

Ganesha Purana – Upasana Khanda

by

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Obeisances unto the Glorious Lord Ganesha

Chapters 1 - 5

Chapter 1

King Somakanta

The Sages said, “O very wise guru, you are the most qualified teacher we have found. You are omniscient and of perfect character. You have appeared because of the pious deeds we have performed in this and previous lives. Our life in this world is now very auspicious, and we, as well as our ancestors and hermitages are truly blessed. O best of the Brahmins, we have heard the eighteen Puranas at length and now would like to hear the others as well. For twelve years we have engaged in Saunaka Rsi’s great sacrifice, and our only reason for stopping is to drink the ambrosia of your tale”.

Suta Gosvami said, “O illustrious sages, your questions are very suitable. The inquiries of those who are virtuous and peaceful are beneficial to all living beings. O Brahmins, I also feel happiness when reciting these transcendental stories, especially in the association of virtuous transcendentalists such as yourselves. In any case, there are also eighteen minor Puranas such as the Ganesha, Narada, Nrsimha, etc. I am going to first recite the Ganesha Purana, which is rarely heard in this mortal world. Simply by hearing it, a person will have all his desires fulfilled. Neither Brahma nor Sesa can completely describe its glories, but with your permission, I will recite it in summary. Those who have performed pious activities over many lifetimes are qualified to hear it. Those defiant

souls, atheists and demons have no desire to hear it. Since Ganesha is eternal, without material qualities and has no beginning, no one seeks to describe his real appearance. However, those who are devoted and worship him can explain his appearance, which is fully transcendental. The blessed Lord Ganesha has the form of OM and he is situated as the first syllable of the Vedas. The great sages and demigods, led by Indra, always remember him in their hearts. Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Indra continually worship him as the cause of creation and cause of all causes. At Ganesha's command, Lord Brahma creates the universe. At Ganesha's command, Lord Vishnu maintains the universe. At Ganesha's command, Lord Shiva destroys the universe. At Ganesha's command, the Sun, as the lord of daylight, moves throughout the universe. At Ganesha's command, Vayu directs the wind. At Ganesha's command, Varuna causes the waters to flow in all directions. At Ganesha's command, the stars shine in the sky. At Ganesha's command, Agni's fire burns in the three worlds.

O Brahmins, his pastimes are hidden and not just told to anyone, so, as I reveal them to you, please listen carefully. Brahma narrated these to the immeasurably splendid Vyasadeva. Vyasa narrated it to Bhrgu Muni, and Bhrgu, to the great King Somakanta. Immeasurable benefits belong to those who visit sacred places, give gifts in charity, perform austerities, make sacrifices and take vows, but for those who hear the Ganesha Purana, wisdom blossoms, and worldly life becomes insignificant in their minds. They then become attracted to the pastimes of Ganesha, Lord of the Peacocks. Please hear about Ganesha's greatness by listening to this Purana's tale of King Somakanta.

In Devanagara, in the province of Surastra , there was a king named Somakanta. He was well versed in the Vedas and understood the meaning of the Sastras. Twenty elephants, two thousand horses and six thousand chariots followed him when he marched out from his kingdom. He also had countless foot soldiers, some of whom carried weapons made of fire and others who carried bows with quivers of arrows. He surpassed Brhaspati in intelligence, Kubera in wealth, the Earth in patience and the ocean in depth. The King also surpassed the brightness of the sun, the splendor of the moon, and Kamadeva, the god of love, in handsomeness. His five ministers were powerful, resolute, and were expert politicians. In this way they defeated their enemies. The first minister was called Rupavat and another was Vidyadosa. There was also Keshemaukara, Jnanagamyia and the fifth was called Subala. Due to their great prowess, they conquered various countries. They were very handsome when dressed up in fine, attractive clothes and ornaments. Always engaged in service to the King, they were all very dear to him.

