

**SUMMER SHOWERS
IN BRINDAVAN
1996**

Discourses by

BHAGAVAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

on the

Ramayana

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Foreword

Summer is a hot and dry season, and few look forward to it. But with the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and Sai devotees in general, it is different. Summer is when the much-awaited Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality takes place, crowned of course by the memorable Divine Discourses of Bhagavan Baba.

Swami's discourses are always nectarine but sweeter it is when the Lord talks about His own incarnations. In the Summer Course of 1996, The *Ramayana* was the anchor around which Bhagavan developed His exhortations. The *Ramayana* is no doubt familiar to all of us but the *Ramayana* as told by Baba has revelations hitherto not made and nuances hitherto not discussed. The Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust is therefore to be complimented for undertaking the task of making Bhagavan's discourses available through the print media to Sai devotees all over the world.

Blessed are they who listen to the Message of the Lord. Even more blessed are those who spread the Message of the Lord. Most blessed are those who make their own lives the Message of the Lord.

Jai Sai Ram.

July 15, 1998
(G. VENKATARAMAN) Vice-chancellor
Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Prashanthi Nilayam - 515 134 (India)

1. Education and Immortality

That indeed is true spiritual education which secures universal peace, dispels narrow-mindedness, and fosters unity, harmony, and co-operation.

Students, Embodiments of Love!

It is the foremost duty of every student to transform every activity of his life into one of strength and beauty. But unfortunately, the education system of today fails to nourish the qualities of wholesomeness, unity and love, which are the hallmarks of true education. Students should realise that their life span is fast melting away like ice, whether they care to improve or not.

Students of today are blind to the goal of life. Some students do not even feel the pain of not knowing the purpose of life. Only one in a million or one in a crore (ten million) strives to realise the essence of life. This striving is the steppingstone for the realisation of the purpose of life. Many students and men feel that the acquisition of food, clothing, shelter, wealth, conveniences, and comforts constitute the very purpose of life. Life remains a tragedy as long as man labours under this kind of delusion. The day he realises the purpose of life, he undergoes a total transformation, from *vedana* (agony) to *nirvedana* (freedom from pain). When one becomes conscious of light, acquires wisdom and realises the meaning of existence, one is transported from agony to ecstasy. Light here does not signify the light of the Sun, the Moon or the lamp but that of the

heart. Wisdom does not refer to scientific wisdom, but enlightenment brought about by the transformation of the heart. What about existence? Awareness of one's own true reality is the proper meaning of existence. The awareness of one's reality lies in the realisation that one is not the body, the mind or the senses. True realisation lies in understanding the fact that man is based on a transcendental principle that goes beyond the boundaries of matter.

The need for gratitude

Man should earnestly investigate the presence of Divinity in human life. Awareness of one's own duty is tantamount to the awareness of Divinity in human life. Students of today are blind to these principles of duty, which are Divine. They do not show gratitude even to doctors who have brought relief to a sick patient or an animal in their homes. They argue that they need not be grateful to the doctor because it is the duty of the latter to bring relief to a suffering patient. But let us remember that the patient too has a duty. Flagrant violation of duty leads us nowhere. It is our duty to show gratitude to the mother who nourished us in the womb and fostered our well being after our birth. But modern students have no sense of gratitude. On the other hand, they question why they should be grateful to the mother, who, in their opinion, is duty-bound to take care of them. Let every student realise that it is his duty to take care of his mother even as she took care of him earlier.

Even the great Greek Emperor, Alexander, harboured the mistaken notion that one need not be grate-

ful to all those people who had performed good deeds out of a sense of duty. But that same Alexander had the good sense to realise that, whereas all human love is marked by selfishness, it is Divine Love alone that is totally free from selfishness. Nothing in the world made by man can equal the glory, grandeur and the majesty of God. Can any high-powered bulb equal the matchless brilliance of the Sun? Can any pump in the world supply as much water as is delivered by a heavy downpour? Can any fan in the world give as much coolness as given by the Wind-God? The gifts of God are abundant, bountiful and beyond comparison.

We pay tax for all the facilities provided to us. We pay water-tax to the Municipality, which provides us with water. We pay tax to the Electricity Department for providing power. But what taxes are we paying to the great Lord who provides us with end-less power, light and wind? When we pay tax to the different departments for services provided, is it not our duty to pay the tax of gratitude to God? We do not show any gratitude to God who has gifted us the five elements, which never get depleted. In fact, it should be our foremost duty to show our gratitude to God, who gives us so much in endless abundance. It is the absence of such gratitude that is the cause of agitation and confusion in the world today. We have to face the consequences of our misdeeds because every action has a reaction, resound and reflection. The awareness of this fact on the part of one and all will bring abundant peace and harmony.

Man is endowed with endless strength. His body is indeed a massive generator. His face is like a televi-

sion-set. But man has lost his value in the world today. It is man who lends value to a diamond. It is man who unearths a raw stone and turns it into a priceless diamond after processing and polishing it. Though man has been able to transform a cheap raw stone into an invaluable diamond, he himself has no value in spite of contributing much to the value-addition of the diamond.

Vidhya and Vidhyarthi

Modern education does not confer any value on man. Even the rich meaning of a word like *vidya* has lost its pristine glory. The syllables *vid* and *ya* are laden with significant meaning. *vid* means light and *ya* means that. Hence, *vidya* means 'that which lends light.' The present educational system keeps us in darkness instead of shedding illumination. True education is that which is in consonance with the *vedic* statement, *Tamasoma jyotirgamaya* (Lead me from darkness to light). But today's education-systems, instead of dispelling the darkness of ignorance, have made the students blind and deaf. Students have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear. They have minds, but they are as deficient as the mentally-deranged. One has lost faith in one's own eyes, ears and mind. Man has begun to deceive himself. Today he sees with the eyes of others, hears with the ears of others and thinks with the minds of others. How can such a man be called human, when he has lost faith in his own eyes and ears and in himself? What can such a man achieve in life?

*Of what avail is all high learning?
Who can erase the scroll on the forehead
written by God?
When bad thoughts are harboured in the
head
The mind becomes blunt and useless.*

Vidhyarthi (student) is the one who contributes substantially to the welfare and the well being of society. He is: *vidya* + *arthi*, a true seeker of learning. Unfortunately, today he seeks sensual pleasures instead of seeking true learning. Why should such students enter educational institutions, which are temples of learning?

Education today is mistaken for bookish learning. It is spirituality that lends excellence to education. Education devoid of spirituality is an utter waste. Great men of learning like Bipin Chandra Pal and Rabindranath Tagore were born in Bengal. In the same State was born Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who had no schooling at all to his credit. Though an illiterate, he is more remembered in Bengal than scholars like Bipin Chandra Pal and Rabindranath Tagore. It is the spiritual might of Ramakrishna Paramahansa that earned for him an eternal place in the hearts of the people. Every bit of learning should be based on the foundation of ethical, *dharmic* (righteous), and spiritual principles. Education that is not founded on these will flounder to the ground and become useless.

*They may be men of eminence,
With MA and BA degrees to their credit.*

*They may be men par excellence,
 Endowed with wealth and merit.
 They may be perfect men,
 Endowed with perfect health and strength.
 They may be men of penance,
 Reciting the vedas with religious zeal.
 But they can never match the excellence and
 splendour of the devotees of God.*

It is by dint of devotion that even ordinary persons are elevated to extraordinary status.

Divine Love and human love

This Summer Course is about Indian culture and spirituality. What is Indian culture? Indian culture is the harmonious synthesis of the ethical, the *dharmic* and the spiritual qualities. The eminent scholar Elliot, after sound investigation, defined culture as a “way of life”. This definition is neither appropriate nor adequate, as it does not properly define the scope of life. It does not mention whether life refers to animal, human or subhuman. Culture lies in seeing unity in diversity, with a deep-seated faith in the unity of Life. We must nourish faith in the feeling of the caste of humanity and the culture of love. Here the culture of love does not refer to the bodily love that marks the relationship between the wife and the husband, between children and parents, and between friends. The son, though he loved his mother with all his heart, flings her body onto the burning pyre and consigns her to the flames without any mercy after death. How can such love be called true Love? All such relationships can at best be termed attachment and not Love.

Attachments come in the middle and pass off in the middle. But Love existed even before birth and will last after death. Attachments are like passing clouds that sail away quickly. There is no love between the husband and the wife before they are wedded. There is no love between the mother and the child before the birth of the child. Only Divine Love exists before birth and lasts after death. True Love is uncontaminated, unsoiled, unadulterated, unpolluted, eternal, perennial, pure and unsullied. It is only Divine Love that is not tainted by selfishness and self-interest. All other kinds of love are stained by selfishness. It is this faith in the glory of Love and Divinity that distinguishes Indian culture.

Culture is universal in its scope and significance. We should not claim and contend that Indian culture is superior to all the other cultures of the world. We should have firm faith in the injunction: "All are one. Be alike to everyone."

Together we shall live.

Together we shall move.

Together we shall grow in splendour.

*Together we shall live in amity and harmony,
without conflict and skirmish.*

We should foster the noble sentiments expressed in *vedic* statements of this kind. Unfortunately, the educational institutions of today do not nourish these noble sentiments in students. They are purely academically oriented and disregard the finer values of life. These institutions impart only the

knowledge of the subjects and lose track of the object of life. The learning imparted covers the physical and the superficial. It is like a camera, which photographs only the physical and the apparent without fathoming the inner recesses. True learning is like an X-ray camera, which lays bare the innermost details with perfect fidelity. Our mind should be like an X-ray with Love as the film, so that it can capture the entire personality of a being with total fidelity. An X-ray machine without film is of no use, as nothing can be captured without a film. Similarly, a mind devoid of Love is of no use. Love does not change with time. It is abiding and eternal. But the love of people today is transient and ephemeral, and may expire at any time. Such a love is not at all worthy of being called Love. True Love endures trial and turbulence, loss, and pain, and it transcends every trying circumstance. We should not forget God under any circumstance, however difficult it might be. Our Love for God should survive every onslaught. We should resist all the ravages of time and the vicissitudes of life. Our Love should not change and float with every passing wind.

The lives of eminent *bhaktas* (devotees) demonstrate to us how firm and strong our devotion should be. The life of Prahlada is a testament of real devotion to God. Though severely tortured by his father, Hiranya Kashyapa, Prahlada stood firm as a rock, steadfast in his devotion to Vishnu. The teachers of Prahlada came to Hiranya Kashyapa and pleaded their inability to divert the mind of Prahlada thus:

O Great Lord of the Demons,

*Though pierced by sharp swords,
Your son does not shed a single tear.
Instead he prays: "O Hari, the destroyer of
demons."*

Though of tender age, Prahlada planted God firmly in his heart and withstood every storm and stress. Physical afflictions had no effect on him and did not reduce his devotion. The mind steeped in the Love of God is beyond any shock and strain like the chloroformed patient who is oblivious of the incisions made by the surgical instruments. Only Love of this kind can be victorious ultimately. Pain is a part of life and must be accepted at any cost. Pleasure is an interval between two pains. But today, the devotion of the people wavers with every trying circumstance. When our wishes are fulfilled, we install many photographs for worship; and when our wishes are not fulfilled, we throw out all the photographs. We must cultivate the temperament that makes us view pleasure and pain alike. Both pain and pleasure are gifts of God, for there is no pleasure without pain and there is no pain without pleasure. Culture lies in seeing this unity of pain and pleasure.

What are culture and spirituality? Culture marked by unity is spirituality. Culture and spirituality enable us to realise our true nature. Hence, secular learning should be coupled with spirituality. It is only such a harmonious blend of the secular and the spiritual that would lend beauty and radiance to life. We should not learn merely to fill our bellies but also to fill our hearts with Bliss. The food eaten fills only

the belly and does not fill the mind, but spiritual food fills the mind and gives eternal Bliss.

Education and morality

Inculcation of morality is very important in life. Students lead chaste and disciplined lives as long as they live in the hostel, but lead an altogether different life once they leave the hostel. Your lives should be marked by discipline and morality, whether you live in the hostel or outside it. Your lives should be lived in consonance with the command of the conscience. It should remain the same, whether observed or unobserved, noticed or unnoticed.

The glory of a race rests on morality.

