

way the bringing together and separating of human beings takes place through the will of the Lord.

44. Whether you consider beings to be eternal, non-eternal, or both, they should not be mourned in any circumstance. To do so is the result of attachment born of ignorance.

45. Therefore, my son, give up your distress. It is caused by ignorance of the *ātman*, and it is because of this that you are thinking: “But they are helpless and without protection: How can they survive without me?!”

46. This body, made of the five elements, is itself subject to the *guṇas*, *karma*, and Time. How can it, then, protect others any more than one grasped by a python can protect others?

47. One living being is the means of sustenance for another: those without hands, for those with hands; those without feet, for those with four feet; and the weak for the strong.

48. This universe is *Bhagavān*, the sole *ātman* among *ātmans*, O king. He is self-manifest—manifesting both within and without [of all things]. Know that it is only on account of His *māyā* power of illusion that He appears to be manifold.

49. O great king, He, the Creator of all beings, is none other than this *Bhagavān* [Kṛṣṇa]. He has incarnated into this world in the form of Time for the destruction of the enemies of the celestials.

50. *Īśvara* has accomplished that which was to be done on behalf of the celestials, and is expecting [to complete] whatever remains.¹⁰³ As long as he remains on this earth, you should witness [his activities].

51. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, accompanied by his brother and his wife, Gāndhārī, has gone to the *āśrama* of the sages, on the south side of the Himālayas.

52. The place is called Sapta-śrota (Seven Rivers), because the *Gaṅgā* divided sevenfold into seven rivers for the satisfaction of the seven different sages.¹⁰⁴

53. Observing a fast of only drinking water, he bathes three times a day, offers oblations into the sacred fire according to the prescribed rules, and remains there with a peaceful mind, free of desires.

54. He has mastered posture (*āsana*) and breath control, withdrawn

consciousness (*pratyāhāra*) from the six senses, and overcome the taints of *rajas*, *sattva*, and *tamas* by his absorption in Hari.

55. He has merged the mind into intelligence, merged that into the *jīva* (*kṣetra-jñā*¹⁰⁵), and then merged that into *Brahman*, the substratum [of everything], just like the air in a pot merges into the totality of air.

56. He has destroyed all the effects of the *guṇas* of *māyā*, restrained his mind and senses, abstained from all food, and is sitting motionless like a pillar. Do not try to hold him back—he has renounced all activities.

57. In fact, on the fifth day from today, O king, he will abandon his body, and burn it into ash.

58. While the body of her husband is burning along with the thatched hermitage, his chaste wife, standing outside, will enter into that fire.

59. After hearing about this amazing thing, O joy of the Kuru dynasty, Vidura, feeling both joy and sorrow, will depart on a pilgrimage of holy places.’

60. Then, having said all this, Nārada, along with his *tumburu* stringed instrument, ascended to the celestial realms. Taking his words to heart, Yudhiṣṭhira gave up his sorrow.”

The Tale of King Parīkṣit: Cursed to Die in Seven Days

Yoga Blueprint

The yogic message imparted by this tale is that, like Parīkṣit, all embodied beings face death. Parīkṣit’s question, then, pertaining to the ultimate duty, purpose, and goal of human existence, what it is that one should do in the world at every moment—in essence, what one should do with one’s mind—sets the stage for the entire text to impart its teachings. Of additional interest is the text’s illustration of the state of samādhi by Śamīka. In nirbīja samādhi (Yoga Sūtras I.47ff.), consciousness is exclusively immersed in its own nature and has no awareness of any external stimulation.

Book 1, Chapter 18

24. Once, after taking up his bow, King Parīkṣit set out to the forest to hunt. While he was pursuing a deer, he became extremely tired, hungry, and thirsty.

25. Not finding any body of water, he entered into Śamīka's [renowned] hermitage, and saw the sage sitting peacefully, his eyes closed.

26. Śamīka had attained the state beyond the three states of consciousness—waking, dream, and deep sleep¹⁰⁶—and so was completely inactive, his senses, *prāṇa* life airs, mind, and intelligence restrained.

27. His dreadlocks were disheveled, and he was draped in a deerskin. The king, whose throat was dry, requested water from the sage, who was in that state.

28. Upon not receiving a straw seat, and not being offered sweet words or a hospitable beverage, or indeed anything at all, the king, feeling that he had been disrespected, became angry.