The King had a wife named Sudharma who was endowed with all good qualities. The other wives of the king were named Rati, Rambha and Tilottama. These queens, due to jealousy toward Sudharma, were very unhappy. On Sudharma's ears were splendid golden earrings studded with many precious gems. On her neck she wore a golden necklace covered with pearls. On her hips she wore a girdle made of various jewels. She wore matching anklets on her feet along with rings on her fingers and toes. She possessed valuable clothes by the thousands, and of many colors. She was devoted to and revered her illustrious King. She was very generous and hospitable to her guests. Sudharma served her husband day and night, always obeying his command. The queen gave birth to an excellent son called Hemakanta who had the strength of a myriad of elephants. He was

wise, courageous, and instilled fear in his enemies. Excellent Brahmins, Somakanta was the best of kings. After he had conquered the entire earth, he established his kingdom based on dharmic law, sacrifice and generosity”.

Thus ends the first chapter of Upasana Khanda of the glorious Ganesha Purana called "King Somakanta".

Chapter 2

Somakanta’s Renunciation

Suta Gosvami said, “Sages, now you must all hear about Somakanta’s past life. As a consequence of his accumulated bad karma, he suddenly began to ooze with leprosy, which was very painful. Whether it is good or bad, karma always accompanies living beings. Whatever actions a person performs become their experiences in future lives. As if he was a rudderless boat in the ocean, the King became immersed in an ocean of sorrow. He felt so much pain as if bitten by a snake. The distraught King was completely covered with sores dripping with purulent blood and worms. He became very thin and deranged with anxiety. He experienced pain in all of his senses. Then, with great effort, the King spoke to his ministers”.

King Somakanta said, “Curse my kingdom and body. Curse my strength, life and wealth! What has caused this horrible misfortune? I have surpassed Soma in splendor, hence I am known as Somakanta. I have protected the good, the wretched, the learned Brahmins, their hermitages, as well as all nations. I have looked after my subjects as though they were my very own children. I have defeated fierce enemies and conquered the entire earth. With a controlled mind and no false attachments, I worshipped Sadashiva

as the Supreme Self. Previously my body was fragrantly scented, but because I now emit a foul smell, my life is worthless. For these reasons, and with your permission, I will retire to the forest. For the sake of my kingdom, you must consecrate my son, Hemakanta, who possesses valor and intelligence. As king, you must protect him courageously. I will never be able to show my face in this world so there is no point having a kingdom, wives, nor a life of regality. Prime Ministers, I am leaving for the forest to practice austerities for my own liberation”.

Suta said, “Excellent Brahmins, after the King spoke, he fell to the ground like a tree blown over by the wind, his body covered by streams of warm purulent blood. The ministers and young women cried loudly along with the rest of his subjects who made dreadful cries of distress. By the use of healing herbs, sacred medicines, and by fanning him and wiping his body, the ministers revived him. When the King was feeling somewhat better, his ministers spoke to him as follows”.

The Ministers said, “Because of you we have all enjoyed happiness equal to that of Indra. How will we live without you? How will we protect the cows? Your worthy son will now rule the kingdom. Hemakanta is a strong leader and possesses great wealth, but leaving behind all happiness, we will now accompany you to the forest”.

Suta said, “His chief wife and heroine, Sudharma, declared that she would also accompany the king to the forest”.

Sudharma said, “I will stay with him until the end, but you ministers should stay here. You must help my son rule the kingdom as I would. When one is mated with another, they must both suffer or enjoy the results of their previous karmas together. The King and

I both enjoyed many pleasures of the kingdom together and separately, but the Sastras prescribe that a woman should accompany her husband in this world and the next”.

Suta said, “The refined Hemakanta, grief stricken, spoke the following words to his father”.

Hemakanta said, “Without you I cannot be responsible for the kingdom, wives or riches. Just as a lamp without oil, or a body without breath is useless, so is this kingdom useless without you.”

Suta said, “After he heard the kind words of his ministers, wife and son, the King, delighted at heart, addressed his son concerning dharma”.

The King said, “A son who always obeys his father and offers oblations to the ancestors, is indeed a real son. A son like this will also bear a good son who understands the true meaning of dharma and of correct political conduct. Therefore, I give my command for you to preside over the kingdom. In cooperation with my ministers, rule these subjects as though they were your own children. Covered with leprosy and beyond contempt, I will go to the forest with Sudharma. Please agree to this, my strong vowed son”.

Thus ends the second chapter of Upasana Khanda of the glorious Ganesha Purana called "Somakanta's Renunciation".

