

### Resource Sheet 7.2.3b "Stories about Reincarnation"

Note: the teacher may need to edit these stories to make them the appropriate length and to match the student reading abilities.



#### Story 1: King Indra Takes Birth as a Pig



Once upon a time Indra, the lord of the gods, was cursed to be born as a pig on earth. After leaving the heavens, he spent his time living a family life in dirty, muddy water, oinking around, sleeping deeply and eating absolutely anything.

One day while passing by, the sage Narada recognized Indra reduced to that lowly form. Narada looked with great pity at Indra, now in the body of a dirty pink pig.

Narada spoke: "My dear Indra, look at what a state you have degenerated into. How did this happen? How could you, a great deity with unlimited power, the lord of all the heavenly regions, have come to this? But never mind, don't worry, I will get you out. I will use all my accumulated powers of to help you."

Narada spoke to Indra with concern and compassion, lamenting that one who once enjoyed all the luxuries of heaven had been put into such a miserable state. "How very unfortunate Indra's life has become", Narada thought.

But, Indra, in the form of the pig, replied with anger, "Narada, why are you coming in the way of my happiness? The joy that I am getting in this dirty water I will not be able to get anywhere else. The wonderful life with my wife and children in this extensive mud hole, I cannot even get in heaven. Why have you come here to meddle with my life and spoil my happiness? Please go away - leave me and my family alone."

Indra, who was under the spell of the illusion (maya) and attachment, did not realize his pitiful condition.



## Story 2: The Three Lives of King Bharata



King Bharata was a wise and experienced monarch, and his citizens expected him to rule for many years. However, in the prime of life he gave up everything – queen, children, and kingdom, to dedicate the rest of his life to self-realisation. He journeyed to a sacred place of pilgrimage called Pulaha-ashrama, at the foothills of the Himalayas. There the former king lived alone in the forest next to the bank of the Gandaki River. His hair and beard grew long and matted and always appeared wet, from his bathing three times a day.

Every morning the king would sing hymns to glorify God, and later in the day he collected various fruits and roots, which he would offer to Lord Krishna before eating. Although the king had previously been surrounded by much worldly opulence, now, due to his austerities, he had no desire for material enjoyment, and had thus become free from the cycle of birth and death. As a great devotee of the Lord, he would constantly meditate upon Krishna and would often experience symptoms of spiritual ecstasy.

One day while he was meditating at the riverbank, a pregnant doe came to drink water. While she drank, a lion in the nearby forest loudly roared. Out of great fear, the doe jumped and a baby deer fell out from her womb into the swiftly flowing waters. The deer, frightened and weak from her miscarriage, entered a cave, where she soon passed away.

Bharata felt great passion as he observed the fawn floating down the river, and so he lifted the baby from the water and brought it to his ashrama. As he was a self-realized soul, he saw all living beings with equal vision, realising that the soul is present in all bodies. He fed the deer daily with fresh green grass and made sure it was always comfortable. Soon, however he began to develop attachment for this deer. He lay down with it, walked with it, bathed with it and even ate with it. When Bharata went to the forest to collect fruits and roots he would always take the deer with him for fear that dogs, jackals or tigers might attack it. He enjoyed watching the deer leap, gambol and play like a child, and would often carry it on his shoulders with great affection. Thus, Bharata's heart became filled with love for his pet.

Being attached to the deer, and spending time raising it gradually resulted in Bharata becoming neglectful of his spiritual practices, and of his meditation upon the Supreme. He thus became distracted from the path of self-realization and could think of nothing but the deer.

One day as Bharata was meditating, as usual he began to think about the deer instead of Lord Krishna. Breaking his concentration, he glanced around to see where was his pet. When he could not see it anywhere, his mind became agitated and he began frantically searching his ashrama. But the deer was nowhere to be found.

Bharata thought to himself, "When will my deer return? Is it safe from tigers and other animals? When shall I see it wandering in my garden, eating the tender green shoots?"

The day wore on and the deer did not return. Bharata became overwhelmed with anxiety, and set out after the deer, following its hoof prints in the pale moonlight. In his madness he began to talk to himself, "This deer was so dear to me, that I feel as though I have lost my own son. Oh, when will he again return and pacify my wounded heart?" Whilst desperately searching for the lost deer

along dangerous forest paths, Bharata suddenly fell into a crevice and was fatally injured. Lying there at the point of death, he visualized the deer suddenly appearing and was sitting by his side watching over him just might a loving son. Thus at the moment of death, the king's mind was completely focused on his pet deer. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna says, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail."