Decline in morality brings degradation of the race as well.

That race is indeed a noble race which seeks sustenance from morality.

Listen to this noble truth, O brave sons of Bharath, O brave students of Bharath!

Divert the mind

Though it is hard to restrain the mind, it can be diverted. When the mind steeped in the secular world is diverted toward Divinity, it gains in moral strength. The mind steeped in the worldly matters makes you a prisoner of the world, whereas a mind steeped in God secures liberation for you. Your heart is the lock and your mind is the key. When you turn the key to the left, it locks. But if you turn the key to the right, it unlocks. It is the turning of the key that makes the difference. Hence the mind is the cause for your liberation as well

as bondage. What then is liberation (*moksha*)? It is not an air-conditioned mansion, but a state devoid of delusion (*moha*). Majesty and morality lie in diverting the mind from the world to God. It is this that really contributes to your progress and prosperity.

Students, in this Summer Course you have to go beyond the borders of the subjects that you study in your classrooms. You have to obtain, in this Summer Course, that wisdom which secures for you moral splendour and bliss.

Though one is endowed with wealth and righteous conduct, one is plagued by the absence of progeny. Though one is endowed with great learning, one is plagued by unemployment. Education today is reduced to begging. If you beg for favours from God, He will certainly respond. It is better to beg from God than to beg from people.

Your Vice-chancellor has appealed to Me to speak about the glories of the *Ramayana*. This I shall do every evening, bringing out the excellence of the Epic. Every syllable of the *Ramayana* is of utmost significance to students. As the human body is made of blood cells, the *Ramayana* too is constituted of sacred and sublime cells. Human life finds fulfilment by dwelling on the sanctity of the *Ramayana*.

Education and Immortality

Students should not confine their studies merely to the subject prescribed in the syllabus. Their interest should embrace the realms of spirituality as well. I do

not underrate the importance of secular education, but I do wish to emphasise the need for cultivating secular as well as spiritual education. Let Me illustrate this with an example.

A game of football is played by two teams, each team consisting of ten players playing on each side of the field. While playing, each team strives to score a goal by shooting the ball between the two goal posts. Life is a game in which one has to aim at leading one's life between the two goal posts of secular and spiritual education. While playing football, one kicks the ball as long as it is filled with air. Once the football is deflated, no one will kick it. The air in the football signifies the presence of ego. A man swayed by ego would have to receive blows until he becomes devoid of ego. Only a deflated ball is taken by the hands, whereas an inflated ball is kicked mercilessly. Similarly, a person who has destroyed his ego is well respected, whereas the person who allows himself to be swayed by ego becomes the target of all sorts of attacks. Only a person who is free from ego can transform himself into an ideal man. Secular things come and go, whereas spiritual gains stay forever. Hence, spirituality should constitute the basis of all our activities.

As the human body collapses without the spinal column, so also human life sinks without morality and spirituality. The spinal column is made of thirty-three rings, and it supports the entire human body. Similarly, moral and spiritual principles constitute the very rings of the backbone of human life.

I will expose the rings of moral principles that constitute the *Ramayana*. My earnest wish is that students evince keen interest in the moral and spiritual principles of the *Ramayana* and fully benefit from it. The elders too should mould their lives in consonance with morality and spirituality. Neither wealth nor scholarship can bring you happiness. Only the Love of God confers endless Bliss on you. It not only bestows happiness but gives extreme strength as well.

*Any amount of learning without Love for
God is utter futility.*

*The foolish one, in spite of all learning, re-
mains a fool forever.*

*The wicked one, despite all learning, never
sheds his wickedness.*

*Learning promotes only logic but not pure
Wisdom.*

*Of what use is learning if it does not bring
you freedom from death?*

You must seek such learning as confers immortality. What is Immortality? The removal of immorality is immortality. Human life, which is mortal, is bound to perish one day or the other. Hence we must strive for morality, which is imperishable. This moral splendour is the need of the country today. It is My earnest wish that our students should cultivate moral splendour and strive for the welfare and upliftment of the country at a time when selfishness and self-interest are so rampant.



2. Glory Of Rama Thathwa

*The name Rama is sweeter than sugar and
the best of honey.*

It is more tasteful than curd too.

*As you go on repeating the name of Rama,
it tastes like nectar itself.*

*Hence, repeat the name of Rama with all
your heart, with utter sincerity.*

The *Ramayana* has been described as the story of Rama, the ideal man. In fact every human, in a way, is Rama Himself, when he embodies the ideals of Rama. Hence, it is imperative on the part of every individual to cultivate the ideals of Rama. The *Ramayana* enshrines in itself the very essence of the *dharma* (righteousness) of the individual, family, and society.

Though thousands of years have passed since the story of Rama was first written, the inner story of the *Ramayana* is being enacted every moment of our life. The *Ramayana* does not signify the story of Rama alone; for, the word 'Rama' signifies Sita as well. Rama means Sita, the daughter of the earth. Since the earth is a part of Nature (*Prakruthi*), every child born on this earth should try to cultivate the qualities of Sita. Valmiki, at the beginning of the *Ramayana* was swayed by the idea that Rama was the ideal man. But during the course of his writing, he was overpowered by the feeling that Rama was Divinity itself and concluded, at the end of the epic, that Rama was the Embodiment of Divinity. On the other hand, Tulsidas began his *Ramayana* with the firm faith that Rama was

verily Lord Narayana Himself and concluded emphasising the fact that Rama was the ideal man. Kamban, the author of *Kamba Ramayana*, wrote his *Ramayana* moved by the feeling that man is God and God is man (*nara* is Narayana and Narayana is *nara*). The three great writers of the *Ramayana* lent different dimensions to it, depending on their inner perceptions. Each writer, who brought forth his version of the *Ramayana*, added his own dimension in consonance with his own faith and temperament. By and large, it is a fact that the *Rama Thathwa* (Rama's Principle) has to be cultivated by one and all.

The Glory of Ayodhya

Ayodhya was a flourishing city in the prosperous Kingdom of Kosala. Emperor Manu founded this city and there was none more beautiful. It had spiraling mansions, sprawling markets, and spruce gardens. The citizens of Ayodhya took delight in adding fresh beauty to the already beautiful city. The mansions were studded with pearls and precious stones and shone with great splendour. Dasaratha, the Emperor, embodied in himself all noble ideals. The people too shared the noble virtues of Emperor Dasaratha. The Emperor was pure and egoless, and verily the embodiment of peace and love. He regarded the subjects of his kingdom as his own children and lavished great love and affection on them.

Dasaratha ruled over his kingdom counseled by eight Ministers. These Ministers were of extraordinary mettle. They were masters of the Scriptures and masters of their senses as well. They held the Emperor's

command in high esteem and were prepared to lay down their lives in the task of carrying out his commands. The Emperor had two eminent priests (*purohitas*), Vasishta and Vamana. These priests led profoundly moral and spiritual lives, and were always absorbed in Divine contemplation.

Though Emperor Dasaratha enjoyed every pleasure at his command, he was plagued by the want of children. In due course of time, Dasaratha's Queen Kausalya, gave birth to a daughter named Shanthi. There was another Emperor who pined for children. He was Emperor Romapada, of the Kingdom of Anga. Since Romapada happened to be a friend of Dasaratha, Dasaratha gave away his daughter to Romapada for adoption. Romapada took extreme care of Shanthi and reared her with love and affection. When Shanthi came of age, Romapada gave her in marriage to a young sage by name Rishyashruna.

One day, Minister Sumanthra approached Dasaratha and advised him to perform the *Putrakameshti Yajna* for begetting children. He further advised him to invite Rishyashruna to officiate at the performance of the *Yajna*. Dasaratha, accompanied by Sumanthra, went to the Kingdom of Anga and invited Romapada and Rishyashruna to Ayodhya on the occasion of the performance of the *Putrakameshti Yajna*.

While all this was happening on earth, the angels and other superhuman beings got together and went to Lord Narayana in the heavenly firmament and pleaded relief from the atrocities being committed by

Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka. They were worried by the fact that Brahma had granted to Ravana, the boon that he would not die at the hands of demons or heavenly beings. Brahma assuaged their feelings, saying that though he had granted the boon to Ravana that he would not die at the hands of the demons and heavenly beings, he did not exempt him from death at the hands of humans. Ravana, who did not hold humans in high esteem and considered them as worms, never had an inkling that he would die at the hands of a human. Brahma assured the divine beings that Lord Narayana would take birth as a man and bring about the death of Ravana. There was thus a happy coincidence of events on the earthly plane and the heavenly plane.

Rama's Birth (The Divine Descent)

In response to the request of Dasaratha, Sage Rishyashrunga came to Ayodhya to officiate at the *Putrakameshti Yajna*. Lord Narayana, pleased by the prayers of Emperor Dasaratha, appeared to him and granted him the boon that he would be blessed with children. He handed over to him the vessel of pudding (*payasam*) and asked him to give it to his wives, to be taken by them. Emperor Dasaratha won the grace of the Lord by his virtuous conduct and by the moral and spiritual life that he led. God's Grace is in proportion to man's efforts.

Emperor Dasaratha distributed the pudding to the three Queens equally, for he had equal love for each of them. Pundits and scholars have distorted facts by saying that the pudding was distributed in different

proportions. The three Queens of Dasaratha, namely, Kausalya, Sumithra, and Kaikeyi lived in great harmony and adjustment. Kaikeyi, the youngest Queen, happily received the pudding. She first thought that her son would be crowned as the King of Ayodhya as per the promise that Dasaratha had given before marrying her. Kausalya also happily received her share of the pudding. She thought that since she was the eldest Queen, the son born to her would be crowned as the King of Ayodhya. But Sumithra, the middle Queen, did not entertain any such wish. She was friendly with everyone and highly merited her name, "Sumithra" (a good friend). She placed her share of pudding on the walled terrace and started drying her hair under the Sun, after her bath. While she was thus busy, an eagle swooped down and carried away the vessel that contained the pudding. Frightened at the prospect of incurring the wrath of Dasaratha, she approached Kausalya and Kaikeyi and told them about her plight. Since the Queens were of highly virtuous disposition, they gave part of their share to Sumithra.

Out of the part of the pudding given by Kausalya, Lakshmana was born to Sumithra, whereas Satrughna was born out of the share of the pudding given by Kaikeyi. Hence, it is no wonder that Lakshmana, born of Kousalya's share, was deeply attached to Rama and Satrughna was deeply attached to Bharatha since he was born of the share of Kaikeyi. Lakshmana served Rama sincerely and faithfully until the end, whereas Satrughna served Bharatha to the last. Bharatha would not live without Satrughna even for a moment, a feeling that was well reciprocated.

Similarly, Rama would not live without Lakshmana and vice versa. When Lakshmana fainted in the battle-field, Rama lamented, “Oh Lakshmana! In this wide world, I may be able to obtain a wife like Sita or a mother like Kausalya. But I will never be able to get a brother like you.” Such was the supreme love of Rama for Lakshmana.

The *Ramayana* and the four ends of life

The four brothers were the embodiments of the four *Vedas*. What are these *Vedas*? *Rig Veda* is the embodiment of speech (*vaak*); *Yajur Veda* is the embodiment of the mind (*manas*); *Sama Veda* is the embodiment of the life principle (*prana*); and *Atharvana Veda* is the embodiment of the intellect (*buddhi*). Thus the four *Vedas* played about in the house of Dasaratha as Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrughna. We do not gain much if we allow ourselves to be dominated by the mistaken notion that Rama is the Embodiment of Divinity and that He is beyond our reach. We should realise the fact that the Lord descended on the earth to demonstrate an ideal to mankind. Hence, every human being should mould himself according to the great example set by Rama. In fact, Rama lives in every human heart as the enchanting principle. The enchanting principle in the heart is the Self. There is none in this world in whom the Self is absent. Hence, the Rama principle exists in everyone. Similarly, we should investigate the inner meaning of the word Dasaratha. Dasaratha was not just an Emperor of the Kingdom of Kosala. He stands for the body, which is verily the chariot of the ten senses. The body is made up of the five organs of action and the five organs of perception.

The four sons of Dasaratha also signify the four ends of Life: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation).

