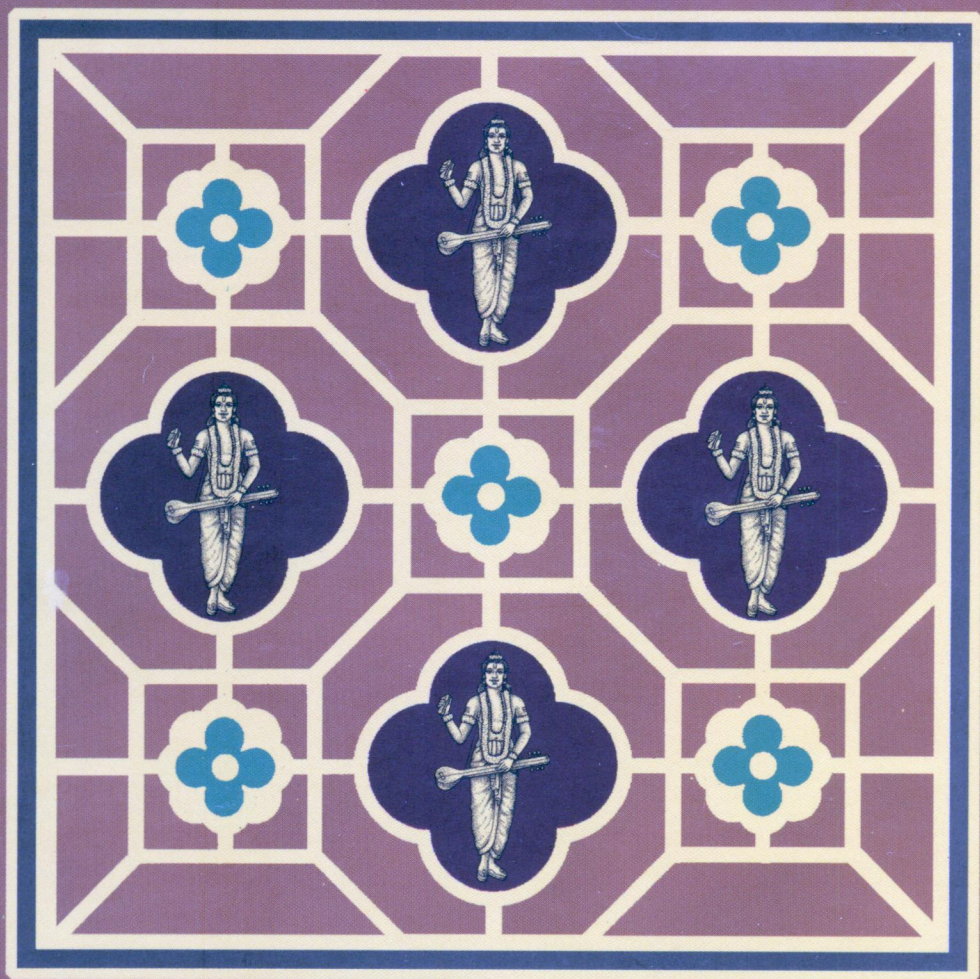


STORIES FROM THE

# NARADA PURANA





Stories from the  
**Narada Purana**  
of  
Srla Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasadeva

Told by Pūrṇaprajña dāsa





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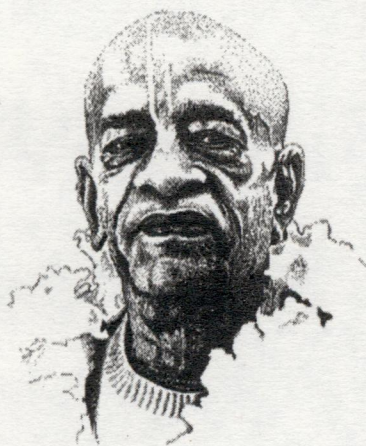
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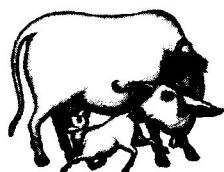


Dedicated to



His Divine Grace  
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda  
founder-ācārya  
International Society for Krishna Consciousness





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## INTRODUCTION

This is the second in the series of maha-puranas, told in story form. In the Shrimad-Bhagavatam, Canto 12 chapter 7 verses 23 and 24 it is stated: The eighteen major Purāṇas are the Brahmā, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Liṅga, Garuḍa, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Agni, Skanda, Bhaviṣya, Brahma-vaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Vāmana, Varāha, Matsya, Kūrma and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas.

The Narada Purana is not as often quoted by the Vaishnava acharyas as most of the other Puranas. In Shrila Prabhupada's books, only one quotation is found as follows, in the purport of the Shrimad-Bhagavatam, Canto 10 chapter 16 verse 57: Commenting on this verse, Śrīla Madh-vācārya has quoted the Nārada Purāṇa as follows: "From Hiraṇyagarbha, Brahmā, comes the second creation of this universe, but the universe is primarily created by Viṣṇu Himself. Viṣṇu is thus the primary creator, and four-headed Brahmā is merely the secondary creator."

This volume is very small, especially considering the size of the Narada Purana, because it is a summary study, in story form. There are not many stories told in the Narada Purana. Most of the book consists of very elaborate descriptions of various methods of worship of the Supreme Lord or the demigods, as well as glorification of various holy places and religious vows.

Just to give an idea of the very intricate rituals outlined in the Narada Purana, I will present here part of the description of how one should offer lamps to Hanuman. Sanat-kumara said, "Henceforth, I shall describe the procedure of offering a lamp to Hanuman. Merely by understanding this, one will attain all perfection."

"I shall mention the size of the lamp and the vessel, as well as the amount of oil that is to be used. I shall tell you the mantra to be chanted when the gift of such a lamp is made. If the lamp is offered using oil made fragrant by means of flowers, it is to be considered the bestower of all desires."

"Mustard seed oil is conducive to the destruction of ailments. In the activities of killing, the oil extracted from white mustard is useful. Gingelly oil is considered conducive to the acquisition of prosperity, and



it is also used as an offering for the arrival of a traveler. In the activities of ostracizing, the oil from the karanja plant should be used. (The list of various oils for various purposes goes on and on)."

"Wheat, gingelly seeds, black gram, green gram and rice. These are the panchadhanya (set of five grains) used for the purpose of nityadipa (a permanent lamp) for the worship of Hanuman, the son of the wind-god."

"Thereafter, the pure devotee, with a fully controlled mind, should make the vessel of the lamp. When the lamp is lit in the vessel, the devotee should read the kavacha pertaining to Hanuman. After placing the lamp on the clean ground, it should be lit on a Tuesday. One should make as many threads in the wick as there are syllables in the mula-mantra, accompanied by the name of the sadhya (the person for whose purpose the ritual is intended)."

"For offering lamps to Hanuman, red threads are considered best. In rites regarding hatred and killing, black threads should be used. (For various purposes, different colors of threads in the wicks are recommended.)"

"In the performance of daily rituals, the amount of oil used in offering should be six palas (a unit of measurement). The lamp should be offered at six places: near the Deity of Hanuman, in the temple of Lord Shiva, at the place where nitya and naimittika rituals are performed, in front of any other deity, at any other place of the devotee's choice if he is afflicted by ghosts and spirits, and where four roads meet."

"When offering a lamp to Hanuman, I am describing whatever is especially liked by him."

Anyway, I have presented this excerpt just to give an idea of how complex and detailed the rituals of worship that are advocated in the Narada Purana are. My interest is just to present the stories of the Puranas, as well as the accompanying wisdom displayed by the story tellers.

While writing articles for Back to Godhead magazine, devotees have referred to several stories in the Narada Purana, including the carving of the Deities of Lord Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra by Vishvakarma, and the story of how Narada Muni became the gopi, Naradi, so that he would be able to understand the conjugal pastimes of Lord Krishna.

I know that everyone loves a good story. There are many fascinating stories contained in the Puranas and so I hope that you enjoy these few that I have presented from the Narada Purana.



Obeisances unto Lord Narayana; as well as to Nara, the supermost human being; to the goddess Sarasvati; and the author, Shrila Vyasadeva, before uttering the word *jaya* and then beginning the recitation of the Narada Purana.

Obeisances unto Lord Krishna, who eternally resides in Vrindavana, and who is the giver of transcendental pleasure to Goddess Lakshmi.

There was a great assembly of sages at Naimisharanya, headed by Shaunaka Rishi. It is said here that their number was twenty-six thousand. Desiring to act for the welfare of the entire world, they questioned Suta Gosvami, the son of Romaharshana, about the means to attain life's goal, which is undivided devotional service to Lord Vishnu.

The sages inquired, "O Suta, please tell us how the primeval Lord Vishnu becomes pleased with His devotee. How is the Lord's worship to be conducted? What are the codes of conduct for people of the four varnas (divisions of occupational duties)? What is the nature of bhakti (devotion) and what is its fruit?"

"O Suta, you are the best of sages and so kindly answer our questions just to dispel all of our doubts. Who is there that would not be keenly interested to hear your talks?"

Suta Gosvami said, "That which you desire to hear about was formerly spoken by the four Kumaras to Narada. It is for this reason that this Purana is named after the Devarshi. The hearing of this Purana awards one worldly pleasure, as well as salvation. Kindly hear it with rapt attention."

"The hearing of the Narada Purana is most effective if done in front of the Deity of Lord Vishnu, in the assembly of devotees, or in a holy place. One should not recite this Purana to those who are against the mission of the Lord, or to a religious hypocrite, who is compared to a crane that feigns meditation until a fish comes within easy reach."

"By listening to this Purana, one can destroy even a mountain of former sins. Only a person who is inclined to listen to these transcendental

subject matters has factually achieved life's purpose. Indeed, it is not possible for a person to have an inclination for such hearing unless he has accumulated the results of pious activities throughout many, many lifetimes."

The sages inquired, "How did it come to pass that Sanat-kumara related this Purana to Narada Muni? How did they meet, and at what place?"

Suta Gosvami said, "The four Kumaras are mental sons of Lord Brahma and all of them are brahmacharies. Their names are Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanat-kumara and Sanatana. They are great devotees of Lord Vishnu."

Suta Gosvami then narrated the following historical event. Once, as the Kumaras were on their way to the abode of Lord Brahma, which is situated at the peak of Mount Meru, they came to the river Ganga. As they were preparing to bathe, Narada Muni came there by the will of providence.

Upon seeing his elder brothers, Narada Muni came and bowed down before them while chanting the holy names of Lord Krishna as follows: "My obeisances unto You, O Narayana, O Achyuta, O Vasudeva, O Janardana, O Vishnu, O Padmanabha, O Keshava, O Damodara, O Narasimha, O Vamana, O Pradyumna, O Aniruddha, O Shankarshana, O Murari!"

Thereafter, they all bathed with great pleasure and then sat down by the side of the river to offer their evening prayers. Narada Muni said: "O sages, all of you are omniscient, and you are exclusively devoted to the Lord. You are engaged in the upliftment of the three worlds, and you are kind toward even those who are in a wretched condition of life. Kindly describe to me the transcendental qualities of the Lord."

"How can a devotee realize, in truth, the existence of Lord Hari, from whose lotus feet the waters of the Ganga emanate? Kindly describe to me the nature of perfect knowledge and penance. Tell me what else might be very confidential and which brings satisfaction to Lord Hari."

"I offer my obeisances unto the Lord, who is called nirguna (without qualities) because He possesses no material qualities, and who is called saguna (possessing qualities) because all of His qualities are transcendental."

"It is He that assumes the form of Brahma to create the material worlds. He assumes the form of Rudra for causing the dissolution of the created manifestation. Assuming the form of Viṣṇu, as well as the brahmanas, the Lord properly maintains the creation."

While listening to Narada Muni's glorification of the Supreme Lord, the four Kumaras felt great delight so that tears could be seen falling from their eyes.

Śrī Sanaka Rishi then said, "In the beginning of creation, the unlimited Supreme Lord, Narayana, presided over the differentiation of the three guṇas (the three modes of material nature—goodness, passion and ignorance). He created Brahma from His right side, Śiva from His middle, and Viṣṇu from His left side."

"Lord Viṣṇu's energy, called *māya-shakti*, exerts a simultaneously positive and negative influence, and is thus called '*vidyā-avidyā*' (spiritual knowledge and the nescience of ignorance). When the universe appears to be separate from Lord Viṣṇu—that is the accomplishment of the *māya-shakti*, which causes only misery. For this reason, the material nature is described in *Bhagavad-gītā* as the separated energy of the Lord."

"O Narada, when a person comes to realize that the material nature is indeed non-different from the Lord, being His energy, and not at all separate from Him, this understanding brings about the termination of *samsāra*, or repeated birth and death."

Sanaka Kumara proceeded to describe the regions of the universe. There are seven regions above the earth—*Bhu*, *Bhuvah*, *Svar*, *Maha*, *Jana*, *Tapa* and *Satya*. The seven regions below the earth are *Atala*, *Vitala*, *Sutala*, *Talatala*, *Mahatala*, *Rasatala* and *Patala*. The earth consists of seven islands and seven oceans. The area north of the salt ocean and south of the Himalayas is called *Bharata-varsha*.

Sanaka Kumara said "O Narada! There is no one else with all the three worlds who is comparable in merit to that person who, after being born in *Bharata-varsha*, is devoted to the worship of Lord Viṣṇu."

"A person who is accustomed to glorifying Lord Hari, a person who is dear to such a devotee, and a person who is eager to render service to the great devotees—these are worthy of being bowed down to by even the demigods."

"A person who delights in worshipping Lord Viṣṇu, or His devotees, and a person who regularly partakes of the remnants of food left by the



devotees attains the highest destination after death."

"Any person who constantly chants the holy names of the Lord and who is freed from the propensity to harm others, is also worthy of being offered obeisances by the demigods."

"A person who, after being born in Bharata-varsha, does not attempt to rectify his fallen condition, will have to suffer the tortures of hell for as long as the sun, moon and stars shine."

"There is no one greater to or equal to the Supreme Lord, Narayana. The entire universe is pervaded by Him. One should bow down to that Lord of lords, for it is He that is truly worthy of being praised."

Sanaka Kumara continued, "All religious acts that are performed with shraddha (firm faith) confer upon one a good result, according to the performer's cherished desires. Everything is achieved through faith. It is by faith in Him that the Lord is propitiated."

"All acts of devotion should be performed with faith. Whatever practices are performed without such devotional faith never fructify. A person endowed with shraddha attains the purusharthas (dharma, artha, kama and moksha)."

"O Narada, Lord Hari is not pleased by the giving of gifts, by austere penance, or by the performance of sacrifice, if these are done without devotion. Charity given without faith in the Lord is simply a waste of money. The penance performed without devotion to the Lord is simply pain given to the body. The offerings made into the sacrificial fire, without devotion, are like ghee poured upon ashes."

"Just as all creatures live by the support of the earth, one should accomplish all objectives of life by taking the support of devotion."

"Few, and rarely seen in this world, are persons who are eagerly desirous of being solely devoted to the Lord. Eternal peace is awarded to those who comes in contact with such devotees."

Narada inquired, "Tell me about the characteristics of the Bhagavatas (the devotees of the Lord). What acts do they perform? What is their destination? Please tell me clearly about all this."

Sanaka Kumara replied, "Listen as I tell you about the most confidential conversation that had taken place between Lord Vishnu and Markandeya Rishi. At the end of the creation's allotted time, the Lord assumed a gigantic form of Rudra and swallowed up the universe, as if it were a tiny morsel. At that time, the universe remained just a vast

expanse of water, and within it, the Lord lay down on the leaf of a banyan tree to rest. While wandering throughout the water, Markandeya Rishi came to that place.”

Narada Muni interrupted by saying, “O Sanaka, we had previously heard that at the time of dissolution, only the Supreme Lord remains, while all others are unmanifest. How then could Markandeya Rishi meet Him? We are very curious to hear about this. Who will feel drowsy and bored when there is the opportunity to drink the nectar of the Lord’s pastimes?”

Being so requested, Sanaka Kumara narrated the following history. There was a great sage named Mrikandu, who performed austerities at a place known as Shalagrama. While fasting, he vibrated the syllable “om”, thus completely controlling his senses. Being afraid of Mrikandu’s penance, the demigods, headed by Indra, sought the shelter of Lord Narayana.

The demigods prayed, “O Lord Narayana, You are the protector of the surrendered souls. Being very afraid of Mrikandu’s austerities, we have sought your shelter. All glories to You, my Lord. You are the original cause of this universe and everything contained within it because this world is a manifestation of Your divine energy.”

Being pleased, Lord Vishnu manifested Himself before the vision of the demigods. The Lord was surrounded by His principal associates and their transcendental effulgence eclipsed the luster of the demigods.

Being overjoyed, the demigods fell to the ground like rods to offer their obeisances. In a deep and resounding voice, the Lord said, “O demigods, I understand your anxiety that is caused by the sage, Mrikandu. Do not worry—that foremost of sages will never trouble you. Whether in affluence or distress, those who are truly good will never cause harm to another person, even in their dreams. Himself being always troubled by material miseries, as well as his six enemies in the form of lust, anger, greed, etc. how can a highly intelligent person become hostile to another, rather than using all his valuable time and energy to free himself from those miseries?”

“One who always troubles others—mentally, verbally, and physically—and who is always in the grips of passion, is a person of bewildered mind. A man who renders service to the world, even at the risk of his life, and is devoid of jealousy and rivalry, is said to be a first-class

man. A person who is always troubled by fear and suspicions leads a miserable life. Those who are fearless and who are not unnecessarily suspicious of others lead a happy life."

"My dear demigods, return to your abodes and rest assured that Mrikandu will never harm you. Have faith that I will always remain as your well-wisher and protector."

After saying this, Lord Vishnu vanished, then and there. Being delighted in their minds, the demigods returned home. Thereafter, Lord Vishnu revealed Himself to the sage, Mrikandu. Opening his eyes, while coming out of his trance of meditation, the sage was astonished to see the Lord before him, dressed in yellow garments and holding in His hands the disc, club, lotus and conch. Indeed, Mrikandu's hair stood on end and tears flowed from his eyes. Quickly, he got up and then fell to the ground like a stick to offer his obeisances.

While washing the lotus feet of the Lord with his tears, the sage Mrikandu offered his prayers in a faltering voice: "I worship the Supreme Lord, who is the original person, and who is freed from all kinds of material misconceptions. I bow down to that Lord who frees the devotees that are completely absorbed in meditation upon Him and that are free from all unwanted habits from the repetition of birth and death in this world. Indeed, the Lord is so kind that he reveals Himself to such pure devotees."

Being very pleased, Lord Vishnu embraced the sage with His four arms while saying, "You are a strict observer of religious vows! Ask for any benediction you may desire. I am gratified by your performance of austerities and your offering of prayers."

Mrikandu replied, "O God of gods, O Lord of the universe, I am completely satisfied just by seeing You here before me. I am seeing You, whom even Lord Brahma can rarely see! Considering this, what more could I ask for?"

"O Lord, simply by the remembrance of Your holy name, even a person who has committed terrible sins can attain the highest destination. What then can be said about those who see You face to face?"

The glorious Lord said, "O learned brahmana, what you say is true. I am really pleased with you and so your meeting with me cannot prove fruitless. Learned scholars say, 'Lord Vishnu treats His devotees as if they were members of His personal family.' I shall insure that these



words of My devotees always remain true. To reciprocate your devotion, I shall become your son. Rest assured that the family in which I incarnate attains liberation from material existence."

After saying this, the Lord vanished from the sage's vision.

Narada Muni inquired, "Please tell me how it came to be that the Lord became Mrikandu's son. After appearing in the family of Bhrigu, what did He do?"

Sanaka Kumara continued his narration: After the completion of his austerities, Mrikandu entered household life. His chaste wife then gave birth to a son who was considered to be a ray of the effulgence of Lord Vishnu. The sage Mrikandu was delighted to have received such a lustrous and qualified son. When the boy was five, he awarded him the sacred thread and began instructing him in the Vedas.

Mrikandu taught his son, Markandeya, "You should only associate with those who are devoted to Lord Vishnu. Do not entertain any hatred or hostility toward anyone. Plan your life in such a way that the activities you perform will be for the welfare of all living beings."

Being thus ordered by his father, Markandeya began to fix his mind upon the Supreme Lord, Hari. He became a lover of piety and was always true to his word. He was splendid, like the sun. He was fully self-controlled and very learned. By performing great penance, Markandeya satisfied the Lord, who then awarded him the benediction of having the right to compose a Purāṇa (the Markandeya Purāṇa).

Later, when the universe was withdrawn and all that remained was a vast expanse of water, the Lord did not include Markandeya with all the other conditioned souls that remained within Him in an unmanifest condition. As the Lord lay upon the water of devastation, Markandeya remained with Him.

Here it is mentioned that one year of the earth is equal to one day and night of the demigods. In other words, the period known as uttarayana (when the sun is in the north) is the day of the demigods, and the period known as dakṣinayana (when the sun is in the south) is the night of the demigods.

A day of the Pitris is equal to one month, or the time from one new moon day to the next new moon day. By human calculation, one thousand yuga cycles makes Lord Brahma's day. By Lord Brahma's calculation, his entire lifetime, referred to as dvi-parardha, is equal to one

day of Lord Vishnu. The period of Lord Vishnu's night is the same.

Thus, for that period of time, Markandeya lay within the water of devastation, being sustained by the spiritual potency of Lord Vishnu, who was lying in yoga-nidra. All the while, Markandeya stayed close by, meditating upon the Lord. Thereafter, at the proper time, Lord Vishnu awoke and then manifested Himself as Lord Brahma, for the creation of the universe. Upon seeing the universe to be once again manifested, Markandeya felt great delight and offered his obeisances at the lotus feet of the Lord.

Markandeya prayed, "I offer my obeisances to the Lord, who needs no support from others, for He is the support of everything. The Lord cannot be measured because He is unlimited. His age cannot be estimated because He is eternal. Although manifest in unlimited forms, the Supreme Lord is an individual person. Unto this Lord, I offer my respectful obeisances."

Lord Vishnu said, "Those who are My unalloyed devotees in this world are called Bhagavatas. I am always pleased with them and so give them all protection. Indeed, it is I alone who manifests My potency within such devotees for the protection of the world."

Markandeya asked, "What are the characteristics of such Bhagavatas? Kindly explain this to me."

The Lord said, "Listen as I describe to you the characteristics of the Bhagavatas although it is not possible to fully do so, even with a duration of millions of years. The Bhagavatas are those who are benefactors of all living beings, who are devoid of jealousy and covetousness, and who exercise self-control. Those who do not trouble others, by thoughts, words or deeds, and who are inclined to renounce their possessions for a proper cause are known as Bhagavatas. Those who are devotees of Lord Vishnu and who are inclined to listening to narrations from the shastra are Bhagavatas."

"Those excellent persons who speak only what is beneficial to others and who appreciate the merit of others are Bhagavatas. Those who perceive others as being on a level as their own selves and who are inclined to only speak that which is truthful are to be known as Bhagavatas. Those who are interested in rendering service to cows and brahmanas and who enjoy going to places of pilgrimage are indeed Bhagavatas. Those who rejoice upon seeing the prosperity of others

and who are devoted to the chanting of the holy name of the Lord are excellent Bhagavatas."

"Those who feel ecstasy upon hearing the holy names of the Lord and whose hair stands on end at the mention of the holy names are indeed the best of Bhagavatas. Those men who bow down upon seeing the tulasi plant are Bhagavatas."

"O brahmana, you should also practice bhagavata-dharma in all respects and offer refuge to all who seek it. Practice meditation on My eternal, transcendental form until the end of this age and you will surely attain the highest destination."

After saying this, the Lord suddenly disappeared from view. Thereafter, Markandeya continued his practice of austerity at the sacred place, Shalagrama. At last, becoming freed from all material entanglement, he attained the highest destination.

Narada Muni then asked, "O sage, please tell me which is the most excellent of all holy places."

Sanaka Kumara replied, "Great sages say that the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna is the most excellent of sacred places. All devas, headed by Brahma, come there to attain pious credit."

"O sage, the Ganga is considered to be the chief of all rivers. Simply by remembering the Ganga, all of one's sins are destroyed. Therefore, the place known as Prayaga should be known as the most sacred of all places on this earth. Bath in all other sacred waters cannot be said as equal to even a fraction of the merit of bathing in the Ganga. Ganga, having emanated from the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu, is worthy of being resorted to by great sages and demigods and so, what to speak of human beings."

"If a sinful person even sees one who has bathed in the Ganga, he can attain the celestial world after death. The dirt touching the tulasi plant; the dust from the feet of brahmanas; and mud from the riverbed of the Ganga all award one with sarupya-mukti. He who says, even once, the two syllables Gan-ga becomes freed from all sinful reactions."

"There is no kinsman equal to tranquility. There is no greater penance than truthfulness. There is no greater acquisition than liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death, and there is no river on a par with Ganga."

"Simply by accepting a drop of Ganga water, a descendent of King Sagara had been saved from the fate of becoming a Rakshasa and instead had attained an exalted destination."

Narada Muni requested, "O sage, please tell me about Maharaja Sagara and the descendent in his family that was saved from becoming a Rakshasa."

In response, Sanaka Kumara narrated the following history. In the dynasty of Surya was born a king named Bahu, the son of Vrika. He was devoted to righteousness and he ruled the entire world. He performed a horse-sacrifice on each of the seven islands and he greatly gratified the brahmanas by gifts of charity. His ambition in life was to remove the misery of others and it was a fact that during his reign, the land yielded grain without being ploughed. The King of heaven showered rain at proper times and the earth was filled with fruit and flowers.

In the course of time, however, great arrogance—which is the cause of destruction of all opulence and the cause of all kinds of failure; and which is accompanied by jealousy—overtook King Bahu. He thought, "I am the lord of the earth and the protector of everyone. Who could be more worthy of worship than me? I am very clever and I have subdued all of my enemies. I am the knower of the Vedas and I am invincible. Who could be superior to me?"

As King Bahu's arrogance increased, jealousy and passion crept in because they are the sequel to such pride. When a man is overcome by vanity, enviousness, and passion, he undoubtedly becomes ruined. Youth, affluence, power, authority and indiscretion—even one of these can bring about one's ruination. What then can be said of a man who possesses them all?

King Bahu's jealous nature was not conducive to his worldly interests and it even began to destroy his body and health. If an envious person becomes too enamored by his wealth, it acts like a fire aided by gusts of wind to consume dry hay. There can be no happiness, in this life or the next, for a person who is envious. His conduct is always filled with hypocrisy and harsh words. For such envious people who are accustomed to speaking harshly, even wife and children are seen as enemies. When one cherishes within his mind the lusty desire to enjoy another man's wife, this is nothing but an axe that brings destruction to his well-being.



If one desires to bring about his own destruction, he should harbor within his mind malicious thoughts upon seeing the good of others. If a man feels inclined to lose his friends, relations, house, land, wealth, and other assets, he should indulge in jealousy as much as possible.

When King Bahu became very proud and arrogant, and thus possessed of jealousy, the kings of the Haihaya and Talajangha dynasties became inimical to him. It is a fact that if the Supreme Lord, Narayana, is pleased with someone, that person's fortune will flourish. On the other hand, if the Lord becomes displeased with someone, that person's fortune will certainly diminish. If the Lord casts His glance favorably upon someone—even if he is foolish, blind or deaf—he will become heroic, praiseworthy and intelligent.

When a person is contaminated with jealousy, his good fortune begins to dwindle and hatred towards others grows within his mind. Lord Viṣṇu becomes averse to a person who continuously hates others and so a wise man should avoid excessive pride by all means.

King Bahu engaged in battle for one month with his enemies, the Haihayas and Talajanghas, and was ultimately defeated and so retired to the forest, accompanied by his two wives, one of who was pregnant. Although dejected, when King Bahu came to a nice lake within the forest, he felt pleasure upon seeing it. And yet, miraculously, when the birds residing there perceived the king's envious nature, they hid themselves while exclaiming, "Alas! What a terrible form has appeared here!"

Accompanied by his two wives, King Bahu entered the lake and drank its water. After coming out, he rested underneath a tree.

When the king had left for the forest, the citizens had censured him greatly while simultaneously being relieved because of his departure. A man possessed of good qualities deserves to be praised by everyone, no matter who he may be. But, a man who is devoid of all good qualities, no matter how rich he may be, deserves to be censured by all. There is nothing comparable to infamy in this world for it is more painful than death. When King Bahu entered the forest, the people of his kingdom felt relief, as if an inflammation of their eyes had subsided. Being hated by everyone, King Bahu remained in the forest like a dead man.

There is no death like infamy. There is no enemy like anger. There is no sin like fault-finding, and there is no intoxication like delusion. There is no infamy like jealousy. There is no fire like passion. There is

no trap like attachment and there is no poison like intimate association with women.

Being extremely dejected, King Bahu lamented like this. Due to anxiety and old age, his body became wasted. After the passage of a long time, the king became very ill and finally died in the vicinity of the hermitage of the great sage Aurva. The younger wife was highly aggrieved and so, after lighting the funeral pyre and placing the dead body of her husband upon it, she started to enter the fire, desiring to accompany her husband, even though she was pregnant. The sage Aurva understood this, being the knower of all that happens—past, present and future. Aurva Muni went to the place where King Bahu's wife was standing.

Seeing that she was about to enter the fire, Aurva Muni said, "O chaste woman, do not proceed with this risky venture. An emperor of the world lies within your womb! It is prohibited for a pregnant woman to ascend her husband's funeral pyre, as it is for a girl who has not yet attained puberty. There is mention of atonement for various sins, even the killing of a brahmana, but there is no atonement for an imposter, one who slanders, an atheist, an ungrateful person, a treacherous person, and a person who kills the embryo within the womb. Do not think of committing this sin. Rest assured that the misery that has befallen you will completely subside in due course of time."

That chaste lady accepted the words of the sage and gave up her attempt to enter the funeral pyre. She clasped the feet of her dead husband and cried bitterly.

The sage Aurva said, "Do not cry. You will soon attain great prosperity. Simply cremate the body of your dead husband. Death is inevitable for all—whether rich or poor, intelligent or foolish. The material body is surrounded by countless pains and ailments. It is subject to much misery and only a semblance of happiness. It is bound by the reactions of past karma."

In this way, the sage consoled that chaste lady, who then carried out her duty with regards to the funeral of her husband. Then, as the sage looked on, the king rose out of the flames and ascended a celestial chariot. After bowing to Aurva Muni, the king attained his heavenly destination. Even sinful men attain an exalted destination if their dead body is glanced upon by a great soul. Finally, the chaste woman and her

co-wife accompanied the sage to his hermitage, where they continued to render service to him.

After six months, however, the elder co-wife became envious of the good fortune of the younger, pregnant queen, and so she gave her poison. The poison proved to be ineffective, however, due to the service rendered by the queen to the sage. Finally, after three more months, King Bahu's younger queen gave birth to a son, along with the poison.

What sin is there that cannot be destroyed by the association of a great soul? Service rendered to great souls immediately vanquishes the reactions to all sins performed knowingly or unknowingly, or by the compulsion of others.

Upon seeing how poison had been born along with a son, the sage Aurva named him Sagara. The queen raised her son with great affection and at the proper time, the sage awarded him the sacred thread. When he grew up, Sagara was trained by the sage in the use of weapons and their corresponding mantras, as well as in knowledge of shastra. Thus, Sagara became very powerful, righteous, grateful and intelligent. Every day, he would bring wood, kusha grass, water and flowers for his spiritual master.

One day, Sagara humbly bowed before his mother and inquired, "Please tell me. Where is my father? What is his name? In which family was he born?"

"Those who are without a father in this world are as good as dead. Life is futile for an orphan, an ignorant person, a childless man, and one immersed in debt. A boy without his father is like a night devoid of the moon, a lake without lotuses and a woman without a husband. A child without a father is like a statement devoid of truthfulness, an assembly without good men, and penance without compassion."

Upon hearing all this, the poor mother felt distressed. While sighing deeply, she told her son all that had happened in her life. After hearing about the death of his father, Sagara became mad with rage and made the following vow: "I will kill all of my enemies without fail!"

After circumambulating Aurva Rishi and receiving his blessings, Sagara departed. First, he went to the great sage Vasishtha, his family priest, and explained everything to him, although the sage already knew of what had happened by means of his power of austerity. From Vasishtha, Prince Sagara acquired celestial weapons, including a sword

and bow equal to Indra's thunderbolt.

After receiving the blessings and permission of the sage Vasishtha, Sagara departed. Soon thereafter, Prince Sagara fought with his enemies. Those who were not killed fearfully fled to the shelter of Vasishtha. Understanding this from his spies, Sagara, now the conqueror of the world, approached his preceptor. Understanding that Sagara had arrived, Vasishtha thought for awhile because he wanted to save those who had sought his shelter, and also gratify his disciple. Finally, to please everyone, Vasishtha made the Shabaras shave their heads, the Yavanas keep long hair, and the Andhras keep their moustaches while shaving their heads. All of them were rejected from Vedic society.

