# Layer 3: Safeguards for a Spiritual Aspirants

Here we will study the most important layer – the safeguards for spiritual aspirants.

## Tataka

The Tataka story is Shri Ram’s very first fight against demons. At the time in the story, Shri Ram is a young boy. He had no experience of any battle, let alone of fighting with a demon. King Dasharatha pleads with sage Vishwamitra not to seek Shri Ram’s help in warding off demons. However, sage Vishwamitra insists on taking Shri Ram’s protection.

Sage Vishwamitra leads Shri Ram directly to a dense jungle, where Tataka, a powerful and cruel female demon, lives. A fight between Tataka and Shri Ram is a challenge and a test for Shri Ram. If Shri Ram passes the test, Vishwamitra will give him powerful weapons.

Just as demon Ravana represents our Ahamkara, the demon Tataka must represent something within us. The clue about demon Tataka’s nature, regarding our body, comes from a story related to the jungle in which she lives.

**Indra had once washed away his bad habits of uncleanliness and excessive eating in that area, resulting in that part of the land becoming polluted.** Therefore, in verse 1-24-22, Indra blesses that area with an abundance of resources, plants, and animals. However, it remained uninhabited by humans for a long time, and thus turned into a dense forest. Hence, we read in the verses 1-24-12 through 1-24-15 that the forest is atypical, horrendous, and impenetrable.

**Indra stands for “indriya,” which means “sense organs.” Uncleanliness and excessive eating are body-related bad habits; a healthy person stays away from them**. The description of the jungle is sage Valmiki’s way of describing the effect of bad habits of uncleanliness and overeating or people having these bad habits. Thus, sage Valmiki is suggesting that a spiritual aspirant needs to control excessive eating, and must maintain hygiene of body.

**It is the first challenge and the test for a Yogi. If a person meets these conditions, then further possibilities of his spiritual progress will open up.** Many Yoga books document Yoga’s insistence on hygiene. Physical cleanliness is the first step of Yoga. In addition, all Yoga books advise that a spiritual aspirant should limit food intake and avoid overindulgence in eating.

## Vishwamitra

There are two entirely distinct personalities of sage Vishwamitra. The first one is of a king. The second is that of a highest-level sage or a brahma-rishi. Of these two personalities, only the first one applies to us as a warning sign.

In his first personality, he is a loving king, and a mighty warrior. He rules a prosperous kingdom; yet, he is not satisfied. He creates an even bigger army than before and marches it all around the earth, trying to be the most powerful king.

On his march, he comes to the hermitage of sage Vashistha, who offers sufficient food for his entire army. Vishwamitra comes to know that the secret of sage Vashistha’s generosity is a cow named Shabala. According to verse 1-52-20, this cow is Kamadhenu, means she can fulfill any wish of her master. Vishwamitra becomes greedy and tries to take control of the Kamadhenu cow by barter. When all attempts fail, he declares war on sage Vashistha. The cow produces an even bigger army for sage Vashistha, which then annihilates the army of Vishwamitra. Sage Vashistha renders the rest of the army of king Vishwamitra to ashes just by the sound "hum." Vishwamitra loses his sons and the entire force. He feels disgraced and distressed. After a humiliating defeat, Vishwamitra realizes that sage Vashistha is superior to him. Vishwamitra plans to beat sage Vashistha at his own game - the power of Energy.

Vishwamitra gives up his kingdom, becomes a sage, and prays to Shiva for an extended time. Shiva, who is also the god of warfare, gives him many powerful weapons. Now, Vishwamitra is ready to take his revenge; he fires all the weapons on sage Vashistha right away. When those weapons do not work on sage Vashistha, he goes back to praying to gain more weapons.

After that event, we read the story of Trishanku, who wants to go to the heaven in his human body and Vishwamitra helped him. Even in this story, we see that Vishwamitra is angry and an egoistic sage. Trishanku’s quest fails and Vishwamitra goes back to praying to get more powers. Lord Brahma tells Vishwamitra to control his senses better, if he wants to call himself a highest-level sage. It takes long and hard prayers for him to establish control over his senses, but when he does this, he becomes a highest-level sage, a Bramha-rishi.

