

Bhagavān and His Avatāra-s

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Bhagavān and His Avatāra-s

Bhagavān has three great modes of being:

I. *Svayam-rūpa* (He Himself, His Own nature).

He is Kṛṣṇa in Goloka-Vraja, Nanda's Son. He knows Himself as a cowherd; He has two arms.

Kṛṣṇa as He is in Dvārakā-Mathurā is a *prakāśa form*¹ of this Kṛṣṇa. He knows Himself as a warrior; generally He has two arms but when He performs heroic deeds of a particular nature He can also have four arms.

[Two arms symbolizes beauty and loveliness, four arms majesty. As Bhagavān's bodily form consists of cit, it is always the particular form that corresponds to His inner thoughts and state of mind that appears.]

Prakāśa either means that *one* form becomes visible at many places *at the same time*² (Goloka-Vraja-Kṛṣṇa during His dance with the gopī-s or Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā during the wedding ceremony with 16 108 princesses) or a *doubling* of the *one* svayam-rūpa as always two-armed, and the two-armed or four-armed Kṛṣṇa³. The four-armed Kṛṣṇa is also Kṛṣṇa Himself.

II. *Tadekātma-rūpa*.

In essence, this mode of being is not separate (a-bheda) from svayam-rūpa, but the form is different as far as bodily constitution and mode of action etc. is concerned.

There are two kinds of *tadekātma-rūpa*:

¹ Vaibhava-prakāśa. The first vaibhava-prakāśa is Goloka-Vraja-Balarāma, who is equal to svayam-rūpa in all respects, except for complexion and astra (weapon).

² Prābhava-prakāśa.

³ Vaibhava-prakāśa.

A) *Vilāsa* (the bodily form is very similar to the *svayam-rūpa*, the śakti is almost as strong but the *līlā* is different).

There are two kinds of *vilāsa*:

1) The first *catur-vyūha*, i.e. the fourfold expansion, consisting of:

- a) *Vāsudeva* (Vasudeva's Son, i.e. Mathurā-Kṛṣṇa)
- b) *Mūla-Saṁkarṣaṇa* (Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's elder brother in Mathurā)
- c) *Pradyumna* (in the *avatāra-līlā* a son of Kṛṣṇa)
- d) *Aniruddha* (in the *avatāra-līlā* a grandchild of Kṛṣṇa)

2) *Nārāyaṇa* or Kṛṣṇa expressing absolute majesty in *Vaikuṅṭham*.

This *Nārāyaṇa* is surrounded by another form of *vilāsa*, originating in the first *caturvyūha*, namely the second *caturvyūha*: *Vāsudeva*, *Mahā-Saṁkarṣaṇa*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*.

From three of them, namely *Mahā-Saṁkarṣaṇa*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*, emanate the three aspects of God that are called *puruṣa-avatāra-s*. They are turned towards the unfolding, maintenance and dissolution of the world.

Sadā-Śiva = *Mahā-Śiva* is a *vilāsa* of *Nārāyaṇa*.

B) *Svāmśa-avatāra-s* (*sva* + *aṁśa* = partial aspect of Himself).

The *svāmśa*, just like the *vilāsa*, is not separate (*a-bheda*) from the *svayam-rūpa* but it manifests less śakti than the *vilāsa*. The *svāmśa-avatāra-s* are divided into three groups:

1) *Puruṣa-avatāra-s*

2) *Guṇa-avatāra-s*

3) *Līlā-avatāra-s* or *kalpa-avatāra-s*. They have this name, because – with a few exceptions – they only become *avatāra* once during each *kalpa*, i.e. the history of one earth.

In addition, there are fourteen avatāra-s in each age of Manu; they are called *manvantara-avatāra-s*.

These manvantara-avatāra-s are almost identical in each kalpa. During the four different yuga-s of a kalpa, they are the different yuga-avatāra-s.

III. *Āveśa*.

When Bhagavān or His śakti seizes a worthy, great ātmā, or become *āviṣṭa*, one speaks of *āveśa-avatāra*. If the śakti is weak, such a bhakta knows himself as a bhakta of Bhagavān. If the śakti is strong the bhakta knows himself as Bhagavān Himself.

