

# THE STORY OF KARKATI

---

## FROM THE YOGA VASISTHA



In Poem by

**SWAMI SURYADEVANANDA**

Edited by Sivananda-Usha

[www.suryadevananda.org](http://www.suryadevananda.org)

### THE FIRST AUSTERITY

There once lived in the Himalayas  
A huge demoness called Karkati  
She was unable to get enough to eat  
Due to her size and immense appetite

She thought about her situation  
Feeling if only she could consume  
All people in the country at once  
Her appetite may be appeased

She felt need for rigorous penance  
Most arduous and unimaginable  
As most difficult was the attainment  
Equally hard must be the effort made

High on the snow peaks she commenced  
Penance in which time too stood still  
Thousand years passed unknowingly  
Till Brahma the creator appeared to her

The creator offered her any boon  
Karkati expressed her wish respectfully  
She was granted a small subtle status  
To inflict those who lived wrongly

From her huge size and stature  
She shrunk to the size of a pin  
So small, she could hardly be seen  
Her mentality had not changed at all

She continued her work, inflicting those  
Who lived wrongly and unjustly  
Thus dependent on the lives of others  
She pondered all this within herself

"A huge demoness I once was  
Never dependent on anyone  
Now I roam in dirt and filth  
Eating a diet most unhealthy"

Deluded ones have no foresight  
Selfish efforts lead to poor results  
Trying to put oneself ahead of all  
Results in being last every time

Disillusioned with her condition  
And her self-inflicted misfortune  
She realized it was her delusion  
That reduced her to this sad state

The mind that is headed to calamity  
First creates delusion and wickedness  
These states themselves expand into  
Conditions and resulting experiences

#### **THE SECOND AUSTERITY**

At once Karkati firmly resolved  
To correct her ways and her self  
Abandoning her physical appetite  
Returned to the Himalayas for penance

Mistakes are the best teachers  
But learning must be self-correction  
It must result in action and change  
Treading immediately the new course

Karkati resolved to rid delusion  
And not stop till completely purified  
And attain the highest wisdom  
Beyond the reach of all suffering

The energy of her hard penance  
Set the Himalayan peaks on fire  
Gods too trembled with great fear  
At her unprecedented austerity

The wind-god was commissioned  
To end her austerity somehow  
Trying to enter her mouth as breath  
He was thrown out again and again

Karkati had withdrawn her life-force  
To the crown of her head in perfection  
Becoming totally pure by her penance  
Gaining direct knowledge of Reality

Direct inquiry into all movements  
Of thought in one's own consciousness  
Is the very best guru or preceptor  
No one else can quite compare

Brahma the creator appeared again  
Granting Karkati boons of choice

She pondered on the use of boons  
As she already had attained perfection

Brahma the creator explained to her  
"The world-order cannot be set aside  
Regain your previous huge body  
And appease hunger with wicked ones

This has already been decreed  
There is no harm or loss at all  
Do what needs to be done as duty  
And lead thou an enlightened life"

Karkati regained her previous form  
Taking up residence in a dense forest  
One day she saw two men appear  
And felt to know if they be wise or fools

She appeared to them in her huge form  
Posing to each some questions  
If answered, they'd be considered wise  
If not, they'd be food for her appetite

Both disclosed their identity  
As minister and king of the region  
Patrolling to insure local security  
As dacoits often terrorized the people

#### **KARKATI'S QUESTIONS**

"What is that one, yet is many  
In which millions of universes merge

Is pure space but appearing not  
Which is in me, in you and everyone

What appears to move but never moves  
Appears a rock though is fully conscious  
What plays amazing tricks in empty space  
Shining eternally but is not sun or moon

What seems to be far but is very near  
Nature of consciousness but unknowable  
What is the all but none of these  
Self of all but veiled by ignorance

What is regained by many lifetimes  
Of intense and persistent effort  
Atomic in nature though immense  
The atom in which the universe rests

Due to what does the universe function  
Though it does nothing at all  
Of what are seer, sight and seen made  
Veiling and revealing threefold divisions

What is it that comes into being  
Into what does all finally vanish  
Answer each of you these questions  
So I may know if you are wise or fools

#### **THE MINISTER REPLIES**

The Self it is that is subtler than space  
Pure consciousness, all dwells in it

Existence is the experience of all  
Being the self of all—It alone exists

Appearing empty, not nothingness  
The Self of all, beyond mind and senses  
The Self it is reflecting as many  
As appearances though the sole reality

