

have no interest even in final liberation, which is the supreme goal of life.¹² Liberation anyway manifests itself [as a by-product of *bhakti*], so all goals are fulfilled by dint of devotion to *Bhagavān*.

18. O king! *Bhagavān*-Mukunda is the Lord, *guru*, beloved deity, lineage master, and sometimes servant of you and the Yadu dynasty. Howsoever that may be, my dear one, He sometimes awards *mukti*, liberation, to those who worship Him, but not *bhakti yoga*.

19. *Rṣabha*'s desires were extinguished, since He had attained experience of His own eternal self. Out of kindness, He explained about the realm of the *ātman*, which is free from fear, to people of the world whose intelligence has been asleep for so long, due to [indulging in] fantasies of unreality [that is, taking the body to be the self]. Reverence to him, *Bhagavān Rṣabha*."

The Tale of King Bharata: The Mind at the Moment of Death

Yoga Blueprint

There are a number of yogic elements in the story of King Bharata. The first, underpinning the cultural context of the *Bhāgavata*, reflects the Vedic notion that individuals are ideally expected to go through four stages of life (*āśramas*), each lasting twenty-five years. The first of these is brahmacharya, celibate studentship,¹³ the second *gṛhastha*, householder;¹⁴ the third, *vānaprastha*, forest dweller;¹⁵ the fourth and final stage, *sannyāsa*, full ascetic renunciant. As we will find in the story of King Bharata, in the last stages, a person severs all attachment to home, hearth, and family and devotes the remaining years of life to cultivating yoga practices, performing austerities, and meditating in solitude. Additionally, the sacred texts advise one to undertake such practices in a holy place, where, in addition to worldly distractions being minimized, the atmosphere is pervaded by associations with divinity, as we will encounter in our story.

The main yoga lesson of the story, expressed in chapter 8, is the principle that the state of one's mind at the moment of death determines one's next life. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* (VIII.6), *Kṛṣṇa* states: "Whatever state of being one remembers when one leaves the body at the end of life, is the very state one will attain in the next life." Since he allowed himself to become excessively attached to a young

fawn to the point where he became consumed with thinking about it constantly, Bharata's mind was absorbed in thought of the fawn when Death came to claim him, and thus his mind and consciousness were transferred into the body of a deer in his next life.

There are, of course, other variables that feed into determining one's next birth, as outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras II.12-14*, such as the pious and impious deeds performed in life, which, in Bharata's story, qualified his next births, granting him the boon of remembering the cause of his condition. Consequently, in his last birth, he exhibited the full symptoms of complete detachment from all things material, as expressed in *Yoga Sūtras I.15-16*. A further feature in this final life illustrates a foundational principle of *bhakti*: divinity can personally transubstantiate and manifest through material elements, such as the deity, as will be found in this story.

Book V, Chapter 7

1. Śrī Śuka said:

"Bharata, the great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, was dedicated to ruling the earth. When he was deliberating on how to govern it [on the orders of his father] *Bhagavān Rṣabhadeva*, he took as his wife, *Pañcajani*, the daughter of *Viśvarūpa*.
[. . .]

3. This continent was [previously] named *Ajanābham*, but since the time of Bharata, they designated it 'Bhārata'.¹⁶

4. Bharata, the Lord of the earth, had vast knowledge. Following his own *dharma* (duty), he governed the citizens with great affection, just as his father and grandfather had done. They, in turn, were following their own respective duties.
[. . .]

8. He enjoyed in this way for ten million years, at which time he perceived that the appropriate moment for extinguishing his *karma* [had arrived]. At this point, he divided among his sons his personal wealth, bestowed by his father and grandfather, according to the norms of inheritance. He then set out from his home, the abode of all kinds of opulence, to the holy place *Pulaha*.

9. Actually, even today, out of affection, Lord Hari appears to His devotees who reside there in that place, in whatever form they desire.

[. . .]

