

as far as words and thought can allow, Brahmā fell silent, as if exhausted.”

## The Tale of Queen Devahūti: The Mystic Powers of Yoga

### Yoga Blueprint

*The story of sage Kardama and Queen Devahūti is noteworthy in its illustration of the mystic powers that accrue from intense meditative practices (a subject matter that occupies almost a quarter of the Yoga Sūtras). These powers are associated with asceticism throughout the entire history of Indic literature, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain, from the earliest Vedic textual sources right into the ongoing hagiographies of modern mystics. The classic eight mystic powers include prākāmya, the ability to fulfill one’s will, and īsitṛva, the ability to control and rearrange the elements, which we see in this story in Kardama’s ability to create an aerial palace at will and fill it with desirable objects. Among other supernatural feats, he then expands himself into nine different forms (see Yoga Sūtras IV.4–5).*

*[Prologue: Kardama, a forest-dwelling ascetic, was offered the hand of Princess Devahūti, who had long been in love with him. He agreed to the marriage on the condition that as soon as she would beget a child, if she so wished, he would leave and take the vow of sannyāsa, the fourth stage of life as a wandering ascetic. Devahūti agreed to this condition.]*

### Book III, Chapter 23

1. Maitreya said:

“After her parents had departed, the chaste Devahūti, who was expert in reading the moods of her husband, served him constantly with love, just like Bhavānī (Pārvatī) served her husband, Lord Śiva. 2.–3. Dedicated and attentive, O Vidura, and renouncing desire, deceit, aversion, greed, sinfulness, and pride, Devahūti continuously satisfied her noble husband through her affection, service, and loving words offered with intimacy, purity of heart, respectfulness, and self-control.

4.–5. She was submissive and emaciated by observing vows over a long period, and was expecting great blessings from her husband who

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was more powerful than Destiny. From his side, with a voice trembling with love, and overwhelmed with affection, Kardama, foremost of the divine sages, spoke to Devahūti, the daughter of Manu, who had been so devoted.

6. Kardama said:

‘O daughter of Manu, now I have become pleased by your exceptional service and complete devotion. This body is very dear to embodied beings, but you have neglected it in renunciation for my sake. You have been very dedicated.

7. I now bestow upon you divine vision. See how I, dedicated to the pursuit of the goal of life, have obtained the Lord’s blessings by dint of my *yogic* practice, learning, *samādhi*,<sup>16</sup> and austerities (*tapas*).<sup>17</sup> You have attained those same blessings, through your service to me. These blessings lift one beyond fear and lamentation.

8. What is the use of other material achievements, which are repeatedly destroyed by the raising of the eyebrows of Lord Viṣṇu<sup>18</sup> [that is, by Time]? You have attained perfection. Enjoy the divine fortunes you have earned from the performance of your *dharma*. These are hard to achieve by those types of men who have the perverse ambition of becoming kings.’

9. Kapila was versed in all the spiritual knowledge systems, and when Devahūti observed him speaking in this way, she became free of anxiety. Her smiling face beaming with bashful glances, she replied with her voice slightly choked with love and modesty.

10. Devahūti said:

‘Lord, best of the twice-born *brāhmaṇas*, naturally I already know that [all] this has been achieved by you, the master of mystic powers (*yogamāyā*). But offspring are a more precious gift to women who have been virtuous [than mystic powers]. Moreover, you once made the promise that one day we would unite intimately.

11. My mind is overwhelmed with love incited by you, but my body, which is full of sexual desire, is wasted and emaciated. Please make suitable arrangements in accordance with the scriptures<sup>19</sup> so that it can be made attractive. And please create a suitable place [for our sexual union], my Lord.’”

12. Maitreya said:

“Then, O Vidura, Kardama, desiring the satisfaction of his beloved, situated himself in *yogic* meditation, and [with his *yogic*

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powers] created a flying palace that could travel according to one's wish.<sup>20</sup>

13. It was a celestial palace that fulfilled all desires. It was replete with all kinds of gems, adorned with pillars of jewels, and generated all types of wealth and prosperity.

