

The child king: a story of wealth, abundance and the pursuit of spirit

Retold by Atma (*from the Bhagavat Purana*)

A very long time ago...

Dew-like beads of perspiration faintly traced the outline of his perfectly formed five-year-old lips. It would startle anyone, to see such a young and beautiful little boy, standing so still, on one leg, palms pressed in front of his heart. He was the emblem of a perfect yogi. After five months practicing yoga on the banks of the sacred Yamuna river, Young Dhruva was about to upset the balance of the whole universe.

To understand this situation, we will have to back up to earlier in the story. Along the way the purpose of this article will also be served. The question central to story and essay is, "What position does yoga philosophy take on the subject of material wealth? What is the modern yogi's approach to abundance?" The answer is complex but cool.

Dhruva Maharaja's extraordinary experiences are recounted in the Fourth Canto of the well known Sanskrit text, *Bhagavata Purana*.ⁱ The events described take place in an age long before our own, when the universe was much younger, in a time when the entire world was controlled by a single King.

The pain of betrayal

The King had two wives and two sons, Dhruva and Uttama. One day Dhruva's younger brother Uttama was resting on the King's lap. Little Dhruva also wanted to climb onto the King's lap. Observing this scene was Uttama's mother, the King's favored wife. Not wanting to displease her, the King did not allow young Dhruva to get up onto his lap. Frustrated, Dhruva looked to his step-mom for help. Instead, she icily explained, "You are not allowed upon the throne."

Dhruva's face flushed knowing his heart was about to be destroyed. The queen continued, "To sit on the King's lap you would have to be born from me, but you were not. Only by performing extreme austerities and pleasing God could you be born from me." In a last, haughty twist of her verbal sword she said, "Perhaps in your next life."

Dhruva's five year old body felt as though it had been dipped in boiling oil. His breathing heavy, his face burning with anger, he looked back to his father, the King for support. The King looked away; uncomfortably silent.

This was too much for young Dhruva to bear. He ran from the palace to his mother. When she saw her child's tears and heard what had happened she felt the totality of her ability to be a mother crumble beneath her.

Speaking in self-reproaching words, through tears heated by her feelings of helplessness, Dhruva's mother said, "My darling son, what your step-mother has said is true. Because I am not favored as she, we have been put in this position." Pausing for a moment, Dhruva's momⁱⁱ turned inward. Reflecting on the essence of virtue, she began to speak in more assuring tones, "Do not desire ill to anyone. Your step

mother's words are a hidden blessing. Only the dedicated pursuit of yoga, with complete surrender to the lotus feet of the divine,ⁱⁱⁱ will bring you your heart's ambition."

Dhruva listened intently, his heart still burning with pride-fueled desire. Although he was only five, he had the spirit of a prince and a warrior. His mother went on to explain the essence of yoga to him. She said, "Ambitious persons with many material obligations can make spiritual progress by dedicating all their activities to the original Divine Person. For those unable to perform lifetimes of karmic rituals, or complete complicated philosophical studies, or live as a renunciate, this path of surrender is ideal."^{iv} Caressing his face, she took him into her arms and said, "You have my blessing to go and find your way spiritually. I know you are not an ordinary child, and that your destiny is for a greatness unimaginable to any of us." Then, she watched her beautiful child turn, and with a dedication known to few grown men, walk out the door.

The Guru appears

Soon after, one of the most famous yogis of all time intercepted young Dhruva as he walked into the woods. Narada Muni was so advanced spiritually that he could travel where he wanted, through any dimension. Due to his mystic power he knew what lay ahead for Dhruva.

At first Narada Muni tried to discourage Dhruva from travelling alone into the woods. But, the young boy adamantly stated his material ambition to the sage, "I wish to obtain a position greater than has ever been achieved in the history of mankind."

When Narada Muni was certain the boy could not be dissuaded he told him how to obtain his goals, saying, "You should go the banks of the river Yamuna. You should bathe three times daily in those sacred waters. You must practice the three-part pranayama. This will prepare your mind and allow you to meditate on the Guru within the heart. "

Narada Muni then described the Guru in the heart as the original Divine Being. He gave a detailed account of his stunning beauty, with skin the color of a dark rain cloud, and a smile so beautiful it made whoever saw it feel as if their heart would burst with longing.

