

Title

**THE
VISHNU
PURÁNA**

Book One

*A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition
Translated from the original Sanscrit
and
illustrated by Notes derived chiefly from other Puranas*

*by
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About this eBook

THE VISHNU PURANA
Book One

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Chapter I

Invocation. Maitreya inquires of his teacher, Parásara, the origin and nature of the universe. Parásara performs a rite to destroy the demons: reproved by Vaśishítha, he desists: Pulastya appears, and bestows upon him divine knowledge: he repeats the Vishnú Purána. Vishnú the origin, existence, and end of all things.

OM! GLORY TO VÁSUDEVA¹. - Victory be to thee, Puńdaríkáksha; adoration be to thee, Víswabhávana; glory be to thee, Hrishikeśa, Mahápurusha, and Púrvaja².

May that Vishnú, who is the existent, imperishable, Brahma, who is Íswara³, who is spirit⁴; who with the three qualities⁵ is the cause of creation, preservation, and destruction; who is the parent of nature, intellect, and the other ingredients of the universe⁶; be to us the bestower of understanding, wealth, and final emancipation.

¹ An address of this kind, to one or other Hindu divinity, usually introduces Sanscrit compositions, especially those considered sacred. The first term of this mantra or brief prayer, Om or Omkára, is well known as a combination of letters invested by Hindu mysticism with peculiar sanctity. In the Vedas it is said to comprehend all the gods; and in the Puráns it is directed to be prefixed to all such formulæ as that of the text. Thus in the Uttara Khańda of the Pádma Purána: 'The syllable Om, the mysterious name, or Brahma, is the leader of all prayers: let it therefore, O lovely-faced, (Śiva addresses Durgá,) be employed in the beginning of all prayers.' According to the same authority, one of the mystical imports of the term is the collective enunciation of Vishnú expressed by A, of Srí his bride intimated by U, and of their joint worshipper designated by M. A whole chapter of the Váyú Purána is devoted to this term. A text of the Vedas is there cited: 'Om, the monosyllable Brahma;' the latter meaning either the Supreme Being or the Vedas collectively, of which this monosyllable is the type. It is also said to typify the three spheres of the world, the three holy fires, the three steps of Vishnú, &c. - Frequent meditation upon it, and repetition of it, ensure release from worldly existence. See also Manu, II. 76. Vásudeva, a name of Vishnú or Krishńa, is, according to its grammatical etymology, a patronymic derivative implying son of Vasudeva. The Vaishńava Puráns, however, devise other explanations: see the next chapter, and again, b. VI. c. 5

² In this stanza occurs a series of the appellations of Vishnú: 1. Puńdaríkáksha, having eyes like a lotus, or heart-pervading; or Puńdaríka is explained supreme glory, and Aksha imperishable: the first is the most usual etymon. 2. Víswabhávana, the creator of the universe, or the cause of the existence of all things. 3. Hrishikeśa, lord of the senses. 4. Mahá purusha, great or supreme spirit; purusha meaning that which abides or is quiescent in body (puri sété), 5. Púrvaja, produced or appearing before creation; the Orphic πρωτογόνοϛ. In the fifth book, c. 18, Vishnú is described by five appellations, which are considered analogous to these; or, 1. Bhútátmá, one with created things, or Puńdaríkáksha; 2. Pradhánátmá, one with crude nature, or Víswabhávana; 3. Indriyátmá, one with the senses, or Hrishikeśa; 4. Paramátmá, supreme spirit, or Mahápurusha; and Átmá, soul; living soul, animating nature and existing before it, or Púrvaja

³ Brahma, in the neuter form, is abstract supreme spirit; and Íswara is the Deity in his active nature, he who is able to do or leave undone, or to do any thing in any other manner than that in which it is done

⁴ Pumán which is the same with Purusha, incorporated spirit. By this and the two preceding terms also the commentator understands the text to signify that Vishnú is any form of spiritual being that is acknowledged by different philosophical systems, or that he is the Brahma of the Vedánta, the Íswara of the Pátanjala, and the Purusha of the Sánkhya school

⁵ The three qualities, to which we shall have further occasion to advert, are, Satya, goodness or purity, knowledge, quiescence; Rajas, foulness, passion, activity; and Tamas, darkness, ignorance, inertia

⁶ Pradhánabuddhyádisú. This predicate of the Deity distinguishes most of the Puráns from several of the philosophical systems, which maintain, as did the earliest Grecian systems of cosmogony, the eternal and independent existence of the first principle of things, as nature, matter, or chaos. Accordingly, the commentator notices the objection. Pradhána being without beginning, it is said how can Vishnú be its parent? To which he replies, that this is not so, for in a period of worldly destruction (Pralaya), when the Creator desists from creating, nothing is generated by virtue of any other energy or parent. Or, if this be not satisfactory, then the text may be understood to imply that intellect (Buddhi) &c. are formed through the materiality of crude nature, or Pradhána

Having adored Vishnú⁷, the lord of all, and paid reverence to Brahma and the rest⁸; having also saluted the spiritual preceptor⁹; I will narrate a Puráña equal in sanctity to the Vedas.

