

CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE

Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna Retrieve a Brāhmaṇa's Sons

This chapter describes how Bhṛgu Muni proved the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, and how Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna recovered the dead sons of an aggrieved brāhmaṇa in Dvārakā.

Once, long ago, on the shore of the river Sarasvatī, a discussion arose among a group of sages as to which of the three chief lords — Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Śiva — is the greatest. They deputed Bhṛgu Muni to investigate the matter.

Bhṛgu decided to test the lords' tolerance, for that quality is a sure sign of greatness. First he entered the court of Lord Brahmā, his father, without offering him any respect. This enraged Brahmā, who suppressed his anger because Bhṛgu was his son. Next Bhṛgu went to Lord Śiva, his older brother, who rose from his seat to embrace him. But Bhṛgu rejected the embrace, calling Śiva a deviant heretic. Just as Śiva was about to kill Bhṛgu with his trident, Goddess Pārvatī interceded and pacified her husband. Next Bhṛgu went to Vaikuṇṭha to test Lord Nārāyaṇa. Going up to the Lord, who was lying with His head on the lap of the goddess of fortune, Bhṛgu kicked His chest. But instead of becoming angry, both the Lord and His consort stood up and offered Bhṛgu respects. "Welcome," said the Lord. "Please sit down and rest awhile. Kindly forgive us, dear master, for not noticing your arrival." When Bhṛgu went back to the assembly of sages and told them all that had happened, they concluded that Lord Viṣṇu is certainly supreme.

Once in Dvārakā a brāhmaṇa's wife gave birth to a son who immediately died. The brāhmaṇa took his dead son to the court of King Ugrasena and berated the King: "This duplicitous, greedy enemy of brāhmaṇas has caused my son's death by failing to execute his duties properly!" The same misfortune continued to befall the brāhmaṇa, and each time he would bring his dead infant's body to the royal court and berate the King. When the ninth son died at birth, Arjuna happened to hear the brāhmaṇa's complaint, and he said, "My lord, I will protect your progeny. And if I fail, I will enter fire to atone for my sin."

Some time later, the brāhmaṇa's wife was about to give birth for the tenth time. When Arjuna learned of this, he went to the maternity house and enveloped it with a protective cage of arrows. Arjuna's efforts were to no avail, however, for as soon as the child was born and began to cry, it disappeared into the sky. As the brāhmaṇa profusely derided Arjuna, the warrior set off for the abode of Yamarāja, the king of death. But Arjuna did not find the brāhmaṇa's son there, and even after searching throughout the fourteen worlds he could find no trace of the infant.

Having failed to protect the brāhmaṇa's son, Arjuna was now intent on committing suicide by entering the sacred fire. But just as he was about to do so, Lord Kṛṣṇa stopped him and said, "I will show you the brāhmaṇa's sons, so please don't despise yourself like this." Lord Kṛṣṇa then took Arjuna onto His transcendental chariot, and the two of them crossed over the seven universal islands with their seven oceans, passed over the Lokāloka mountain range and entered the region of dense darkness. Since the horses could not find their way, Kṛṣṇa sent His blazing Sudarśana disc ahead to pierce the gloom. Gradually they came to the water of the Causal Ocean, within which they found the city of Lord Mahā-Viṣṇu. There they saw the thousand-hooded serpent Ananta and upon Him lay Mahā-Viṣṇu. The great Lord greeted Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, saying "I brought the brāhmaṇa's sons here simply because I wanted to see the two of you. Please continue to benefit the people in general by exemplifying religious behavior in your forms of Nara-Nārāyaṇa Rṣi."

Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then took the brāhmaṇa's sons, went back to Dvārakā and returned the infants to their father. Having directly experienced the greatness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna was amazed. He concluded that only by the Lord's mercy can a living being exhibit any power or opulence.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Once, O King, as a group of sages were performing a Vedic sacrifice on the banks of the Sarasvatī River, a controversy arose among them as to which of the three chief deities is supreme.

Text 2:

Eager to resolve this question, O King, the sages sent Lord Brahmā's son Bhṛgu to find the answer. First he went to his father's court.