29. O *brāhmaṇa* (Śaunaka), the king's anger and resentment suddenly erupted against the *brāhmaṇa*. This had never happened before to the king, but he had become compromised by hunger and thirst.

30. So, as he was leaving, the king placed a dead snake with the tip of his bow on the shoulder of the *brāhmaṇa* sage out of anger, and returned to his city.

31. [The king wondered:] “Were his eyes closed because he had closed down his senses? Or was it rather really a feigned state of *samādhi* because of [not wishing to interact with me], a lowly member of the *kṣatriya* warrior caste?”

32. While this had been taking place, the *brāhmaṇa*'s son had been out playing with other young children. Although he was but a boy, he was very powerful. When he heard that his beloved father had been subject to an offense by the king, he uttered these words then and there:

33. “Just see the irreligiousness of the rulers, who are like crows who have grown fat from eating the oblations meant for sacrifice! This is an offense against their masters by servants who are doorkeepers, like dogs.

34. A lowly *kṣatriya* is clearly ordained to be the doorkeeper of the *brāhmaṇa* caste. How does one, who is supposed to stand at the door of the house, deserve to eat from the same dish [as the master]?

35. Since Lord Kṛṣṇa, the punisher of the miscreants, has left the world, I

myself will today punish the transgressors of the law. Just witness my power!”

36. After uttering this to his companions, the sage’s son, his eyes red with anger, touched the water of the *Kauśikī* river, and released a verbal thunderbolt in the form of a curse.

37. “Unleashed by me, the snake-bird Takṣaka will bite that destroyer of his family’s reputation. He has transgressed the limits of the law and insulted my beloved father,” he said.

38. Having done this, the boy returned to the *āśrama* hermitage and saw his father with the corpse of the snake on his shoulder. Overwhelmed with pain, he cried out aloud.

39. The father, a descendant of sage Aṅgirā, heard the cry of his son. Slowly opening his eyes, he saw the dead snake on his shoulder, O *brāhmaṇa*.

40. He threw aside the snake, and then inquired: “My son, why do you wail? Who has wronged you?” Addressed in this way, the son informed him about what had happened.

41. When he heard the account, the father did not approve of his son’s curse upon the king, who had not deserved such a thing: “*Aho! Aho!* You have done a grave thing today; you have inflicted an enormous punishment for a minor offense.

42. You should never equate the king with ordinary men, you foolish boy. He is declared [in the sacred texts] to be preeminent. Through his formidable power, the citizens are protected without fearing anything and live in well-being.

43. The king, lord of men [is equal to] Lord Viṣṇu, the wielder of the discus. If he does not oversee [the kingdom], O son, then, in an instant, the world, unprotected and filled with thieves, becomes destroyed, like a herd of sheep.

44. People, many of whom are thieves, will curse, kill, and rob cattle, women, and wealth from each other. [Because of your deed], we will today incur the sin committed by the plunderers of wealth in those places where the king has been destroyed, even though that sin was not

directly performed by us.

45. Without a king, the righteous codes of the Āryas—the injunctions of the four *varṇas*, castes, and *āśramas* (stages of life), outlined in the three Vedas—will vanish from society. As a consequence, when people become absorbed in lust and profit, the mixing of the castes will ensue.¹⁰⁷ People will then behave like monkeys and dogs [that is, with few regulations].

46. The king is the protector of *dharma*. He is the Lord of men, a sovereign of wide renown. He is the performer of horse sacrifices,¹⁰⁸ a sage-king, and a great devotee in person. The poor man was beset by hunger, thirst, and fatigue; he did not deserve to be cursed by us in that manner.

47. *Bhagavān*, the soul of all, should please forgive the sin performed by this young immature boy against His sinless servant, the king.

48. The Lord’s devotees, even though certainly capable of doing so, do not retaliate when abused, insulted, cursed, dishonored, or even when struck.”

49. In this way, even though he had been disrespected by the king, the great sage did not consider this to be an offense, but rather was distressed by the offense made by his son.

50. Generally, saintly persons, when made to encounter the dualities of the world,¹⁰⁹ are neither disturbed nor elated by [the actions of] others.¹¹⁰ This is because [they have realized] the *ātman*, situated beyond the *guṇas*.

Book 1, Chapter 19

1. Sūta continued:

“Meanwhile, the great king, thinking about the offense that he had done, was extremely troubled in mind: ‘*Aho!* I performed a despicable deed, as if I were a non-Āryan, against an innocent *brāhmaṇa*, whose *yogic* power is retained concealed.