Literally, avatāra means descent. When Bhagavān becomes avatāra, His nature does not change in any way. Thus it is not a matter of incarnation. But His śakti is able to adapt His form and līlā to the circumstances prevailing on earth at the respective time, so that they *seem to be* earthly, human or animal.

Consequently the avatāra-s are eternal modes of Bhagavān's being in His realm beyond time and space, and they become visible in the realm of time and space according to a certain rhythm.

Note that Nārāyaṇa, as the extreme of aiśvarya *never* becomes avatāra Himself. This also concerns a vilāsa form of Nārāyaṇa, Sadāśiva in Sadāśiva-loka.

Puruṣa-avatāra-s

The word *puruṣa* means: puri śete = he rests in the pura or resides in there.

There are three different puruṣa-avatāra-s:

I. *Prathama or the first puruṣa-avatāra.*

He emanates from the second catur-vyūha's Saṅkarṣaṇa. When it is time for *ṣṛṣṭi* or emanation of a universe, an impulse emanates from His manaḥ, an impulse to

sr̥ṣṭi. This impulse is compared to a glance, casually turned towards prakṛti. Up to then, the three guṇa-s of Māyā or prakṛiti had been in the state of equilibrium, which is now disturbed. With Saṁkarṣaṇa's glance *kāla* or time [kāla = from √kal, urge, push on] sets in. This kāla is the first category that comes before the emergence of the category space or *ākāśa*. Kāla thus disturbs the equilibrium of the three guṇa-s. Before the emanation (sr̥ṣṭi) the ātmā-s and their adṛṣṭa, i.e. the karma that had not yet had its effect, were at rest. With kāla and Saṁkarṣaṇa's glance the multitude of ātmā-s with their subtle coverings are immersed in prakṛti's womb. As the ātmā-s consist of cit this glance is compared to a mass of light or *jyotiḥ*. This mass of light is the *liṅgam*, the indication that Saṁkarṣaṇa is present. Māyā, who is touched by this glance or the multitude of ātmā-s, is also called *yoni* or plane of contact. This liṅgam gives rise to auspiciousness or *śam* for the beings and is therefore called *śambhu*.

Those who have been more focused on Sadā-Śiva than Nārāyaṇa, i.e. the Śiva-bhakta-s or the Śivaites, consider śambhu or liṅgam and yoni to be modes of manifestations of Śiva, and therefore they call Śambhu Śiva. This is fully legitimate, as Sadā-Śiva is a vilāsa of Nārāyaṇa.

Saṁkarṣaṇa is also called Mahā-Viṣṇu. Accompanied by his śakti *Lakṣmī* he rests on the throne of *Ananta* (the Infinite), on the waters of the Causal Ocean (*kāraṇa*). This ocean emanates from him and gives coolness, because through the impregnation of the ātmā-s in Māyā golden, glowing balls, eggs or *aṇḍa-s* emanate. From Māyā's material emanates *mahat* (cf. the table of "Physiological and Psychological Correspondences").

II. *Dvitiya* or the second *puruṣa-avatāra* emanates from the first *puruṣa-avatāra* but at the same time he is an expansion of the Pradyumna, who belongs to the second catur-vyūha. He enters each of the innumerable golden eggs. Thus he is the Paramātmā or Antaryāmi, who is inherent in the universe or brahma-aṇḍa. He uses a particular śakti or power, *saṁhānana-śakti*, which brings about that the

threefold ahaṅkāra and all that follows subsequently develop from mahat. The different parts of the emanation do not unite into organic units, however, and from Pradyumna then emanates:

III. *Tritīya or the third puruṣa-avatāra.*

He is a vilāsa of Aniruddha at the same time. Whereas the second puruṣa-avatāra rests on the waters of *garbha* or the embryonic universe, and hence is called Garbhodaka-Śāyī-Viṣṇu, the third puruṣa-avatāra rests on the waters of milk [kṣīra], i.e. in the form of Paramātmā he nourishes and sustains the continuity of all ātmā-s in their coverings.

This third puruṣa-avatāra is called Kṣīrodaka-Śāyī-Viṣṇu. He is *one* person in an infinite number of modes of being of himself. Whereas the first and second puruṣa-avatāra metaphorically are depicted as thousand-headed [thousand is a number that means infinite] the Paramātmā is four-armed. This third puruṣa-avatāra is identical with the guṇa-avatāra Viṣṇu.