Chapter 3

Description of Conduct

Suta Gosvami said, “Rising up and taking his son by the hand, the King took Hemakanta to a room upstairs in the palace where they often took council. In this room

stood a golden nrsingasana bedecked with many precious stones. It was inlaid with pearls and coral that shined like the palace of Indra . Father and son sat together on that throne. Although there were only two of them, they appeared to be many, reflected in every gem. Concerned for his son and his family's honor, the King spoke first about personal conduct and then of the art of politics”.

King Somakanta said, “One should rise before dawn. Sitting in a clean place, one should meditate on his guru. Then one should meditate upon Mother Earth and ask her to patiently accept the touch of one's feet upon her. Having meditated upon the Supreme, one should first offer prostrations and recite the following prayers.

'At sunrise I offer my humble prayers to Lord Gananath, who is the cause of this manifestation, who awards boons to the demigods such as Brahma and others, abounds in the Agamas, awards the results of the activities of dharma (religiosity), artha (economic development), and kama (sense gratification), who is the cause of liberation for the human race, is beyond words, is the beginning, and has unlimited incarnations.

At sunrise I offer my humble supplication to Lord Shiva, the husband of goddess Parvati, who carries the moon on his head, dresses in a tiger-skin, who is pitiless toward mind-born lust, awards boons to Vishnu and Indra, who is loved by the demigods and perfected beings, carries the damaru drum and trident, wears a garland of snakes and who is Puru's enemy.

At sunrise I offer my humble supplication to Lord Vishnu, the husband of goddess Laksmi, who possesses great strength, manifests unlimited incarnations for the protection of the divine souls, dwells in the ocean of milk, who is the controller of the demigods,

who is the Supreme Lord – dispeller of darkness, defeats all of his enemies and who is the cause of their liberation.

At sunrise I offer my humble supplication to Surya, Lord of Light, who removes sins, removes darkness, who is praised by divine beings, who is the three Vedas, expelled the enemies of the demigods, and who is the cause of spiritual knowledge.

At sunrise I offer my humble supplication to Goddess Parvati, who is also known as Suresi, daughter of the Himalayas, who creates prosperity, saves those who are drowning in the ocean of material existence, possesses three eyes, who is the cause of the creation of matter, who expelled the enemies of the demigods, who is illusion personified, and who is praised by the great sages and demigods'.

After one has meditated on other demigods and sages in the same way and worshipped them in one's mind, one should pray to them for forbearance. Then taking a water-pot, one should walk in a southwesterly direction from the village. After one has covered the ground with grass, he should relieve himself while facing the north or south. Having first cleaned oneself with grass or soft wood, one should wash five times with clay and water. Then immediately after, one should wash both hands. After sipping some water and taking a piece of wood from the milk or thorn tree, one should clean his teeth and tongue. Thus praying, 'O Lord Krishna, please give me strength, power, glory, energy, cows, intelligence, wisdom and knowledge of Brahman'.

Then having taken one's bath in cool water, one should offer prayers and benedictions for his immediate family. One should then make an offering to the ancestors and demigods, and practice the recitation of the Vedas. Finally, one should worship God and then offer food to the demigods, deities and guests under the guidance of the Brahmins.

One should also listen to the recitation of the Puranas, give gifts in charity and avoid criticizing others. With loving words, energy, and wealth, one should be very generous to others and never hurt anyone's feelings or engage in self-praise. One should remain faithful and respectful towards one's guru, nor be offensive toward the Vedas. One should not engage in heresy or associate intimately with non-spiritual people. One should not eat unclean foods like meat, fish or eggs or have sexual relations with a married woman. One should not neglect one's partner, but approach them at a suitable time for sexual relations. One should always respect and act dutifully towards one's mother and father, guru and the cows. One should give food and clothes to the weak, blind and poor. Most importantly, always be truthful in speech and honest in all of one's dealings.

Those who are virtuous enjoy the king's favor, but those who are not, are to be punished according to the Sastras, but only after consulting with those learned in politics and the law. One should not trust those who do not inspire goodness. If one wants to survive, do not have excessive confidence in those who are egotistic. Especially do not rely on those who are arrogant and violent. By ruling the kingdom through the principles of the dharma, one should create prosperity for all. Give in charity according to one's capacity, otherwise you will become weak minded. When there is confusion, always choose the right path. He should always be represented honestly through ambassadors, and be of handsome appearance.

