. His complexion is blue. Yama has two visages. A pleasant one is displayed to the good and an awesome one to the sinners. Yama decides, on the basis of past karma, where the preta is to be taken.

After one year has passed, the preta reaches Yama's abode. He is no longer a preta, but becomes one of the ancestors. The varshika shraddha that is performed is a recognition of this fact.

### Vrishotsarga

Garuda said, Lord Vishnu, please tell me more about vrishotsarga. Who was the first one to perform this ceremony?

Vishnu told him the story of Viravahana.

There was a king named Viravahana who ruled in the city of Viradha. Viravahana was a good king who ruled according to the norms of righteousness. Once the king arrived at the sage Vashishtha's hermitage and thought that while he was there, he might learn some words of wisdom from the sage.

Viravahana told Vashishtha, I have heard so much about Yama's tough dealing that I am scared. Please tell me how I can avoid going to hell.

There are many paths to dharma. replied Vashishtha. The learned have described these paths. But donating a bull is the best of them all. A dead person who does not have a bull donated in his name on the eleventh day after his death, is sure to go to hell. Why don't you donate a bull? Pick a bull that is five years of age and donate it with one or two or four cows. Do you know what happened to Dharmavatsa?

Viravahan did not, so Vashistha told him the story of Dharmavatsa.

Many years ago there was a brahmana named Dharmavatsa who lived in the city of Vidha. He was devoted to Vishnu. The brahmana once went to a hill to fetch some sacrificial grass. While he was searching for grass in the forest, four handsome men came and grabbed the brahmana. They lifted him up into the sky and began to carry him far away. Eventually they arrived at a city with many gates and palaces. The city was clearly a wealthy one.

The brahmana was not very sure whether this was a dream. Or whether all of it was an illusion. By then, the brahmana had been brought before a king. The king sat on a golden throne. The king took up on seeing the brahmana and started to worship him with all sorts of offerings.

Today I am blessed, said the king. I have seen you. Now please take him back to where you brought him from, he instructed the four handsome men.

Dharmavatsa was bewildered. Just a minute, he interrupted. Will you please explain what is going on? What is this place and why was I brought here? And why am I being taken back?

I like to see those who are fit to be worshipped, replied the king You follow the path of dharma and you are devoted to Vishnu. You were brought here so that I might see you. Please pardon my impertinence. As for the rest of the story, I can't tell that. My minister will tell you. The minister's name was Vipashchit and instructed by the king, he began to relate the story. In earlier life, the king used to live in the city of Viradha. His name was Vishvambhara and he was a viradha. His name was Vishvambhara and he was a vaishya. He worshipped the brahmanas, prayed to the gods, looked after his relatives and cattle, donated alms and served his guests well. Together with his wife, he performed the duties of a householder extremely well. Vishvambhara once went on a pilgrimage with his friends and on this way back, he met the sage Lomasha. He bowed down before Lomasha.

Vishvambhara, asked Lomasha. Where are you coming from? I am very glad to see you. You are a good man. I thought that my days on earth were numbered, replied Vishvambhara. I am now old. It is time to do something about acquiring punya. So my wife and I have been on pilgrimage with our friends. We have been to many tirthas and we have donated a lot of alms.

Indeed, said Lomasha. Which are the tirthas that you have visited? Vishvambhara recited a long list of names. Then he said, But my mind continues to be attached to material possessions. Please tell me, sage, what should I do?

Lomasha told him the story of the sage Narada.