Upon seeing how Vasishtha had treated his enemies, Sagara laughed heartily and then said, "It is in vain that you are protecting these wicked persons. By all means, I shall see that they are killed because it is they who had deprived me of my father. If one looks upon one's enemies, seeing them as friends (or without enmity), he himself becomes the cause of his destruction. Those who are actually sinful by nature act piously as an outward show, as long as the king's controlling power is sufficient."

"One who desires his own welfare should not believe in the friendliness and subservience of one's enemies, the profession of love by a prostitute, and the innocent appearance of a serpent. As long as one is powerful, the wicked joke and speak pleasantries but when there is a reversal in one's position, these same people will devour one. One should never believe in the outward show of goodness exhibited by wicked people. A person who believes in the following is no better than dead—a friend that acts deceitfully, a wicked man who shows submission, and a wife who acts unfaithfully."

Sagara concluded by saying to Vasishtha, "Please do not give protection to these wicked persons. Outwardly, they may appear like cows but internally, they are like tigers. After killing all these wicked men, I will rule over the earth, by your grace."

Vasishtha was very pleased by Sagara's speech. While stroking his body, he said, "You have spoken well! Still, you will attain good fortune if you heed my words. Those persons who were actually inimical to you have already been killed by their destinies. Everyone in this world is already killed as a result of their fruitive activities. What can



you gain by killing them again? The physical body is produced as a result of one's sinful activities and those same sins thus condemn one to death (for wherever there is birth, death is certain). The embodied soul, however, cannot be killed, for he is eternal. The embodied soul is just an instrument in the enjoyment of his previous fruitive activities. Therefore, my son, please do not think of killing these men who are already in the jaws of death."

After hearing this, Prince Sagara gave up his anger. Thereafter, the sage Vasiṣṭha performed his coronation ceremony, installing him as the emperor of the world. Sagara had two wives, the daughters of Vidarbha, who belonged to the dynasty of Kāshyapa. Their names were Keshini and Sumati.

Thereafter, from time to time, Aurva Muni would come visit King Sagara and give him instructions. On one such occasion, the queens requested him to benedict them in such a way that they would have children. After going into a trance of meditation, Aurva Muni informed them, "One of you will give birth to a single son who will continue your dynasty. The other will give birth to sixty thousand sons. Now, it is up to you to choose which of you will have one son and which will have sixty thousand."

Queen Keshini chose to have one son and so, later on, sixty thousand sons were born to Sumati. The son of Keshini was named Asamanjasa. He was very mischievous, however, and upon seeing his evil behavior, the other sixty thousand boys also became degraded. While seeing the despicable activities performed by his son, King Sagara became very anxious and pondered over the matter deeply. He thought, "How painful it is to have the association of wicked people!"

After growing up, Asamanjasa had a son named Amshuman. He was very pious and always did that which was pleasing to his grandfather whereas the sons of Sagara were all evil-minded and harassed the people. In fact, they took pleasure in obstructing the religious observances of the citizens. They drove off the demigods and enjoyed the sacrificial offerings made by the brahmanas. They would take the Apsaras, such as Rambha, by force, dragging them by the hair, and enjoy them against their will. They were addicted to drinking wine, and they took parijata flowers from heaven and used them to decorate their bodies.

Because of the behavior of Sagara's sons, the demigods, headed by Indra, became distressed and began thinking of the means of their destruction. After making up their minds, they disguised themselves and approached the sage, Kapila, who was at that time engaged in meditation beneath the surface of the earth.

After falling flat to offer obeisances, the demigods prayed to Kapila Muni, praising Him highly as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In reply, Kapila Muni instructed that those who harass innocent people soon meet with destruction. Kapila Muni assured the demigods that Sagara's sons would meet with death in a very few days.

Meanwhile, King Sagara began the performance of a horse-sacrifice, under the guidance of the sage, Vasishtha. During the sacrifice, Indra came and stole the sacrificial horse and left it near to where Kapila Muni was in meditation. The sons of Sagara then searched throughout the world for the horse. When they failed to find it, the sons of Sagara dug the earth and began to search in the nether regions. There, they came upon Kapiladeva, whose form was greatly effulgent, absorbed in a trance of meditation. When they saw the sacrificial horse nearby, the sons of Sagara became mad with rage and rushed to attack Kapila Muni, shouting, "Let us kill him, for he has stolen our horse! He is certainly most wicked for pretending to be in meditation."

Kapiladeva didn't even notice the sons of Sagara's actions as some of them kicked him while others grabbed His arms. Finally, being thus disturbed, Kapila Muni came out of His trance and said in a booming voice: "The following persons lose all sense of discrimination; those who are arrogant due to wealth, those who are oppressed by hunger, those who are overwhelmed by lust, and those who are overly proud of themselves. If a wicked person becomes wealthy, this becomes the cause of great suffering in the world."

While giving such instructions, the infuriated Kapiladeva made flames issue forth from His eyes, instantly reducing the sons of Sagara to ashes. Upon seeing this, the inhabitants of the lower planets thought that the time of dissolution had arrived prematurely. Indeed, innumerable Rakshasas and Nagas were scorched by the fire and so they entered the ocean for relief.

A messenger from the demigods then came and informed King Sagara of what had happened. The king happily remarked, "The wicked

ones have finally been subdued by Fate. Whether a father, brother, mother or son, a sinful person should be considered one's enemy. This is the verdict of śāstra."

Thus it was seen that King Sagara was not sorry for the loss of his sons. The king then deputed his grandson, Amshuman, to retrieve the sacrificial horse. Amshuman went to where the sons of Sagara had excavated the earth and after entering the crevice, he came upon the sage, Kapila Muni.

After prostrating himself before Kapiladeva, Amshuman said, "Kindly forgive the offenses of my uncles. Sages who are engaged in working for the welfare of others are known to be forgiving. Indeed, saintly persons show mercy to even the wicked, just as the moon shines upon the dwelling of even a chandala. A good man, even when harassed and troubled, acts in a way that is pleasing to all, just as sandalwood, even when cut to pieces, renders the atmosphere fragrant."

After being praised by Amshuman, Kapiladeva said, "O sinless one, I am pleased with you and so you may ask for the benediction that you desire."

Amshuman requested, "If you are pleased with me then kindly allow my ancestors to attain liberation from the conditional life of material existence."

Kapiladeva said, "Your grandson will bring the Ganga to earth, thus enabling your ancestors to attain the highest regions. Now, return with this horse so that the sacrifice of your grandfather can be completed."

Thereafter, Amshuman returned to King Sagara and while handing over the sacrificial horse, he narrated to him all that had happened. King Sagara successfully completed the horse-sacrifice, with the help of the brahmanas, and at the end of his life, he attained the abode of the Lord, Hari. Amshuman's son was Dilipa and Dilipa's son was Bhagiratha, who brought the celestial river Ganga to earth. By the touch of the water of the Ganga, the sons of Sagara were delivered.

Later, in the line of Bhagiratha was born Sudasa. His son was Mitrasaha, who became a Rakshasa by the curse of Vasiṣṭha Muni. He became free from this curse when water of the Ganga was sprinkled over him.

Narada Muni inquired, "How was it that the son of Sudasa was cursed by Vasishtha Muni, and how was he purified by contact with the water of the Ganga? Kindly describe all this to me."

Sanaka Kumara continued the narration. The righteous son of Sudasa ruled the entire earth, consisting of seven islands and seven oceans. Once, while hunting in the forest, he became thirsty and so approached the river Narmada. After bathing, he had his meal and then spent the night there, along with his retinue. The next morning, the king resumed hunting and while riding upon his horse, he chased a deer, leaving his army far behind. Coming to a cave, Mitrasaha saw a tiger engaged in sexual intercourse with his mate. Leaving aside the pursuit of the deer, the king fitted his arrow onto his bowstring and struck the female tiger.

Immediately, the female tiger assumed the form of a hideous female Rakshasha, thirty-six yojanas tall, roaring fearfully. The male tiger then said with great hatred, "I shall take revenge for this" and after saying this, vanished then and there. Being fearful, the king rejoined his army, telling of what had happened, and then returned to his capital.

Thereafter, the son of Sudasa (Saudasa) always waited for the time when that Rakshasha would try to harm him. Because of this fear, he completely gave up hunting in the forest. After a long time had passed, Saudasa began to perform a horse-sacrifice under the direction of Vasishtha Muni and other sages.

At the completion of the sacrifice, Vasishtha Muni and the other priests left the sacrificial arena. At that time, the Rakshasha whose wife had been killed came there, disguised as Vasishtha, desiring revenge. Approaching Saudasa, he said, "I would like to have something to eat now. I wish to eat some meat."

Instantly, the Rakshasha again disguised himself as the king's cook. After preparing human flesh, he presented it to the king. Holding the pot made of gold, Saudasa awaited the return of Vasishtha Muni. When the real Vasishtha Muni returned, the king respectfully served him the human flesh. When he looked at the food before him, Vasishtha Muni wondered what it actually was and so he began to reflect on the matter deeply.

In his trance of meditation, the sage understood that it was human flesh that was served to him by the king. In great indignation, he said,

"How depraved is the character of the king who has served me this forbidden food, for the purpose of bringing about my ruination."

"O king, let this food be your regular diet. The food that you have served me is only fit for a Rakshasha and so let you now assume that form!"

Trembling with fear, Saudasa replied, "It was you who commanded me to serve you this food."

Upon hearing this, Vasishtha again contemplated the matter deeply and finally understood that the king had been deceived by a Rakshasha. At this moment, Saudasa touched water in preparation for cursing his preceptor, feeling that he had been wronged. Seeing this, the queen, Madayanti, a strict follower of religious vows, intervened by imploring, "Noble one, you should curb your anger because one who curses his preceptor will certainly become a Brahma-rakshasha in the forest. Know for certain that the fate that has befallen you is the result of your own karma."

Being dissuaded by his wife, the king gave up his attempt to curse his preceptor, thinking, "Where shall I throw this water that I had picked up for uttering the curse? Surely, wherever this water falls will be reduced to ashes."

Thinking in this way, Saudasa poured the water on his own feet. As a result, a black spot appeared on his foot and for this reason, he became known as Kalmashapada. Madayanti then tried to console her husband, who fearfully bowed down at preceptor's feet, saying, "Kindly forgive me for all that has happened. There is really no fault on my part."

Condemning his own thoughtlessness, Vasishtha Muni said to himself, "Lack of discrimination is the greatest cause of adversity. There is no doubt of this. One who lacks discrimination is no better than an animal. The king was unaware of the Rakshasha's mischief and so it is I who am at fault for cursing him."

Vasishtha then said to the king, "Don't worry, your curse will not be permanent. It will last for twelve years. After being sprinkled with water of the Ganga, you will give up your form as a Rakshasha and once again rule the earth. In addition, due to contact with the Ganga, you will be freed of all sins, become solely devoted to the service of the Lord, and thereafter attain His supreme abode."

After saying this, Vasishtha Muni returned to his ashrama while the king, filled with grief, accepted the form of a Rakshasha. In this form, he was always in a furious mood and oppressed by hunger and thirst. Having a terrifying appearance and a black complexion, he wandered throughout the forests, killing and devouring men, reptiles, birds and animals. Because of this, the very ground became littered with bones and dead bodies, the blood of which had been sucked out by the Rakshasha. In fact, within a period of six months, Saudasa would render a forest to the extent of a hundred yojanas littered with dead bodies and thus move on to another.

Finally, being accustomed to eating human flesh every day, Kalmasapada went to the banks of the river Narmada, the resort of many sages and Siddhas. One day, while wandering by the side of the river, he came upon a sage engaged in amorous play with his consort. Being oppressed by hunger, he went and grabbed the sage.

Upon seeing her husband struggling in the grips of the Rakshasha, the brahmana lady folded her hands and pleaded, "Please save me from this distress by releasing my husband, who is dearer to me than my own life. You are not actually a Rakshasha for you were born as the son of a king, named Mitrasaha. Now, please protect me, a woman, who is residing in this uninhabited forest. A woman who is bereft of her husband is as good as dead, although living. What then can be said of widowhood at an early age?"

"Sir, I am like your daughter. Be pleased to save me by giving me my husband as a charitable gift. The wise have said that there is no nobler charity than the saving of a person's life."

After saying this, that chaste lady fell at the feet of the Rakshasha. And yet, he devoured the brahmana right then and there, like a tiger devouring a fawn. Being infuriated, the brahmana woman cursed the Rakshasha, although he was already suffering from a curse: "Because you have killed my husband as he was engaged in sexual pleasure, the moment you try to unite with a woman, you will also die. And, because you devoured my husband, your term as a Rakshasha will never end!"

Upon hearing this, the Rakshasha became enraged and said, "Wicked woman, why have you cursed me twice, without reason? Because my offense was only one, you should have uttered a single curse. Because of this, you will become a female ghost this very day, in the



company of your son."

Being thus cursed, the brahmana lady immediately assumed a ghostly form. Being oppressed by hunger, she and her son departed, screaming in agony. Thereafter, as Kalmashapada, in the form of a Rakshasha, continued to wander in the forest, he came to where another Rakshasha was staying in a banyan tree. He had assumed that form due to exhibiting indifference toward his preceptor.

That Rakshasha addressed him as he approached: "Why have you come here, disturbing me? What sins did you commit to get such a ghastly form?"

In reply, Kalmashapada related the story of his life and then inquired, "Now, please tell me about yourself. Who are you? What sins did you commit to attain this state of life? As a friend, it behooves you to tell me truthfully. One's miseries immediately become diminished as soon as one sees his friend. That wicked-minded person who deceives his friend is tortured in hell for many millions of years. For this reason, no sensible person will ever deceive a friend."

Being so urged, the brahma-rakshasha said, "Formerly, I was a brahmana in the kingdom of Magadha, named Somadatta, and I was very devoted to the practice of dharma. Unfortunately, I became very proud and even arrogant due to my vast learning, wealth and youthful age. Because of this, I treated my preceptor with indifference and this was the cause of my coming to this condition of life. Now, I am disgusted with this life. As a Rakshasha, I have devoured thousands of brahmanas and still I am tormented by hunger and thirst."

Kalmashapada inquired about the nature of a preceptor and the brahma-rakshasha responded by listing various types of gurus. At Kalmashapada's urging, he explained that of all preceptors, the one who expounds the meaning of the Puranas is the greatest. He said, "Devas and rishis have said that the Puranas constitute the essence of the Vedas. Because of this, the teacher of the Puranas is the greatest of all preceptors. A person who regularly listens to the Puranas will certainly become devoted to dharma and attain happiness in this life and the next."

"Previously, I heard discourses on the Puranas from Gautama Muni, on the banks of the Ganga. Once, however, I went to worship Lord Shiva and even though Gautama Rishi was present there, I did not of-

fer him obeisances. He did not mind my neglect, but Lord Shiva could not tolerate my negligence and so turned me into a Rakshasha. As soon as one disrespects his preceptor; his intelligence, learning, wealth and religious merit perish."

Miraculously, as the brahma-rakshasha was thus instructing Kalmashapada, the sins of both of them were vanquished. At that time, a brahmana named Garga, from the kingdom of Kalinga (Orissa) came there, carrying a container of Ganga water on his shoulder and singing the names of Lord Vishnu. Upon seeing him, Kalmashapada rushed at him, exclaiming, "My breakfast has arrived!" Because of hearing his recitation of Lord Vishnu's names, however, he was not able to attack him.

The brahma-rakshasha residing in the banyan tree then said, "My obeisances unto you, noble-minded brahmana. Due to your recitation of Lord Vishnu's names, we Rakshashas have to stay at a distance from you. We have already devoured thousands of brahmanas but the holy name of Lord Vishnu has saved you. Indeed, even we have attained great satisfaction by hearing the names of Lord Achyuta. Except the hearing and chanting of the holy name of the Lord, which is the panacea for all the terrible miseries of material existence, by what other means can one attain liberation?"

"Now, please release us from the reactions to our sins by sprinkling over us some water of the Ganga. The conduct of good men contributes to the happiness of all, just as the moon gives delight to everyone."

The brahmana was very pleased to hear the Rakshasha's speech. He thought, "Even among the Rakshashas there is so much devotion for the Ganga."

The brahmana sprinkled Ganga water over the Rakshashas and when this was done, they immediately gave up their horrible forms and assumed bodies like those of devas. Indeed, the brahmana Somadatta ascended to the abode of the Lord, having achieved sarupya-mukti, liberation of having a four-armed form like that of the Lord.

Kalmashapada regained his form as a king but because the brahma-rakshasha had attained liberation, he felt unhappy, thinking that his fortune was inferior. A voice from the sky then announced: "O King, do not be depressed. At the end of your period of enjoyment on earth, you will also attain the abode of Lord Vishnu. There is no doubt that those who are engaged in the devotional service of Lord Vishnu will

attain His eternal abode.”

Mitrāsaha felt satisfied to hear this and while constantly chanting the holy names of the Lord, he proceeded to Varanasi. He remained there for six months, bathing in the Ganga every day. Thereafter, he returned to his capital and was installed upon the throne by the sage, Vasishtha. Later on, his wife delivered a son that was conceived within her womb by Vasishtha Muni.

Narada Muni said, “If you consider me to be worthy, kindly tell me about the origin of the Ganga, whose source is the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu.”

Sanaka Kumara narrated the story as follows: There was a sage named Kashyapa and Diti and Aditi, who were daughters of Dakṣa, were his wives. Aditi was the mother of the devas and Diti was the mother of the Daityas. These two wives and their sons always sought to vanquish one another. The first Daitya was Hiranyakāshipu and Prahlaḍa was his son. Prahlaḍa’s son was Virocana and his son was the heroic Bali, who became the leader of the Daityas’ armies. After conquering the earth, Bali desired to conquer heaven. Bali had one hundred sons, the eldest of whom was Bana.

When Bali and his army of Daityas laid siege to Amaravati, Indra and the other demigods came to fight with him. The great battle that ensued lasted for eight thousand years and at last, the demigods fled, being overwhelmed. Assuming the forms of human beings, they began wandering over the earth.

Thereafter, Bali carried out the duties of Indra and the other Lokapalas while worshiping Lord Viṣṇu by the performance of sacrifice. Being very distressed, the mother of the demigods, Aditi, went to the Himalayas to perform austerities for one thousand celestial years, for the benefit of her sons. Indeed, for a long time, she stood on one leg while finally subsisting upon air alone.

When Bali learned of this, he commanded the Daityas to assume the forms of Devas and approach Aditi. Coming before her, they said, “O mother, why do you perform this austerity and thus torment your body? If the Daityas learn of this, they will certainly harm us. Therefore, please give up your penance at once. Those who are wise have said that to give trouble to the body is to give trouble to the soul and so kindly desist from these austerities.”

"Those who are devoid of a mother are no better than dead. There is no happiness to be derived without one's mother. Even if one is poor or sick, he derives great joy by the mere sight of his mother. A person may develop aversion to food, wealth and even lovely women but there is no one who turns his face away from his mother. One who has neither a mother nor a chaste and devoted wife at home should go and live in the forest."

And yet, even though she was thus petitioned by her sons, Aditi was not in the least disturbed from her trance of meditation on Lord Narayana. Upon being neglected like this, the Daityas became enraged and wanted to kill Aditi. Their eyes turned red and due to the gnashing of their fangs, fire was created that burned the entire forest for one hundred yojanas. Indeed, the Daityas themselves were burned so that only Aditi remained alive, being protected by Lord Vishnu's Sudarshana cakra.

Narada Muni said, "This seems miraculous. How could the forest fire spare Aditi while consuming all the Daityas in a moment?"

Sanaka Kumara continued his narration by saying, "Just consider the greatness of those who are pure devotees of Lord Hari. Is there any person capable of harassing a saintly person who is constantly engaged in meditation upon the Lord? The demigods, headed by Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, as well as the leaders of the sages reside permanently with a person engaged in the pure devotional service of the Lord. Lord Hari resides within the hearts of those who constantly chant His holy names."

After the forest was consumed, along with the Daityas, while Aditi remained unharmed due to the protection of the Sudarshana chakra, Lord Vishnu appeared before her, holding a conch, disc, lotus and chakra in His hands. Illuminating all sides with His effulgence, the Lord touched Aditi with His hand and said, "O mother of the devas, I am very pleased with you because you have worshiped Me for such a long time while performing very severe austerities. Ask for any benediction from Me, according to your desire and rest assured that I will grant it."

Aditi bowed to Lord Vishnu and said, "O Lord of the devas, I offer my obeisances unto You. You are the primeval person, the original cause of the universe and the controller of maya. O maintainer of the helpless, please protect my sons, who are being harassed by the Daityas.

I don't wish any harm for the Daityas but at the same time, I would like my sons to regain their prosperity."

The Lord said, "Gentle lady, I am pleased with you and so I shall become your son. It is rare for a woman to have affection for the sons of her co-wife. He who treats his own son and the son of another equally will never experience sorrow due to separation from his son."

Aditi said, "O Lord, I will not be able to bear You within my womb. You are the greatest personality and universes come from the pores of Your body. Considering this, how will I be able to keep You within my womb? Of course, it is up to You to do as You wish."

Upon hearing this, the Lord granted Aditi the benediction of fearlessness and then said, "You have spoken truthfully but I will disclose to you something very confidential. To those devotees who worship me, being freed from all attachment and hatred, and who are devoid of jealousy and without hypocrisy—I always come and dwell within their hearts."

"Gentle lady, you value your husband more than your own life. You are virtuous and you take delight in the welfare of all living beings and so I will become your son, just to fulfill your desire."

After saying this, the Lord took off His necklace and presented it to Aditi. After doing so, He vanished from sight. Aditi bowed down to the Lord and then returned home. In due course of time, she gave birth to a son named Vamana, who was Lord Vishnu Himself. Kashyapa Muni was overwhelmed with joy and he offered nice prayers to the Lord.

Lord Vamana responded, "My dear father, I am pleased with you and shall accomplish all of your desires. In your previous two births, I was also your son."

Meanwhile, Bali began a great sacrificial performance under the guidance of Sukracharya and other brahmanas. Bidding farewell to His mother and father, Vamana went to his sacrificial arena. It is as if He were going to the sacrifice to personally accept the offerings being made by Bali. When the sacrificial priests saw Vamanadeva approaching, they knew Him to be Lord Vishnu and so they stood up to show respect.

Sukracharya then said to Bali, "Lord Vishnu has appeared as Vamana, the son of Aditi, to deprive you of your opulence. Please take my advice and do not give Him anything, no matter what He might ask. One's intelligence is conducive to one's happiness and the intel-

ligence of the preceptor is even more so. But, the intelligence of an enemy is directed towards one's destruction and even more so is the intelligence of a woman. A benefactor of one's enemy should be killed without delay."

Bali replied, "O preceptor, you should not give advice that is contrary to virtue. If Lord Vishnu Himself comes to accept an offering from us, what greater fortune could there be? The gift that is given to Lord Vishnu is the greatest charity and its benefit is everlasting. I am performing this sacrifice for the satisfaction of Lord Vishnu and so if He has personally come here, I am highly satisfied."

As Bali was speaking, Lord Vamana entered the sacrificial arena. Bali stood up and greeted Him with folded hands. He then offered Vamanadeva a seat, washed His lotus feet and then sprinkled the water over his head and the heads of his family members. He then offered arghya and while doing so, he felt such great delight that his bodily hair stood on end and tears flowed from his eyes.

Bali said, "Today, I have attained the goal of human life and my sacrifice has borne fruit. O Lord, by Your arrival, a great festival has been observed without any effort. I offer my repeated obeisances unto You. Now, please order me. What is it that I should do?"

Smilingly, Lord Vamana replied, "Kindly give me as much land as can be covered by My three steps so that I can stand there and perform austerities."

Bali replied, "You have not requested a kingdom, a village or any amount of wealth. What kind of gift have You requested?"

The Lord then spoke with the intention of creating detachment in Bali, who was about to lose his kingdom: "O lord of the Daityas, please consider this carefully. Of what value is wealth for a person who has given up all worldly association and attachment? For those who perceive all living beings as on a level as their own selves—who is the giver and what can be given? I am the inner controller of all and everything in existence is within Me. What then can I gain by obtaining something in charity?"

"O Bali, the earth is under the control of the kshatriyas and it is the duty of the citizens to give them one-sixth of all production. Still, the duty of a ksatriya is to give in charity to the brahmanas. A gift of land is considered to be the best of gifts. By giving a small piece of land



to a brahmana who is well versed in the Vedas, the donor will be freed of all sinful reactions. In this regard, kindly listen as I relate to you an ancient history."

Formerly, in the Brahma-kalpa, there lived a brahmana named Bhadramati, who was very poor and had no means of livelihood. He was a great scholar of the Vedas and Puranas and he had six wives—Shruti, Sindhu, Yashovati, Kamini, Malini and Shobha. From his wives, he had two hundred and forty sons and yet, all of them suffered from hunger due to poverty to the extent that they were practically on the verge of starvation.

Himself being famished, the brahmana, Bhadramati lamented, "To hell with a life devoid of wealth. Oh, pity the life of a man bereft of prosperity and burdened with wives and children. Virtues such as scholarship, gentleness and nobility of birth do not shine in a man who is immersed in the ocean of poverty! Everyone, even near and dear ones, forsake a man who is without wealth."

"A poor man is condemned almost like a dead body. A wealthy man is honored as being kind, even though he may be ruthless; and he is thought of as learned, even if he is a great fool. One becomes praiseworthy simply by possessing wealth. Oh, poverty is miserable but even more miserable is the expectation of gaining something from others. Those who maintain the false hope of getting something from others suffer everlastingly. Those who harbor such expectations are the slaves of all in this world but those who have subdued such a desire are honored by all. Even a learned scholar is thought of as a fool if he is poor. Who can rescue such a person who is overwhelmed by poverty?"

After lamenting like this at great length, the brahmana, Bhadramati, concluded that the gift of land, being the best means of attaining merit, should be resorted to. For this purpose, he went to the city of Kaushambi, along with his wives and children, and approached a leading brahmana there, named Sughosha, hoping to obtain a small plot of land.

Sughosha considered Bhadramati to be a worthy recipient of charity and so he happily gave him the land as requested, feeling that he had been given an opportunity to obtain great pious credit. While offering the land, Sughosha chanted the required mantra: "The earth belongs to Lord Vishnu and it is protected by Lord Vishnu. It is my hope that

Lord Vishnu is pleased by my gift of land."

At the end of their lives, both brahmanas achieved exalted destinations. Bhadramati attained the abode of Lord Brahma and thereafter, residence in the abode of Indra before once again being born on earth in a highly prosperous family. In that birth, he gave much land in charity to impoverished brahmanas and by this act, he greatly pleased Lord Vishnu so that he ultimately became liberated from the vicious cycle of repeated birth and death.

Vamanadeva concluded His narration by once again requesting, "O lord of the Daityas, please give Me a piece of land measuring three of My footsteps so that I can perform My penance there."

Being delighted with Vamanadeva's speech and behavior, the son of Virochana picked up his water pitcher to grant the land as requested. Sukracharya then obstructed the flow of water from the pitcher in an attempt to thwart the intended gift of charity. Upon seeing this, Bali took the kusha grass that he held in his hand and placed the tip in the mouth of the pitcher. That kusha grass was imbued with the power of Brahma and had the effulgence of many suns. Desiring to pluck out Sukra's eye, the tip of the kusha grass said, "O Bhargava, see with equal vision both the demigods and the demons."

At this, Vamanadeva began to expand His body and while doing so, He covered the entire universe with two steps. Indeed, His toe pierced the coverings of the universe so that water from the Garbhodaka Ocean rushed through, washing His lotus feet, thus giving it the power to purify the entire world. That water fell on the top of Mount Meru and upon seeing this, the demigods offered prayers in glorification of the Lord.

Thereafter, the Lord arrested Bali because he had failed to fulfill his promise of providing three paces of land. Still, in consideration of his being His devotee, the Lord awarded him the rule of the lower planet, Rasatala, where He would remain as Bali's doorman.

Narada Muni said, "I have heard from you about the origin of the river Ganga. Now, please speak some more about the giving of charity and describe those persons who are worthy recipients of such charity."

Sanaka Kumara said, "The brahmanas are the preceptors of society and so charitable gifts should be given to them. Charity should never be accepted by a kshatriya or a vaishya. Whatever gifts are given to one who has a fiery temper, who is sonless, or who is addicted to hypo-

critical behavior and thus avoids his proper execution of duty, is futile. Whatever is given to a perpetual beggar, to one who indulges in sex with another man's wife, and to one who covets the wealth of others, is also futile."

"Those who do not help others, think well of others, and speak nicely about others are considered the most sinful of men. Do not the trees have life? Just see how they are engaged in helping others by giving shade, fruit, and wood. O Narada, listen as I narrate to you an ancient history."

Formerly, there lived a king named Bhagīratha, a descendent of King Sagarā. He ruled the entire earth, he was as handsome as the god of love, he performed countless sacrifices, he was courageous in battle and he was very pious. Knowing of the king's exalted character, Dharmarāja, the lord of justice, appeared before him and said, "O king, you are the most excellent among those who practice righteousness. Upon hearing of your fame, I have come to speak with you."

Maharāja Bhagīratha bowed down to offer respect to Dharmarāja and then said, "You are the impartial witness of all that is occurring in this world. Kindly favor me by answering my questions. What are the destinations of those who are righteous? What tortures are there in hell and to who are they meted out? Who are those that are honored by you and who are those that are fit to be chastised?"

Dharmarāja replied, "You have inquired well! I shall explain to you what are acts of righteousness and what are acts of evil. It is not possible to describe all of the virtues and evils even with thousands of years at one's disposal and so I shall explain them in brief."

"The gift of a means of livelihood to a brahmana is glorified as being highly meritorious. One who bestows a means of livelihood to a scholar of Vedic literature who is decorated with all good qualities is extremely meritorious. Particles of dust may be counted. Drops of rain may be calculated but the benefit accrued by providing a brahmana with a means of livelihood cannot be estimated even by Lord Brahma."

In the course of his discussion, Dharmarāja narrated the following history: In the land of Gauda, there was a king named Virabhadra, who was heroic, learned, and ever respectful to the brahmanas. His queen was named Champakā-manjari. His ministers always considered matters in the light of dharma-shāstra. Because of the king's pious rule,

no one in his kingdom was ill-behaved and so the land of Gauda was like heaven.

One day, the king went to the forest to hunt, accompanied by his ministers. As fortune would have it, even by noon, he did not kill a single animal. Being tired, when the king came to a dried up lake in the forest, he thought, "Who has made this lake in an elevated place. How could we secure some water to quench our thirst?"

It then occurred to King Virabhadra that if the lake were further excavated, it might become filled with water. Thus, the king had the lake dug out so that water was eventually found and he and his entourage quenched their thirst.

The king's chief minister, Buddhisagara, then said, "O king, formerly this lake received plenty of rainwater. Now, with your permission, I would like to have a strong embankment built all around it."

The king gave his consent and personally took part in the construction. Dharmaraja concluded by saying to Bhagiratha, "When that lake was completed and filled with water, both travelers and animals of the forest benefited. Thereafter, when the king and his minister died and came to my abode, I was informed of their pious act and so rewarded them greatly."

In this way, Dharmaraja continued his conversation with Maharaja Bhagiratha, describing the merit achieved by building a temple of Lord Vishnu or Lord Shiva, by cleansing the temple of the Lord, by bathing the Deities with panchamrita, by clapping one's hands in front of the Deities, by playing musical instruments during kirtana, and other pious acts.

Dharmaraja discoursed at great length on various sinful and pious activities and their results, and he described the various hells and the types of punishment meted out to sinners. This description is similar as that given in the Fifth Canto of Shrimad-Bhagavatam and so it has not been included here. Finally, he said, "O king, I shall now disclose the purpose of my visit. Your grandfathers, who committed grievous sins, were burnt by the wrath of Kapiladeva and are now residing in hell."

"O pious ruler of men, you should deliver these sons of Sagara by bringing the Ganga to earth and covering their remains with her water. It is a fact that contact with the Ganga destroys all sins. If the ashes of a person's body are touched by the water of the Ganga, he will attain

the abode of Lord Viṣṇu. A man whose bones or ashes are cast into the Ganga by his relatives becomes freed from all sins and attains the supreme abode of the Lord. Indeed, whatever sins were mentioned by me are destroyed simply by the sprinkling of some drops of Ganga water."