2. Therefore it is certain that a terrible calamity will very soon befall me because of the offense I performed against this divine being. Let this freely occur to absolve me of sin so that I never commit such acts again.

3. Since I am so wretched, let the fire of the *brāhmaṇa*'s rage even today consume my kingdom, strength, wealth, and treasury such that I never again harbor a sinful attitude toward the twice-born *brāhmaṇas*, gods, or cows.'

4. As he was thinking in this manner, the king heard about his impending doom looming in the form of [the snake-bird] Takṣaka, invoked by the son of the sage. He considered this to be fitting: he was attached [to worldly life] and the fire of Takṣaka would soon be the means of his detachment.

5. Parīkṣit gave up [any desire for] this world and the celestial one—he had anyway long determined that they should be renounced, considering service to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa to be superior. He then sat down to fast to death on the bank of the *Gaṅgā* river.

6. What person, who is about to die, would not worship the *Gaṅgā*? She brings water made divine from the dust of the feet of Kṛṣṇa¹¹¹ mixed with the beautiful *tulasī* plant.¹¹² She purifies both worlds (earthly and celestial), along with their celestial lords.

7. Having made this resolve to sit on the banks of the *Gaṅgā* to fast until death, Parīkṣit, the descendant of the Pāṇḍavas, firm in the vows of a sage, and free from all attachments, concentrated on the feet of Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa] with undivided attention.

8. At this, the great, realized sages, who can purify the worlds, arrived there along with their disciples. The saints, under the pretext of performing pilgrimage, actually themselves purify a pilgrimage place.¹¹³

9. They were: Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Cyavana, Śaradvān, Ariṣṭanemi, Bhṛgu, Aṅgirā, Parāśara, the son of Gādhi (Viśvāmitra), Rāma, Utathya, Indrapramada, Idhmavāha.

10. Medhātithi, Devala, Ārṣiṣeṇa, Bhāradvāja, Gautama, Pippalāda, Maitreya, Aurva, Kavaṣa, Kumbhayoni, Dvaipāyana, and the great Nārada.

11. And other great sages and eminent *brāhmaṇas* arrived also, as well as prominent kings like Aruṇa, *etc.* The king honored the eminent sages from various lineages that had gathered there, and paid obeisance by

bowing his head [to their feet].

12. When they were seated comfortably and he had once again offered homage to them, the king stood before them with hands folded in supplication, his mind completely detached from worldly affairs, and informed them of his intentions.

13. The king said:

‘*Aho!* The dynasty of kings is actually contemptible, and deserves to be discarded far from the place where the water used for washing the feet of the *brāhmaṇas* is found.¹¹⁴ But nonetheless, because of this, we kings are actually the most fortunate among men, since this character of ours makes us eligible for the compassion of magnanimous souls.

14. I am a sinful member of such a dynasty, and my mind is always attached to household affairs. The Supreme Lord of all has manifested in the form of a *brāhmaṇa*’s curse, and in this manner has thereby become the trigger for my detachment from worldly affairs. Because of such a curse, people who are attached to worldly affairs would normally be immediately thrown into a state of fear.

15. May the sages and Mother *Gaṅgā* accept me as someone who has turned to the Lord, and whose mind is fixed on Him. Let Takṣaka, or whatever magical thing was discharged by the *brāhmaṇa*, bite me as is fitting. And may you all please sing the glories of Viṣṇu.

16. May fellowship with those who have taken shelter of the unlimited Lord, as well as affection for them, be bestowed upon me in whatever be the next birth I may obtain in this material world, and may I be a friend to all. I offer homage to the *brāhmaṇas*.’

17. The king, who had handed over his responsibilities to his son, was determined and resolved in mind. On the southern side of the *Gaṅgā* facing north, he sat down on *kuśa* grass with its roots facing east.¹¹⁵

18. When the king of kings was seated on that seat and awaiting death in this manner, the hosts of celestial beings in the heavens joyfully praised

him, showered flowers on the earth, and played kettledrums continuously.