Maitreya¹⁰, having saluted him reverentially, thus addressed Parásara, the excellent sage, the grandson of Vaśishtha, who was versed in traditional history, and the Puráñas; who was acquainted with the Vedas, and the branches of science dependent upon them; and skilled in law and philosophy; and who had performed the morning rites of devotion.

Maitreya said, Master! I have been instructed by you in the whole of the Vedas, and in the institutes of law and of sacred science: through your favour, other men, even though they be my foes, cannot accuse me of having been remiss in the acquirement of knowledge. I am now desirous, oh thou who are profound in piety! to hear from thee, how this world was, and how in future it will be? What is its substance, oh Brahman, and whence proceeded animate and inanimate things? Into what has it been resolved, and into what will its dissolution again occur? How were the elements manifested? Whence proceeded the gods and other beings? What are the situation and extent of the oceans and the mountains, the earth, the sun, and the planets? what are the families of the gods and others, the Menus, the periods called Manwantaras, those termed Kalpas, and their subdivisions, and the four ages: the events that happen at the close of a Kalpa, and the terminations of the several ages¹¹: the histories, oh great Muni, of the gods, the sages, and kings; and how the Vedas were divided into branches (or schools), after they had been arranged by Vyasa: the duties of the Brahmans, and the other tribes, as well as of those who pass through the different orders of life? All these things I wish to hear from you, grandson of Vas'ishtha. Incline thy thoughts benevolently towards me, that I may, through thy favour, be informed of all I desire to know.

Parásara replied, well inquired, pious Maitreya. You recall to my recollection that which was of old narrated by my father's father, Vaśishtha. I had heard that my father had been devoured by a Rákshas employed by Viswámitra: violent anger seized me, and I commenced a sacrifice for the destruction of the Rákshasas: hundreds of them were reduced to ashes by the rite, when, as they were about to be entirely extirpated, my grandfather Vaśishtha thus spake to

⁷ Vishnú is commonly derived in the Puráñas from the root Vis, to enter, entering into, or pervading the universe, agreeably to the text of the Vedas, 'Having created that (world), he then afterwards enters into it;' being, as our comment observes, undistinguished by place, time, or property. According to the Mátasya P. the name alludes to his entering into the mundane egg: according to the Padma P., to his entering into or combining with Prakriti, as Purusha or spirit. In the Moksha Dharma of the Mahábhárata, s. 165, the word is derived from the root ví, signifying motion, pervasion, production, radiance; or, irregularly, from krama, to go with the particle vi, implying, variously, prefixed

⁸ Brahmá and the rest is said to apply to the series of teachers through whom this Puráña was transmitted from its first reputed author, Brahmá, to its actual narrator, the sage Parásara. See also b. VI. c. 8

⁹ The Guru, or spiritual preceptor, is said to be Kapila or Sáraswata; the latter is included in the series of teachers of the Puráña. Parásara must be considered also as a disciple of Kapila, as a teacher of the Sánkhyá philosophy

¹⁰ Maitreya is the disciple of Parásara, who relates the Vishnú Puráña to him; he is also one of the chief interlocutors in the Bhágavata, and is introduced in the Mahábhárata (Vana Parva, s. 10.) as a great Rishi, or sage, who denounces Duryodhana's death. In the Bhágavata he is also termed Kausháravi, or the son of Kusharava

¹¹ One copy reads Yuga dherma, the duties peculiar to the four ages, or their characteristic properties, instead of Yugánta

me: Enough, my child; let thy wrath be appeased: the Rákshasas are not culpable: thy father's death was the work of destiny. Anger is the passion of fools; it becometh not a wise man. By whom, it may be asked, is any one killed? Every man reaps the consequences of his own acts. Anger, my son, is the destruction of all that man obtains by arduous exertions, of fame, and of devout austerities; and prevents the attainment of heaven or of emancipation. The chief sages always shun wrath: he not thou, my child, subject to its influence. Let no more of these unoffending spirits of darkness be consumed. Mercy is the might of the righteous¹².

Being thus admonished by my venerable grandsire, I immediately desisted from the rite, in obedience to his injunctions, and Vaśishthā, the most excellent of sages, was content with me. Then arrived Pulastya, the son of Brahmā¹³, who was received by my grandfather with the customary marks of respect. The illustrious brother of Pulaha said to me; Since, in the violence of animosity, you have listened to the words of your progenitor, and have exercised clemency, therefore you shall become learned in every science: since you have forborne, even though incensed, to destroy my posterity, I will bestow upon you another boon, and, you shall become the author of a summary of the Purāñas¹⁴; you shall know the true nature of the deities, as it really is; and, whether engaged in religious rites, or abstaining from their performance¹⁵, your understanding, through my favour, shall be perfect, and exempt from). doubts. Then my grandsire Vaśishthā added; Whatever has been said to thee by Pulastya, shall assuredly come to pass.

