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## THE APPEARANCE OF GANGES



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THE WATER FROM LORD BRAHMA'S POT  
Sri la Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura

The Supreme Lord, whose activities are wonderful, covered the earth - which now belonged to Bali- with one footstep, the sky with his body, and all directions with his arms.

After covering the earth, He took a second step with His left foot which covered the heavens, Bali's dwelling place. There was no place now for His third step. Though Vamana requested only three steps of land, his arms and upper body spread over the sky (above *svarga*). This is not an improper interpretation since the word "land" also includes everything above the land. This is the explanation of Sri Jiva. Other commentators explain that the second step itself included the sky, and thus the Lord covered everything with the second step.

With Vamanadeva's second step His foot increased in size. It went from Maharloka to Janaloka, and then to Tapoloka and finally it extended to Brahmaloka. Some say that his toe nail broke the shell of the universe. Others say that after he broke the eight layers of the universal shell, the Viraja water entered.

After his planet was touched by Vamana's foot, Lord Brahma, his abode, his effulgence and his own form became dim by the light from the effulgence of Vamana's moon-like toe nails. He offered respects to the Lord and the great sages

headed by Marici and *yogīs* like Sanandana and others also offered respects to the Lord.

The *Vedas*, *Upavedas*, *Nyāya* scriptures, histories, the *āṅgas* of the *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, *Saṁhitās*, along with *yamas* and *niyamas*, and persons purified of sinful acts by the fire of knowledge which was ignited by the air of yoga, persons who had attained Brahmaloka (which is devoid of *karma-kāṇḍa*) by the power of remembering the Lord's feet, all offered respects to the Lord. Brahma offered foot washing water to the Lord's raised feet. Brahma of spotless fame, who appeared from the Lord's navel, then worshipped the Lord with devotion and praised Him with authentic eulogies.

The water from Lord Brahma's pot, purified by washing the lotus feet of Vamanadeva, became the water of the Gaṅga. Falling down from the sky, it purifies the three worlds like the pure fame of the Supreme Lord.

— From 'Sārārtha-darśinī', Sri la Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakur's commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam » Canto 8 : Withdrawal of the Cosmic Creations » Chapter 20 : Bali Maharaja Surrenders the Universe » Verse: 32-34 and Chapter 21: Bali Maharaja Arrested by the Lord » Verse: 1- 4.

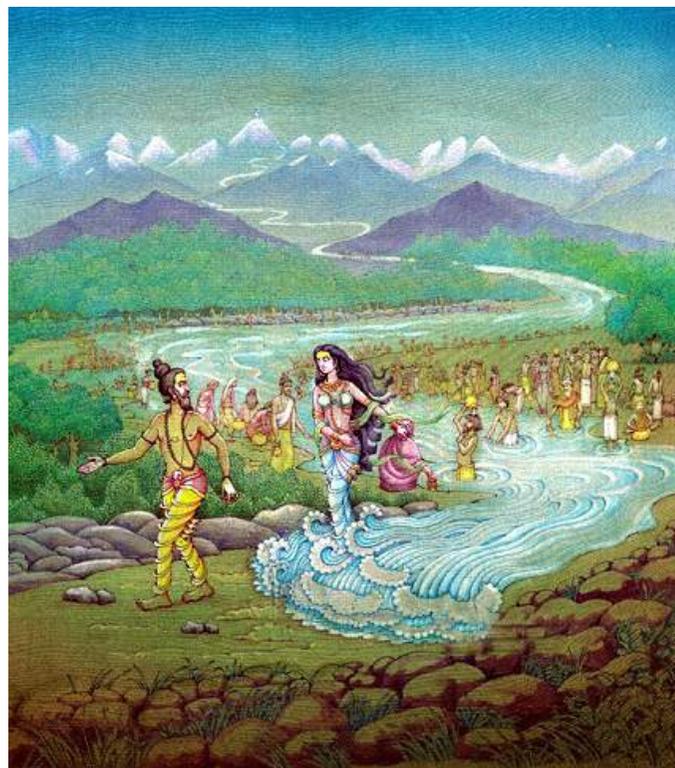
THE APPEARANCE OF THE GANGES  
Sri la Sukadeva Goswami

Lord Vishnu, the enjoyer of all sacrifices, appeared in the sacrificial arena of Bali Maharaja as Vamanadeva. Then He extended His left foot to the end of the universe and pierced a hole in its covering with the nail of His big toe. Through that hole, the pure water of the Causal Ocean entered this universe as the Ganges River. Having washed the lotus feet of the Lord, which are covered with reddish *kumkuma* powder, the water of the Ganges acquired a very beautiful pink color. Every living being can immediately purify his mind of material contamination by touching the transcendental water of the Ganges. Still her waters eternally remain pure. Because the Ganges directly touches the lotus feet of the Lord before descending within this universe, she is known as Vishnupadi. Later she received other names like Jahnavi and Bhagirathi. After remaining on the head of Lord Shiva for one thousand millennia, the water of the Ganges descended to Dhruvaloka, the topmost planet in this universe. Therefore, all learned sages and scholars proclaim Dhruvaloka to be Vishnupada ("situated on Lord Vishnu's lotus feet").