Guṇa-avatāra-s

The guṇa-avatāra-s Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva emanate from the second puruṣa-avatāra.

I. This *Viṣṇu* is the same as the third puruṣa-avatāra or the Paramātmā. Through Viṣṇu *sthiti* or maintenance of a universe takes place and from him a number of *līlā-avatāra-s* emanate. He acts by means of *sattva-guṇa*, without being affected by it.

II. *Brahmā* emanates from a lotus that grows from the second puruṣa-avatāra's navel. In our universe he is four-armed and four-headed. By means of *rajaḥ* he shapes the forms of the coverings of the ātmā-s after ideas conveyed to him in the

Vedas. The Vedas are Bhagavān's and His vilāsa-s' modes of being in the form of sound vibrations. The material Brahmā uses for shaping the forms is supplied by prakṛti.

At the end of each kalpa the three worlds [Bhū (the earth), Bhuvah and Svah] are destroyed and Brahmā shapes them anew.

On the first day of Brahmā's term of office Nārāyaṇa conveys the Vedas to him, on the first day of the second half of his term of office they are conveyed by the second puruṣa-avatāra.

At the end of his term of office Brahmā returns into the second puruṣa-avatāra, the second puruṣa-avatāra returns into the first puruṣa-avatāra and Brahmā then returns to Nārāyaṇa.

In most cases, however, it is a particularly worthy ātmā who receives Brahmā's office. The second Viṣṇu then gives him the power to shape the world or else the avatāra Brahmā incorporates this ātmā into himself.

III. Śiva either emanates from the root of the nose of the second puruṣa-avatāra or from Brahmā's eyebrows. By means of *tamaḥ-guṇa* he brings about the dissolution of a universe. He is called *Rudra*, because the living beings who cling to their lives at the time of the dissolution of the world burst into tears. As the dissolution of the world initiates a long rest, lasting for a kalpa, for the ātmā-s who rove in saṁsāra, and implies liberation for the ātmā-s who are worthy to be liberated from their coverings, Śiva is also called Śambhu.

Originally, this Śiva is like a great *jyotirlingam* (column of light). As long as the dissolution of the world is not initiated, this liṅgam is connected with prakṛti and thereby it guarantees the continuance of the world and *śam* [auspiciousness] for those who want to stay in it. In this regard the the guṇa-avatāra Viṣṇu's functions are almost the same as Śiva's.

From this Śambhu or Rudra emanates 11 Rudra-s, aṁśa-s of the original Rudra. Almost all of them are five-headed, three-eyed and ten-armed. At the time

of the dissolution of the world – from the first puruṣa-avatāra – also emanates Kāla-Agni-Rudra, who burns everything to ashes.

Rudra can also be either the direct avatāra of the second puruṣa-avatāra or a worthy ātmā. Viṣṇu's function, however, is only performed by himself. Brahmā's and Śiva's functions are closely connected with rajo- and tamo-guṇa which affect Brahmā's and Śiva's nature.

Apart from the Brahmā mentioned above, who is visible to the deva-s and also called *Vairājaḥ*, there is another form of Brahmā that is very subtle and called *Hiraṇya-Garbha*. He is not visible to the deva-s [*hiraṇya* = gold; *garbha* = the embryonic form of the universe]. He is the shaping power that works in each of the golden aṇḍa-s and his covering is mahat.

The structure of the raw form of a universe or aṇḍa is quite similar to the psychological and physiological structure of the ātmā with the exception that in the cosmic structure it is Brahmā who is the ātmā and the second puruṣa-avatāra the Paramātmā, whereas in the psychological structure it is the individual ātmā who is the ātmā and the third puruṣa-avatāra the Paramātmā.

Contrary to the *sva-aṁśa-avatāra-s*, who are not separate from Bhagavān, only express less śakti, the *jīva-ātmā* is a *vibhinna-aṁśa*, as the cit-ātmā's sat, i.e. being, is not grounded in itself, but in Bhagavān's sat-being. In this regard the individual ātmā is separate or vibhinna from Bhagavān. On the other hand, being a particle of Bhagavān's *taṭastha-śakti*, the ātmā is not separate from Bhagavān. The ātmā is thus an infinitesimal partial aspect of Bhagavān Himself. Subjectively he can separate himself from Bhagavān, i.e. he can wish to turn away from Bhagavān, and then he comes under the influence of Bhagavān's māyā-śakti. Objectively, however, the nature of the ātmā and his connection to Bhagavān does not change at all.