In one of Narada's earlier lives, Narada was born as the son of a brahmana's maid-servant. From the brahmana, Narada picked up knowledge of the shastras. Once many sages came to visit the brahmana, and from them, Narada learnt many more words of wisdom. He learned the true nature of the atman and the virtues of being devoted to Vishnu. This was the true knowledge that we have earlier talked about. Lomasha told Vishvambhara the nature of this true knowledge. This pacified Vishvambhara's mind. But Lomasha also said, You have acquired a lot of punya. However, I do think that all this is incomplete without vrishotsarga. Donating a bull is as good as performing an ashvamedha sacrifice. Go to the tirtha named Pushkara and donate a bull there. Vishvambhara did as he had been told. This gave him so much punya that in his next life he was born as a king named Virapanchanana. The minister said that this was the king who had had Dharmavatsa brought to him. Since he liked to associate with righteous men, King Virapanchanana had such men brought to him so that he could worship them. And as for the beautiful and wealthy city, all this was due to the punya acquired from vrishotsarga. The minister concluded his story. The brahmana was taken back. Having related the story of Dharmavatsa, the sage Vashishtha asked Viravahana to organize a vishotsarga sacrifice. This Viravahana did. And when he died, he was sent by Yama straight to heaven. Such are the wonderful properties of vrishotsarga. Santaptaka and the Ghosts.

There was a brahmana named Santaptaka who had lost all interest in the material world. He lived in the forest and performed tapasya. Santaptaka decided that he would like to go on a visit to places of pilgrimage. But he lost his way and landed up in the middle of a thick forest. The forest was so thick that even birds could not fly inside it. Wild animals like lions, tigers, bears and wolves roamed in it. It was also populated by rakshasas and pishachas.

After Santaptaka had travelled a bit in this thick forest, he came upon a banyan tree. A dead body hung from the tree and five ghosts (preta) were eating the body. The ghosts were just like skeletons, but their eyes were huge. They did not have any noses. With their teeth and their nails, the ghosts tore to bits the flesh and the bones of the dead body.

As soon as the ghosts saw Santaptaka, they came and grabbed him. Two grasped his legs, two his hands and the fifth caught him by the head, they pulled at the brahmana and each one said I saw him first. I will eat him first.

The ghosts rose with the brahmana up into the sky and started to discuss amongst themselves how much of meat there was in the brahmana's body. Santaptaka was frightened and didn't know what to do. So he began to pray to Vishnu. Vishnu naturally came when a devotee was calling. But instead of interfering directly himself, he called Manibhadra, the king of the yakshas. He asked Manibhadra to adopt the form of a preta himself and fight with the other ghosts for the brahmana's body.

Manibhadra did as he had been asked. Instructed by Vishnu, he himself adopted the form of a fearsome ghost. With his legs he fought with two of the other ghosts, with his hands he tackled two others and with his head he struck the fifth. A terrible fight then ensued between Manibhadra and the other ghosts. In the course of the fighting, Manibhadra caught hold of the dead body that was in the banyan tree and disappeared. When the ghosts saw that their food was being taken away, they tried to pursue the king of the yakshas. But to no avail.

The ghosts then returned to eat the brahmana. But thanks to Vishnu's grace, they remembered the stories of their earlier lives. They fell at the brahmana's feet and begged for mercy. Pardon us, they said. We have become pretas because of our earlier karma. Our names are Paryushita, Suchimukha, Shighraga, Rodhaka and Lekhaka.

Santaptaka was bewildered at these developments. But he said, Since you have remembered the stories of your earlier lives, please tell me how you came to be ghosts.

Paryushita's story was that he once invited a brahmana to a shraddha ceremony. But the brahmana was late in coming. After waiting a long time for the brahmana, Paryushita became hungry and ate the food. When the brahmana arrived, Parushita gave him whatever food was left to eat. But since Paryushita had already eaten some of the food, the food had become tainted (paryushita). He was therefore cursed that he would be a preta.

Suchimukha's story was that a brahmana woman had gone to a tirtha named Bhadravata. She had her five year old son with her. Suchimukha used to be a kshatriya. But he was an evil kshatriya. He fell upon the brahmana woman and her son and stole all their belongings. When the five year old boy tried to drink some water from a pot, Suchimukha grabbed the pot and drank the water himself. The boy died of fright and thirst. Stricken with grief, the brahmana woman threw herself into a well and committed suicide. Suchimukha became a ghost because of this sin. His mouth (mukha) became as small as a needle (suhi) so that he had great difficulty in eating or drinking.

