

# Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 1 Chapter 4: Vyasa's Discontent

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## A note before you read

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The primary and recommended way to study is to read directly from the physical Gita Press Bhagwat. When you are travelling, away from home, or the book is not at hand, these summaries may be used as a companion for continued study, revision and understanding.



*On the holy bank of the Saravati at sunrise, the sage Vedavyasa sits in quiet sorrow — for though he had divided the Vedas and composed the Mahabharata, his heart was still not at peace.*

Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

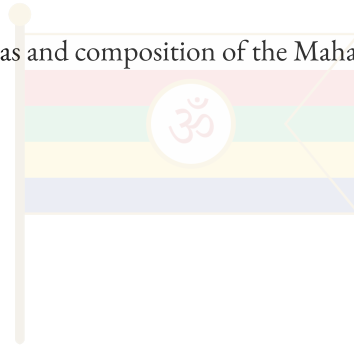
Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

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Welcome to *Srimad Bhagavatam Wisdom*, a devotional journey through the sacred histories and teachings of the Srimad Bhagavat Mahapurana. In this fourth chapter of the first Canto we come upon one of the most tender and surprising moments in the whole scripture: a sage of immeasurable greatness, the very compiler of the Vedas, discovers that his heart is still unsatisfied. Here the Bhagavata quietly reveals its own origin — how the incompleteness felt by Vedavyasa, and the counsel of a divine well-wisher, would give birth to the great song of devotion we are now reading.

## Chapter Information

- Scripture: Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa
- Canto: 1 (Book One)
- Chapter: 4 (Discourse 4)
- Chapter title: The Dissatisfaction of Vedavyasa and the Coming of Narada
- Principal speakers: the sage Śaunaka (renewing the questions) and the blessed Sūta, Ugraśravā (giving the reply)
- Principal listeners: the Sūta, and then the assembled sages of Naimisaranya
- Main setting: the sacrificial ground in the Naimisaranya forest; and, within the narrative, the hermitage of Vedavyāsa on the bank of the river Sarasvatī
- Central subject: the origin of Vedavyāsa, his division of the Vedas and composition of the Mahabharata, his lingering discontent, and the arrival of the divine sage Nārada
- Principal verse range: Canto 1, Chapter 4, verses 1–33
- Primary edition: Gita Press *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*



## Context from the Previous Chapter

In the third chapter the blessed Sūta had recounted the many descents of the Lord and told how, in this very age of Kali, Vedavyāsa compiled the Śrīmad Bhāgavata and taught it to his son Śukadeva, the foremost of Self-realized souls. Śukadeva in turn recited it to King Parīkṣit as the king sat fasting on the bank of the Gaṅgā. The Sūta, having himself heard it there, promised to repeat it to the sages of Naimisaranya just as he had learnt it. It is at this point, with the promise freshly made, that the fourth chapter begins.

## Shaunaka Renews the Questioning

When the Sūta had spoken thus, the eldest of the assembled sages rose to respond. This was Śaunaka — a lifelong student of the Ṛgveda and the head of a great seminary — who, being the senior-most among all the seers gathered for that long sacrificial session, spoke on behalf of them all. He first praised the Sūta warmly, and then laid before him a fresh round of eager questions.



*Shaunaka, eldest of the sages gathered at Naimisaranya, rises to honour the blessed Suta and renew the questioning (verses 1–2).*

व्यास उवाच

इति ब्रुवाणं संस्तूय मुनीनां दीर्घसत्रिणाम् ।

वृद्धः कुलपतिः सूतं बह्वृचः शौनकोऽब्रवीत् ॥ १ ॥

*vyāsa uvāca iti bruvāṇaṁ saṁstūya munīnāṁ dīrgha-satriṇām । vṛddhaḥ kula-patiḥ sūtaṁ bahvṛcaḥ śaunako 'bravīt ॥ 1 ॥*

**Meaning:** When the Sūta had spoken thus, Śaunaka — the aged head of the assembly and a knower of the Ṛgveda, senior-most among the sages engaged in the long sacrifice — praised him and then addressed him. (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 1)

“O Sūta, most blessed and foremost of expositors,” Śaunaka began, “pray repeat to us that same sacred story of the Lord which the divine sage Śuka recited to King Parīkṣit.” He then pressed for the setting of that great recital: In which age, at what place, and on what occasion was it held? At whose prompting did the sage Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana — Vedavyāsa — compile this Saṁhitā?

