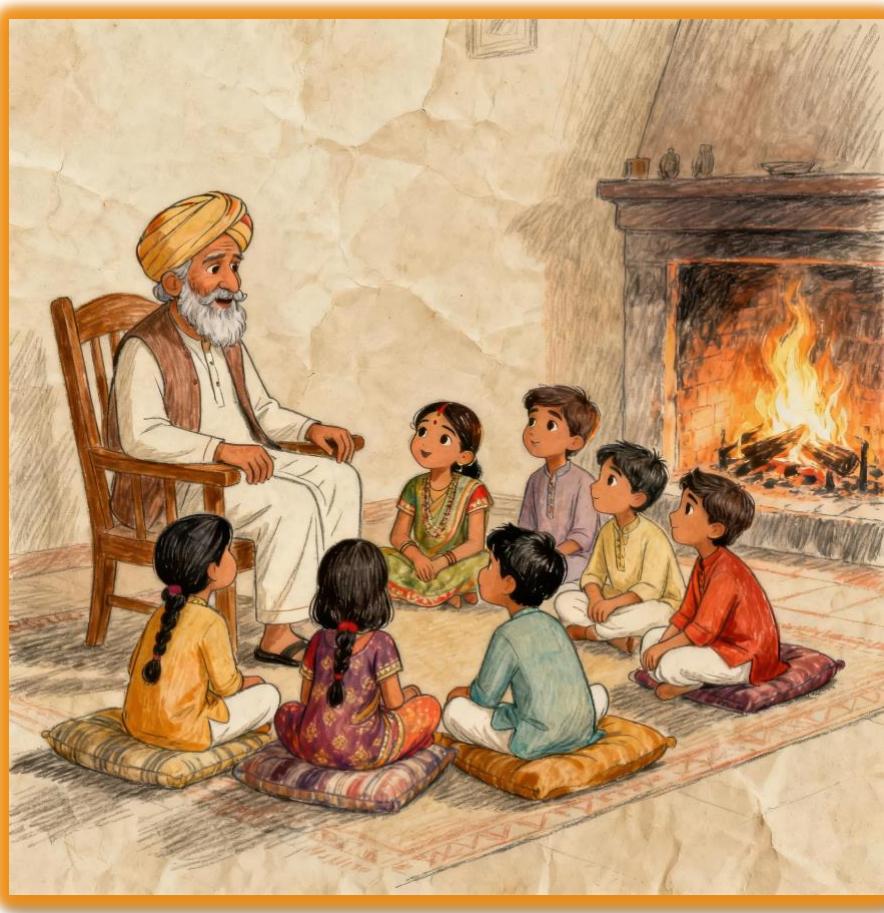


# When the Worlds Were Young

## A Grandfather's Stories of the Divine

By - Tarun Singh

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One evening as the fire crackled softly as the winter wind pressed against the wooden walls, and the children huddled closer to their grandfather, wrapped in blankets and sleepy excitement. He rubbed his hands together, the glow of the flames dancing in his eyes.

"Well now," he said with a smile, "what story shall I tell you tonight?"

The youngest, barely keeping her eyes open, lifted her hand. "Grandpa... tell us something magical, something that I have not heard before ... something that I will remember forever."

"Ah," he chuckled, settling deeper into his chair. "You're reaching for the big stories tonight. The ones that don't just put you to sleep, they follow you into your dreams." The children leaned in, their breath quiet, waiting.

"Well then," he said, lowering his voice as if sharing a secret, "let me tell you an old story, a very old story, about how the universe itself took its first breath, how great forces shaped everything we see, and how awareness found a home inside every living thing. It's a tale passed down through ages, told by wise ones long before your grandparents were even born."

He looked around the circle of small faces lit softly by the fire. "If you're ready, I'll guide you through it gently. We'll walk together through creation, challenges, and the moments of understanding that followed. And who knows?" He winked. "By the time the fire burns low, we might find that the story of how life began also whispers something about our own lives."