These four ends of life give fulfilment to human life. No human can find fulfilment without these four. There is a close connection between *dharma* and *artha*. Wealth should be acquired in a righteous way. Similarly, every desire should be a sacred and righteous one. Sri Rama was the embodiment of this *dharma*. That is why it is said *Ramo Vighavan Dharma*.

We should enjoy life basing ourselves firmly on the principles of *dharma*. Unfortunately, the four ends have been sadly neglected with utter disregard. *dharma*, however, does not enjoy full freedom, it is subservient to God, its Master.

Ravana sought wealth and gratification of desire, utterly violating the principle of *dharma*. Ravana was a scholar par excellence. He had mastered the sixty-four disciplines of learning whereas Rama had mastered only thirty-two disciplines of knowledge. However, Rama put them into practice and thereby digested them, whereas Ravana failed to digest them. The indigestion on the part of Ravana arose in the form of *kama*, which ultimately destroyed him. While Rama was the Embodiment of *Dharma*, Ravana remained as the embodiment of *kama*. Thus, there arose a conflict between Righteousness and the unrighteousness. Rama transformed Himself into the embodiment of *sathya*, since He followed the principle of *dharma*. Since Ravana violated *dharma*, he became the em-

bodiment of *ssathya*. There is an eternal warfare between righteousness and unrighteousness, truth and untruth. It is the duty of everyone to follow and practice the twin principles of truth and righteousness. *Sathya* and *dharma* are verily the Embodiment of Divinity, and there is no God other than these two.

Live the Ramayana

The Rama principle is laden with many subtle secrets. The Rama story is of exemplary excellence ethically, spiritually and materially as well. The story of Rama teaches us how a man should live in the world and conduct himself in the family as well as in society. It also teaches us how one should retain one's individuality and shape one's personality.

Only when we shape ourselves into a strong personality can we conduct ourselves ideally in the family and in society. Rama enshrined in Himself all these ideal qualities and shone as an ideal being. He also enshrined in Himself the principle of equanimity, unity and Bliss. This principle of Bliss is latent in every human heart. Every human has a right to realise and enjoy this principle of Bliss, which is the *Rama Thathwa*. Rama was the Embodiment of four cardinal principles: truth, righteousness, love, and peace.

Rama was an Embodiment of *Dharma*, which is the basis for the entire Universe. A true human being is one who follows and practices the principle of *dharma*. Burning is the *dharma* of fire. Coolness is the *dharma* of ice. Fire is no fire without burning. Ice is no ice without coolness. Similarly, the *dharma* of man lies

in performing actions with the body and following the commands of the heart. Every act performed with thought, word, and deed in harmony is an act of *dharma*. Thus, a *dharmic* life is a divine life.

We say the word *dharma* without knowing its true nature and majesty. *Dharma* is of various kinds: *dharma* of a householder, a celibate, a recluse, and a renunciate. But the *dharma* of the heart is the supreme *dharma*. This *dharma* of the heart is verily the *dharma* of life as well. The unity of thought, word, and deed has to be achieved at any cost. The *Ramayana* stands as a supreme testimony to it. The synthesis of humanity in divinity, and divinity in humanity, leads to totality (*poornathva*). It is said *Poornamidham poornaath poorna-mudatchyate*. This totality is present fully in human beings.

Many people are ignorant of the inner significance of the Rama story. I shall explain to you in due course the subtleties contained in the *Ramayana* and the deep significance of words like Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Bharatha, Satrughna, etc. You will have the full assessment of the *Ramayana* only after knowing the subtle truths contained in it.

The principle of Rama is most sacred, sublime and glorious. There is nothing in the world that cannot be achieved by cultivating the *Rama Thathwa*. Though thousands of years have elapsed since the story of Rama took place, the Rama Principle is deeply imprinted in the hearts of the people. The Rama Principle is ever fresh, ever new and embraces infinitude itself.

The Rama Principle is contained in the smallest of the small and the largest of the large. The Principle of Rama is not confined to name and form. It is a transcendental principle, which transcends time itself. The Rama Principle lives as eternally blooming, blossoming and bursting forth. Students will understand the true nature of humanity by realising the Rama Principle.

When God descends in human form as an *Avatar*, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that the *Avatar* is a simple human form like ourselves. His form may be human; but His majesty and magnificence are Infinite.

*We should not mistake a white stone for
sugar candy and munch it,
We should not mistake a cotton fruit for a
mango and eat it.*

Why Does God Take Human Form?

We should not be deluded by the form and deceive ourselves thereby. God has to take the human form and change the lives of humans by His own example. The emancipation of humanity is possible only by taking the human form. It is only man who has descended to the depths of degradation by his utter disregard of his *dharma* and divinity. Man alone has disregarded his human *dharma*, whereas birds and beasts firmly adhere to their own respective *dharmas*. There is no need for the *Avatar* to arise amongst birds and beasts since *dharma* has not declined in them.

Lord Krishna declared, *Parithranaya saadhunam* (I come down for the protection of the good). The *Avatar* hence comes for the protection of the good. There is no use merely lispig Rama's name. You must realise the Rama Principle first and foremost. The *Rama Thathwa* is *Prema Thathwa* (Principle of Love). We have to emulate Rama and transform ourselves by following the path of Love. However deep and great our scholastic eminence may be, we cannot achieve anything without undergoing the transformation of the mind.



3. The Mission Commences

*When truth, righteousness, and love are
practised, Earth greatly rejoices.
These noble principles secure universal
peace and happiness.
Listen to this noble truth, Oh! brave son of
Bharath.*

Sage Valmiki propagated the *Ramayana* in three different ways: As the story of Rama, as the story of Sita, and as the story of the slaying of Ravana.

Ramasya ayanam iti Ramayanam. The *Ramayana* unfolds the story of Rama. It is also the story of Divinity. Further, the *Ramayana* is the epic that unfolds the story of Sita; and the story of Sita is also the story of the individual self. The third aspect of the *Ramayana* is the annihilation of Ravana. The destruction of Ravana signifies the destruction of ignorance. Ignorance is extinguished when we realise perfectly the relationship between the individual self and the Absolute Self.

There are three syllables *ra*, *aa*, and *ma* in the word Rama. *Ra* signifies the principle of fire; *aa* signifies the principle of the Sun; *ma* signifies the principle of the Moon. The primal sound *Aa*, which is the Sun principle, dispels the darkness of ignorance. *Ma*, which signifies the Moon principle, cools the inner heart. *Ra*, which signifies the fire principle, destroys illusion. Hence, the name of Rama contains the *Vedic* message:

Asathoma Sad Gamaya

(Lead us from falsehood to truth).

Tamasoma Jyothir Gamaya

(Lead us from darkness to light).

Mrithyorma Amrutham Gamaya

(Lead us from death to immortality).

Vasishta's Joy

When the four children were born, Emperor Dasaratha performed all the rituals connected with the birth of the children. On the second day, Dasaratha asked Sage Vasishta, to bestow his blessings on the four children. At first, Sage Vasishta remained speechless and could not utter the words of blessing. Recovering, Vasishta said, "How can I utter them when I am spellbound? The mission for which I came to the royal house is fulfilled today." He added: "I came here as a priest so that I may have the good fortune of associating myself with the Lord, who has chosen to be born in your lineage. I did not come to you tempted by your wealth and stature. The One who has taken birth in your lineage is verily God Himself. But swayed by illusion, you harbour the notion that He is a human child." Vasishta returned home shedding profuse tears of Bliss, for he realised that his life had attained fulfilment that day.

The Tutelage

Prior to this, a significant thing happened as soon as Rama was born. The servant maid of Kausalya rushed to Dasaratha to inform him of the good news of the birth of the child. Overjoyed by the good news, Dasaratha wished to present the servant maid with a

necklace of precious stones. The servant maid rejected the offer and instead pleaded: “Master, grant me the boon of fondling, caressing and cradling your child.” Such noble thoughts arise in people due to the meritorious lives led by them in the past.

Emperor Dasaratha brought up his children with great love and affection and performed the thread ceremony when they were five years old. The Emperor prayed to Sage Vasishta to initiate the children into the discipline of learning. The children mastered the four *Vedas* before their tenth year. Indeed, before the age of ten, they became masters of all types of knowledge—moral, secular, and spiritual. These four children strove to secure the welfare and well being of all people.

The foremost knowledge obtained was that of the Spirit, for spiritual learning is supreme learning. All secular disciplines are like streams, whereas spiritual knowledge is like a mighty ocean. These four children also cultivated noble virtues and supreme qualities. The children cultivated qualities that were not tainted by selfishness. They mastered military arts like archery, swordsmanship, and equestrian skills. The four brothers were past masters in horse riding and elephant riding. They rode so fast that people could hardly see them. It was Kaikeyi who initiated Rama into archery, since she was an expert archer herself. She taught Him military skills with great love and rare affection.

When the children attained the age of fourteen, Dasaratha decided to get them married. It was the tradition in those days to perform the marriage early so that the boys did not go astray. For this purpose, the Emperor consulted elders and men of eminence, like Sage Vasishta.

At this stage, Sage Vishwamitra arrived on the scene. Dasaratha received him with great reverence and courtesy. Sage Viswamitra first blessed the Emperor and made enquiries about the welfare of the Emperor and his subjects. When Dasaratha asked him the reason for his visit, Vishwamitra said that he would explain the cause only if the King promised to grant him his wish. When Dasaratha promised that he would honour the words of the Sage, Viswamitra said that the King should send his son Rama for the protection of his *yajna* (sacrifice). Hearing the words of the Sage, Dasaratha pleaded, “Oh Sage! My son Rama is only fourteen years old. He is tender and has not known any hardship. So, it is not possible for me to send my son along with you for the protection of the *yagna*.”

Vishwamitra became furious and said, “It is extreme folly to go back on your word, for no one in the noble lineage of Ikshvaku has, until now, ever broken his word. The scions of the Ikshvaku lineage have always been truthful, pure, and sacred. You are tainting their glory by breaking the promise given to me. No merit accrues to those who break their promise, even if they perform many a noble deed and *yaga*. Death is

preferable to the sin of uttering falsehood. It is better that one dies rather than break one's promise."

Dasaratha became frightened on hearing the words of Sage Vishwamitra. At that instant, Vasishta arrived. Assessing what had happened, the Sage said to Dasaratha, "Oh King, it is not proper on the part of the scions of the Ikshvaku lineage to go back on their word. You need not fear about the safety of Rama. He is the auspicious One and the incarnation of Narayana. You should send Rama along with Vishwamitra for the protection of the *yajna*." Dasaratha agreed to send Rama along with Vishwamitra. Lakshmana wanted to follow Rama since he was the very reflection of Rama. He was Rama's shadow. Similarly, Satrughna would follow Bharatha, since he was the very reflection of Bharatha. The following episode illustrates how Lakshmana and Satrughna were attached to Rama and Bharatha.

Sumithra's two children, Lakshmana and Satrughna, arrived in the world crying as soon as they were born. They would not stop crying at all, while Rama and Bharatha were playing about with blissful smiles, in their cradles. The children of Sumatra puzzled everybody by their incessant crying. Sumatra tried, by resorting to various stratagems like toys and colourful objects to make them stop crying but it was of no avail. Emperor Dasaratha consulted several physicians to cure the strange malady of Sumithra's children; but nothing worked. Mother Sumatra then called Sage Vasishta as the last resort to her problem. The eminent Sage meditated for some time and said, "Oh

Mother, you need not administer any medicine to alleviate your children's suffering. All you have to do is to keep Lakshmana by the side of Rama, and Satrughna in the cradle of Bharatha. Rama and Lakshmana are of one *amsha*, and so are Bharatha and Satrughna."

Sumatra did accordingly and found that Lakshmana and Satrughna stopped crying immediately. The two children who had refused to drink milk until then, started taking food and playing in the cradle. Surprised at this sudden change of their behaviour, Sumatra prayed to the Sage to explain the cause of this behaviour. The Sage explained thus, "Oh noble mother, a branch is a part of the tree. Humans are part of Divinity and cannot live without Him. Since Lakshmana was born of the same aspect as Rama, he did not rest until he was united with Rama. The same holds good for Satrughna. He would not bear the separation from Bharatha. The Individual cannot live apart from the Absolute Self, which is its source. A fish cannot exist away from water, even if it is placed in a golden bowl studded with precious stones. The fish can be at rest only in water and not in a golden bowl, for water is its life source. Similarly, the individual self is restless until it reaches the Absolute Self, which is its source."