Dhruva Maharaja, the famous son of Maharaja Uttanapada, is known as the most exalted devotee of the Supreme Lord because of his firm determination in executing devotional service. Knowing that the sacred Ganges water

washes the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu, to this very day Dhruva Maharaja, who resides on his own planet, accepts that water on his head with great devotion. Because he constantly and very devoutly thinks of Krishna within the core of his heart, he is overcome with ecstatic anxiety. Tears flow from his half-open eyes, and eruptions appear on his entire body. The seven great sages (Marici, Vasistha, Atri and so on) reside on planets beneath Dhruvaloka. Well aware of its influence they place Ganges water on the tufts of hair on their heads to this day. They have concluded that this is the ultimate wealth, the perfection of all austerities, and the best means of consummating transcendental life. Having achieved uninterrupted devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, they put aside all other auspicious processes like religion, economic development, sense gratification and even merging into the Supreme. Just as *jnānīs* think that merging into the existence of the Lord is the highest truth, these seven exalted personalities accept devotional service as the perfection of life. After purifying the seven planets near Dhruvaloka [the polestar], the Ganges water is carried through the skies of the demigods in billions of celestial airplanes. Then it inundates the moon (Candraloka) and finally reaches Lord Brahma's abode atop Mount Meru.

On top of Mount Meru, the Ganges divides into four branches, each of which flows in a different direction (east, west, north and south). These branches, known by the names Sita, Alakananda, Caksu and Bhadra, flow to the ocean. The branch of the Ganges known as the Sita, flows through Brahmapuri atop Mount Meru, and from there it runs down to the nearby peaks of the Kesaracala Mountains, which stand almost as high as Mount Meru itself. These mountains are like a bunch of filaments around Mount Meru. From the Kesaracala Mountains, the Ganges falls to the peak of Gandhamadana Mountain and then flows into the land of *Bhadraśva-varṣa*. Finally it reaches the ocean of salt water in the west. The branch of the Ganges known as Caksu falls onto the summit of Malyavan Mountain and from there cascades onto the land of *Ketumāla-varṣa*. The Ganges continuously flows through *Ketumāla-varṣa* and in this way also reaches the ocean of salt water in the west. The branch of the Ganges known as Bhadra flows from the northern side of Mount Meru. Its waters fall onto the peaks of Kumuda Mountain, Mount Nila, Shveta Mountain and Srngavan Mountain in succession. Then it runs down into the province of Kuru and, after crossing through that land, flows into the saltwater ocean in the north. Similarly, the branch of the Ganges known as



Alakananda flows from the southern side of Brahmapuri (*Brahma-sadana*). Passing over the tops of mountains in various lands, it falls with fierce force upon the peaks of the mountains Hemakuta and Himakuta. After inundating the tops of those mountains, the Ganges falls down onto the tract of land known as *Bhārata-varṣa*, which she also inundates. Then the Ganges flows into the ocean of salt water in the south. Persons who come to bathe in this river are fortunate. It is not very difficult for them to achieve the results of performing great sacrifices like the *Rājasūya* and *Aśvamedha yajñas* with every step they take. Many other rivers, both big and small, flow from the top of Mount Meru. These rivers are like daughters of the mountain, and they flow to the various tracts of land in hundreds of branches.

Among the nine *varṣas*, the tract of land known as *Bhārata-varṣa* is understood to be the field of fruitive activities. Learned scholars and saintly persons declare the other eight *varṣas* to be meant for very highly elevated pious persons. After returning from the heavenly planets, they enjoy the remaining results of their pious activities in these eight earthly *varṣas*. In these eight *varṣas*, or tracts of land, human beings live ten thousand years according to earthly calculations. All the inhabitants are almost like demigods. They have the bodily strength of ten thousand elephants. Indeed, their bodies are as sturdy as thunderbolts. The youthful duration of their lives is very pleasing, and both men and women enjoy sexual union with great pleasure for a long time. After



years of sensual pleasure when a balance of one year of life remains the wife conceives a child. Thus the standard of pleasure for the residents of these semi-heavenly regions is exactly like that of the human beings who lived during Tretā-yuga. In each of those tracts of land, there are many gardens filled with seasonal flowers and fruit, and there are beautifully decorated hermitages as well. Between the great mountains demarcating the borders of those lands are enormous lakes of clear water filled with newly grown lotus flowers. Aquatic birds such as swans, ducks, water chickens, and cranes become greatly excited by the fragrance of lotus flowers, and the charming sound of bumblebees fills the air. The inhabitants of those lands are important leaders among these quasi demigods. Always attended by their respective servants, they enjoy life in gardens alongside the lakes. In this pleasant environment the wives of the celestials smile playfully at their husbands and look upon them with amorous desires. They are constantly served with sandalwood pulp and flower garlands by their servants. In this way, all the residents of the eight heavenly *varṣas* enjoy, attracted by the activities of the opposite sex.