"Ready!" the children chorused.

"Good," he said. "Then let us begin..."

### **The story begins with the Primordial Silence and the First Breath**

O young seekers, gather close and listen. Before dawn learned the name of light, there was only the stillness of the Infinite, neither day nor night, neither being nor nonbeing, only Nārāyaṇa, the Boundless, reclining upon the ocean that has no shore. Time asleep. Space unimagined. Silence complete.

Then, as a swan stirs once upon a windless lake, the Unseen breathed. That breath was not air but intent, icchā śakti, the first will. From it arose a sound that was not heard but known: Om. At its vibration the waters remembered how to ripple, and the ripples remembered how to bloom.

Upon those waters lay the Lord in serenity, Ananta Śeṣa coiled beneath Him like the measureless script of destiny. From the lotus of His navel golden, dew-drunk, and fragrant with beginnings, there appeared a lone being who knew not his name. He opened his eyes to a dawn that had never been and whispered into the void, "Who am I?"

That one was Brahmā, child of the lotus. He looked above and saw only sky; he looked below and saw only stem sinking into the unknowable. He climbed down, down through ages whose lengths cannot be counted, searching for the root of his birth. No shore. No bottom. Exhausted, he returned to the flower and sat in quiet until a voice, sweet as rain upon parched earth, arose within his heart: "Tapa... tapa." Meditate.

Brahmā folded his legs and stilled his breath. Aeons passed like beads through steady fingers. Through that inner lake, a form bright as a million moons appeared, the Lord Viṣhṇu, the Sustainer, whose eyes hold both dusk and dawn. Brahmā bowed, tears cooling his cheeks.

"O Lord," he said, "I sit upon Your gift and yet do not know You."

Viṣhṇu's smile was the first festival of light. "Know Me within," He said, "and create without. What you shape will be shaped by Me; what you speak will be carried by My breath."

The oldest boy leans forward, eyes wide.

“Grandpa... what does it mean that Brahmā climbed down the lotus and couldn’t find where he came from? Why did he have to meditate?”

The grandfather smiles, warming his hands near the fire.

“Well,” he says, “that part of the story is really about us. Sometimes we look everywhere outside ourselves for answers far into the world, far into the past thinking we’ll find who we are. But the more we search outward, the more lost we feel.

“When Brahmā finally sat still and listened inside, that’s when he heard the truth. The story is reminding us that creation, anything we want to build in life, begins with quiet, not noise.”

The children nod slowly, thinking.

Grandfather continues, the first breath is intent; Om is the bridge between silence and speech. Brahmā’s descent on the lotus-stem is the soul’s first pilgrimage: we look into the world’s depths for origin until the heart whispers “turn within.” Creation begins not with hands but with stillness.

Grandpa continues:

### **The Pillar of Fire and the Humbling of the Maker**

Empowered by the Lord’s glance, Brahmā divided the cosmic egg, spun out the elements, named the winds, and taught the rivers to curve toward seas. He fashioned beings of light and beings of clay, sages whose beards were snowfall, and forests whose leaves remembered hymns. Craft ripened into pride.

“Am I not the first?” Brahmā wondered. “Does not everything come after me?” Pride is a sweet poison; it tastes like nectar at the lip and burns the throat unseen.

Then the heavens tore like silk and between worlds appeared a pillar of fire, no beginning, no end, standing as if it had always stood. Its light asked questions no eye could answer. Brahmā sprang aloft to find its crown; Viṣṇu, transformed as the Boar of the Depths, dove to seek its root. Ages folded like paper cranes. No top. No base.

Viṣṇu returned and bowed, “I do not know the measure of That.” Brahmā, breath ragged, claimed, “I have seen its summit.” But even as he spoke, the pillar opened like a dawn splitting a mountain, and from the heart of flame stepped Śiva, ash-smeared, silent, his third eye a quiet storm.