Consequently, in his next life, King Bharata entered the body of a deer. Although most living beings are unable to remember previous lives, due to his spiritual advancement Bharata, even in that animal body, could understand the cause of his taking such a birth. He began to lament, "What a fool I was! I have fallen from the path of self-realization. I gave up my family and kingdom and went to a solitary holy place in the forest to meditate, where I always glorified the Lord of the universe. But due to my foolishness, I let my mind become attached to – of all things – a deer. And now I have justly received such a body. No one is to blame but myself."

Having learnt a valuable lesson, Bharata was able to continue his spiritual progress even as a deer. He once again became detached from all material desires. He no longer cared for the succulent green grasses, nor how long his antlers would grow. He gave up company of all deer and left his mother in the Kalanjara Mountains where he had been born. He returned to Pulaha-asrama, the very place he had practiced meditation in his previous life. This time, however, Bharata was careful not to ever forget the Supreme Lord. Staying near the hermitages of great saints, he avoided all materialists and lived very simply, eating only hard, dry leaves.

When the time of death came, upon leaving his body of a deer, Bharata loudly uttered the prayer, "Oh Lord, you are the source of all knowledge, the controller of the entire creation, and the supersoul within the heart of every living being. You are beautiful and attractive. I am quitting this body offering my obeisances unto you hoping that I may eternally engage in your devotional service."

In his next life, King Bharata took birth in a pure, brahmin's home, and again by God's mercy could remember his past lives. Known as Jada Bharata, he became very much afraid of his family and friends as he grew up, since they were mostly materialistic people, and Jada Bharata feared that their association might again propel him into the lower species.. Therefore to avoid such contact, Jada Bharata pretended to be dumb, deaf and blind, although he actually extremely intelligent. Within himself, however, he would always fix his mind upon the Lord within the heart.

Jada Bharata's father was very affectionate towards his son, and hoped that one day he would become a great scholar. He patiently tried to educate his son, but Jada Bharata continued to act like a fool, hoping that his father would abandon his attempts. His father however continued to instruct his son till the day he died.

After the death of Bharata's father, the boy's nine stepbrothers, who considered him a useless fool, abandoned all efforts to educate him, and instead sent him to work like a slave in the fields. Jada Bharata, however, did not protest against their mistreatment, for he was completely liberated from the bodily concept of life. He gladly accepted whatever little they gave him to eat and wear, and never bore any grudges. He thus displayed the symptoms of a perfectly self-realised soul.

One night, whilst Jada Bharata was sitting on high ground, guarding the field against the attack of wild boars, a band of thieves searching for a dull, unintelligent human being caught sight of him, and bound him with ropes to sacrifice him in the temple of Goddess Bhadrakali. Such sacrifices are certainly not endorsed by the Vedas, but were conducted by the robbers for the purpose of gaining material wealth.

Jada Bharata, because of his complete faith in God, did not protest. The thieves bathed him, dressing him in new silk garments and decorated him with flower garlands and ornaments. They then fed a sumptuous last meal before bringing him before the Goddess. Then one of the thieves, acting

as the chief priest, took out a razor-sharp sword in order to slit Jada Bharata's throat so that his warm blood could be offered to Kali. The Goddess could not tolerate this insult to a great saintly person. Suddenly, she burst from the form of the deity, her body burning with an intense and intolerable radiance. Leaping violently from the altar, she seized the sword with which the dacoits were about to sacrifice Jada Bharata, and decapitated them, one after another.

After his extraordinary escape from the Kali temple, Jada Bharata continued his wandering, remaining aloof from ordinary, materialistic men. One day, as King Rahugana of Sauvira, was being carried through the district, the men carrying his palanquin became fatigued. Realising that they will need extra help in order to cross the River Iksumati, the King's servants began searching for help. They soon stumbled across Jada Bharata. He appeared a good choice for he was very young and built like an ox. However, the new man didn't perform his service very well, pausing periodically to make sure that he didn't step on any ants. Unaware of what was causing the rough ride, King Rahugana angrily bellowed, "What's going on? Why does my palanquin keep shaking in this way?"

Hearing the threatening voice of the King, the servants quickly attributed blame to the newly employed Jada Bharata. The King angrily rebuked him, sarcastically calling him a weak and frail old man. Despite the king's tirade, Jada Bharata remained unaffected. He understood his true spiritual identity, knowing that he was not the body but the eternal soul within. He therefore remained quiet and continued carrying the palanquin as before. Unable to control his temper, the King threatened, "You rascal! What are you doing? Don't you know that I am your master? For your disobedience I shall now punish you!"