The unfolding, maintenance and dissolution of the world gives the ātmā who wants to enjoy the world the possibility to realize his choice, made of free will.

The Paramātmā accompanies the ātmā as the Inner Friend, i.e. Bhagavān Himself accompanies and looks after the ātmā, who is a particle of Himself.

Moreover there are also *līlā-avatāra-s* and *āveśa-avatāra-s* etc. The cosmic process only constitutes Bhagavān's outer līlā (a quarter of His nature). *The līlā-avatāra-s* etc. belong to the inner līlā (three quarters of His nature). The task of these avatāra-s is:

1. To play with His Own bhaktas. Either with those who are His eternal co-players or those who are worthy to become such.
2. To promulgate and expound the Vedas. Although the Vedas are conveyed to Brahmā in the beginning of each unfolding of the world, and by him to other worthy receivers, who on their part transmit them further, they nevertheless become distorted or lost during the course of time. And the avatāra-s not only teach the Vedas, they live the ideal of the Vedic principles in their own lives.
3. To annihilate those who oppose Bhagavān and the Vedic order. The annihilation of the asura-s (a+su+rā = not give in the right way) implies great grace, because through the contact with an avatāra the ātmā in an asura immediately becomes free from attachments. Extreme hatred or dveṣa is thus a means to emancipation. This hatred, however, must be so strong that the person concerned in his hatred cannot think of anything else than God. Those who lack this extreme hatred are certainly killed by others but they enter into even darker wombs.

These three motives, however, are gaṇa or of secondary importance. Mukhya or the main motive for the avatāra-līlā-s is to intensify Bhagavān's Own līlā. When the avatāra descends into the world, His nature of sat-cit-ānanda is completely preserved. At every occasion Bhagavān's svarūpa-śakti adapts His form after the prevailing circumstances on earth, so that He looks like an earthly form (man,

animal etc.). It is only when one or two intimate bhaktas are present that He directly reveals Himself as avatāra the way He is in His Own realm.

Otherwise He comes, so to say, through the "door" of His Own parents, who are His eternal companions. In this avatāra-līlā the svarūpa-śakti arouses in the companions the impression that they are ordinary human beings and it is only in the course of the development of the līlā that their own nature shines forth to them.

Līlā-avatāra-s

They are also called kalpa-avatāra-s, because with a few exceptions they only become avatāra once during each kalpa.

I. *Catuṣsana* = Brahmā's four spiritual sons:

1. Sanatkumāra
2. Sanaka
3. Sananda
4. Sanātana

They look like five-year-old Brahmin boys. Their complexion is gaura, i.e. golden and their līlā is to proclaim and practice jñānam and bhakti. They play the role of Bhagavān's bhakta-s.

II. *Varāha* or boar.

He appears *during* the first and sixth age of Manu. His śakti is *Prthivī* or the Earth. Varāha raises the Earth who has sunk in the flood. Their child is called *Bhauma*, who is later killed by Kṛṣṇa during His līlā, and as both Kṛṣṇa and Varāha are Bhagavān, one says that Kṛṣṇa killed His Own son to teach the world

by His Own example that a bad-mannered son must be punished without mercy, even when he is God's Own son.

His complexion is black or white. Varāha is either a boar or a combination of nṛ = man and boar.

III. *Nārada*

Bhagavān in the form of His Own ṛṣi-bhakta. His līlā is to proclaim bhakti to Bhagavān and intensify the līlā by frequently causing confusion and leading others astray. He has the form of a young man, with flowing hair, always carrying his vīṇā, i.e. lute.

Complexion: candra-śubhra = moon-coloured, silver-coloured. Just like the first līlā-avatāra, Catuḥsana, Nārada stays during the whole kalpa.

IV. *Matsya* or fish.

He appears at the end of every age of Manu. As a fish he pulls the boat with the next Manu and the seven ṛṣi-s during the great flood and conveys the Vedas to them. He has a horn, where the boat is tied.

V. *Yajña-Hari*

He only appears in the first age of Manu and he also takes over the office of Indra. His form is the sacrificial fire as a person.