To show mercy to His devotees in each of these nine tracts of land, the Supreme Personality of Godhead known as Narayana expands Himself

in His quadruple principles of Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. In this way He remains near His devotees to accept their service. In the tract of land known as *Ilāvṛta-varṣa*, the only male person is Lord Shiva, the most powerful demigod. Goddess Durga, the wife of Lord Shiva, does not like any male to enter that land. If any foolish man dares to do so, she immediately turns him into a woman. In *Ilāvṛta-varṣa*, Lord Shiva is always encircled by ten billion maidservants of Goddess Durga, who minister to him. The quadruple expansion of the Supreme Lord is composed of Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sankarsana. Sankarsana, the fourth expansion, is certainly transcendental, but because His activities of destruction in the material world are in the mode of ignorance, He is known as *tāmasī*, the Lord's form in the mode of ignorance. Lord Shiva knows that Sankarsana is the original cause of his own existence, and thus he always meditates upon Him in trance by chanting the following mantra.

The most powerful Lord Shiva says: O Supreme Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisance unto You in Your expansion as Lord Sankarsana. You are the reservoir of all transcendental qualities. Although You are unlimited, You remain unmanifest to the non-devotees. O my Lord, You are the only worshipable person, for You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the reservoir of all opulence. Your secure lotus feet are the only source of protection for all Your devotees, whom You satisfy by manifesting Yourself in various forms. O my Lord, You deliver Your devotees from the clutches of material existence. Non-devotees, however, remain entangled in material existence by Your will. Kindly accept me as Your eternal servant.

We cannot control the force of our anger. Therefore when we look at material things, we cannot avoid feeling attraction or repulsion for them. But the Supreme Lord is not affected in this way. Although He glances over the material world for the purpose of creating, maintaining and destroying it, He is never affected, even to the slightest degree. Therefore, one who desires to conquer the urges of the senses must take shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord. Then he will be victorious. For persons with impure vision, the Supreme Lord's eyes appear like those of someone who indiscriminately drinks intoxicating beverages. Thus bewildered, such unintelligent persons become angry at the Supreme Lord, and due to their angry mood, the Lord Himself appears angry and very fearful. However, this is but an illusion. When the wives



of the serpent demon were agitated by the touch of the Lord's lotus feet, due to shyness they could proceed no further in their worship of Him. Yet the Lord remained unagitated by their touch, for He is equipoised in all circumstances. Therefore who will not worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead?

All the great sages accept the Lord as the source of creation, maintenance and destruction, although He actually has nothing to do with these activities. Therefore the Lord is called unlimited. Although the Lord in His incarnation as Sesa holds all the universes on His hoods, each universe feels no heavier than a mustard seed to Him. Therefore, what person desiring perfection will not worship the Lord? From that Supreme Personality of Godhead appears Lord Brāhma, whose body is made from the total material energy, the reservoir of intelligence predominated by the passionate mode of material nature. From Lord Brahma, I myself am born as a representation of false ego known as Rudra. By my own power I create all the other demigods, the five elements and the senses. Therefore, I worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is greater than any of us and under whose control are situated all the demigods, material elements and senses, and even Lord Brahma and I myself, like birds bound by a rope. Only by the Lord's grace can we create, maintain and annihilate the material world. Therefore, I offer my respectful obeisance unto the Supreme Being.

The illusory energy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead binds all of us conditioned souls to this material world. Therefore, without being favored by Him, persons like us cannot understand how to get out of that illusory energy. Let me offer my respectful obeisance unto the Lord, who is the cause of creation and annihilation.

— Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam » Canto 5: The Creative Impetus » Chapter 17. The Descent of the River Ganges » Verses:1-24.