Though many people have power and wealth at their command they enjoy no peace of mind, for they live apart from their source, which is God. The world may give temporary joy; but to enjoy eternal peace and bliss, we must go back to the source. This episode of Lakshmana and Satrughna crying until they were

united with Rama and Bharatha respectively, illustrates the supreme truth that the individual being too can find happiness only in the union with the Eternal. It is the first great lesson that the *Ramayana* teaches us.

Vishwamitra comforted Dasaratha saying that, because Rama was the incarnation of Narayana, nothing would happen to Him. He further assured him that he should not grieve over the departure, since Rama was Divinity Himself. He thus tried to dispel the spell of illusion that surrounded Dasaratha. Though he tried to free Dasaratha from the spell of illusion, later he himself came under the spell while going with Rama through the forest.

It was evening when the Sage and the two brothers reached the banks of the river Sarayu. He then said, “Oh Rama and Lakshmana, you are young and have never set eyes on the terrible forms of demons until now. I will teach you the *mantras*, *Bala* and *Athibala* to protect yourselves from the Demons.” After teaching the *mantras* to the children, he regretted his audacity to teach *mantras* to the very embodiments of Divinity!

The mission starts

On the second day, Vishwamitra, accompanied by Rama and Lakshmana, proceeded to Siddhashrama, which had earlier been sanctified by Lord Vamana, who was none other than Narayana born in the lineage of Kashyapa. After reaching the *ashrama*, Vishwamitra said to Rama, “Oh Rama! This Siddhashrama is harassed by the demoness Thataki,

who possesses the strength of a hundred elephants. You will have to kill her.” To this Rama replied, “Guruji, I don’t wish to kill a female, since the scriptures forbid it.” Vishwamitra replied, “Females should be killed if they commit atrocities. It is not sinful to kill a female who is a curse to the world.” Rama then quoted the scriptures as saying, “It is not righteous on the part of anyone to kill the one who is frightened, one who is asleep, one who is intoxicated, one who has sought protection, and one who is a female.” Vishwamitra answered this by saying, “Though the scriptures forbid the slaying of a woman, it is not sinful to kill a woman who has perpetrated crimes on mankind.” Still unconvinced, Rama asked, “Was there anyone in the past who has killed women?” Vishwamitra then replied, “Indra himself killed Mandhara, the daughter of Virochana for she had inflicted great suffering on mankind. Indra justified his act by asserting that Mandhara deserved to die. Vishnu killed the wife of sage Bharadwaja, since she indulged in violence.” Hearing these accounts, Rama decided to slay Thataki. Rama realised that the noble and righteous women should not be touched but evil demons who committed atrocities must be killed. While they were deliberating thus, they heard deafening sounds emanating from Thataki. She rained stones on them. By discharging his arrows, Lakshmana stopped the volley of stones. She then began to rain blood and fire. Rama encountered her bravely and repulsed her attack. Thereupon, Thataki assumed an ugly form and made deafening and frightening sounds. Rama employed the technique of *shabdhabhedhi* by which the discharged arrows reach the very source of sound and attack it. The demoness

was thrown on the ground immediately. After some time Maricha and Subahu, the sons of Thataki launched an attack. Like Thataki, they also rained fire, blood and stones on Siddhashrama. Rama then used *Manasa Astra*, which hurled Maricha to a distance of a hundred miles. Rama then released the *Agneyastra* on Subahu, who collapsed on the ground then and there. Rama followed this up by launching the *Vayu astra* on the followers of Subahu, who melted into thin air instantaneously. Eventually Siddhashrama regained its original serenity and peace, and the inmates of the hermitage—sages, students, women, and children—were filled with unspeakable joy. The sages gathered in front of Rama and extolled Him, “Oh Rama! You are verily the incarnation of Lord Narayana. You are the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, and the all-pervasive One. In Your youth itself, You have achieved what no one could achieve before.”

Vishwamitra then started the performance of the *yajna*, which lasted over five days. In accordance with the promise they had given to Vishwamitra, Rama and Lakshmana guarded the *Yajna* continuously, moving around the sacrificial altar, forsaking food and sleep. Upon the conclusion of the *yajna*, Vishwamitra asked Rama and Lakshmana to relax, for they had had no rest during the previous five days.

At this stage news arrived from Janaka, the King of Mithila, that a meeting was being arranged to which the bravest heroes of Bharath were being invited. It was to see if anyone could break the bow of Shiva. The victor could win the hand of Janaka’s

daughter, Sita. Vishwamitra told Rama and Lakshmana that they should go to Mithila to break the bow of Shiva. At first Rama was not keen to go to Mithila since He had not obtained the permission of His father. Vishwamitra convinced them thus, "Rama, your father Dasaratha ordered You to obey my command and asked You to conduct Yourself in consonance with my wishes. Since I ask You to go to Mithila, along with me, You have to obey my word." Rama had no option but to obey the command of Vishwamitra.

It was during the journey to Mithila that Sage Vishwamitra gave to Rama powerful arrows like *Gandaka*, *Dharmaja*, *Dharmaka*, *Vishnukula*, *Bhramaku*, etc., for he was a master of archery. The hermits and others who lived in the ashram chose to accompany Vishwamitra as far as Mithila, for they knew that Vishwamitra would never return to Siddhashrama. The animals that lived around shed profuse tears when Vishwamitra chose to go to Mithila. Vishwamitra had great compassion for animals and treated them with unbounded love and affection. The birds and beasts also followed Rama and Lakshmana, since they were fascinated by these two princes of Ayodhya.

During the journey, Vishwamitra narrated to them the past history of the Ashramas that they came across on the way. At last, they reached the hermitage of Gautama where Gautama's wife, Ahalya, lay in one place like a stone, having been earlier cursed by her husband. Rama, the incarnation of Lord Narayana, knew everything, but pretended as though He did not know anything. As He moved toward Ahalya, the vi-

brations that emanated from His feet brought a new surge of life into her petrified form. She immediately clung to the feet of Rama, and prayed to Him to forgive her and shower grace on her. At that very instant, Sage Gautama arrived on the scene and accepted the purified Ahalya. Gautama knew that Lord Rama would come and sanctify his ashram. After redeeming Ahalya, Rama and Lakshmana, accompanied by Vishwamitra, Gautama, and a host of other sages, proceeded towards Mithila.

The arrival of Rama and Lakshmana, who moved like lion cubs in the streets of Mithila, created a sensation. People admired them and began talking about these two handsome princes. Emperor Janaka received them with due courtesy and extended to them warm hospitality. Janaka had made all arrangements for them in a spacious mansion. Rama pretended as though He was tired and lay down. Keeping one leg on the other, He started massaging His own feet. Sage Narada arrived there to see Lord Narayana in human form. Observing the Lord massaging His feet, Narada said, "Lord are You tired because You have walked a long distance?" To this Rama replied, "Narada, do I ever get tired? Never. This body of Mine has come for your sake and not for Mine. With this human body of Mine, I have to bring succour to the ailments of man."

The power of maya

God descends to the earth in human form for the sustenance of *dharma*. Of all the living beings that exist in the world, it is man alone who has strayed from the path of *dharma*. When Divinity dons the garb of a

human body, people are thickly blanketed by illusion. They become blind to the Divinity of God. Illusion covers the eyes of men like a thick curtain and prevents them from seeing the Reality. Even Yashoda and Vishwamitra were no exception to this, though they came into intimate contact with Divinity.

Once Balarama complained to mother Yashoda that his brother Krishna was eating mud. Challenged by Yashoda to tell the truth, little Krishna made a startling statement, “Oh mother dear! Am I an infant, or a foolish one, or a mad one, to eat mud?” These very words speak eloquently about the Divinity of Krishna, but poor Yashoda failed to fathom the depth of the revelation contained in Krishna’s words. On the other hand, she demanded that Krishna should open His mouth, so that she could check for herself whether Krishna had eaten mud. Little Krishna opened His mouth wide. To her utter shock and amazement, Yashoda saw heavenly spheres rolling in the mouth of Krishna. She exclaimed:

*Is this a dream or magic spell cast by a
magician?*

Is all this true or false?

Am I awake?

Am I Yashoda?

At that instant, she realised that Krishna was verily God Himself. However, this realisation did not last long. As soon as Krishna closed His mouth and stood in front of her with an innocent look, she hugged Him to herself, and treated him as an ordinary child. It

was the same with great Sages like Narada and Vishwamitra as well.

Though Sage Vishwamitra had firmly declared to Dasaratha that his son Rama was the very Embodiment of Divinity, he chose to teach the *mantras Bala* and *Athibala* as though Rama was an ordinary prince. Even an eminent Sage like Vishwamitra could not escape the magic spell cast by *maya* (illusion).

Shiva's Bow is broken

Thousands of strong men wheeled the great bow of Shiva into the open court. Many a Prince from far-off parts of Bharath had assembled there, to win the hand of Sita. They were more interested in winning the hand of Sita than in facing the trial of strength. But Rama and Lakshmana came there in simple obedience to the command of Vishwamitra and without any expectation. One after another, the Princes tried to lift the bow of Shiva; but they returned to their seats humiliated. Even Ravana came there to lift the bow and break it, but he fell under the bow, much to his humiliation. The one who is swayed by ego is sure to suffer in life. When people laughed loudly at his plight, Ravana felt deeply wounded, as though he had lost all his ten heads.

At that instant, Rama walked quietly towards the bow, much to the chagrin and amazement of the princes gathered. Commotion arose in the court when Rama, a tender boy of fourteen, was walking towards the bow of Shiva, for it was an audacious act on the part of a young boy to dare to lift the matchless bow of Shiva. But the instant Rama reached the bow

and raised it with His left hand, there was thunderous applause. When Rama bent the bow to tie the string, the bow snapped with a deafening sound. The people clapped loud and long, rejoicing that a worthy one had at last arrived to win the hand of Sita. Vishwamitra asked Rama whether he was ready to marry Sita. Rama politely observed that He would not think of marriage without obtaining consent of His parents. Rama went so far as to say that He would not even look at Sita without obtaining the permission of His parents. Thereupon, Emperor Janaka sent speedy messengers on chariots to bring Dasaratha and his entourage to Mithila. The men and women were filled with joy and jubilation at the prospect of the marriage between Rama and Sita. They sang many a song expressing their desire to see the marriage.

In the meantime, Dasaratha accompanied by his Queens, Ministers and a host of others, arrived at Mithila. Emperor Janaka received them with great courtesy and extended full hospitality. All preparations were ready for the grand event, and Rama, adorned with most beautiful ornaments, was brought to the marriage pandal.

It is an Indian custom that the bride and the bridegroom should pour on each others' head a handful of sacred grain. Since Rama and Sita were of royal lineage, arrangements were made for Rama and Sita to pour precious pearls on each others' head. The white pearls shone with orange splendour when they were in the hands of Sita, for Sita had painted her hands in red. When these pearls were placed on the white tur-

ban of Rama, they shone white. When these pearls fell on the blue complexioned body of Rama, they shone like sapphires.

The marriage of Rama and Sita was verily the marriage of *Prakruthi* and *Paramatma*. Since Sita was born of the Earth, she was endowed with the magnetic power of the Earth. That is why she could easily lift the bow which was also a part of *Prakruthi*. With the aid of magnetic power, the bow slowly raised itself, as Sita once tried to lift it. The same principle operated when Rama tried to lift the bow of Shiva. Since Rama was a magnet Himself, it was not that difficult for Him to raise the bow. It was all a part of Divine drama enacted for the benefit of mankind. The marriage of Rama and Sita was performed on a most magnificent scale, and people vied with each other to sing the glory and grandeur of the Divine wedding.



4. Prakruthi Marries Paramatma

*Truthful speech earns respect and honour,
The truthful one lives in happiness and com-
fort,
There is nothing more eternal than truthful
life,
This is the truth which I wish to tell you.*

*Can a tree ever taste the sweetness of its own
fruit?
Can a creeper ever enjoy the honey latent in its
flowers?
Can a worldly scholar ever enjoy the sweet es-
sence of spiritual lore?
Can a sheet of paper enjoy the sweet wisdom
contained in the book?*

Embodiments of Love!