¹² Sacrifice of Parāśara. The story of Parāśara's birth is narrated in detail in the Mahābhārata (Ādi Parva, s. 176). King Kalmāshapāda meeting with Sakti, the son of Vaśishthā, in a narrow path in a thicket, desired him to stand out of his way. The sage refused: on which the Rāja beat him with his whip, and Sakti cursed him to become a Rákshas, a man-devouring spirit. The Rāja in this transformation killed and ate its author, or Sakti, together with all the other sons of Vaśishthā. Sakti left his wife Adriśyanti pregnant, and she gave birth to Parāśara, who was brought up by p. 5 his grandfather. When he grew up, and was informed of his father's death, he instituted a sacrifice for the destruction of all the Rákshasas; but was dissuaded from its completion by Vaśishthā and other sages or Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, and Kratu. The Mahābhārata adds, that when he desisted from the rite, he scattered the remaining sacrificial fire upon the northern face of the Himālaya mountain, where it still blazes forth at the phases of the moon, consuming Rákshasas, forests, and mountains. The legend alludes possibly to some transhimalayan volcano. The transformation of Kalmāshapāda is ascribed in other places to a different cause; but he is every where regarded as the devourer of Sakti or Saktri, as the name also occurs. The story is told in the Linga Purāña (Pūrvārdha, s. 64) in the same manner, with the addition, conformably to the Saiva tendency of that work, that Parāśara begins his sacrifice by propitiating Mahādeva. Vaśishthā's dissuasion, and Pulastya's appearance, are given in the very words of our text; and the story concludes, 'thus through the favour of Pulastya and of the wise Vaśishthā, Parāśara composed the Vaishṇava (Vishṇu) Purāña, containing ten thousand stanzas, and being the third of the Purāña compilations' (Purāñasanhitā). The Bhāgavata (b. III. s. 8) also alludes, though obscurely, to this legend. In recapitulating the succession of the narrators of part of the Bhāgavata, Maitreya states that this first Purāña was communicated to him by his Guru Parāśara, as he had been desired by Pulastya: i. e. according to the commentator, agreeably to the boon given by Pulastya to Parāśara, saying, You shall be a narrator of Purāñas;. The Mahābhārata makes no mention of the communication of this faculty to Parāśara by Pulastya; and as the Bhāgavata could not derive this particular from that source, it here most probably refers unavowedly, as the Linga does avowedly, to the Vishṇu Purāña

¹³ Pulastya, as will be presently seen, is one of the Rishis, who were the mind-born sons of Brahmā. Pulaha, who is here also named, is another. Pulastya is considered as the ancestor of the Rákshasas, as he is the father of Visravas, the father of Rāvana and his brethren. Uttara Rāmāyaṇa. Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, s. 272. Pādma Pur. Linga Pur. s. 63

¹⁴ Purāña sanhitā kerttā Bhavān bha vishyati. You shall be a maker of the Sanhitā, or compendium of the Purāñas, or of the Vishṇu Purāña, considered as a summary or compendium of Pauranic traditions. In either sense it is incompatible with the general attribution of all the Purāñas to Vyāsa

¹⁵ Whether performing the usual ceremonies of the Brahmans, or leading a life of devotion and penance, which supersedes the necessity of rites and sacrifices

Now truly all that was told me formerly by Vaśishtha, and by the wise Palastya, has been brought to my recollection by your questions, and I will relate to you the whole, even all you have asked. Listen to the complete compendium of the Pur pas, according to its tenour. The world was produced from Vishnú: it exists in him: he is the cause of its continuance and cessation: he is the world¹⁶.

¹⁶ These are, in fact, the brief replies to Maitreya's six questions, or, How was the world created? By Vishnú. How will it be? At the periods of dissolution it will be in Vishnú. Whence proceeded animate and inanimate things? From Vishnú. Of what is the substance of the world? Vishnú. Into what has it been, and will it again be, resolved? Vishnú. He is therefore both the instrumental and material cause of the universe. 'The answer to the "whence" replies to the query as to the instrumental cause: "He is the world" replies to the inquiry as to the material cause.' 'And by this explanation of the agency of the materiality, &c. of Vishnú, as regards the universe, (it follows that) all will be produced from, and all will repose in him.' We have here precisely the τὸ πᾶν of the Orphic doctrines, and we might fancy that Brucker was translating a passage from a Purána when he describes them in these words: "Continuisse Jovem (lege Vishnum) sive summum ortum in se omnia, omnibus ortum ex se dedisse, omnia ex se genuisse, et ex sua produxisse essentia. Spiritum esse universi qui omnia regit vivificat estque; ex quibus necessario sequitur omnia in eum reditura." Hist. Philos. I. 388. Jamblichus and Proclus also testify that the Pythagorean doctrines of the origin of the material world from the Deity, and its identity with him, were much the same. Cudworth, l. c. p. 348