

# THE STORY OF THE DESCENT OF GANGA TO EARTH

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by

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The background to this story: When King Sagara of the suryavamsa decided to perform the ashvamedha yagna, his courtiers discovered the sacrificial horse had gone missing. The king therefore ordered his 60,000 sons to go find the horse. The arrogant princes went about burning and destroying places in their quest to find the horse. And presently they came to Sage Kapila's hermitage. They found him in meditation and the horse tied next to him.

**Swamiji:** ...and he [Sage Kapila] was, with yoga power, above the earth. They thought this is the culprit, and set fire underneath. His bottom started heating up, and he opened his eyes; and when he opened his eyes, all the princes became ashes.

Far away, the king was thinking, "What happened to my children? They are not coming back." He sent his son, Amsuman. [Prince Amsuman met Sage Kapila and learnt of the whole event. It was the sage's counsel that if Amsuman wanted his brothers back, he must perform the cremation rites of washing the spot where they were turned to ash, with the holy waters of the Ganga available only in Swarga.]

Throughout his life prince Amsuman struggled to bring Ganga down. He said, "Until Ganga flows on their ashes, they are not going to get liberation." And he died. Throughout his life he struggled, but nothing happened. Then came his son Bhagiratha. Bhagiratha prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed. Ganga was sitting in a big Kamandal in Brahmaloaka, and he prayed to Brahma, "Please release it."

Brahma said, "It cannot be released like that. When Narayana (Vishnu) takes Vamana Avatara, he will become Visvarupa; and his feet will touch all the three worlds and his toes will topple down the Kamandal and the Ganga will flow down. Then only you will get it."

Oh! Bhagiratha was waiting for Vamana Avatara. You can imagine how many births he had taken; God only knows. And Vamana Avatara took place, and the toe of Vishnu touched that Kamandal and it turned upside down. The whole thing fell down. And Brahma said, "Now it will go to Patala. Its force is such that you will not get the Ganga here. It will go to the nether regions. So you must do something to prevent it from going.

Then he [Bhagiratha] prayed to Lord Siva, "Please hold it up in your Jeta [matted locks]; otherwise my whole effort is a waste." He tied his Jeta and kept it [Ganga]. But Siva wouldn't release it. He simply kept quiet. Then again Bhagiratha prayed to Lord Siva, "Please release it. The purpose is something else." Then afterwards he [Siva] released it through his hair. Then Ganga came with such force, and it flowed through the Ashrama of a sage called Jahnu. He was so angry he simply took the Ganga and swallowed it. Then Bhagiratha prayed to Jahnu, "Please release it." Then he released it through the ear. Because it [Ganga] came out of the ear of Jahnu Rishi, she is called Jahnavi. Then it flowed, and it flowed through the ashes of the ancestors and then they were liberated. This happened, they say, today [Ganga Dasara]. This is the whole story. The entire episode is described in great detail in Valmiki Ramayan, in the Bala Kandam - worth reading. Several chapters Valmiki devotes to

narrate this wonderful history of Ganga coming here. She flowed through three regions. First from heaven; from heaven she came to the astral region; and from the astral region to earth she came. And she is called by different names. In one place it's Mandakini; in another it's Bhagirathi; a third is Jahnvi. So, this is the birth of Ganga on this earth.

**Devotee:** Alakananda is not Ganga, Swamiji? Alakananda is also Ganga?

**Swamiji:** Alakananda comes from Badrinath, and Ganga is called Bhagirathi. The name 'Ganga' came afterwards. Bhagirathi flows from Gomukh, and this Bhagirathi and Alakananda join together in Devprayag. Then she is called Ganga. And then she flows. In Allahabad she joins Yamuna also. And there is a third river called Sarasvati, which is flowing underneath, they say - under the earth, and you cannot see her. Then Ganga becomes very mighty and devastates everything. So holy!

Bhagavadgītākijnchidadhītā, ganga jalalava kanikāpītā, sakridapi yena murāri samarch, kriyate tasya yamena na charchā. This is Sankara Acharya's Bhaja Govindam. Even if you have taken only one drop of Ganga: gangā jalalava kanikāpītā – *kanika* is "drop"; sakridapi yena murāri samarchā: if at least once a person worships Lord Krishna; *kriyate tasya yamena na charchā*: he need not have to encounter Yama afterwards.