14.–15. It was filled with celestial paraphernalia, and was pleasant in all seasons. It was decorated with a variety of ribbons and banners; resplendent with fabrics, assorted linens, silks, and fine cloth; and there were bees inside buzzing about beautiful wreaths and exotic garlands.

16. It was constructed with different levels placed one on top of the other. The place was delightful, with seats, fans, couches, and beds placed here and there.

17. It was adorned with various types of artwork placed all about, and was magnificent with emerald floors and coral daises.

18. Resplendent with doors inset with diamonds and with coral thresholds at the entranceway, the palace was crowned with golden urns on its sapphire turrets.

19. It was designed with very valuable arched doorways of gold, and had assorted canopies built into the walls. These walls were inset with diamonds and rubies that looked like eyes.

20. It echoed here and there with the cooing of flocks of pigeons and swans. These kept flying up again and again, mistaking artificial [birds] to be their own kind.

21. Kardama was himself astonished by its pleasure grounds, resting places, bedchambers, courtyards, and patios, all designed to delight!

22. Kardama, who knew the minds of all creatures,<sup>21</sup> addressed himself to his wife, who was staring at this spectacular house, her mind ill at ease.

23. 'Bathe in this lake, O timid Devahūti, and then ascend into this palace. It is a sacred place created by Viṣṇu and fulfills the wishes of human beings.'

24. The lotus-eyed Devahūti, who was wearing dusty clothes and whose hair was matted, accepted the words of her husband.

25. Her body was covered with dirt and her breasts were speckled with grime. She entered the sacred pure waters of the *Sarasvatī* river.

26. Within a building inside the lake, she saw ten thousand young girls who were all youthful and as fragrant as lotuses.

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27. When they saw Devahūti, the women immediately rose up and addressed her with folded hands: ‘We are your maidservants. Instruct us as to what we can do for you.’

28. The respectful women bathed the wise Devahūti with costly bathing paraphernalia, and offered her new, spotless, fine-quality cloth.

29. They gave her exquisite, valuable shiny ornaments. They fed her with foodstuffs of every flavor, and gave her an inebriating nectar drink.

30. After this, Devahūti saw herself [in a mirror]: she was clean, wearing spotless garments and a garland, receiving great honor from the maidservants, and blessed by the gods.

31. Bathed and with washed hair, she was decorated with all kinds of ornaments, bracelets, tinkling golden ankle bells, and a golden necklace.

32. She was adorned with a golden girdle decorated with jewels placed over her hips, a pearl necklace, and golden ornaments of great value.

33. She had beautiful teeth and eyebrows, and her eyes, which rivaled the lotus, had slightly moist corners. Her face was glowing with bluish curls.

34. As soon as she thought of her beloved husband, the best of sages, she immediately found herself with her thousand maidservants in the very place where Kardama was to be found.

35. Upon observing her husband before her and the thousand maidservants accompanying her, Devahūti fell into a state of confusion from witnessing his display of *yogic* power.

36. Devahūti had been bathed clean, and her lovely breasts covered. Unlike her previous condition, she now appeared effulgent, revealing her original beauty.

37. She was beautifully dressed and was being served by the thousand celestial females. Love arose in the benevolent Kardama, and he brought Devahūti to the palace.

38. Kardama’s [*yogic*] glory was not dissipated in that palace, even though he was devoted to his beloved and received personal service from the celestial damsels.<sup>22</sup> He was as effulgent as the beautiful moon, lord of the rows of blooming night lotuses, surrounded by stars in the sky.

39. Praised by the *siddhas*, perfected beings,<sup>23</sup> he enjoyed for a long time in that palace in the valleys of Meru, king of the mountains.

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Delightful with breezes, which are the friends of Cupid, and the auspicious sounds of the *Gaṅgā* river's descent,<sup>24</sup> these valleys were the pleasure grounds of the celestial guardians of the eight directions. Surrounded by groups of damsels, Kardama resembled Kuvera, treasurer of the celestials.

40. Fully satisfied, he enjoyed with his wife in the celestial gardens of Vaiśrambhaka, Surasana, Nandana, Puṣpabhadra, Caitrarathya, and in the celestial Mānasa lake.