11. Bharata lived alone in the grove around that place known as Pulaha-*āśrama*. He dedicated himself to the worship of Lord Viṣṇu with varieties of flowers, shoots, *tulsi* leaves, and water, and with offerings of bulbs, roots, and fruits.¹⁷ Detached from desires for sense objects, he cultivated peacefulness of mind and attained ultimate bliss.

12. By such uninterrupted worship of the Supreme Being, Bharata became calm and his heart melted from the surge of his growing love for God. All the hair on his body was seen to stand on end due to the force of his ecstasy, and his vision became obstructed by tears of affection caused by his contemplation.¹⁸ His intelligence was absorbed in his heart,¹⁹ which was like a deep lake overflowing with supreme bliss from his devotional practices of ever increasing meditation on the red lotuslike feet of his beloved Lord. In this state, he even sometimes forgot the very service to the Lord that he was supposed to be performing.”

Book V, Chapter 8

1. Śrī Śuka said:
“Once, after finishing his customary duties and taking his bath in the great river, Bharata sat down on the water bank, reciting the sacred syllable *om* for a period of three *muhūrtas* (two and a half hours).²⁰ *Om* is the Absolute Truth *Brahman* manifest as sound.²¹
2. Just then, O king, a deer arrived at that body of water at that spot, desiring to drink.
3. Just at the very moment that she was drinking the water, the fierce sound of a lion's roar burst forth nearby, striking terror in all creatures.
4. The doe was by nature timid. When she heard that sound, her heart immediately became alarmed, her thirst was pushed aside, and her eyes became restless with trembling glances. Overwhelmed by fear of the lion, she suddenly leaped up in terror.
5. The deer happened to be pregnant. The embryo, dislodged due to her great fear, emerged from her womb and fell into the waters.
6. Separated from her herd, and traumatized by exhaustion and fear, as well as by the leap and the birth, the black doe then dropped down dead in some cave.

7. The kingly sage Bharata saw that the deer's offspring had been discharged by its parent and was being helplessly carried away by the current. So, with the compassion of a well-wishing soul, he lifted it out and took it to his *āśrama* hermitage, understanding that it was motherless.
8. Indeed, Bharata became personally extremely attached to the deer's offspring. Because of his contemplating, petting, fondling, protecting, and nurturing it day by day, his spiritual practices—adherence to the moral *yama* vows²² and worship of the Supreme Being, etc.—were discarded, one by one. Finally, after the passing of some days, all of them were abandoned.
9. The king thought: ‘Alas, this helpless offspring of a deer has been separated from its friends and herd by the Lord's power of Time, which is like an ever-moving chariot wheel. It has approached me for protection, and sees me as parent, brother, kinsman, and herd companion. It knows no one else and has full faith in me alone. Therefore, since it has taken refuge of me, it is fitting that I attend to its petting, fondling, protection, and nurture. I am not callous, and I know the sin of neglecting one's dependents.’²³
10. Surely those who are noble saintly Āryas,²⁴ peaceful in nature and benevolent to the helpless, sacrifice their own needs, even if they are very important, for a need such as this.’
11. In this way, Bharata became attached to the young deer while eating, bathing, wandering about, sleeping, and sitting, and his heart became bound by affection.
12. When he was about to go and collect *kuśa* grass, flowers, leaves, fruits, roots, or water, he became apprehensive about the threat of wolves and dogs [in his absence] and so he went into the forest accompanied by the young deer.
13. When, due to its simple nature, the deer became stuck here or there on the trails, Bharata would carry it on his shoulder out of kindness, his heart burdened with excessive love. Similarly, he would place it on his lap or chest and experienced great joy in petting it.
14. Even while he was in the middle of performing his religious rites, the emperor would get up midway and cast a glance at her. At such times, his mind reassured, he prayed for blessings for the fawn, saying: ‘May there always be good fortune for you.’