Sanaka Kumara said, "Thereafter, Maharaja Bhagiratha went to the Himalayas and performed austerities near the ashrama of Nara and Narayana Rishis. By means of that penance, he caused the Ganga to descend to earth."

Narada Muni said, "Please tell me what King Bhagiratha did after reaching the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas."

Sanaka Kumara continued his narration: As Bhagiratha Maharaja was going to the Himalayas, when he came to the banks of the Godavari, he saw the ashram of Bhrigu Muni. When the king entered the hermitage, he saw deer roaming freely and peacocks dancing joyfully. There were sages engaged in chanting the Vedic mantras as well as the texts of various scriptures. The king approached Bhrigu Muni, who shone like the sun and was surrounded by many disciples.

King Bhagiratha touched the sage's feet and made other gestures of respect. He then said, "O sage, I am very afraid of material existence. Please tell me what can bring about the end of the cycle of repeated birth and death in this world. What acts cause the Supreme Lord to become gratified with the performer?"

Bhrigu Muni replied, "I understand your desire. You are the most excellent among meritorious persons, otherwise how is it that you desire to uplift your forefathers? I shall now tell you about the conduct whereby the Supreme Lord becomes pleased with His devotee."

"O king, be devoted to truth. Do not unnecessarily indulge in violence. Always act in a way that is for the welfare of all living entities. Perform the worship of Lord Viṣṇu and chant the twelve syllable mantra, om namo bhagavate vasudevaya, and the eight syllable mantra, om namo narayanaya. If you act in this way, your future welfare will be assured."

Maharaja Bhagiratha inquired, "Kindly describe to me the nature of truth and that of falsity. What is the nature of wicked people and what is regarded as the nature of good men? How is Lord Viṣṇu to be remembered? Please explain all this to me."

Bhrigu Muni said, "Your questions are excellent! The statement of that which is factually correct is called truth by learned men. Falsity is just the opposite. Those persons whose intelligence is always directed toward that which is not conducive to others' welfare are considered to be wicked. Those who follow the path chalked out by the Vedas and who therefore act for the well-being of all are glorified as good men. Lord Vishnu should be remembered by understanding how all things are in relation to Him and how all living entities are His eternal parts and parcels."

After instructing the king, Bhrigu Muni wished him all success in the performance of his penance. Maharaja Bhagiratha then departed and soon reached the Himalayas, where he entered a forest and began his execution of austerities. He bathed three times daily and subsisted upon fruit and roots. He passed his time absorbed in the worship of Lord Narayana.

After some time, King Bhagiratha began to eat only dry leaves and practice pranayama (control of the breath). At last, he performed his penance by entirely restraining his breath while continuing his meditation upon Lord Narayana. In this way, the king remained for sixty thousand years and a terrible fire emanated from his nostrils, scorching the devas. Being frightened, they approached Lord Vishnu, going to the northern shore of the Milk Ocean.

There, the demigods, headed by Indra, glorified the Lord. In response, Lord Vishnu awarded the demigods fearlessness by assuring them that He would make King Bhagiratha desist from his terrible austerities.

Thereafter, when the king saw Lord Vishnu before him, holding a conch, disc, club and lotus in His four hands, he fell flat onto the ground to offer obeisances. Rising up, Maharaja Bhagiratha beheld the Lord, whose eyes appeared like lotus flowers, whose complexion was like that of the atasi flower, who illuminated all directions with His effulgence, and whose lotus feet were being worshiped by all the demigods.

Being overwhelmed by feelings of ecstasy, the king could simply utter, "Krishna, Krishna, Krishna."

The Lord said, "O Bhagiratha, rest assured that your desire will be fulfilled. Your ancestors will come to live with Me in My transcendental abode. You should now worship Lord Shiva for it is with his help that

you will accomplish your purpose.”

After saying this, the Lord suddenly vanished from view. Being highly astonished, King Bhagiratha wondered whether he had been dreaming or whether his vision of the Lord was a reality. To dispel the king's perplexity, a voice from the sky announced, “Know that what you experienced is true indeed. There is no need for you to entertain any doubt in this matter.”

Thereafter, Maharaja Bhagiratha worshiped Lord Shiva with the offering of prayers wherein he emphasized that there is essentially no difference between Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. Lord Shiva is an expansion of Lord Vishnu and therefore, to view him as a separate entity is a product of ignorance.

Being highly gratified by King Bhagiratha's worship, Lord Shiva appeared before him at the completion of his penance. The king immediately fell at Lord Shiva's lotus feet, offering obeisances. Then, standing up, he gazed upon the lord, who possessed five heads, ten arms and three eyes, who wore a garment of elephant skin, and who was decorated with a sacred thread consisting of serpents.

Lord Shiva said, “I am pleased with you. Ask for the benediction you desire.”

Being thus encouraged, Maharaja Bhagiratha said, “If you wish to favor me then kindly grant me the Ganga for the purpose of liberating my ancestors.”

Lord Shiva gave his consent and the Ganga immediately poured forth from his matted locks and thereafter followed King Bhagiratha to where the ashes of Sagara's sons lay. As soon as these ashes were swept away by the current of the Ganga, the sons of Sagara were delivered from hell, where they had been severely tortured by Yamaraja. Indeed, when he realized that the Ganga had swept away their ashes, Yama bowed down to Sagara's sons, offered them much respect, and had them seated upon a celestial chariot that would carry them to the abode of the Lord.

The sages at Naimisaranya had been listening to this narration by Suta Gosvami and they praised him for describing the glories of the Ganga in such a nice way. They inquired, “What did Narada Muni next ask, after hearing about the greatness of the Ganga?”

Thus, Suta Gosvami continued to describe the conversation



between Narada Muni and Sanaka Kumara that took place long ago.

Narada Muni said, "Those who are saintly persons worship Lord Vishnu with great respect and attention and always strive for the welfare of others. They are eager to advise those who are ignorant, so as to bring them to the platform of actual happiness. Now, please tell me about those observances which, when performed, make Lord Vishnu satisfied. Because the Lord becomes pleased by pure devotional service, He does not easily award it."

In reply, Sanaka Kumara described in great detail the observance of Dvadashi and the worship of Lakshmi-Narayana in the temple. Then, he told about the vrata known as dhvaja-ropana, the installation of a flag atop the temple. There are a lot of observances and rituals to be performed before the installation of the flag and these are described here in great detail.

Sanaka Kumara concluded this discussion by saying, "One who installs a banner on top of the temple of Lord Vishnu and looks at it every day, attains heaven by the path known as devayana, just like King Sumati."

Narada Muni inquired, "Please tell me the history of King Sumati, who was mentioned by you."

Sanaka Kumara obliged by narrating the story as follows: Formerly, in the Krita-yuga, there lived a king named Sumati of the Soma dynasty. He was a great devotee of Lord Hari, being always absorbed in His worship and the narrations of His pastimes. He was very pious and truthful and he happily engaged in the service of the Vaishnavas.

Sumati's queen was named Satyamati. She was very chaste and endowed with all auspicious characteristics. Both husband and wife had the recollection of their past life and together, they would worship Lord Hari. On every Dvadashi, the king would place a nice flag atop the temple of Lord Vishnu. Knowing of King Sumati's reputation as a very pious devotee, the sage Vibhandaka came to visit him, along with his disciples.

Upon hearing of the arrival of the sage, the king and queen went out of the city to greet him, taking much paraphernalia for his worship. Finally, after having the sage seated comfortably, and himself taking a lower seat, King Sumati said, "I am very happy because of your visit. Good men always greatly praise the arrival of a saintly personality."

“O learned brahmana, my wife, sons, riches and whatever else I have are dedicated for your service. Tell me—what can I do to serve you?”

Being very pleased by the king’s humility, the sage fondly stroked him with his hand and said, “O king, your actions and words are just befitting your exalted lineage. It is humility alone that awards one the four puruṣharthas—virtue, wealth, enjoyment and liberation. What is it that is difficult to attain for noble souls such as you?”

“I wish to ask one thing of you. Of the many practices that are pleasing to Lord Viṣṇu, you engage in the installation of a flag atop the temple as your main method of worship. Your wife also simply engages in dancing before the Deity in the temple. Why is this—kindly explain to me.”

Maharaja Sumati said, “I know that my conduct, and that of my wife, are surprising to those who hear about them. Formerly, I was an evil-minded śudra named Malini. I hated righteousness, I constantly criticized others, and I acted in a way that was meant for others’ harm. Among other sinful acts, I used to plunder the wealth of temples, and kill cows and brahmanas. My speech was always harsh and I passed my time dallying with prostitutes.”

“After some time, I was abandoned by my kinsmen and so I went to live in the forest, where I ate the meat of deer and other animals and robbed whatever wayfarers came my way. It was a miserable life, however, being isolated from society. One very hot summer day, when I was utterly famished and thirsty, I came to an old, dilapidated temple of Lord Viṣṇu. Nearby was a lake teeming with swans and ducks. I drank the cool water and ate some fruit from the trees on the shore. In this way, I became refreshed and began to reside in that old, broken down temple.”

“Gradually, I repaired the temple by using pieces of wood and putting back the stones that had fallen. I kept it clean by sweeping the area daily. In this way, I continued living the life of a hunter, killing animals for my subsistence. In fact, I went on in this way for twenty years.”

“One day, a Nishada lady from the region of the Vindhya mountains happened to come there. Her name was Avakokila and she had also been abandoned by her kinsmen. Like me, she was very miserable and emaciated. Upon seeing her, I felt sympathy and so I gave her water, fruit and freshly killed meat. After being refreshed, she inquired from

me about my life and told me about hers. She had been rejected by her family because she was unchaste, a thief and a person who always maligned others. Still, her husband continued to maintain her but then he died. Ever since that time, she had been wandering in the forest until she one day came to where I was staying."

"Thereafter, we remained together as husband and wife, living in that temple and subsisting upon fruit and meat. Then, one night, after becoming intoxicated by drinking wine, we began to dance in the temple, blissfully unconcerned about our condition. At that time, as the result of our past fruitive activities, the duration of both of our lives came to an end."

"As we were absorbed in dancing, fierce looking Yamadutas appeared upon the scene with their nooses. Being pleased by our service of cleaning His temple, however, Lord Vishnu sent His servants to protect us. These four-armed Vishnudutas, who were splendid like the sun, forbade the Yamadutas from binding us."

"An argument then took place between the Vishnudutas and Yamadutas. The Yamadutas considered us to be great sinners and thus liable for punishment in hell. The Vishnudutas refuted this, however, pointing out that we had become freed from all sins by rendering devotional service to the Lord."

"The Vishnudutas said, 'At the time of death, this woman was dancing before the Deity of Lord Vishnu and this man had just installed a flag atop the temple. Because of this, they became absolved of all sins. Simply by chanting the holy name of the Lord, or even by hearing it, at the time of death, one attains the Lord's abode in the spiritual sky. What then can be said of those who engage in the Lord's service? These two have been cleansing the temple of the Lord and repairing it. How then can they deserve to experience the torments of hell?' "

"After saying this, the Vishnudutas cut our bonds and then took us in celestial chariots to the abode of Lord Vishnu within this material world. There, we were awarded forms like that of the Lord (sarupya-mukti). After remaining there for a very long time, again we were born on earth."

King Sumati concluded his narration to the sage, Vibhandaka, by saying, "By rendering service to the Lord, without desiring anything in return, we attained this wonderful result."

After hearing all this, the sage praised King Sumati highly and then returned to his ashram.

Next, Sanaka Kumara described at great length the glories of the Ekadashi-vrata. He emphasized that one should completely fast on Ekadashi, saying, "The man that desires to eat food on Ekadashi is one who seeks the enjoyment of all sins. Whatever sins there are, even the killing of a brahmana, abide in grains cooked on this day of Lord Hari (Ekadashi). For sins such as killing a brahmana, there may be some expiation but there is no redemption for one who eats on Ekadashi. On the other hand, if one is tainted by great sins, or even all types of sins, he can attain salvation from their reactions by refraining from food on Ekadashi. Ekadashi is a highly meritorious day, the most pleasing to Lord Vishnu."

As Sanaka Kumara continued describing the glories of Ekadashi, he related the following story. Formerly, a sage named Galava lived by the side of the Narmada river. His son was named Bhadrashila, who could remember his previous births. The boy was so devoted to Lord Narayana that even while playing with boys his age, he would make a Deity of the Lord out of clay and worship Him. While offering obeisances to the Deity, Bhadrashila would pray, "May there be well being for everyone in the world."

During the boy's play, he would often pretend that it was Ekadashi and thus dedicate that time for the service of the Lord. Upon seeing the wonderful conduct of his son, the sage Galava embraced him and said, "You truly deserve the name Bhadrashila (having auspicious conduct) for you are always devoted to worshiping Lord Hari and following the Ekadashi-vrata. Indeed, you are free from duality, devoid of false ego and very serene due to absorption in meditation upon the Lord."

"My dear son, people's minds are naturally directed toward ignorance and passion. How then have you attained attraction for the transcendental Lord? It must be the result of previous pious activities. That is the verdict of shastra."

Bhadrashila replied, "My dear father, I know all that I had previously done because I can remember my past lives. Formerly, I was a king in the Soma dynasty named Dharmakirti. I was a student of Dattatreya Rishi and I ruled the earth for nine thousand years."

"I became very proud and arrogant, however, due to my position,

and by associating with atheists, I gave up the Vedic path and engaged in all kinds of sinful activities. Upon seeing my example, the citizens also became degraded and as a result, I had to accept one-sixth of their sinful reactions.”

“One day, as I was hunting in the forest, I left my entourage. Being very tired, hungry and thirsty, I came to the banks of the river Reva. After bathing, I felt refreshed. Nearby were sages engaged in executing the Ekadashi-vrata and so, in their association, I fasted and stayed awake all night. At the end of the night, due to exhaustion and hunger, I gave up my life. Immediately, the Yamadutas came and bound me and brought me into the presence of Yamaraja. The lord of death then asked Chitrugupta about my pious and sinful acts.”

“In response, Chitrugupta explained, ‘It is true that this man engaged in many sinful activities but at the end of his life, on the banks of the Reva, he fasted on Ekadashi and remained awake all night. By doing this, he became freed from all sinful reactions.’ ”

“Upon hearing this, Dharmaraja offered me great respect and then said to his assistants, the Yamadutas, ‘Do not bring to me those who are engaged in the worship of Lord Vishnu and who observe the vow of fasting on Ekadashi. Avoid at a great distance those devotees who chant the holy names of the Lord. Instead, bring to me those who have no taste for hearing the pastimes of the Lord, those whose activities are injurious even to their benefactors, those who are inimical to following the Ekadashi-vrata, and those who refuse to bow down to Lord Narayana or visit His temple.’ ”

Bhadrashila continued, “While listening to Yamaraja speak, I felt great remorse due to remembering my sinful behavior. My repentance burned up the last traces of my sinful reactions and thereafter, Dharmaraja dispatched me to the abode of Lord Vishnu. After residing in the abode of Lord Vishnu, I descended to Indraloka and then finally, I was born on earth, in a family of devotees.”

“Dear father, now you know the reason why I take special delight in observing Ekadashi while worshipping Lord Vishnu in my play.”

Galava Rishi became very pleased while listening to his son and indeed, he felt that by having such a child, his life had become fruitful.

Next, Narada Muni requested Sanaka Kumara to tell him about the duties that are prescribed for members of the four varnas and four

ashramas. I will present here some of the most interesting instructions gleaned from this very extensive discourse on varṇasrama-dharma.

Sanaka Kumāra said, "There are certain activities that are considered righteous in three yugas but are to be avoided in Kali-yuga. These are undertaking a sea voyage, marriage of the twice-born with girls not belonging to their varṇa, begetting of children with the wife of a deceased brother, the offering of flesh in the śrāddha ceremony, the vanaprastha stage of life, remarriage of a girl whose marriage was not consummated, naishtika-brahmachārya, human sacrifice, horse-sacrifice, and gomedha (cow sacrifice)."

"A brahmachāri should only partake of food gotten as alms. He should never eat what was received from a single person. He should beg from the houses of brahmanas of irreproachable character. After offering everything to his preceptor, he should, with his permission, partake of it while restraining his speech."

"A brahmachāri should avoid wine, women, meat, salt, betel-leaves, eating food left by others, sleep during the day, use of an umbrella, the wearing of shoes, the use of scents, garlands, water sports, dance, vocal music and instrumental music. He should abstain from slandering others, putting others into distress, association with atheists and association with śhūdras."

"A brahmachāri should habitually offer respect to elders. There are three kinds of elders—in terms of knowledge, in terms of piety and austerity, and in terms of age."

"A sensible man should not marry a girl who is sickly, whose eyes are round, who is hot-tempered, too short or too tall or who is physically handicapped. One should not marry a girl with masculine features, traces of a moustache or beard, who is a voracious eater or whose teeth or lips are too large. One should not marry a girl who is cunning and mischievous, who habitually speaks worthless and meaningless words, who is a thief, who is a liar and a cheat, whose body is covered by hair or whose nose is too big."

"If a marriage had taken place during childhood when the real nature of the wife could not be understood and if her defect is realized after maturity—one should forsake her. If a woman always speaks harshly to her husband and children but is favorably disposed to others—one should by all means forsake her."

"The eight types of marriages are—Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasha and Paischacha. The previous ones are considered better than the latter ones. The five types, beginning with Prajapatya, are considered worthy of criticism."

Next, Sanaka Kumara spoke about the various sins and the means of atonement for those who perform them.

He said, "These are the five great sinners (maha-patakas)—the killer of a brahmana, the drunkard, the thief, one who has sex with his guru's wife, and one who associates with any of the above. If one associates with such a great sinner by sharing his bed, seat or food for a period of at least a year, he should be considered fallen."

"If one unintentionally kills a brahmana, he should wear tree bark and keep matted hair and should hold the brahmana's skull in his hands. He should roam about in the forest, keeping the skull (or any other article belonging to the brahmana) on a staff, thus displaying his guilt. He should then go on a tour of holy places and continue this atonement for twelve years."

"Alcoholic beverages are of three kinds—those prepared from molasses, those prepared from grains, and those made from honey. These should not be drunk by anyone of the four varnas, or by women. The atonement for a drunkard is that he should bathe with his clothes on and remain wearing wet clothes. While remembering Lord Narayana, he should take one of these three—milk, ghee, or cow's urine—and make it boiling hot and then drink it, thus meeting death."

"It is said that the vessel that comes in contact with liquor is also contaminated. Water drunk from a container of liquor is considered to be on a par with drinking liquor. If a brahmana accidentally drinks liquor, he should once again be invested with the sacred thread."

"If one has sexual intercourse with his mother or her co-wife, he should cut off his testicles while proclaiming his sin. He should then hold his testicles in his hands and proceed toward the south-west, never considering what is pleasant and what is unpleasant. While going, he should not look at other people. If he walks in that way until meeting death, he becomes purified of his sin."

"If, as a regular practice, one has sexual relations with a woman of his own caste (other than his wife), he can be purified of the sin by being burned in a fire of dried cow dung."



"If one performs the prescribed means of atonement with feelings of devotion for Lord Nārāyaṇa then all of his sins will perish. But, if one has no such feelings, even if he performs the atonement, he will remain fallen. One who is free from lust, anger and greed; who has genuine repentance; who is possessed of mercy and kindness toward all beings and who is devoted to the remembrance of Lord Viṣṇu—he is absolved of all sins, whether great or small."

Next, Sanaka Kumāra described what is called the forest of material existence. All living entities in the material world suffer and enjoy the results of their activities (karma). As a result of their pious acts, they may enjoy life in heaven and as a result of their sinful acts, they may suffer terribly in hell. Along with the residue of their dwindling karma, they are once again born on earth, first appearing as immobile living beings (sthavara), such as trees, bushes, plants, grass and mountains.

While remaining in this immobile state for a long time, the living beings experience many miseries. For example, they are munched by monkeys and squirrels, they are cut by men, destroyed by forest fires, endure scorching heat and freezing cold, and then finally perish.

From the status of immovable living beings, the living entities next take the forms of worms and other such beings and thereby suffer continuous misery. The life span of such living beings is very short, they are not able to ward off the attacks of stronger creatures, and they endure perpetual hunger. During some births, the living beings are herbivorous (vegetarian) and during some births they are carnivorous. Sometimes, they even eat stool.

When the living beings come to the form of birds, they eat flesh, stool, and all kinds of other things and they are prone to injure others. Coming to the animal forms, when the living beings are born as domesticated animals, they continue to suffer greatly, such as separation from their kindred, bearing heavy burdens, bondage by tethers, being beaten by whips and dragging ploughs.

Finally, after wandering through innumerable species, the living entity comes to the human form of life. In that form also, they suffer terribly as cobblers, chandalas, hunters, barbers, washermen, potters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, weavers, tailors, launderers and dyers, painters, servants, errand boys, slaves, etc.

The soul enters the mother's womb along with the man's semen at the time of sexual union. Gradually, the fetus develops and after seven months, he is given the facility of remembering his previous birth, as well as his sojourn in hell.

Being tormented within the womb by worms and burning heat caused by surrounding substances, he prays, "Alas! How sinful I am! In my previous birth I was so fond of my friends, children, women and possessions. Just to maintain my family I lied and cheated. Being blinded by lust, I desired the affection of other men's wives. Because of my sinful activities, I suffered in hell very terribly."

"The wives and children that I formerly maintained have now gone elsewhere, according to their karma. How miserable is the existence of materially embodied beings! Indeed, the material body is born of sin. Previously, I had inflicted pain upon others and now, I am being tortured within my mother's womb."

In this way, the embryo within the womb laments. Finally, he consoles himself by making the following decision: "After my birth I will become pure in mind by association with saintly persons and engagement in the service of the Lord. By worship of Lord Narayana, I will be able to surpass this material existence and thus free myself of all miseries."

At last, the embryo is pushed out of the womb, which is not only very painful for him but also for his mother. After coming out of the womb, he forgets everything of his previous determination to engage in Krishna consciousness while continuing to experience countless miseries.

After growing up and meeting with frustration, one accuses destiny, saying, "Why has fate rendered me so unfortunate?" Finally, old age arrives with all of its attendant miseries. At the very end, one becomes incapable of even moving his hands and feet while surrounded by weeping kinsmen. Again, he is bound by the Yamadutas and taken to suffer in hell for all of the sinful acts that he had committed. Just as metal is put into the fire and blown by the bellows until the impurities are removed, the living beings are tortured in hell until their karma is completely destroyed.

Sanaka Kumara concluded this description of the forest of material existence by saying, "One who is scorched by the forest fire of material

life should cultivate the understanding that can free him from the vicious cycle of repeated birth and death. Men who are devoid of such an understanding are considered as no better than animals, although walking on two legs. Who is more foolish than one who does not worship the Supreme Lord, even after attaining the human form of life? How astonishing it is that men undergo so much suffering as Lord Vishnu stands by, waiting for them? Even as Lord Vishnu waits for them to turn to Him, men prefer to be cooked in hell."

"After attaining a disgusting body full of stool, urine, blood and pus, one who does not worship Lord Vishnu and thus put an end to the cycle of birth and death is a great sinner. How is it that foolish, sinful men do not become disgusted while contemplating the stool and urine that has come out of their bodies? One who is truly clever must use the rarely achieved human body to attain life's greatest gain, which is to go back to the eternal abode of the Lord."

Narada Muni said, "Whatever I had asked has been duly answered by you. Those bound to the wheel of birth and death in this world suffer great miseries. Now, kindly tell me by what means one can achieve liberation from this condition of life."

"Every day, actions are being performed by the living beings, one after another, and the reactions are being enjoyed by them as well. How can this cycle of action and reaction be stopped? The conditioned soul receives a material body as a result of his past karma, or activity. Being impelled by lust, he becomes greedy for acquiring assets and when his greed is frustrated, he becomes angry. Anger results in the bewilderment of one's intelligence. Such a confused person once again acts sinfully, and so ultimately, the body can be thus seen as the result of sin."

Sanaka Kumara said, "You have spoken well because you have inquired about the means of liberation from the misery of material existence. You should know that it is only Lord Vishnu who is the bestower of liberation. It is by absorption of the mind in meditation on Lord Narayana that one can become freed from having to once again enter a mother's womb. The yogi who worships the Supreme Lord while engaging in the practice of yoga attains the highest destination."

Narada Muni requested, "Kindly describe to me in detail the practice of yoga whereby one can attain the supreme destination after giving up his material body."

Sanaka Kumara said, "The practice of yoga is understood in eight divisions, known as yama (restraint), niyama (observances), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal), dharana (fixed attention), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (trance)."

"Briefly, the yamas are ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), asteya (avoidance of stealing), brahmacharya (celibacy), aparigraha (refusal of monetary gifts), akrodha (absence of anger), and anasuya (non-enviousness)."

"Ahimsa means to not give pain to anyone, whether it be mental or physical, by means of one's thoughts, words, or deeds. Satya means to state the facts as they are, after discriminating between dharma and adharma. Steya (stealing) is the taking away of wealth belonging to others by means of force or deceit. Brahmacharya means abstinence from sexual activity, both mental and physical. If one engages in the practice of yoga while craving for sexual gratification, even those who merely talk to him become sinfully contaminated. Refusal to accept money, even in emergencies, is called aparigraha. If, as a result of one's superior position, one indulges in harsh speech, that is called krodha. Akrodha is the opposite. Severe pain in the heart and mental agony experienced upon seeing others' superiority in terms of wealth, beauty, etc. is called anasuya. The abandonment of such jealousy is called anasuyata."

"The niyamas are the performance of austerity, recitation of mantras (japa), study of the Vedas, contentment, purity (cleanliness), worship of Lord Hari, and the offering of prayers at the sandhyas. These are the chief niyamas."

"Japa is said to be of three types—vachika (verbal), upamshu (muttering softly), and manasa (mental). Mental japa is considered to be the best. If a mantra is uttered so that all of the syllables are distinctly heard, that is called vachika. Such chanting bestows the benefits of all kinds of yajnas. When a mantra is chanted so that the syllables are only slightly distinct from one another that is called upamshu and gives twice the benefit of vachika japa. When the mantra is pondered within the mind, that is called manasa, and it bestows all yogic perfection. The Lord becomes extremely pleased with one who continuously chants japa."

"Satisfaction with obtaining what comes of its own accord is called santosha (contentment). A disgruntled man does not find pleasure

anywhere. Never does lust subside by the enjoyment of the pleasures of lust. The lustful desire, 'when will I get more than this?' ever goes on increasing. For this reason, one should leave aside lust, which causes degeneration of the body. One should be content with what is easily gotten while absorbed in the execution of his duties."

"Cleanliness is of two types—internal and external. External cleanliness is obtained by bathing with clay and water and internal cleanliness is purity of thought. The performance of sacrifice by those who lack internal purity is fruitless, like oblations poured onto ashes. If a person devoid of internal cleanliness worships the Deity, he offends the Lord and is thrown into hell. One who lacks internal cleanliness but strives for external cleanliness cannot attain satisfaction, just as a pot of liquor remains impure, no matter how much it is washed. If a person mentally yearns for a sinful thing while propounding righteousness, know him to be the most villainous among the great sinners."

"One who has conquered his senses and steadied his mind and intelligence by means of yama and niyama should begin the practice of asanas (sitting postures). The asanas mentioned by great sages are thirty in number. They are—padmaka, svasatika, pitha, saimha, kaukuta, kaunjara, kaurma, vajrasana, varaha, mriga, chailika, krauncha, nalika, sarvatobhadra, varshabha, naga, matsya, vaiyaghra, ardhachandrika, dandavata, shaila, svabhra, maudgara, makara, traipatha, kashtha, sthanu, vaikarnika, bhauma, and virasana."

"The yogi should firmly situate himself in one of these asanas and then practice breathing exercises to transcend the dualities of material existence. He should practice yoga in a quiet place that is not frequented by people. Pranayama (breath control) is of two types—agarbha and sagarbha, the latter of which is better. Agarbha is the control of breath without japa and meditation whereas sagarbha is with these two practices."

"Breathing, as prescribed by the process of pranayama, has four parts—rechaka (exhalation of air), puraka (inhalation of air), kumbhaka (retention of air), and shunyaka (the stage where breathing is suspended)."

"The channel for the passage of air on the right side of the body (including the right nostril) is called pingala. The sun is the controlling deity of that passage. The channel on the left side of the body (includ-

ing the left nostril) is called ida and the moon is the controlling deity of that passage. In the middle is the passage called sushumna, which is very subtle. Brahman is the controlling deity of that passage."

"While practicing pranayama, the breath should be expelled through the left nostril and the intake of air must be through the right nostril. One should breathe deeply and thus fill the body with air and thus remain like a pitcher filled with water. When there is no exhalation or inhalation—this is known as shunyaka. The control of breathing must be done very slowly and carefully, otherwise there can be great harm to the practitioner."

"After controlling the breath, one should withdraw all the senses from their objects. This is known as pratyahara. If anyone tries to absorb his mind in meditation (the next stage of yoga) without first completely controlling his senses, know him to be in delusion and doomed to failure. The complete withdrawal of the senses culminates in a state of retention that is called dharana. The yogi should then engage in meditation upon the Supreme Lord, who is situated within his heart."

"There is a subtle lotus of the heart that has eight petals, wherein Lord Vishnu resides. The Lord has eyes like the petals of a blooming lotus, He wears yellow garments and has the mark of Shrivatsa on His chest. The state of unobstructed meditation upon Lord Vishnu is known as dhyana. By such meditation, the yogi becomes freed from all sins and is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. The Supreme Lord is very pleased with the yogi who practices such meditation."

"When the yogi becomes so absorbed in meditation that he no longer hears, sees, smells, touches, or speaks—that perfect state is called samadhi (trance). At that time, the soul is completely cleansed of all impurities and can perceive the Lord as Paramatma within his heart. As long as one is under the influence of maya, the illusory energy, the Lord remains covered from his vision. When one is freed from the influence of maya, he can see the Supreme Lord directly, without any impediment."

Narada Muni said, "You have nicely described the yoga system to me. You have also mentioned that yoga can only be perfected by those possessing devotion for Lord Vishnu. Now, kindly tell me in more detail about devotion for the Lord."

Sanaka Kumara said, "It is a fact that the practice of yoga is just

meant for bringing one to the point of unalloyed devotion for Lord Vishnu. Whether practicing this eight-fold yoga or not, one who has unflinching faith and devotion for Lord Vishnu is the best among human beings and attains all desirable goals of life. Thus, anyone who desires freedom from the cycle of repeated birth and death should practice devotion for Lord Narayana, whose form is eternal, fully cognizant and all-blissful."

"The two legs that proceed toward the temple of Lord Vishnu are most glorified. The two hands that engage in the service of Lord Vishnu are worthy of praise. The two eyes that gaze upon the Deity of Lord Janardana actually see, and the tongue that is engaged in chanting the holy name of Lord Vishnu is a real tongue. With upraised arms I emphatically proclaim the truth that there is no god equal to or superior to Lord Keshava."

"In this temporary world where nothing is of real value and no venture awards one real success, the only substantial thing is Lord Vishnu's worship. With the axe of devotion for Lord Hari, one should cut the strong bonds to material existence. Who can be more foolish that he who after attaining the rare human form of life does not worship Lord Hari? If meditated upon, worshiped, or bowed down to, Lord Janardana severs the bondage of worldly existence. Who then would not worship Him?"

"By the mere utterance of the Lord's holy names, great sins are destroyed and yet, it is astonishing that people continue to undergo suffering even when the holy name of the Lord is present. How pitiful it is! How pitiful it is that even after realizing the perishable nature of the material body, materialistic persons do not engage in the service of the Lord. Raising my arms, I repeatedly proclaim: After giving up hypocrisy, arrogance, envy and falsity, one should wholeheartedly worship Lord Vasudeva. I solemnly assert the truth that all ailments perish when medicine in the form of the chanting of the holy names of the Lord is administered."

Next, Sanaka Kumara narrated the history of Yajnamali and Sumali as follows. Formerly, during the Raivata manvantara, there was a well-known brahmana named Vedamali, who was very merciful towards all living beings. While engaged in worshiping the Lord, Vedamali began to think about amassing wealth for the benefit of his wife, friends and



sons. For this purpose, he regularly sold forbidden things and conversed with chandalas and atheists while accepting money from them. He also performed religious rituals for payment. All this he did for the sake of his wife.

After some time, Vedamali received twin sons, named Yajnamali and Sumali. Becoming very affectionately attached to his sons, Vedamali carefully raised them and provided them with the best of everything. Finally, after amassing a great deal of wealth, Vedamali counted it to see how much he had.

After going through it all, he felt quite pained, however, thinking, "This wealth has been earned by accepting money from sinful people and by performing forbidden acts. And yet, my unbearable thirst for gold has not been satisfied. It seems to desire a mountain of gold like Meru! How painful this process is! One works so hard to attain something and then he desires something else and so has to work even harder to achieve it, and the cycle never ends."