The king alone shall dole out punishment. Only through fear of punishment do ordinary people adhere to their own duties. Otherwise how would they discern the difference between right and wrong? In praise and blame one should remain equal minded. If in the past one has injured another or has lost his riches, yet now comes for

refuge, he should always be afforded it. The advice of spies should be utilized for the protection of the kingdom. Having subdued the six enemies of the soul, such as lust, one should strive to conquer the rest which include anger, greed, pride, jealousy, and egoism. An excellent king sees to the livelihood of everyone and not the deprivation of his subjects, the demigods, public parks or places of worship. To attain renown, one should give gifts and charity during the recommended phases of the moon. He should not issue commands to his friends or divulge secrets, other than to one's partner. He should help cows that are in need, and release a Brahmin from debt. He should never tell a lie or abandon dharma. He must captivate the hearts of his ministers, subjects and dependents, and he should always pay homage to Vishnu and the Brahmins".

Suta said, "Somakanta taught his son everything about political conduct as it is presented in the Vedas. This knowledge brings about peace and is very pleasing to everyone. Noticing that the hour was auspicious, the King summoned his ministers. They immediately gathered together many Brahmins that were expert in Vedic knowledge and skilled in sacrificial rites. Then the King invited other kings and queens, his own friends, the city chiefs, and the all the citizens to witness the consecration of his own son, Hemakanta. After the King worshipped Ganesha and Shiva, he then asked for his mother's blessings, and performed his own renunciation ceremony. He then refreshed the Brahmins with fruit juices and completed his son's consecration to the accompaniment of Vedic hymns. Somakanta then made the following statement to his three principal advisors".

The King said, “Here is my son, ministers. Be very careful. He is in your hands alone. In the same way as those who are skilled in politics carry out my orders, they too, including the chiefs of the cities, should also obey his command”.

Thus ends the third chapter of Upasana Khanda of the glorious Ganesha Purana called "Description of Conduct".

Chapter 4

Entering the City

Suta Gosvami said, “When the ceremony began, the King honored the Brahmins by giving away jewels, pearls, coral and numerous wonderful cows. To show his gratitude, he also gave elephants, horses, gold, and fine clothes. These clothes came from various regions and were woven with pure gold thread. To the other kings, queens, and village leaders, he gave a considerable amount of clothes of variegated colors. To his dependants and those of good character, he gave according to what they deserved. Then to his ministers he gave large amounts of gold and authority over many villages. After he gave away a portion of his immense wealth in charity, feeling grief and pain, and exceedingly impure, the King left for the forest. Once the King had departed, a great cry of distress arose among the people. Everyone instantly abandoned their duties. All of them, including his ministers, wife, son, and friends, followed the King. When he left the kingdom, he stumbled and fell on the ground. He then got up, tried to run away from them, and began to cry. The King had only gone two miles from the city but became very tired. The distressed ministers and towns-people caught up and surrounded him. Taking

shelter of a nearby lake of cool water surrounded by many trees, the King spoke to all the ministers, town's people and his kinsmen”.

King Somakanta said, “Please forgive all the offences I have committed against you during my long reign. With all sincerity, I offer my deepest respects. Have compassion on my son and myself too, who has become this way because of fate. Please do not lose affection for me. Everyone who has come, including the women and elderly, must go back to the city now. You are being protected by my son, so you will be free from all worries. All of you bid me farewell, for I am resolved to go to the forest. When you have gone back to the city, I will feel much better. All of you kindly do this great favor for me. Although I want to leave this world behind and am in great distress, I am unable to speak harshly to you. I have acquired this karmic reaction due to misdeeds from other lifetimes, so it is for the benefit of good people, such as your selves, that I have separated myself from the kingdom. Since I am oozing from leprosy, what else can I do? Each person experiences his own fate”.

Suta said, "After they had heard his wishes, the King's friends were speechless. Some who were very distressed struck their heads with the palms of their hands. The learned consoled each other by relaying stories of previous great kings. Others, having realized the situation at hand, were like yogis, having analyzed the true nature of the world. Then some, who were bold, having calmly held back their own sorrow, spoke to the distressed Somakanta, who was longing to leave for the forest".

