

2. He abandoned the insidious attachment to his kingdom, which was being well managed, and to his friends, wealth, livestock, residence, wife, and his own body.
3. That high-minded one had faith in hearing about the activities of Kṛṣṇa, and asked this very same question that you have asked, O great saints.
4. After coming to know of his impending death, Parīkṣit renounced the threefold pursuits (*dharma*, duty; *artha*, prosperity; and *kāma*, enjoyment), and entered into a state of devotional absorption in *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva.”
5. The king said:
“You are an omniscient being, and your words are true, O *brāhmaṇa*. My ignorance is being dispelled as you narrate the stories of Hari.
6. I wish to know once again about how *Bhagavān* creates this universe by His personal *māyā*, which is so difficult to comprehend, even by the great lords of the celestials.
7. How does He maintain it and then again destroy it? How does that Supreme omnipresent Being, who possesses all power, harness His power, and then playfully engage in creation Himself, as well as enhance His creation through the play of others [such as *Brahmā*]?
8. There is no doubt, O *brāhmaṇa*, that the wondrous deeds of *Bhagavān* Hari appear difficult to comprehend, even by the sage poets. His feats are amazing.
9. How does He uphold the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, both simultaneously and sequentially? Although He is One, He engages in activity through manifold incarnations.
10. Since your holiness is well-versed in the Vedic literature and in the Absolute Truth, please address this confusion that I have.”

[Here follows one of the *Bhāgavata*'s several sections on creation.]

The Tale and Teachings of Lord *Brahmā*: The Primordial *Yogī*

Yoga Blueprint

Brahmā is the creator of the universe, but a secondary creator, more like an engineer: he does not create the primordial matrix of *prakṛti*,

which as we know is a śakti power of Kṛṣṇa, but is designated to create the forms of the universe from this preexisting stuff. He too is a mortal being with a finite life span. Known also as Hiranyagarbha, Brahmā is of interest for a number of reasons, one of which is that he is considered the primeval founder of yoga according to tradition,²⁴ the primordial yogī. In this, he is associated with first imparting the practices in the original teachings known as the Hiranyagarbha Treatise (which is no longer extant but referred to in various texts).

The narrative here makes several important points. One important yogic message is that even Brahmā, the most intelligent being in the universe, is utterly incapable of perceiving or even understanding Viṣṇu. The limitations of even the most powerful intellect in understanding God is thereby delineated. It is only after he has performed the requisite austerities that Viṣṇu reveals Himself as well as Vaikuṅṭha, the Kingdom of God. The subtext here as everywhere else in the text, is that such a vision can never be attained by one's own intellectual or even yogic prowess, but only by devotion (see also Gītā 11.54). However, while devotion is paramount and autonomous, Brahmā nonetheless had to perform intense austerities in order to gain this vision. Tapas, austerity, the first element in Patañjali's kriyā yoga (II.1), is by no means jettisoned in bhakti.

This tale patches together two different narratives pertaining to Brahmā's vision from two different books of the Bhāgavata.

Book II, Chapter 5

1. Nārada said:

"Homage to you, Brahmā, lord of the celestials! You are the firstborn being, and the progenitor of all other beings. Kindly explain to me the knowledge through which the ātman is revealed.

2. Please disclose the truth about this material reality. What is its form? What is its support? From what is it created, O master? On what is it resting? And what is beyond it?

3. After all, your Lordship knows everything, past, present, and future. You know this universe through direct realization, as if it were an āmalaka fruit in the palm of your hand, O master.

4. Through your own māyā power, you alone create the embodied living beings by means of the physical elements. But what is beyond

you? What is your support? What is your true nature? And what is the source of your perception?

5. Like a spider, you create those beings without fatigue, but you yourself are not created by anyone else; you rest on your own potency.

6. I do not know from where else anything that has form and is nameable²⁵ can be created, O master, whether it is an entity that is high or low, gross or subtle, or in between.

7. But yet you undertook that severe austerity (tapas) with extremely concentrated mind. Because of that you confuse us: you raise a great doubt in our minds as to whether you are in fact the Supreme Being.²⁶

8. O omniscient lord of everything! Kindly explain everything that I have asked about so that I may understand by your instruction."

9. Brahmā said:

"This inquiry of yours could not be better, O son! You are blessing me since I am now inspired to explain the glories of Bhagavān, O gentle one!

10. What you have said is correct, my child. Since your knowledge about me is limited, you do not know He who is greater than I.

11. I do illuminate the universe, but it has already been illuminated by His effulgence, just as the sun, fire, the moon, the constellations, the planets, and the stars are illuminated by Him.

12. Reverence to Bhagavān Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa]. It is because of His insurmountable māyā illusion that people call me the guru of the world; but the fact is that I myself meditate on Him.