Shighraga's story was that he used to be a vaishya. With a friend he went to a distant country to trade. The friend made huge profits. But Shighraga lost all his capital. On their way home, they came to a river. While his friend was sleeping with his head on Shighraga's lap. Shighraga flung his friend into the river and so killed him. He then appropriated all his friend's wealth. He returned home and reported to his friend's wife that this friend had been killed by bandits. The good woman was so grief-stricken that she immolated herself on a funeral pyre. When Shighraga died, he became a ghost because of this sin. Shighra means quick and since he had quickly run away after killing his friend, he came to be known as Shighraga.

Rodhaka's story was that he used to be a shudra. The king liked Rodhaka and gave him a hundred villages to lord over. Rodhaka had a brother. But such was his love for wealth that he deprived his brother of all property. The brother lived in penury. Rodhaka's parents used to secretly help his brother and Rodhaka did not like this at all. He not only berated them, but imprisoned and shackled them as well. The parents took poison in the prison and died. The young brother begged for a living. But eventually, he too died. This sin turned Rodhaka into a ghost. Rodha means obstacle or prison and since he had imprisoned his parents, the ghost came to be known as Rodhaka.

Lekhaka's story was that he used to be a brahmana who lived in the city of Avanti. He was employed by the king as a priest. In the temple there were many images of gods and goddesses. The images were bedecked with jewels and golden ornaments. Lekhaka could not control his greed. With an iron implement, he prised out the jewels and ornaments from the images. The images became disfigured and the king resolved that he could kill the thief, even if the thief happened to be a brahmana. This resolution so sacred Lekhaka that he secretly entered the palace at night and killed the king with a sword. He then fled with all the jewels and ornaments, but was killed by a tiger in a forest.



As a result of the sin Kekhaka had committed, he became a preta. Kehana means to write or mark and since he had marked he images, the came to be known as Lekhaka. After the stories had been told, Vishnu appeared before Santaptaka and the five ghosts. The ghosts were pardoned. Six vimanas descended and took Satnaptaka and the other five to vishnuloka. A person who reads this wonderful story never becomes a ghost.

### **Sapindas**

Garuda asked, Lord Vishnu, you have told me that sapindas of a dead person are entitled to perform funeral rites. But you have not told who these sapindas are. Who are they?

Vishnu replied as follows.

Sapindas of a dead person his sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, brothers, nephews (sons of brothers) and the sons of these people. It is they who are entitled to perform funeral rites. If none of these are available, wives are authorized to perform the task. And if wives are also not available, the king has to take upon himself the duty of performing the funeral rite.

If a person knows that he does not have any spindas, he can perform his shraddha ceremony himself in advance, that is, before his death.

### **Babhruvahana**

There was a king named Babhruvahana who ruled in the kingdom of Banga. He was righteous king who looked after his subjects well. There were no sinners in his kingdom. Nor were there any thieves or diseases.

Once Babhruvahana went to the forest for a hunt. The forest was full of lions and deer and the king killed many deer. A deer was struck by an arrow and the king followed it. In the process, the king got separated from his soldiers and companies.

He felt very thirsty. He found a pond where he could drink water. But Babhruvahana was so tired by now that he thought that he would rest for some time. He tied his horse to a banyan tree and fell asleep under the tree.

As soon as the king fell asleep, a ghost arrived on the scene. He was followed by hundreds and hundreds of ghosts. Their bodies were like skeletons and they were looking for food to eat. They made such a clamor that the king woke up. He saw the ghosts and grasped his bow and arrow to shoot them. But the first preta was not at all frightened and just stood there.

At this, Babhruvahana asked the preta, Who are you? Why have you become a ghost?



The preta replied, I am blessed that I have met you. I shall no longer remain a ghost. Those who do not have shraddha ceremonies performed safter their deaths become ghosts, as do those who die unnatural deaths. That is the reason why we are here. Why don't you perform a funeral ceremony for the ghosts? That wil free us. You have the right, you are the king. It is decreed that the king shall perform funeral rites for those who have no parents or children.

