

The Dashavataram: Divine Descents and Their Profound Teachings

General Collection

 **Date:** 2025-10-31

 **Description:** A comprehensive exploration of the concept of Avataram and the spiritual wisdom embedded in the ten principal incarnations of Lord Vishnu

 **Tags:** dashavataram, avataram, vishnu, incarnation, hindu-philosophy, spiritual-teachings, moksha, krishna, rama

The sources provide a comprehensive overview of the concept of Avataram (incarnation) and its application within the specific context of the Dashavataram (Ten Incarnations), emphasizing the profound teachings and learnings derived from each descent.

The Concept of Avataram

Avataram in Sanskritam literally means the process of descending. When the Lord (Paramatma) comes from the top to the bottom, this is called Avatarati, or Avataraha. The term Avatar Shabdam specifically refers to the Lord descending.

Nature and Scope of Avatars

- **Innumerable Descensions:** All Acharyas state that Paramatma has taken asankhyeya avataram (innumerable avatars). Beyond the ten, the sources mention examples such as Kapila, Rishabha, Hayagreeva, Prithu, Hamsa, Dattatreya, Adishesha, and Garuda.
- **The Divine Couple:** When the Lord chooses to be born on earth, his consort, Shri Mahalakshmi, also accompanies him. This is the process of the divya dampati taking the avataram. For instance, when the Lord is Raghava Ramachandra, she is Sita; when he is Krishna, she is Rukmini.

- **Deciphering an Avatar:** The Avatars are spread throughout the world, and the Lord does not show favoritism or partiality (Vaishamyam or Nairghrinyam). However, determining that a person is an Avatar Tara requires wisdom. The experts who could decipher and correlate these events were largely the Alwars and Acharyas, who were incidentally born in the Indian subcontinent.
- **Respect for Individuals:** Because any person could be a blessed avatar of the Lord, Shastram instructs followers not to disrespect any individual.

The Context of Dashavataram

Despite the existence of innumerable incarnations, the term Dashavataram is used to highlight the "chosen ten". This selection is primarily made because of human limitations in grasping and retaining knowledge; the Acharyas shortlisted these ten, encouraging people to remember at least these if they cannot remember all. Thus, Dashavataram is considered a beginning, not the end, of the total number of incarnations.

Variations and Classification

- **List Variations:** There are variations in which figures are included in the ten. Some traditions count Buddha as an Avatar. Parashara Bhatta, for instance, in his commentary on the Vishnu Sahasranamam, cites ten Namas that describe the Lord's Avatar of Buddha. Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara of the Jains, is also treated as an Aveshya avatar of Narayana as per Srimad Bhagavatam.
- **Chronology:** The order of the Dashavataram (e.g., Matsya, Kurma) does not correlate to the chronological order in which they occurred, and there is always a jumble. The attempt to forcefully induce Darwin's theory of evolution into the chronology of the Dashavataram is discouraged, as the theological and scientific explanations should be kept separate where mutual exclusivity exists.
- **Types of Avatars:**
- **Mukhya Avataram (Purna Avataram):** A complete incarnation where the Lord is born as himself (e.g., Rama and Krishna).

- **Amukhya Avataram (Apurna Avataram):** An incomplete incarnation where the Lord chooses a jeevatma and induces one of his qualities. These avatars will have flaws and suffer defeat at the hands of a Purna Avataram (e.g., Parashurama's ego was ended by Rama).



Teachings and Learnings from Dashavataram

The sources detail specific teachings derived from the individual avatars:

Avatar	Teachings and Learnings
Matsya (Fish)	The Lord's action was inspired by Shri Mahalakshmi's eyes, which resembled a fish (Meenalochna). The teaching is that the Lord's eye glances alone will suffice for our nourishment and grace.
Kurma (Tortoise)	The lesson is Vihara Kachapa—to be playful and take life not too seriously. The Lord took the mountain churning as a playful way to get his back scratched, which put him to sleep.
Varaha (Boar)	This incarnation signifies the restoration of the dignity of mother earth (Bhumi Devi). It teaches that one cannot call anybody less beautiful or ugly, as the boar form is complete. Furthermore, the solution to any life problem is usually very close to you (Varaha arose from Brahma's nose, solving Mother Earth's problem, whose unique feature is smell). It also offers hope to those suffering from ailments, like the spotless lotus (Pankajam) arising from the marshes (blemishes).
Narasimha (Man-Lion)	The Avatara is primarily a testament to the devotee's greatness (Prahlad's) and signifies the necessity of complete belief (vishwasah). The Lord appeared Yadrichha ("just like that" or unexpectedly). The emergence from an insentient pillar to a sentient Nrisimha demonstrates that logic cannot always be applied to Paramatma.
Vamana (Dwarf)	The primary teaching is that Ahankaram (ego) is a major deterrent to spiritual understanding (Vamana measured Bali's ego, not the physical worlds). It also emphasizes the importance of following the guidance of the Acharya, lest both the student and the Acharya face consequences (like

Avatar	Teachings and Learnings
	Shukracharya losing an eye). Vamana's USP is protection (Raksha Vamana).
Parashurama (Axe-wielder)	He serves as an example of how not to be. His unwarranted anger is not celebrated, which is why he is respected but not revered, and few temples are dedicated to him. As an Apurna Avataram, he suffered defeat at the hands of the Purna Avataram Rama.
Rama (Ramachandra)	The essence of this Avatar is Karuna (Mercy) (Karuna Kakutstha). The attempt to be perfect is what is revered. Sita is identified as the personification of this Karuna, through whom mercy is mediated.
Balarama (Halahalin)	The message is also to be playful. As an Apurna Avataram, his plans were consistently broken by the Purna Avataram Krishna.
Krishna (Vallabha)	Every action of Krishna is characterized by an element of surprise and is beyond the realm of understanding and logic. The ultimate teaching is play (Kreeda Vallabha). Out of supreme mercy (parama karuna), he gave the world the Bhagavad Gita. Even granting moksha (liberation) to a humble seller of curds or his pot is performed as an act of play.
Kalki	This Avatar is described as coming on a white horse (Kalka). Few clear details are available about this future incarnation.

Moksha and the Cycle of Rebirth

The teachings of Dashavataram must be understood in the context of the endless cycle of birth and death (punarapi jananam punarapi maranam). The ultimate goal is Moksham—the state from which there is no return (anāvṛtti śabdāt). This cycle necessitates the existence of Avatars.

The Paramatma (often through Avatars like Krishna) is the only one who can cut this cycle (Janardana—the one who cuts the cycle of birth). The practice of a disciplined life (niyati) is crucial because it helps the Jeevatma develop Gnanam (knowledge) about the path to exit this cycle. The sources emphasize that

achieving liberation is why the Acharyas insist on devotion (bhakti) and adherence to Dharma.



Reference

This blog post is based on notes taken from the following video : **Video Source: Watch on YouTube** For a more detailed explanation, I highly recommend watching the original video.



Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org> for more information. These notes are presented solely for educational purposes to help viewers download and benefit from these teachings. Any incorrect interpretations or inaccuracies are mine and unintentional—please forgive me. For any feedback, please send an [email](#).