He spoke, voice like the pause between thunder and rain: “O Lotus-born, O All-pervading, I am neither above you nor below you. I am the witness of the dance you call time, the one into whom forms fall when their names grow tired. From Viṣṇu comes preservation, from you, creation; through Me, dissolution. We are three flames from one fire.”

Brahmā’s pride fell from him like dry bark. “Lord,” he whispered, “forgive the vanity of a child of flowers.” Śiva raised a hand in blessing; the pillar dimmed to a memory of warmth.

A younger child tilts his head. "Grandpa... why did Brahmā say he reached the top if he really didn't?"

"Ah," he says softly, "because even wise beings forget themselves sometimes. Pride sneaks in quietly. The pillar of fire is like pure truth, endless. When we pretend, we already know everything, we stop growing. But when we admit we don't know, like Viṣhṇu did, wisdom returns."

Pride builds ladders; truth removes the walls. The pillar of fire is pure awareness: no border, no edge. Viṣhṇu's humility and Brahmā's confession teach that wisdom begins where certainty kneels.

Grandpa continues:

### **The Descent of the Śaktis**

Creation is a song, and every song needs breath. Thus did the Divine Energies descend.

From Brahmā's contemplative brow arose Sarasvatī, fair as the first thought, veena cradled to her heart. Wherever she stepped, streams found their voices and languages braided themselves into scripture. She looked upon Brahmā and said, "I am speech to your idea."

From Viṣhṇu's boundless chest blossomed Lakṣhmī, lotus in hand, whose glance teaches seeds to become harvests. Prosperity is not gold; child it is the grace that keeps boats from forgetting harbors. She took her place upon the ocean's calm and smiled toward all worlds.

From Śhiva's very half emerged Pārvatī, Gaurī of the mountain hush, eyes deep as the caves where secrets sleep. When she breathed, ascetics remembered courage; when she laughed, even storms recalled making rain, not ruin.

The three bowed to one another, for they knew: Consciousness and its Power are two mirrors facing each other into eternity.

As the grandfather's story unfolded, the subtle sense of competition among the children sparked a lively interest. Eager to participate, several children raised their hands, each hoping to ask the next question. The grandfather's eyes twinkled with warmth as he surveyed the room, appreciating their enthusiasm.

He smiled, reassuring them, "You all will get a chance to ask." With gentle fairness, he chose the youngest child, inviting them with affection: "What is your question, my love?"

She begins to formulate the question in her mind and then blurts out "Grandpa... why did the goddesses come from the gods? And why are they important?"

He smiles. "Because every action needs energy. Every idea needs expression. Sarasvatī, Lakṣhmī, and Pārvatī show us that knowledge, nourishment, and inner strength must work together. Without them, nothing beautiful lasts."

Śhakti is not beside God; Śhakti is God's dynamic face. Sarasvatī is the river of meaning, Lakṣhmī the rhythm that sustains, Pārvatī the fire that transforms. When these currents flow together, the world becomes music.

Grandpa continues:

### The Quarrel of the Three Queens

Listen carefully, for even heavens have seasons.

One evening in Vaikuṇṭha's gentle light, Sarasvatī, Lakṣhmī, and Gaurī gathered like three lamps upon a single altar. Words began as play, as they often do among those who love one another. But play sometimes sharpens into contest.

Sarasvatī plucked her veena, notes spilling like swans upon a lake. "Without knowledge," she said, "who would know the path to God? I am the doorway."

Lakṣhmī's smile was a rain that makes deserts bloom. "Without sustenance, who can walk any path at all? I am the bread and the breath of the journey."

Gaurī's eyes were mountain-midnight. "Without transformation, knowledge rots into pride and wealth into chains. I am the fire that clears the path when forests overgrow."

Their words grew arrows. The gods held their breath. Brahmā glanced at Viṣhṇu; Viṣhṇu glanced at Śhiva; and the three wise as river, sea, and sky remained silent, for silence sometimes saves more than speech.