The paths in the world are twofold: The path of *pravritti* (worldly way), and the path of *nivritti* (inward way). People think that the materialistic phenomena perceived and enjoyed by man belongs to the realm of *pravritti*, and everything that transcends it, embracing the blissful and the immortal, is the realm of *nivritti*. Actually, both are one and the same, for they arise from the same source. The outward tendencies are nothing but the resounds and the reflections of the feelings within.

How is it that man is not able to free himself from the shackles of *pravritti* and follow the path of *nivritti*? The tendencies of the past accumulated over

many lives is the cause for this. It is not possible for anyone to plunge headlong into path of *nivritti* all of a sudden. The changeover from the path of *pravritti* to *nivritti* should be gradual and steady.

Sita Kalyanam

The marriage celebrations at Mithila lasted four days. Though to us our marriage rituals appear to be merely materialistic, they are laden with deep, spiritual significance. On the first day of the marriage, the bridegroom's party proceeded to the house of the bride, accompanied by pundits and priests, to hand over the wedding invitation. On the same day, the bride's party, accompanied by Sumangalis (women whose husbands are alive), proceeded to hand over the wedding invitation to the bridegroom's house. On the second day, the history of the dynasties to which the bride and the bridegroom belonged was read out aloud, and due gratitude was expressed to their respective ancestors. The names of the great Kings who brought glory to Kosala and Mithila were read out and their virtues extolled. The great Emperors who adored the Ikshvaku dynasty were remembered, and their virtues were praised. Similarly, the names of the great ones who reigned over the Kingdom of Videha were read out, beginning with Emperor Nimi who founded the great city of Mithila. These rituals bring out the truth that gratitude is an important aspect of life, and should be expressed towards all those who had contributed to the glory of one's lineage and country.

On the third day, great acts of charity were performed. Cattle and cows, beautifully decorated with

ornaments and golden linen, were given away in charity to the deserving ones. Giving away cows in charity is significant, for the cow is one of the four mothers of man (*Dehamata Gomata, Bhoomata, and Vedamata*).

On the fourth day, the ritual of *Kanyadana* took place. Janaka brought his daughter Sita, followed by Urmila, Mandavi, and Srutakeerti. These three were the daughters of Janaka's brothers Saaka and Kushadhawaja. Urmila was the daughter of Saaka, while Mandavi and Srutakeerti were the daughters of Kushadhawaja. In the meanwhile, Dasaratha brought his four sons. The curtain between the brides and bridegrooms was raised.

Rama was looking elsewhere and refused to look at Sita. Janaka noticed this and said to Rama, "*Mama puthri idam Sita*" (this is my daughter Sita). To this Rama replied, "I have not yet tied the *mangala sutra* (wedlock thread). It is sinful to see the lady before marriage to her, I do not wish to bring disrepute to the great Ikshvaku lineage by my misconduct." This statement of Rama testifies to the fact that He was the Embodiment of *Dharma*. Rama observed the principle of one wife, one word, and one arrow. While the priests were chanting *mantras* and the musicians were playing on the musical instruments, Rama tied the *mangala sutra* around the neck of Sita.

It was then the time for the bride and the groom to garland each other. Rama stood much taller than Sita, and it was difficult for Sita to reach Rama's height and garland Him; so she stood silently, holding

the garland in her hand. Rama then made a sign to Lakshmana. Lakshmana alone knew the meaning of this sign, as he was extremely intelligent. Understanding the sign made by Rama, Lakshmana replied via another sign signifying that what Rama wanted was not possible. Rama had conveyed through His sign that since Lakshmana was Aadhissha (the serpent upon whose coils Lord Narayana reclined) he should raise the ground where Sita was standing. Lakshmana, by his sign, indicated that if he were to raise the ground on which Sita stood, the entire ground around them would be raised. Rama was unwilling to bend down His head, for He had vowed that He would not bend His head to a lady, though He was ready to bend down His head for His devotees. Lakshmana who was very resourceful, immediately fell at the feet of Rama. Rama now had to bend down to raise Lakshmana to his feet. Sita immediately took advantage of the situation and garlanded Rama! The four bridegrooms, accompanied by the four brides, then circumambulated the sacred fire.

Revelations of Divinity

A servant maid then brought a vessel filled with the water of the Sarayu river for Sita to wash the feet of Rama. Sita was hesitant to do so, for she thought that the golden wristlets that she wore might turn into women, as did the petrified Ahalya rise as a full-blooded woman, on contacting the feet of Rama! Lakshmana who read the thoughts of Sita, wiped the feet of Rama with a towel. He then asked Sita to wash the feet of Rama with the waters of the Sarayu river. Sita did so and sprinkled the water on her head.

At the time of *Kanyadana* (giving away the daughter as charity) Janaka, in accordance with the injunctions of the Scriptures said, "I am giving my daughter as charity to You." The groom was then expected to say, "I accept your daughter", but Rama remained silent without uttering a single word. The priest who was officiating at the marriage said to Rama, "Oh Rama! The auspicious moment is getting over; hurry up and say, I accept your daughter." Rama then replied, "Those in the Ikshvaku lineage never accept charity. Since you have used the word *dana* after the word *kanya*, I cannot accept her. Those in the Ikshvaku dynasty only give charity and never accept it. If you remove the word *dana* after *kanya*, I am prepared to accept her." Janaka who understood the mind of Rama, withdrew the word *dana* after the word *kanya*. Then, Rama said, "I accept your daughter."

According to the Indian tradition, the bridegroom should make the promise *arthecha, kaamecha, dharmecha, naathi charmi* (I will please her with regard to wealth, desire, and righteousness). Rama refused to give such a promise for He felt that one should be ready to renounce one's partner in life if she came between Him and His people. So, He vowed, "The welfare of my subjects is of Supreme importance to Me. If I find that she displeases My subjects, I will renounce her." That is how Rama set high standards of conduct as a ruler. The rulers of those days were particular about every word they uttered, for they would never go back on their word.

Vishwamitra Departs

While they were busily engaged thus, Vishwamitra came close and said, “Oh, Rama and Lakshmana! I am bestowing on you my last blessing, for I am going to the Himalayas right now. The mission on which I came to the world is already fulfilled. I was waiting to see marriage between *prakruthi* and *Paramatma*. I have been instrumental in bringing about the marriage of Lord Narayana and Lakshmi. It is high time I shed the body. That is why I am going to the Himalayas.” On hearing these words of Vishwamitra, everyone felt sad and stunned. Vishwamitra thus played a pivotal role in the early part of the *Ramayana*. Before departure, Vishwamitra gave away all his powerful weapons to Rama and said, “You are the original source of all weapons. I am returning them to You. The welfare and well-being of the world rests with You. That is why I am delivering these weapons into Your hands.” Shedding profuse tears, Dasaratha said, “Sage Vishwamitra, I cannot forget the good that you have done to my Son. I shall be ever grateful to you.” Vishwamitra received the salutations of all the people there, consoled the crying ones, and went to the Himalayas. After this incident, there is no mention of Vishwamitra anywhere in the *Ramayana*.

All arrangements were made for the return journey to Ayodhya, but Mandavi and Srutakeerthi hesitated to start on that day. Srutakeerti, who was an expert in the science of reading the omens, felt that it was not an auspicious day for the journey. But they could not tell it openly to everybody, so they said that they would join the group later. However, Dasaratha

refused to agree to the suggestion and wanted them to get ready for the journey. Urmila who heard from Mandavi the cause for hesitation, said to Sita that the day was not auspicious for starting the journey. Sita replied to her, "Why should you worry when the Lord Himself is coming with us? Lord Rama is an Embodiment of Time. When the Lord Himself is coming with us, we should not wait for any such auspicious time. Rama will look after us if anything untoward happens on the way."

The return trip to Ayodhya commenced, and the people of Mithila felt intensely sad. Even Emperor Janaka who was a great *karma yogi*, himself shed tears. The people of Mithila were stunned when they saw that Janaka, who had no attachment, was crying. Explaining himself, Janaka said, "These tears of mine are not tears of sorrow, they are indeed tears of bliss."

Janaka sent a large retinue of chariots, horses, and elephants along with the four brides. While they were traveling, they heard a loud voice saying, "Stop!" Parasurama appeared on the scene, much to the shock and surprise of everyone. Parasurama said to Rama, "Oh Rama! I have heard that You have broken the bow of Shiva. The bow of Shiva is of no consequence, and it is not at all hard to lift it. If You really have strength, You should break this weapon of mine." So saying Parasurama hurled his weapon at the feet of Rama. Rama calmly picked it up and broke the weapon. Parasurama at once fell at the feet of Rama.

People have a distorted opinion about Parasurama, describing him as a very egoistic sage who itched to fight with Rama. Parasurama actually came there for the divine purpose of handing over to Rama one of the sixteen splendours (*kalas*) he had with him. A *Poornavathar* has sixteen splendours. Lord Rama possessed twelve *kalas* and his brothers had three *kalas*. The remaining one *kala* was with Parasurama. While bowing to the feet of Rama, he passed on the sixteenth *kala* to Him. The caravan then continued toward Ayodhya, where a magnificent reception awaited them. Men and women sang and danced, and offered *arathi* to the princes and their wives. There was joy and jubilation everywhere. The celebration lasted for ten full days.

For twelve years, Rama and Lakshmana assisted their father in the administration of the kingdom. They conducted themselves in a most exemplary manner, much to the delight of everyone in the kingdom.

The Emperor's Decision

One night, Dasaratha felt thirsty and wanted to drink water. When he picked up the jug containing water, he found that his hand was trembling. He realised that he was no longer as strong as he once was, and it dawned upon him that having become weak, he was unworthy of ruling the kingdom any longer. This thought deeply disturbed him, and he could not sleep the rest of the night. Dasaratha felt he had become weak and his conscience told him that he was no longer fit to rule. He then and there decided to hand over the

kingdom to a worthy successor. The next morning he summoned his Ministers to hold deliberations about the prospective ruler of Ayodhya. How magnanimous and noble was the conduct of Dasaratha! The conduct of Dasaratha is in sharp contrast with the conduct of modern politicians who wish to cling on to power despite their many disabilities.

It was decided in the meeting that Rama, the eldest son, was the worthy successor to the throne of Ayodhya. He was able, efficient, ideal and Omniscient. The citizens greatly rejoiced at the prospect of Rama becoming their ruler. Rama was very dear to them. They called Him *Priya darshana*. The citizens were yearning to have Rama as their ruler, for He was the very Embodiment of Love. Grand arrangements were then made to celebrate the great event with all magnificence.

Manthara's Mischief

Manthara, the servant-maid of Queen Kaikeyi, was smitten to the quick when she heard that Rama was to be crowned as the Emperor of Ayodhya. She bore a grudge against Rama from the day she had been hurt by a ball hit by Rama, which struck her on her back. It so happened that Manthara happened to be at a place where the four brothers were playing with a ball. When Rama kicked the ball, it went straight to Manthara and hit her on the back. Manthara jumped up as soon as the ball struck her. All the brothers, except Rama, laughed aloud at the action of Manthara. She felt deeply insulted, and from that day harboured ill-feeling toward Rama. When she heard about

Rama's impending coronation, her anger increased by leaps and bounds, and she desperately sought an outlet. The *krodha* (anger) of Manthara and *kama* (desire) of Soorpanakha are the cause for the entire *Ramayana*. The anger of Manthara sent Rama to the forest and the desire of Soorpanakha sent Sita to Lanka.

The hard-hearted Manthara then went to Kaikeyi and gave her the news. Kaikeyi felt overjoyed when she first heard from Manthara that Rama, who was dearest to her heart, was going to be crowned as the Emperor next morning.

Manthara became furious when Queen Kaikeyi gifted a pearl necklace on receiving the good news of Rama's coronation. She immediately flung it away, for she could not brook the idea that Rama, who had once insulted her, was going to be crowned as the Emperor of Ayodhya. Inflamed with anger, she began poisoning the mind of Kaikeyi, though the queen had nurtured deep love for Rama. Indescribable is the damage done by anger.