41. Moving like the wind through the realms of the universe in that magnificent and resplendent palace, which could travel at his will, Kardama outdid the celestials in their vehicles.

42. What is there that is difficult to attain for those people whose minds are controlled? They take shelter at Kṛṣṇa's feet, which remove distress.

43. After showing his wife the extent of the wondrous sphere of the universe with all its manifestations, the great *yogī* returned to his *āśrama*.

44. Kardama divided his body into nine forms and gave sexual pleasure to his beautiful wife, the daughter of Manu, who was eager for sexual pleasure. They enjoyed for many years; but these passed as if in an instant.

45. Reclining in that palace in the company of her very handsome husband on a magnificent bed, which enhanced sexual pleasure, Devahūti was not aware of the passing of Time.

46. In this manner, through the power of *yoga*, one hundred years went by in the twinkling of an eye for the couple who were enjoying themselves, eager for sexual pleasure.

47. The powerful Kardama, knower of the *ātman* and knower of everyone's desires, considered Devahūti as his other half. He divided himself into nine personal forms and deposited his semen in Devahūti.

48. Consequently, Devahūti gave birth that very day to nine female babies. They were delightful in every limb, and as fragrant as the red lotus.

49. Seeing her husband setting out to leave home [as per their agreement<sup>25</sup>], Devahūti, who desired [a son] was smiling externally, but inside her heart was agitated with distress.

50. Her face downcast, she scratched the ground with her foot, with its beautiful jewel-like nails, and spoke sweetly with her charming voice, holding back her tears.

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51. Devahūti said:

‘Everything that you promised me, my Lord, I have received. Nonetheless, dedicated as I am to you, kindly provide me with security.

52. O *brāhmaṇa*, your daughters will find suitable husbands for themselves. But there should be someone to free me from anxiety when you set out for the forest.

53. Enough of wasting so much of my time in attachment to sense indulgence. [On account of this], I had given up [seeking] the Supreme Soul, my lord.

54. Attached to you, I indulged in sense gratification, ignorant of your higher nature. Despite this, please bestow fearlessness upon me.

55. Attachment, when placed in unrighteous people out of ignorance, is the cause of *samsāra*; but when placed in the righteous, it leads to nonattachment.<sup>26</sup>

56. A person whose work in this world does not lead to *dharma*, or to detachment, or to the service of Viṣṇu, is actually as good as dead, even though living.

57. I am surely such a person: I have been utterly deceived by the Lord’s illusion (*māyā*) because, despite obtaining you, the giver of liberation, I did not desire liberation from bondage.’”

### Book III, Chapter 24

1. Maitreya said:

“The compassionate sage, remembering what had previously been declared by Viṣṇu,<sup>27</sup> replied to the praiseworthy daughter of Manu, who was speaking despondently in this way.

2. The sage said:

‘Do not torment yourself in this manner, O princess: you are blameless. The infallible Lord will shortly enter your womb.

3. May you be blessed: you have been firm in your vows. Worship *Īśvara* with faith, charity, wealth, austerities, moral observances (*niyama*),<sup>28</sup> and sense control.

4. Viṣṇu, as your son, will spread my fame. Worshipped by you, [He will impart to you] teachings on the subject of *Brahman* and cut the knot in your heart.’”<sup>29</sup>

5. Maitreya said:

“With great respect, Devahūti fully trusted the advice of Kardama,

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who was one of the *prajāpatīs*.<sup>30</sup> She worshipped the Supreme Soul (*puruṣa*), who is the most worthy of worship.

6. After the passing of many moons, the Lord, Madhusūdana (Viṣṇu)<sup>31</sup> entered into the seed of Kardama and took birth from Devahūti, like fire from wood.

7. At that time, hosts of clouds and musical instruments resounded in the sky. Celestial *gandharvas* sang and *apsarās* danced joyfully.<sup>32</sup>

8. Divine flowers fell, thrown by celestials traveling in the heavens,<sup>33</sup> and everything became pure: the directions, the waters, and people's minds.

9. Brahmā, along with sages such as Marīci,<sup>34</sup> arrived at the location of Kardama's *āśrama*, which was encircled by the *Sarasvatī* river.