**Devotee:** We have all done this at least once, Swamiji. Are we liberated, or is it only you who are liberated, Swamiji?

**Swamiji:** This is an atheistic argument. Atheists, they don't believe in God. They say there is nothing. Marx would talk like that.

**Another devotee:** We have to infer that [if it is done] with sincerity and faith and intensity, then once is enough. Otherwise...

**Swamiji:** With faith that it is Ganga, even if you take bath in a pit, it will liberate. There was a person who mistook the

Godavari for Ganga, and he took bath and sprinkled like this [gesturing]. But the faith that it is Ganga, and not Godavari, liberated him. It is faith that works; faith in anything.

Frog curry... Someone cursed a sweeper, "Tapala curry". She went for Sri Vidya initiation to an orthodox Namboodiri Brahmin in Kerala. Namboodiris will not even look at a woman who is of a low caste. She said, "Please teach me Sri Vidya." "Hey!" he said. He had to take bath for having seen her. "Tapala curry," he said [in anger; 'tapala' means frog]. She thought, "This is the mantra of Sri Vidya." But through the power of faith, "Tapalacurry" got transformed into "SakalaKreem". "Tapala curry" became "SakalaKreem" by the power of faith itself. And with such powers, she could walk on the waters. All the people said, "How? Where did you learn all this?" "Guru. Guru's Upadesham," she said. They went to the Guru (and asked), "What have you taught?" "I have not taught anything," he said. He called the lady. "What have I taught?" "You told me 'Tapala curry', so I am saying it as 'Sakala Kreem', 'Sakala Kreem'. Devi blessed me; I am walking on water." Then the Brahmana was ashamed because he could not walk on water. Faith works wonders. Intellectual argument is no good. What is wanted is sincerity, and it will come.

Do you know the story of Moses? Someone was preparing shoes for God. He was crying so sincerely. He was a shoemaker. "God, what is the size of your feet? I want to offer some shoes. Please let me know what is the size of your feet." So sincere, the heart melted, that he wanted to offer shoes to God. At that time, they say, Moses was passing that way. Moses was very much upset. "This fellow, idiot, he wants to offer shoes to God!" "Hey, have you no shame? You are desecrating God's name! Do you think God wants your shoes? Take his name." He went away. In the night, Moses had a vision of God. God said, "Hey, why have you insulted my devotee? He is a sincere man. He offered to give me shoes. And you think you are a very learned man. Go and apologise!" Then Moses said, "Excuse me."

Whatever you think God is, that He really is. Otherwise, how did Narayana, the Universal Being, come from a brick pillar? Can anyone imagine? How can He come from inanimate brick? There is nothing inanimate for Him. Everything is scintillating. Faith is the greatest thing. Unlettered people - all the greatest saints were unlettered, illiterate, no education. They knew nothing, but had so much faith. That is what we have to learn.

**Devotee:** Swamiji, the initial faith is there, the initial enthusiasm dies away.

**Swamiji:** Dies away, therefore that cannot be called faith. It is only a crooked way of thinking. It is not faith.

**Devotee:** There is that consciousness initially, Swamiji, but it is difficult to sustain because...

**Swamiji:** That is because the passions of the soul can completely turn it upside down. So you must have enough strength to subdue the sense organs. The distraction of the mind is due to the power of the sense organs. They are telling you, "Give us our dues." You cannot get even a passport unless you pay the income tax due to the government. When you enter the passport office they say, "Bring.... Where is the tax clearance?" Like that the senses will say, "You clear our dues first, then only you go to God." But we are hurrying up. Every step, every stage, from the senses onwards, body, mind onwards, intellect onwards, causal body onwards, you have to pay dues to them. You cannot bypass anything. Not a single policeman can be bypassed. They will hold you there. There are seven gates to Vaikuntha. At each gate they will hold.

**Devotee:** Swamiji, in this book Swamiji has spoken of a pit to hell at the gate to heaven itself.

**Swamiji:** Like a boat it will go on moving, and everything is okay, but it can simply turn upside down. Even if you have crossed three-fourths of the river, that one fourth may drown you completely by some wind. So nobody should be so confident about it. Humility is most important.