We can relate to the story of the first personality of Vishwamitra. It is a classic example of praying to God for benefits. As the story suggests, our desire to get more and more in life is the real driver behind all our activities. Even when we change the **paradigm**, **similar to Vishwamitra, this drive does not stop.** Earlier Vishwamitra was a king, waging wars for expanding the kingdom, and he tried to take Kamadhenu by force. **He gave up the kingdom to become a sage, but his anger, ego, and jealousy remained the same as before.** Previously, he was running toward, say, the north. Realizing that the south is even more powerful, he started running toward the south. **He changed the direction, but inside, he and his running continued to be the same.**

**This story is an important warning sign, and sage Valmiki posts it at the very beginning of the road. He makes us aware of the danger that a change of direction or paradigm does not lead us anywhere.** Countless people have made this mistake and taken the wrong turn on this slippery road. Unable to control their senses, they gave up the household life and took up a solitary life. That did not help them. Similar to Vishwamitra, their ego, anger, and senses went with them in their solitary life. Previously, it was easy for them to see their faults. In the solitary life, no one challenges them. **Therefore, sage Valmiki suggests we need to change ourselves. The genuine change needs to happen inside of us. A change of physical location or directions is irrelevant.**

## Trishanku

The story of Trishanku is yet another warning sign that comes right after Shri Ram’s journey begins. We saw the king Vishwamitra’s story as a warning; Trishanku’s story is a continuation of the same warning.

We identify ourselves with our body. Our body represents our identity. Associating ourselves with the body means making efforts to satisfy its desires for hunger, sleep, and other things. There is nothing wrong with having desires, and we see in Ramayana that great sages are married and engage in everyday activities.

The problem comes when the Ahamkara, the sense of I that separates us from the others, drives our actions with greed and hatred. In the story of Trishanku, he wants to go to the heaven with his body, which means his sense of identity. His problem is that he is greedy; he wants to keep his bodily identity, attachments, and desires as-is and go to the heaven at the same time.

As per sage Valmiki, for anyone to go to the heaven, he or she must meet one of the two conditions. The first condition is the person must give up bodily attachments and the ego. The second condition is this person must have a lot of accumulated Energy. If a person cannot meet these conditions, death is the only option for him. Many characters, like king Dasharatha, went to the heaven only after their death. However, Trishanku is not ready to meet the conditions. He is smart, but lazy to do his hard work for going to the heaven. So, he figures out an easy way to achieve his desires. He asks sage Vashistha and his sons for help, but that does not work, and he ends up with a deformed body.

Trishanku – a former king – knows that sage Vishwamitra considers sage Vashistha as an archenemy and uses this animosity of Vishwamitra to his advantage. He butters up Vishwamitra, who is full of pride, anger, and arrogance, and convinces him to send him to the heaven by giving him Energy. Vishwamitra has great powers, but he has not yet crossed the ultimate stage of becoming a Bramha-rishi. At this point of time, Vishwamitra is just an arrogant and prideful person with an exorbitant amount of Energy accumulated from doing long austerities. Trishanku is getting a free ride from Vishwamitra by using the accumulated Energy of Vishwamitra to go to the heaven with his body.

However, going to the heaven with the body is not allowed. Hence, Indra, the ruler of heaven, blocks Trishanku’s upward path. If we replace Indra with Indriya, meaning sense organs, we see that Trishanku’s senses and desires block his path. Thus, he is badly stuck in the middle. Neither can he go to the heaven with his body, nor can he come back on the earth, as Vishwamitra will not allow that to happen. The only way out for him is to give up his identity and desires. Then, he is free to go up to heaven.

Note the meaning of the name Trishanku. “Tri” means “three” and “shanku” probably means “hanging from.” Therefore, his name translates into “hanging from three worlds.” The story shows him hanging between two worlds – the earth and the heaven. That means that his name should have been Dwishanku – “hanging from two worlds.” So, what is the third world sage Valmiki might refer to?

We know that all the worlds are within us, so we need to search deeper within ourselves. Let us not think of Trishanku as someone outside our body, as he too represents us. Our imagination of the heaven makes us greedy, and we too would like to go to the heaven as-is. In sage Valmiki’s world, the heaven is a temporary state of Consciousness, which is relatively higher than our normal state. This state is not to be confused with the highest state of Consciousness, which is termed as Brahma-Loka or Lord Brahma’s abode.

Indra is the ruler of this temporary state (that is, the heaven), in which all needs, wishes, and desires are fulfilled instantaneously. The existence of desires, their satisfaction, and the connection to senses represent that the heaven is an intermediate state. People believe if a person does many good deeds in his lifetime, then he goes to the heaven after death and enjoys the fruits of his actions for some time. Once the power of his accumulated good deeds is over, he comes back to the earth and begins a new cycle of birth.

Going to the heaven requires a substantial amount of Energy. We do not have it, and will not make the efforts to get it. If we were to make efforts to get Energy, we would lose our false identity or the Ahamkara in the process. The simple way out is to get help from an external source – a person who has the gained Energy and is ready to give it to us. If someone transfers such an enormous amount of Energy to us, it would easily rise to the top of the crown of our head, and then, we can be in a higher state for some time.