VI. *Nara-Narāyaṇa*

As two great jñāni-s they teach ātmā-vidyā in Badari's aśram or hermitage. They stay during the whole kalpa. They seem to be twins. In some kalpa-s they are four ṛṣi-s or quads. The other two are called Hari and Kṛṣṇa. During Kṛṣṇa's līlā Nara and Nārāyaṇa enter into Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa and at the end of the līlā they return to their own places.

VII. *Kapila*

A ṛṣi who teaches Sāṅkhya (the teachings about the 24 principles, starting with Puruṣa and ending with the five great elements) and yoga, i.e. to separate the ātmā from prakṛti. His instructions to his mother Devahūtī are renowned.

VIII. *Dattātreya*

Līlā as an ascetic. He gives instructions on the ātmā. His father prayed to Bhagavān for an offspring but forgot to mention a particular name of Bhagavān. Then Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā appeared, all three of them. The father did not understand whom he had actually called for. Viṣṇu with a partial aspect of himself then became Datta, Śiva the quick-tempered ṛṣi Durvāsaḥ and Brahmā Soma.

IX. *Hayaśīrṣa*

A golden, humanoid figure with the head of a horse. The Vedas, which had been stolen, are blown out from his nostrils.

X. *Haṁsa*

Or swan. He gave Nārada instructions on prema-bhakti and jñāna, so clear that all bhaktas could understand it.

[The swan symbolizes the power of discrimination, the ability to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, because one says that it can extract the milk from a mixture of milk and water.]

XI. *Dhruva-Priya*

Four-armed form of Viṣṇu. He appeared in the world as a son of the wise Sutapā and his wife Pṛṣni and therefore he is also called Pṛṣnigarbha. He appeared before the boy Dhruva (the pole star), who was a prince.

XII. *R̥ṣabha*

He is a ṛṣi of extreme asceticism, who previously was a king. He proclaims and lives the dharma of the parama-haṁsa-s (the highest migratory birds or swans), i.e. the dharma of the jñānī-s and ascetics, those who are free from all attachment.

XIII. *Pṛthu*

He is a king. He was born through whisking the bones from the right arm of the atheist and anarchist Veṇa.

[I–XIII appear during the first manvantara, XIV, XV, XVI and XVII during the second age of Manu.]

XIV. *Nṛsiṅha*

Man-lion.

He rescues his bhakta Prahāda and kills Prahāda’s father Hiraṇyakaśipu (“golden cushion or comfort”).

XV. *Kūrma*

Turtle. He is an avatāra of Ajita, the sixth manvantara-avatāra.

XVI. *Dhanvantari*

He is also an avatāra of Ajita. He appears during the whisking of the ocean and proclaims ayur-veda (medicine).

XVII. *Mohinī*

She appears during the whisking of the ocean.

XVIII. *Vāmana*

He is a Brahmin dwarf during the seventh age of Manu. During the first kalpa he comes three times (the accounts of king Bali).

XIX. Bhārgava-Rāma or Paraśu-Rāma

I.e. Rāma with the axe. 21 times he annihilates the warriors in the world, because they oppress the Brahmins. He comes during the seventh age of Manu, in the twenty-second catur-yuga.

XX. Rāghavendra-Rāma

His śakti is Sītā. They come during the seventh age of Manu, in the twenty-fourth catur-yuga.

XXI. Vyāsa

An old, wise ṛṣi who proclaims and arranges the Vedas and the Śāstram-s. His son is the renowned Śuka-Deva. He comes during the the seventh age of Manu, in the dvāpara-yuga of the twenty-eighth catur-yuga.

XXII–XXIII. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma

They come during the seventh age of Manu, in the dvāpara-yuga of the twenty-eighth catur-yuga.

XXIV. Buddha

In our kali-yuga (during the twenty-eighth catur-yuga).

XXV. Kalkī

He comes as a son of a Brahmin at the end of kaliyuga and annihilates the atheists. He rides a red horse.

