

Book VII

The Teachings of Yamarāja: Lament of the Widowed Queens

Yoga Blueprint

This pithy story, which contains a fable within it, illustrates the futility of grieving for a deceased loved one, given that the body is still present, while the soul had never been perceived in the first place. The teachings also stress the importance of accepting one's karma.

Book VII, Chapter 2

27. People recite this ancient legend (*itihāsa*); it involves a conversation between Yama and the relatives of a dead person. Please listen to it.
28. There was a renowned king called Suyajña in a kingdom called Uśīnara, who was killed by his enemies in battle. His relatives gathered round his body.
29. His jewel-laden armor was shattered, and his garland and ornaments were in disarray. He was lying covered in blood, his heart pierced by arrows.
30. His hair was scattered, his eyes glazed, and his lip bitten in fury. His lotus face was darkened with dust and his arms and weapons had been severed in the battle.
31. The lord of the Uśīnara kingdom had been reduced to this state by Fate. His queens were distraught upon seeing him. "Our lord has been killed," they said. Beating their chests forcefully with their fists again and again, they fell at the feet of the king.

32. Crying loudly, the poor queens bathed his lotus feet with their tears, reddened with the *kunkuma* powder from their breasts, their ornaments and hair in disarray. They wailed, invoking people's pity by their laments.

33. "Aho! O lord, you have been taken away from our sight by cruel Fate. You, who were previously the maintainer of the citizens of Uśīnara, have now been reduced to the source of their lamentation.

34. How will we exist without you, our dear friend and guide, O great king? Tell us the means of following your steps, O hero, to wherever you will go. We are your faithful servants."

35. The queens, embracing their husband and lamenting in this way, were resisting carrying away the dead body; then the sun finished setting.

36. After hearing such lamentation by the relatives of the dead man, Yama, the god of death, assumed the form of a young [orphan] boy and personally came there. He addressed the queens.

37. Śrī Yama said:

"Aho! Just see the bewilderment of these queens who are mature in age, even though they know the laws of nature. These queens lament uselessly, even though they themselves are bound by the same rules. This dead man has gone back to wherever he came.

38. Aho! We ourselves are most fortunate, because even though we were abandoned by our parents, we are not in anxiety. Even though we are weak, we have not been devoured by wolves and wild animals. That Being who protects us in the womb, will protect us now.

39. Out of His desire, that imperishable Lord creates this universe, and He protects and dissolves it. They say that this is the play of that Lord, O women! He is the Controller in the coming together and dissolution of moving and non-moving beings.

40. In some cases, even if fallen by the roadside, one lives when protected by Fate, in others, even if safely situated at home, one meets destruction when neglected by Fate. An orphan in the jungle survives when protected by Fate, while one secure at home does not live when struck by Fate.

41. Without exception, living bodies appear and then disappear in time in accordance with their respective *karma* and particular births. Although embedded in *prakṛti*, the *ātman* is completely different, and is not actually bound by its *guṇas*.

42. This body made of material elements is produced by illusion and is different from the *puruṣa*, just as a person is different from a house made of earth, water, and fire. A person is born, undergoes some changes, and then dies in due course of time.

43. Just as fire manifests in pieces of wood but is different from them; and just as air enters the body but exists distinct from it; and just as the sky, which is omnipresent, is not tainted by anything; so a being, who is the support of all the *guṇas* is yet transcendent to them.

44. O foolish people! That Suyajña for whom you lament still lies here. But [the consciousness of] the one who was the hearer and the responder was never perceived in the first place.¹

45. The primary life air in the body, even though essential, is also not the hearer or responder. It is the *ātman* who is the possessor of the senses, and it is different from the body and life airs.

46. By its own potency, the omnipresent *ātman* possesses bodies in higher and lower births characterized by mind, senses, and material elements but yet is different from them.

47. For as long as the *ātman* is connected with the subtle body, it is bound by *karma*. As a result, it is subject to error, defects (*kleśas*), and the influence of *māyā*.

48. This ego, which perceives and speaks of objects in the *guṇas*, is illusory. It is like a dream, which is a mental concoction. All things made of the material elements are false.

49. Those who understand the truth do not lament for anything in this world, whether permanent or impermanent. But the nature of those who lament is to say, 'It is not possible to do anything other than lament.'

50. Once upon a time, some hunter—the harbinger of death to birds—spread out his nets and placed them about in the forest, setting bait here and there.

51. He saw a pair of *kulīṅga* birds wandering about there. The female one of them was suddenly allured by the hunter.

52. She became trapped, O queens, bound by Fate in the cords of the net. The male *kulīṅga* bird, seeing her fallen into this calamity, was greatly aggrieved out of affection. Unable to do anything, the poor thing lamented for his poor mate:

53. 'Aho! Fate is cruel. What will the Supreme Lord do with me, an unfortunate soul, and with my poor wife who is so kind she is lamenting for me?

54. Let Fate take me as it pleases. What is the use of living miserably with only half of myself? There will only be suffering from such a bereaved life.

55. My poor offspring are awaiting me in the nest. How will I maintain the chicks, whose wings have not yet grown, now they have been bereft of their mother?

56. Propelled by the Time factor, the hunter had hidden nearby. While the *kulinga* bird was lamenting in this way, its throat choked up with tears due to being afflicted by this separation from its beloved, the fowler pierced it with an arrow.

57. In the same way, you queens will not get your husband back even if you lament for hundreds of years; meanwhile you are foolishly not perceiving your own imminent death.”

58. While the young boy was discoursing in this way, all the relatives' minds were struck with astonishment. They realized that everything is temporary and situated in unreality.

59. After Yama had imparted these instructions, he disappeared from there. Then the relatives of King Suyajña performed the funerary ceremonies.

60. Therefore, free from bodily ignorance in the form of clinging (*abhiniveśa*²) to notions of self and other—such as “Who am I and who is other?” or “What is mine, here, and what belongs to others?”—you should not lament for your own body or anyone else's.

The Tale of Child Prahlāda: Viṣṇu Protects His *Bhaktas*

Yoga Blueprint

The story of Prahlāda is one of the best-known bhakta stories in Hinduism. As with Dhruva, Prahlāda was a child bhakta, in addition to which he was born into a family of asuras (demons). This once again underscores the principle that neither age nor birth nor any other factor disqualifies one from the path of bhakti. In fact, the text selects Prahlāda to formally articulate the nine practices that form the core of vaidhī bhakti discussed in part 1. Significant here is Prahlāda advising his fellow boy students not to fritter away even a moment of human life, but to start thinking about the purpose of life even as children.

We find here another example of the Bhāgavata's disinterest in the standard goal of yoga—realization of the ātman (VII.6.25), not