They said, "Because you have nourished and protected us, it is not right that you should leave. In the same way that cold does not leave water, or heat and light from the Sun, or as the ocean does not abandon its shores, how can we enter the city without you,

our beloved King. Indeed, like the starry heavens without the moon, this city will have no splendor without you. O conqueror of enemies, we will go with you onto two or three sacred spots. Your bodily appearance, which was splendid before, will be splendid again by visiting such places. With the sages chanting mantras, and with great joy, we shall again enter the city together, which is decorated with banners".

Suta said, "King Somakanta, although bowing down to them after having heard their speech, was irritated and anxious, and said repeatedly, 'No! No!' Then Hemakanta, accompanied by the ministers, spoke to the beloved king with appropriate decorum along with feelings of compassion and affection".

Hemakanta said, "I cannot bear to go and rule the kingdom living without you. How can I tolerate be separated from you, never having experienced this before?"

The King said, "It was for this very reason that I instructed you in the Sastras which contain so much knowledge about good conduct and politics. Don't be useless! Once upon a time Rama, having left his kingdom, went to the forest with his younger brother Laksman. Rama causelessly abandoned Sita in there. Therefore, at my command, Hemakanta, go quickly to the city with my three ministers and rule the kingdom which I have entrusted to you. Just like a wise man, who is intent upon remaining fixed on the Supreme Self, when I have left for the forest, I will always think of you. When good fortune has arisen again through the power of fate, I may again come home. The injunctions of the Sastras will certainly continue to operate if you act in accord with my command, but if you accompany me, this will not be so. Therefore go back to the city so I may leave".

Suta said, "The towns-people, ministers and his son were feeling very depressed, but when the King decided to depart, they offered obeisance to him. After having praised the King with prayers and circumambulating him, he dismissed them to return home. The proud Hemakanta, holding a parasol and banner, then assembled his great army with foot soldiers, chariots, horses and elephants, and went back to the city".

Thus ends the fourth chapter of Upasana Khanda of the glorious Ganesha Purana called "Entering the City".

Chapter 5

Conversation between Sudharma and Cyavana

Suta Gosvami said, "Speaking to his mother, Hemakanta said to her eagerly with a mixture of affection and embarrassment, 'Mother, why abandon me? I am faultless'."

Hemakanta said, "You should tell my father that his son must go with you also! If you command me to go, he will take me with him and I will serve you both. I don't desire to be king. How will this kingdom give me happiness when I am without you and father?"

Sudharma said, "Although he is plagued with so much grief and misery, the King will not issue this command to me. Therefore, my great-armed son, depart with my permission! Son, I am obedient to the oath of loyalty to my husband. For a wife there is no hero other than her husband, so he alone must be regarded".

Suta said, "After he heard these orders, their kind-hearted son Hemakanta offered obeisance to his mother, obtained her consent, circumambulated her, and then returned to the city. Like Indra's kingdom, the city's moistened roads were opulent with fragrant scents and were adorned with blossoms, flags and banners. After Hemakanta had

distributed betel nut and various clothing to his subjects, he sent them away to their homes. The joyous, but grieving King, entered his own splendid home. He ruled the kingdom by dharma, protecting his subjects as he would his own sons. Consistent with the teachings of the Sastras, he contemplated the four aims of human life, which are religious duty, economic development, sense gratification and liberation”.

The Sages said, "What happened to Somakanta? Did he reach the forest? Did he make any friends or engage in some type of activity? Please tell us everything!"

Suta said, "Yes immaculate sages, listen carefully and I will tell you the story of King Somakanta after he had gone to the forest. With his wife Sudharma and two of his ministers, Subala and Jnanagamyā, he entered the forest which was difficult to access. In front went the two ministers, in the middle was the King, and his wife Sudharma followed, like Sita behind Rama. The four were of one mind concerning eating, and choosing dwelling and resting places. They went from forest to forest, indifferent to happiness and distress. Then, terribly beset by fatigue, hunger and thirst from climbing hills which were without paths, they finally took shelter of a shady spot and settled down, not knowing where they were. Then, after traveling further into the forest they saw a large lake where dwelt tortoises and crocodiles, and where there were beautiful trees including palmyra, khadira, pine, priyala, bakula, bread-fruit, rose-apple, neem, and fig. These trees were laden with multitudes and varieties of creepers. The darkness of this forest seemed dense like the inside of a mountain cave, but the pleasant breeze carried the aroma of the lotus and kadamba flowers. There were geese in the lake where the sages gathered their lotuses and fruit. There were also swans, herons, hawks, parrots, crows, cuckoos, sarikas and cranes, all making different cries. Those who lived within the many

arbors of creepers and flowers did not notice too much light or darkness, nor heat or cold. Only those who possess great merit reside where there is no hunger, thirst or death, as in the spiritual realm.