But hurt, once loosed, circles like a hawk. In a moment of heat, Sarasvatī spoke a curse: "Lakṣhmī, be born among mortals and taste separation, so you may know the hunger you feed." Lakṣhmī, eyes wet yet steady, answered softly, "Sister, may your wisdom wander. Let it visit many, but dwell with few, so that seekers will learn devotion, not mere cleverness."

The heavens dimmed. Śhiva rose, ash drifting like snow. Viṣhṇu stood, every gesture a harbor. "Enough," they said as one. "You are not three branches, You are one tree. Knowledge, Provision, and Power must clasp hands, or worlds will tilt."

The goddesses, swift to repent as only the noble can be, embraced. Yet vows made in heaven echo upon earth. Thus, in each age when Viṣhṇu descends, Lakṣhmī too takes birth. Sītā beneath a furrow, Rukmiṇī in a palace, meeting separation and reunion as part of the great teaching. And Sarasvatī, river of wisdom, visits wherever there is effort and purity, yet never lingers where pride builds dams.

Another hand goes up, this time from the oldest girl and she says, "Why did the sisters argue if they loved each other?"

"Families argue," he chuckles. "Even heavenly ones. But the lesson is that each quality such as wisdom, prosperity, and strength must stay in balance. When one tries to be more important than the others, life becomes uneven."

When the inner house is divided, mind, heart, and will at odds, life stumbles. Reconciliation is not forgetting; it is remembering we are members of one body. Knowledge without compassion, wealth without wisdom, strength without humility all are half-lights.

And then he continues:

### **The Sacrifice of Dakṣha and the Storm of Śhiva**

There lived a lord of ceremonies named Dakṣha, deft with rules, precise as a metronome. He could braid a thousand rites into a single day and not lose a thread. But a heart too fond of order can grow proud of its own straight lines.

Dakṣha arranged a sacrifice vast as a season, inviting gods, sages, and winds. Yet he refused to summon his son-in-law, Śhiva with wild hair, ash-smeared skin, a moon tucked like a secret because the Lord of Yogis did not fit Dakṣha's careful diagrams.

Sati, Śhiva's beloved, arrived unbidden, eyes bright with the hope that love might warm her father's chill. But Dakṣha's words were winter. He spoke of decorum and derided the one who lives beyond it. Sati stood very still. Then, in a voice that trembled like a bowstring, she said, "I will not bear a body that listens quietly while love is mocked." She sat upon the earth and became a flame of her own choosing.

When the news reached Śhiva, he did not roar; he went quiet in a way that mountains understand. From that quiet, a storm stood up. He plucked a hair and cast it, and from that thunderbolt of grief rose Vīrabhadra, black as the shadow of noon. The warrior strode into the sacrifice, shattered its pillars, and silenced the drums. Dakṣha's head fell, and pride with it.

Later, as tears cooled to prayer, the gods begged Śhiva to bind the world back together. He lifted the sacrifice from the ground like a broken cart, set it right, and because anger is not his home, placed a goat's head upon Dakṣha's neck and returned him to breath. Thus, does destruction make way for renewal when it is held in the hand of wisdom.

Another curious hand is raised and this time with sadness in his eyes and concern in his tone he says "Grandpa ... why did Sati become fire? That sounds so sad."

He nods gently. "It is sad. But Sati teaches us something powerful: we should never stay where love is insulted. She chose dignity over hurt. And Śhiva's anger afterward? That's the kind of anger that comes from deep love, not destruction, but correction."

Discipline without devotion hardens into cruelty; devotion without discipline burns out like straw. Sati's fire is the conscience that refuses to warm itself at the hearth of insult. Śhiva's wrath is the surgeon's knife, terrible to see, merciful in purpose.

Silence in the room and with a gentle pause Grandpa continues:

## The Preserver's Descent: Avatāras upon the Ages

Whenever the world leans too far, Viṣhṇu becomes a staff beneath its arm.

As Varāha, the Great Boar, He plunged into the drowning dark, lifted Earth upon His tusks, and shook oceans from Her hair. “Do not fear the deep,” He whispered to Her trembling mountains, “for even the abyss has a floor when love holds you.”