Manvantara-avatāra-s

[Manvantara = Manu + antara = within an age of a Manu]

<i>The Manu's name</i>	<i>The avatāra's name</i>	
1. <i>Svāyambhuva</i>	1. <i>Yajña</i>	Svāyambhuva's father is Svayambhu or Brahmā. (svayam = self, bhu = created) Yajña himself takes over Indra's office.
2. <i>Svārocisaḥ</i>	2. <i>Vibhu</i>	Svārocisaḥ is Agni's son. 88 000 muni-s learned the techniques of yoga by Vibhu.
3. <i>Uttama</i>	3. <i>Satyasena</i>	As Indra's friend he annihilates the adversaries of Indra.
4. <i>Tāmasa</i>	4. <i>Hari</i>	He rescues Gajendra from the jaws of the crocodile.
5. <i>Raivata</i>	5. <i>Vaikuṅṭha</i>	
6. <i>Cākṣusa</i>	6. <i>Ajita</i>	See līlā-avatāra 15 and 16.
7. <i>Vaivasvata</i>	7. <i>Vāmana</i>	Līlā-avatāra 18. Vaivasvata is a son of Vivasvat = Sūrya. At the end of

the sixth manu he is called
Satyavrata, the one who is rescued
by Matsya-avatāra.

8. *Sāvarṇi* 8. *Sarvabhauma*

9. *Dakṣa-Sāvarṇi* 9. *Ṛṣabha*

10. *Brahma-Sāvarṇi* 10. *Viśvakṣena*

11. *Dharma-Sāvarṇi* 11. *Dharmasetu*

12. *Rudra-Sāvarṇi* 12. *Sudhāmā*

13. *Deva-Sāvarṇi* 13. *Yogeśvara*

14. *Indra-Sāvarṇi* 14. *Bṛhadbhānu*

Manu-s are the original forefathers of the human races. They are ṛṣi-s who survive the flood at the end of the preceding age of Manu. By means of their sons and their descendants they proclaim and practice the *dharma* or the true religion. The seven ṛṣi-s assist them, as they “see” the Word revelations or *śrūti* (*śrūti* = the perceived sound vibrations of the Vedas) and convey them to Manu and his sons, as the Śrūti-s are lost at the end of each kaliyuga. Indra and the other deva-s, who share the offerings that people offer them, give rain, nourishment and capacity for thinking. The manu, the seven ṛṣi-s and the deva-s stay in their offices during their entire life time. During each age of Manu a manvantara-avatāra appears, who becomes visible to the devas. His task is to assist Indra and the deva-s.

The names of the manu-s and the manvantara-avatāra-s are almost identical during each kalpa, whereas the persons of the manu-s, deva-s and the seven ṛṣi-s change in each age of Manu.

Yuga-avatāra-s

In each age of Manu there are 71 catur-yuga-s, i.e. groups of 4 yuga-s. In each of these four-yuga-s the manvantara-avatāra appears as yuga-avatāra. His task is to proclaim the best dharma, the form of dharma that is most suited for the respective yuga-s. In satya-yuga the complexion of the avatāra is *śukla* (light, white), in treta-yuga *rakta* (red), in dvāpara-yuga *śyāma* (dark, like rain clouds), in kali-yuga *kṛṣṇa* (almost black).

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa Himself comes as avatāra only once during each kalpa or the history of one earth – in the 7th manvantara, at the end of the dvāpara-yuga of the 28th four-yuga. Then all the other avatāra-s enter into Him and through Him they take part of His lilā. By the end of this lilā they leave Him and return to their respective realms. In the following 28th kali-yuga Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya appears; His complexion is golden. Intrinsicly He is Kṛṣṇa Himself, united with Rādhā's nature, but not Her person.

Kali-yuga's yuga-avatāra is *prachanna* or hidden, i.e. his form as Bhagavān is not *pratyakṣa* or directly visible. Whereas all the other avatāra-s sometimes manifest *aiśvaryam* or power, majesty – and also make use of their own *astram-s* (insignia or weapons) – the yuga-avatāra of kali-yuga always appears as an ordinary, natural and noble human being – even to most of His co-players. Therefore it is said that Viṣṇu is *triyugī*, i.e. only becomes visible as Bhagavān in the first three yuga-s.

Lilā-avatāra 25, Kalki, is not an yuga-avatāra. He comes at the end of kali-yuga, before the new satya-yuga begins.