When the King's party had reached the lake, they all drank some cool water to dispel their fatigue. After bathing and performing obligatory rituals, they also enjoyed some fruit. The two ministers, with the King's permission, left to gather tubers, roots, flowers and lotus shoots. For a while, the King slept on a pleasant sandy bank while his wife stayed and massaged his feet.

Then Sudharma noticed a boy of brilliant appearance who was intense, powerful, and radiating with splendor. Because of his striking appearance she thought, 'this boy was previously born as Cupid'. After she had seen him, Sudharma rejoiced, and believed that he must be the bearer of good fortune. She then felt some uneasiness in her heart because now she was unsure if the boy meant them harm or could actually be of some assistance. She then asked him, 'Who are you and why have you settled in this place? Whose son are you and who is your mother? Friend, please speak pleasantly and delight my ears with your ambrosial words!' The boy then addressed the King's wife with his pleasant words".

Cyavana said, "Forest woman, Bhrgu is my father and Puloma is my mother. I have come here from my house to collect some water. Beautiful lady, I am called Cyavana and I am carrying out my father's instructions. Who are you, and is this man your husband? Why has he come to this forest? Why are his limbs streaming blood like a mountain in the rainy season? What bad karma has caused this revolting smell? Tell me! Being so charming yourself with your beautiful eyes, your impressive elegance, your clear face, and lovely, enchanting, splendid form, why are you waiting upon him who is completely

covered with worms? A person as eminent as your husband could not appear like this to your father, friends, brothers and brahmins, yet he is a leper overburdened with this dilemma. Why were you chosen as his bride, and why have you come to this practically inaccessible forest?"

Suta said, "When the intelligent son of Bhrgu had questioned Sudharma, who was filled with grief and joy, she explained everything to him".

Sudharma said, "In the region of Surastra there is a great and famous city called Devata. My husband, Somakanta, lived there and ruled the kingdom. He was very proud, munificent, courageous, mighty and heroic, possessed innumerable troops and was a destroyer of the kingdom's enemies. He performed sacrifices, was most handsome, of regal splendor, and made his friends very happy. The King was discriminating in all his duties and proficient in the treatises on political conduct. For a long time, excellent Brahmin, the King enjoyed his own domain, a position attained due to the ripening of earlier good karmas. Accompanied by his two ministers, he has come to this forest. Since he has presented the kingdom to our son, I have been wandering here and following him. I have come here with two ministers named Subala and Jnanagamyā. Having received the King's permission, those two went into the forest in search of food. I understand that cooked food is ample nourishment for the poor and for a prosperous king also, although there is not so much nourishment in cooked food alone. When he was in the company of the Brahmins, he did not find pleasure in oily, sweet, acidic, salty or bitter food, so now the King verily enjoys foods like fruits, roots and tubers of sour and harsh flavors.

Raksasas, spirits, ghosts, birds and beasts of various kinds terrify us here. I don't know why they haven't killed us. I can not bear to feel the King's misery, yet I am

standing here before him. Nor can I see an end to his unhappiness or to his bad karma. He used to sleep in a soft bed which was heavenly, but now you can see on his body the dilapidation caused by time. His many kinds of lovely perfumes used to fragrance all the directions, but now he smells bad and is smeared with purulent blood. Surrounded by Brahmins, the King was immersed in an ocean of bliss, but now he is covered by worms and is sunk in an ocean of misery. I don't know how we will cross over this ocean, son of Bhrgu. Like a boat on the deep sea rescues those who are drowning, you must be that boat and help save my husband.”

*Thus ends the fifth chapter of Upasana Khanda of the glorious Ganesha Purana
called "Conversation between Sudharma and Cyavana".*

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`The Ganesha Purana (Chs. 1 - 5) Edited by C. Devadas`