Note that the Energy transfer from the other person has to occur at the base of the spine, the Muladhara Chakra. The additional Energy from the outside merges with our Energy at the Muladhara Chakra and collectively both energies try to rise above as one. Vishwamitra is the example of an external person who is transferring his Energy to Trishanku/us. As per the laws of Energy, this is a valid transfer. However, it may not work if Trishanku/we are not ready. Our mind is stuck in desires or senses; we cannot drop our Ahamkara and do not let ourselves go. In the final countdown, the desire of senses wins over the force of Energy that is helping us to move higher. The Energy cannot travel upwards because the Nadi(s) are blocked because of desires. The result is that the Energy cannot complete its work and thus runs havoc in the body and the mind.

We wondered what the three worlds mentioned in Trishanku’s name were and saw that he could not gain access to the temporary higher state. Because of the Energy’s abnormal patterns in Trishanku’s body, he is in tremendous pain. In addition, his mind is going crazy, so much so, that he is close to madness. The body, the mind, and the temporary higher state are the three worlds his name refers to. If he does not achieve the aim of being in a higher state of Consciousness, he/we lose the body and the mind too. In such a case, the Energy may run downwards from the base of the spine toward the legs, which causes pains in the legs. A documented result of this half-hearted attempt to raise the Energy to the crown is severe pain in the legs.

The only way out from this torturous condition is to sever our ties with the desires that bind us. Once we let go of desires, the blockages in the Nadi(s) open up automatically, and the Energy can go upwards. **Trishanku’s story is a warning sign for both the disciple and his guru not to seek or initiate Energy transfer casually. When the disciple is ready to let go of his desires, the Ahamkara, and the bodily attachments, only then the guru should initiate Energy transfer.**

## Unnamed Sages, who Direct Shri Ram into Dense Jungle

**In verse 2-116-13, the unnamed sages tell Shri Ram, since the time he came to this side of the jungle, the demons have been ill treating them.** In verses 2-116-10 through 19, we read that even demon Khara has started to trouble sages, which shows that earlier Khara was not a troublemaker.

These verses show the correlation between Shri Ram's coming to Mt. Chitrakuta and the demons starting to trouble the unnamed sages. **This correlation, as seen by the unnamed sages, irrespective of its correctness, puts the responsibility to protect them on Shri Ram's shoulders**.

The unnamed ascetics and sages are part of our Body-Mind processes, but they seem to play a small part. They refer to our wishes, intentions, and attempts to walk the path of spirituality, to do well, or to search for God. The demons, that trouble them, represent our limitations or desires related to our Ahamkara. Thus, these sages need and deserve protection from Shri Ram/the Consciousness, because only the Consciousness can keep the Ahamkara in check.

In verse 2-119-20 and many other verses, we read that the unnamed sages direct Shri Ram southward, deeper in the jungle, which leads Shri Ram straight into demon Viradha's cruel hands.

Shri Ram's entry into the jungle was not his choice; it was his father's wish and order. When he entered the jungle, the demons felt threatened by his mere presence and started the trouble. Thus, to put out the fire started by the demons and to protect the sages, Shri Ram enters deeper into the jungle.

The question, which naturally comes to the mind is why the demons start troubling the ascetics and sages suddenly? Sage Valmiki does not offer the demon side of view related to this question in Ramayana, as he sees no need for it. **However, we are egoistic people, so we are much closer to the demon side, which helps us to understand the demon side of view.**

Before this point in the story, Ahamkara has driven our body and mind almost to the level of insanity. The higher Consciousness we occasionally get from doing Yoga, brings calming sensations to the over-agitated body-mind and thus brings some sense of sanity. **Precisely because of the newly arrived sanity, the level of pre-existing insanity comes to our attention.**

Many people get demoralized after seeing that they are almost no control over their desires related to Ahamkara. Think of it in this way - when someone is insane, the person is not even aware that he is insane. **Only when some sense of sanity is present does the person realize his insanity. Sage Valmiki suggests not to be afraid of this insanity, and to seek protection from the higher Consciousness.** When such insanity is exposed, it becomes the job of the Consciousness to take action to fix the problem.

## Viradha

To understand demon Viradha, we need to read his story in the middle and then read it from start to end. Somewhere in the middle of two chapters devoted to Viradha, we get a small one-liner that explains his character.