Śaunaka’s curiosity turned next to Śukadeva himself, that great mystic who saw all beings with an equal eye, whose mind rested wholly upon God, and who, being wholly detached, wandered the world unrecognized — so aloof that ordinary people mistook him for a simpleton. How, the sages wondered, did the citizens of Hastināpura come to recognize such a hidden soul when he passed through their country like one who was mad, dumb and dull? And how did the royal sage Parīkṣit come to sit with him in the conversation from which this very Bhāgavata poured forth? For it is well known that Śukadeva would linger at a householder’s door only for as long as it takes to milk a cow — just long enough to sanctify the home.

The sages then asked to hear the story of King Parīkṣit himself — reckoned among the foremost devotees of the Lord — the wonder of his birth and his deeds. Why did that emperor, whose enemies once bowed at his footstool, renounce his imperial fortune while still so young, and take his seat upon the bank of the Gaṅgā resolved to fast until death? Those

who are wholly devoted to the Lord, Śaunaka observed, live not for themselves but for the welfare of the world; why then did such a king cast off his body, which was itself a support to other beings? “Tell us all that we have asked,” he concluded, “for we know that, apart from the Vedas alone, you have mastered the whole range of sacred lore.”

## The Coming of Vedavyasa

In answer, the Sūta began at the beginning — with the birth of Vedavyāsa. In the Dvāpara age, the third turning of the four-fold cycle of yugas, the great yogi Vyāsa was born as a partial manifestation of Śrī Hari Himself, through the sage Parāśara and Satyawatī, the daughter of Vasu.

सूत उवाच

द्वापरे समनुप्राप्ते तृतीये युगपर्यये ।

जातः पराशराद्योगी वासव्यां कलया हरेः ॥ १४ ॥

*sūta uvāca dvāpare samanuprāpte tṛtīye yuga-paryaye / jātaḥ parāśarād yogī vāsavyām kalayā hareḥ ॥ 14 ॥*

**Meaning:** When the Dvāpara age had arrived, the third in the turning of the yugas, the great yogi Vyāsa — a partial descent of Śrī Hari — was born to Satyawatī through the sage Parāśara. (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 14)

One morning, after bathing in the sacred waters of the Sarasvatī, Vyāsa sat alone in a quiet place just as the sun was rising. Gifted with an unfailing vision that could read both past and future, the sage perceived how, through the silent passage of time, the duties of the ages had fallen into disorder. He saw that the potency of material things was waning, and that people were growing irreverent, weak of will, dull of mind, and short of life. Moved by compassion for these unfortunate souls, he began to consider, by his divine insight, what would truly serve the good of every class and every stage of life.

## The Division of the One Veda

Seeing that Vedic sacrifice — performed through the four officiating priests, the Hotā, the Adhvaryu, the Udgātā and the Brahmā — was the great purifier of humankind, Vyāsa resolved to make its practice endure. To that end he divided the single Veda into four, so that the vast body of sacred sound might be more easily preserved and used.



*Perceiving the waning powers of the age, Vedavyasa divides the one Veda into four and entrusts each to a worthy disciple (verses 19–24).*

Thus he separated the Ṛgveda, the Yajurveda, the Sāmaveda and the Atharvaveda; and the ancient histories and Purāṇas he counted as the fifth Veda. Each branch he entrusted to a great disciple: Paila received the Ṛgveda, Jaimini learnt to chant the Sāmaveda, and Vaiśampāyana mastered the Yajurveda. The sage Sumantu, son of Daruṇa, took charge of the Atharvaveda, while Romaharṣaṇa — the father of the Sūta himself — gained mastery over the histories and Purāṇas. These teachers in turn divided their portions into many branches, and so, through pupils and pupils' pupils, the four Vedas spread into their countless recensions. All of this the compassionate Vyāsa arranged so that even those of modest understanding might hold and cherish some portion of the sacred word.

## The Mahabharata for All People

Yet Vyāsa's compassion reached further still. He saw that women, labourers, and those born in the higher orders who had not kept to their discipline were, by custom, kept from even hearing the Vedas — and so remained unaware of the acts that lead to the highest good. For their sake, out of pure mercy, the sage composed the great epic history, the Mahābhārata, so that they too might find the path to blessedness.