Avatāra-s' tārātamyam

[Tārātamyam = comparative excellence]

I. *Parāvastha* [para + avastha = literally: in the highest state]

1. *Kṛṣṇa*

The avatārī or aṁśī (all other aspects or avatāra-s are contained in Him) = lilā-avatāra 23. He is Goloka-Kṛṣṇa, two-armed. His prakāśa is the four-armed Dvārakā-Kṛṣṇa.

2. *Nārāyaṇa*

As regards śakti Kṛṣṇa's vilāsa in the form of Nārāyaṇa (majesty dominating) is almost equal to Kṛṣṇa. Nārāyaṇa's vilāsa on the other hand is Sadāśīva (jñānam and vairāgyam dominating). The four vyuha-s: Vāsudeva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha are almost equal to Nārāyaṇa.

3. *Rāma*

Lilā-avatāra 20. He is almost equal to Kṛṣṇa. In Kṛṣṇa charm and exhilaration are dominating, in Rāma beauty and dignity are harmoniously balanced.

4. *Nṛsiṅha*

Lilā-avatāra 14. He is also almost equal to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa but in him *jñānam* (knowledge) and *bala* are stronger than Bhagavān's other qualities.

II. *Vaibhava*

1. Six avatāra-s are almost equal to the four parāvastha-avatāra-s, but they have less śakti.

- a) Varāha = līlā-avatāra 2
- b) Hayagrīva = līlā-avatāra 9
- c) Hari = manvantara-avatāra 4
- d) Vaikuṅṭha = manvantara-avatāra 5
- e) Ajita = manvantara-avatāra 6
- f) Vāmana = manvantara-avatāra 7

2. The following avatāra-s have somewhat less śakti than 1.

- a) Matsya = līlā-avatāra 4
- b) Naranarāyāṇa = līlā-avatāra 6
- c) Dhrūvapriya = līlā-avatāra 11
- d) Balarāma = līlā-avatāra 23
- e) Manu-avatāra-s = 1–3 and 8–14

III. *Prābhava*

They have less śakti than II.

1. Not manifest for a long time and not so well-known.

- a) Mohinī = līlā-avatāra 17
- b) Haṁsa = līlā-avatāra 10
- c) Yuga-avatāra-s

2. Manifest during a longer time; proclaim special Śāstram-s.

- a) Dhanvantari = līlā-avatāra 16
- b) R̥ṣabha = līlā-avatāra 12
- c) Vyāsa = līlā-avatāra 21

[This līlā-avatāra Vyāsa is a direct avatāra but only in the 28th catur-yuga. In the other catur-yuga-s there are particular ṛṣi-s who fulfill Vyāsa's task.]

- d) Kapila = līlā-avatāra 7
- e) Datta = līlā-avatāra 8

During particular kalpa-s āveśa of *jñāna-śakti* takes place in līlā-avatāra 1, of *bhakti-śakti* in līlā-avatāra 3, of *śṛṣṭi-śakti* (power to shape the world) in Brahmā, *bhū-dhāraṇa-śakti* (maintenance of the earth) in Ananta, *seva-śakti* in Śeṣa (the snake who constitutes the bed that the Viṣṇu-s rest upon, Nārāyaṇa's throne, the sandals), *pālana-śakti* (protection of the subjects) in Pṛthu and the power to annihilate kings eager to fight in Paraśurāma.

The vibhūti-s that Kṛṣṇa describes to Arjuna in chapter 10 in the Gītā only have insignificant power compared with these āveśa-s of Bhagavān and His śakti. The power through which Kṛṣṇa acts in the world is strictly speaking only āveśa of an *abhāsa* or reflection of śakti. These vibhūti-s are meant to serve as objects of contemplation for those who have not yet the power to understand God's Own nature. From the human point of view, vibhūti is the strongest power that expresses itself in different persons and objects in the universe in an especially powerful way. That is due to the fact that Bhagavān as Paramātmā is certainly present in everything that has organic form but expresses His presence in the vibhūti-s in a particular way, according to the excellence of their outer form. In

the third book of the Bhāgavatam, Kapila (līlā-avatāra 7) explains to his mother Devahūtī that, from Kṛṣṇa's point of view, man has a higher position than plants and animals, because the presence of the Paramātmā is stronger expressed in man than in other beings. That is the reason why the human form deserves greater consideration and respect than the form of the animal and plant. As regards the heavenly bodies in a planetary system it is in the sun that the Paramātmā expresses his presence most powerfully.