"In my old age, all my senses have become weak and my skin wrinkled but my longing has attained its prime of youth! How strange it is that as the body grows old, the yearning for more and more material enjoyment grows young! Only he is actually a learned scholar whose yearnings have been quelled. Without subduing his yearnings, even the most intelligent man will often become bewildered. One who desires permanent happiness must give up the longing for sense enjoyment."

"Up until this time, I had spent my life accumulating wealth with great endeavor. Now, however, my body has become old and weak. From this time onward, I will sincerely endeavor for my welfare in the next life."

Having decided this, Vedamali began to devote himself to righteousness. He divided his wealth, keeping half for himself and one-fourth he gave to each of his sons. He then constructed many artificial lakes, gardens and temples, and distributed much food on the banks of the Ganga, just to destroy his accumulated sinful reactions.

In this way, Vedamali gave his wealth in charity and by doing so, he became inclined toward devotion for the Supreme Lord. He then went to the abode of Nara and Narayana Rishis for the purpose of performing penance. There, he saw a beautiful hermitage inhabited by numerous sages who were studying the Vedic literature and engaging in

the service of the Lord. Among them, Vedamali saw a greatly effulgent sage named Jananti, who was surrounded by his disciples. Vedamali bowed down to the sage, who then welcomed him and offered him some fruit and roots.

Vedamali said, "O holy one, please uplift me by imparting to me the gift of perfect knowledge."

The sage Jananti said, "O brahmana, I shall briefly describe to you the way of severance from bondage to worldly existence. It is very difficult to practice, even for those who are self-controlled. Perpetually worship Lord Viṣṇu and continually remember Him. Indeed, this is the essence of all Vedic injunctions—always remember the Lord and never forget Him. Always engage yourself in helping others worship Lord Nārāyaṇa and never criticize anyone unnecessarily. Carefully avoid association with non-devotees. Avoid lust, anger, greed and pride. Show kindness to all living entities and render service to the pure devotees of the Lord."

"Worship Lord Viṣṇu in His temple and serve Him by cleaning the floor and repairing the building when needed. Every day, listen to the Purāṇas as much as you are able. If you follow my instructions, you will surely attain perfect knowledge of the Absolute Truth and become freed from all sinful reactions."

Thereafter, Vedamali engaged himself as directed by the sage Jananti. After some time, having become purified, he thought to himself, "Actually, who am I? What is my duty? How was I born in this world? What is my eternal form?"

In this way, Vedamali pondered, day and night, but was unable to come to any firm conclusion. Finally, he once again approached the sage Jananti and said, "My dear preceptor, I am confused. Please tell me—who am I? What is my duty? Why was I born in this world?"

The sage Jananti said, "It is true that you are confused because the mind is the abode of ignorance. You must transcend the stage of identifying with the mind to realize your true self, which is without any material designations. Your duty is to realize this self by meditation and surrender to the Supreme Lord who is residing within your heart. You were born in this world due to thinking of yourself as separate from the Lord. Now, continue your meditation and you will eventually reach the stage of perfection."

Vedamali eventually came to the realization that he is eternally the servant of the Supreme Lord and thus non-different from him. He could see that maya or illusion resulted from thinking oneself as being separate from the Lord. After some time, Vedamali went to Varanasi and there, he attained liberation from material entanglement.

Meanwhile, Yajnamali and his younger brother, Sumali lived off the wealth bestowed upon them by their father, Vedamali. Sumali delighted in sinful activities, however, and so he passed his time singing, playing musical instruments, drinking liquor, and dallying with prostitutes. In this way, Sumali squandered all the money he had inherited.

Finally, when all of his wealth was exhausted, Sumali took to stealing from others so that he could maintain his relationship with his beloved prostitutes. The very intelligent Yajnamali became very distressed to see his younger brother's behavior and so he said, "Enough of your evil conduct! In our family, you alone are wicked-minded."

In this way, Yajnamali tried many times to wean his younger brother away from his sinful habits. Finally, Sumali angrily picked up a sword, grabbed Yajnamali by his hair and tried to kill him. This caused a great uproar in the town and the people came and arrested Sumali. Being bound by affection for his younger brother, however, Yajnamali begged the people to release Sumali and so they finally let him go.

Yajnamali then gave Sumali half of his inheritance but being very arrogant and deluded, he once again squandered it by drinking liquor and eating beef. Finally, Sumali was rejected by his kinsmen and then arrested by the king. Still, in spite of all this, Yajnamali remained fixed in righteousness and continued to spend his money for the distribution of food and other welfare activities, and engage in the service of the Lord in the temple.

Finally, the two brothers became old and then died simultaneously. At this time, the Lord dispatched the Vishnudutas to bring Yajnamali so that he mounted a celestial chariot while being praised by the devas and Gandharvas. As Yajnamali was proceeding toward the abode of the Lord, he happened to see his brother, Sumali, being beaten by the Yamadutas after having assumed the form of a ghost. He was naked, thoroughly miserable and bound by nooses. While trying to run, here and there, he was crying helplessly. Although he could not recognize

his younger brother, Yajnamali became exceedingly distressed upon seeing him.

Overwhelmed by compassion, he asked the Viṣṇudutas, "Who is this man being harassed by the Yamadutas?"

The Viṣṇudutas replied in resounding voices, "This is your younger brother, Sumali."

Yajnamali requested, "Tell me the means whereby one who is afflicted by the reactions of innumerable sins can become freed from his suffering."

The Viṣṇudutas said, "In your previous birth, you were the son of a vaiśya named Viśhvambhara. In that life, countless sins were committed by you. Indeed, you didn't perform even a trace of good deeds. You were even against your own parents."

"Finally, you were forsaken by your family and so you became very miserable. While wandering about, hungry, you came to a temple of Lord Viṣṇu. There had been heavy rain and so the whole area was flooded. Because you decided to stay at that temple, you cleaned it very nicely. That night, you were bitten by a serpent and died. Because of the merit attained by cleaning the temple, your next birth was that of a brahmana."

"Now, we will tell you the means whereby you can deliver your younger brother from his hellish destination. Just give him part of the merit that you had earned by cleaning the temple of Lord Viṣṇu. This will be sufficient to save him."

Being thus advised, Yajnamali gave that pious credit to his brother, thus freeing him of all sins. Indeed, as soon as the gift was given, the Yamadutas let go of Sumali and fled while a celestial chariot immediately came there. After embracing each other with great happiness, the two brothers ascended to the supreme abode of the Lord, where they attained *salokya-mukti*.

Next, to further illustrate the benefit of worshiping Lord Viṣṇu, Sanaka Kumara related the following history. Formerly, in the Kṛitayuga, there lived a hunter named Gulika, who was always engaged in trying to steal other men's wives and wealth as the leader of a gang of dacoits. He took pleasure in torturing all kinds of creatures and he killed thousands of cows and brahmanas.

Once, Gulika went to the capital of Sauvira, a city full of great wealth and innumerable beautiful women. In this way, it resembled a city of the demigods. In the middle of a park was a temple of Lord Keshava having many domes made of gold. This very much pleased the hunter, who looked like the god of death and who had an ardent desire to steal.

Finally, having made up his mind to steal as much gold as possible, Gulika entered the temple. There, he saw the brahmana, Utanka, engaged in rendering service to the Deity. The exalted brahmana was alone and was about to sit in meditation upon the Lord and yet Gulika saw him as an obstacle on his path to stealing the gold. Desiring to kill Utanka, Gulika took out his sword and pressed down the brahmana's chest with his foot.

Understanding that the hunter wanted to kill him, Utanka said, "It is utterly futile for you to try and kill me, who am sinless. In what way have I offended you? In this world, powerful persons chastise the wicked to teach them a lesson but rarely kill them, for they hope to reform them by bringing out the good in them. Great persons are forbearing, even when harassed and such behavior is pleasing to Lord Vishnu. Even up to the point of death, great persons think of the welfare of others while excusing their offenses. Even when cut, a sandalwood tree renders the axe fragrant."

"Alas! This world is such a miserable place that even those who live without attachment are sometimes harassed by the wicked. Innocent fish and animals are killed by fishermen and hunters and similarly, those who are good are often attacked by those who are envious. Maya is very strong. It deludes all people, making them suffer for the sake of sons, friends and women."

"By stealing, you have maintained your wife and others but in the end, you will have to leave them and go alone to some destination. We feel that, 'This is my mother, my father, my wife, and my children.' This sense of possessiveness and relationship causes unnecessary pain. One can remain with kinsmen only for as long as one can earn wealth. After death, it is only the reactions to our pious and sinful activities that accompany us."

"The lust of those indulging in sinful activities increases, day by day, but the lust of those engaged in meritorious acts becomes reduced.

People are always in anxiety about earning money. If one realizes that what is destined to happen will surely take place and what is not destined to happen will never occur, he becomes free of anxiety."

While listening to the speech of the sage, Uttanka, Gulika became fearful. Releasing him, Gulika joined his hands and begged forgiveness. Being in the temple of the Lord and in the association of a great soul, he had become freed of all sins. With great repentance, he said, "O brahmana, I have committed so many sins. How is my redemption possible? To whom can I take shelter? I was born as a hunter as the result of the sins of my previous births. Because of the sins committed in this life, I do not know what my destination will be after death. For how many more births will I have to go on committing sins?"

Thus censuring himself, the hunter became so miserable that he died then and there. Being kind by nature, the sage Uttanka sprinkled over his body some water that had washed the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. Immediately, Gulika became freed from all sins and was seen seated upon a celestial chariot.

He said, "O sage, you are my preceptor and I am eternally grateful to you for releasing me from my sinful life."

After saying this, Gulika showered flowers upon Uttanka. Finally, after circumambulating him three times and offering his obeisances, Gulika boarded a celestial chariot and ascended to the abode of the Lord. Sage Uttanka was very pleased to witness this and he thereafter offered very nice prayers to the Lord.

Uttanka concluded his prayers by saying, "O ocean of mercy, please protect me. I am fallen into this miserable material existence. I am miserly, deluded, and bound by hundreds of lustful entanglements. I am always critical, ungrateful, impure, angry and constantly engaged in sinful activities. I am frightened as well. I seek refuge in You—please save me."

The Lord of Lakshmi then appeared before the sage. Being highly delighted, the sage washed the lotus feet of the Lord with his tears. Picking Uttanka up, the Lord embraced him and asked him to accept a benediction. Sage Uttanka bowed down and said, "O Lord, why do You delude me? What use are benedictions to me? May my devotion to You be firm and unwavering in all of my births."

The Lord said, "Let it be so" and touched Uttanka with the tip of

His conch, thus granting him transcendental knowledge. Placing His hand on Utanka's head, the Lord said, "O brahmana, go now to the abode of Nara and Narayana. There, you will attain perfection."

After saying this, Lord Vishnu vanished from sight. Thereafter, Utanka went to the abode of Nara and Narayana Rishis, where he continuously worshiped the Lord. Having become purified of all sins, at the end of his life, he attained the supreme abode of the Lord.

Next, Sanaka Kumara narrated another story that illustrates the effectiveness of devotional service to Lord Vishnu. Formerly there lived a king of the Soma dynasty named Jayadvaja, who was devoted to Lord Narayana. He regularly engaged in cleaning the temple. Once, the king constructed a beautiful temple of Lord Vishnu on the banks of the river Reva.

The king's priest was named Vitihotra. Being surprised at the king's unwavering devotion for the Lord, Vitihotra one day asked, "O king, you clean the temple every day and offer many lamps to the Deity. What benefit to you hope to gain by this? There are many activities in the service of the Lord. Why do you limit yourself to these two?"

With a laugh, the king replied, "O brahmana, due to being able to remember my previous births, I know what I had done before and what the results of those actions were. Long ago, in the Svarochana manvantara, during a krita-yuga, there lived a prominent brahmana named Raivata. He was a master of the Vedas and he used to perform sacrifices on behalf of those not eligible to do so. He was very envious and so constantly found fault with others and he used to deal in illegal merchandise."

"Finally, he was abandoned by his relatives because of performing forbidden rites. At last, he became penniless and miserable. While wandering over the earth in search of wealth, he died on the banks of the river Narmada. After his death, his wife, Bandhumati, became a wanton woman and she also was forsaken by her kinsmen. I was her son, named Dandaketu. I was a very sinful man and I hated the brahmanas. I coveted others' wealth and wives. I killed many animals, even cows, and I killed some brahmanas as well. I stole much gold and passed my time drinking liquor."

"One day, I became overwhelmed by lust and desired to have sex with my wife. We came to an abandoned temple of Lord Vishnu and



went inside. Thinking that I would enjoy with my wife there that night, I used my clothing to sweep the floor. Immediately, as many sins that I had committed as particles of dust that I had swept were nullified. I had kept a lamp in the temple and that act also destroyed innumerable sinful reactions.”

“That night, the city guards arrived there. Catching hold of both of us, they exclaimed, ‘Here are adulterers!’ and then killed us. Immediately, the Vishnudutas arrived upon the scene. At their urging, we boarded a celestial airplane after assuming divine forms and proceeded to Vishnuloka. After residing there for many kalpas of Brahma, I was born in the Yadu dynasty.”

“O brahmana, after rendering some service to the Lord just for my enjoyment, such benefit was obtained. I cannot imagine the extent of what is achieved by those good men who perform these acts with devotion. Now you can understand why I clean the temple and light lamps with such dedication.”

After hearing the testimony of King Jayadvaja, the brahmana, Vitihotra became more absorbed in his worship of the Lord.

Next, Sanaka Kumara related another story that illustrates the wonderful effect of devotional service, even if performed unintentionally. Once, Indra inquired from Brihaspati about the duration of Brahma’s life and other, similar topics. Brihaspati recommended that they hear from Sudharma, who had come from Brahmaloḳa to reside in Amaravati, the city of Indra.

In the course of their conversation, Sudharma related the story of his past life as follows: “Formerly, I was a very sinful vulture, eating raw flesh and stool. One day, as I was perched atop a temple of Lord Viṣṇu, I was hit by a hunter’s arrow and fell dying into the courtyard. As I was giving up my life, a dog came and caught hold of me with his jaws. Other dogs gave chase and being frightened, he ran around and around the temple with the others in pursuit. Being pleased by this circumambulation of His temple, the Lord granted me and the dog liberation in His eternal abode. If this is the result that we achieved then what would be attained by worshiping the Lord properly?”

Indra was delighted to hear this account and thereafter, he became more seriously engaged in the Lord’s service.

Narada Muni next inquired about the characteristics of the four

yugas, especially the Kali-yuga. Here are a few of the most interesting things that Sanaka Kumara said in reply.

"In the terrible age of Kali, people maintain themselves by eating fish and flesh and they milk even goats and sheep. Women desire to imitate the make-up and behavior of prostitutes. People take bribes as their means of livelihood. Occupying excellent seats, shudras expound on the subject of dharma. Shudras and outcastes become kings and brahmanas are engaged in rendering service to them. Women are self-supporting and they dress like prostitutes."

"What one acquires by meditation in the Krita-yuga, by performing yajna in the Treta-yuga, and by worshiping the Lord in the Dvapara-yuga, one obtains in the Kali-yuga simply by chanting the holy names of the Lord. Kali does not oppress those who are engaged in worshiping the Lord and chanting His holy names. It is only by the repetition of the names of the Lord that redemption is attained by people who commit sins, who are bereft of Vedic culture, and who are mentally impure."

"O Narada, how fortunate are those who are engaged in chanting the holy names of the Lord! Such persons are worthy of being worshiped even by the demigods. My very life is only the holy names of the Lord, only the holy names and nothing more. I emphatically declare that in the Kali-yuga, salvation is never possible by any other means."

Next, Narada Muni inquired from Sanandana Kumara, "Please describe how this universe was created and how the different orders of life were thereafter manifest. What is the nature of the soul? Where do those who die go? Kindly explain all this to me."

Sanandana Kumara said, "I shall relate to you a conversation that took place long ago, between Bhrigu Muni, who was seated atop Mount Kailasa, and the sage Bharadvaja."

In the discourse given by Bhrigu Muni there is the description of the creation of the material elements from subtle to gross, much the same as is found in Shrimad-Bhagavatam. Some of the most interesting parts of this discussion are as follows:

Bharadvaja asked, "Lord Brahma is always referred to the first-born within the universe but since he was born on a lotus flower, it seems that the lotus should be considered the first-born."

Bhrigu Muni said, "To give a seat to the physical form of Brahma, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu's material mode of passion, a lotus

was manifested from Garbhodakshayi Vishnu's navel. The pericarp of that lotus is Mount Meru and Lord Brahma sits at the top."

Bharadvaja requested, "Kindly tell me how Lord Brahma creates the varieties of living entities while seated atop Mount Meru."

Bhrigu Muni said, "Lord Brahma creates the living beings mentally and to maintain them, water was manifested from the very beginning. Water is vital to all living entities. Indeed, it is the very life of all those who grow and multiply. The entire universe is surrounded by water because water is the support of everything."

Bharadvaja said, "You have said that the bodies of all living beings are created from the five great elements (pancha maha-bhuta) but I cannot perceive these elements in the living beings. Trees, for example, seem solid and I cannot perceive ether or air in them. Sound, form, taste, smell and touch are characteristics of the elements but trees do not see, hear, smell, taste or touch."

Bhrigu Muni explained, "Although trees appear solid, there is no doubt that ether is within them. Indeed, it only because of this that they are able to bear fruit and flowers. When there is loud noise, such as thunder, fruit and flowers fall from trees and this is the proof that they have ears and thus hear. Besides this, when nice music is played near plants, they are seen to grow healthier. When a creeper grows around a tree, it sees the way to go and so it cannot be blind. By applying various scents, plants and trees grow better and so it is a fact that they can smell. When a branch is cut from a tree, it grows back. This proves that the tree perceives happiness and misery. Trees and plants also require nourishment and they consume their food with the help of wind and fire."

"Thus, it is a fact that the five elements are present in the bodies of all living beings. They act in diverse ways so as to enable the body to function. Skin, bones, flesh, marrow and muscles are constituted of the earth element."

"Strength, the fire of digestion, anger, and bodily temperature are manifestations of fire within the body."

"The places of ether within the body are the eyes, nostrils, mouth, heart and belly."

"Water is present in phlegm, bile, sweat, fat and blood. The five types of air are prana, samana, udana, vyana and apana."

"The living being perceives smell because of the earth element. Smell is of nine varieties—agreeable, disagreeable, sweet, pungent, that which spreads widely, that which is compact, that which is harmonious, bland and mild, dreamy and sullied, and calm."

"There are six types of taste, perceivable because of the element of water. They are sweet, salty, bitter, astringent, sour and pungent."

"Form and color are perceived due to the presence of fire. They are classified as short, long, stout, symmetrical, atomic, circular, white, black, red, blue, yellow, pink, hard, smooth, delicate, slimy, soft and rough."

"Sound is perceived in ether. It is perceived in a scale as sadja, rishabha, gandhara, madhyama, panchama, dhaivata, and nishada."

"The quality of touch pertains to air and is of eleven varieties—hot, cool, pleasing, painful, soft, clearly manifest, rough, smooth, slimy, light and heavy."

Narada Muni was pleased after hearing all this. Next, he inquired, "Please tell me about the path of liberation, whereby one is freed from darkness."

In response, Sanandana Kumara recounted the following history. Long ago, there was a king of Mithila named Janadeva who always contemplated on the conduct that would lead one to liberation. Many preceptors propagating heretical doctrines, as well as those accustomed to dwelling in cemeteries used to come and stay in his palace. Being well-versed in Vedic understanding, Janadeva was not satisfied with the teachings of these bogus gurus.

One day, a sage named Pancha-shikha, a disciple of Kapiladeva, arrived at Mithila in the course of his wandering over the earth. This sage had completely finished with material desires and was thus beyond the influence of duality, causing happiness and distress. It was said that Kapiladeva, the propounder of Sankhya philosophy, would reveal transcendental knowledge through the mouth of Pancha-shikha.

King Janadeva (also known as Janaka), accompanied by his ministers, warmly welcomed the sage. Pancha-shikha proceeded to discuss philosophy with the king's one hundred preceptors and easily confounded them with his superb reasoning. Being very impressed with the sage's presentation, King Janaka abandoned his one hundred teachers and bowed at his feet.

Thereafter, the sage Pancha-shikha rigorously taught the king the philosophy of Sāṅkhya, which carefully analyzes the characteristics of the material elements, the working senses and the senses of perception, the sense objects, mind, intelligence and ego—just to enable the student to isolate his real self from all of these and thus attain liberation from material bondage.

In conclusion, the sage Pancha-shikha said, “As long as one considers the body, consisting of senses, to be the self, and thinks of the objects of the senses as desirable, there will be unending misery due to incorrect understanding. Sorrow requires some basis or cause. What cause for misery is there for a person who considers material objects, including his body and senses, as having nothing to do with the self? Being unattached to them, such a person never suffers.”

“All Vedic practices are meant for ultimate renunciation. Sacrifices are prescribed for the renunciation of wealth. Vows and the performance of austerity are prescribed for the renunciation of pleasure. Yoga is prescribed for the renunciation of everything. Thus, the path of yoga is propounded for the extermination of all misery.”

“Material consciousness is of three types- *sattvika*, *rajas* and *tamasa*. Love, joy and tranquility—either arising from some cause or from no apparent cause, or through renunciation—these are the attributes of a mind possessed of *sattva-guṇa*.”

“Discontent, distress, sorrow, greed and non-forbearance—whether due to some cause or without any apparent cause—these are the attributes of a mind possessed of *rajo-guṇa*.”

“Thoughtlessness, delusion, carelessness, day dreaming, sleep and laziness—these are the attributes of a mind possessed by *tamo-guṇa*.”

“When, by the practice of yoga, one becomes free from these conditioned mentalities by renunciation gained from constant practice, he attains liberation in the Supreme. Just as a spider weaves his web made from thread manufactured within his body and then goes to a better location, so the yogi becomes freed from all reactions to karma and attains the supreme destination.”

After hearing from the sage Pancha-shikha, King Janadeva carefully pondered over the matter, thus ascertaining the truth of the self. Casting off all mundane happiness and sorrow, he at last became merged in the happiness of self-realization.

Next, Narada Muni requested Sanandana Kumara to speak more on the subject of yoga and so the sage narrated the following incident: There was once a king in the dynasty of Janaka named Dharmadhvaja. His two sons were named Amitadvaja and Kritadvaja, who always delighted in discussions of spiritual topics. Keshidhvaja was the son of Kritadvaja and the name of Amitadvaja's son was Khandikya.

Khandikya was banished from the kingdom, along with his preceptor and ministers. In exile, he wandered through the forests while his cousin performed sacrifices and cultivated transcendental knowledge, desiring to cross over the ocean of birth and death.

Once, as Keshidhvaja was performing a sacrifice, the cow that was intended for sacrifice was killed by a tiger. When he received this news, Keshidhvaja asked his sacrificial priests, "Considering the circumstances, what atonement should I undergo?"

The priests replied, "We do not know. You should consult Kasheru."

When Keshidhvaja went to Kasheru with the same question, he replied, "I do not know. Go to Shunaka, for he most know something."

Thereafter, Shunaka told the king, "Neither I nor anyone else in this world knows the answer. Only your enemy, Khandikya knows it."

Keshidhvaja replied, "I will go to my enemy and consult him. If he kills me, I will receive the benefit of completing my sacrifice. If he gives me the proper means of atonement—that will also be for my benefit."

Keshidhvaja, who was dressed in deerskin, rode on his chariot into the forest to where Khandikya was staying. Upon seeing his enemy approach, Khandikya angrily picked up his bow, placed an arrow upon the bowstring and said, "With deerskin as your armor, do you hope to kill me? Or, do you think that I will not release my arrow at one so clad? I will not kill you, who took away my kingdom!"

Keshidhvaja said, "Khandikya, it is to attain knowledge that I have approached you—not to kill you! Therefore, please give up your anger and put down your arrow."

After hearing this, Khandikya went to consult his preceptors, priests and ministers. The ministers advised, "Your enemy has come under your control and so you must kill him. By doing so, rule of the earth will be yours."

Khandikya responded, "Undoubtedly it is so. The entire earth will be mine but the next world will be his. If I don't kill him, the next world will be mine even though I don't conquer this world. For this reason, I will not kill him."

Khandikya went back to Keshidhvaja and said, "Whatever you want to ask, do so and I will give you my answer."

Keshidhvaja then told about the killing of his sacrificial cow and asked about the means of atonement. In reply, Khandikya explained all of the expiatory rites that are prescribed for such an occurrence. Having understood this, Keshidhvaja returned to his sacrificial arena and performed the necessary atonement. After successfully completing the sacrifice, the king took his avabhṛitha bath.

Thereafter, the king thought, "My sacrifice has been performed and the objective has been achieved. All of the priests were sufficiently rewarded and the guests were properly honored. Whatever is worth doing in this world has been done by me. How is it that I feel as if some religious duty has not been accomplished?"

Finally, he remembered, "Oh, the remuneration that should be given to a preceptor was not given by me to Khandikya."

Thus, Keshidhvaja mounted his chariot and again went to the dense forest where Khandikya was staying. Upon seeing his enemy one again coming, Khandikya picked up his bow and placed an arrow upon the bowstring.

Keshidhvaja said, "Khandikya, don't be angry! I have not come here to harm you. I have come to reward you, my preceptor. In accordance with your instructions, my sacrifice was successfully completed and so I have come to give you guru-dakshina. Please tell me what it is that you want."

After hearing this, Khandikya again went and consulted his ministers. He said, "He wants to compensate me for the advice I had previously given. What should I request of him?"

The ministers suggested, "Ask him to give you his entire kingdom."

Khandikya laughed and said, "You want to acquire the kingdom of the earth with no endeavor—just by sitting here! The kingdom of the earth is a possession of short duration. Your advice is on the basis

of self-interest. You are not clever enough to understand the truth underlying my statements."

Khandikya again approached Keshidhvaja and said, "Will you actually give me the preceptor's fee that I ask?"

Keshidhvaja said, "Of course."

Khandikya then said, "You are certainly expert in knowledge of spiritual matters. I want as my preceptor's fee the knowledge whereby all distress is subdued. Kindly explain this to me."

Keshidhvaja asked, "Why did you not ask me for my kingdom? There is nothing more pleasing for a kshatriya than the acquisition of a kingdom."

Khandikya said, "Those who are actually wise do not yearn for a kingdom because such a desire binds one to the cycle of repeated birth and death. Besides, begging is not prescribed for a kshatriya. Even learned men whose minds are filled with the false ego of possessiveness desire a kingdom. Such egoistic persons may desire to have a kingdom without struggle but not me."

Keshidhvaja said, "By means of true knowledge I wish to cross over the ocean of birth and death. I rule my kingdom righteously and perform various sacrifices. I will now tell you the true nature of ignorance. It is the misunderstanding of the self as being something that it is not, and mistaking as one's own things that are not one's possessions. This is the seed of the tree of nescience."

"A person of impure intellect firmly thinks that the body composed of five elements is his self. Although the soul is different from the body, even so-called intelligent men think that the things in relation to the body, such as house, land and relatives are theirs. Especially with regards to the children and grandchildren produced from his body, a person thinks, 'these are mine.' The individual soul traverses the path of material existence in the course of many thousands of births. While doing so, he accumulates the dust of countless impressions and experiences. When this dirt is washed off by means of the hot water of perfect knowledge, the wayfarer's delusion subsides as his heart becomes clear. Ultimately, such perfect knowledge leads him on the path of yoga thus reviving his eternal, blissful identity."

Khandikya said, "Your talks are most pleasing to the heart. Thanks to your instructions, the misconceptions of my mind have been washed



away. I have now understood the illusion of accepting the material body as the self and those things in relation to the body as mine."

"Keshidhvaja, you can go home now and continue your righteous rule of the kingdom for you have amply rewarded me by your instructions."

After being worshiped by Khandikya, Keshidhvaja returned to his capital. Khandikya then installed his son upon the throne and went to Vishala for practicing yoga, as instructed by Keshidhvaja.

Next, Sanandana Kumara related to Narada Muni the history of Maharaja Bharata, the son of Rishabhadeva. It is said that present-day India is called Bharata-varsha after him. This history is narrated more fully in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam and so I will not repeat it here, except some of the most interesting instructions to King Rahugana.

Jada Bharata said, "You are asking me about the highest welfare of the living beings. Generally, people think of many things as being for their welfare but in fact, they are not the real objective of human life."

"If acquisition of wealth is the highest welfare then why is it used for the sake of dharma or for obtaining desired objects?"

"If having a good son is the highest welfare then one's own self would be the highest welfare for his father and his father the highest welfare for one's grandfather."

"If it is thought that the acquisition of a kingdom is the highest welfare then just consider how this is sometimes accomplished and then lost again."

"If you say that the performance of sacrifice awards the highest welfare then I must reply that since the result is residence in heaven, which is temporary, this cannot be so. The highest welfare must award one permanent benefit."

"Therefore, it is realization of the eternal self in relation to the Supreme Self that is the highest welfare for the living entities."

To illustrate this, Jada Bharata related to King Rahugana the following history: Ribhu was a son of Brahma and his disciple, Nidagha, was the sage Pulastya's son. Although Nidagha received instruction in the spiritual science, he really had little interest in learning it. This was understood by Ribhu.

Nidagha then went to live in a forest next to the beautiful city of

Viranagara, on the banks of the river Devika, which had been established by his father, Pulastya. After a long time had passed, Ribhu went to see his former disciple, Nidagha. At that time, Nidagha was standing at his front door, waiting for a guest after his daily performance of sacrifice to the Vishvadevas.

Nidagha took Ribhu into his house, although he did not recognize him. After his guest had washed his hands and feet and was comfortably seated, Nidagha requested, "Kindly have some food."

Ribhu replied, "O brahmana, if I must eat in your house then first tell me what you have to offer because I never like to eat bad food."

Nidagha said, "Excellent brahmana, you may have what you like from my stock of barley, gruel, and fried cakes of grain."

Ribhu said, "These are all bad food. Please give me some sweet rice, milk pudding, sugarcane juice and other sweet dishes."

Nidagha told his wife, "Go and prepare the most delicious sweet dishes you know."

Later, when Ribhu was seated, eating all that had been prepared, Nidagha stood nearby and asked, "Are you satisfied with the food? Where do you now reside? Where are you going from here? From where have you come just now?"

Ribhu replied, "O brahmana, when a hungry person eats, he certainly feels satisfaction. But, how can I feel satisfied when I was not hungry? When the earth element in the body is parched by fire, hunger is generated. Thirst is felt when the gastric fire within the body dries up all moisture. The hunger and thirst of the body are not my concern, however. For this reason, there is no possibility of hunger ever disturbing me."

"You ask me where I reside, from where I came and to where I am going. What is the question of coming or going for the eternal soul, who is not materially situated? If you wonder why I asked for sweet food and rejected other food offered by you, here is my explanation. When one eats too much, even sweets begin to taste repulsive and when one is famished, even bland food is imagined to be very nice. Is there any food that is equally tasty in the beginning, middle and end?"

"Just as a house made of clay in the form of bricks is reinforced with more clay, the body made of earth is nourished with bits of earth in the form of barley, wheat, dal, sugar, fruit, etc. Having realized that

it is only the mind that decides whether something is sweet or not, I have gained an equipoised outlook."

After hearing this, Nidagha fell at Ribhu's feet and said, "O brahmana, kindly disclose your identity. You have come here just to dispel my delusion."

Ribhu replied, "I am Ribhu, your spiritual master. I came here to awaken your spiritual understanding."

After being worshiped by Nidagha, Ribhu departed. After a long time, he returned to Viranagara once again so that he could further instruct his disciple. This time, Ribhu saw Nidagha standing at the outskirts of the city as the king was entering it, along with his retinue. Hungry and thirsty, Nidagha was standing in a secluded place, holding kusha grass and firewood in his hands.

Upon seeing Nidagha, Ribhu approached him. Being unrecognized, Ribhu offered his respects and then said, "O brahmana, why are you standing apart in this lonely place?"

Nidagha replied, "There is such a crowd of people here to watch the king entering the city. That is why I'm standing here."

Ribhu said, "I believe that you are well informed and so please tell me—which one is the king?"

Nidagha replied, "There he is, riding upon his elephant which is as huge as a mountain."

Ribhu said, "I see the king and the elephant as one entity whereas you see them as separate entities. Please explain the difference between them. Which one is the elephant and which one is the king?"

Nidagha replied, "That which is under the king is the elephant and that which is on top of the elephant is the king. Can't you understand the relationship between that which carries and that which is carried?"

Ribhu said, "O brahmana, please enlighten me so that I can understand what is above and what is underneath."