स्त्रीशूद्रद्विजबन्धूनां त्रयी न श्रुतिगोचरा ।  
कर्मश्रेयसि मूढानां श्रेय एवं भवेदिह ।  
इति भारतमाख्यानं कृपया मुनिना कृतम् ॥ २५ ॥

*strī-śūdra-dvijabandhūnām trayī na śruti-gocarā । karma-śreyasi mūḍhānām śreya evaṁ bhaved iha । iti bhāratam ākhyānam kṛpayā muninā kṛtam ॥ 25 ॥*

**Meaning:** Since women, labourers and the unqualified among the twice-born could not hear the three Vedas, and did not know the way to the highest good, the sage, out of compassion, composed the history of the Mahābhārata so that even they might attain welfare here. (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 25)



*Out of compassion for those debarred from hearing the Vedas, Vedavyasa composes the great Mahabharata for the blessedness of all people (verse 25).*

## A Heart Still Unsatisfied

And here the chapter turns inward, to its most poignant moment. For all his monumental labour — the dividing of the Veda, the fashioning of the Purāṇas, the composing of the vast Mahābhārata, all of it undertaken tirelessly for the welfare of every living being — Vyāsa's own heart was still not content.

एवं प्रवृत्तस्य सदा भूतानां श्रेयसि द्विजाः ।  
सर्वात्मकेनापि यदा नातुष्यद्दृढयं ततः ॥ २६ ॥

*evam pravṛttasya sadā bhūtānām śreyasi dvijāḥ । sarvātmakenāpi yadā nātuṣyad dṛḍhayaṁ tataḥ ॥ 26 ॥*

**Meaning:** O sages, though he had thus laboured wholeheartedly and by every means for the welfare of all beings, his heart still found no satisfaction. (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 26)

Feeling this unease, the sage — who knew well the secret of Dharma — withdrew to a secluded spot on the holy bank of the Sarasvatī and sat reflecting within himself. “With a steadfast vow,” he mused, “I studied the Vedas reverently, served my elders, and worshipped the sacred fires faithfully, following every precept. Through the Mahābhārata I have laid open the very purport of the Vedas, so that even women and labourers and all others might find their duties explained. And though I stand foremost among the masters of sacred knowledge, and am not without uncommon powers, it seems my soul has still not realized its own true nature.” Something, he sensed, was missing — some essential thing that all his greatness had not touched.

## The One Thing Wanting: The Path of Loving Devotion

Then, searching his own heart, the sage drew near to the answer. Could it be, he wondered, that he had not yet given proper place to the one thing dearest of all — the loving service and glorification of the Lord?

किं वा भगवता धर्मा न प्रायेण निरूपिताः ।

प्रियाः परमहंसानां त एव ह्यच्युतप्रियाः ॥ ३१ ॥

*kiṁ vā bhāgavatā dharmā na prāyeṇa nirūpitāḥ । priyāḥ paramahaṁsānām ta eva hy acyuta-priyāḥ ॥ 31 ॥*

**Meaning:** “Or is it because I have not fully described the ways of loving devotion to the Lord — those Bhāgavata-dharmas which are dear to the perfected saints and dear to the infallible Lord Himself?” (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 31)



*In quiet reflection Vedavyasa senses the one thing wanting in all his work — the direct glorification of the Lord, dear to the perfected saints (verse 31).*

In this single, searching thought lies the whole seed of the Bhāgavata. All Vyāsa’s earlier works had taught duty, knowledge and righteousness; but the pure, motiveless love of God — the very heart of religion, treasured by the great *paramahaṁsas* and dear to the Lord Himself — had not yet been given its central place. The emptiness he felt was not a lack of learning but a longing of the heart, and the Bhagavata is teaching us that no attainment, however vast, can satisfy the soul until it rests in loving devotion to the Supreme.

## The Arrival of Devarshi Narada

It was in this very state of holy sorrow — Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana Vyāsa grieving over the sense that something was still wanting in him — that grace arrived, unbidden and perfectly timed. The divine sage Nārada, wandering the worlds, came to Vyāsa’s hermitage on the bank of the Sarasvatī.