To help him meditate on the divine form Narada Muni gave Dhruva initiation in the mystical twelve syllable mantra: *Om-Namo-Bhagavate-Vasudevaya*. He also told the boy to institute the simplest Deity worship that circumstance would allow. In addition he should meditate internally on all the known incarnations of the lord. He finished by telling young Dhruva, "In this way you must focus your mind intensely on the Divine as a person, and as energy. Meditate on His many activities and His names. Remain steady and fixed in practice and all your desires will be fulfilled."

Falling flat, Dhruva offered his respects. He then set off for the banks of the Yamuna River.



The young yogi's practice

The first month of his practice he ate only fruits and berries every third day. In the second month he ate dry leaves and grass once every six days. In the third month he would take a drink of water every nine days.

In the fourth month Dhruva mastered the practice of pranayama. He would inhale once every twelve days. He was able to live only on air. His mind had become intractably focused on the divine.

By the fifth month, the King's little boy, was able to stand continuously on one leg, perfectly motionless, with his mind absorbed in pure spirit (*brahma*) and its form (*bhagavato rupam.*) In this way Dhruva captured within his heart, the ultimate master of all living beings, and the source of pure spirit.^v

It was at this point that the intensity of Dhruva's practice began to affect the entire universe. Standing on one foot, the pressure of his big toe was beginning to push the earth out of its orbit. Because he had completely stopped breathing, the entire universe, which now resonated in perfect harmony with Dhruva's heart, began to suffocate.

In great desperation all the advanced yogis and demi-gods went to plead with Hari, the Lord of the universe. "Please save us, we do not understand how the very air is being removed from all dimensions of existence."

Lord Hari said to them, "Do not be afraid, this is due to the yoga practice of young Dhruva. He is so fully absorbed in thoughts of Me he is choking the universal prana. I will go myself and put a stop to this danger."

Material wealth and regret

As the demi-gods and hyper-dimensional beings returned to their respective homes, Dhruva was deep in the yogic trance known as samadhi. Oblivious to the influence of time and space, Dhruva was seeing with his inner vision the perfect form of the absolute truth. The more he focused his attention on the features of the divine the more rapt grew his ecstasy.

Suddenly, the form of the lord upon which Dhruva was meditating disappeared from his vision. Deeply disturbed, his trance broken, he opened his eyes. Standing before him was the Lord himself, just as he had been seeing him in his heart.

Overwhelmed with love for the original divine person, Dhruva fell at his feet. His five year old body was shaking with joy, and tears seemed to pulsate and pour out his eyes, his arms wrapped around the Lord's ankles and he pressed and rubbed his forehead against the Lord's feet. He felt as if his heart was breaking and floating in honey at the same time. He understood, with startling intimacy, how one God could have unlimited manifestations, both personal and impersonal.

Filled with mystic fluency Dhruva began to speak, “My dear Bhagavan, I realize now that loving you is both the journey and the destination. I am ashamed that instead of seeking you selflessly, I came to you seeking material wealth and influence. Now my ambitions appear empty and hollow.”

Feeling guilty Dhruva spoke very submissively, “ You are Vishnu, the maintainer of all life. You are the original divine soul. Please bless me to be with, and to become, one of those saintly people who have no interest in wealth, fancy homes, a beautiful wife, and influential friends. I no longer aspire to the position of power I previously sought.”

Smiling with a sparkling compassion, the Original Soul of Souls, lovingly spoke to Dhruva, “My dear son of the King, your efforts and behavior are not unnoticed by me. Nor are the desires of your heart. Although they are not easily obtained, I will fulfill all your wishes. In this life you will become the ruler of this world, you will forever be known as Dhruva Maharaja (the great King Dhruva.) After your time on earth I will award you a planet and position more exalted than has ever been attained, you will live eternally in pure consciousness of me.”