As Nr̄sīrīha, half-man, half-lion, He burst from a pillar to answer a child’s fearless faith. The tyrant laughed at heaven; the boy Prahlāda sang instead. In the hour between heartbeat and blade, the Lord arrived like truth emerging from a lie and tore arrogance like rotten cloth.

As Rāma, He walked the long road of righteous exile, showing that a crown sits safest on the head that has known the dust. Sītā (Lakṣhmī on earth) followed Him into forests where the moon hung from tall sal trees, and their separation taught that love is a vow kept in absence no less than in nearness.

As Kr̄ṣṇa, cowherd of Vrindāvan and charioteer of Kurukṣetra, He sweetened the world with flute and steadied it with counsel. To Arjuna He spoke: “Act but give Me the fruit; be a sword but keep the hand unstained.” And hearts everywhere, hearing the Gītā’s river, remembered their source.

A young boy with his head on the older sister’s lap, tucked in his blanket says “Grandpa ... Grandpa ... Why does Viṣhṇu keep coming back in different forms?”

“Because” he replies, “whenever the world forgets kindness or fairness, someone must remind it again. Viṣhṇu’s forms teach us courage, devotion, truth, and steady action.”

An avatāra is not an escape from the world but entry into it without bondage. Each descent is a parable for our ascent: lift what sinks, protect what trusts, walk the hard road without bitterness, and choose duty over despair.

The fire still burning bright and warmly, kids with spark in their eye and fixed on their grandpa wait patiently for the story to go on. Sensing their anticipation, Grandpa reads their minds and continues, weaving the next chapter into the gentle hush of the room. His words gather the children’s attention, the warmth of the flames matching the glow of curiosity on their faces, as the story unfolds further into the night.

## The Cosmic Night: Pralaya

A day of Brahmā is a library of ages; his night, a cave where even echoes sleep. When cycles conclude, Śhiva stands and the stars listen. He raises the drum whose two faces are birth and death; from its beat letters fly, then fold back into silence. Mountains bow; oceans draw their veils; fire forgets its hunger.

Worlds, weary from being names, return to being nameless. Brahmā sleeps, his dreams becoming seeds. Viṣhṇu reclines upon the ocean that has no shore, smiling the smile that

contains all mornings. Only the pulse remains, the breath of the One who is three, the three who are One.

The little girl who is little sleepy now suddenly wakes up with curiosity and some concern and says "Grandpa... what happens when everything goes to sleep? Is it scary?"

"No, child," he says softly. "Pralaya is like the world cleaning its room. It puts things away so the next beginning can be fresh. Even in our minds, thoughts must rise and fall so new ones can come."

In meditation, thoughts arise, endure, and pass which is creation, preservation, dissolution until even the watcher rests.

And he continues:

### **The Dawn Again and the Doctrine of Unity**

When the first saffron of a new creation stains the edge of nothing, the sages gather and ask, "What is the thread through all these beads?" The Trinity appears, not as three kings upon three thrones, but as one light speaking with three voices.

Brahmā says, "I am the wonder that begins things." Viṣṇu says, "I am the patience that keeps them true." Śiva says, "I am the mercy that returns them home." And the light that holds them all whispers the truth that is both difficult and simple: "We are one yet not the same, "achintya-bheda-ābheda", the inconceivable bridge between unity and difference."

The sages bow, for they see that diversity is not chaos when it arises from a single heart.

A question brings a smile to his face when a young boy, puzzled by the story's blend of mathematics and mythology, asks, "Grandpa, I am confused. So... are Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva one or three?"

He chuckles. "That's like asking whether a lamp, its flame, and its light are one or three. They are different, yet they belong to each other."

To cling only to oneness is to deny the color of flowers; to cling only to difference is to forget that the garden is one. The lesson, Grandpa suggests, is to walk the middle meadow: honor the many parts but love the whole.