Text 3:

To test how well Lord Brahmā was situated in the mode of goodness, Bhṛgu failed to bow down to him or glorify him with prayers. The lord became angry at him, inflamed into fury by his own passion.

Text 4:

Though anger toward his son was now rising within his heart, Lord Brahmā was able to subdue it by applying his intelligence, in the same way that fire is extinguished by its own product, water.

Text 5:

Bhṛgu then went to Mount Kailāsa. There Lord Śiva stood up and happily came forward to embrace his brother.

Texts 6-7:

But Bhṛgu refused his embrace, telling him, "You are a deviant heretic." At this Lord Śiva became angry, and his eyes burned ferociously. He raised his trident and was about to kill Bhṛgu when Goddess Devī fell at his feet and spoke some words to pacify him. Bhṛgu then left that place and went to Vaikuṇṭha, where Lord Janārdana resides.

Texts 8-9:

There he went up to the Supreme Lord, who was lying with His head on the lap of His consort, Śrī, and kicked Him on the chest. The Lord then rose, along with Goddess Lakṣmī, as a sign of respect. Coming down from His bedstead, that supreme goal of all pure devotees bowed His head to the floor before the sage and told him, 'Welcome, brāhmaṇa. Please sit in this chair and rest awhile. Kindly forgive us, dear master, for not noticing your arrival.'

Texts 10-11:

"Please purify Me, My realm and the realms of the universal rulers devoted to Me by giving us the water that has washed your feet. This holy water is indeed what makes all places of pilgrimage sacred. Today, my lord, I have become the exclusive shelter of the goddess of fortune,

Lakṣmī; she will consent to reside on My chest because your foot has rid it of sins.”

Text 12:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Bhṛgu felt satisfied and delighted to hear the solemn words spoken by Lord Vaikuṇṭha. Overwhelmed with devotional ecstasy, he remained silent, his eyes brimming with tears.

Text 13:

O King, Bhṛgu then returned to the sacrificial arena of the wise Vedic authorities and described his entire experience to them.

Texts 14-17:

Amazed upon hearing Bhṛgu’s account, the sages were freed from all doubts and became convinced that Viṣṇu is the greatest Lord. From Him come peace; fearlessness; the essential principles of religion; detachment with knowledge; the eightfold powers of mystic yoga; and His glorification, which cleanses the mind of all impurities. He is known as the supreme destination for those who are peaceful and equipoised — the selfless, wise saints who have given up all violence. His most dear form is that of pure goodness, and the brāhmaṇas are His worshipable deities. Persons of keen intellect who have attained spiritual peace worship Him without selfish motives.

Text 18:

The Lord expands into three kinds of manifest beings — the Rākṣasas, the demons and the demigods — all of whom are created by the Lord’s material energy and conditioned by her modes. But among these three modes, it is the mode of goodness which is the means of attaining life’s final success.

Text 19:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: The learned brāhmaṇas living along the river Sarasvatī came to this conclusion in order to dispel the doubts of all people. Thereafter they rendered devotional service to the Supreme Lord’s lotus feet and attained His abode.

Text 20:

Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī said: Thus did this fragrant nectar flow from the lotus mouth of Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the son of the sage Vyāsadeva. This wonderful glorification of the Supreme Person destroys all fear of material existence. A traveler who constantly drinks this nectar through his ear-holes will forget the fatigue brought on by wandering along the paths of worldly life.

Text 21:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Once, in Dvārakā, a brāhmaṇa's wife gave birth to a son, but the newborn infant died as soon as he touched the ground, O Bhārata.

Text 22:

The brāhmaṇa took the corpse and placed it at the door of King Ugrasena's court. Then, agitated and lamenting miserably, he spoke the following.

Text 23:

[The brāhmaṇa said:] This duplicitous, greedy enemy of brāhmaṇas, this unqualified ruler addicted to sense pleasure, has caused my son's death by some discrepancies in the execution of his duties.

Text 24:

Citizens serving such a wicked king, who takes pleasure in violence and cannot control his senses, are doomed to suffer poverty and constant misery.

