

### **38. The Theory of Avataras (Divine Manifestations)**

The idea of manifestation, in the world of men, of Great Ones who have passed beyond our ken, of Divine Beings and Devas, for helping humanity at critical times in the history of the world, is common to all religions. They come when Their coming alone can save the situation. In the words of the Gita, They come to restore Righteousness when it has been trampled under foot by human selfishness and perversity. The question naturally arises, why should there arise in the Universe, created and sustained by an Omniscient and Omnipotent God, such a condition at all? The answer to this lies in two important factors. In the first place there is a Plan of God; it is in the Cosmic Divine Mind, which is beyond Space and Time

as we understand them. In that Mind the past, the present and the future exist together as an Eternal Now. It is true that ultimately that Plan will be fulfilled, but the Time factor is elastic. Evolution towards that Consummation may be quickened or retarded by man. Secondly, God has given man a very precious gift and that is free will. Theoretically man can set his will against God's Will. This free will is provided for in the Plan. It happens that at times man makes such a mess of things here that some special intervention is necessary to redeem the situation. Hence the need for Avataras.

Who incarnates as an Avatara? The work of carrying on the work of the Universe is in the hands of Vishnu, the Second Logos. In the Divine Government of the Universe there is a Department, if I may use the word, which is in charge of this duty. Some Great One from this department will come as an Avatara. Whosoever comes will be called Vishnu, because He comes from Vishnu's department as his Deputy. At times some minor officer of this branch may come; it all depends on the nature and magnitude of the work to be done. In Hindu religion they speak of the ten major Avataras and also of other minor Avataras.

How does the manifestation take place? Here we are on rather uncertain ground. There are various ways and grades of manifestation, from inspiration and over-shadowing to full possession of the body in which the manifestation takes place; Hinduism speaks of kalavatara, amsavatara, poornavatara, avesha and so on. On looking into the matter deeply and rationally, one may venture to say that almost all the Avataras have been only aveshas. If we study carefully the Avataras we shall see that, in the life-period of the Avatara, the special work for which the manifestation came, does not take the whole period; it is only on certain specific occasions that the need for the manifestation arises. It will be too much to expect a Great

One (Vishnu) to leave His Cosmic work aside and live in a mortal body for a life-time when really the need for His work comes only on a few occasions. It will be reasonable to presume that the body will be looked after and kept going by some one—an advanced soul himself—and surrendered to the Lord for being used by Him for the special purpose. If we study the lives of the Avataras, specially Rama and Krishna, we shall find plenty of hints to support this position as the most logical one. It is obvious that such a surrender of the body cannot be made by all and sundry. He who can do this must be a great yogi himself who knows his mission of preparing a body fit to be used by the incarnating Great One. Other great Rishis also help in this preparation, for example, Vishwamitra for Rama and Sandeepani for Krishna. In the case of Rama the first attempt at occupation of the body by Lord Vishnu takes place when Parasurama hands over the divine bow of Lord Vishnu to Rama, when the latter is returning to Ayodhya after his marriage with Sita; a reference to Valmiki will show this. There are also other references in Ramayana, Bhagavata and Mahabharata which will suggest the idea that almost all Avataras are of the nature of Aveshas only.