Self is not void or nothing at all  
Self is the self of everything  
Even of those who disbelieve  
Self is their very self as well

It cannot be experienced indirectly  
It alone is the consciousness of all  
The substance of this world-appearance  
It has to be known by each directly

Due to indivisibility of consciousness  
I am you and you are me as well  
Indivisible consciousness stays unchanged  
Becoming neither—it alone is everything

Self is infinite though not moving  
It is everywhere without movement  
Indivisible, all forms appear in it  
Doing nothing to bring this about

Reality in fire, it does not burn  
Nor can it be burnt at all  
The eternal light, it shines in all  
Everything shines by its light alone

Nothing exists independent of Self  
Time and space are reflections in it  
Appearing as moments and eternity  
There is nothing apart from the Self

As long as the appearance is felt real  
The reality is never ever seen  
When this assumption is discarded  
Pure consciousness is experienced

Self is all of what appears to be  
Its power creates terrific illusions  
Of subject and object as different  
All within indivisible consciousness

This diversity from creator to insect  
Is a long-standing illusion like a dream  
As a single seed contains the huge tree  
Self contains diversity in indivisibility

#### THE KING REPLIES

Your questions pertain to Brahman  
Eternal, pure existence-absolute  
Known directly when the mind-stuff  
Is rid of all movement of thought

It is expressed in silence  
When the known comes to an end  
For unknowable and inexpressible  
Is Brahman the absolute

It is the extremely subtle  
In the middle of two extremes  
That middle too has two sides  
As diversity also seems divided

When this Brahman wishes  
Elements and nature appear  
It is all and it is nothing  
All appears by its omnipotence

Many are ways to attain the Self  
Still nothing is really attained  
Upon the supreme attainment  
As it is the self of one and all

One roams in the forest of samsara  
Till wisdom dawns within one's self  
Which is able to dispel root-ignorance  
About the reality of world-appearance

This infinite pure consciousness  
Perceives the universe within itself  
Extremely subtle, pure consciousness  
It pervades the entire universe

This omnipresent existence inspires  
The world-appearance to dance  
To its tune, music and wish  
All due to its omnipresence

The sole illuminator of all  
All shines by its light alone

Its illumines the effects of ignorance  
Without removing darkness from ignorance

Just as a drop of honey contains  
The essence of all flowers  
So too in it are ever present  
All possible experiences

Experiences rise and fall in it  
It is the sole experiencer  
It alone is all of this you see  
Though extremely subtle it is

Ages pass within itself  
In the twinkling of an eye  
Objects appear and disappear  
All within pure consciousness

Doer and experiencer of all  
There is nothing apart from it  
As doership and the experiencer  
Are inherent in infinite consciousness

Words like inner and outer  
Are used for instruction only  
The seer remaining unseen  
Sees himself—pure sight only

The seer is the sight only  
Realized when impressions end  
Pure being is again realized  
When external objects cease

The subject becomes the object  
Objects must have a subject  
What we call subject then  
Is a word used in relationship

Subject is pure consciousness  
This seer alone is the reality  
Objects are hallucinations  
Notions that create division

Because of consciousness  
In a bracelet made of gold  
Gold realizes its goldness  
Object realizes subjectivity

The subject and object  
Reflections of the other  
Real duality does not exist  
Realize this by direct inquiry

Division does not contradict  
The existing unity at all  
Both words used for instruction  
The supreme self alone exists

#### **VASISTHA'S CONCLUDES**

Hearing the minister and king  
Karkati became tranquil  
Her demoniacal nature left her  
She praised both for their wisdom

One who is blessed to experience  
The company of enlightened ones  
Does not suffer in this world at all  
As one holding a candle in the dark

I have told you this story of Karkati  
Because I remembered her questions  
And the wise answers of both  
The minister and the noble king

Just as a leaf, flower and fruit  
All extend from one seed  
In which there cannot be diversity  
Universe extends from consciousness

By listening to my words O Rama  
You will attain enlightenment  
The universe has arisen from Brahman  
The universe is Brahman alone

Words have their limitations  
They are used in instruction  
They are not what they indicate  
As all division is illusory

I once asked Brahma to teach me  
How this universe was created  
His reply I will narrate to you  
Listen attentively to this story