10. Brahmā, who is unborn and self-manifest,<sup>35</sup> knew that the Supreme Godhead had taken birth through His pure partial manifestation.<sup>36</sup>

11. Offering homage to Lord Viṣṇu with pure mind, his spirits enlivened because of that which the Lord intended to do [teach the truths of Sāṅkhya], Brahmā spoke as follows to Kardama.

12. Brahmā said:

'I have been fully honored by you without offense, my dear Kardama. You are respectful to others and have respected my instruction that I previously imparted to you.

13. Sons should perform service to the father in exactly this manner. One should accept the words of the *guru* with gravity, saying: "This will definitely be done."

14. These chaste daughters of yours with beautiful waists, dear Kardama, will certainly increase this creation manifold with their own progeny.

15. Therefore, bestow your daughters in marriage today, according to their wishes and personalities, to the best of the sages, and thereby spread your fame throughout the world.

16. O sage, I know that the original Person [Viṣṇu] has incarnated by His own power and assumed a body as Kapila, a treasure trove for all beings.

17. He has golden hair, lotus eyes, and lotus feet marked with the lotus.<sup>37</sup> By means of *yoga*, wisdom, and knowledge, He will pull out the roots of action performed in ignorance.<sup>38</sup>

18. He, Viṣṇu, the destroyer of the demon Kaitabha,<sup>39</sup> has entered your womb, O Devahūti, daughter of Manu. After cutting your knot of doubt and illusion, He will wander over the earth.

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19. This son will be known in the world as Kapila, and will be highly esteemed by the great teachers of the Sāṅkhya knowledge system.<sup>40</sup> He will wander about spreading your fame.’”

20. Maitreya said:

“After encouraging the couple, Brahmā, ‘the Swan,’<sup>41</sup> the creator of the Universe, returned on his swan carrier back to his abode, the highest place in the three realms,<sup>42</sup> accompanied by the four Kumāras<sup>43</sup> along with Nārada.<sup>44</sup>

21. O Vidura, Kardama, who received instructions from Brahmā in this way, did as had been instructed. After Brahmā had departed, he bestowed his daughters to the progenitors of the universe.<sup>45</sup>

[ . . . ]

26. When Kardama understood that Viṣṇu, chief of the gods, had incarnated, he approached Him in private, offered Him homage, and addressed Him:

27. ‘At last, after a long time the gods are definitely pleased with those who are burning in hell due to their own misdeeds.’<sup>46</sup>

28. Ascetics in secluded places strive to see God’s feet by means of pure concentration (*samādhi*) in undeviating *yoga* practice that has matured over many births.<sup>47</sup>

29. That same Supreme *Bhagavān* has today taken birth in the homes of vulgar folk such as us. Disregarding our offenses, He nourishes the aspirations of His devotees.

30. *Bhagavān* broadcasts the fame of His devotees. You have incarnated in my house desiring to establish the knowledge [of Sāṅkhya philosophy] and fulfill Your promise truthfully.

31. [Although] You are without [material] forms, whatever forms please Your devotees are pleasing to You, O *Bhagavān*!<sup>48</sup>

32. I offer homage to You. Even Your footstool<sup>49</sup> is always worthy of worship by sages desiring to understand the Truth. You possess complete beauty, potency, knowledge, fame, renunciation, and power.<sup>50</sup>

33. I offer respects to You, Kapila. Your power manifests simply by dint of Your own will. You are the maintainer of the worlds, and You are the three *guṇas*.<sup>51</sup> Through Your intelligence You absorb the material manifestation back into Your own self. You are the Supreme Person, the creation, cosmic Intelligence, Time, and the wise Seer of Truth.

34. Today I am submitting a request to You, O Lord of beings: following the path of the roaming ascetics, I wish to wander forth, free

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from sorrow, connected to You in my heart. All my obligations have been erased by You, and all my desires fulfilled.’

35. The Lord said:

‘Whatever is spoken by Me in worldly or spiritual matters is authoritative for people in the world. This is the reason for My taking birth in your family: to fulfill what I previously told you, O sage.