13. People with less intelligence, who are bewildered by that māyā, think in terms of 'I' and 'my.'²⁷ But māyā herself is ashamed of presenting herself before Him.

14. There is no other thing in reality apart from Vāsudeva, O brāhmana,²⁸ whether in the form of substance, activity, Time, nature, or soul.²⁹

15. The celestials are born from Nārāyaṇa's body. The Vedas accept Nārāyaṇa as the supreme, the various worlds accept Nārāyaṇa as supreme, ritual sacrifices are offered to Nārāyaṇa as supreme.

16. Yoga is dedicated to Nārāyaṇa as supreme, tapas is devoted to Nārāyaṇa as supreme, knowledge accepts Nārāyaṇa as supreme, and the final destination of life is Nārāyaṇa as supreme.

17. I myself am created by Him, and then, directed by His glance, create the creation. He is the Seer, the Lord, the highest Truth, and the *ātman* of all.

18. Although He is transcendent to the *guṇas*, by His *māyā* potency, He has adopted the forms of the three *guṇas*—*satva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—for the purpose of maintenance, creation, and destruction, O great one.

19. The *guṇas*, which are the basis of material substances, knowledge, and action, continually bind the *puruṣa* in cause, effect, and agency.³⁰ Although he is free, the *puruṣa* is subject to illusion.

20. He, *Bhagavān* Adhokṣaja [Lord Viṣṇu], is imperceptible because of these three *guṇas*. But he is my *Īśvara* as well as the *Īśvara* of all others, O *brahmaṇa*.”

[An account of creation follows, involving the Sāṅkhya metaphysical categories.]

Book II, Chapter 6

[A discussion of the *Virāt Puruṣa* opens this chapter. This involves a meditational form of Viṣṇu associating the limbs of God with various natural phenomenon such as the sun and moon.]

30. This universe is situated in *Bhagavān* Nārāyaṇa. Although He is beyond the *guṇas* (qualities) of *prakṛti*, He utilizes His own *māyā* for the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the universe. His qualities are wondrous.

31. It is under His appointment that I create the world, and it is under His control that Hara, Śiva, destroys it. He, the controller of the three *guṇas*, maintains it in the form of the great *Puruṣa*, Viṣṇu.

32. Thus I have explained to you, O son, about that which you inquired. There is no existent, moving or non-moving, other than *Bhagavān*. 33. Because I keep Hari fixed in my heart with great intensity, my words have never proved to be false, my dear Nārada, nor has any falsity ever entered my mind, nor have my senses ever fallen into unrighteous ways.

34. Although I am the keeper of sacred lore, and the embodiment of austerity (*tapas*), and although I am honored as the Lord of the progenitors (*prajāpatis*), and although I am immersed in the practice of *yoga* and have fully mastered that practice, yet I do not understand He from whom I myself am generated.

35. I offer homage to His feet—they are all auspicious, destroy *saṁsāra*, and bring all blessings to those who seek them. Even He cannot fathom the omnipotency of His own *māyā*—just like the sky cannot understand its own limit—so how can anyone else understand Him?!

36. Neither I, nor you, nor Śiva understands His real nature, what to speak of other celestials knowing it. Those of us whose intelligence is bewildered by His *māyā* perceive the composition of this world in accordance with our own perspectives.

37. We all glorify the deeds of His *avatāras*, but we do not understand Him in truth. Obeisance to Him, *Bhagavān*.

38. He is the original unborn *Puruṣa*. Every age (*kalpa*) he creates, maintains, and destroys Himself within Himself through Himself.³¹

39. He is pure autonomous knowledge, pervading everything completely. He is the complete Truth, nondual, transcendent to the *guṇas*, eternal, without beginning or end.

40. O sage! Whereas the wise, whose minds, senses, and body are controlled, realize Him, He becomes distorted by perverse argumentation, and disappears.

41. The first *avatāra* of the Supreme is the *Puruṣa*. He is Time, nature, the mind, cause and effect, material substance, the evolutes of *prakṛti*, the qualities of things, the senses, the Cosmic Being (*Virāt*)³², self-luminous, and the aggregate of all moving and non-moving entities.