19. The great sages who had assembled there also praised him with joyful hearts: ‘Well done!’ Their nature is to bestow blessings on living beings, and so they spoke to him about the pleasing qualities of Lord Viṣṇu, whose glories are supreme:

20. ‘O best of sage-kings, from among those who are devoted to Kṛṣṇa, there is nothing surprising about the fact that the ones who desire to become personal associates of *Bhagavān* renounce the royal throne, which is honored by the helmets of other kings.¹¹⁶

21. So now we will all remain here until this foremost of *Bhagavān*’s devotees relinquishes his material body and departs to the supreme realm, Vaikuṅṭha, which is free from sorrow and hankering.¹¹⁷

22. Those assembled sages were fixed in *yoga*, and their words were impartial, full of sweetness, profound, and true. After listening to them, Parīkṣit, desiring to hear about the deeds of Viṣṇu, offered the sages his respects and addressed them:

23. ‘You have all assembled here from all the corners of the world—just as the Vedas which are beyond the three worlds manifest divine bodily forms.¹¹⁸ One whose nature is to bestow grace on others has no other purpose whatsoever, either in this world, or in the next, other than to do this.

24. Therefore, with full faith in you, O learned ones, I submit to you this most worthy query: From all those duties that are to be performed by everyone, which is the optimum duty that should be performed specifically by those about to die? Please give this your full consideration.’

25. At that moment, by chance, the son of Vyāsa, the great Śuka, happened to arrive there. He was wandering around the earth in the guise of an ascetic renunciant, completely unattached to anything, as he was satisfied by the realization of his *ātman*, the inner self. Surrounded by young boys, his elevated characteristics lay concealed.

26. He was sixteen years of age, with handsome and youthful feet,

hands, thighs, arms, shoulders, cheeks, and body. His face had beautiful wide eyes, a stately nose, symmetrical ears, and attractive eyebrows. His fine neck was like a conch shell.

27. His collarbones were concealed, and he had a broad, attractive chest. His navel was like a whirlpool, and his stomach had beautiful lines. He was naked, and his hair was scattered about his face. His arms were long, and he was as attractive as the best of the celestials.

28. He was dark complexioned and displayed an attractive, youthful appearance. He was captivating to women because of his charming smile. All those sages could recognize his [saintly] characteristics even though his luster was covered over, and so they rose up from their seats.

29. Thereupon, Parīkṣit, beloved of Viṣṇu, offered respect by bowing his head to Śuka, who had arrived as an unexpected guest. At this, all the simple folk, women and children [who were following him], departed. Honored in this way, Śuka sat on an elevated seat.

30. Surrounded by *brāhmaṇa* sages, kingly sages, and celestial sages, the divine Śuka, a great soul among great souls, shone forth in that place like the moon surrounded by the multitude of planets, constellations and stars.

31. Śuka was acutely intelligent. The king, devotee of Viṣṇu, approached the sage, who was sitting peacefully. Parīkṣit bowed his head to him, and attentively offered him respects with joined hands. Then he inquired from him with joyful words.

32. Parīkṣit said:

‘*Aho!* By your lordship arriving here unexpectedly out of kindness, we, who are mere *kṣatriyas*, members of the warrior caste, have today become worthy of being served by saints, O *brāhmaṇa*; we have been transformed into pilgrimage places by your presence.

33. By simply remembering such persons [as yourself], our houses become purified. What then to speak about seeing and touching you, washing your feet, and offering you a seat, and so forth?

34. From being in your presence, O great *yogī*, even the greatest of sins are immediately destroyed, just like the enemies of the celestials are

destroyed in the presence of Viṣṇu.

35. *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa, who is dear to the sons of Pāṇḍu, is surely pleased with me: so as to please his paternal aunt's sons, the Pāṇḍavas,¹¹⁹ he has accepted the descendants of their lineage.

36. Otherwise, how is it possible for me to be blessed by seeing you? You are perfect and compassionate, but your ways are concealed to humankind—especially to those who are about to die.

37. Therefore I ask of you, the most eminent of *gurus* among *yogīs*: What is the means to perfection? What should be done at every moment by a person in this world about to die?

38. What should be heard? What *mantra* should be chanted (*japya*)¹²⁰? What actions should be performed by men, O master? What should be remembered? And what should be worshipped? And also please tell me what should be avoided.

39. Indeed, O *brāhmaṇa*, it is known that your honor never lingers in the homes of those attached to their households for more than even the brief time taken to milk a cow.”¹²¹

40. Sūta said:

“Addressed and questioned in this way with those sincere words, the great Śuka, son of Bādarāyaṇa (Vyāsa) and knower of *dharma*, responded to the king.”

[Continued in the next tale.]