Text 25:

The wise brāhmaṇa suffered the same tragedy with his second and third child. Each time, he left the body of his dead son at the King's door and sang the same song of lamentation.

Texts 26-27:

When the ninth child died, Arjuna, who was near Lord Keśava, happened to overhear the brāhmaṇa lamenting. Thus Arjuna addressed the brāhmaṇa: "What is the matter, my dear brāhmaṇa? Isn't there some lowly member of the royal order here who can at least stand before your house with a bow in his hand? These kṣatriyas are behaving as if they were brāhmaṇas idly engaged in fire sacrifices.

Text 28:

“The rulers of a kingdom in which brāhmaṇas lament over lost wealth, wives and children are merely imposters playing the role of kings just to earn their livelihood.

Text 29:

“My lord, I will protect the progeny of you and your wife, who are in such distress. And if I fail to keep this promise, I will enter fire to atone for my sin.”

Texts 30-31:

The brāhmaṇa said: Neither Saṅkarṣaṇa; Vāsudeva; Pradyumna, the best of bowmen; nor the unequaled warrior Aniruddha could save my sons. Then why do you naively attempt a feat that the almighty Lords of the universe could not perform? We cannot take you seriously.

Text 32:

Śrī Arjuna said: I am neither Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa, O brāhmaṇa, nor Lord Kṛṣṇa, nor even Kṛṣṇa’s son. Rather, I am Arjuna, wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow.

Text 33:

Do not minimize my ability, which was good enough to satisfy Lord Śiva, O brāhmaṇa. I will bring back your sons, dear master, even if I have to defeat Death himself in battle.

Text 34:

Thus convinced by Arjuna, O tormentor of enemies, the brāhmaṇa went home, satisfied by having heard Arjuna’s declaration of his prowess.

Text 35:

When the wife of the elevated brāhmaṇa was again about to give birth, he went to Arjuna in great anxiety and begged him, “Please, please protect my child from death!”

Text 36:

After touching pure water, offering obeisances to Lord Maheśvara and recollecting the mantras for his celestial weapons, Arjuna strung his bow Gāṇḍīva.

Text 37:

Arjuna fenced in the house where the birth was taking place by shooting arrows attached to various missiles. Thus the son of Pṛthā constructed a protective cage of arrows, covering the house upwards, downwards and sideways.

Text 38:

The brāhmaṇa's wife then gave birth, but after the newborn infant had been crying for a short time, he suddenly vanished into the sky in his selfsame body.

Text 39:

The brāhmaṇa then derided Arjuna in front of Lord Kṛṣṇa: "Just see how foolish I was to put my faith in the bragging of a eunuch!

Text 40:

"When neither Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Rāma nor Keśava can save a person, who else can possibly protect him?

Text 41:

"To hell with that liar Arjuna! To hell with that braggart's bow! He is so foolish that he has deluded himself into thinking he can bring back a person whom destiny has taken away."

Text 42:

While the wise brāhmaṇa continued to heap insults upon him, Arjuna employed a mystic incantation to go at once to Saṁyamanī, the city of heaven where Lord Yamarāja resides.

Texts 43-44:

Not seeing the brāhmaṇa's child there, Arjuna went to the cities of Indra, Agni, Nirṛti, Soma, Vāyu and Varuṇa. With weapons at the ready he searched through all the domains of the universe, from the bottom of the subterranean region to the roof of heaven. Finally, not having found the brāhmaṇa's son anywhere, Arjuna decided to enter the sacred fire, having

failed to keep his promise. But just as he was about to do so, Lord Kṛṣṇa stopped him and spoke the following words.

Text 45:

[Lord Kṛṣṇa said:] I will show you the brāhmaṇa's sons, so please don't despise yourself like this. These same men who now criticize us will soon establish our spotless fame.

Text 46:

Having thus advised Arjuna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead had Arjuna join Him on His divine chariot, and together they set off toward the west.

Text 47:

The Lord's chariot passed over the seven islands of the middle universe, each with its ocean and its seven principal mountains. Then it crossed the Lokāloka boundary and entered the vast region of total darkness.