*When anger seizes a person,
He cannot perform any work successfully.
He gathers sin and is humbled.
Anger extinguishes one's reputation,
And separates him from people who are
near and dear.*

Manthara ultimately succeeded in changing the mind of Kaikeyi and caused the departure of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from Ayodhya. The hour at which

Rama was to be crowned became instead the hour of His departure from Ayodhya.

Some people say that the time set for the coronation was not an auspicious one, and it was that which caused the departure of Rama from Ayodhya. Such a contention is wrong. The time for the coronation was set by no less a person than the enlightened Sage Vasishtha. All said and done, it was the will of Rama that ultimately caused His departure from Ayodhya. Rama had long ago prepared the mind of Kaikeyi in this regard, for He had been very close to her. One day during the course of His conversation with Kaikeyi he said to her, "Mother, be prepared for My departure to the dense forests. I have to go there to bring about the destruction of the demons. You may earn an evil reputation due to this, but be strong in mind. Ask father the boon that Bharatha should be crowned as King and that I should be sent to the forest." That was the intimacy and understanding which existed between Queen Kaikeyi and Rama. She was an embodiment of virtue. She loved Rama more than her son Bharatha.

At last, the hour for the departure of Rama from Ayodhya arrived. Rama was all smiles, though the hour of coronation turned out to be the hour of His departure to the forest. Rama could behave like this because He was no ordinary human but the Embodiment of Divinity. Kausalya could not take the sad news with equanimity like Rama. She said, "Oh Rama! I had never dreamt even in my wildest dreams that You would go to the forest. What is destined to happen will happen. For You, the forest will be Ayodhya, and for

me, this Ayodhya will be a forest. Succeed in Your mission and come back home.”

Journey to the Forest

As Rama was leaving for the forest Lakshmana joined Him, for it was impossible for him to live without Rama. Separation between Rama and Lakshmana is unthinkable, because Lakshmana was the incarnation of Adishesha, on whom Lord Narayana reclines. Lakshmana accompanied Rama without speaking a word to anybody. He simply told Rama, “Oh Rama, I came to this world to serve You. I cannot live without You even for a moment.” Since Rama knew the heart of Lakshmana, He allowed him to accompany Him. Meanwhile, the people came to know of the departure of Rama. They were plunged into inexpressible grief and cried out heartrendingly, “We cannot live without Rama. It is better to be dead than alive, for we cannot endure the agony of separation from Rama.” Rama consoled them and made His way to the forest. Back in Ayodhya, Dasaratha died of the grief of separation from Rama.

At the time Rama went into exile, Bharatha and Satrughna were away in the Kingdom of Kekaya, having been taken there by their uncle. Sage Vasishta, the high priest, sent word to the King of Kekaya that Bharatha and Satrughna should be sent back to Ayodhya immediately. He did not inform them that Dasaratha had died. It took fifteen days for Bharatha and Satrughna to reach Ayodhya, though they sped fast in chariots. The two brothers were shocked to see the lustreless face of Ayodhya. Birds and beasts hung

their heads in sorrow, and were crying disconsolately. Dogs were roaming on the roads, whining loudly. Bharatha stopped the chariot in front of the mansion of Kaikeyi and rushed to see his mother but was shocked to see her condition. She told Bharatha that Dasaratha had passed away and that he should perform the obituary rites. Bharatha felt sad that he did not have the good fortune of seeing his father when he was on his deathbed. He consoled himself that at least Rama and Lakshmana merited the good fortune of being with their father at the last moment.

Bharatha, the ideal brother

Bharatha then rushed to the mansion of mother Kausalya. There, Kausalya related to him the chain of events that led to the departure of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita from Ayodhya. Bharatha's sorrow at the death of his father receded into the background when he heard the more sorrowful news of the departure of Rama from Ayodhya. His grief at the death of his father turned into fury when he heard that it was his father who had commanded Rama to leave Ayodhya. Flushed with anger and fury, he refused to perform the obituary rites to his father and decided to go to the forest to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. But Sage Vasishtha pacified him and convinced him that it was his duty to perform the last rites of his father. Eventually Bharatha performed the last rites to the body, which had been preserved in oil for fifteen days.

Bharatha now resolved to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. Accompanied by his mothers, ministers, and the royal entourage, he proceeded to the forest. Even Manthara accompanied him. Saint Thyagaraja has

paid tribute to Bharatha by describing him as an “intelligent” one. The Saint sang,

*Would the monkey cross the bridge?
Would goddess Lakshmi adore You
and Lakshmana worship You?
Would the Intelligent Bharatha salute You
If You are not really Divine?*

Bharatha followed the trail left by Rama’s chariot. Deep in the forest, he found flocks of birds moving about. Looking at them, Bharatha concluded there must be water in the neighbourhood because birds usually flock in large numbers near water sources. He also concluded that Rama would not be far away from the source of water, for He too would require water. The huge procession of men, soldiers, horses, and elephants that followed Bharatha created a commotion and kicked up clouds of dust high into the sky. Lakshmana was curious to find out the source of all this commotion. Climbing to the top of a tree, he found that Bharatha was coming with an army and the people of Ayodhya. Since he was the incarnation of Adisesha (the thousand-hooded serpent), he was immediately smitten by anger and burst out, “Oh Rama! Bharatha is coming here to drive us deeper into the forest. He has come with his army to fight us.” Rama smiled at Lakshmana and said, “Lakshmana! Though you have moved with Bharatha you have not understood him. He is the embodiment of peace, and he loves Me deeply. Do not harbour any ill-feeling toward him. Wait and see.”

Bharatha came running to Rama and fell at His feet. He wailed and wept, and sought His forgiveness for all that had happened. Rama caressed His brother and said, "Oh Bharatha! Are mother and father doing well? Is everyone safe at home?" Doubting Thomases may wonder, "If Rama was really God, why did He ask about His father's welfare when Dasaratha had already died?" We should realise that the *Avatar* who comes in a human form behaves in a human way. At the same time, He conducts himself with exemplary excellence, so that mankind may learn from Him.

Bharatha gave Him the news of the death of Dasaratha. Rama, who heard the sad news of His father's death, went to the river Sarayu accompanied by His three brothers to offer oblations. After this, Bharatha pleaded with Rama to come back to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. But Rama refused for He would never break the word He had given to His father. Bharatha told Rama that he would not live in Ayodhya without Him, because Ayodhya sans Rama was a forest. He would install the sandals of Rama on the throne, and he himself would live in Nandigram outside Ayodhya. He would carry out the affairs of the state from there. He would await Rama's arrival for fourteen years at Nandigram. If Rama did not arrive in Ayodhya at the end of the term, he would immolate himself. Rama told Bharatha to rule over the kingdom justly, and assured that He would surely return to Ayodhya at the end of fourteen years. Counseled thus by Rama, Bharatha left for Nandigram with a heavy heart. All the brothers of Rama were most obedient to Him. For them, His word was a commandment.

One day, Rama asked Lakshmana to build a hut on the Chitrakoota mountain. Lakshmana asked Him to select the spot for the hut. Rama said, "Lakshmana! Build the hut wherever you like." Hearing these words Lakshmana was struck speechless and felt deeply pained. When Sita asked him the cause for his grief, Lakshmana said, "I don't have a will of my own. The liking of Rama is my liking. What sin have I committed to merit such words from Rama?" Rama, who understood the heart of Lakshmana, caressed Lakshmana and said, "forgive Me for having hurt you. Build a hut here, on this spot."

The *Ramayana* demonstrates to us how one should live in the world, in the society, and in the family. Rama provides the example of an ideal brother, ideal son, ideal husband and ideal ruler. The ideal of Rama is most relevant to the world, at a time when it is fraught with chaos and confusion. We live today in a world where misunderstanding is driving a wedge between husband and wife, father and son, teacher and student, rulers and citizens. The remedy for all this lies in following the ideal set by Rama.

5. The Abduction Of Sita

What we think to be non-existent actually exists;

What we think to be existent does not really exist.

It is only Divinity that exists forever.

It is the world that does not exist.

Students, the Embodiments of Love:

Human life is most sublime and sacred. Of all the species that exist on the earth, man is the highest, not only by virtue of his intellectual eminence but also by dint of the sanctity he possesses. He is endowed with many talents and abilities. Unfortunately, man wastes his life by misusing his capabilities. There are two avenues open to man: the *Sreyo Marga* (the path of Welfare) and the *Preyo Marga* (the path of Enjoyment). The path of Welfare is nothing but the path of inward life, whereas the path of Enjoyment is the path of outward life.

During the course of His stay on the Chitrakuta mountain, Rama had many deliberations with Sages and Seers. These aspirants, who had been eagerly awaiting a rendezvous with Divinity, made good use of the opportunity by discussing topics like *pravritti*, *nivritti sreyas*, *preyas*, etc. However, the serene atmosphere of the Chitrakuta mountain soon gave way to agitation and turbulence. The demons, having got wind of the spiritual activities in progress, intensified their attacks on the sages and troubled them. The sages wished to leave the mountain and go to a safer place.

An old sage came to Rama and said, “Rama, the nefarious activities of the demons are increasing day by day. They are harassing the aspirants more and more. Hence, they wish to leave the place. It is not advisable for You to live here because You are leading a family life. It may be dangerous to live here, though You are endowed with enormous strength.” The sages and Rama then held consultations and decided to enter Dandakaranya, a dense forest area.

Rama in Dandakaranya

Trouble surfaced as soon as they started living in the Dandakaranya forest. One day, a demon by name Viradha abducted Sita and refused to hand her over to Rama. He warned Rama and Lakshmana of dire consequences if they tried to retrieve Sita from him; but unmindful, Rama and Lakshmana attacked Viradha. The enraged Viradha then grasped Rama and Lakshmana one in each hand and started running. Seeing this, Sita bewailed her misfortune and appealed to the demon to take her away also. Rama and Lakshmana then cut off both the hands of Viradha, wanting to kill him; but Viradha did not die. Viradha said to Rama, “You cannot kill me as I am protected by a boon. You must dig a pit and bury me there.” Viradha then added, “Not far away from here is a hermitage, where Sage Sharabhanga is waiting for You day and night.” Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, then made His way to Sharabhanga. When Sharabhanga saw Rama he became ecstatic. He said, “O Rama! Today I have found fulfilment and I need not live any longer. I was about to leave my body many a time, but then I remembered that Narayana

would one day come into the forest. Thus, I wished to live to see God in human form. Today I have seen God. Please wait a little.” After uttering these words in the presence of Rama, he made a pyre and plunged into the burning flames, saluting Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita for the last time. From the burning flames arose Thumburu, the celestial musician, who had lived his life as Sharabhanga due to a curse. Thumburu advised Rama and Lakshmana to go to the ashram of sage Agastya so that they could get help from the venerable sage.

The brothers along with Sita then went to the hermitage of sage Agastya, who directed them to go to a place called Panchavati, which was situated on the banks of the river Godavari. Agastya added that fruits and roots were available in abundance in Panchavati and the temperate climate was most conducive for living there. The Sage deliberately directed them to Panchavati so that the abduction of Sita, which was so important for the killing of the demons, could occur there. He did not keep Rama and Lakshmana in his own hermitage since the abduction of Sita would then be impossible.

Sita’s Advice

The three exiles started living in Panchavati. Sita, however, was not happy in Panchavati, because almost every day Rama and Lakshmana indulged in violence. One day, while Lakshmana was away collecting fruits and tubers, Sita approached Rama and said, “Lord, those who have desires commit three evils: uttering falsehood, eyeing other ladies, and committing

violence. Certainly, You are free from the first two evils. I firmly believe that You can never utter falsehood, for You are the Embodiment of Truth.” Rama felt happy at these words of Sita and said, “It is certainly a qualification for a man to be described as a virtuous person by his own wife. Sita, I am happy that you have recognised My affinity to Truth.” Sita continued, “You are also free from the weakness of looking at the wives of others. This is another great virtue in You. But I cannot appreciate Your committing violence on the beasts and demons. These demons are in no way harming You.” Rama smiled at these words and said, “Sita, though you have spoken the truth, My conduct is in consonance with the promise I gave to the sages and aspirants here. I am bound by My duty and want to stand by My promise. Though these demons are not harming Me personally, they are subjecting My devotees to untold suffering. They ruthlessly disturb the sacrifices performed by the sages. The sages perform sacrifices for the welfare and well-being of mankind. I cannot but resort to violence for the well-being of mankind.” Sita realised her mistake and sought the forgiveness of Rama by touching His feet. The conduct of Sita is in consonance with the scriptural injunction:

*The wife should advise her husband well
when he indulges in evil;
She should be like a Minister who advises
the King properly.*

In fact women should follow the example of Mandodhari, who always struggled to mend the ways of her husband, Ravana.