Babruvahana told the ghost, first tell me your story.

The ghost said that he used to be a vaishya named Sudeva who lived in the city of Vaidesha. He always worshipped the gods. He donated alms to brahmanas. He had never refused guests. But all this amounted to nothing since Sudeva did not have any sons or relatives who could perform a shraddha ceremony for him. Accordingly, Sudeva turned into a ghost.

Babhruvahana returned to his capital and performed funeral rites for the ghosts. The ghosts went straight to heaven. Sudeva gave Babhruvahana a valuable gem as a token of his gratitude.

The Story of Rama and Sita

Garuda asked, I don't understand how the ancestors accept the pindas that are offered. How do they come? They have no bodies. Please explain this.

Vishnu replied, at every shraddha ceremony brahmanas are invited. The ancestors enter the bodies of the brahmanas and thus partake of the prindas. Let me tell you the story of Rama and Sita.

Rama and Sita had to go to the forest for fourteen years to ensure that Dasharatha's promise to Kaikeyi was not falsified. Dasharatha was Rama's father and Kaikeyi was Rama's stepmother. Kaikeyi wanted to make sure that her son Bharata, rather than Rama, became king after Dasharatha.

In the forest, Rama learnt of Dasaratha's death and a funeral ceremony had to be performed. Sita cooked the food and several sages were invited to the ceremony. But when the food was to be served, Sita could not be found. Rama waited for Sita. But she did not come. Finally, Rama served the guests himself. When the guests had left, Sita appeared.

Where were you? asked Rama.

I was hiding, replied Sita. I was ashamed to appear before the guests.

Ashamed of what? asked Rama. What was there to be ashamed of ?

I saw your father, grandfather and great-father sit down to eat with the other guests, replied Sita. How could I appear before them in the skins that I was wearing? I was also ashamed that we were going to give these great kings such poor food to eat. I hid myself in shame and waited until they had left.

That is how ancestors come to partake of food at a shraddha ceremony together with the assembled guests. Garuda was gratified to learn all this.

### Hierarchy of Beings

There is a hierarchy of beings. All living beings are divided into four groups. The first group consists of those that are born from eggs, the second of those that are born of sweat, the third of herbs and plants, and the last of mammals. These four groups are respectively known as andaja, svedaja, udbhijja and jarayuja.

Every atman has to be born in each of these forms twenty-one lakh times, subject of course to consideration of papa and punya performed in earlier lives. That is, an atman has to spend eighty-four thousand lives on earth.

Amongst mammals, men are superior to all others and it is very difficult for an atman to be born as a human. It is only if the atman has acquired a lot of punya that it is born as a human. Living beings are the best of all elements, intelligent living beings the best of all living beings, humans the best of all intelligent beings, brahmanas the best of all humans, learned brahmanas the best of all brahmanas, and brahmanas blessed with the knowledge of the brahman the best of all learned brahmanas.

### Donations and Hells

Garuda said, I have heard that all sorts of donations are to be made at the time of the shraddha ceremony. What are the objects of these donations? You haven't explained these at all, except for the donation of a bull in the case of vrishotsarga.

I will tell you about them now, replied Vishnu. The first object that should be donated is an umbrella (chhatra). On the way to Yama's abode, the preta has to pass long stretches where there is no shade at all and the sun shines very brightly. If an umbrellalla is donated, it can be held over the preta's head as it is taken Yama's abode. The preta suffers less. The second object that should be donated is a pair of sandals (paduka). There is a possiblibility that the preta may land up in asipatravana naraka. If you remember, there the sands are very hot and sinners have to dash over the hot sands to a cool grove that is in the centre of the hell. If sandals are donated, the preta does not have to walk over these hot sands, but gets to ride a horse.

