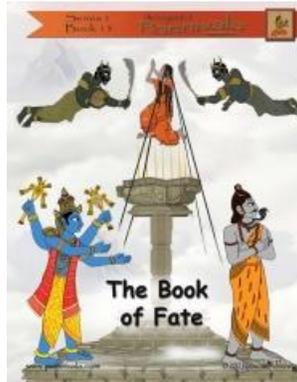


## Episode 13 – The Book of Fate (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

**Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)**

**VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you**



### 13-a) The Queen Sits Deep In Prayer For 21 Years

The queen now sits on her pillar of penance for twenty one years. She is so motionless that a family of heavenly parrots build a nest in her nose. Eventually Lord Vishnu comes to check on her, and as he waves his arms the parrots leave the queen's nose and fly off to earth. They go directly to the palace of the hill-dwelling hunter king. His sister greets them warmly and they settle in her forest (until needed later in the story).

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Sometimes people slip into a deep trance-like state. Sometimes their thoughts or their “spirit” are understood to travel to a higher realm during this interlude. Have you ever “seen” something like this or read a story about such a person?**

**COMMENTARY:** Trance-like states can be compared to extensive prayer or meditation. There are many examples one can find in native North American traditions where young men are sent into the wilderness and required to experience a special communion with an animal or with the spirit world. It is interesting to think about the heroine doing the same kind of thing in this story. Again, note that the character chosen for this is a woman. Some medieval female saints in Europe took on similar trials. If one focuses on the pillar in this story one can also compare the queen to Simeon Stylites, an actual historical (documented) Christian saint from Aleppo (now in modern Turkey) who sat on a pillar for over thirty years.

### 13-b) The Queen Is Tested Seven Times

The supreme god, Lord Shiva, now pushes the queen to the brink of death. He then revives the poor queen only to put her through the same cycle again and again. Finally she has experienced a complete cycle of seven “rebirths.”

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know anyone who says they have been “reborn?” What did they mean by this? Was it similar to what happens to the heroine in this sub-story?**

**COMMENTARY:** Concepts of “rebirth” are common in many cultures. In Hinduism the idea of rebirth has so much importance that it can be said to be a popular cultural theme. Taking this perspective, human lives are seen to “cycle” through many births on earth. If they are dedicated and good at heart, such lives will finally build up enough merit through prayer and good deeds to find “release” from their

perpetual rounds of struggle. Christians share a related idea. Many say that they have experienced “rebirth” when they undergo a baptism or other ritual that marks their entry into the fold of devout believers. The heroine in this story is being “fast tracked” on the rebirth circuit. Her seven deathlike experiences are intended to purify her soul and ready her for the miraculous event soon to come.

### 13-c) Lord Vishnu Intervenes

Lord Vishnu sees all this and becomes worried about the woman he has helped so much. So he takes the form of a beggar and goes before the wife of Lord Shiva (who is also his sister). After being screened by a maid he is allowed in at last. There he complains to Shiva’s wife (his sister) about the queen’s treatment. She then promises him that she will intercede with Lord Shiva himself. But Shiva is angry about the “heat” generated by the penitent who is requesting the gift of sons. (His body is now covered with sores). He does not quickly cede to Vishnu’s request for mercy easily.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** What stories do you know where a leader, a saint or other helper intervened to assist someone in approaching a higher authority? Was the intervener honorable? Did he or she have the authority and the connections needed to get the job done, as Lord Vishnu certainly does in this case? Do you know of an opposite story, where an intervener misrepresents himself or is only interested in personal gain?

**COMMENTARY:** Sometime a pilgrim or penitent feels unworthy of meeting a god face-to-face. So they will ask for help from an intermediary. There are differing kinds of “connections” that an intermediary can have with a higher authority and differing motives. These can be points for discussion. Sometimes an intermediary has to “strike a bargain” in order to get what is wanted for the “client” or supplicant. In this case Lord Vishnu is quite selfless.

### 13-d) The Queen’s Prayers Are Answered!

Finally Shiva allows his brother-in-law to bring the queen before him. He has his accountant check his records and then grants the penitent three children. The two boys will each reincarnate the spirit of an important hero in India’s famous classical epic: the Mahabharata. The girl will reincarnate one in a set of seven “virgin sisters” who live near Shiva’s council chambers. But there are two provisos: 1) All three children will have lives lasting only 16 years. 2) Vishnu must give up his sacred conch shell and leave it “in hock” with the great god Shiva. He will only get this important possession back when he physically brings the lives of the three divine children back to Shiva’s chambers when their sixteen years of life are over. After these matters are finalized the couple start their long journey back to earth. Lord Vishnu revives the heroine’s “dormant” husband when she reaches the spot where he rests. The couple continue on to their palace together.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** The queen was on a long quest. But she finally succeeds and gets the outcome she wanted. What

**other long quests do you know about, either real ones in the history books, or from stories and myth? Did any of them succeed?**

**COMMENTARY:** This is the “climax” point of the entire first half of the Ponnivala story. The queen is finally granted the wish she has struggled to obtain for so long. The bargain Vishnu strikes with this brother-in-law Shiva is notable as the conch is an instrument of war and its sound has very special powers. Lord Vishnu’s own strength is “reduced” until he can get it back. Furthermore, the heroine’s pregnancy is caused by a god, and her children represent the “rebirth” of divine spirits. There is even a kind of “annunciation.” The parallels with the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition and the miraculous birth of Christ are thus rather strong.