Book II

The Teachings of Sage Śuka: The Wandering Enlightened Sage

Yoga Blueprint We notice in verses I.7 and I.9 that sages who are already enlightened, and consequently have completely lost attraction for all things related to the *guṇas* from having attained realization of the *ātman*, nonetheless are attracted to the narratives of *Kṛṣṇa*. Here again we find one of the main subthemes of the *Bhāgavata*. The text thus indicates that *Kṛṣṇa*'s nature and qualities are not only transcendent to *prakṛti*, but higher than the individual *ātman*. His form and characteristics are the highest and most blissful expression of Brahman, and a vision of Him is the ultimate spiritual experience. In this regard, we see here, as elsewhere, the repetition of a fairly detailed description of the form of *Viṣṇu*. This recurs frequently throughout the *Bhāgavata* in order to fully ingrain the details of this form in the practitioner's mind, such that it can be recalled during meditation along the lines indicted in 2.9–14.

Other noteworthy points are the equivalence of sacred texts with Brahman in I.8 (the sixteenth-century theologian Vallabha considered the *Bhāgavata* a type of literary *avatāra*). This section also includes a technical and esoteric passage on the subtle physiology that is of particular interest to the *Śākta* traditions (II.19–32). The somewhat technical practice outlined here involves an involution of the *Sāṅkhya* categories of the body from their grossest to progressively subtler forms until one arrives at the *ātman*. However, the ultimate goal of all and any practice is to remember *Nārāyaṇa* at the end of life (II.1.6).

Book II, Chapter 1

1. Śrī Śuka said: “This question of yours, posed for the welfare of people, is excellent, O king. It is appreciated by those who know the *ātman*, and, from everything that is useful for people to hear, it is the most worthwhile topic.
2. For those people who have not seen the truth of the *ātman* and are

attached to their homes and households, there are thousands of things that seem worth hearing, O king.

3. The prime of life is carried away by sexual intercourse and sleep during the night, O king, and, through striving for wealth and maintaining one's family during the day.

4. Obsessed with one's body, children, and wife, etc., which are like illusory soldiers [subject to death at any moment], one does not perceive their demise, even while actually perceiving it.

5. Therefore, O son of Bhārata, one desiring freedom from fear should hear about, glorify, and remember Hari. He is *Bhagavān*, *Īśvara*, the soul of everything.

6. Indeed, the perfection of life for a person, whether through the paths of Sāṅkhya or Yoga, through performance of duty, or through knowledge, is to remember Nārāyaṇa at the end of life.

7. Usually, O king, sages who have desisted from [mundane ritualistic] rules and regulations, and are situated in the state beyond the *guṇas*—i.e., have attained *Brahman*—relish the qualities and stories of Hari.

8. This *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is nondifferent from *Brahman*. I learned it from my father, Vyāsa, at the end of the *Dvāpara yuga*, the third world age.

9. Although I had attained perfection and was situated in the state beyond the *guṇas*, my mind was captured by the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa; hence I studied this history, O sagely king.

10. I will narrate that Purāṇa to you; you are a great soul, sir. Devotion for Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa] is awakened in those who have faith in it.

11. The chanting of the name of Hari has been prescribed for those *yogīs* who are disinterested [in material enjoyment] and who desire freedom from fear.

12. What is the use of many years squandered mindlessly by a deluded person? Let it be known that it is better for one hour to be spent striving for one's ultimate welfare.

13. After the sage-king by name of Khaṭvaṅga found out what remained of his life in this world, he renounced everything in an instant, and dedicated himself to Hari, who bestows fearlessness.¹

14. There is a limit also, O Kaurava, to your life span: seven days. Take all steps necessary to prepare for death during this time.

15. When the end comes, a person should sever desire for this body and all that is associated with it [family, possessions, and the like] with the weapon of detachment, free from fear.

16. With mind fixed, one should leave home alone, wash in the waters of a sacred place, and then sit on a seat prepared according to the prescriptions.

17. One should concentrate on the three constituent phonemes of *om̐* [*a-u-m*], the great and pure *Brahman* in the form of sound. One should restrain one's mind and control one's breathing, keeping one's mind fixed on that seed of *Brahman* [*om̐*].

18. With the intelligence as the driver,² one should remove the senses from the sense objects by means of the mind. If one's mind becomes disturbed by agitation, one should focus it on the desired object, Lord Kṛṣṇa, by means of the intelligence.