The third object that should be donated is a seat (asana). If a seat is donated, the preta gets enough food to eat as it is taken to Yama. The fourth object that should be donated is a water-pot (kamandalu). If a water-pot is donated, the preta does not suffer from lack of drinking water on the journey. The fifth object that should be donated is clothing (vastra). If clothing is donated, Yama's messengers do not torture the preta on the journey. The sixth object that should be donated is a ring (mudrika). If a ring is donated, Yama's messengers allow the preta to travel at his own pace. They do not rush him and goad him to travel fast. The benefits of whatever is donated percolate through to the preta himself. Sometimes they directly reach the preta.

I don't understand how that is possible, said Garuda. How do they reach the preta?

Varuna accepts these offerings, replied Vishnu. He then gives them to the god Bhaskara. And Bhaskara takes these objects to the preta.

You had mentioned several hells, said Garuda. But you mentioned the names of only the seven major ones. What are the names of the others?

Vishnu told him the names of the other hells. They are tamisra, lohashanku, shalmali, kudnala, kalasutra, putimirittika, sanghata, lohatoka, savisha, sampratapana, mahanaraka, kakola, sanjivana, mahapatha, avichi, andhatamisra, kumbhipaka and patana.

Together with the seven hells mentioned earlier, this gives a total of twenty-five hells. There are actually supposed to be twenty-one hells. Probably four of the hells have two names each. Or perhaps the figure that is given elsewhere in the Garuda Purana, of there being eighty-four lakh hells, is the right figure.

### **Ghosts**

Garuda asked, But sometimes ghosts come and pester people. How do they manage to do that? How do they escape from hell?

In the same manner that prisoners escape from prison, answered Vishnu. They come and disturb their friends and relatives.

They return to their old houses and cause all sorts of illnesses, such as fever. They are positively delighted when people get headaches or cholera. The more they loved their dear ones when they were alive, the more harm they cause them as ghosts. It is in kaliyuga that one has all these ghosts. There were no such ghosts in satyayuga, dvaparayuga or tretayuga. These ghosts cause strife among friends and kill animals and children.

How does one know that ghosts are around? asked Garuda.

The signs are fairly obvious, replied Vishnu. Animals die and friends fight. There are sudden catastrophes. Children turn against their parents, brahmanas are criticised and there are bad harvests. Fire break out for no reason at all. Husband and wife fight all the time. These are all signs.

What does one do if one knows that there are ghosts around? asked Garuda.

I have already indirectly answered the questions, replied Vishnu. Perform a funeral ceremony for the ghost. But it is also good to consult someone who is learned in these matters, a diviner or astrologer (daivajna).

A ghost is a sinner. And a person who knows that there are ghosts around but does nothing about it, also becomes a sinner by contamination. In his next life such a person is born poor, diseased, without a living and does not have any sons. Or he may even be born as an animal. If nothing is done about the ghosts, the ghosts themselves realize after sometime that there is no hope for salvation in haunting people. Their only hope for salvation lies in returning to hell and serving out their terms of penance. So they return to hell and give up the haunting.

The worst form of ghost is a pishacha. They are very mischievous. They appear to their friends and relatives in all sorts of different forms, as bulls, horses and elephants. They make sleepers have nightmares. They frighten people . Sometimes pishachas appear and beg for food. At other times, they steal food and water. You will know a pishacha if you run into a cow or bull that talks in the human tongue. Friends and relatives discover that they are being carried (through the sky) to all sorts of different places by the pishacha.

If it is known that a pishacha is around , the first thing that is to be done is to bathe in a tirtha. A bliva tree is to be watered next. And finally a ceremony is to be performed, at which learned brahmanas are given grain.

## **Life**

Garuda said Lord Vishnu, the Vedas say that humans live for a hundred years. And yet I find that very few people actually live for a hundred years. Why is this?

You are quite right, answered Vishnu. The Vedas do indeed say that humans live for a hundred years. But that is really their entitlement of life. How long they actually live depends on the sins that they commit. All sins lead to a lowering of life expectancy. Sins are there to tempt anyone who is born as a human being.

For the first five years of life, there are very few sins to tempt a child. But thereafter the temptations start and people succumb to these temptations start and people succumb to these temptations. That is the reason why very few people live to be a hundred years old. Why only a hundred years? If people are completely righteous, they can even be immortal.