As the night sets in and the fire begins to lose its warmth, the children, now starting to yawn, signal that the time has come for Grandpa to bring the evening to a close. Observing their sleepy faces and the gentle hush settling over the gathering, he senses that the moment for final words has arrived. The stories have woven their magic, and the lessons of unity and difference, like the fading embers, linger in the air. With a quiet smile, Grandpa prepares to end the night, letting the wisdom shared settle into the hearts of his listeners as they drift toward sleep.

## The Temple Within: Paramātmā and the Pilgrim

Now hear the quieter tale, told in the same key as the stars.

Within the heart of each is a small altar where a flame does not flicker. That flame is the Paramātmā, the Lord as indwelling witness. He remembers what we have forgotten and forgets what would break us. When we cry in the places we do not show, He is the hand that does not embarrass us by being seen.

Sometimes a seeker sits and says, "I do not know the way." Then within rises the voice that told Brahmā to meditate: "Begin with one true breath." Sometimes the seeker asks for a teacher, and the inner guide opens a door in the outer world. Two gurus, one kindness inside and out, walking us back to the Self we have never actually left.

"Grandpa is God really inside us?" this question brightens his eyes, and He places a hand on his chest.

"Yes. The quiet voice that guides you, comforts you, and reminds you to be better, that's the divine whisper inside."

Paramātmā is Viṣhṇu as nearness; the courage to change is Śhiva within; the spark that imagines a better life is Brahmā's gift. The trinity maps the mind as much as it moves the stars.

## The Blessing at the Fire

And thus, O little seekers, the tale returns to where you sit now. The night has grown friendly. Sparks rise like small planets and go out as softly as blessings. Remember: you are not merely listeners to this story; you are characters in it.

When you think a new thought that heals, Brahmā smiles. When you keep a promise through winter, Viṣhṇu walks beside you. When you let an old bitterness be ash and plant something kinder in its place, Śhiva lifts his trident like a flag at the summit. And when knowledge, prosperity, and power work together in you as sisters reconciled, the world around you becomes a little more like heaven.

Carry these names not as ornaments but as tools. Speak "Om" before speech. Honor the breath that began beginnings. And when the heart is steady, listen as the cosmos is still telling its story through you.

As the story settled into a warm silence, the children curled closer to the fire, eyes dreamy and full. None of them noticed the soft creak of the door as their grandmother slipped into the room, drawn by the sound of their voices. She settled quietly in the corner, hands folded in her lap, listening with a gentle smile.

When the grandfather finished speaking, she leaned forward just enough for the firelight to touch her face.

"My loves," she said softly, "you've asked such wonderful questions tonight." The children turned, surprised but delighted to see her.

Then she looked toward her husband with a knowing warmth.  
"Tell them one more thing," she said. "Help them understand why these stories matter, why they are more than magic and adventure. Why we carry them with us."

The children's eyes widened, waiting for the answer they didn't know they needed.

He chuckled quietly, as though he'd been waiting for her to ask.  
"Well," he began, "these stories are like lamps we keep in our hearts. They shine when life feels confusing. They remind us how to think, how to act, and how to be gentle and strong at the same time."

He looked at each child and then said,

"When you hear that Brahmā creates, it reminds you that you, too, can create new beginnings.  
When Viṣṇu protects, it teaches you to care for what you love.  
And when Śhiva lets things go, it shows you that change is part of growing."

The rites are simple: a clear mind, a steady heart, a generous hand. Creation, preservation, and dissolution are three steps of a single dance; learn the rhythm, and even ordinary days will ring like temple bells.

He took the grandmother's hand, giving it a small squeeze.

"These stories may look magical," he said, "but their magic is meant to be lived. They show us how to be better people, how to steady our minds, open our hearts, and walk through the world with kindness."

The children listened quietly, not quite knowing how to put their feelings into words.

Their grandmother smiled. "That," she whispered, "is why we tell these stories."

*Story by Tarun Singh (Dec 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025)*

*Note: Referenced from Brahma Vaivarta Purana*