Upon hearing this, Nidagha jumped upon Ribhu and said, "I am now above you like the king, and you are below me like the elephant. This practical demonstration is given by me for your understanding."

Ribhu said, "If you are sitting as if a king upon me as if I were an elephant, just tell me which of us is you and which is me?"

When he heard this, Nidagha immediately bowed down at Ribhu's

feet and said, "My dear sir, I now recognize you as my spiritual master. No one else is so absorbed in oneness and non-duality. I can now understand that you have come here to impart further instruction unto me."

Ribhu said, "Due to your past service, I have come to give you the essence of all transcendental knowledge—the philosophy of non-dualism."

In this way, Nidagha became devoted to a non-dualistic understanding of life, seeing all living beings as non-different from his self. At last, he became merged in the Brahman conception of the Absolute Truth, achieving liberation in the supreme.

Next, while discussing the study of the Vedas, Sanandana Kumara said, "One should acquire learning step-by-step, with great care; one should save money gradually, over a long period of time; one should climb a mountain slowly, and one should travel by foot without over-exerting oneself."

"An ant walking slowly and steadily covers a great distance but Garuda, if he does not move, goes nowhere."

"Studies done only with the help of books and not under the guidance of a preceptor do not shine in an assembly of learned men just as a woman impregnated by a paramour, out of marriage, is not respected."

"Having observed how even a heap of rice gradually disappears (by daily use), and how an anthill becomes a high mound by the slow and continual addition of small particles of dirt, one should devote some time every day for studying Vedic literature."

"If a book is studied thousands of times and is taught hundreds of times, it will automatically come to the tip of the tongue like water flowing from a higher level to a lower one."

"A student should not be late for study by spending a long time eating, nor should he be immersed in thoughts of the temptations of women. A person desirous of mastering a text should study long and steady, like a swan flying over a sea."

"A student who shuns the company of ordinary people, even friends, as if they were a kind of hell, and who carefully protects himself from associating with women, as if they were female Rakshashas—only such a person attains mastery over a subject."

"Those who are dishonest, who are cowardly, whose heads are swol-

len due to pride, those who habitually procrastinate, and those who are afraid of public criticism never become learned."

"Even if one masters a subject by means of his great intellect, if he has done so without serving a qualified teacher, his studies will never bear fruit—like a young, barren woman."

Next, Sanandana Kumara gives a lengthy exposition of Sanskrit grammar that will not even be superficially dealt with here.

He described the six angas or supplements to the Vedas as follows: "Shiksha (dealing with phonetics), Kalpa (treatise on rituals and ceremonies), Vyakarana (grammar), Nirukta (etymology and semantics), jyotisha (astronomy) and Chandas (prosody)—the learned know these as the six supplements of the Vedas (Vedangas)."

The science of jyotisha is said to have three sections—astronomy (ganita), horoscopy (jataka), and natural astronomy (sambhita). Here, in the Narada Purana is a lengthy treatise on mathematics that is surprisingly advanced in its understanding. I will only present a few examples.

Sanandana Kumara said, "The hypotenuse (karma) of a triangle is the square root of the sum of the squares of the base (bhujā) and altitude (koti). The altitude would be the square root of the difference between the squares of the hypotenuse and the base."

"O sage, the diameter of a circle multiplied by 22 and divided by 7 will give the circumference."

"To measure grain heaped in the shape of a cone, whether coarse, medium or fine, the height of the cone would be one-ninth, one-tenth, and one-eleventh of the respective circumferences."

It is said here that during a cycle of the four ages, Satya-yuga, Treta-yuga, Dvapara-yuga and Kali-yuga, there are 7,022,376 revolutions of Venus; 17,937,060 revolutions of Mercury, and 146,568 revolutions of Saturn. The number of days in a maha-yuga (a cycle of the four yugas) is given as 1,577,917,828.

Next is a lengthy treatise on astrology which is beyond the scope of this summary in story form. Those who are interested in astrology may wish to go through the complete text of Narada Purana.

It is interesting to note that there was knowledge of sunspots in Vedic times. Sanandana Kumara said, "Spots on the sun in the shape of a rod, corpse, crow and pillar, respectively, indicate disease, turbulence,

trouble from thieves and loss of wealth for the king."

"Sunspots in the shape of an umbrella, chamara, banner, rain cloud, smoke and sparks predict the destruction of the kingdom."

Special attention is given to performing certain activities at times that are considered auspicious and avoiding the performance of such activities at inauspicious times, according to the position of the planets and stars, the days of the week, and the time of day or night, which is measured in muhurtas. Fifteen muhurtas make up a day and fifteen comprise a night. There are lords of each muhurta so that they known as Brahma-muhurta, etc.

In this section, the effects of many events are analyzed according to the time at which they occur. When one is able to plan an event, auspicious times should be considered and inauspicious times should be carefully avoided. When an event cannot be planned, there are counter-measures given to minimize an inauspicious result.

Sanandana Kumara said, "All men always wish for a minimum of bad effects and a maximum of good effects. Bad effects are inherent in material existence, however, and even the creator (Brahma) is incapable of eradicating them completely. It is therefore necessary to act in a way that bad effects will be minimized and good effects maximized."

A girl's first menstruation (period) is an example of an event that cannot be executed at a proper time, according to plan. Certain days of this occurrence are considered auspicious and other days are considered inauspicious. For example, it is said herein: A girl having pratama-artava (first menstruation) on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> days of the moon as the sun transits into the birth sign, or while sleeping, or during a lunar or solar eclipse—such a girl would prove unchaste.

When pratama-artava occurs on Sunday, this indicates ill health. Monday indicates that she will be dear to her spouse. Tuesday indicates unhappiness. Wednesday indicates that she will have many daughters. Thursday indicates a sensuous nature. Friday indicates chastity, and Saturday indicates the possession of thick, healthy hair.

Certain times of conception are recommended for one who desires a male child. Certain days are recommended for the performance of rituals such as the name-giving ceremony for a child and the first feeding of solid food. The sowing of seeds in the agricultural field should also be done on certain days, and not on others.

As for solicitation for marriage, the following is said by Sanandana Kumara, "Of all stages of life, the householder life is the most exalted. In married life, happiness depends upon the wife being of good character. A girl's acquiring a good character depends upon the beneficent lagna at the time of marriage. If, at the time of a marriage proposal, auspicious signs are seen, this indicates the welfare of the couple and if inauspicious signs are seen, this indicates undesirable consequences."

This is gone into in great detail and I will just give the following example: If the sections in the lagna relating to Libra, Taurus and Cancer are occupied or aspected by Venus or the moon, the people who solicit the bride will obtain her.

It is desirable to conduct the marriage of girls in the even years of their birth, and that of boys in the odd years of their birth. Otherwise, the marriage will prove destructive of both husband and wife.

Many people might consider all of this within the realm of superstition. Vedic society made a person very conscious of the circumstances under which an activity is undertaken. It can be seen that all of this is conducted on a subtle platform. That is why our gross materialistic society at present doesn't appreciate the value of such considerations. Still, it is a fact that everyone can perceive subtle influences at work. Even if ignorant of this subtle science, a person can intuitively feel that something being done will turn out successful or not.

Next, Narada Muni requested, "Kindly tell me about the birth of Vyasadeva's son, Shukadeva."

In reply, Sunandana Kumara narrated the following history. Once, Mahadeva was sporting in a forest of karnikara trees atop Mount Sumeru, in the company of his wife, Parvati, as well as numerous ghostly associates. At that place, Shrila Vyasadeva was performing austerities for the purpose of having an exalted son of great prowess. It is said that he stood for one hundred years, subsisting only upon air while worshipping Lord Shiva. As he was absorbed in the trance of yoga, Vyasa's matted hair shone with great effulgence.

Being pleased with Vyasa's performance of austerities, Lord Mahadeva appeared before him and smilingly said, "Your child will be a pure and self-realized soul, firmly fixed in the Brahman conception of life, and he will become famous throughout the three worlds."

Vyasa was very pleased to receive this benediction. One day there-

after, as the sage was rubbing two sticks together to ignite his sacrificial fire, he happened to see the Apsara, Ghritachi, who possessed incomparable beauty. Upon seeing her roaming in that heavenly forest, the sage immediately became enamored and inflamed with passionate desire.

After arousing Vyasa in this way, Ghritachi assumed the form of a female parrot and approached him. Still, every part of Vyasa's body was saturated with lust, so that he could not control it. While trying to suppress his passion, he applied his mind to igniting the sacrificial fire. Suddenly, his semen was ejected and fell onto the sticks.

In this way, Shukadeva was born as Vyasa continued to ignite the sacrificial fire. It is actually said that Shukadeva was born from the womb of the two sticks that were used for igniting the sacrificial fire. Just as a sacrificial fire, when fed with ghee, blazes brightly, Shukadeva shone brilliantly, assuming a very beautiful form. Ganga came and bathed Shukadeva and a deerskin fell from the sky for him to wear. The Gandharvas sang while the Apsaras danced. The demigods and celestial sages then arrived. Lord Shiva performed the ceremony of awarding Shukadeva the sacred thread. Indra gave Shuka a waterpot (kamandalu).

Just after his birth, the Vedas, along with their confidential understanding, approached Shukadeva for residing in him. Although he was thus fully conversant with the Vedas, he knew that it was his duty to accept a guru and so he selected Brihaspati as his spiritual master.

Even as a child, Shukadeva practiced brahmacharya and executed severe austerities. Being detached from the bodily conception of life, Shukadeva said to his father, "You are the knower of all kinds of religious principles and so kindly describe to me the path that leads one to emancipation from the cycle of repeated birth and death."

In reply, Vyasadeva advised his son to carefully study those sections of the Vedic literature that deal with the subject of liberation. After some time, when Vyasa saw that his son had attained the splendor of Brahman, he told him, "Go to Janaka, the king of Mithila. He will explain to you the purport of moksha-shastra (the scriptures dealing with liberation from material bondage)."

As Shukadeva was about to depart, Vyasa further instructed him, "You should go by the path traversed by mortals (in other words, he should not travel through the sky by means of his yogic perfection).



While residing with the king, you should do whatever he asks of you."

After crossing the Himalayas, Shukadeva reached Bharata-varsha. Passing through many kingdoms, he finally arrived at the palace of King Janaka, where he was stopped by the guards.

Even though he was hungry and thirsty, and even though he was standing in the hot sun, Shukadeva was not disturbed. Seeing how he blazed with ascetic splendor, one of the guards approached him. After offering his obeisances, the guard took Shukadeva to a heavenly garden within the palace compound. After seating Shukadeva, the guard went and informed the king of his arrival.

After being informed that Shukadeva was waiting to see him, King Janaka first sent some beautiful girls to serve him and ascertain the disposition of his mind. All of the girls were very young and beautiful. They were dressed in red and wore gold jewelry. All of them were adept in the art of conversation, they could very well understand the mind of a man, and they were skilled in the art of amorous enjoyment. There were more than fifty girls and they arranged a nice reception for Shukadeva, giving him water to wash his feet and then a nice meal.

After Shukadeva finished eating, the girls took him on a tour of the palace gardens. By playing, singing and giggling, the girls tried their best to entertain Shukadeva, knowing well the subject of male psychology. Shukadeva, who was born from fire sticks, being of pure mind, free from anger, and having controlled senses, was absorbed in meditation upon the Absolute Truth and so he was neither delighted by nor angry at the girls' behavior.

After completing his sandhya religious duties, Shukadeva sat down and began to meditate upon the purpose for which he had come to the kingdom of Janaka. Finally, in the middle of the night, he slept. Early the next morning, Shukadeva awoke. After bathing, although surrounded by the girls, he once again applied his mind to meditation on the Supreme Brahman.

That morning, the king came to see Shukadeva, keeping his family priest in front and accompanied by his ministers and wives. King Janaka carried many articles of worship on his head, such as arghya, and he had a gem-studded throne brought by the servants.

First, King Janaka had Shukadeva seated and then he worshiped

the preceptor's son according to the prescribed manner, after offering him water to wash his feet. At this time, the king presented Shukadeva with the gift of a cow in charity.

In return, Shukadeva inquired about the king's welfare. After assuring him of his well-being, King Janaka asked for Shukadeva's permission to sit on the ground in front of him. Finally, the king inquired about the purpose of Shukadeva's visit.

Shukadeva said, "My father, Vyasa, had informed me that you are not only his disciple but a true knower of the scriptures dealing with moksha-dharma. For the purpose of hearing from you about these confidential topics, he asked me to come and meet you. Now, kindly instruct me. What are the duties of a brahmana? What should be done by a person who desires liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death? Is liberation achieved by the cultivation of spiritual knowledge or by the performance of severe austerities?"

King Janaka replied, "After receiving the sacred thread, a brahmana should devote himself to the study of the Vedas. While performing austerities, serving his spiritual master, and maintaining a vow of celibacy, he should remain free from greed and enviousness. After completing his studies and rewarding his guru, with his permission, he can enter household life."

Shukadeva inquired, "When perfect spiritual knowledge is attained, the Supreme Brahman can be directly realized. However, it is said that such attainment of spiritual knowledge is not possible without the association of pure devotees of the Lord. Is it necessary for one to enter household life after a life of brahmacharya?"

King Janaka explained, "It is a fact that realization of the Absolute Truth is not possible without the guidance of a bona-fide spiritual master. The guru is like the captain of the ship of transcendental knowledge. What is the necessity of accepting the household ashrama for one who has already realized the Absolute Truth? One who has transcended the dualities of material existence never puts another person into anxiety, nor is he ever anxious due to the actions of others. He never covets that which is possessed by others, nor does he feel revulsion for anyone. Such a person has realized his identity with Brahman."

"Shukadeva, I can observe that you have already attained this exalted state of existence because you possess all of the attendant

qualities. Anything more that you wish to know will be ascertained by means of introspection. You make no distinction between pleasure and pain and you attach no importance to the objects of the senses. You feel no bond with your kinsmen. Your mind remains undisturbed whether you are praised or blamed. You are thus already in a liberated state. What more do you wish to ask?"

Thereafter, while remaining fully absorbed in meditation upon the Supreme Self within, Shukadeva journeyed toward the north. Coming to the residence of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who was surrounded by his disciples, teaching them his compilations of the Vedas, Shukadeva went and caught hold of his father's lotus feet. He then related all that had happened in the court of King Janaka. After hearing about the conversations between the king and Shukadeva, Vyāsa fondly embraced his son and seated him by his side.

After some time, Vyāsa's disciples, headed by Paila, having completed their studies, came down to the plains of Bharata-varṣa, to propagate what they had learned. Thus, Vyāsa remained in his ashram with his son as his only companion. One day, as they sat together, absorbed in meditation, a voice from the sky announced, "O sage, why do I not hear the chanting of Vedic mantras in your hermitage? Why are you sitting silently, absorbed in meditation? Are you brooding over something? Being without the vibration of transcendental sound, this place does not appear as attractive as before. Now, along with your son, begin the recitation of the Vedas."

After hearing this, Vyāsa commenced the chanting of Vedic hymns, along with his son, Shukadeva. After the chanting had continued for quite some time, there arose a violent wind. Because of this, Vyāsa told Shukadeva to stop his chanting.

Shukadeva asked, "Tell me—from where is this wind coming?"

Vyāsadeva replied, "It is an ill omen that indicates the suspension of the recitation of the Vedas."

Vyāsa proceeded to describe the classifications of air—sāmana, udāna, vyāna, āpana, and prāna. He concluded by saying, "The wind-gods, the sons of Aditi, act in a manner both free and astonishing, being practically all-pervading. It was indeed most astonishing that even these mountains were shaking due to the blowing of the wind."

"Actually, this wind is the exhalation from the nose of Lord Viṣṇu.

When it blows forcefully, the entire world becomes agitated. It is for this reason that the knowers of the Vedas suspend their recitations during such fierce storms."

Thereafter, when the storm subsided, Vyasadeva asked his son to continue his recitation of the Vedic hymns while he departed for the Ganga to bathe. After some time, Sanat-kumara came to see Shukadeva, as he was seated in a secluded place, reciting the Vedas.

After being very respectfully welcomed, the son of Brahma inquired, "O most fortunate son of Vyasa, what are you now engaged in?"

Shukadeva replied, "I am engaged in understanding the Self by means of receiving knowledge of the Vedas. It is my great fortune just to be able to see you. Now, kindly explain to me something about that path that leads to liberation from material existence."

Sanat-kumara said, "There is no vision on a par with receiving knowledge from authorities. There is no misery comparable to attachment to the objects of the senses. There is no happiness like renunciation."

"Refraining from sinful activities, engaging in acts that are beneficial for all, and good behavior—these three are most conducive to one's welfare. The intelligence of a person who is attached to worldly affairs enhances his entanglement, causing him misery in this life and the next. The restraint of lust and anger is essential for one who desires his own welfare."

"Restraint of cruelty is the greatest religious principle, forbearance is the greatest strength, knowledge of the soul is the greatest knowledge, and truthfulness awards one the greatest benefit."

"O gentle one, by renouncing all desires for material enjoyment, one is released from a host of miseries. Wives, sons, body and wealth—what can one actually claim as his own? Only the reactions to one's pious and sinful activities accompany him after death. Since one will have to leave everything at the time of death, why should one perform harmful activities for the sake of temporary gain?"

"The desire that one feels for living amidst fellow human beings in a family and community is meant for one's bondage. Spiritually advanced people can cut that knot asunder and thus liberate themselves, whereas sinful persons cannot."

"Don't you feel depressed when you see people of your own age

being taken away by the god of death? If not, your heart must be made of steel."

"Every day, thousands of incidents causing delight and thousands of actions causing sorrow affect a person devoid of true wisdom, but not a self-realized soul. To foster detachment, one should find out the faults in the objects of his attachment."

"All things that are hoarded are left behind in the end. All ascents end in downfall, all unions end in separation, and life ends in death. There is no end to the desire to acquire more and more. Satisfaction alone is the greatest pleasure. For this reason, those who are learned praise satisfaction as real wealth."

"Like a tiger pouncing upon a weaker animal, the god of death takes away a person whose desires were not fulfilled."

Sanat-kumara concluded by saying, "My dear Shukadeva, I have thus recounted to you the confidential knowledge that fosters the desire for liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death."

After being worshiped by Vyasa's son, Sanat-kumara departed. Shukadeva then went to see his father before proceeding toward Kailasa, where he planned to engage in a life of tapasya. Being overwhelmed with affection for his son, Vyasa begged, "Wait here, at least for some time."

Shukadeva was above such attachment, however, and so he started out at once. He proceeded through the airways, on the strength of his yogic perfection, and all beings were astonished to see him. As the Gandharavas, Apsaras, Siddhas and celestial sages were gazing upon him, Shukadeva said, "If my father follows me, calling out my name, kindly respond to him (in such a way that Vyasa will think that his son is answering)."

After casting off all subtle coverings of ego, Shukadeva came to two mountains of gold and silver, situated close together, each one hundred yojanas in height, seemingly obstructing his path. By the force of his impact, however, the two closely-joined peaks were broken apart and Shukadeva continued on. Soon, he beheld the river Mandakini, surrounded by a forest filled with blossoming trees. There, celestial damsels were bathing naked. Understanding that Shukadeva was proceeding to Brahmaloka, the girls paid little heed.

To follow his son, Vyasa also sat in yogic meditation and soon came

to where the two mountain peaks lay shattered, leaving the passage through which Shukadeva had passed. The Siddhas and others loudly praised the accomplishment of Shukadeva and upon hearing his son's name, Vyasa began to loudly lament. The echo of his crying was heard in all directions and Vyasa considered this to be his son's reply (it sounded like "Bho!", or "O my father!"). Even today, sounds echo in caves and other such places, as if in response to Vyasa's crying.

Shukadeva achieved liberation by means of his journey. To console Vyasa, Lord Shiva spoke to him as follows: "Why are you so distressed because of your son? Can't you see that he has attained the supreme state of Brahman?"

Being somewhat pacified, Vyasa returned to his ashram. Once, later on, Vyasadeva went to see Nara and Narayana Rishis at Badarikashrama. By witnessing their engagement in severe austerities, Vyasa was inspired to also embark on such a life, although the memory of his son was still fresh within his mind.

At that time, Shukadeva went to see Lord Narayana at Svetadvipa. The Lord told him, "By means of the practice of yoga as taught to you by Sanat-kumara, you have attained perfection and can travel at will throughout the material and spiritual worlds. Utilize this ability and witness the grandeur of My creation."

Thereafter, Shukadeva traveled to Vaikuntha, which was surrounded by the river Viraja. He was not forbidden by the gatekeepers and so he entered that supreme abode of the Lord. There, He perceived the Lord in His four-armed form, holding a conch, disc, club and lotus.

After Shukadeva had glorified Him with many prayers, the Lord said, "The form that you are now seeing is identical with the one that you had witnessed in Svetadvipa. You have attained liberation as one of the Siddhas (perfected beings) and you have achieved pure devotion to Me, which is rarely seen. Having attained this perfection, there remains nothing further to be gained."

"Being instructed by Nara and Narayana Rishis, your father, Vyasadeva, will compile the great literature, Shrimad-Bhagavatam. You should now descend to the earth and learn that great Purana from him. Vyasa is performing austerities at the mountain known as Gandhamadana. Due to separation from you, his mind is depressed. Please go and pacify him because he is very dear to Me."

Being thus advised, Shukadeva bowed to the Lord and thereafter returned by the path by which he had come. When Vyasadeva saw his son before him, he felt exceedingly delighted and desisted from his austerities. After bowing to Nara and Narayana Rishis, he returned to his ashram, along with his son. There, he concentrated his mind upon compiling the great literature, Shrimad-Bhagavatam, which gives light to all persons suffering in the darkness of the age of Kali.

After completing the Bhagavatam, Shrila Vyasadeva taught it to his son, Shukadeva. Although a self-realized soul, Shukadeva took great delight in relishing the descriptions of the qualities and pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

After thus hearing these explanations of moksha-dharma, Narada requested Sanat-kumara to describe in more detail the worship of the Supreme Lord in His various expansions and incarnations. In reply, Sanat-kumara explained how the Lord can be worshiped in a ritualistic manner that is so complex and detailed that it appears as if the devotee would have to devote all of his time and energy just to understand the procedures.

Just to give an example of how complex ritualistic worship of the Lord can be, here are some of the instructions for worshipping Lord Nrisimhadeva. The thirty-two syllable mantra of Lord Nrsimhadeva is the bestower of an empire. The sage is Brahma, the meter is Gayatri and the Deity is Nrisimhadeva. The mantra is recited as follows: ugram viram mahavishnum/jvalantam sarvatamukham/nrsimham bhishanam bhadram/mrityumrityum namamyaham.

First, the devotee should perform the ritual called nyasa by fixing the various syllables of the mantra to different parts of his body. After performing the nyasa, he should meditate on Lord Nrisimhadeva within his heart while reciting this prayer:

“May Nrisimha always protect us. Nrisimhadeva’s arms shine brightly near His neck as He touches His mane. In His hands, He holds a disc and a lotus flower. He split open the lord of the Daityas with the tips of his nails. Lord Nrisimhadeva has three eyes and His face appears very fierce due to His curved fangs. He moves about on land, in the water and in the sky.”

After meditating on this description of Lord Nrsimhadeva, the devotee should exhibit the mudra of Lord Nrisimhadeva as follows: The

mouth and chin are placed between one's knees while the two hands are placed firmly on the floor. The mouth should be kept wide open with the tongue moving restlessly, and the body should tremble from time to time. This is the chief mudra pertaining to Lord Nrisimhadeva.

Next, the thumb and little finger of the left hand are joined while the other three fingers are raised like a trident. The thumb and little finger of the right hand are similarly joined and the two created circles are interlocked while the remaining fingers of the right hand are turned toward the floor. The two hands are placed near the navel, palms facing the floor. With the two index fingers in the lead, the hands are raised to the shoulder. This mudra is called the Antranamudra (the gesture of the intestines).

In this way, the mudra of the chakra and the mudra of the curved fangs are next described. It is said that these mudra are destructive of all sins. Next, it is said that the mantra should be chanted one hundred thousand times for each syllable (in other words, the mantra should be chanted 3,200,000 times).

A person desirous of prosperity and glory should continuously meditate on the white-complexioned form of Lord Nrisimhadeva. He is embraced by Lakshmi, who is standing on His left side, holding a lotus flower in her hand. His appearance is terrible to behold and He wears a garland of intestines. A serpent is His sacred thread. The Lord has five faces, each having three eyes. In this way, the angry Lord assumed a form like Rudra.

When one faces a very difficult task, he should meditate upon Lord Nrsimhadeva having sixteen hands. With His sixteen hands, the Lord splits open the demon with two and lifts his intestines with two more. Two hands hold a conch and disc, two more hold a bow and an arrow, two more hands hold a sword and an iron club, two hands hold a mace and a lotus, two hold a noose and a goad, while the remaining two hands are kept on the crown of the enemy.

If a task is exceedingly great, Lord Nrisimhadeva should be meditated upon as having thirty-two hands. Another form of meditation is upon Lord Nrisimhadeva, seated upon Garuda.

Next, the Jvalamali mantra of Lord Nrsimhadeva is given and then other mantras, one of which has one thousand syllables:



om hrim shrim klim krodhamurte nrsimha mahapurusha pradhana  
dharma-dharmanigadanirmochana kalapurusha sadriktoyam sveshvara  
sadrigjalam shranta nivishtha chaitanyacit sadabhasaka kaladyatita ni-  
tyodita udayastamayakranta mahakarunika hridayabjachaturdala nivish-  
tita chaitanyatmamshchaturatman dvadashatman chaturvimshatman pan-  
chavimhatman baka hari sahasramurte ehi ehi bhagavan nrisimhapurusha  
krodheshvara sahasravanditapada kalpantagnisahasrakotyabha mahadeva  
nikayadasa shatayajnatata amala amala pingalekshana shatadamshtre-  
yudha nakhayudha danavendranta vahnī shonita samsaktavigraha  
bhutapasmara yatudhana surasura vandhyamana padapankaja bhaga-  
van vyoma chakreshvara prabhavapyayar upenottistha avidyanichayam  
daha daha jnanaishvairyam prakashaya prakashaya om sarvajna arosha  
jambhajrimbhavyavatara-kasatyapurusha sadasadmadhya nivishtam mama  
duhsvapnabhayam nigadabhayam kantarabhayam visha jvara dakinikritya  
adhva revati bhayam ashani durbhiksha bhayam maribhayam chaya  
skanda aspmara bhayam chaurabhayam jalasvapnagnibhayam gajasimha  
bhujanga bhayam janma jara marana bhayam nirmochay nirmochaya  
prashamaya prashamaya jneyar upadharana nrisimha brihat sama purusha  
sarvabhayanivarana ashtashtaka chatuhshpati chetikabhayam vidyavrita  
trayastrimshaddevata koti namita padapankajanvita sahasravadana sahas-  
radara sahasrekshana sahasrapadasahasrabhujasahasrajihva sahasratalaja  
sahasrayudha tamah prakashaka puramathana sarvamantrarajeshara  
vihayasagatiprada patalagatiprada yantramardana ghorattahasa hasita  
vishvavasa vasudeva akrura hayamukha paramahamsa vishvesha vishva  
vidambana nivishtha pradurbhavakaraka hrishiksha svacchanda nih-  
sheshajiva grasakamahapishitasriglampata khechari siddhipradayaka  
ajeya avyakta brahmandodara brahma sahasra koti srag mundamala  
panditamunda matsya kurma varaha nrsimha vama trailokyakramana  
padashalika ramatraya vishnurupa tattvatraya pranavadhara shikhapada-  
nivishtha svaha svadha vashat vaushat hum pranadhara adideva pranapana  
nivishtita pancharatrika ditija vinidhanakara mahamaya amoghadarpa  
daityendrardarpadalana tejorashin om klim tejasvarapurushaya satyapuru-  
shaya phat o mom phat om namah vasudevaya phat om mayamurte phat  
klim amurte phat om kraum vishvamurte phat om hrim vishvatmane phat  
om sau chaturatmane phat om vishvarupin phat om au hrai parama hrai  
parama hram sap hat om hrah hiranyagarbhar upadharana phat om hraum  
anaupamyar upadharin phat om kshaum nrismharupadharin klam shlah

*asheshanga vinaysa vinyastamurtidharin phat hrau nisargasiddhaikaru-  
padharin phat om hum hum hum kraum amuka mastakam khanda khanda  
khadaya khadaya klim sadyamanaya Anaya mahatman samyag darshaya  
darshaya ksham ksham kshum kshaim kshaum kshah kshraum kshapita  
kalmasha yam yam dram drim klim blum sah nrisimhaya jvalatmane svaha  
nrisimhaya kalatmane svaha om kshraum klim shrim shrim hrim om.*

In this way, very elaborate methods of worshipping the various forms of the Lord are presented by Sanat-kumara in the Narada Purana. The chanting of mantras is to be accompanied by the performance of fire sacrifices; as well as the worship of the paraphernalia of the Lord, each of which is symbolized by geometric figures; and the worship of the lords of the directions.

Sanat-kumara said, "I shall now speak of another practice that destroys all sins—the narration of the life of Hanuman, the son of Vayu. This history had formerly been related to me by Lord Rama."

Once, Gautama Rishi performed a sacrifice and so he invited many brahmanas, demigods, Daityas and kings to attend. When all had assembled, a disciple of Gautama Rishi named Shankaratman arrived, naked. Sometimes, he would appear as a brahmana while at other times, he would look like a shudra, or a yogi, or an ascetic. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva.

After arriving, Shankaratman approached Gautama while he was having his meal. Shankaratman ate with his preceptor and then partook of his remnants. Thereafter, he was sometimes seen licking the cooking pots, sometimes passing urine within the house, and sometimes smearing mud over his body. Whenever he would see him, Gautama would take Shankaratman by the hand, lead him into his temple, and make him sit on his seat while feeding him with his own hand.

Once, desiring to test him, Gautama's wife, Ahalya, called Shankaratman and said, "Please eat whatever I offer you, without hesitation."

Shankaratman ate all that Ahalya gave him. He drank fire as if it were water and he ate thorns as if it were rice.

Shankaratman was then invited by the daughters of the sages to eat. Thereafter, he was fed clay, stool, mud and pieces of wood and was

delighted to accept them all. At this time, his form resembled that of a chandala.

Taking a pair of torn shoes in his hand, Shankaratman approached Vṛishaparva and began conversing with him. Indeed, he stood naked between Lord Shiva and Vṛishaparva. Becoming outraged, Vṛishaparva cut off the sage's head. At this, everyone became extremely displeased and Gautama, especially, was sad.

Addressing the assembly, Gautama said, "What sin has this great devotee of Lord Shiva committed so that his head has been severed? I will also surely die because the preceptor is the life and soul of a disciple."

Shukra, the preceptor of the demons, said, "If that be the case, I will revive you by my ascetic prowess."

Indeed, even as he was speaking, Gautama gave up his life. Upon seeing this, Shukra also abandoned his life by utilizing his prowess of mystic yoga. When they saw this, the assembled Daityas, headed by Prahlaḍa, as well as the demigods, sages and brahmanas all gave up their lives.

Witnessing this, Ahalya began to cry very loudly, whereas Virabhadra, the servant of Lord Shiva, became angry. He exclaimed, "A great number of Lord Shiva's devotees have lost their lives. I will go and inform the lord of this."

Virabhadra went to Mount Mandara and told Lord Shiva all that had transpired. Addressing Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Brahma, who were also present there, Lord Shiva said, "Even though these persons knew me as the bestower of benedictions, they took to this lamentable path. I will go and see what is actually happening."

Mounting his bull carrier, Lord Shiva departed, along with Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Brahma and countless attendants. After a short while, the procession arrived at Gautama's hermitage. Simply by glancing from the corner of his left eye, Lord Shiva revived Gautama, saying, "I am pleased with you and so please ask for a benediction."

Gautama replied, "If you are pleased then let all of these persons who have died be restored to life. This sage, Shankaratma, was a great yogi who displayed complete indifference toward the dualities of material existence. Especially I wish that he be brought back to life."

Lord Shiva glanced at Lord Vishnu, who then entered the body of Shankaratma, along with Vayu. As a result, Shankaratma became the son of the wind god, assuming the form of Hari (which also means "monkey"). It was then declared that this best of monkeys, Hanuman, would live until the end of the kalpa and would be able to change form at will.

Thereafter, Lord Shiva asked Gautama to prepare some food. He then took Lord Vishnu by the hand and led Him to a secluded place in the forest, keeping the bull, Nandi, as a guard. There, the two lay down on a nice, soft bed. After conversing for some time, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva got up, desiring to bathe. They entered a nearby lake where many sages and Rakshashas were splashing water upon one another.