Viradha was a nice guy before he became a demon. He used to work for Kuber, the god of wealth, and we can guess that he had a great life going on for him. He was obsessed to a beautiful girl called Rambha, but there is no mention that Rambha was interested in him. It looks like a one-sided affair, and probably he spent his time daydreaming about being with Rambha.

So far, everything was okay, and no one seemed to have any problem with Viradha or his crush on Rambha. However, things changed drastically when he failed to do his duty, probably unintentionally. **The story mentions one-line – while thinking about Rambha, he failed to perform his duty.** It does not give any details about his duty or how he failed to do it or how often it happened.

**Dereliction of duty is a terrible sin in sage Valmiki's world.** Thus, Kuber cursed Viradha to be reborn as a terrible demon. **Looking at this from the opposite side, we can say a person with an intense obsession becomes a demon himself.**

Viradha has a boon that no weapon can kill him and that only Shri Ram can kill him. By now, we know these strange boons hide a reality. We will see it shortly.

When Viradha sees Sita in the jungle, he throws a cheesy line at her and calls her as "the woman with the best waist”. He is attracted to her and right away declares that he wants to marry her. After finding out that Sita would not marry him willingly, he abducts her. This abduction does not surprise us, as we know his character.

When Viradha fights with Shri Ram, he cannot recognize him. He picks Shri Ram and Laxmana up and carries them deep in the jungle; note that Shri Ram intentionally let him do that.

Finally, Shri Ram and Laxmana cut off his hands. Realizing that Viradha will not die from a weapon, they dig a pit and drop Viradha into the pit. Only when Viradha is in the pit does he realize the actual identity of Shri Ram. He then advises Shri Ram to go southwards to the hermitage of sage Sharabhanga.

**In terms of our Body-Mind processes, we can easily identify the Viradha-like tendencies to be the sex obsession in our mind. With Viradha's boon that he will not die from a weapon, sage Valmiki suggests that the force does not work on sex obsession.** Modern psychology has already taught us that suppression of sexual desires by force only reinforces them and strengthens them.

**Sage Valmiki's suggestion is that we must not deny their existence and should not fight them by using force. The best way to deal with them is not to act on these obsessions and not give any attention to them.** Sage Valmiki makes this suggestion by showing Shri Ram and Laxmana as cutting off both hands of Viradha, and burying him in a pit, thus removing him from sight.

The worst thing, which can happen to the spiritual aspirant, is Viradha-like tendencies not being removed properly, which allows them to hide safely for a long time. It means that eventually (probably later in a person’s life), this obsession will show up again. The person might be much older and may not have a physical strength to act upon this type of desires to satisfy him. Without the strength of body, there is no way to satisfy the sexual desires, and a person remains obsessed with them forever.

## Kabandha

In verses 3-69-15 through 17, we read that demon Ayomukhi attacks Laxmana and Laxmana cuts off her nose and ears. This story reminds us of demon Shurpanakha, and thus, we can call it a duplication of the Shurpanakha episode.

In verse 3-36-29, a big demon, Kabandha, who is the brother of demon Ayomukhi, appears in front of Shri Ram and Laxmana. He has no neck or head, and his mouth is on his chest. He has only one blazing red eye above his mouth. He has two arms that stretch very long. He grabs anything that has life and hauls it into his mouth.

Kabandha grabs Shri Ram and Laxmana, which is a duplication of Viradha grabbing them. In verse 3-70-8, we read that Shri Ram and Laxmana cutoff Kabandha's hands, just as in the Viradha story. Like Viradha’s story, there is an interesting story of why Kabandha became a demon, and it explains his character.

Originally, Kabandha was in the heaven and had the boon of a long life from Lord Brahma. Since he had the boon of a long life, he thought Indra could not harm him. Therefore, verse 3-71-8, 9 tells us he got into a fight with Indra, possibly for the throne of heaven. That, however, turned out to be a miscalculation and Indra struck Kabandha with a thunderbolt, making Kabandha disfigured and a demon.

The full description of greedy Kabandha comes from sage Valmiki’s portrayal of him. Using root “bandh” which means, “limits” his name sounds like "one who recognizes no limits." **Kabandha is a personification of greed itself. He has arms that stretch very long, and he uses them only to collect food. He has no head or neck, but an enormous stomach, which can gobble up almost anything. With his one infernal, red eye, Kabandha sees nothing except his object of desire, food. One eye represents the imbalanced outlook of a greedy person, who sees only what interests him.**

The story tells us that Shri Ram and Laxmana cutoff Kabandha’s hand, following which Kabandha asks Shri Ram to incinerate him. Sage Valmiki’s prescription for greed is not only to act on it but also to remove it firmly, leaving no trace of it.