

to his sons, who all had his same qualities, and entered the forest. There he absorbed his mind in Vāsudeva, the Supreme *Ātman*, and the flow of the *guṇas* ceased for him.

27. By glorifying and contemplating this pure narrative about the emperor Ambarīṣa, O king, one becomes a *bhakta* of *Bhagavān*.”

### The Tale of Saubhari: Suppressed *Samskāras*

**Yoga Blueprint** *The short Tale of Saubhari illustrates that even though one may renounce the world radically—Saubhari went so far as to meditate underwater in his attempt to completely distance himself from sense objects—samskāras of desire never fully disappear but remain latent. They can be triggered at any moment—in his case, simply by witnessing two fish mating. This narrative feeds into the Bhāgavata’s overall insistence that only through bhakti can the desires themselves be burned. Other processes can remove the karmic consequences of past actions, and suppress the desires that cause them, but not eliminate them. The story also strongly underscores the perception that desires, even if fulfilled in abundance, can never fulfill.*

#### Book IX, Chapter 6

39.–40. Śrī Śuka said: “Saubhari was submerged in the waters of the *Yamunā*, disciplining himself with severe austerities. There, under the water, desire was kindled in him after he saw the king of fishes happily engaging in sex. As a result, the *brāhmaṇa* [gave up his practices] and then requested the king for one of his maiden daughters. The king replied: ‘You may take a maiden, O *brāhmaṇa*, at her choice in a *svayamvara* ceremony, [where the maiden chooses her own husband].’

41. Saubhari thought to himself: ‘I am gray and wrinkled, and my head shakes. I am in fact being spurned [by the king] as I am old and unattractive to women and so will not be chosen.’

42. So the [yoga] master resolved: ‘I shall perfect my body such that it becomes desirable even to celestial women, not to mention mortal princesses.’

43. After doing this, the sage was then admitted by the guard into the opulent inner quarter of the palace reserved for maidens. There, although he was a sole suitor, Saubhari was selected as husband by all fifty princesses!

44. Because their minds had all become drawn to him, great dissent broke out between the maidens, and their affection [for each other] was

broken: ‘This man is fit for me, not you,’ they all said.

45.–46. Saubhari was well versed in the *Ṛg-Veda* [and thus skilled in *mantra* incantations]. He enjoyed with those princesses without interruption in palaces furnished with the most exquisite and priceless opulence [created by] his austerities.<sup>11</sup> They were filled with costly garlands, foodstuffs, ointments, bathing places, ornaments, garments, sitting places, and beds, and they were attended by beautifully adorned male and female attendants. They had fragrant groves, streams with crystal waters, and a variety of garden parks with birds, bees, and bards celebrating in sound.

47. The ruler of the seven continents, Māndhatā, was so astounded at seeing Saubhari situated in his householder life that he gave up the pride that accompanied his own universal opulence.

48. But, absorbed in sense gratification in his palaces and stimulated by varieties of pleasures, Saubhari was still not satisfied, just as fire is not extinguished by drops of ghee.<sup>12</sup>

49. One day, that great master of the *Ṛg-Veda*, while sitting down, realized his compromised condition, caused by his own self, which had all come about because of the mating of fish.

50. ‘Aho! Just look at my downfall, me, an ascetic performer of austerities, who had taken a vow of acting in Truth! [My absorption on] *brāhman*, cultivated for such a long time, was derailed because of the mating of fish underwater!

51. One desirous of liberation must renounce all association with those who are dedicated to sex. With all one’s heart and soul, one must not let the senses flow outwardly. Living alone in a secluded place—or perhaps in the company of *sādhus* who have taken the same vows—one should engage one’s mind on the unlimited Lord.

52. I was a lone ascetic performing *tapas* underwater, but because of associating with fish, I have become fifty [as it were]—without even mentioning my five hundred offspring! I can find no satisfaction for my desires for this world or the next—they demand never-ending indulgence. My mind has been overwhelmed by the *guṇas* of *māyā*, and

my consciousness has sense objects as its goal.’

53. Living in this way in his household for some time, Saubhari eventually became averse to it. Once he had become fixed in renunciation, he eventually went to the forest. His wives followed him, considering their husband to be their lord.

54. There, with controlled mind, Saubhari performed intense austerities. It is through these that the *ātman* is revealed. Then, along with the sacred fires, he joined his *ātman* with the Supreme *Ātman*.

55. The wives, seeing that their husband had attained the supreme destination, followed him by dint of his potency, just as flames [become extinguished], when a fire has become extinguished, O great king.”