Lord Shiva splashed water mixed with lotus filaments onto Lord Vishnu's face, causing Him to close His eyes. At that time, Maheshvara got up onto Lord Vishnu's shoulders, caught hold of His head and pushed it down into the water. After coming up and being submerged, again and again, Lord Vishnu managed to throw Mahadeva from His shoulders. Catching hold of his legs, Lord Vishnu whirled him around and around. Lord Shiva then struck Lord Vishnu in the chest, making Him fall into the water.

Again, the two resumed splashing water upon one another. In this way, the play within the water continued for some time. Meanwhile, as the sages battled one another in the water, their matted hair became entangled with one another. Becoming agitated, the sages tugged and tugged, trying to free their hair so that the stronger ones dragged the weaker ones.

As this was going on, Hanuman danced and sang in the sky. Lord Shiva began to listen attentively and while doing so, he sang along. Lord Vasudeva picked up a drum and provided accompaniment. Gautama joined in while the devas and Danavas silently sat and listened.

Lord Mahesha caught Hanuman by the arm and requested, "Get up on my bull carrier and let me hear you sing some more."

Hanuman replied, "You alone are worthy of that honor. If I were to ride upon Nandi, I would become a great offender. Instead, O lord of the demigods, why don't you ride on me? While traversing the sky, I will sing for your pleasure."

Thus it came to be that Lord Shiva rode upon Hanuman. They went

to Gautama's ashram, where lunch was awaiting them. Thereafter, as Hanuman was seated in a lotus posture, Lord Shiva came and, placing his hands on his head, turned him to face the east. Lord Shiva then placed one of his feet on Hanuman's folded hands and his other foot on his face. With two of his toes, Lord Shiva lovingly caught hold of Hanuman's nose. With his other foot, Mahadeva touched his Hanuman's shoulders, face, chest, belly and navel. Shankara then grasped Hanuman's head and bent it a little, touching his back with his chin while placing a pearl necklace around his neck.

At this time, Lord Vishnu said, "In the three worlds, there is none like Hanuman. His position is unexplainable by the Vedas and incomprehensible to the demigods.

Gautama then came and informed Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva that it was time for lunch and so the two Lords entered the rishi's ashram. Lord Shiva sat down with Lord Vishnu facing him as Gautama began serving them thirty types of food. As Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu ate, Gautama picked up a large fan and fanned them.

From this description, we can have a glimpse of the very friendly relationship enjoyed by Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. In the Narada Purana, as well as other Puranas, the injunction is stated again and again that one should never see a difference between Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. This does not mean that Lord Shiva is identical to Lord Vishnu in all respects. What it indicates is that Lord Shiva has no separate interest from Lord Vishnu. It is seen in India that the devotees of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu are often at odds. This is not the case with the two Lords themselves, however.

Next, at Narada Muni's request, Sanat-kumara gave a brief table of contents for all of the Puranas, one after another. Sanat-kumara said, "O brahmana, the stories found in the Puranas are miraculous and very detailed. They took place in various kalpas and so their descriptions vary from one account to another."

Next, Narada Muni inquired about the duties pertaining to each of the days of the waning and waxing moon. In response, Sanat-kumara requested Sanatana-kumara to speak. Finally, at the conclusion of this discourse, Narada Muni worshiped the four Kumaras—Sanat, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanatana. Thereafter, the four Kumaras departed for the abode of Lord Shiva.

Next, to illustrate the efficacy of observing the vow of Ekadashi, Suta Gosvami narrated the following story to the sages at Nimiśharanya:

Once, there lived a king named Rukmangada, who was endowed with the good qualities of patience and forgiveness. He was a devotee of Lord Vishnu, who lies on the Milk Ocean, and he was a strict follower of Ekadashi. In fact, on Ekadashi, the king had his servants mount a drum on top of an elephant and while beating it, they would announce throughout the land, "If anyone more than eight years old and less than eighty-five partakes of food on this day of Lord Vishnu, he will be either killed or banished from the kingdom, even if he or she may be my father, brother, son, wife or friend. Indeed, the person who eats on this day will be punished just like a robber. Today, give charity to the brahmanas and bathe in the Ganga."

Every Ekadashi, the king made this proclamation throughout his kingdom. As a result, the pathway leading to the kingdom of God was crowded with people because all persons dying within that glorious kingdom after following Ekadashi went to the abode of the Lord. Even those who follow the Ekadashi-vrata just to make a show of religion attain the Lord's abode after death. One who eats on Ekadashi, however, consumes all the sins of this world.

Because of this, Yamaraja, the son of the sun-god, was put into difficulty and Chitragupta found himself with nothing to do. Indeed, Chitragupta had to erase all the accounts of previous sins committed by those who followed Ekadashi and thereafter ascended to the Lord's supreme abode. Finally, all of the hells became devoid of sinful persons and the paths leading to Yama's abode became neglected. In fact, because all of the people went to the abode of Lord Vishnu, riding upon Garuda, even the heavenly planets appeared practically vacant.

The performance of sacrifices to the Pitris and Devas, pilgrimage to holy places, and other religious rituals became out of fashion. Only Ekadashi was observed by men.

When heaven and hell thus became empty, Narada Muni went to Yamaraja and said, "O king, no cries of anguish are heard coming from hell. Chitragupta is sitting silently like a yogi. Why are no sinners coming to your abode?"

Feeling aggrieved, Yamaraja replied, "O Narada, the emperor of the earth is a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. With the beating of drums, he announces throughout his kingdom, 'Being Ekadāśi, nothing should be eaten today. Those who do so are liable to punishment.' Being afraid of him, all of the citizens strictly observe Ekadāśi. As a result of this practice, everyone attains the abode of the Lord after death."

"O brahmana, it is for this reason that the paths leading to my kingdom are vacant and the writers of accounts are resting. Indeed, all of the sinful acts that had been recorded by my scribes have had to be erased with great endeavor. This is the greatness of the Ekadāśi-vrata."

"Now, I feel useless—like a hen-pecked husband, like an impotent man with a youthful wife, like a wooden deer, like a brahmana who has given up reciting the Gayatri mantra, or like a man without eyes and ears. I no longer desire to maintain my position as one of the lords of the world. For this reason, I will go to Lord Brahma and inform him of my plight."

Yamaraja, Narada Muni, and Chitrāgupta went to the abode of Lord Brahma. They saw Lord Brahma, surrounded by many exalted souls. Lord Hamsa was also seen there, holding kusha grass in His hands as He was worshiped by the controllers of the universe. In the midst of this gathering, Yamaraja entered like a bashful bride. With his head bent low and his glance fixed downward, the lord of death appeared in that great assembly.

Those present were very surprised to see Yamaraja. They said, "The son of the sun-god is always so busy punishing sinful souls that he cannot find even a moment's relaxation. How is it that he has come here?"

While hearing this talk, Yamaraja came before Lord Brahma and fell flat to offer obeisances. He cried out, "Save me! Save me! O lord of the devas. My accounts have all been washed clean and so I do not know what to do."

After saying this, Yamaraja fell unconscious. At this, there was a great commotion in the assembly as people said, "He who inflicts pain upon all kinds of sinful people is now crying out in distress. How can this be? Perhaps the saying is true: 'He who gives pain to others has to suffer afterwards.'"

Understanding the intention of Lord Brahma, the wind-god, Vayu, silenced the people and then went and picked up Yamaraja. Actually, Yama was very upset and he was thinking to run away from the assembly and so Vayu consoled him while gently placing him in a seat. Vayu asked, "Who has attacked and banished you? Who has erased the cloth that records all the activities of the world? Tell us what is the matter. Rest assured that Lord Brahma will dispel your grief."

Yamaraja glanced at Narada Muni and then spoke with a voice that was choked with tears. He said, "O grandsire of the worlds, kindly listen to me. Humiliation after performing meritorious deeds is worse than death. One who does not perform his duties but simply consumes the wealth of his master will have to become a worm in stool. At your behest, I have been engaged in administering justice—rewarding those who are meritorious and punishing those who are sinners. Up until now, I had engaged in my occupational duties without impediment but today, I have been defeated by a king named Rukmangada."

"Out of fear of this king, no one on the earth eats anything on Ekadashi. They do not care for any other religious act and so there is no more performance of sacrifice, travel to holy places of pilgrimage, or bathing in holy rivers. Even though they commit any number of sins, the people of the earth still attain the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu, along with their ancestors, on the strength of observing the Ekadashi-vrata."

"It is this that has stopped me from executing my duties, thus giving me great pain. It is for relief from this distress that I have sought shelter at your lotus feet. It is my wish that sinful men may not escape punishment by me in this manner."

"It seems to me that the abode of Lord Vishnu is unlimited since all the people of the earth have gone there and still it is not full. I consider King Rukmangada to be my greatest enemy and so I wish that he could be restrained. If he remains unchecked, this king will take all the residents of the universe to the abode of Lord Vishnu. My staff of justice and cloth recording the deeds of men were awarded by you and yet this king has nullified them. The shame of this makes it difficult for me to continue living."

Lord Brahma replied, "What surprising thing have you seen? Why are you so distressed? Distress felt upon witnessing the good fortune



of others is an anguish that lasts until death. Why should not the observance of a fast on Ekadāśi award one attainment of the Lord's supreme abode, just like the utterance of His holy name? If one achieves liberation simply by chanting the Lord's holy names, why should he not achieve the same by fasting on the holy day of Ekadāśi?"

"How could you be so wicked-minded as to think of punishing those who have observed the sacred vow of Ekadāśi? That you have not been ground into power or punished in some other way is simply due to the Lord's mercy. One who is a servant of the king should not try to punish those who are especially dear to him. How can you dare to punish those who are devotees of Lord Janardana?"

"I could maybe help you to restrain devotees of Lord Shiva, or the sun-god or even my own devotees but I would never hinder the devotees of the primeval Lord, Puruṣhottama."

Yamarāja said, "O lord of the universe, I shall not resume by duties as the lord of justice as long as King Rukmangada continues to rule the earth. If, when Ekadāśi comes, you are able to convince the king to give up his determination to make all of his subjects fast, I shall resume my duties as your servant. King Rukmangada is my enemy and so if I am able to make him eat on Ekadāśi, I will feel as if I have accomplished my goal of life."

Lord Brahma thought deeply for awhile, desiring to do something for the benefit of Yamarāja. Finally, he created from his mind a most beautiful young woman. As the young girl, who was fully endowed with the wealth of feminine attractiveness, stood before him, Lord Brahma could see how the others in the assembly were staring at her with lusty intentions.

Closing his eyes so that he would not be disturbed in that way, Lord Brahma said to those surrounding him, "He who lustily glances and one's mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, brother's wife, preceptor's wife, or king's wife will fall into a terrible hell. If a member of the three higher orders thinks lustily about a chandala woman, he also falls into hell. One who indulges in sexual intercourse with the above-mentioned women has ten thousand of his pious acts cancelled and he gradually sinks down to having to accept the form of a rat. For this reason, no intelligent man will look upon such a woman with lust."

"Once a boy has attained the age of twelve, he should no longer

massage his mother with oil. A boy over twelve may have his mother massage his body with oil if she is over sixty. Whether an old man or a young man, no one should ask his daughter-in-law to massage his feet. It is said that in such a case, both of them will fall into the hell called Raurava."

"O Yamaraja, a woman who shows her uncovered limbs to her father-in-law will be eaten by worms in hell. The same fate awaits a man who has his daughter-in-law bathe him or smear oil over his body."

After saying this, Lord Brahma paused a moment and then addressed the beautiful woman as follows: "O fair-complexioned lady, because you have been created from my mind, you are truly competent to make the minds of men mad."

The young woman bowed to Lord Brahma and said, "O lord, just see how everyone in the three worlds has become deluded by seeing me—even sinless yogis. There is no man within the three worlds, including you, who does not become agitated upon seeing me. Of course, praising oneself is not a good habit but I have done so because I can understand that you have created me for some special purpose."

"I can understand that you have created me to make someone excited and perturbed. Kindly command me and I shall make that person lose his composure. The Puranas have described the powerful impact of a woman's glance by saying that it causes madness and is destructive of holy vows. It is only until the shaft-like glance of a dalliance-minded damsel pierces a man's heart that he remains on the path of virtue, continues to control his senses, and remains decorated with humility and a sense of shame."

"To hell with the descriptions of foolish poets that compare the face of a beautiful woman to the moon. Does the moon possess side-long glances, a look of wounded pride or the appearance of pleasure and laughter?"

"Only when drunk does liquor cause delusion within the mind of a man but a young girl excites delusion simply by being seen or remembered. O lord, you have created me for fascinating someone and so, kindly command me. Who is it that you wish for me to bewilder?"

Lord Brahma replied, "O lady with shapely thighs, you have spoken rightly. There is nothing that cannot be achieved by you within this world. It is true—even my mind is being agitated so that I am struggling

to control it with the goad of perfect knowledge.”

“Upon the earth, in the city of Vidisha, there is a king named Rukmangada, whose wife, Sandhyavali, is comparable to you in beauty. They have a son named Dharmangada who is even more glorious than his father. Due to bashfulness, however, the boy has not yet experienced the thrill of intimately associating with a girl like you. Thousands of women have approached him of their own accord but he has rejected them all because they could not sway him from his vows. In his house, three hundred mothers look upon him with great affection.”

“O woman of faultless features, I want you to approach the king at Mount Mandara. Becoming enamored by your singing, the king’s horse will carry him to that place. After leaving his horse, the king will climb to the top of the mountain, being enticed by your voice. When he approaches you, you must say, ‘O king, I will undoubtedly become your wife, on the condition that whatever I say must be carried out by you.’ Being enamored by your beauty, the king will surely give his consent.”

“After some days, when the king is very eager for sexual intercourse, take him by the hand and remind him of his previous promise to do your bidding. When the king expresses his eagerness to obey your every command, you must say to him, ‘From now on, no one must observe fasting on the Ekadashi day. O beloved husband, your observance of a fast is detrimental to our sensual pleasure. One who does not gratify his youthful wife, saying that he will do so later, is certainly most wicked.’ Even after saying this, if the king does not comply with your wish then you must say, ‘If you do not want to abandon your fasting on Ekadashi then cut off your son’s head and place it upon my lap.’ If you can accomplish your mission, the people of the earth will surely give up fasting on Ekadashi so that hell will once again become populated. In this way, my purpose will be served.”

After hearing this, the lotus-eyed woman said, “Kindly give me a name. After all, children must be named by their father.”

Lord Brahma said, “O beautiful woman, because the entire universe is enchanted by you—let your name be Mohini.”

After bowing down to Lord Brahma, Mohini departed for Mount Mandara. It was this mountain that was formerly used by the demigods and demons to churn the Milk Ocean for the purpose of producing

nectar. After arriving at the mountain, Mohini sat on a flat rock where a great Shiva-linga was located and waited for the king while singing in a very sweet voice. The sound of Mohini's voice was so captivatina that even Lord Shiva desired to enjoy with her. Being ashamed due to the presence of his wife, however, the lord desisted.

At that time, King Rukmangada addressed his son as follows: "The father who does not give responsibility to his son when he is mature enough, and the son who does not accept responsibility so that his father can gain relief—these two are condemned. My dear son, I have never rested or enjoyed life while insuring that my subjects faithfully follow the vow of Ekadashi. Many persons in my kingdom put forth various arguments for accepting food on that day but I refuted them all. Being engaged in this way, I did not allow myself to enjoy any kind of happiness. I live for the benefit of my subjects and not for my personal enjoyment."

"Now, my dear son, I wish to roam throughout the mountains and forests, on the pretext of hunting. I can do so only after entrusting you with the burden of ruling the kingdom."

Dharmangada replied, "I shall do as you wish. Enjoy life to your heart's content while I bear the responsibility of maintaining the kingdom. A son who does not act according to the wish of his father will certainly incur disrepute."

Rukmangada was delighted to hear this. Dharmangada summoned his subjects and said, "I have been commanded by my father to rule the kingdom and so whatever was ordered by him, I want you to continue—especially fasting on the day of Ekadashi, for that is his permanent practice."

Dharmangada had hardly a moment's rest from that time onward as he continually dealt with matters of state administration. He put drums on the heads of elephants and toured his kingdom, proclaiming that everyone should worship Lord Vishnu. When he understood that his son was such a highly qualified ruler, Rukmangada felt great satisfaction.

Desiring to benefit her husband, who was engaged in hunting in the forest, his queen, Sandhyavali said, "I also feel great satisfaction for there is no greater joy than having a qualified son. Now that you have placed the burden of ruling the world on our son's shoulders,

you should abstain from violence to the deer in the forest and instead perform sacrifices for the satisfaction of the Lord.”

“O king, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure by fathers having grown-up sons is like the leaving of amorous scratches on the breasts of an old woman.”

“Worship the Lord instead of killing innocent deer. The Puranas have declared that non-violence is the greatest virtue. One who maintains himself through violent means practices religion in vain. When animals are killed and eaten, six persons are considered to be responsible and thus liable to suffer sinful reactions—one who approves of the violent act, the owner of the establishment, the actual killer, one who eats the animal, one who cooks it, and the person who serves it. It is only for your welfare that I am advising you to give up hunting.”

Rukmangada replied, “O gentle lady, I have no desire to hunt or kill deer. I only use hunting as an excuse to wander in the forest so that I can kill the plunderers residing there.”

After saying this, the king mounted his horse and departed. After traveling a great distance, King Rukmangada came to an ashram of rishis that was surrounded by flowering trees, as well as those that were laden with fruit. Upon entering the hermitage, he saw the sage Vamadeva, surrounded by many disciples.

After being honored with a presentation of arghya, the king sat on a mat of kusha grass. The sage expressed his pleasure at meeting such a greatly pious king who had vanquished Yamaraja. He also said something that is often found in the Puranas: Even a chandala who is a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu is superior to a brahmana whereas a brahmana devoid of devotion to the Lord is lower than a chandala.

Vamadeva said, “The king who is not a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu but worships other gods is like a woman who gives up the service of her husband due to attachment to a paramour.”

King Rukmangada did not like to be praised, however, and so he replied with great humility, “O sage, I am not worthy of this for I do not consider myself to be equal to even the dust of your lotus feet. There is one thing I would like to ask of you. I do not know the cause of my great fortune. My wife is the most beautiful of women and she does not display even the slightest symptom of aging, such as wrinkled skin or grey hair. My son is the most obedient son that could be imagined. I am

the conquerer of one of the seven islands but my son has conquered the remaining six. By what previous meritorious act do I now enjoy such a level of happiness?"

Vamadeva considered the matter deeply for a few moments. Then, knowing the cause of the king's great fortune, he said, "Formerly, you were born as a shudra. You were oppressed by poverty and harassed by a wicked wife. You maintained yourself on the meager wages earned by serving others."

"Once, in the company of some brahmanas, you went on a tour of holy places. After visiting many places, you finally came to Mathura and bathed in the river Yamuna. There, in a temple of Lord Varaha, you heard narrations of the Puranas and according to what you learned, you performed a particular ritual that is pleasing to Lord Vishnu, called Ashunya Sayana. It is because of this observance that you have attained such good fortune in this life."

King Rukmangada then explained to the sage how he wanted to see Mount Mandara and for that purpose, he had handed over the rule of his kingdom to his son. Thereafter, with Vamadeva's permission, the king mounted his horse and departed. After going around Gandamadana and passing through the kingdom of the northern Kurus, the king arrived at Mount Mandara. Due to having received the touch of Lord Vishnu, the mountain was surrounded by vast quantities of gold.

Mount Mandara was frequented by numerous Gandharvas and Apsaras and the cries of various birds and animals resounded everywhere. As the king looked for the path leading to the top of the mountain, he saw flocks of birds flying over the trees, being attracted by the charming voice of an enchanting lady. Indeed, that sweet sound entered King Rukmangada's ears as well. Being fascinated, he got down from his horse and began the climb to the top.

In this way, King Rukmangada came upon an astonishingly beautiful young lady whose complexion was like molten gold. She was engaged in worshipping a great linga that rose high into the sky. She appeared to be the personified form of the mental wish of a meritorious person. When he saw the enchanting form of Mohini, the king lost his senses and fell to the ground. After regaining consciousness, his body was seized by a high fever.

Stopping her singing and keeping her mission in mind, Mohini got

up from her seat and approached him, saying, "O king, I am already under your control. You are able to bear the burden of the entire world. Why have you lost your composure upon seeing me? If you desire to have union with me as your willing partner after the performance of the proper rituals, you can do so. You can freely enjoy me as your slave, who is adept in the art of sexual enjoyment."

King Rukmangada replied in a faltering voice, "Young lady, many women with moon-like faces have been enjoyed by me but I have never seen one so lovely as you. It appears as if your beauty fascinates the entire world. O lovely-faced woman, simply the sight of you has pierced my heart with the arrows of Cupid so that I fell to the earth as if stunned."

"O lady with beautiful thighs, be gracious to me. I will grant whatever it is that is in your mind. Being bound by affection for you, there is nothing within the three worlds that I would not be willing to give you. Indeed, I am ready to give up the kingdom of the earth for your sake."

"O most enchanting form of a woman, I am ready to forsake even my soul for your love, and so what to speak of ordinary wealth?"

Upon hearing the king's speech, Mohini smiled. Taking him by the hand, she raised him up, sweetly saying, "I do not want to possess the earth, along with its mountains and seas. The only thing I want is that when the time presents itself, you will carry out my wish without hesitation. Enter into this agreement and I will enjoy with you to your complete satisfaction."

The king replied, "O gentle lady, I agree to all that you say."

Mohini said, "Give me your right hand, which has practiced many holy rites, so that I can place my faith in your words. I know that you have never uttered a lie on any occasion. Still, this is the convention that is followed while making a solemn promise."

Being delighted, King Rukmangada said with great delight, "O beautiful lady, I have never uttered a lie since birth. I hereby offer my right hand to you and declare that if I do not carry out your wish then all the merit achieved by me will become yours. Become my wife, for I have come under the sway of your charm."

"My name is Rukmangada, in the dynasty of Ikshvaku. I am the son of Ritadvaja. Dharmangada is my son. Under the pretext of hunting

deer, I have entered this forest. After visiting the hermitage of the sage Vamadeva, I have come here. While roaming about the mountain, your sweet singing entered my ears. Being attracted, I have come to you. Now that you have come within the range of my vision, I feel as if I have been born again."

Mohini said, "O king, I am born from Lord Brahma and have come here for your sake, after hearing about your fame and glorious character. I have forsaken all the gods, headed by Indra, to come here and meet you. While waiting for you, I have been worshiping the lord of the devas, Shankara, by singing for his pleasure. I feel that the lord has been pleased by my worship and it is for this reason that I, who love you, have attained you, who love me."

After saying this, Mohini lifted up the king, who had all the while been lying upon the ground as if struck by the thunderbolt of Indra. After lifting him up, Mohini said, "O king, do not entertain any doubt. Know me to be a sinless virgin girl and so marry me according to the injunctions of the grihya-sutras."

Thereafter, King Rukmangada married Mohini on that mountain top. Being united with her, he smiled and said, "O lovely one, the attainment of heaven is not as conducive of happiness as gaining you. Even though I am a resident of earth, having you by my side, I feel superior to Indra in heaven. I shall always do that which is pleasing to you—kindly command me. Tell me where you would like to reside—here at Mount Mandara, in my palace, or at any other heavenly garden."

In reply, Mohini spoke as follows, to increase the king's happiness: "O king, if I reside in your palace I will have to see the envious glances of your co-wives. I would like to reside here with you but I know that you will be unhappy without your beloved wife, Sandhyavali, and your son, Dharmangada. Your sorrow would only serve to increase my sorrow and so I am willing to live with you at the place of your choice. It is the duty of a wife to stay with her husband, wherever he may be."

Upon hearing this, the king was delighted. After embracing Mohini, he said, "You will stand above all my other wives. Do not doubt this, thinking that you will have to face misery. Let us now proceed to my capital, where we can freely pursue whatever pleasures we desire."

Thereafter, King Rukmangada and Mohini departed. When they came to the base of the mountain, the king found his horse waiting for



him. At that time, as the horse was digging the earth with his hooves, a lizard emerged from underground. Seeing that the lizard was being crushed by the horse, the kind-hearted king exclaimed, "Alas! The lizard is being squashed by the horse's hooves!"

Rushing up to the horse, the king took a leaf from a tree and scraped the lizard from the horse's hoof and threw it onto the grass. Seeing the lizard unconscious, the king said to Mohini, "O lotus-eyed lady, bring some water immediately so that I can sprinkle it on the lizard."

Mohini brought some water and the king sprinkled it on the unconscious lizard. Upon regaining consciousness, the lizard saw the king before her. Although experiencing great pain, she said, "O mighty-armed Rukmangada, please listen to my story. In my last life, I was the wife of a brahmana in the city of Shakala. Although young and beautiful, my husband did not like me very much. Although he didn't hate anyone, he didn't like me and always spoke harshly to me."

"I was very unhappy because of this and so I consulted some other women who had been neglected by their husbands but then later on won their favor. These women assured me that their husbands had become meek and submissive to them after a female rishi had given them some magic potion. They suggested that I also see this ascetic woman."

"I immediately started out and some people directed me to that woman's palace, which rested on one hundred columns. After entering, I saw that effulgent woman who practiced the vow of celibacy. She had long, matted hair and was dressed in flowing robes. A number of women attended her and one was gently fanning her. With beads in her hands, she chanted a mantra that is capable of bringing someone under a person's control."

"I placed a gold ring at her feet and offered my obeisances. She was delighted to see the ring and even without my saying a word, she understood how my husband had neglected me. She said, 'This medicinal powder and amulet are capable of bringing anyone under control. Your husband must eat the powder and wear the amulet around his neck. If this is done, he will become submissive to you and not even look at another woman.' "

"I quickly returned to my husband. That night, I mixed the powder in his milk and he drank it. Later, as he rested, I tied the amulet around his neck. This being accomplished, I felt relieved. It so happened that

after taking the powder, my husband became very ill and day by day, his condition worsened. Sores surrounded his genitals and worms fed on the pus. Having become very weak, my husband lamented night and day. He told me, 'My dear wife, I am your slave. I am taking refuge in you, please save me. I promise that I will never approach another woman again.' "

"When I heard this, I felt terrified and so I returned to the ascetic lady and told her all that had happened. I asked her, 'How can my husband achieve happiness?' The female rishi gave me a second dose of medicinal powder and when I gave it to my husband, he instantly returned to his normal condition. From that time onward, he was subservient to me and obeyed my every word."

The lizard continued her story to the king: "Finally, I passed away and fell into the hell called Tamrabhrashtra (like a copper frying pan). After becoming freed from most of my past sins by being tortured in hell, I was born on the earth as a lizard."

"O king, this is the result achieved by any woman who tries to control her husband by such wicked means as I had formerly employed. Now, unless you deliver me, who have sought refuge in you, I will again have to accept another abominable species like this. This can be done if you donate to me the merit that you have earned by observing the vow of Vijaya-dashami performed at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Sharayu. You are the destroyer of the path leading to the abode of Yamaraja. I am most miserable—please save me."

After hearing this, Mohini told the king, "Every living being suffers and enjoys the results of his own actions. What do you have to do with this sinful creature who had acted wickedly to her husband? What is given to good people surely is the cause of future happiness but a gift to a wicked person causes one's downfall. If milk is mixed with sugar and given to a serpent, it will simply increase its poison. Similarly, help rendered to sinful people serves no good purpose."

"O King, let us leave aside this sinful person and resume our journey to your city."

Rukmangada replied, "O daughter of Brahma, how is it that you are speaking like this? Persons who are opposed to helping others are certainly sinful. Such people only think of their own happiness and feel no qualms while harassing others. The moon, sun, clouds, the earth,

fire, water, sandalwood, trees and good people are always engaged in helping others."

"O fair-faced maiden, there was a king named Harishchandra. Being afraid of uttering even a single lie, he had to undergo various miseries. He had to stay in the house of a chandala and he had to sell his wife and son. Due to his adherence to truth, however, the demigods became pleased with him and asked him to accept the benediction of his choice. King Harishchandra replied, 'If you are actually pleased with me then grant me this boon: May this entire city of Ayodhya, along with all of its inhabitants, including even the trees and animals, ascend to heaven. If the people have committed sins then I will take on their reactions and suffer for them in hell while they enjoy in heaven. I do not wish to go to heaven alone, leaving aside the people of this world.' "

"Thus it came to be that the entire city of Ayodhya ascended to heaven. Indeed, the king is situated in heaven, even to this very day, and he moves about at will in his celestial chariot. Here is another example. After learning that the demigods had been defeated by the demons, the sage Dadhichi donated his bones for the sake of the devas. O fair lady, formerly King Shibi donated his flesh to a cruel vulture to save the life of a dove. Thus, a king should always be sympathetic to the sufferings of others, irrespective of who they might be. The moon shines on the houses of all people—even chandalas. The cloud showers rain upon all without discrimination. Considering all this, I will certainly deliver this lizard from his suffering by means of donating to him my pious credits."

Thus disregarding Mohini, King Rukmangada said to the lizard, "The merit I achieved by observing the holy rite of Vijaya-dashami is now given by me to you. Be free of all sins and proceed to the abode of Lord Vishnu."

As soon as this was said, the lizard gave up her form as a repile and assumed a beautiful celestial form. She then bid farewell to the king and, while illuminating all directions, proceeded to the abode of Lord Vishnu.

Being very pleased, Rukmangada told Mohini, "Now, let us mount our horse and set out. Like Lord Krishna's horse, this horse can travel ten thousand yojanas in just a moment."

As Mohini climbed onto the horse, she said, "Proceed at once to

your city for I have a great desire to meet your son."

As they proceed with great haste through the sky, passing over the hermitage of Vamadeva, Rukmangada simply bowed his head as a token of respect. At the city of Vidisha, Dharmangada had heard through his spies that his father was approaching and so he came to greet him. He told his subordinates, "If a son does not go to personally greet his father upon his arrival, he falls into a terrible hell and stays there for the duration of the reign of fourteen Indras. On the other hand, if a son goes to greet his father, he receives the fruit of performing a yajna at every step."

Dharmangada went and fell at the feet of his father. Getting down from his horse, Rukmangada picked up his son and embraced him warmly. While smelling his head, he said, "My dear son, I hope that you are protecting the subjects and punishing the offenders. I hope that you have provided sufficient maintenance for the brahmanas. I presume that gambling and the drinking of alcoholic beverages are not permitted throughout the land. I hope that no one has eaten on the day of Ekadashi."

Dharmangada bowed his head and replied, "Whatever you had instructed, I have carried out without fail. O father, after entrusting me with the responsibility of ruling the kingdom, where did you go? Where did you find this lady of great luster? In this world, there is no other woman as beautiful as she."

In reply, Rukmangada described all that had taken place. He concluded by saying, "My son, this lady is also to be considered your mother and so you should offer your obeisances to her."

Dharmangada bowed his head to the ground and said, "O gentle lady, dear mother, please favor me. I am your son, your servant and your slave."

Mohini got down from the horse, picked up Dharmangada and embraced him. Then, he had his mother and father place their feet upon his back so that they could easily remount their horse while he would continue on foot. While walking, Dharmangada praised his good fortune by saying, "Blessed is the son who has many mothers in the form of fresh, charming and beloved wives of his father. If one has only one mother, his father is surely miserable. When the father is miserable, what happiness can a son have?"

After entering the city, Rukmangada had Mohini accompany his son to his palace. Thus, Dharmangada entered his palace with Mohini, eager to render service to her. He had his step-mother sit on a golden bed that was inlaid with valuable jewels. He then brought water for her to wash her feet. Although he was a young and handsome man and she was a beautiful woman with shapely buttocks, breasts and thighs, he treated her like a mother. Indeed, he considered her to be like a ten thousand year old lady and himself a boy of three.

After washing Mohini's feet, Dharmangada sprinkled the water over his head. He then presented her with very valuable jewelry. Formerly, Hiranyakashipu's queen had a wonderful jewel that shone like lightning. Before ascending her husband's funeral pyre, she had cast that jewel into the sea. Later on, the sea presented that foremost of jewels to Dharmangada, who now gave it with great delight to his step-mother.

After being given valuable clothing and other presentations, Mohini was fed very sumptuously with food that was served by Sandhyavali. Before this, Dharmangada had instructed his mother by saying, "There is no doubt that the wishes of the king must be carried out by both of us. She who is the king's beloved is to be highly respected by us. A wife who act harshly towards her husband's beloved falls into hell and suffers while fourteen Indras reign. She who harbors ill feelings toward the woman her husband loves and thus tries to separate them is fried in the hell called Tamrabhrashta (copper frying pan). A wife must always do that which is conducive to her husband's happiness. Even if the woman her husband loves is of a lower caste, a wife must serve her. Upon seeing a co-wife to be the beloved of her husband, if a woman renders service to her, she will attain eternal peace in heaven."