Spring arrived, trees sprouted green leaves and cool winds blew softly. There arrived on the scene a golden deer. Sita, who had never asked Rama for the fulfilment of any desire, pleaded with Him to capture the golden deer for her. Rama agreed. Though Lakshmana volunteered to do the task, Rama did not allow him to do so; for He knew that if He were to be present there in the hut, the abduction of Sita could not take place. Everything had its place in the master plan, which He had drawn up long ago. Rama then went in pursuit of the golden deer. When He found that the deer was eluding him, He shot an arrow at it.

The golden deer was none other than the demon Maricha, who had assumed the form of a deer to draw Rama away from Sita. While dying, Maricha, imitating the voice of Rama, cried out aloud, "Oh, Lakshmana, Oh, Sita!" Sita heard these words, became agitated, and asked Lakshmana to go and find out what had happened. She was overcome by the fear that something dangerous had happened to Rama, since the voice sounded like that of Rama. Lakshmana said to Sita, "Mother, the voice you have heard is not the voice of Rama. It is but the trick of the demon, who wants to deceive us. Nothing dangerous can ever happen to Rama, as He is the incarnation of Lord Narayana. Do not worry in the least." Sita, who knew the master plan of Rama, was determined to send Lakshmana on one pretext or the other. She knew that soft and gentle words would not make Lakshmana leave the place. Hence, she used stern words and said, "Oh Lakshmana! Perhaps, you wish to have me as your

wife, when Rama dies.” Unable to bear the words uttered by Sita, Lakshmana decided to go in search of Rama. But before leaving the place he told Sita not to cross the line that he drew around the ssram. Lakshmana then went in search of Rama.

Meeting with Jatayu

In the meantime, Ravana came in the guise of an ascetic and abducted Sita. When Rama and Lakshmana returned to the hut, they found the hut empty. The two brothers now went in search of Sita in Dandakaranya. While searching for Sita, they found the bird Jatayu badly mutilated. Rama had earlier met the bird and mistaken it for a demon. The bird then said to Rama that it was a friend of his father, Dasaratha. It prayed to Rama to give it the duty of looking after Sita in their absence. At the time of Sita’s abduction, Jatayu encountered Ravana in the sky and fought bravely to prevent Ravana from carrying her away. But Ravana axed its two wings. The helpless Jatayu was now dying. It was at this juncture that the brothers approached Jatayu and learnt about the abduction of Sita. Rama felt deep pity and gratitude for the bird Jatayu, which had sacrificed its life for His sake. He placed Jatayu’s head on His lap and poured cool water down its throat. Drinking water from Rama’s hand, the bird breathed its last. While Dasaratha did not have the good fortune of attaining *Shubagathi*, the heavenly state, Jatayu did while resting its head in Rama’s lap. That is why it is said:

*Oh Mind! do not ask for anything.
The more you ask, the longer will it be delayed.*

*If you do not ask,
The sooner will it be done.
Did not the Lord bless Jatayu and Shabhari,
Though they never asked for their last moments
to be spent in His proximity?*

God knows for sure when, where, and how He should bless His devotee. Divine Grace is in proportion to the meritorious deeds that one performs.

While dying, Jatayu told Rama to seek the help of Sugriva, who lived on Mount Matanga. Rama performed the last rites of Jatayu and started toward the Matanga mountain.

Living for God

During the course of their journey, Rama and Lakshmana had to inflict much violence on the demons. Though Sita had tried to restrain them, eventually she herself became a victim of the evil ways of the demons. Sita had rightly said to Rama that the three evils, namely, untruth, lust, and violence, are the causes of all the evils in the world. Sita, the symbol of *prakruthi* and the embodiment of truth and righteousness, possessed noble conduct. Her example is worthy of emulation by every woman of India. That is why the *Ramayana* is also described as the story of Sita.

The *Ramayana* is replete with many lessons for mankind. It tells us that worldly tendencies lead us to sorrow, whereas spiritual tendencies lend contentment and happiness to mankind. Sensual pleasures are like passing clouds. These pleasures give temporary joy, whereas *Atmic* realisation bestows eternal Bliss.

There is no sorrow for those people who live in the Bliss of God. But unfortunately, people today do not wish to follow the example of the great devotees of God, who live in eternal Bliss. To people, *abheesta* (desire) has become dearer than *adarsha* (ideal). Desires are ephemeral, whereas ideals are eternal.

It is really tragic that people do not strive to benefit, though God has come down in human form to help mankind. People do not have the good sense to follow the ideals of the *Avatar*. They take delight in conducting themselves contrary to the commands of the *Avatar*.

Fortunate are those who live for God. To these people, the satisfaction of God is of paramount importance. These people observe the principle of *Sarva karma Bhagwat prityartham* (all deeds should be done for the joy of the Lord). Such people who live for God are rewarded with eternal Bliss. The life of Sharabhanga stands as a supreme testimony to this. Sharabhanga lived only for God. In this country, there were many sages and saints who lived like Sharabhanga and dedicated their lives to God.

But man today is oblivious of the great ideals contained in the *Ramayana*. People have no individuality of their own. They have become highly imitative and heavily dependent on others. In fact, they have become slaves of others. These persons see with the eyes of others, hear with the ears of others, and think with the minds of others. They cannot achieve anything in life. It is said:

*Though endowed with eyes, they are stark
blind,
Since they did not wish to see the auspicious
form.
Though endowed with ears, they are stone-
deaf,
Since they do not wish to listen to His en-
chanting music.*

It is very difficult to attain human life. You are born as a human because of actions performed in the past, over many lives. You should foster the feelings of the oneness of *Atma* and the unity of mankind. The *Ramayana* abounds in episodes and illustrations that demonstrate the Divinity in man. It abounds in lessons for mankind, whatever may be the episode or chapter you take for study. Hence, imprint on your heart the story of Rama and thereby find fulfilment in life.



6. The Search for Sita

*If the mind is cleansed of all dirt,
And lofty thoughts are nourished,
Then to the wise would be visible,
Entire Creation, resplendent with Divinity.*

Students, Embodiments of Love!

Those who want to harvest *Atmic* Bliss should follow the example of Rama. Those people who want to find fulfilment in life must live by the ideals set by Sita. This is the message of the story of Rama and Sita, as depicted in the *Ramayana*. Ravana, who could not conquer his weakness for women, was the cause for the death of his sons, brothers and relatives. He was the cause for the destruction of Lanka. How did it all end? It ended in the destruction of Ravana and brought him disrepute that outlived his death. It was the evil desire of Ravana that brought his end. If only he had controlled his desire, his sons, brothers, and relatives would have survived and prospered. The selfishness of Ravana and his uncontrollable desire brought endless sorrow to his people.

Surpanakha Arrives

One day, while Rama and Sita were entering their hut in Panchavati, guarded by Lakshmana, a lady was seen walking toward them. Though Rama and Sita did not see her, the ever-watchful Lakshmana spotted her and asked, "Who are you?" The lady ignored him and went straight to Rama. Rama too asked the same question. The lady countered by asking a

question herself, "What does it matter to you as to who I am? By the way, who are you?" Rama then introduced Himself as the son of Dasaratha. The lady responded by introducing herself, "I am the sister of the brave Ravana. I am the sister of Kumbhakarna and Vibishana, Khara, and Dhushana. My name is Surpanakha." When Rama asked her to explain the purpose of her visit, she replied without a trace of modesty that she wanted to marry Him!

Rama and Lakshmana could not help smiling at the behaviour of Surpanakha and decided to have some fun at her expense. Rama said to her, "Oh lady! You are the very embodiment of beauty. It is not possible for Me to marry you since I have a wife of My own. See there! That young man will be a fitting husband for you, since he is not accompanied by his wife." Taking Rama seriously, she went to Lakshmana and said, "Lakshmana, are you ready to marry me?" To this Lakshmana replied, "Yes, I am ready. But I do not wish to reduce you to the lowly status of a servant. Since I am the servant of Sri Rama, you too will become the servant of Sri Rama if you marry me. You are the sister of Ravana who is of a great royal lineage. It is not proper on your part to become a servant by marrying me. Hence, marry my Master Sri Rama, instead of wishing to marry me."

In this way, the two brothers had fun teasing Surpanakha. In the end, Surpanakha came to Rama and said, "If You permit me, I will kill Sita and Lakshmana so that both of us can live happily in this forest." Saying this she rushed toward Sita in order to

swallow her. Rama sent a signal to Lakshmana by looking at the sky. The intelligent Lakshmana, who had a thorough understanding of the signs and gestures of Rama, concluded that Rama was asking him to cut off her nose and ears, since the sky signifies sound and sound in turn signifies ears.

Surpanakha was now devoid of her ears and nose. She screamed furiously, calling her brothers Khara and Dhushana to her rescue. In a trice Rama wiped out Khara, Dhushana, and a host of terrible demons who accompanied them. Surpanakha then rushed to her brother Ravana and related her pitiful story. Ravana burned with fury when he heard her and at once dispatched a force of forty thousand demons to destroy Rama. Meanwhile, Lakshmana thought that it was not wise to keep Sita there, since there would be an encounter between Rama and the demons. He took Sita to a cave and stood guard at its entrance, while Rama fearlessly faced the forty thousand demons. He discharged an arrow, which multiplied itself into forty thousand arrows and attacked the demons, annihilating them all in no time.

The Cause for the *Ramayana*

Surpanakha's anger and frustration increased on seeing the death of the vast army of demons at the hand of Rama, and she now resolved to bring about the death of Rama and Lakshmana at any cost. She said to Ravana, "Brother, Sita, the wife of Rama, is the most beautiful lady I have ever seen. She is a lady worthy to be your wife. Somehow or other, bring her to your

palace. This would be the greatest achievement in your life.”

*People do not hear noble words,
But they eagerly hear evil words.
How can these people ever realise You?
Of what avail is all their intelligence?*

Evil people easily succumb to evil words. The words of Surpanakha created a storm in the mind of Ravana. He worked hard at hatching a plot to abduct Sita and make her his wife. He summoned Maricha to help in the abduction of Sita. He asked him to don the guise of a golden deer and draw Rama away from Sita, so that he could abduct Sita.

Maricha, who had earlier witnessed the prowess and sanctity of Rama, tried to reason with Ravana, saying, “Ravana, you do not know the matchless strength and prowess of Rama. There is none equal to Him in the world. Your power and prowess are infinitesimally small when compared with the infinite power of Rama. You will only bring about the destruction of your life and kingdom!”

The Golden Deer

Inflamed by the words of Maricha, Ravana roared, “O Maricha! You are giving too much credit to the hapless and helpless humans who are roaming in the forest. Sita is fit to be with me for I am omnipotent and omniscient.” Ravana then sternly warned Maricha that he would kill him if he did not obey him. Maricha thought to himself: “If I do not obey Ravana I will definitely die at his hands. On the other hand, if I come to

You, Rama, as a golden deer, You will chase me and I will certainly die at Your hands. Either way, death is inevitable. It is better to die by Your hands than by those of wicked Ravana.” So praying, he agreed to carry out the wish of Ravana. Maricha then turned himself into an enchanting golden deer and played about in the vicinity of Rama’s hut in Panchavati. Sita was fascinated by the deer. She told Rama,

*Hear my prayer, O my Lord! I love this
golden deer.
Fetch it for me, O Rama, and fulfil my de-
sire thereby.
I will play with this golden deer,
In this lovely hut that my brother-in-law
has built for me.*

Sita had never before asked for the fulfilment of any wish. Rama went after the golden deer to capture it for her.