Texts 48-49:

In that darkness the chariot's horses — Śaibya, Sugrīva, Meghapuṣpa and Balāhaka — lost their way. Seeing them in this condition, O best of the Bhāratas, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the supreme master of all masters of yoga, sent His Sudarśana disc before the chariot. That disc shone like thousands of suns.

Text 50:

The Lord's Sudarśana disc penetrated the darkness with its blazing effulgence. Racing forward with the speed of the mind, it cut through the fearsome, dense oblivion expanded from primeval matter, as an arrow shot from Lord Rāma's bow cuts through His enemy's army.

Text 51:

Following the Sudarśana disc, the chariot went beyond the darkness and reached the endless spiritual light of the all pervasive brahmajyoti. As Arjuna beheld this glaring effulgence, his eyes hurt, and so he shut them.

Text 52:

From that region they entered a body of water resplendent with huge waves being churned by a mighty wind. Within that ocean Arjuna saw an

amazing palace more radiant than anything he had ever seen before. Its beauty was enhanced by thousands of ornamental pillars bedecked with brilliant gems.

Text 53:

In that palace was the huge, awe-inspiring serpent Ananta Śeṣa. He shone brilliantly with the radiance emanating from the gems on His thousands of hoods and reflecting from twice as many fearsome eyes. He resembled white Mount Kailāsa, and His necks and tongues were dark blue.

Texts 54-56:

Arjuna then saw the omnipresent and omnipotent Supreme Personality of Godhead, Mahā-Viṣṇu, sitting at ease on the serpent bed. His bluish complexion was the color of a dense rain cloud, He wore a beautiful yellow garment, His face looked charming, His broad eyes were most attractive, and He had eight long, handsome arms. His profuse locks of hair were bathed on all sides in the brilliance reflected from the clusters of precious jewels decorating His crown and earrings. He wore the Kaustubha gem, the mark of Śrīvatsa and a garland of forest flowers. Serving that topmost of all Lords were His personal attendants, headed by Sunanda and Nanda; His cakra and other weapons in their personified forms; His consort potencies Puṣṭi, Śrī, Kīrti and Ajā; and all His various mystic powers.

Text 57:

Lord Kṛṣṇa offered homage to Himself in this boundless form, and Arjuna, astonished at the sight of Lord Mahā-Viṣṇu, bowed down as well. Then, as the two of them stood before Him with joined palms, the almighty Mahā-Viṣṇu, supreme master of all rulers of the universe, smiled and spoke to them in a voice full of solemn authority.

Text 58:

[Lord Mahā-Viṣṇu said:] I brought the brāhmaṇa's sons here because I wanted to see the two of you, My expansions, who have descended to the earth to save the principles of religion. As soon as you finish killing the demons who burden the earth, quickly come back here to Me.

Text 59:

Although all your desires are completely fulfilled, O best of exalted personalities, for the benefit of the people in general you should continue to exemplify religious behavior as the sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa.

Texts 60-61:

Thus instructed by the Supreme Lord of the topmost planet, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna assented by chanting om, and then they bowed down to almighty Lord Mahā-Viṣṇu. Taking the brāhmaṇa's sons with them, they returned with great delight to Dvārakā by the same path along which they had come. There they presented the brāhmaṇa with his sons, who were in the same infant bodies in which they had been lost.

Text 62:

Having seen the domain of Lord Viṣṇu, Arjuna was totally amazed. He concluded that whatever extraordinary power a person exhibits can only be a manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's mercy.

Text 63:

Lord Kṛṣṇa exhibited many other, similar heroic pastimes in this world. He apparently enjoyed the pleasures of ordinary human life, and He performed greatly potent fire sacrifices.

Text 64:

The Lord having demonstrated His supremacy, at suitable times He showered down all desirable things upon the brāhmaṇas and His other subjects, just as Indra pours down his rain.

Text 65:

Now that He had killed many wicked kings and engaged devotees such as Arjuna in killing others, the Lord could easily assure the execution of religious principles through the agency of such pious rulers as Yudhiṣṭhira.