तमभिज्ञाय सहसा प्रत्युत्थायागतं मुनिः ।  
पूजयामास विधिवन्नारदं सुरपूजितम् ॥ ३३ ॥

*tam abhijñāya sahasā pratyutthāyāgataṁ muniḥ । pūjayām āsa vidhivan nāradaṁ sura-pūjitaṁ ॥ 33 ॥*

**Meaning:** Recognizing him at once, the sage Vyāsa rose up in haste and, according to the sacred rites, worshipped Nārada, who is adored even by the gods. (Canto 1, Chapter 4, verse 33)



*The divine sage Nārada arrives at the hermitage on the Sarasvati, and Vedavyasa rises at once to worship him (verses 32–33).*

The moment is beautifully arranged. The very instant a great soul admits his own incompleteness and longs, with a humble heart, for what is missing, the messenger of grace appears at his door. And Vyāsa — for all his eminence — does not receive his guest with pride, but rises up at once and worships Nārada with full reverence. With this meeting the chapter closes, and the great conversation that will reveal the cure for Vyāsa's sorrow — and give the Bhāgavata to the world — is about to begin.

## Principal Teachings

1. Even the greatest works cannot satisfy a heart without devotion. Vyāsa had divided the Vedas and composed the Mahābhārata, yet his heart found no peace (verse 26). Learning, power and good works are precious, but the soul rests only in loving devotion to the Lord.
2. The scriptures are given out of compassion. Vyāsa divided the one Veda into four (verses 19–24) and composed the Mahābhārata (verse 25) not for fame but so that people of every class and capacity, in a declining age, might reach the highest good.

3. Bhāgavata-dharma is the essence dear to the perfected souls. Loving devotion to the Lord — the one teaching Vyāsa realized he had never fully set forth (verse 31) — is what the *paramahāṁsas* hold dearest of all, and what the Lord Himself receives most gladly from His devotee.

4. Honest self-examination is the beginning of grace. Vyāsa did not blame the world for his unease; he turned within and searched his own heart (verses 27–31). It is this humble self-scrutiny that opens the door to higher guidance.

5. Grace comes to the humble at the right moment. The instant Vyāsa acknowledged his incompleteness, Nārada arrived (verses 32–33), and the eminent sage rose to worship him. Greatness that remains humble is the soil in which wisdom takes root.

## A Devotional Reflection

There is a rare comfort in this chapter for every sincere seeker. If even Vedavyāsa — the compiler of the Vedas, a partial descent of the Lord Himself — could labour magnificently and still feel an emptiness within, then our own restlessness need not shame us. The Bhagavata does not present that emptiness as a failure but as a doorway. Vyāsa's dissatisfaction was, in truth, the stirring of the soul reaching past all achievement toward its true home in loving devotion. His response is our lesson: he did not distract himself, nor grow proud of his accomplishments, but sat quietly by the sacred river and asked his heart what was missing. And in that honest asking, help was already on its way. When we feel that quiet ache that no success can fill, we may remember Vyāsa on the bank of the Sarasvatī, and turn — as he did — toward the one thing that satisfies: remembrance and loving service of the Lord.

## A Daily Devotional Practice

Take a few quiet minutes today, as Vyāsa did beside the Sarasvatī, to sit in stillness and gently ask your own heart what it truly longs for beneath all its busyness. Then offer that longing to the Lord — perhaps by softly reciting one of His holy names, or by reading a single verse of the Bhagavata with attention. Let the practice be humble and honest. That turning of the heart is itself the beginning of grace.

## Conclusion

So ends the fourth discourse of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata, set partly in the Naimisaranya forest and partly on the bank of the Sarasvatī, in Book One of this great Purāṇa which the God-realized call the Paramahāṁsa-Saṁhitā. In this chapter, Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 1 Chapter 4, the sage Śaunaka renews the questioning of the blessed Sūta, and the Sūta answers by unfolding the origin of Vedavyāsa — his birth in the Dvāpara age, his division of the Vedas, and his merciful composition of the Mahābhārata. Yet at the height of his labours the great sage found his heart unsatisfied, and in searching himself he sensed that the direct, loving glorification of the Lord had not yet been given its rightful place. At that very moment the divine Nārada arrived, and Vyāsa rose to worship him. From this meeting the whole song of the Bhāgavata will be born. May we learn from Vyāsa to seek, beneath all our doing, the one thing that alone can fill the heart.

May the divine wisdom of Srimad Bhagavatam awaken pure devotion within our hearts.

Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

Jay Shree Madhav.

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## References and Attribution

*Primary edition: Gita Press, Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa (English), Book One (Skandha 1), Discourse 4, book pages 11–14.*

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॥ हरि ॐ तत्सत् ॥

*Jay Shree Madhav*

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