19. Then, one should meditate on one limb of the Lord, with uninterrupted mind. After controlling the mind and removing it from sense objects, one should not think of anything else. The mind should take pleasure there alone: the Supreme destination of Viṣṇu.

20. Normally, one's mind is harassed by *rajas* and deluded by *tamas*. A wise person should control it by concentration (*dhāraṇā*) and destroy all the impurities created by it.

21. While this concentration on the refuge [of Lord Viṣṇu] is being practiced, the symptoms of *bhakti*, devotion, appear in the *yogī*. This *yoga*, which is most auspicious [that is, *bhakti*], quickly manifests.”

Book II, Chapter 2

1. Śrī Śuka said: [...]

2. “The path of the Vedic scriptures is such that one's intelligence puzzles over the meaningless words. Wandering here and there in the world of *māyā*, illusion [in pursuance of the Vedic injunctions], one does not attain one's goals,³ just like a sleeping person [does not attain his

goals] through dreams, which are made of memory imprints.⁴

3. Therefore, a sage, who is not deluded, but whose intelligence is fixed [on the self], should accept whatever things are necessary for accomplishing this purpose and no more; one should not struggle [for anything more] than this, realizing that doing so would simply be labor [for nothing].

4. When the ground is there, what is the use of endeavoring for beds? When two arms belong to oneself by nature, what is the use of pillows? When there are two hands, what is the use of a variety of implements for food? And when nakedness or the bark of trees⁵ is available, what is the use of clothes?

5. Are there no torn clothes discarded on the road? Do the trees, who maintain others, no longer give alms? Have the rivers dried up? Are the caves closed? Does the almighty Hari not protect his devotees? Why should wise people serve those who are blinded by the pride of wealth?

6. It is the *ātman* that is the cherished goal. It is [a part of] the unlimited *Bhagavān*. It is self-manifest and perfect and lies within one's heart. This *ātman* is the goal that one should fix in mind and worship contentedly. It is in this way that the cause of *samsāra* is brought to an end.

7. Upon seeing people fallen into the *Vaitaraṇī* river [on the way to hell]⁶ and experiencing the suffering generated by their *karma*, who other than a beast would neglect contemplating on the Supreme and instead engage in immoral behavior?

8. Some people contemplate with concentration on the Supreme Being as situated in the inner space of the heart within their own bodies. The size of the span of a hand,⁷ He has four arms bearing lotus, disc, conch, and club.

9. He has a smiling face and eyes large as lotuses. His cloth is yellowish like the filament of a *kadamba* flower. He has ornaments brilliant with precious jewels and gold, and earrings and a headpiece glittering with great gems.

10. His tender budlike feet are placed by the masters of *yogis* into the receptacle of their hearts, which are like the pericarp of full-blown

lotuses. He is marked with the sign of Śrī, the Goddess of Prosperity [the *śrīvatsa*, a curl of hair on His chest]. He wears the *kaustubha* jewel around His neck, and is covered by a garland of forest flowers of unfading beauty.

11. He is adorned with a belt, and with very valuable rings, anklets, and bracelets. His beautiful smiling face is delightful with lustrous, clean, curly, bluish locks.

12. His abundant grace is evident from the play of His eyebrows and the brightness of His happy, playful, smiling eyes. The *yogī* should gaze at this mental image of *Īśvara*, which is pieced together by the mind, for as long as the mind can remain fixed in concentration.

13. With one's mind one should focus on each limb consecutively, from the feet up to the smiling face of Kṛṣṇa, the bearer of the club. As one's intelligence becomes progressively purified, one should move on from the previous lower part [of the Lord's anatomy] and fix one's mind on the next higher part.

14. Until *bhakti yoga* is awakened by this form of the universal *Īśvara*, the Supreme Seer, then one should instead contemplate the grosser form of the Supreme Person after the completion of one's daily religious practices.⁸

15. When the ascetic becomes desirous of abandoning this world, dear king, he should establish himself on a comfortable stable seat (*sthira-sukham āsanam*),⁹ and, with his breath mastered, control his *prāṇa*. His mind should not become attached to time and place.¹⁰

16. After controlling the mind by means of his pure intelligence, the *yogī* should merge it into the subtle body (*kṣetra-jñā*),¹¹ and the latter into the *ātman*. The wise person should then absorb the *ātman* into the Supreme *ātman*. Upon attaining complete peace, one should desist from all activity.

17. In that state there is no Time, which is the controller of even the celestials, what to speak of the influence of the higher gods who are controllers over the universe. Neither *sattva*, nor *rajas*, nor *tamas* exists there, nor does ego, intellect, or primordial matter.