A human being is called an infant (shishu) from birth to sixteen months of age. From sixteen to twenty-seven months of age he is called a child (bala or balaka). From twenty-seven months to five years of age he is called a boy (kumara). From five years to nine years of age he is called an adolescent (pouganda). From nine to sixteen years of age he is called a youth (kishora). Thereafter, he becomes a young man (yuvaka).

### **The Human Body**

Vishnu next described to Garuda the human Body.

The human body is formed of skin(charma), blood (rakta), flesh (mamsa), fat (meda), marrow (majja), bones (asthi), and life (jivana).

The five elements are the earth (kshit), water (apa), energy, (teja), wind (vayu) and the sky (akasha). Each of these elements goes into the constitution of the human body. The earth forms the skin, the bones, the veins (nadi), the hair (roma) and the flesh. The water forms parts like saliva (lala), marrow and blood. Energy gives rise to hunger (kshudha), sleep (nidra), thirst (trishna), lassitude (alasya) and lustre (kanti), The wind produces anger (raga), spite (dvesha), modesty (lajja), fear (bhaya) and ignorance (moha). The sky gives rise to holes (chhidra), gravity (gambhira), hearing (shravana) and mind (sattva).

There are several senses or faculties (indriya). The sense of intelligence (buddhindriya) are the ears, the skin, the eyes, the tongue and the nose. The senses of action (karmendriya) are objects like the hands, the feet and speech.

There are ten veins in the body. Their names are ida, pingala, sushumna, gandhari, hastijihva, pusha, yasha, alambusha, kuhu andshankhini. There are ten types of breath in the body. Their names are prana, apana,samana, udana, vyana, naga, kurma, krikara, devadatta and dhananjaya. The body-hair on a human body number three and a half crores and there are three lakh hairs on the head. Teeth number thrity-two and nails twenty. Pala is an unit of measurement. There are one thousand palas of flesh in the body, one hundred palas of blood, ten palas of fat, ten palas of skin and twelve palas of marrow. So say the learned men.

There is a complete correspondence between the human body and the universe. The portion below the waist corresponds to the underworld and the part above the waist to the upper regions. The balls of the feet correspond to the underworld region tala, the ankles to vitala, the calves to sutala, the knees to talatala, the thighs to rasatala and the waist to patala. The navel corresponds to bhuloka (the earth), the stomach to bhuvanloka, the heart to svarloka, the throat to maharloka, the face to janaloka, the forehead to tapoloka and the top of the head to satyaloka. All fourteen worlds are thus to be found in the human body.

### Epilogue

Garuda obtained answers to all his questions. He touched Vishnu's feet and expressed his thanks.

He then went to the sage Kashyapa and recited the Garuda Prana. The knowledge of this sacred text then percolated down a line of sages, from Bhrigu to Vashishtha, from Vashishtha to Vamadeva, from Vamadeva to Parashara, from Parashara to Vyasadeva and from Vyasadeva to Romaharshana.

Romaharshana told the sages assembled in naimisharanya. I have now recited for you all that I had learnt. The person who reads this Purana, or hears a recital of it, is guaranteed happiness in this world and the next. This sacred text gives men true knowledge. This is a purana that should always be revered. Let us finally thank Vyasadeva for having passed this knowledge on to us.

Although Vyasadeva was not physically present there, the sages recorded their thanks to him. They also thanked Romaharshana for the pains he had taken. They kept saying, Romaharshana, you are indeed blessed.

By then, the yajna that was being organized was over. Romaharshana left the hermitage. And the sages went their separate ways.

Great punya is acquired from reading or hearing the Garuda Purana. But a word of warning: At the end of the recital, the reciter should be given some alms. Otherwise, no punya is acquired at all. The text of the Purana should be worshipped. The reciter should then be worshipped with clothes, cows, food, gold and land.

Aum Namoh Narayanayah Hari Aum Namoh Bhagavatte Vasudevayah Aum TaT Sat.