36. This birth of Mine in this world is to reestablish the teachings of Sāṅkhya—the analysis of the ingredients of material reality. This knowledge in the matter of self-realization is highly esteemed by those desiring liberation from the subtle body.<sup>52</sup>

37. This path toward realization of the soul is difficult to understand, and so had disappeared, lost due to the passing of the ages. Please know that I have assumed this body in order to reestablish it.<sup>53</sup>

38. Go as you please, with My approval. Overcome Death, which is so hard to overcome, by dedicating all your actions to Me; worship Me to [attain] the state of immortality.

39. I am self-luminous, the hidden refuge within all beings. Without anxieties, you will perceive Me, the [Supreme] *Ātman*, in [your own] *ātman* through the *ātman*.<sup>54</sup> At that time you will attain the state of fearlessness.

40. I will impart spiritual knowledge, which puts an end to all *karma*, to My mother. By this knowledge, she will overcome fear.’”

41. Maitreya said:

‘Kardama, the progenitor of species (*prajāpati*), addressed in this way by Kapila, circumambulated Him,<sup>55</sup> and joyfully set out for the forest.

42. The sage, fixed in the vow of silence and absorbed in the *ātman*, wandered forth over the earth, without any company, without residence, and neglecting the sacred ritualistic fire.<sup>56</sup>

43. He fixed his mind on *Brahman*, which is beyond the real and unreal.<sup>57</sup> Although it itself is devoid of the *guṇa* qualities (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*), yet it is through *Brahman* that the *guṇas* are manifest.<sup>58</sup> It can be experienced only by exclusive devotion.<sup>59</sup>

44. Kardama was without ego, without sense of ownership, beyond all dualities,<sup>60</sup> perceiving all beings equally, and the seer of his own inner self. He was fixed, his mind peacefully turned inward, like an ocean whose waves are calm.<sup>61</sup>

45. Freed from the bonds of (*saṁsāra*), he realized his own self by means of the highest devotion to God, Vāsudeva, the omniscient inner Soul.

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46. He saw God, *Bhagavān*, as the Supreme Soul situated within all beings, and all beings within *Bhagavān*, the Supreme Soul.
47. With his mind free from desire and aversion, and seeing everything equally, Kardama attained the divine destination by engaging in devotion to God.”

### The Teachings of Lord Kapila: Sāṅkhya Yoga

#### Yoga Blueprint

*The result of the union between Kardama and Devahūti is the birth of Kapila, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Kṛṣṇa informs us in the Bhagavad Gītā (IV.7–8) that He descends into the world, among other reasons, to reestablish dharma. This is the bhakti notion of avatāra, the incarnating of Viṣṇu into the world in times of need. Of particular relevance to Yoga, however, is that tradition recognizes Kapila as the original expounder of the Sāṅkhya system of philosophy.<sup>62</sup> Yoga operates within the metaphysical contours provided by the Sāṅkhya principles—indeed, while later tradition pairs Sāṅkhya and Yoga as “sister schools,” earlier sources, including the Gītā (V.4–5) consider them one and the same—Sāṅkhya providing the metaphysics, and Yoga the practices relevant to liberating the soul, ātman/puruṣa, from the world of matter, prakṛti.<sup>63</sup>*

*Kapila’s instructions to his mother represent classic Yoga teachings embedded in the highly devotionalized context of bhakti. This section contains some of the most important core teachings of the Bhāgavata: many of the verses illustrating the teachings of bhakti in part I are found in these instructions. Particularly noteworthy are the teachings on the experience of birth, as well as on the process of dying and the fate awaiting those who have squandered their human life after the moment of death.*

#### Book III, Chapter 25

1. Śaunaka spoke:

“Although He Himself is actually unborn, Kapila, who is *Bhagavān* in person, took birth through His spiritual potency as the expounder of Sāṅkhya philosophy, so as to impart knowledge of the *ātman* to mankind.

2. My life force<sup>64</sup> is never satiated from repeatedly hearing about the Lord of the Vedas.<sup>65</sup> He is the best of men, and the foremost of all *yogīs*.

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