

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The History of Kāliya

This chapter describes how Kāliya left the island of the snakes and how the sleeping residents of Vṛndāvana were saved from a forest fire.

When King Parīkṣit inquired about Kāliya's leaving Ramanāka Island, the abode of the serpents, and about why Garuḍa acted inimically toward him, Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī replied as follows: All the serpents on the island were afraid of being devoured by Garuḍa. To placate him, every month they would leave various offerings for him at the foot of a banyan tree. But Kāliya, puffed-up as he was with false pride, would eat these offerings himself. Hearing of this, Garuḍa became furious and went to kill Kāliya, whereupon the snake began biting the great bird. Garuḍa fiercely beat him with his wing, sending Kāliya fleeing for his life to a lake adjoining the Yamunā River.

Prior to the above incident, Garuḍa had once come to the Yamunā and started eating some fish. Saubhari Ṛṣi had tried to stop him, but Garuḍa, agitated by hunger, had refused to heed the sage's prohibitions, and in response the sage had cursed Garuḍa that if he ever came there again he would immediately die. Kāliya had heard of this, and thus he lived there without fear. In the end, however, he was driven out by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

When Lord Balarāma and all the residents of Vṛndāvana saw Śrī Kṛṣṇa rise up out of the lake, beautifully decorated with many different gems and ornaments, they embraced Him in great pleasure. The spiritual masters, priests and learned brāhmaṇas then told Nanda Mahārāja, the king of the cowherds, that although his son had been caught in the grips of Kāliya, it was by the king's good fortune that He was now free again.

Because the people of Vṛndāvana were quite worn out by hunger, thirst and fatigue, they spent that night on the banks of the Yamunā. In the middle of the night, a fire happened to blaze up within the forest, which had become dry during the hot season. As the fire surrounded the sleeping inhabitants of Vṛndāvana, they suddenly awoke and rushed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa for protection. Then the unlimitedly powerful Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, seeing His dear relatives and friends so distressed, immediately swallowed up the terrible forest fire.

Text 1:

[Having thus heard how Lord Kṛṣṇa chastised Kāliya,] King Parīkṣit inquired: Why did Kāliya leave Ramanaka Island, the abode of the serpents, and why did Garuḍa become so antagonistic toward him alone?

Texts 2-3:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: To avoid being eaten by Garuḍa, the serpents had previously made an arrangement with him whereby they would each make a monthly offering of tribute at the base of a tree. Thus every month on schedule, O mighty-armed King Parīkṣit, each serpent would duly make his offering to that powerful carrier of Viṣṇu as a purchase of protection.

Text 4:

Although all the other serpents were dutifully making offerings to Garuḍa, one serpent — the arrogant Kāliya, son of Kadru — would eat all these offerings before Garuḍa could claim them. Thus Kāliya directly defied the carrier of Lord Viṣṇu.

Text 5:

O King, the greatly powerful Garuḍa, who is very dear to the Supreme Lord, became angry when he heard of this. Desiring to kill Kāliya, he rushed toward the serpent with tremendous speed.

Text 6:

As Garuḍa swiftly fell upon him, Kāliya, who had the weapon of poison, raised his numerous heads to counterattack. Showing his ferocious tongues and expanding his horrible eyes, Kāliya then bit Garuḍa with the weapons of his fangs.

Text 7:

The angry son of Tārṁśya moved with overwhelming speed in repelling Kāliya's attack. That terribly powerful carrier of Lord Madhusūdana struck the son of Kadru with his left wing, which shone like gold.

Text 8:

Beaten by Garuḍa's wing, Kāliya was extremely distraught, and thus he took shelter of a lake adjoining the river Yamunā. Garuḍa could not enter this lake. Indeed, he could not even approach it.

Text 9:

In that very lake Garuḍa had once desired to eat a fish — fish being, after all, his normal food. Although forbidden by the sage Saubhari, who was meditating there within the water, Garuḍa took courage and, feeling hungry, seized the fish.

Text 10:

Seeing how the unfortunate fish in that lake had become most unhappy at the death of their leader, Saubhari uttered the following curse under the impression that he was mercifully acting for the benefit of the lake's residents.

Text 11:

If Garuḍa ever again enters this lake and eats the fish here, he will immediately lose his life. What I am saying is the truth.

Text 12:

Of all the serpents, only Kāliya came to know of this affair, and in fear of Garuḍa he took up residence in that Yamunā lake. Later Lord Kṛṣṇa drove him out.

Texts 13-14:

[Resuming his description of Kṛṣṇa's chastisement of Kāliya, Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued:] Kṛṣṇa rose up out of the lake wearing divine garlands, fragrances and garments, covered with many fine jewels, and decorated with gold. When the cowherds saw Him they all stood up immediately, just like an unconscious person's senses coming back to life. Filled with great joy, they affectionately embraced Him.

Text 15:

Having regained their vital functions, Yaśodā, Rohiṇī, Nanda and all the other cowherd women and men went up to Kṛṣṇa. O descendant of Kuru, even the dried-up trees came back to life.

Text 16:

Lord Balarāma embraced His infallible brother and laughed, knowing well the extent of Kṛṣṇa's potency. Out of great feelings of love, Balarāma

lifted Kṛṣṇa up on His lap and repeatedly looked at Him. The cows, bulls and young female calves also achieved the highest pleasure.

Text 17:

All the respectable brāhmaṇas, together with their wives, came forward to greet Nanda Mahārāja. They said to him, “Your son was in the grips of Kālīya, but by the grace of Providence He is now free.”

Text 18:

The brāhmaṇas then advised Nanda Mahārāja, “To assure that your son Kṛṣṇa will always be free from danger, you should give charity to the brāhmaṇas.” With a satisfied mind, O King, Nanda Mahārāja then very gladly gave them gifts of cows and gold.

Text 19:

The greatly fortunate mother Yaśodā, having lost her son and then regained Him, placed Him on her lap. That chaste lady cried constant torrents of tears as she repeatedly embraced Him.

Text 20:

O best of kings [Parīkṣit], because the residents of Vṛndāvana were feeling very weak from hunger, thirst and fatigue, they and the cows spent the night where they were, lying down near the bank of the Kālindī.

Text 21:

During the night, while all the people of Vṛndāvana were asleep, a great fire blazed up within the dry summer forest. The fire surrounded the inhabitants of Vraja on all sides and began to scorch them.

Text 22:

Then the residents of Vṛndāvana woke up, extremely disturbed by the great fire threatening to burn them. Thus they took shelter of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord, who by His spiritual potency appeared like an ordinary human being.

Text 23:

[Vṛndāvana’s residents said:] Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, O Lord of all opulence! O Rāma, possessor of unlimited power! This most terrible fire is about to devour us, Your devotees!

Text 24:

O Lord, we are Your true friends and devotees. Please protect us from this insurmountable fire of death. We can never give up Your lotus feet, which drive away all fear.

Text 25:

Seeing His devotees so disturbed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the infinite Lord of the universe and possessor of infinite power, then swallowed the terrible forest fire.