42.-44. I myself; Śiva; Viṣṇu; Dakṣa, and all the progenitors of created beings; others such as yourself; the rulers of the celestial realms; the rulers of the realms of accomplished *siddhas* who travel through the ether;³³ the rulers of the realm of mortals; as well as those of the lower realms; the lords of the celestial *gandharvas*, *vidyādharas*, and *cāraṇas*;³⁴ the lords of the *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, serpents, and *nāga* divine snakes;³⁵ the best among the *ṛṣi* sages and forefathers; the chiefs among the *daiṛyas*, *dānavas*, and *siddhas*; and others who are the foremost among the deceased spirits (*pretas*), evil beings (*piśācas*), ghosts, *kūṣmāṇḍas*, large aquatics, deer, and birds; in short, whatever in this world possesses supernormal qualities (*bhaga*)³⁶ greatness, potency, fortitude, strength, compassion, beauty, modesty, power, intelligence, amazing color, with form or shapeless, is nothing other than that Ultimate Truth.

45. O sage! The scriptures describe the principal *līlā-avatāras* of the *Puruṣa*, who is the ground of all beings. I will narrate them to you.

Relish them—they are wonderful, and evaporate all the impurities of the ears.

[A narration of the principal incarnations ensues.]

Brahmā's Vision of God

Book II, Chapter 9

1. Śrī Śuka said:

“O king! No actual connection can exist between the objects of the world and the conscious transcendent soul. It is only because of *māyā* (illusion) cast over the soul that this appears to occur. This is just like one who sees objects in a dream; [there is no actual connection between these objects and the dreamer].

2. The *ātman* appears to have many forms, by dint of *māyā* assuming many forms. Enjoying itself in the *guṇas* of *māyā*, it thinks: ‘I am’ and ‘This belongs to me.’

3. When, on the other hand, its illusion is dissipated, and the soul reveals in its own magnificence, which is transcendent to Time and *māyā*, it is then able to renounce both Time and *māyā* and exist in its own autonomy.

4. Worshipped by Brahmā's sincere vows, *Bhagavān* revealed His form to him. He then imparted divine Truth to him so as to remove all doubts about the reality of the *ātman*.

5. Brahmā, the first of the celestial gods and the foremost teacher of the world, sat on his seat and, with a desire to create, reflected [on how he might do so]. But he could not figure out the necessary means for creating the manifest universe.

6. One day, as he was deliberating in this way, the great Lord Brahmā heard a voice from the water below, which twice uttered two syllables. They consisted of the sixteenth (*ṭa*) and twenty-first (*ṇa*) letters of the Sanskrit alphabet: (i.e., *tapas*, austerity). This word is the wealth of the ascetics.

7. Upon hearing this, Brahmā looked all around, striving to see the speaker. Upon not seeing anyone else there, he got up from his seat, and decided that the voice had been for his benefit. So, taking this as if it were an instruction to perform *tapas*, he concentrated his mind.

8. Brahmā's intuition was correct. With his breath and mind under control, and with both sets of senses³⁷ restrained, he performed *tapas* for a thousand years. Brahmā, the greatest performer of *tapas* from all those who perform *tapas*, engaged in *tapas*, illuminating all the worlds.

9. Worshipped in this manner, *Bhagavān* revealed His personal abode to Brahmā. Extolled by men who have realized their own true selves, *Vaikuṇṭha* is the supreme place. There is nothing higher that exists. It is free of all suffering, illusion, and fear.

10. *Rajas* and *tamas* do not prevail there, nor *sattva* tinged by either of them. Time has no sway there, nor *māyā*—what then to speak of anything else! The attendants of Hari there are worshipped by both gods and demons.

11. These attendants have brilliant dark hues and lotus-petal eyes. They wear yellowish garments and have extremely attractive and beautiful forms. They are effulgent and decorated with the choicest ornaments and medallions of brilliant flawless gems. Their complexions are of coral, gems, or lotus fiber. They wear dazzling necklaces, crowns, and garlands.

12. Just as the sky is illuminated by rows of clouds filled with lightning, so *Vaikuṇṭha* shone forth, filled with rows of brilliant sparkling flying vehicles belonging to the great liberated souls accompanied by their lustrous female consorts.

13. There, the beautiful Goddess of Fortune, Śrī, offers devotion at the feet of Viṣṇu in various ways through Her potencies, as She reclines on a swing. She is singing of the deeds of Her beloved, as She Herself is glorified by the bees, the followers of Spring.

14. In *Vaikuṇṭha*, Brahmā saw Viṣṇu, Lord of the devotees, Lord of Śrī, Lord of sacrificial rituals, and Lord of the Universe. Viṣṇu, God Almighty, was being attended to by the most prominent of His associates: Sunanda, Nanda, Prabala, Arhaṇa, and others.

15. Viṣṇu was favoring His servants with kindness, and His glances were like intoxicating nectar. His face had reddish eyes, and bore a charming smile. He had four arms, and wore a helmet and earrings. He wore yellow garments, and bore the mark on His chest of Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune.³⁸

16. The Supreme Being was seated on an invaluable throne, surrounded by His four, sixteen, and five *śakti* powers.³⁹ He was endowed