

Chapter One

The Arrival of the Gods

The sages said:

1. Sūta, you have spoken rightly
of the creation of the first man,
the expansion of the cosmos,
and the order of world-epochs.
2. You say that celibate students
engaged in *dharma* and constantly
devoted to the yoga of knowledge
should worship god, the lord of lords.
3. Please explain the supreme knowledge
whose sole object is *brahman*,
destroying the suffering of all rebirths
and allowing us to see the ultimate.
4. Lord, you have obtained
complete knowledge from Vyāsa,

who is Nārāyaṇa personified.
Therefore, we ask you again.

5. Sūta, bard of the Purāṇas,
listened to the sages' words.
Calling Lord Vyāsa to mind
he was about to speak.
6. At that very moment Vyāsa,
Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana himself,
arrived where the great sages
were holding their sacrifice.
7. Those brahmins bowed down
upon seeing Vyāsa, knower
of the Veda. His splendor was like
a dark cloud, his eyes like lotus leaves.
8. Seeing Vyāsa, Sūta threw himself
to the ground, straight as a stick.
Sūta walked around the teacher
and stood by his side, palms together.
9. Vyāsa inquired after the health
of Śaunaka and the other wise men.

They reassured the great sage
and arranged for him a proper seat.

10. Then mighty Lord Vyāsa,
son of Parāśara, asked them,
“Are there any difficulties with your
austerities, Vedic studies, or learning?”
11. Sūta bowed to his teacher,
that great sage, and said,
“Please explain to these wise men
the knowledge of *brahman*.
12. These calm ascetics are
sages engaged with *dharma*,
full of desire to listen.
Please explain as it truly is
13. the divine knowledge leading to freedom.
You told it to me in person.
Viṣṇu explained it to the wise men
long ago, in his tortoise form.”
14. Hearing Sūta’s request,
the sage Vyāsa, son of Satyavatī,

bowed his head to Śiva
and spoke these pleasing words.

Vyāsa said:

15. I will tell you what the god Śiva
himself said when questioned
long ago by the lords among yogis,
headed by Sanatkumāra.
16. Sanatkumāra, Sanaka,
Sanandana, and Aṅgiras,
along with Rudra and Bhṛgu,
the great scholar of *dharma*,
17. Kaṇāda, Kapila the yogi,
the great sage Vāmadeva,
Śukra, and glorious Vasiṣṭha,
all masters of mental discipline,
18. consulted one another,
their minds penetrated by doubt.
They practiced fearsome austerities
at holy Badarikā hermitage.
19. There they saw Nārāyaṇa,
the seer whose yoga was great,

the son of Dharma, immortal
and pure. Nara was with him.

20. They all praised him
with various hymns from the Vedas.
Full of devotion, the yogis bowed
to the one who knows yoga best.
21. The omniscient lord
who knew their wishes
asked them in a deep voice,
“What is the purpose of these austerities?”
22. Thrilled, they spoke to Nārāyaṇa,
eternal self of the universe,
the god whose arrival before them
signaled their achievement.
23. “We who speak of *brahman*
are sunken in doubt.
We approach you alone
for refuge, the highest spirit.
24. You know that highest truth.
You are the sage and omniscient lord,
the ancient unmanifest spirit,
Nārāyaṇa himself before our eyes.

25. There is no one who knows
other than you, supreme lord.
We are eager to listen,
So please cut off all of our doubts.
26. What is the cause of this whole universe?
Who is reborn time and time again?
What is the self and what is liberation?
What causes the cycle of rebirth?
27. Who is the lord who causes others
to be reborn? Who sees everything?
What is the highest *brahman*?
Please explain all of this to us."
28. After saying this, the sages saw
the highest spirit had cast off
his form as an ascetic,
and stood now in his own brilliance.
29. Shining, immaculate, embellished
with a halo of light, the god had
the brilliance of molten gold.
The mark of Śrī's beloved was on his breast.
30. Covered with light, in his hands
were a conch, discus, club, and bow.

For an instant Nārāyaṇa's
radiance made Nara invisible.

31. Just then the great Lord Śiva appeared,
crescent moon upon his forehead,
the terrifying one,
with kind intentions for the sages.
32. Seeing him, their minds were thrilled.
With devotion they praised the lord
of the universe, the three-eyed one
whose ornament is the moon:
33. "Hail, lord! Hail, great god!
Hail, Śiva, lord of beings!
Hail, lord of all sages,
recipient of our austerities!
34. Hail, thousand-formed one, self of all beings,
Impeller of the world-machine,
endless cause of the world's creation,
preservation, and destruction!
35. Hail, thousand-footed lord, delightful one
extolled by the greatest yogis!
Husband of the mother goddess,
supreme lord, we bow to you!"

36. After this praise, the three-eyed lord
felt affection for his devotees.
He embraced bristling-haired
Nārāyaṇa and spoke in a deep voice:
37. "Lotus-eyed one, why have
the great sages who speak of *brahman*
come to this place? Unwavering one,
what should I do for them?"
38. The god among gods,
Nārāyaṇa, gave ear to the lord's words.
He replied to the great god Śiva
who stood there with kind intentions.
39. "Lord, these sages are ascetics
who have wiped away all impurity.
With the desire for right knowledge
they have come to me for refuge.
40. If you are pleased with
these self-cultivated sages,
please explain that divine knowledge
here in my presence.
41. You know your own self.
Śiva, there is no one else who knows.

So you yourself should show
the self to the great sages.”

42. Saying this, he gazed at Śiva,
whose emblem is the bull.
Disclosing Śiva’s yogic power,
Nārāyaṇa spoke to the bulls among sages.
43. “Because you have now seen Śiva,
the great lord, trident in hand,
know yourselves truly
to have achieved your goal.
44. You may ask the lord of the universe,
who stands before your eyes.
And you, lord, please speak the truth
here in my presence.”
45. After hearing Viṣṇu’s words
the sages bowed to Śiva.
Headed by Sanatkumāra
they queried the great lord.
46. At just that moment a throne appeared
from the sky, divine, auspicious,
immaculate—something inconceivable,
as befits Lord Śiva himself.

47. The maker of all, self of yoga,
sat down there with Viṣṇu.
Great Lord Śiva shone, filling
the universe with his radiance.
48. The sages who spoke of *brahman*
saw Śiva, radiating brilliance,
first of the gods and lord
of them all, on that flawless throne.
49. They saw calm Śiva, his radiance
without equal. Those who are
steady in yoga see that lord
as the self inside themselves.
50. They saw the lord of beings
seated upon that throne.
From him comes the creation of beings.
Into him that creation dissolves.
51. They saw that lord seated
alongside Nārāyaṇa.
Everything is inside of him.
This world is not separate from him.
52. After their request, the blessed one
glanced at lotus-eyed Nārāyaṇa.

The supreme lord taught the sages
the unsurpassed yoga of his own self.

53. “All you blameless sages,
you whose minds are at peace,
listen to my true teaching—
the wisdom imparted by the lord.”