"In this regard, I will tell you a story. There was once a very wicked shudra who kept a prostitute in his house, along with his wife. Desiring to please her husband, the woman served both him and his beloved prostitute. She washed their feet and ate the food left by them. As they slept on the bed, she lay down on the ground nearby. In this way, the chaste wife served the two for a long time, wading through the ocean of misery."

"Neglecting his good wife's advice, however, the wicked shudra ate many horrible things and as a result, he became very ill, so that he

suffered, day and night. The prostitute took whatever was of value in the house and went to live with another young man. Because of this, the shudra felt great shame. Being greatly distressed, he said to his wife, 'O gentle lady, please save me, even though I have been very cruel to you. I know that due to my sinful behavior, I await a next birth in the house of a chandala. O slender-waisted one, in spite of my insults, you never took offense.' "

"The wife replied, 'It is the sins of a previous birth that yield miseries in this life. A learned person will therefore tolerate them. I was a sinful in my previous births and I am thus experiencing the results in this life. For this reason, I am not sorry because of my suffering.' "

"In this way, the wife consoled her husband. She then brought some money from her relatives and used it for the treatment of her diseased husband. With her nails, she scraped the worms from his body. In fact, she kept herself so busy serving her husband that she hardly slept at night."

"While lamenting for the suffering of her husband, she prayed to the goddess, Chandika: 'May he become free from all sins. I shall observe ten fasts, I shall lie down on a bed of thorns, and I shall not eat any sweets if my husband can live without disease.' "

"Once, as she was giving her husband some medicine, his jaws suddenly clamped shut so that her finger was bitten off, remaining in his tightly shut mouth. In fact, he had given up his life and so she sold her gold bangles to buy wood for his funeral pyre. After placing her husband's dead body upon the funeral pyre, she poured ghee upon the wood. As the fire blazed, she climbed onto the pyre, placing her body next to that of her dead husband. As the fire blazed brightly, she ascended to heaven, along with her husband."

Dharmangada said, "O mother, give up all jealousy and serve Mohini very nice food. What is conducive to the happiness of my dear father must be done by both of us."

Sandhyavali fondly embraced her son and replied, "I shall carry out your instructions, which are full of virtue."

After saying this, she simply glanced at the pots and utensils, causing them to become full of food with the taste of nectar. With a golden spoon, she then served Mohini with great respect. Dharmangada fanned her as she ate. After Mohini had finished eating and had

washed her hands, Dharmangada glorified his mother at great length. After hearing this, Mohini contemplated as follows: "Ruthless as I am by nature, how can I hurt a boy like this who is so sinless? It is for performing a dastardly act against such a fine person that I have become his step-mother."

Mohini then said, "Please call my husband for I cannot remain without him for even an hour."

Dharmangada went and summoned his father. When Rukmangada entered Sandhyavali's rooms, he saw that she had given up all sense of jealousy and was serving Mohini, who was lying upon a golden bed. Mohini said, "O husband, kindly come and sit next to me. O king, you have looked after the affairs of the kingdom for a long time. Still, your desire to rule the kingdom does not cease. I consider you to be the most sinful person on earth because you continue to rule the earth even though you have a fully qualified son. If you are going to look after the kingdom then what use am I to you? If a man is so absorbed in performing his duties that he neglects his youthful wife, she may leave him."

"If a wife is not enjoyed, she may leave a man. If money is not given in charity, it may vanish. If knowledge is not recited, it becomes lost to memory. O king, why have you left me alone while you look after the affairs of the kingdom, even in the presence of a competent son?"

Upon hearing these words of Mohini, who was very fond of sexual enjoyment, King Rukmangada, who was standing next to his son, felt ashamed. He said, "I did not have my son take you to his palace so that I could rule the kingdom. I was very tired and so wanted to sleep for some time. That is why I told him to bring you here and worship you, my favorite wife."

"As soon as I awakened, I hastened here to see you. Do not fear—I shall carry out your every desire."

Mohini said, "O king, go now and satisfy your other wives, for they have certainly become hopeless of having their passionate desires fulfilled. A young wife deals a severe blow to the hearts of all senior wives. What peace can I have while being scalded by the hot tears of chaste women?"

Upon hearing this, the king felt great shame. He was standing with Sandhyavali and their son. Dharmangada knew very well that his father was overwhelmed by love for Mohini. Calling together all of the queens,

headed by Sandhyavali, he said, "Mohini, the daughter of Brahma, is my step-mother. She longs to be alone with the king so that they can enjoy pastimes of love together. Kindly give your consent."

The queens replied, "My dear son, who would encourage a serpent to swallow him? Who will set fire to himself? Who will knowingly swallow poison? Who will cut off his own head? Who will tie a heavy stone around his neck and then try to swim across the ocean? What lady will approve of her husband making love to her co-wife? What woman can bear to see her husband being loved by another woman? She would rather have her head cut off with a sharp sword! What woman could bear the thought that her husband is caressing the breasts of another woman (and so, what to speak of see it with her own eyes)? This is the greatest of all miseries—for a woman to see her husband enamored with another woman. My dear son, it is better if we all die together than see our husband united with Mohini."

Dharmangada said, "O ladies, if you are not prepared to do that which gives my father happiness then I will mix poison and drink it. After I die, you can enjoy all the happiness you want. Any lady who carries out; whether mentally, verbally or physically; that which causes misery to my father—I consider her as an enemy, deserving to be killed, even if she is Sandhyavali."

Trembling with grief, the queens replied in faltering voices, "What you say is reasonable and so must be executed. Let your father approach Mohini after giving gifts to all his other wives. If a man wishes to marry again and receives the permission of his wife, in return, he must do whatever she desires."

After hearing this, Dharmangada cheerfully gave his step-mothers numerous gifts, including thousands of villages and ten thousands garments each, as well as gold obtained from Mount Meru and hundreds of male and female slaves. To each, he gave ten thousand cows and ten thousand pots of ghee. Desiring the happiness of his father, he gave many, many more gifts.

Finally, after circumambulating the queens, Dharmangada folded his hands and said, "I bow down to you with my head bent low. I have no malice toward you when I ask that you request my father to enjoy with Mohini freely."

Thus, the queens went to King Rukmangada and said, "Enjoy with



the daughter of Brahma for a long time. That she will have connection with you cannot be a cause of our grief. Know that we are speaking without any pain in our hearts."

Being delighted, the king instructed his son how to rule the earth in a most vigilant and righteous manner while he engaged in enjoying with Mohini. King Rukmangada said, "When a father is old and wrinkled, his teeth are loose and his hair is grey, he becomes an object of shame and derisive laughter if he wants to enjoy sexual intercourse in the presence of a grown up son. My dear son, although I am old, I am not weak and infirm. My condition of life is flourishing and I wish to enjoy this most beautiful lady who has come to me of her own accord. By enjoying with Mohini in the forests beside the rivers, I will achieve my cherished desire."

Thereafter, as King Rukmangada enjoyed life with Mohini, he was not aware whether it was day or night. He was not conscious of how the days and months passed by. Indeed, even years went by unmarked by the king because he was so enamored by his dalliance with the beautiful Mohini. The more he engaged in sexual relations with Mohini, King Rukmangada's virility increased, like the waxing of the moon, being driven by Kamadeva. Thus, he never became exhausted even by frequent sex indulgence. Just as the demigods become stronger by drinking nectar, the more the king touched Mohini, the fresher he became. While touching and caressing the parts of Mohini's perfectly-formed body, the king felt himself to be more fortunate than the demigods in heaven.

Sometimes, King Rukmangada thought, "Oh, whatever this slender-waisted woman wants from me, I shall give. I am ready to give her all that I possess, even things that should not be given—my life, for example. If she requests my life, I will definitely give it to her. Excepting my son, there is nothing that should not be given to her."

In this way, eight years passed. In the ninth year, Dharmangada conquered five Vidyadharas on the Malaya Mountain. As booty, he obtained five wonderful jewels. One jewel yielded a huge quantity of gold. The second jewel bestowed countless garments and ornaments. The third jewel exuded nectar that rejuvenated those around it. The fourth jewel could erect assembly halls and present cooked food. The fifth jewel enabled one to move about through the sky to any place within the three worlds.

Taking these jewels and the defeated Vidyadharas, Dharmangada went to where his father was staying, along with Mohini. He presented the five jewels to his father, requesting him to give them to his beloved wife. Dharmangada then proceeded to describe to his father his various exploits as a conquerer, including his defeat of the Nagas at Bhogavati and his victory over Varuna, the lord of the waters. After being defeated, Varuna gave Dharmangada a very beautiful virgin girl that he accepted as his wife.

Dharmangada concluded by saying, "Father, there is nowhere within the three worlds I could not go and conquer, as a result of the merit attained by serving you. Kindly get up and inspect all of the wealth I have brought from my conquests. All my wealth and my very self are subservient to you."

King Rukmangada was delighted to hear his son's speech. He got up, along with Mohini, and made a survey of all the wealth that his son had acquired by means of his conquests. He gave the daughter of Varuna and the girls brought from Nagaloka to his son for becoming his wives and all the rest, he gave to Mohini. Summoning his family priest, the king said, "Kindly arrange the marriage ceremony of my son at a time that is most auspicious. The marriage of a son must be arranged by a father who wishes to attain piety. If a father does not endow his son with a wife and wealth, he becomes despised in this life and the next. He should in no way be considered a good man. Therefore, the duty of a father is to arrange for a good occupation for his son and provide him with wives, so that he can pass his life happily."

Although, due to bashfulness, Dharmangada did not crave the happiness of women's association, he accepted the Naga girls and Varuna's daughter at the behest of his father. After the marriage ceremony, he gave charity to the brahmanas and bowed down at the feet of his mother and father. At that time, he told his mother, Sandhyavali, "I have no desire for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and I don't care for residence in heaven. My only wish is to go on rendering service to my father."

Sandhyavali embraced her son with great pleasure. Thereafter, he resumed his rule of the kingdom, inspecting once in a month the affairs of all departments. Rukmangada and Mohini continued traveling to places of great scenic beauty, thus enhancing their pastimes of love.

After obtaining Mohini, the king gave up all kinds of religious practices except the observance of fasting on Ekadāśi. Although excessively enamored by Mohini, he did not give up this sacred vow. Every two weeks, he would forgo sexual pleasure for three days, beginning on the Dāśami.

When the month of Kārttika arrived, which is highly meritorious because it marks the end of Lord Viṣṇu's mystic slumber in yoga-nidra, King Rukmangada said to Mohini, "O gentle lady, I have enjoyed sexual pleasure with you for many years. Previously, I was afraid to give you any kind of instruction, for fear of your displeasure. Now, however, I desire to tell you something. Many Kārttikas have gone by since I became infatuated with you but I failed to observe a single one. Now, I wish to observe the holy vow of Kārttika. Even meat-eating kings who hunt in the forest give up eating meat during this holy month. O Mohini, with your permission, I will forgo the worship of your breasts for this month and instead observe the Kārttika-vrata."

"There is no other yuga like Kṛta. There is no holy rite equal to mercifulness. There is no holy river equal to the Gāṅgā. There is no charitable gift like that of land. There is no pleasure equal to that derived from one's wife. There is no possession equal to agricultural land. There is no valuable acquisition like that of a good cow. There is no greater austerity than abstaining from food. There is no auspicious thing on a par with self control. No gratification equals that of the tongue. No one is equal to a brahmana. There is no friend on a par with dharma and no fame excels that achieved by truthfulness. No opulence is greater than freedom from disease. Learned men know that there is no month equal to the month of Kārttika."

Mohini said, "O king, describe to me the greatness of Kārttika. After hearing this, I shall be happy to perform the vow, as you desire."

In reply, King Rukmangada talked at great length about the glories of the month of Kārttika. He said, "During the month of Kārttika, one should only have one meal a day, in the evening. On Ekadāśi, one should abstain from all food and remain awake all night. During this month, one should abstain from meat and the enjoyment of sexual pleasure. One who worships Lord Viṣṇu while observing these restrictions will surely not have to again enter a mother's womb."

Mohini said, "The observance of fasting as described by you is no

doubt excellent but such vows are never prescribed for kings. In fact, except for brahmanas, such rules and regulations do not apply. Therefore, if you want me to remain with you, you should not follow the vows relating to the month of Karttika. In fact, I cannot remain without you for even an hour. How could I remain without your intimate association for a whole month? If you feel that the Karttika-vrata must be observed, then let this be done by your senior wife."

After hearing this, King Rukmangada called for Sandhyavali. She immediately came to where her husband was seated on a fine bed, being embraced by Mohini. When she asked the reason for being summoned, the king explained how he desired to observe the Karttika-vrata but that Mohini forbade him. When requested to observe the vow on his behalf, Sandhyavali readily consented.

Thereafter, as Sandhyavali continued to execute the Karttika-vrata, King Rukmangada said to Mohini, "Lovely one, whatever you suggested has been carried out by me. Feel free to enjoy yourself as you desire, knowing that I have forsaken all duties for your pleasure."

Mohini replied, "O lord, it was only after knowing you to be such a loving and dedicated person that I came to you from heaven, passing by the best of celestials. Like-mindedness of the husband and wife is the real fruit of passion. Passionate union when the mind is elsewhere is no better than the union of two corpses."

After saying this, Mohini embraced the king lovingly and proceeded to delight him according to the injunctions of Vatsyayana (as described in the Kama-sutra). Even as they were engaged in gratifying their lust, the sound of drums that had been mounted upon elephants, according to the orders of Dharmangada, reached their ears. The decree being announced was: "Tomorrow is Ekadashi. Forego all food and lie down upon the bare ground. Remain celibate, even in the presence of your wives and always remember the Lord of the universe, Vishnu. This is the Ekadashi in the bright fortnight of the month of Karttika, which awakens the Lord from His mystic slumber. He who does not follow my instructions is liable to be killed, banished from the kingdom, or punished in some other way."

Upon hearing this, King Rukmangada disengaged himself from Mohini's embrace and sat up on the bed. He said, "O gentle lady, tomorrow is Ekadashi, which is the destroyer of all sins. Please forgive me. I

want to observe all the restrictions that are prescribed for that holy day. Worship Lord Viṣṇu with me and thus attain auspiciousness.”

Mohini said, “You have spoken well. At your behest, I will happily worship the Lord of the three worlds. Now, the time has arrived for you to fulfill the promise that you had made at the time of our marriage. What I ask of you should be given to me—otherwise all of the merit you had previously achieved will prove fruitless.”

King Rukmangada replied, “Charming lady, I will certainly carry out whatever is entertained by you. There is nothing that I would not do for you. For you, I am ready to sacrifice my life.”

Mohini said, “O lord of my life, who is very fond of sexual intercourse, if you wish to continue enjoying me then no fast should be observed on Ekadāśi. O king, am I not your beloved wife? I do not wish to spend even an hour without embracing you. If you want to continue enjoying with me then give up fasting on Ekadāśi. This is the favor that I ask of you.”

The king pleaded, “O noble lady, please do not speak like this. Why should you, a daughter of Lord Brahma, create obstacles on the path of dharma? Since my birth, I have never eaten on Ekadāśi. It is a despicable act to eat on Ekadāśi—an act that I had never done in childhood or in youth. How shall I do it now? Ask anything else of me. I shall seat you on a palanquin and carry you wherever you wish. I will prepare a swing of pearls and swing you day and night for a month, if you so desire.”

“Food taken on Ekadāśi contains the following sins—the destruction of cows’ pasture land; the stealing of invested money; perjury; the obstruction of the marriage of a virgin girl; the milking of a cow whose calf has died; failure to give a brahmana that which was promised; the use of false weights while selling something; and lies told for the sake of selling a cow. Knowing this, how can I eat on Ekadāśi?”

Mohini said, “I will be pleased if you eat on Ekadāśi but I won’t be pleased even if you cut off your head and give it to me. If you do not accept food on Ekadāśi, I will not touch the body of one who is untruthful. It is by truth alone that the universe is maintained. Truthfulness surpasses thousands of horse sacrifices. By forsaking truth, you will be tainted by the greatest of sins.”

King Rukmangada argued, “The injunctions of śāstra state that

on Ekadashi, roots, fruit, milk and water can be taken but nowhere is the eating of a full meal mentioned. Please do not insist that I eat on the day that is most sacred to the Lord, thus breaking my holy vow. If there is anything else that appeals to you, I will surely do it."

Mohini said, "There is nothing else that appeals to me" and fell silent.

Although greatly afraid and agitated, the king laughingly said, "O Mohini, the Puranas have repeated, again and again, 'On Ekadashi, food should not be eaten, food should never be eaten.' Who will have sexual intercourse with another man's wife? Who will not offer respect to his father? Who will not worship his mother? Who will not go to bathe in the Ganga, the holiest of rivers? Who will blaspheme the Vedas? Who will cause the downfall of a brahmana? Who will eat food on Ekadashi?"

Mohini then told a servant woman to go summon some brahmanas so that they could give their opinions in this matter. Soon, thereafter, many brahmanas arrived, headed by Gautama Rishi. After being seated, Gautama Rishi said, "O Queen, we are all expert in the various departments of Vedic knowledge. Kindly tell us the purpose of your requesting our presence."

Mohini said, "The doubt I wish to clear is whether this man is foolish or not. He vows that he will not eat on Ekadashi. Even those who have died (the Pitris, or forefathers) are delighted by offerings of cooked food. Where is it mentioned in shastra that a king should force his subjects to fast? A king's sole duty is to protect the subjects, just as a woman's duty is to serve her husband, a sons' duty is to obey his parents, and a shudra's duty is to render service to the brahmanas."

The brahmanas said, "This is true. O king, you have taken a vow that no one should eat on Ekadashi but this is not based on shastra, it has evolved from your imagination. Let your vow end today, as advised by the brahmanas, and rest assured that you will not incur sin. There is no cause for remorse on your part. One who disregards the advice of the brahmanas will have to accept fifteen births as a Rakshasha."

Upon hearing this, King Rukmangada became so furious that his lips trembled. Still, he replied in a soft and gentle voice, "O brahmanas, you are the spiritual masters of human society. You have quoted from shastra supporting the view that fasting is not necessary on Ekadashi but you

have ignored the injunctions of the devotional literature. How can I give up my vow of fasting on Ekadāśi at the urging of some brahmanas who are following the wrong path? It is most improper for you to speak against my fasting on Ekadāśi. Indeed, I would not give up fasting on Ekadāśi even at the urging of Lord Brahma or Lord Śhiva."

While listening to this, Mohini burned with anger so that her eyes became red. She replied to her husband, "O King, when promising to do my bidding, you had extended your right hand, and now you haven broken that trust. Therefore, my responsibility to you is over. Taking all of your religious merit, I will depart. I am no longer your beloved wife and you are no longer my husband. To hell with you—the breaker of your promise!"

After saying this, Mohini stood up. She then departed from that place, in the company of the brahmanas. Being very angry, she cried much. Meanwhile, after touring the earth, Dharmangada returned home, riding upon his horse, just as Mohini and the brahmanas were leaving.

Quickly dismounting, Dharmangada went and fell at his father's feet. Upon getting up, he humbly approached the brahmanas with folded hands. Then, seeing how Mohini was leaving in a very angry mood, he went to her with folded hands and said, "O mother, beloved of my father, who has insulted you? Where are you going with these brahmanas?"

Mohini replied, "My dear son, your father is a liar. He falsely gave me his right hand and made a solemn vow. It is for this reason that I am not staying here any longer."

Dharmangada said, "Gentle lady, I will do whatever you say. Give up your anger and return to my father."

Mohini said, "I had become the wife of your father at Mount Mandara under certain conditions. Lord Śhiva was standing nearby as the witness of what I say. Now, however, he does not want to fulfill my desire. I am not asking for gold, villages or anything else that would make him incur a loss. Indeed, what I want would be for the gratification of his body, and in no way for harm. But, out of delusion, the king does not grant my wish. Because he has fallen away from truthfulness, I am forsaking him."

Dharmangada said, "As long as I am there, I can assure you that

my father will not prove false. Please return to him. Indeed, it is due to his truthfulness alone that the abode of Yamaraja has been vacated and the universe has become filled with his fame."

Mohini returned to where Rukmangada was laying, as though dead, her hand resting on Dharmangada's shoulder. Dharmangada sat next to his father. With folded hands he said, "Dear father, this mother says that you are a liar. How can this be true? The entire world is under your control and so you should give her whatever she desires. As long as I hold my bow in my hand, who can oppose you? If she wants the post of Indra—give it! There is nothing within the three worlds that is difficult for me to do and so there is nothing that cannot be given to her."

King Rukmangada replied, "My dear son, may my fame perish. May I be called a liar. May I fall into a terrible hell. How can I eat on Ekadashi? Let Mohini return to the abode of Brahma. Again and again, she prods me, saying, 'Except your accepting food on Ekadashi, I do not wish for anything, including a kingdom, wealth or even the entire earth.' Even if I have to be born as a germ, I will never eat anything on Ekadashi. Even if I die of separation from Mohini—that is preferable to eating on Ekadashi. How can I give delight to Yamaraja by making sinful men proceed along the path to hell?"

"I may drink poison, I may enter fire, I may jump from a lofty mountain, I may cut off my head with a shining sword; but I will never partake of food on Ekadashi. How, by accepting food on Ekadashi, can I destroy the reputation that I have earned? Even if it stops, falls, perishes, or breaks into pieces, my heart will not desist from its determination."

After hearing this, Dharmangada called for his mother, Sandhyavali. After being informed of the situation and requested to somehow mediate, Sandhyavali said to Mohini, "O beautiful lady, give up your determination. Never will the king eat cooked food on Ekadashi. The husband is considered a preceptor for the wife and so you should follow his directions. When the king offered you his hand at Mandara Mountain, he was under the sway of lust and so this act should not be taken very seriously. For the sake of my husband, I will bow down to you, although you are younger and I am elder. Do not force him to do that which is inappropriate. The woman who traps her husband by means of a former promise and makes him do something sinful, will surely dwell in hell."



Mohini replied, "You are worthy of being honored by me and so I will do as you say. If the king does not wish to eat on Ekadāśī, being urged on by destiny, I will ask for something else, although it is painful for me to do so. A child is born with the same emotions and feelings that the father had at the time of discharging semen within the mother's body. I was created by Lord Brahma at a time when he was disturbed in mind by hearing criticism of King Rukmangada. For this reason, although I appear in a fair-complexioned form, I must be the perpetrator of an act that will hurt the king."

"O gentle lady, it is not the lagna, nor the planet, nor the time that indicates one's future nature. The emotional state of the parents at the time of conception is the most important determining factor. Now, I shall say something that will take away your life, as well as that of your husband. If you act according to my suggestion, your fame will be glorious, although I will no doubt suffer infamy."

Summoning her courage, Sandhyavali urged, "Tell me. What do you wish to say that will cause me so much pain? If it is for the benefit of my husband, I do not mind my own death, or even the death of my son. On the other hand, if a wife enjoys great affluence and does not utilize it for the benefit of her husband, who is suffering—she is born as a worm in stool. To illustrate this truth, I will narrate to you a story."

"This incident happened during my childhood. There was a man at my father's house, chopping wood. At that time, I was playing with my girlfriends nearby. While watching the man, I noticed a shiny worm coming out from the pile of wood, about the size of my finger. When it fell to the ground, a crow came to eat it. Just as the crow was about to pick up the worm up in his beak, I threw a lump of clay, making him fly away."

"The worm had been injured by the crow and so could not crawl. Seeing it on the verge of death, I went and sprinkled some water on it. After regaining some strength, the worm spoke to me in a human voice, calling me by name. The worm said, 'O Sandhyavali, in my previous birth, I was the daughter of a sage named Sumantu. My husband's name was Kaundinya and we resided at Kanyakubja. Before my marriage, I was the pet child of my parents and due to their affluence, I was proud and arrogant. My husband was from an aristocratic family and so, after marriage, I also lived very comfortably.' "

The worm continued speaking as follows: "After some time, my father-in-law passed away and my mother-in-law followed him by ascending the funeral pyre. Two months later, my husband went to the king's palace and there, he saw many beautiful courtesans so that his heart became filled with lusty desires. By giving profuse wealth, my husband was able to bring two of these girls back home with him. The simple truth is that he wanted to keep them in his house just for enjoying sexual relations."

"Thereafter, my evil-minded husband squandered all of his wealth while pleasing those girls. After three years had passed in this way, he became absolutely poverty stricken. At that time, he asked me to give him my jewelry but I refused. Instead, I took all my things and went back to my father's house. My husband followed me and there and sold whatever he could find and gave the money to his two prostitute friends. That money was soon exhausted, however, and so he finally sold the agricultural fields, clothes and kitchen utensils at throw away prices."

"When everything was thus squandered, my foolish husband boarded a boat that was sailing abroad. While at sea, a violent storm came up. The boat was smashed to pieces and everyone drowned, except my husband, who somehow clung to a piece of wood and reached the shore. There, he saw a heavenly mountain. Grapes were growing in the wild and so his hunger was appeased. After eating, he went to sleep in the shade of a huge tree."

"That night, as my husband was sleeping, a terrible Rakshasha came there. He had kidnapped the beautiful daughter of the king of Kashi, named Ratnavali, and he entered his house, which was situated within a cave that was near to where my husband was sleeping. After entering the cave, the Rakshasha placed the terrified girl upon a nice bed. When the Rakshasha's wife saw the kidnapped girl, however, she was furious."

She rebuked her husband, saying, "Why have you brought this girl when I am here? If you want to keep her then I will not remain as your wife."

The Rakshasha replied, "O splendid lady, this girl has been brought by me to serve as your food. There is someone else, a brahmana, sleeping outside, underneath a tree. Go and bring him so that I can have

my meal."

Upon hearing this, the beautiful daughter of Kāśhī said, "Out of fear of you, he is lying. He is unhappy because you are old, ugly and awkward. At night, as I was sleeping in my father's house, he kidnapped me, desiring to make me his wife."

Believing the girl's words, the Rākshashī became furious. She thought, "There is no other misery like having another woman share the love of one's husband."

The Rākshashī told her husband, "This girl will be my food. I will go and bring the brahmana for your meal."

When the Rākshashī went out and saw the handsome brahmana sleeping underneath a tree, she became attracted to him. By her mystic power, she assumed the form of a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl and approached him. Waking him up, she said, "Who are you? From where have you come? I ask this because I desire to have you as my husband. I am a Rākshashī who is overwhelmed by love for you. I have been abandoned by my husband and so you are my only refuge."

Although frightened, the brahmana replied, "O Rākshashī, how can there be sexual union between you and me, a human being? I know that you consider us to be your food."

The Rākshashī replied, "By the will of providence, the impossible can become possible. In the Purāṇas it is said that, in the future, the Rākshashī Hīdimba will become the wife of Bhīma and their son will be Ghatotkacha, who will be killed by Indra's śakti weapon. Do not be afraid, it is by the will of providence that I will become your wife."

"Once, when Indra went to meet Bālī, my husband stole his śakti weapon and hid it in this tree. That weapon will not return to the hand of Indra without killing at least one person. I will now climb the tree and give you Indra's śakti weapon so that you can kill my husband with it. This weapon is infallible, even against one who is immortal. If you do not kill my husband, there is no doubt that he will eat both of us. He has kidnapped a young girl, making her his wife. It is for this reason that I hate that wicked soul. After killing him, we can enjoy ourselves as we please."

The brahmana agreed, saying, "Bring the śakti weapon to me. After I kill the Rākshasha, all the wealth that I see here should be given to me. It was only for gaining wealth that I crossed the sea and came here."

As the Rakshashi climbed the tree to get the shakti weapon, the Rakshasha became overwhelmed by lust and tried to rape the princess he had kidnapped. The girl fearfully said, "It is a great sin to rape a virgin. Perhaps none of this is your fault because I am simply suffering the results of my own activities. Destiny is the main cause of acquiring a mate, wealth, learning or good birth. O Rakshasha, out of necessity, you alone will be my husband. Therefore, bring the brahmana who is sleeping under the tree outside and let him unite us in marriage according to the proper rituals. Even without all the requisite paraphernalia and performance of ceremonies, a marriage that is blessed by a brahmana becomes fruitful. After he performs the marriage ceremony, you can eat him if you so desire."

The Rakshasha went outside to bring the brahmana. There, he saw his wife in a human form, fondly embracing her new-found love. She said, "I am abandoning you, sinful Rakshasha who is enamored with a young human being."

Upon hearing this, the Rakshasha angrily rushed at the couple like a violent storm, hoping to devour them. At that time, the Rakshashi fearfully urged the brahmana to hurl the shakti weapon. Taking courage, the brahmana let go of that effulgent weapon and it pierced the heart of the Rakshasha, reducing him to ashes.

The delighted Rakshashi said to the brahmana, "My lover, come on. Let's go in the cave and enjoy all the pleasures that worldly life can provide."

The brahmana consented and so, without even bothering to look at the pile of ashes that was her former husband, the Rakshashi took him by the arm and entered the cave. Pointing to the princess of Kashi, the Rakshashi said, "This girl was kidnapped by my husband and brought here to become his wife. You should return her to her father and take me with you, along with all of these valuable things, which you can sell."

The brahmana guardedly replied, "I have sought shelter of you, the killer of your husband. How then can I trust that you will not kill me one day?"

The Rakshashi replied, "I hated my unfaithful husband but you have placed your full trust in me. The ways of morality are very subtle and difficult to understand. Vyasadeva was the compiler of the Vedas and yet he was born from the semen of one who defiled a virgin girl. Later

on, he had sexual intercourse with the wives of his younger brother. King Shantanu was the second husband of Satyawati. The Pandavas were born of adultery and all five married the same woman, Draupadi. Still, they are glorified in the Vedic literature. Lord Shiva, the lord of the material nature, once approached the wives of the demigods out of lust.”

“Truthfully, I have delivered my husband from a sinful destination. By obstructing his attempt to defile a virgin girl, I have saved him from going to hell. Being killed by you, a brahmana, he has attained an exalted birth. I also achieved piety by saving your life. Although born in the species of Rakshashas, I have now attained the status of a brahmana. I have also helped this princess of Kashi and she will become your wife in her father’s house. I will guard both of you while enlightening you with my instructions on the subject of dharma.”

“Before you met me, you had a wife who will be born in a lower species. Later on, as a result of my blessings, she will be delivered. O brahmana, in my previous birth, I was the beautiful daughter of the sage Aurva, named Kandali. I was given in marriage to the sage Durvasa but then I quarreled with him so that he cursed me, reducing me to ashes. Because of my sins, I was born as a Rakshashi and was married to the Rakshasha, Gobhila, who was killed by you. Actually, he had been cursed to die at my instigation, for the sake of a princess. Now, as a result of all my past pious activities, I have become your helpmate.”

“O brahmana, because you have put your full trust in me, I hereby promise to protect you in all respects. In return, you must always act in a way that is agreeable to me.”

The Rakshashi then assumed the form of an elephant and carried the brahmana and the princess to Kashi. Upon their arrival at that holy city, the brahmana and princess got down from the back of the elephant, who once again assumed the form of a beautiful woman. The princess, Ratnavali, then instructed a guard to convey the following message to her father, King Sudyumna: “Dear father, I have returned to you unharmed and unravaged so that I am still as pure as the water of the Ganga. Rest assured that there is no shame to be endured.”

The guard went and conveyed Ratnavali’s message to the king, saying that she was accompanied by a brahmana and a woman. After hearing the message, the king went out of the city to meet his daughter,

accompanied by his wife, ministers and family priest. There, he saw his daughter comfortably seated on the shore of the Ganga. After seeing her in the distance, the king hurriedly went and embraced her. Being overjoyed, the princess bowed down to her father and then met her mother.

Princess Ratnavali said, "O father, I was sleeping in the hall of jewels, surrounded by my girlfriends, without having washed my feet and with my head facing north. As I was dreaming about my future marriage, I was abducted in the middle of the night. This woman is the wife of the demon who abducted me and she caused the death of her husband through the agency of this brahmana. After this, she assumed the form of an elephant and brought me here. Now, please arrange for my marriage with this brahmana. I shared the same seat with him and so I already consider him to be mine. The Puranas state, 'He alone shall be the husband of a girl with whom he shares the same seat.' My dear father, I do not wish to choose any other husband."

After hearing this, King Sudyumna honored the Rakshashi. Soon thereafter, the marriage took place.

It must be remembered that this story is being narrated by the worm that came from the pile of wood that was being cut in the presence of Sandhyavali, at a time before her marriage. The worm told how she had formerly been a brahmana's wife in the city of Kanyakubja. Her husband had squandered all their money and then boarded a ship bound for a distant land. The boat sank in a storm and the brahmana managed to cling to a piece of wood and reach the shore. After killing the Rakshasha Gobhila, the brahmana journeyed to Kashi and married the king's daughter.