"My dear King," replied Jada Bharata, "Whatever you have said about me is true. You seem to think that I have not laboured hard enough to carry this palanquin. That is true, because actually I am not carrying this palanquin at all! My body is carrying it, but I am not my body. You accuse me of not being very stout and strong, but this merely shows your ignorance of the spirit soul. The body may be fat or thin, or weak or strong, but the soul is neither fat nor skinny."

Jada Bharata then began to instruct the fiery monarch; "You think you are the lord and master, and you are therefore trying to command me, but this is also incorrect. Today you are a king and I am your servant, but in our next life the roles may be reversed; I may be the master and you my servant. In any case," Jada Bharata continued, "who is master and who is servant? Everyone is forced to act by the laws of material nature, therefore no one is master, and no one is servant."

King Rahugana who had been previously educated in spiritual science, was astonished to hear the teachings of Jada Bharata. Recognising him as a saintly person, the King descended from his palanquin and fell humbly to the ground, with his head at the feet of the holy man.

"Oh saintly person, why are you moving through the world unknown to others! Oh spiritual master, I am blind to spiritual knowledge. Please tell me how I may advance in spiritual life."

Jada Bharata replied, "Because the mind is full of material desires, the soul takes on different bodies to enjoy and suffer the pleasures and pains brought on by material activities." Jada Bharata then revealed his own past lives, "In a previous birth, I was known as King Bharata. I was fully engaged in the service of the Lord, until I became so lax in mind that I developed affection towards a small deer and neglected my spiritual duties. At the time of death, I could think of nothing but this deer, and so I had to accept a corresponding in my next life."

Jada Bharata continued his teachings by informing the King that those who wish to escape the cycle of birth and death must constantly associate with pure and learned devotees of the Lord. After receiving lessons from the great devotee Jada Bharata, King Rahugana became fully aware of the true position of the soul and gave up completely the bodily conception of life.



### Story 3: The Sadhu's Blessings



A sadhu (saintly person) and his disciple were passing through a city. "Let us see whether we can make our journey a learning experience," the teacher said to his disciple. By chance, just as they were walking by the prince of the kingdom was mounting his fine white stallion

"Greetings holy man," the prince called out. "Please give me your blessings."

Raising his palm, the sadhu replied, "May you live forever."

The prince happily galloped off, and the sadhu's disciple enquired, "Why did you bless him to live forever, master?"

The sadhu answered, "He is now enjoying his life of sense pleasure. However, he hunts animals for sport, so when he dies he'll suffer for his sin. So it's best for him to live forever and stay as he is now."

Later they saw a young student of spiritual science, a brahmachari, dressed in saffron cloth, collecting alms for his teacher. When he saw that the sadhu he touched his palms together, offering him respect.

In reply, the sadhu said, "May you die immediately."

Again the disciple queried, "Master, why did you curse him to die?"

The sadhu laughed. "That was not a curse, but a blessing. At present he is pure and sinless. However, if he continues to live his future is uncertain."

Why is that?" the disciple asked.

"Because there is always the danger of falling into worldly ways. But if he dies right now, he will certainly be promoted to the higher worlds."

As they approached the market place, the disciple had to hold his nose. The air was filled with the sickly smell of death wafting from the corpses of skinned animals, cut into pieces and hung on hooks in front of the butcher's shop.

A red-faced man, the shop owner, called out to the sadhu, "Hello! Any blessings for me today?"

Once again the sadhu raised his palm. "Yes, I bless you that you neither live nor die."

The butcher scratched his head and muttered, "What a strange blessing."

After they left the market place the disciple enquired, "What did you mean by that greeting?"

"Don't you think the butcher is in a hellish condition right now?" the sadhu asked. His disciple nodded.

"He has killed so many innocent animals that he will surely go to hell for many thousands of years," the sadhu explained. "So he will suffer if he lives or if he dies."

Next, they passed a temple entrance where a devotee was offering her heartfelt prayers to the Supreme Lord. She did not even notice the sadhu approaching, but he called out, "May you live or may you die."

"Let me guess why you said that," ventured the disciple. "Constantly remembering God, a devotee is always happy. Therefore, it makes no difference to her whether she lives or dies. She will go on remembering God in this life and in the next." Smiling, the sadhu replied, "My disciple, you are learning well."