### BHAGIRATHA, SURYA DYNASTY AND THE GANGES Sri Bhaktivinoda Thakura

Following the modern opinion regarding the Ganges, it may be said that King Bhagiratha of the Surya dynasty performed the laudable work of spreading the glories of the Ganges to the ocean, thus extending the area of Aryavarta. At that time Aryavarta extended only as far as Mithila, and the dynasty of Manu was almost extinct. The kingdoms of the Surya and Rudra dynasties were both very powerful at the time, and they had such an alliance that no general work could go on anywhere in India without their consent. When King Sagara's sons were cursed to die near the ocean, it created a bad name for the Surya dynasty. In order to counteract that bad name, King Bhagiratha worshiped Brahma, the leader of the demigods, and Shiva, the King of the Rudra kingdom, and thus received permission to make Aryavarta prosperous. Bhagiratha then connected the Ganges with the ocean. In the



beginning, the Sarasvati was the only sacred river. Gradually when the areas around the Yamunā were populated by the Aryans, the glories of the Yamuna also spread. Then during the time of Bhagiratha, the Ganges became celebrated as the topmost of all sacred rivers.

— Sri Krishna Samhita by Srila Bhaktivinod Thakura » Translated by Bhumipati dasa.



### THE GANGES AND THE JAHNU MUNI Srila Valmiki

When Ganges flowed into the sacrificial arena of the great soul Jahnu, who could perform amazing feats during his executing a sacrifice, he became enraged. Therefore he performed the herculean feat of drinking the Ganges dry. Seeing that, the demigods, gandharvas and sages were greatly astonished. They offered respects to Jahnu, that great soul and best of men, and then contrived that the Ganges become the daughter of the great sage. Being pleased by this scheme, the highly powerful sage allowed the Ganges to flow from his ears. Thus, the Ganges is called the daughter of the sage Jahnu and is known as Jahnvi. The Ganges again began following King Bhagiratha's chariot. Then that best of rivers reached the ocean. She thereafter entered Rasatala to fulfill the desire of King Bhagiratha who had brought her there with great effort. Seeing the charred remains of his ancestors Bhagiratha fainted. However when

the waters of the Ganges flowed over that pile of ashes King Bhagiratha's ancestors, now purified of their sins attained heaven.

—Sri Ramayana» Bala-kanda » Chapter 43 » Shiva receives the Ganges on His Head.

### WHY IS GANGES CALLED PATITA-PĀVANĪ? His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The water of the Ganges is called *patita-pāvanī*, the deliverer of all sinful living beings. It is an observable fact that a person who regularly bathes in the Ganges is purified both externally and internally. Externally his body becomes immune to all kinds of disease, and internally he gradually develops a devotional attitude toward the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Throughout India, many thousands of people live on the banks of the Ganges, and by regularly bathing in her waters, they are undoubtedly being purified both spiritually and materially. Many sages, including Shankaracarya, have composed prayers in praise of the Ganges, and the land of India itself has become glorious because such rivers as the Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Kaveri, Krishna and Narmada flow there. Anyone living on the land adjacent to these rivers is naturally advanced in spiritual consciousness. Srila Madhvacharya says:

*vārāhe vāma-pādam tu tad-anyeṇu tu dakṣiṇam  
pādam kalpeṇu bhagavān ujjahāra trivikramah*



Standing on His right foot and extending His left to the edge of the universe, Lord Vamana became known as Trivikrama, the incarnation who performed three heroic deeds.

— Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam » Canto 5: The Creative Impetus » Chapter 17. The Descent of the River Ganges » Verses:1, Purport.

### WHY DO THE VAISHNAVAS SOMETIMES TAKE BIRTH AT PLACES DISTANT FROM GANGES?

Srila Bhaktisiddhnata Saraswati Thakura

The Ganges, which emanates from the lotus feet of Vishnu and which is the best of the seven sacred rivers, is glorified by the *Purāṇas* as possessing the topmost potency for purification. That is why she has a special position amongst the devotees. The Ganges, also known as Bhagirathi, flows through Navadvīpa of *Gauḍa-deśa*. Since many of Śrī Chaitanya's associates appeared outside of *Gauḍa-deśa*, doubts may arise in the hearts of materialistic people. If Vaishnavas appear in a place that is so contaminated that a visitor there requires atonement, then people will consider these pure Vaishnavas as materially contaminated persons who are forced to experience the fruits of pious and impious activities. Therefore the following question arises: Why did the supremely pious Vaishnavas take birth in places not visited by the Pandavas or touched by the Ganges instead of appearing in the vicinity of the Ganges? One may also question why Śrī Chaitanyadeva personally appeared in the highest *brāhmaṇa* family of Navadvīpa,

which is situated on the banks of the supremely pure Ganges, yet He had His associates appear in places far from the Ganges in families other than *brāhmaṇas*. In answer to these questions it may be said that pure Vaishnavas appeared in such places and in such families in order to purify them.

— Caitanya Bhagavata » Adi Kanda » Chapter 2 » Verse: 44-45 » Srila Vrindavan Das Thakura » Translated by Bhumiapati Dāsa.



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His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

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