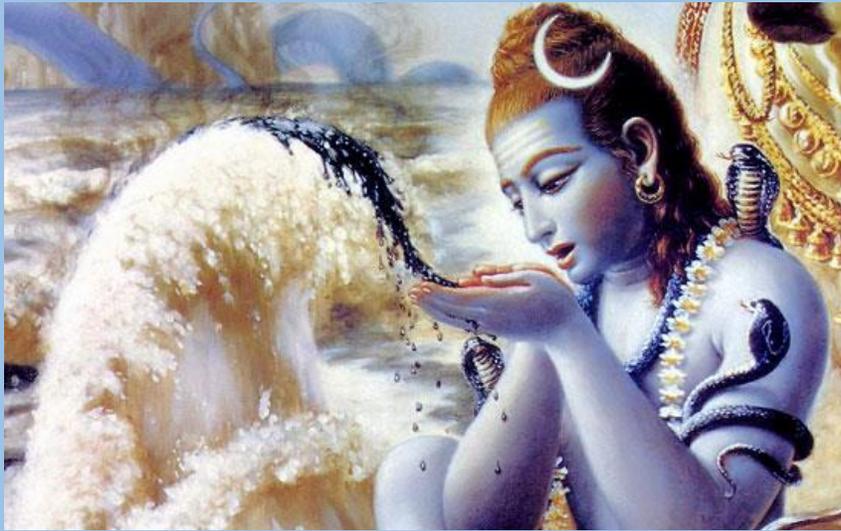


A MOST GRACIOUS ONE - NEELKANTHA



Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: O best of the Kurus, Mahārāja Parīkṣit, the demigods and demons summoned Vāsuki, king of the serpents, requesting him to come and promising to give him a share of the nectar. They coiled Vāsuki around Mandara Mountain as a churning rope, and with great pleasure they endeavored to produce nectar by churning the

Ocean of Milk.

The Personality of Godhead, Ajita, grasped the front portion of the snake, and then the demigods followed. The leaders of the demons thought it unwise to hold the tail, the inauspicious portion of the snake. Instead, they wanted to hold the front, which had been taken by the Personality of Godhead and the demigods, because that portion was auspicious and glorious. Thus the demons, on the plea that they were all highly advanced students of Vedic knowledge and were all famous for their birth and activities, protested that they wanted to hold the front of the

snake.

Thus the demons remained silent, opposing the desire of the demigods. Seeing the demons and understanding their motive, the Personality of Godhead smiled. Without discussion, He immediately accepted their proposal by grasping the tail of the snake, and the demigods followed Him. After thus adjusting how the snake was to be held, the sons of Kaśyapa, both demigods and demons, began their activities, desiring to get nectar by churning the Ocean of Milk.

When Mandara Mountain was thus being used as a churning rod in the Ocean of Milk,

it had no support, and therefore although held by the strong hands of the demigods and demons, it sank into the water. Because the mountain had been sunk by the strength of providence, the demigods and demons were disappointed, and their faces seemed to shrivel.

Seeing the situation that had been created by the will of the Supreme, the unlimitedly powerful Lord, whose determination is infallible, took the wonderful shape of a tortoise, entered the water, and lifted the great Mandara Mountain. When the demigods and demons saw that Mandara Mountain had

been lifted, they were enlivened and encouraged to begin churning again. The mountain rested on the back of the great tortoise, which extended for eight hundred thousand miles like a large island.

When the demigods and demons, by the strength of their arms, rotated Mandara Mountain on the back of the extraordinary tortoise, the tortoise accepted the rolling of the mountain as a means of scratching His body, and thus He felt a pleasing sensation. Thereafter, Lord Viṣṇu entered the demons as the quality of passion, the demigods as the quality of goodness, and Vāsuki as the

quality of ignorance to encourage them and increase their various types of strength and energy.

Manifesting Himself with thousands of hands, the Lord then appeared on the summit of Mandara Mountain, like another great mountain, and held Mandara Mountain with one hand. In the upper planetary systems, Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, along with Indra, King of heaven, and other demigods, offered prayers to the Lord and showered flowers upon Him.

The demigods and demons worked almost madly for the nectar, encouraged by the Lord,

who was above and below the mountain and who had entered the demigods, the demons, Vāsuki and the mountain itself. Because of the strength of the demigods and demons, the Ocean of Milk was so powerfully agitated that all the alligators in the water were very much perturbed. Nonetheless the churning of the ocean continued in this way.

Vāsuki had thousands of eyes and mouths. From his mouths he breathed smoke and blazing fire, which affected the demons, headed by Pauloma, Kāleya, Bali and Ilvala. Thus the demons, who appeared like sarala trees burned by a forest fire, gradually

became powerless. Because the demigods were also affected by the blazing breath of Vāsuki, their bodily lusters diminished, and their garments, garlands, weapons and faces were blackened by smoke. However, by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, clouds appeared on the sea, pouring torrents of rain, and breezes blew, carrying particles of water from the sea waves, to give the demigods relief.

When nectar did not come from the Ocean of Milk, despite so much endeavor by the best of the demigods and demons, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Ajita, personally

began to churn the ocean. With His strong, glorious arms, which award fearlessness throughout the universe, He took hold of Vāsuki and began churning the ocean, using Mandara Mountain as a churning rod. When engaged in this way, the Lord appeared like a beautifully situated mountain named Indranīla.

The fish, sharks, tortoises and snakes were most agitated and perturbed. The entire ocean became turbulent, and even the large aquatic animals like whales, water elephants, crocodiles and timingila fish [large whales that can swallow small whales] came to the

surface. While the ocean was being churned in this way, it first produced a fiercely dangerous poison called hālahala. O King, when that uncontrollable poison was forcefully spreading up and down in all directions, all the demigods, along with the Lord Himself, approached Lord Śiva [Sadāśiva]. Feeling unsheltered and very much afraid, they sought shelter of him.

The demigods observed Lord Śiva sitting on the summit of Kailāsa Hill with his wife, Bhavānī, for the auspicious development of the three worlds. He was being worshiped by great saintly persons desiring liberation. The

demigods offered him their obeisances and prayers with great respect. Lord Śiva is always benevolent toward all living entities. When he saw that the living entities were very much disturbed by the poison, which was spreading everywhere, he was very compassionate. Taking his eternal consort, Bhavani in confidence, Lord Śiva began to drink the poison, and Bhavānī, who knew perfectly well the capabilities of Lord Śiva, gave him her permission to do so.

Thereafter, Lord Śiva, who is dedicated to auspicious, benevolent work for humanity, compassionately took the whole quantity of

poison in his palm and drank it. As if in defamation, the poison born from the Ocean of Milk manifested its potency by marking Lord Śiva's neck with a bluish line. That line, however, is now accepted as an ornament of the Lord.

Everyone, including Bhavānī [the daughter of Mahārāja Dakṣa], Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu, and the people in general, very highly praised this deed performed by Lord Śiva, who is worshiped by the demigods and who bestows benedictions upon the people. Scorpions, cobras, poisonous drugs and other animals whose bites are poisonous took the

opportunity to drink whatever little poison had fallen and scattered from Lord Śiva's hand while he was drinking.