After the wedding, the Rakshashi once again assumed the form of a female elephant and quickly transported the newly-wed couple to Kanyakubja. At this time, some people informed the brahmana's first wife (who later became the worm), "O gentle lady, your husband has returned with much wealth and two wives."

The worm continued her narration: "At this time, I was greatly rebuked by my friends and relatives. They taunted me by saying that even if my husband would allow me to enter his house, he would never show love for me. They said, 'There is nothing so miserable in this world than the coming together of a husband and wife whose minds are far

apart.' When I heard this, I became filled with a terrible anguish. With tears in my eyes, I kept my head bent downward."

"I thought to myself, 'Formerly, I was too greedy so that when my husband asked for it, I refused to give my gold jewelry. The husband is to be regarded as the master of a woman's wealth and very life. What will be my future? How can I go and see him? What will I say?'"

"At that time, a palanquin came for me, sent by my husband. His kinsmen said to me, again and again, 'We have been sent by your husband, just after his arrival. He has brought a great deal of wealth and two wives, and he wants you to join him.' Upon hearing this, I felt ashamed and remained silent. They once again implored me to accompany them, saying, 'You have been called by your husband. If a wife does not rejoin her husband when invited to do so, she will take fifteen births as a female crow.' Thereafter, I mounted the palanquin and soon reached the town of Mahodaya, where my husband was staying."

"Upon my arrival, the Rakshashi and princess bowed to me with great respect. That evening, after bathing and having my meal, my husband called me and then held me tightly in his arms for a long time. He told the Rakshashi and princess, 'Service to this lady should be done by both of you with devotion, for she is my seniormost wife.' Thereafter, my husband had all the wealth that he had acquired brought there, and he offered it to me. He then kissed my lips and embraced me, as I was seated upon a couch. As his hands firmly held my breasts, being thrilled by his dedication and words, I suddenly collapsed, giving up my life."

"I was taken to be tortured in hell. After sufferin in hell for a long time, I was born as a worm. After this, I will have to be born in the animal kingdom for thousands of births. O Sandhyavali, the woman who does not dedicate her wealth and life to her husband will undoubtedly attain such a destination."

Sandhyavali was very pleased to hear the worm's talk. She said, "I feel very unhappy to see your plight and so please tell me what can be done to liberate you from this miserable condition."

In reply, the worm described religious rites to be performed in the month of Magha that free one from all sinful reactions. She said, "Glorious is the month of Magha, glorious is the human birth, glorious is the early morning bath, and glorious indeed is the opportunity to serve Lord Krishna. Most glorious of all is the Ekadashi day, which is a day of

fasting. In the month of Magha, the demigods invest their potency in water and so bathing during this month bestows great merit."

"If one bathes in a river, lake or artificial pond—that is most excellent. Bathing with water from a well that was kept in a pot is mediocre in benefit. Bathing in water that is warmed by fire is of the least benefit. Merit cannot be obtained through the enjoyment of pleasure—it is attained by distress and exertion."

"Bathing is for the purpose of observing holy rites and not merely for the sake of cleanliness. Fire is used for performing sacrifices and not simply for gaining relief from the cold. One should bathe before sunrise. If a river is not available, water should be kept overnight in a clay pot and wind should blow over it during the night. Taking a bath in the river during the month of Magha relieves one of all sinful reactions. Observing fasting on the Ekadashi day in the month of Magha is the most auspicious of all religious observances."

"O Sandhyavali, you have observed the Ekadashi-vrata since your birth and because of this, you have accumulated incomparable merit. Not only in this life, but in a previous life as well you had faithfully observed Ekadashi. This observance has also bestowed great happiness upon your husband and son. If you willingly give me one-fourth of that accumulated merit, I will be able to attain the realm of Lord Vishnu."

"I had incurred sin by denying wealth to my husband. The woman of perverted mind who does not give herself for sexual intercourse when requested by her husband, or who denies his request for wealth, is certain born as a worm in her next life."

Sandhyavali continued relating her story to Mohini, saying, "After hearing the words of the worm, I took water in my hand and said, 'By one-fourth of the merit I had achieved by fasting on Ekadashi, may this worm be liberated from the sins she had committed in her previous birth.' As soon as these words were uttered, I could see the worm, in a luminous transcendental body, ascending to the abode of Lord Vishnu while seated upon a divine chariot."

"O Mohini, the husband is a deity for a wife and so whatever it is that you want, for the sake of our husband, I will gladly give. Indeed, I am ready to give up my own life or that of my son."

Mohini, who was the personification of delusion, replied in a way that would help her accomplish her mission: "O splendid lady, if you



wish to do that which will maintain the religious principles of your husband then give me the head of your son. If your husband is not willing to eat on Ekadashi, this is the only alternative. Let him pick up his sword and cut off the head of his son, Dharmangada, letting it fall into my lap."

Upon hearing this, Sandhyāvali momentarily shivered like a banana tree in a strong wind. She then smiled and replied, "There is a statement in the Purāṇas that says: 'One may abandon his wealth, wife, house, land, friends, preceptor, practice of yoga, learning, the giving of charity and even the chance for liberation—but one should never abandon the observance of fasting on Ekadashi.' In consideration of this, I will order my husband to give you the head of my son, for your satisfaction."

In this regard, Sandhyāvali told Mohini the following story. There was a Daitya named Virochana, the son of Prahlaḍa. His wife was inclined to the worship of the brahmanas. Every morning, she would wash the feet of a brahmana and drink the water. Being oppressed by Virochana, the demigods consulted Brihaspati, asking him what should be done. Brihaspati advised the demigods to go and respectfully inform Lord Viṣṇu of the situation.

The demigods did as advised. After offering their prayers, they said, "O Lord, being oppressed by the Daityas, we are seeking refuge in You. Please do that which will allow us to continue performing our duties without undue anxiety."

Being pleased with the prayers of the demigods, Lord Viṣṇu appeared before them in His effulgent, transcendental four-armed form. After receiving assurances from the Lord, the demigods departed for their own abodes. Thereafter, Lord Viṣṇu assumed the form of an old brahmana and went to see Virochana. He arrived just at the time when Virochana's wife, Viśhalakṣhi, was worshiping the brahmanas. She was very pleased to see the old brahmana and offered Him a nice seat.

The elderly brahmana said, "Gentle lady, I will not accept the seat offered by you. First, allow Me to tell you about the mission for which I have come. I will accept the worship of that person who agrees to the accomplishment of My task."

Being deluded by Lord Viṣṇu's yogamāyā, Viśhalakṣhi felt delighted and said, "O brahmana, I shall give You whatever You want.

Now, please be seated and wash Your feet with this water so that I may drink it."

The old brahmana replied, "I do not believe the words of a woman. If your husband says that he will fulfill my desire, I will believe it."

Vishalakshi called for her husband and when he came there, she explained all that had transpired. Being deluded by the Lord's yogamaya, as well as being under the sway of affection for his wife, Virochana promised to fulfill the old brahmana's purpose. Being delighted, the old brahmana said, "I want you to give me your youth and duration of life."

With folded hands, the couple replied, "You can take our lives. Just give us the water that has washed Your lotus feet."

Thereafter, Vishalakshi washed the old brahmana's feet and sprinkled the water over her head and that of her husband. Immediately, Virochana and his wife assumed spiritual bodies, ascended a transcendental chariot, and went to Vaikuntha.

After concluding this story, Sandhyavali said to Mohini, "What was promised to you must be given. I will not allow my husband to divert himself from the path of truthfulness."

Sandhyavali then went and clasped her husband's feet and said, "I have given good advice to Mohini, just as you did, but her mind does not waver from its determination. She wants you to either eat on Ekadashi or kill your son. I feel that it is better for you to kill our son rather than violate your solemn promise. The affection a mother has for a child is greater than that of the father because of the great suffering she had to endure while maintaining him within the womb and while giving birth. Still, I am ready to renounce that affection for achieving eternal auspiciousness."

"O king, give up your affection for your son and kill him. Do not transgress your vow of truthfulness. I believe that Mohini was sent by the demigods just to test us. By fulfilling your promise, we shall certainly attain the favor of Lord Vishnu. It is known that the demigods are envious of the devotees of Lord Vishnu and so by killing your son, you will make them hang their heads in shame."

King Rukmangada replied, "O beloved wife, the killing of one's son is an exceedingly sinful act. It is worse than the killing of a brahmana. After killing my son, what will be my destiny? How will I live? I think

that the god of death has appeared as Mohini for the destruction of our son."

After saying this, the king turned to Mohini and said, "I will not accept food on Ekadashi and I will not kill my son! I would much rather kill myself or Sandhyavali. Tell me—what will you gain by my eating on Ekadashi or by my killing my son? O fair-faced lady, I am your slave. Please request something else."

Mohini replied, "Dharmangada is not my enemy. I don't want to kill him. I told you that all I want is for you to give up fasting on Ekadashi."

Dharmangada, who was standing nearby, took out his shining sword and placed it in front of the king, saying, "O father, you should not delay. Strike me down at once and thus keep your promise. The soul should be protected even at the sacrifice of sons, wives and wealth. Even after the destruction of this body, I will attain another one, in due course. Whatever my mother, Mohini, orders must be carried out."

While hearing this, King Rukmangada glanced at Sandhyavali's face, which seemed to say, "Do not accept food on Ekadashi. Instead, kill our son, Dharmangada."

At this time, Lord Vishnu came there and invisibly remained stationed in the sky, seated upon the back of Garuda, to witness the courage displayed by His three devotees—Rukmangada, Dharmangada and Sandhyavali. As Mohini said, "Eat on Ekadashi", the king picked up the shining sword. Dharmangada offered obeisances to his parents and Lord Vishnu, while gazing at the face of his mother. Dharmangada placed his neck close to the ground. When the king raised his sword with the intention of cutting off his son's head, the entire earth began to quake, the oceans swelled, and hundreds of meteors fell from the sky as raging winds blew.

Mohini thought to herself, "My mission has not been accomplished and so the residents of heaven will treat me with disdain, as if I were lower than the grass. My birth has been useless and my beauty is in vain since I could not make the king give up fasting on Ekadashi."

Indeed, as the king raised his sword, Mohini fainted to the ground. Then, just as the king was about to cut off his son's handsome head, Lord Vishnu restrained him by catching hold of his arm. The Lord said, "I am very pleased with you. After placing your foot on Yamaraja's

head, ascend to My eternal abode, along with your wife, Sandhyavali and your son, Dharmangada."

Due to being touched by the Lord's hand, King Rukmangada was immediately freed from all sinful reactions. As the spirit soul emerged from his body and merged within the transcendental body of Lord Vishnu, flowers showered from heaven, the Gandharvas sang, and the Apsaras danced in ecstasy.

Yamaraja could see how the king, along with his wife and son, had entered the supreme abode of the Lord. He could also see how all the people of the world were following the path of the king and this made him fearful. He said to four-headed Brahma, "O lord, I cannot remain in such a useless position. Create a new post for me. Do not let my rod of chastisement be a mere showpiece. Mohini has been unsuccessful, like a barren woman's attempt to have a child. Indeed, she has fainted and is ashamed to even approach you. I am without a job. What should I do? Please guide me."

Lord Brahma said, "First, we will go and revive Mohini. Then, we will accomplish your task."

The demigods, headed by Lord Brahma and Indra, went to earth in their celestial chariots and surrounded Mohini. They saw Mohini to be like a river that had dried up, a man defeated in battle, a flower that has wilted, a seat of honor after the conclusion of a festival, a field after the grain has been harvested, speech that is not refined, a young woman whose husband has been killed, the earth without a king, a king without a minister, a house devoid of wealth, a householder without a wife, a doctor whose treatment failed, a tree whose branches has been cut, a man who has lost his senses, a lover who is not satisfied with his beloved (or a lover without a favorable response from his beloved), a scriptural text that has been distorted, a lake devoid of lotuses, a path overgrown with grass, or dharma tarnished by arrogance.

The demigods said, "O fair lady, do not be aggrieved for you tried your best. If a work is begun in earnest and is performed with great care and attention—even if the fruit is not gained, what is the fault? If, after an honest effort, a servant has not successfully accomplished a task, the remuneration should still be given. Therefore, we have come to benedict you, knowing that whatever you desire should be given. Seeing how the king was ready to kill his own son rather than break his vow of fasting

on Ekadāśi, Lord Viṣṇu became exceedingly pleased. We know that you are frustrated due to your failure, and we also feel anxious.”

Mohini replied, “To hell with my life, for I could not accomplish my mission. King Rukmaṅgaḍa is now living in the abode of Lord Viṣṇu, enjoying eternal bliss whereas I am still rotting in the material world. O demigods, those who accept their salary without completing their tasks are born in this world as horses. Considering this, how can I accept a benediction from you?”

The demigods said, “Don’t hesitate, my dear, we shall award you the fulfillment of your heart’s desire. After helping you, we shall be free of our debt to you.”

As the demigods were speaking, King Rukmaṅgaḍa’s priest came there. He had been performing pranayama under water for twelve years and his vow had just been completed. After emerging from the water, he heard about what had happened with Mohini and so he approached the assembly of demigods, saying, “To hell with this woman! To hell with the demigods! The benediction that is about to be given to Mohini will be the destroyer of your good reputation. This killer of her husband and her husband’s son is no better than a man-eating Rakṣaṣī. Even if she burns herself in a fire, she will not become purified of her sins. She has made the earth devoid of a good ruler. How can a person who recommends eating on Ekadāśi be rewarded? This woman is not even worthy of being touched and so, how can you award her a benediction?”

“O devas, I shall immediately reduce Mohini to ashes, as well as anyone who sides with her.”

Saying this, the brahmana took water in his hand. While looking furiously at Mohini, he violently threw it on her head. That water shone like fire and as soon as it touched Mohini, her body burst into flames like a bundle of straw as the demigods helplessly looked on. Thus, Mohini was reduced to ashes.

After being burned to ashes, Mohini tried to enter heaven but was refused entry. Indeed, she was rebuked by Vāyu, who said, “It is hell that is the residence for those who are averse to the ways of dharma.”

Beating her with his rod, Vāyu drove Mohini away. Under the influence of the brahmana’s curse, Mohini arrived at hell, where she was tortured by the Yamadūtas for a long time. However, due to the

strength of the brahmana's curse, the hells themselves felt tortured by Mohini's contact.

Being greatly afflicted, the Yamadutas approached their master and said, "O lord, be merciful to us. Take this lady away from us so that we can have relief. By her very touch, we are being reduced to ashes. Please banish her from hell."

Yamaraja was very surprised to hear this and he thereafter banished Mohini from hell. From hell, Mohini tried to enter the lower planets but was turned away. Being extremely ashamed, she went to her father and informed him of her condition. Mohini said, "Father, there is no resting place for me within the three worlds. Wherever I go, people rebuke me. It was at your behest that all this has come about and so you should do something to rescue me. If you go and pacify the brahmana that cursed me, I can be restored to a normal condition of life."

Being thus requested, Lord Brahma set out, accompanied by Lord Shiva, Indra and the other chiefs of the demigods. Lord Brahma and the other demigods approached the brahmana priest of King Rukmangada and offered their obeisances. Upon seeing Lord Brahma and the other demigods before him, the brahmana got up from his seat and offered his obeisances.

After being seated, Lord Brahma said, "O brahmana, please exhibit some compassion and deliver Mohini from her distress. To bewilder Rukmangada, she was sent by me. She is my daughter. Seeing Yamaraja's abode empty, I created Mohini. The ways of morality are very subtle. Whatever has happened, it must be admitted that Rukmangada is now residing in the abode of Lord Vishnu. Whatever Mohini did was on behalf of the demigods and so she should not be considered sinful. Still, if you consider what she had done to be harmful, kindly forgive her."

Being thus urged, the brahmana gave up his anger. After carefully considering the matter for some time, he replied to Lord Brahma, "O lord, because of her sinful contamination, Mohini is not fit to live with others. Therefore, let her live at an uninhabited place."

Lord Brahma consulted the other demigods and then said to Mohini, "Gentle lady, there is no place anywhere that is suitable for you."

Upon hearing this, Mohini bowed down to all present and said, "I request you to grant this wish of mine, for it is beneficial for all. The

salvation of all sinners is accomplished by the observance of Ekadāśi. I feel that my purpose has been served because this pastime has certainly increased the glories of that holy day. My husband has gone to Vaiṣṇava and so I will stay here as a widow, making sure that the observance of fasting on Ekadāśi will continue. There is nothing more sanctifying as the observance of Ekadāśi. Let my abode be a period of time in the vicinity of Ekadāśi."

Thus it came to be that Mohini was awarded the post of superintending the time at the end of the Dāśami, just before the start of Ekadāśi. There are various types of Ekadāśis, according to how the day overlaps with the Dāśami or the Dvādāśi. An example is the Māhādvādāśi. By stationing herself at the junction of the Dāśami and Ekadāśi, Mohini got the chance to bewilder the men of this world. Because Rukmāṅga and his son had ascended to Vaiṣṇava, drums were no longer mounted upon elephants for the purpose of announcing that the vow of fasting on Ekadāśi must be observed throughout the world. As a result, Yamarāja got his job back and was thus pleased.

After the demigods had departed, Mohini approached Lord Brahma and said, "O father, being cursed, my physical body was burnt to ashes. Now, please do something so that I may regain my physical form. Go and appease the brahmana once more."

Lord Brahma begged permission from the brahmana to restore Mohini's physical body. The brahmana gave his consent and so Lord Brahma sprinkled water from his waterpot onto Mohini's ashes. Immediately, Mohini became endowed with a physical form and she bowed down to her father and the brahmana, Vasu. Thereafter, Lord Brahma returned to his own abode.

The remaining portion of the Nārada Purāṇa consists of the talks between Mohini and her brahmana priest, Vasu. First, Vasu recounts the glories of the River Gāṅgā. Here are some of the most interesting statements. Vasu said, "The man who performs austerities by standing on one leg for a thousand years, and the person who daily bathes in the Gāṅgā for one month—these two achieve equal merit."

"For a person suffering from the miseries of material existence and who desires salvation, there is no refuge like the Gāṅgā."

In Satya-yuga, all holy places are considered equal. In Treta-yuga, Puṣkara is considered the best of all holy places. In Dvāpara-yuga, the

holiest place is Kurukshetra, and in Kali-yuga, the Ganga is superior to all others."

"Even a person addicted to sinful activities attains the highest goal of life if he is touched by the wind that has blown from a person who is wet with the water of the Ganga."

"What is the use of performing the eight-fold path of mystic yoga? What is the use of performing austerities? What is the advantage gained by performing sacrifices? Living by the side of the Ganga is superior to them all."

"The benefit a man attains by giving a thousand cows in charity at Prabhasa at the time of a solar eclipse can be derived by a single bath in the Ganga."

"By drinking a handful of Ganga water, one attains a hundred times more benefit than that achieved by giving one's virgin daughter in marriage, or the gift of land, gold, chariots, horses or elephants in charity."

After glorifying the greatness of Gaya and Kashi, the brahmana, Vasu, described the greatness of Jagannatha Puri (Purushottama).

On the earth, Bharata-varsha is said to be the karmabhumi. There, in Bharata-varsha, on the shore of the southern sea, in the land known as Utkala (modern Orissa), lies the holy place of Purushottama.

Formerly, in the Satya-yuga, there lived a king named Indradyumna. He was truthful, heroic, pleasing in speech, a liberal giver of charity, a worshiper of the brahmanas, and he was loved by his subjects. He was a great student of Vedic knowledge and a pure devotee of Lord Vishnu. He thought, "How shall I please Janardana, the Lord of the demigods? In which place can this be done?"

After reviewing within his mind's eye all of the holy places on earth, the king chose Purushottama. He went there with his entourage and army and constructed a palace as his residence, after which he performed a horse-sacrifice and distributed much wealth in charity. After some time, King Indradyumna installed the Deities of Lord Jagannataha, Lady Subhadara, and Lord Balarama.

Mohini inquired, "The king installed the Deities of Jagannata, Balarama and Subhadra. Were there already Deities in Purushottama or were the Deities that the king installed the original ones?"

In reply, the brahmana, Vasu, referred to a conversation between



Lakṣmi (Shrī) and Lord Jagannātha that took place long ago, on the peak of Mount Meru.

Shrī inquired, "O Lord, the material world appears to be a great ocean of lust and anger, full of sharks of delusion and greed. It is very difficult to perform auspicious activities in such a situation. How can the soul be liberated from the impassible material ocean?"

The Lord replied, "On the earth is a well-known holy place called Puruṣhottama. There is no place equal to it within the three worlds. Once, Yamarāja happened to meet Me. When he glorified Me at great length, I asked, 'Why do you eulogise Me like this? Tell Me truthfully?' Yamarāja replied, 'In the holy place of Puruṣhottama, there is a Deity made of indranila (sapphire). Those who worship that Deity without ulterior motive attain the abode of Svetadvīpa. Because of this, my work is being hampered. Kindly withdraw that Deity of Yours.' I told Yamarāja, 'Do not worry, for I shall conceal the Deity within the sand.' "

The Lord hid the Deity of indranila within a jungle and then departed. Much later, as previously described, Indradyumna Mahārāja came to Puruṣhottama and constructed a palace there. Thereafter, the king pondered deeply as follows: What Deities should I install here to worship? There are Deities of three types—those made of metal, stone and wood. If worshiped with pure devotion, the Lord agrees to appear in His Deity incarnation."

While thinking in this way, day and night, the king did not take pleasure in any kind of worldly enjoyment. He did not even bother to bathe or dress himself nicely.

Desiring to attract the mercy of the Lord, King Indradyumna prayed, "I have been deluded by Your energy, Maya, for a long time. I have been wandering in the ocean of material existence, which is very difficult to cross. I am born, again and again, in thousands of species."

"Dissatisfaction and satisfaction have been felt by me. Many times, I have hoarded wealth and many times, I have squandered it. O Lord of the universe, I have sometimes risen to a high position and at other times, I have fallen to the depths. Again and again, I have experienced association with and then separation from wives, children, and friends. Various kinds of mothers and fathers have been seen by me. Many sorrows have been experienced and many happy occasions as well."

"While staying within the mother's womb, I have experienced great

misery. I have experienced miseries during childhood and miseries during haughty youth. I have experienced miseries in old age and miseries at the time of death. I have suffered on the path to Yama's abode and I have been tortured in hell."

"I have been born, again and again, in the species of germs, insects, trees, elephants, horses, deer, birds, buffaloes, cows, and every other kind of animal. I have been born in the wombs of brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. I have attained both poverty and affluence. I have worked as a slave for many men. Many have been killed by me and I have been killed by many others. Things belonging to me have been stolen and I have stolen many things."

"I have suffered because of things done by fathers, mothers, wives and friends and I have been delighted by their actions as well. On many occasions, due to misery, my face has been washed by my tears."

"My Lord, there is no place among the demigods, animals, human beings or any other moving or non-moving being that I have not been. O Lord, sometimes, I resided in heaven and sometimes, I resided in hell."

"O Lord, I have been transmigrating in this way for a long time and I do not see the end of it. Being utterly exhausted, I seek refuge in You. O Krishna, please save me. If You consider me to be Your devotee then be merciful to me. Except for You, there is no one who really cares for me. In whatever birth I am destined to achieve, may my devotion for You never be obstructed. I know that I am not able to glorify You properly and so kindly excuse my offenses. My obeisances are unto You, My Lord."

After offering these nice prayers, King Indradyumna spread kusha grass on the ground and covered it with a cloth. He then lay down to sleep while thinking, "When will the Lord of the universe become pleased to reveal Himself to me?"

That night, as Indradyumna Maharaja was sleeping, Lord Vasudeava appeared in his dreams in an eight-armed form, seated upon the back of Garuda. The Lord said, "Intelligent king, I am very pleased with your devotion. Why are you so unnecessarily worried? I shall now tell you how to receive a Deity that is worthy of being worshiped by kings. Tomorrow, after dawn, look for a great tree on the shore of the ocean that is half in the water and half out of it. With an axe in your hand

and without any companion, enter the water. You will find this tree by the signs that will be sent to you. Cut down the tree and make a Deity from the wood. Do as I say and cast aside your anxiety."

After saying this, the Lord disappeared from King Indradyumna's dream. The king awoke, being highly astonished and he spent the rest of the night thinking about that dream. The next morning, at the break of dawn, the king bathed in the sea. Then, leaving his entourage behind, Maharaja Indradyumna set out alone, along the beach. Soon, he came upon a great tree. Knowing it to be the one indicated by the Lord in his dream, the king cut it down with his axe.

Then, as he gazed at the fallen tree, Lord Vishnu and Vishvakarma assumed the forms of brahmanas and came there. Appearing greatly effulgent, they inquired from the king, "Why have you cut down this tree? What is your intention?"

King Indradyumna bowed down to the two brahmanas and said, "I want to make a Deity of the Lord for His satisfaction. Indeed, the Lord, in my dream, instructed me to come here and cut down this tree for that purpose."

The Lord (in the form of a brahmana) replied, "O king, the earth is certainly blessed to have such a qualified ruler as you. Come, let us sit down in the shade of this tree. My companion is a very expert sculptor, on the level of Vishvakarma, and he has come to assist you. He will make the Deities that you have been thinking of."

The three sat in the shade of a large tree. The Lord said to Vishvakarma, "Carve the Deities according to My instructions. The first Deity will be of Lord Krishna. He shall appear very peaceful and with large eyes that resemble lotus petals. The second Deity will be white in complexion. This Lord will wield a plough in His hand. The third Deity will be of Vasudeva's sister, Subhadra, of golden complexion."

Upon receiving these instructions, Vishvakarma instantly made the three Deities. The first Deity made was that of Balarama, having red eyes and a huge body. He was dressed in blue clothing. The second Deity had the color of a dark raincloud. He was Lord Achyuta, with the mark of Shrivatsa on His chest. The third Deity, Subhadra, appeared very beautiful.

Upon seeing the manifestation of the three Deities, King Indradyumna was indeed surprised. Not only did the Deities appear in an

instant but they were nicely clothed and decorated with various ornaments. The king said, "I think that you two brahmanas must be demigods in disguise. I seek refuge of you—kindly reveal your identities."

One of the brahmanas replied, "I am not one of the demigods, I am the Lord, Purushottama, the master of material nature. It is I who become Brahma, Shiva, Yama and the other universal controllers. O king, I am pleased with you and so I want you to ask Me for a benediction. For those lacking in devotion, I cannot be seen, even in a dream. I have appeared before you because of your steadfast devotion for Me."

Again, the king offered nice prayers to the Lord, after which he prostrated himself upon the ground to offer obeisances. He said, "My Lord, if You are actually pleased with me then I would like to go to Your supreme abode, by Your mercy."

The Lord replied, "Whatever you desire will be attained by you, by My grace. O king, you should continue to rule your kingdom for ten thousand nine hundred years. Let this place, where you performed sacrifice, become known as Indradyumna-saras. One who bathes here, even once, will attain the abode of Indra."

After saying this, Lord Purushottama and Vishvakarma suddenly disappeared from view. The king, along with his ministers and priests, carried the Deities of Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra, by means of chariots, to the city. In due course of time, the Deities were properly installed in a room in the king's palace, and worship was carried out very opulently, under the direction of brahmanas.

At last, after ruling the kingdom for his prescribed duration, Maharaja Indradyumna ascended to the eternal abode of the Lord in the spiritual sky.

The final portion of the Narada Purana deals with glorification of other holy places of pilgrimage, including Prayaga, Kurukshetra, Pushkara, Gokarna and finally, Mathura. After a describing the glories of Mathura, the Narada Purana ends with a description of the topmost of all holy places, Vrindavana.

In reply to Mohini's inquiries, the brahmana, Vasu, narrated this story. Once, as Narada Muni was wandering throughout the three worlds, he came to Vrindavana and stopped at the lake known as Pushpasara. After drinking the cool water of the lake, Narada Muni

sat down beneath a tree that was situated just next to the hermitage of Vrinda.

As Narada Muni sat watching, groups of cowherd boys and cowherd girls came and entered the beautiful hermitage and then left after some time. Narada Muni sat for about three hours and then entered Vrinda's hermitage to see for himself what was going on.

Upon seeing Vrinda, Narada Muni bowed down with respect and then sat on the bare ground. At the end of her meditation, Vrinda opened her eyes and then offered a seat to her guest, Narada Muni. Desiring to experience some confidential pastimes of Lord Krishna, and being respectfully honored by Vrinda, Narada Muni happily stayed there for some time.

After understanding Narada Muni's desire, Vrinda called for her friend, Madhavi. At Vrinda's behest, Madhavi took Narada Muni to the lake and told him to bathe in the water, facing the north-west. When Narada Muni plunged into the lake, Madhavi returned to Vrinda's hermitage.

Soon thereafter, when Narada Muni came out of the water, he was astonished to find himself in the form of a woman. Naradi (Narada Muni in his female form) saw a beautiful woman nearby, beckoning to him with a gesture of her hand, and so he went to her. The woman took Naradi to a room that was beautifully decorated and filled with cowherd women, headed by Vishakha.

A maidservant took Naradi into an inner chamber and there, he saw Lord Krishna, the Lord of the gopis. After bowing down before the Lord, Naradi approached him bashfully. Lord Krishna then embraced Naradi. After enjoying her company for some time, the Lord dismissed Naradi, who then returned to the lake, Pushpasara. She was again asked to bathe and after plunging into the water, Narada regained his manhood, much to his surprise.

Thereafter, being requested by Vrinda, Narada remained at that lake, performing penance. Vrinda supplied fruit for him to eat. One day, as Narada was moving about, he heard a charming sound uttered by a woman. Being curious, he searched the area but could not find her. Finally, Narada Muni inquired about this from Vrinda. In response, Vrinda narrated to Narada the story of Kubja, the hunchbacked woman.

Vrinda informed Narada that Kubja lived in an underground house and would receive Lord Krishna daily, serving Him to her heart's content. Vrinda said, "O sage, except for me, no one knows of her presence here."

The brahmana, Vasu, concluded his description of Vrindavana by saying, "In all the three worlds, there is nothing difficult to attain for that person who gives up all material attachment and resides in Vrindavana."

"O Mohini, in the holy land of Vrindavana—men, women, monkeys, worms, insects, birds, trees, deer and mountains always utter the names of Radha and Krishna."

"I think that a visit to Vrindavana is difficult for those men who are overwhelmed by Krishna's maya and whose minds are therefore filled with lust."

"The lives of those persons who have visited Vrindavana have been rendered fruitful. They deserve the mercy of the Lord."

"Vrindavana must be seen, approached, taken refuge of, and meditated upon always. There is nothing else on earth that is as conducive to the enhancement of one's glory."

"It is in Vrindavana that, long ago, in a former kalpa, a brahmana named Govardhana performed great austerities for the purpose of becoming detached from the material conception of life. To benedict the brahmana, Lord Vishnu appeared before him."

"Upon seeing the Lord in front of him, the brahmana, Govardhana, got up from his seat and then fell flat like a rod to offer obeisances. When asked to accept a benediction, the brahmana requested the Lord to stand on his back. After considering this matter carefully for some time, the Lord stood on the brahmana's back. At that time, the brahmana, Govardhana, said, 'O Lord of the universe, I do not want You to get off my back and so please remain like this.' Ever since that time, the Lord has remained with Govardhana, who assumed the form of a mountain."

"When Lord Krishna incarnated upon the earth, in Vrindavana, He fed the brahmana, Govardhana, with a hill of cooked rice and other food. Then, realizing that Govardhana must be thirsty after eating so much, the Lord had him drink showers of rain coming from dense masses of clouds."

“O Mohini, the person who circumambulates Govardhana Hill with devotion will no longer experience birth and death in this world. Indeed, there is no other place within the three worlds but Vrindavana that is worthy of being taken shelter of. Thus, the greatness of the forest of Vrindavana has been narrated by me to you, O daughter of Brahma. There remains nothing further to be said. One who listens to the glories of Vrindavana and who glorifies Vrindavana is undoubtedly dear to Lord Krishna.”

Thereafter, the brahmana, Vasu, departed for the abode of Brahma while Mohini embarked on a pilgrim's journey. Vasu related to Lord Brahma all that had transpired and then went to reside in Vrindavana, where he performed austerities for many years. Becoming very pleased with him, the Lord appeared before Vasu and requested him to accept a benediction.

Vasu replied, “Simply grant me eternal residence in the land of Vrindavana for there is nothing else that I desire.”

The Lord granted this wish and then vanished from the brahmana's view.

Thus ends the narration of the Narada Purana, which awards learning to brahmana, the ability to conquer the earth to a kṣatriya, great wealth to a vaiśya, and freedom from miseries to a śudra.





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