Then, speaking to Dhruva’s feelings of material guilt, He said, “Dedicate all your campaigns to Me, perform charity and work for the welfare of humanity. Thinking of Me with the longing of a lost love, you can then accept the blessings of material life. Upon reaching the end of life you will certainly remember Me, and return to Me.”

Dhruva again fell to the ground offering his respects. He then made his way home, where he was received with great pomp and circumstance. His father, the King, was overjoyed to see him, and felt deeply chastened by the ordeal. He could see that Dhruva had been extraordinarily elevated by his time in the woods. Shortly after that, with the support of his staff and the public, he turned over control of his Kingdom to his son, Dhruva Maharaja. Dhruva ruled for many years and in the end he was transferred to a spiritual sphere, where continues to live and have adventures to this day.

The modern yogi’s path

Although these events took place in time when mystic yogis still existed on the planet, Dhruva Maharaja’s life story illustrates the path suggested to yogis living in our time.

The old-school-mystic yoga path requires, among other things, total renunciation (*vairagya* in Sanskrit.) The modern yogi is encouraged to renounce by using everything in service of the Divine. This dovetailing or engaging everything you have (time, talent, money, etc...) is called *yukta* in Sanskrit. So the modern yogi’s rallying cry is *yukta vairagya*: use everything in service of spirit.

If, powerful material desires exist in the heart, they can be used to fuel the spiritual journey. The great danger for the modern yogi, is getting lost in personal sense gratification. The solution is to simplify one’s lifestyle to the furthest extent possible.

In the beginning Dhruva Maharaja gave up everything in pursuit of his spiritual mission. That might be a bit extreme for most people. Four-hundred-and-fifty years ago, the Bhakti yoga scholar Jiva Goswami gave the formula for the ideal modern yogi: 50/25/25. The idea was, “Simplify your life so that you can use fifty percent of your income for charity and good works; live on twenty-five percent, and the rest

should be invested for retirement and future care of family.” While this would be a challenge for most, it is not unheard of here in America. In December 2007, People Magazine highlighted a number of people who were living the fifty percent rule

Yoga’s vast philosophy has many things to say about conscious finance and abundance. This complexity is useful because different times and circumstances require shifting perspectives. Yoga’s suggestion for our time is appropriately described in the history of Dhruva Maharaja. The issue is not, how much wealth you have, or how much you should earn, but whether you will be defined by your assets, or your actions.

Yoga’s prescription for modern times is, “Live simply, earn as much as you want, but use everything to honor and connect to the Divine.” Yoga, without ascribing to any particular belief, suggests, “What is the least you can need, so you can do the most for others? What are you willing to sacrifice?” Interestingly, the word yoga is synonymous with the word sacrifice (*yagy* in Sanskrit) which does not mean performing painful austerities. It means making everything sacred. This is the actual origin of the word (*Latin=sacrificium; from sacer or holy + fic, from facere to make.*) One of the many lessons the modern yogi can take from the child king and original modern yogi, Dhruva Maharaja, is to make life a sacred adventure.

ⁱ The Bhagavata Purana (also known as Srimad Bhagavatam) is one of the eighteen principal puranas (or histories) of Vedic knowledge. Many yogis feel that of the eighteen the Bhagavata Purana is the most important.

ⁱⁱ Dhruva's mothers name was Suniti which means virtue - she was in fact the personification of that quality

ⁱⁱⁱ The word Suniti uses here is *Purusham* - which means, God in the form of the original soul

^{iv} Here Suniti refers to the three paths of liberation described in the Vedas - Karma Kandha: the path of moral behavior and ritualistic activities. Jnana Kandha: the path of austere life and the philosophical study of the Sanskrit texts, and Yoga which is divided into two main paths: the path of mystic renunciation (ashtanga/raja, dhyana...) and the path of loving surrender (karma, bhuddhi, Bhakti...)

^v The direct Sanskrit here is: *pradhana-purusa-isvara dharayamanasya* - literally: having taken into his heart the ultimate controller of all living beings S.B. 4.8.78