18. The *yogīs* long for the supreme abode of Viṣṇu. Desiring to abandon all that is illusory by the process of elimination (*neti neti*¹²), they give up misidentification with the body, and embrace His adorable feet in their hearts with exclusive devotion at every moment.

19. The sage who is situated [in *Brahman*], who is vigorous, whose mind is controlled, and who has gained wisdom from the sacred texts, should leave his body in the following manner: he should block the anus with his heel, and then energetically raise the life air (*prāṇa*) up through the six locations [the *cakras*].¹³

20. He should raise the air situated in the navel [*maṇipūṛaka cakra*] to the heart [*anāhata cakra*]; from there, by means of the motion of the upward-moving (*udāna*) life air, the sage should lead it to the breast [*viśuddhi cakra*], and from there the concentrating sage should aim with his intelligence for the root of the palate and slowly lead the life air upward to that place.

21. From there, he should raise it up to between the eyebrows, indifferent [to all desires] and with all the seven outlets of the body [eyes, nostrils, ears and mouth] closed off. After holding the life air there without effort with his gaze fixed, he should eject it through the crown of the head [*sahasrāra cakra*], abandon his body, and attain the supreme.

22. But if, O king, he should wish to reach the abode of Brahmā; or, indeed, the pleasure grounds of the celestial beings who can travel through the air; or achieve the eight mystic powers over anything made of the *guṇas*, then he should retain his mind and senses [in the subtle body] so as to achieve these.

23. They say that the masters of *yoga*, who practice the cultivation of knowledge, austerities, *yoga*, *samādhi*, and devotion, and who have [subtle] bodies that [can travel] through the air, can attain destinations anywhere within or beyond the three worlds. Such destinations are not available for those who engage in *karma*, mundane ritualistic activities.¹⁴

24. Once he has passed through the pure *suṣumṇā* pathway¹⁵ leading to Brahmā's realm, he reaches the abode of Agni, the god of fire. Thereafter, when all his impurities have been cleansed, he proceeds

higher, O king, to the *śaiśumāra*, the whorl in the heavens resembling an alligator, presided over by Lord Viṣṇu.

25. Then, alone, in the pure subtle body, manifesting the *aṇimā* mystic power of becoming smaller than the smallest, the *yogī* proceeds beyond the navel of the universe of Lord Viṣṇu.¹⁶ He thereafter attains the realms adored by the knowers of *Brahman*, where the celestials who live for a *kalpa* aeon¹⁷ enjoy themselves.

26. Then, after witnessing the entire universe being consumed by the fire issuing forth from the mouth of Ananta (Śeṣa¹⁸), he emerges at Brahmā's highest abode of Satya-loka, which endures for Brahmā's entire life, a period of two *parārdhas*.¹⁹ This is the realm enjoyed by the masters of the perfected beings.

27. In that realm there is no sorrow, no old age, no disease, no death, and no afflictions. Nor are there any concerns—except sometimes the mind feels compassion from witnessing the terrible sufferings and births and deaths of those who do not know all this.

28. Then, with his mind, the *yogī* fearlessly returns [his body] to the elements: earth to water, and then, without haste, after manifesting an effulgent form, to fire. After merging this into air, in turn, by his mind, he eventually also dissolves this into ether, the great subtle covering of the *ātman*.

29. The *yogī* attains the quality [*tanmātra*] of smell by means of the nose; taste, by means of the tongue; sight, by means of the eye; touch, by means of the skin; and sound, the special quality of the sky, by means of the ear. He accomplishes this goal by manipulating the *prāṇa* life air.

30. Then he attains the *ahaṅkāra* (ego) where the senses, sense objects, mind, and their presiding deities are merged. Then, along with the *ahaṅkāra*, the *yogī* attains *buddhi* (*mahat*, intelligence), and then *prakṛti*, where the *guṇas* are quiescent.²⁰

31. Along with *prakṛti* his *ātman* finally attains the supreme soul [Viṣṇu], who is peaceful and blissful. Attaining his blissful nature in that final goal, the *yogī* enters the divine state, and is never again interested in this world, my dear king.

32. These two paths about which you inquired, O king, are eternal, and are described in the Vedas.²¹ Actually, *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva had previously spoken about them, after He had become satisfied from being worshipped by Brahmā.