15. At other times [when he could not see the fawn], he became like a miser who had lost his wealth. Pining over the fawn because of his affection and compassion, his heart would become afflicted with distress from being separated from her. Overwhelmed with intense anxiety, he then spoke as follows:

16. 'Oh alas! The helpless fawn, offspring of a dead doe, placed her faith in me. I have done nothing to merit this: on the contrary, I have the mentality of a deceitful *kirāta* hunter.²⁵ Will it return and, like a noble person, disregard all this by trusting me again?

17. Will I see it again wandering tranquilly on the fresh grasses of the gardens of this hermitage, under divine protection?

18. I hope that no wolf or wild dog or other such creature, wandering about alone, devours it.

19. The sun, lord [of the heavens], which is the soul of the three [Vedas]²⁶ and which arises for the welfare of the entire world, is now setting, but the fawn has not returned. She was entrusted to me by the doe.

20. Or perhaps the fawn princess will yet return, and bring me delight—driving away the pining of its well-wisher with its various pleasing and attractive fawnlike frolics—even though I have done nothing to deserve this?

21. While it was playing, it would approach me in great alarm whenever I would close my eyes in a feigned state of *samādhi* meditation. On those occasions, agitated with affection, it would strike me with the tips of its horns, soft as water drops.

22. When the oblations for the fire sacrifice that had been placed on the sacred *kuśa* grass had been polluted [by it]²⁷ and it was reproached by me, it became very frightened. It immediately stopped its frolics, and remained with all of its senses restrained, like the son of a sage.

[. . .]

26. With his heart bewildered by such unsustainable delusions manifesting in the form of the fawn due to the force of his previous *karma*,²⁸ Bharata abandoned his *yogic* practices, his performance of *yogic* austerities, and the specifics of his worship of *Bhagavān*. How could this unnatural attachment to the fawn—a member of a different species—become an obstacle like this for the sage-king Bharata, who had taken up the practices of *yoga*? Bharata had already renounced even his own sons, as obstacles to his realization of the Ultimate

Truth, and they are so difficult to give up. But yet, he ended up neglecting his soul, *ātman*, due to his attachment to petting, pleasing, rearing, and nurturing that fawn. Finally, unsurpassable Death in the form of Time, voracious and consuming, appeared before him, like a snake before a mouse hole.

27. At that time, gazing at the deer who was lamenting at his side like a son, his mind completely absorbed in the deer, Bharata left this world, and with it the deer. He subsequently himself obtained the body of a deer.²⁹ However, along with losing the dead body, he did not lose the memory of this past life, as others do.

28. In that next birth, as a consequence of his previous efforts to worship God, Bharata was able to remember that he himself was the cause of attaining that state as a deer.³⁰ He lamented profusely:

29. 'Alas, what misfortune! I have fallen from the path of those who have attained self-realization. I had taken refuge in a sacred forest in solitude, had freed myself from all attachments, and had realized my own *ātman*. For a long time my mind was completely and utterly absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, the inner Soul of all souls by means of the *yogic* practices of hearing about him, reflecting upon him, chanting his glories, worshipping Him, and remembering Him all the time in all possible ways. But I let that same mind again flow away after a fawn from some distant place. What a fool I am!

30. In this way, his detachment from worldly objects concealed [by his birth as a deer], Bharata left his mother deer and returned again from Kālāñjara to the *āśrama* of the sages Pulastya and Pulaha. It was a sacred place, where the sacred *śālagrāma* stone is found,³¹ a place favored by groups of tranquil-minded sages.

31. Subsisting on dry leaves, grass, and plants, and with only his own *ātman* as companion, Bharata awaited Death in that place, very fearful of [developing] any attachments. Counting [the days until] his deliverance from the *karma* that had caused this state of being a deer, when the time came, he gave up his deer body, which was wet from bathing in the waters of that holy place."³²

Book V, Chapter 9

1. There was a certain *brāhmaṇa* in the lineage of sage Aṅgirā.³³ He was endowed with the qualities of peacefulness, self-control, austerity, the study and recitation of the Vedic texts, renunciation, contentment,