33. There is no path more auspicious than this, for one who is immersed in *saṁsāra*, because by following it *bhakti yoga* for *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva is developed.

34. After applying his intelligence to studying the entire three Vedas, Lord Brahmā, the highest being, determined the means whereby love for the Supreme is attained.

35. *Bhagavān* Hari is perceived in all living beings by means of His presence as the *ātman*. There [must exist] a seer on account of the existence of [instruments of sight] such as the intelligence, etc., as well as the existence of objects of sight; it is by these characteristics that the existence of the *ātman* (the seer) can be inferred.²²

36. Therefore, O king, it is *Bhagavān*, Hari, who should be heard, recited, and remembered about by people with all their hearts, in all places and all times.

37. *Bhagavān* is the soul of the saintly persons. Those who drink the nectar of stories about Him attained through the vessels of the ears, purify the heart from the contamination of sense objects and attain His lotus feet as their destination.”

Book II, Chapter 3

1. *Śrī Śuka* said: “In this way, the question your highness posed to me has been answered on behalf of all wise people in human society who are about to die.

[...]

10. Irrespective of whether one is free of desire, full of all desires, or desirous of liberation, *mokṣa*, one should intensely worship the Supreme Person through the practice of *bhakti yoga*, if one is intelligent.

11. The attainment of the highest good, even for those who worship the

celestial beings,²³ is this: unflinching devotion to *Bhagavān*, attained from association with the devotees of *Bhagavān*.

12. Knowledge causes the whirlpool of the waves of the *guṇas* to abate. From that comes satisfaction in the self and disinterest in the *guṇas*. Thereafter comes *bhakti yoga*, which is the best path to liberation. Who, contented by the narrations of Hari, would not develop attraction for these narrations?”

13. Sage Śaunaka said: “After hearing all these teachings that had been imparted to him, what else did the foremost king of the Bharatas further inquire from the seer sage Śuka, son of Vyāsa?

14. You should kindly relate these to us, O learned Sūta, we are eager to hear. Discussions which culminate in narratives about Hari are surely most fitting in an assembly of saintly people.

15. That very Pāṇḍava king Parīkṣit, the great charioteer, [in his childhood] imitated the pastimes of Hari while he was still playing with toys.

16. Śuka, that great son of Vyāsa, was devoted exclusively to Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa]. It is certain that the enlivening qualities of Viṣṇu, whose glories are broadcast widely, would have been expressed in that gathering of saints.

17. The rising and setting of the sun in the heavens takes away the life of all men here on earth, except for that person whose every moment is spent in talking about the glorious Viṣṇu.

18. Do not the trees also live? Do not bellows breathe? Do not the other animals in the village eat and mate?

19. That person whose ears have never heard the name of Kṛṣṇa, the elder brother of Balarāma, is considered to be a beast, like the donkeys, camels, pigs, and dogs.

20. The cavities in the ears of a person who does not listen to the deeds of the glorious Viṣṇu (Urukrama), are just like empty holes, and the tongue that does not recite the verses about Viṣṇu (Urugāya) is useless, like that of a frog’s.

21. The head, even though adorned with a crown or turban, is simply a

large burden, if it does not offer obeisance to Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa]. And the hands, even though bedecked with shining golden bracelets, are like those of a corpse if they do not offer worship to Hari.

22. The eyes of men that do not gaze on the forms of Viṣṇu are like the eyes of a peacock's plumage, and the feet that do not travel to the pilgrimage places of Hari are like [the roots] of the tree species.

23. A person who does not obtain the dust from the feet of *Bhagavān* is like a corpse, even though living, and a human being who has not experienced the smell of the *tulasī* plant from the feet of Viṣṇu is likewise a corpse even though capable of smelling.

24. That heart is made of stone, which, when hearing the name of Hari, does not produce bodily transformations such as tears in the eyes and the hair standing erect on the body.

25. Speak to us, dear Sūta, it is pleasing to the mind. Śuka, son of Vyāsa, is expert in the knowledge of the *ātman* and foremost of devotees. Tell us what he related to the king, when being questioned by him in such an exemplary fashion.”

Book II, Chapter 4

1. Sūta said: “After hearing the words of Śuka, which contained clear truths about ultimate reality, Parīkṣit, son of Uttarā, fixed his undivided intelligence on Kṛṣṇa.

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•

6. THE KING SAYS.

“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 *Hiraṇyagarbha*, *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 *Hiraṇyagarbha 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