In the meantime, Ravana abducted Sita. He then mortally wounded Jatayu, when the bird obstructed him in the sky to prevent the abduction of Sita. Rama and Lakshmana returned to find the empty cottage. They searched the forest thoroughly. Every bush and corner, every valley and every dale was searched for Sita. Rama, the all-knowing One, knew the whereabouts of Sita but pretended as though He did not. While searching for Sita, Rama and Lakshmana entered a forest. There they saw a strange monster, with its head in the place of its stomach.

They could not help laughing at the sight of this monster. Becoming curious, they began to observe him.

Suddenly, Kabhanda, the strange monster, caught both of them in his hands. Both the brothers struggled to free themselves from the iron grip of Kabhanda but they failed. Lakshmana, who thought that death was inevitable at the hands of Kabhanda, said to Rama that he would become the food of Kabhanda so that Kabhanda would release Rama. He said, "Rama, allow me this favour of helping You in this way." But Rama refused to listen to the words of Lakshmana. He said, "O Lakshmana, you are the most virtuous one in this world. One can never get a brother like you. Let Me become the food for Kabhanda. You go and find Sita and protect her." In this way, each brother vied with the other to sacrifice himself for the sake of the other. One can never find such ideal love between brothers anywhere in the world. While there was hatred between brothers like Vali and Sugriva, Vibhishana and Ravana, there was only pure love between Rama and Lakshmana. In the end, the brothers decided to destroy Kabhanda and axed both his hands.

An angel immediately emerged from the body of Kabhanda and said, "Rama, today I am freed from my curse by the touch of Your Divine body! Once upon a time, I was the son of a Sage. But I was turned into a monster by a curse that I earned due to my evil deeds. You have now freed me from my curse, and I am eternally grateful to You. Not far from this place is the hermitage of Sage Matanga. There, an old devoted lady is eagerly awaiting Your arrival."

The two brothers then traveled north and sighted the hermitage of Sage Matanga. There they saw Sabari, a great devotee of Rama. Her master, Sage Matanga, at the time of casting away his body, had told her that Rama and Lakshmana would come there, and that she should wait for their arrival. Though extremely old, she held on to life in order to obey the command of Sage Matanga and to receive Rama and Lakshmana in the hermitage. She offered them her humble hospitality, washed their feet with water, and sprinkled the water on her head. Satisfied, she then cast off her body. However, while dying, she directed Rama to move in the northern direction, to meet Sugriva at the mountain Rishyamuka. From the mountain top Sugriva observed them approaching and wondered whether they were sent by Vali, his enemy. He then sent Hanuman, his minister, to discover the identity of the two visitors.

Befriending Sugriva

Hanuman was the embodiment of peace, virtue, strength and wisdom. He had mastered the four *Vedas* and was well versed in the scriptures. Hanuman was a past master in etiquette and courtesy and went as an emissary to meet the brothers. Assuming the guise of a Brahmin, he began talking to them. He heard their story from the beginning to the end, and decided to take them to Sugriva, who lived on the mountain top. Hanuman volunteered to carry Rama and Lakshmana to the mountain top on his shoulders. There, Hanuman related to Sugriva the story of the two brothers.

When Sugriva heard about the abduction of Sita, he summoned a soldier to bring a bundle of ornaments that some monkeys had found in the forest. Rama asked Lakshmana to find out if the ornaments in the bundle belonged to Sita or not. Lakshmana opened the bundle and started shedding tears. He said, "O brother! I can identify only the toe rings that sister-in-law wore, since I always noticed them when I used to prostrate before her feet every day in the morning." Lakshmana was the embodiment of purity and virtue. He is a worthy ideal to be emulated by students. Though he lived for thirteen years in the company of Rama and Sita, he had never looked at the face of Sita.

Rama would always praise Lakshmana for his great virtues, but Lakshmana would modestly say "Rama! I am Your servant. You are Lord Narayana Himself. This is the effect of Your company." Virtuous people are always modest and humble.

On the Rishyamuka mountain, Rama and Sugriva set the seal of friendship. Rama promised to help Sugriva in exchange for the help he would render to Him in searching for Sita. Sugriva decided to test the strength of Rama, to find out whether He was stronger than his brother Vali. Once, Vali shot an arrow that pierced through five trees, one after the other. Sugriva asked Rama whether He would be able to emulate this feat. Rama felt pity for Sugriva, since he could not recognise Rama's Divinity. Only equals can judge equals; small ones can never grasp the powers of the great. Since Rama needed Hanuman for His mission, and

since Hanuman belonged to the clan of Sugriva, He agreed to face the trial of strength set by Sugriva.

Rama discharged His arrow. It not only pierced through five trees but even crossed the mountains beyond. Sugriva immediately felt repentant for doubting the strength of Rama and sealed his friendship with Rama, with fire as the witness. Rama assured him that He would stand by him and crown him as king. Rama felt that Sugriva was punished by Vali, for no fault of his. Vali had committed the most heinous act of appropriating the wife of Sugriva, when one should actually consider the wife of one's younger brother as one's own daughter. Hence, Rama decided to punish Vali for his unrighteousness. On the strength of the promise given by Rama, Sugriva dashed to the mansion of Vali and challenged him to a fight. But poor Sugriva had to flee, severely battered by the blows of Vali.

Rama persuaded Sugriva to challenge Vali once again, assuring him that He would definitely kill Vali this time. While the two brothers were locked in mortal combat, Rama, hiding behind a tree, discharged an arrow at Vali and killed him. Many denounce this act of Rama, asserting that it was not proper on His part to have killed Vali while hiding behind a tree. All said and done, Rama's act can be justified on three counts: Firstly, hunters shoot an animal by hiding themselves. Secondly, no one could defeat Vali face to face, since he had earned a boon by which half of the strength of his opponent would flow into him in a face-to-face fight. Thirdly, if Vali were to fall at Rama's feet when Rama

appeared in front of him, Rama would be forced to give him shelter and consequently break the promise given to Sugriva. The justification for the act of Rama lies in these three reasons. Vali himself, while dying, caught hold of the hands of Rama, admitted his mistake, and said that what Rama did was justified. He prayed to Rama to crown his brother Sugriva as the King of Kishkindha and to make his son Angada the Crown Prince. Later, Rama fulfilled the promise given to Vali.

After Vali's death, two months passed, but no action was taken by Sugriva to help Rama. Rama then sent Lakshmana to warn Sugriva. Lakshmana told Sugriva, "You have forgotten to honour your word after receiving help from Rama." Sugriva humbly said to Lakshmana, "It is the rainy season now. The climate is not conducive for the monkeys to move about searching for Sita. I can never forget the help rendered to me by Rama. Very soon my emissaries will comb every forest and valley for Sita."

Hanuman in Lanka

Sugriva sent the soldiers of his army in the four directions, in search of Sita. He selected Hanuman, who merited the titles *Balavantha* (the powerful one) and *Dheemantha* (the intellectual one), for the task of searching for Sita in Lanka. Hanuman had all the qualifications to be Rama's emissary to Lanka since he was strong, steady and intelligent. He firmly resolved that he would find Sita at any cost and work on the task with one-pointed attention, devotion, and dedication. Nothing would deter the iron resolve of Hanuman to trace Sita's whereabouts. He even looked

into the bed chamber of Ravana, to find if Sita was held a prisoner there. Though, he moved in the bedrooms of the people in Lanka, his mind never wavered. He found women sleeping in all sorts of postures and positions, but never once did an evil thought enter the mind of Hanuman.

At one place, he found an extremely beautiful woman, sleeping in the bedchamber of Ravana. For a moment he thought that she might be Sita, for she was extremely beautiful. Immediately he regretted having had such a thought. He knew for certain that Sita would never agree to occupy the bedchamber of the evil Ravana. Hanuman then made a thorough search of Lanka to trace out Sita, but he failed. Deeply frustrated, he climbed to the top of a tree on the sea shore and he desired to commit suicide by plunging into the sea. The very thought that he was not able to perform the task assigned by Rama gnawed deeply at his heart. Then all of a sudden, he realised that he had not searched for Sita in the Ashoka grove, which he spotted from his vantage point. He leapt toward the grove.

While Hanuman was trying to enter the garden, he was captured by the eldest son of Ravana and brought to the court of Ravana, who sat on a high throne. Finding Ravana, who was full of evil, seated so high, Hanuman thought that being a devotee of Rama he should not be at a lower level. He increased the length of his tail, coiled it like a seat, sat on it, and rose much higher than Ravana's throne. Hanuman then felt satisfied that he had occupied a pedestal higher than that of Ravana.

There then ensued a furious exchange of words between Ravana and Hanuman.

Ravana: *O monkey! Who are you? You have spoilt my grove. Who sent you to Lanka?*

Hanuman: *The great Rama, the King of kings, who had cut off the nose of your sister, has sent me.*

Ravana: *Why do you address me so disrespectfully?*

Hanuman: *I am the servant of Lord Rama. I am at liberty to address you, a sinner, thus.*

Ravana felt frightened, looking at the power and prowess of Hanuman. He thought that when a mere monkey had so much courage and strength, the followers of Rama must be much greater than him. Ravana decided to humble Hanuman by setting fire to his tail, for the tail is very dear to a monkey. Yards of cloth were brought to wrap around the monkey's tail, and it was set on fire. Hanuman leapt from mansion to mansion, setting fire to every house with his burning tail. After causing incalculable damage to Lanka, Hanuman plunged into the ocean to extinguish the flames on his tail.

When he surveyed Lanka burning furiously, Hanuman regretted his action. He thought that Sita might be burnt in the flames. Hanuman rushed to the Ashoka grove to find out if Sita was safe. Since he had never seen Sita before, he found it difficult to identify her amongst the numerous ladies in the grove. At last,

he noticed a lean lady with downcast eyes under a tree. He wondered whether she was Sita. He then started reciting the story of Rama to check if the lady under the tree was Sita or not. While he was reciting the story, the lady under the tree looked up with tears streaming down her face.

Hanuman sees Sita

At that time, Sita was in the company of Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, and her two daughters, Ajata and Trijata. Hanuman found that these three ladies were the only friends of Sita in Lanka. It was due to the solace and assurance provided by them that Sita survived. Hanuman then dropped Rama's ring in front of the lady under the tree, to further confirm whether she was Sita. The lady grasped the ring with great ecstasy and showered a volley of questions at Hanuman. She asked him, "Are you the messenger of Rama, or are you a trickster sent by Ravana to deceive me? The demons here assume strange forms and indulge in strange deeds." To impress upon Sita that he was indeed the messenger of Rama, Hanuman then ripped open his heart to show Rama installed there. Looking at the image of Rama imprinted on the heart of Hanuman, Sita fainted. Hanuman then became completely certain that the lady was indeed Sita.

Without wasting any time, Hanuman instantaneously leapt across the ocean to convey the message of Sita's whereabouts, to Rama. While the monkeys were busy eating fruits in Madhuvana, Hanuman, forsaking food and sleep, hurried to Rama to convey the good news. He said, "Sri Rama! Sita is verily a jewel amongst women, chaste and virtuous. Her plight is like

that of a parrot confined in a cage of arrows. She was surrounded by many demons, who were brandishing their swords to kill her. I found Sita trembling at the sight of these terrible women.” Hearing these words of Hanuman, Rama, overcome with emotion, wanted to rush to Lanka to fight Ravana at once. Hanuman and Sugriva restrained Rama and told Him that it would take some time to make arrangements for the battle against Ravana. All the great warriors then rallied together to hold deliberations and devise strategies to defeat Ravana.

The battle between Rama and Ravana is the battle between righteousness and unrighteousness, truth and untruth. It is an eternal battle, which wages in the human heart. *Prema*, which represents Rama, *Atma*, which signifies Sita, *kama*, which stands for Ravana, are seated in the same human heart.

We should not confine the scope and significance of the *Ramayana* only to the physical plane. The inner *Ramayana* is most beneficent, for it is full of lessons for mankind.

Rama displayed great intellectual acumen and alertness in drawing up plans for defeating the enemy. The *Ramayana* is a manual of military strategies and astuteness. Rama, as the Leader, knew who should be given what responsibility and how it should be discharged. He had the ability to appoint the right person to the right position. While fighting the battle against Ravana, Rama observed the principles of *dharma*. He never took advantage of the weakness of his adversary,

but gave ample opportunity for the enemy to prove his strength. The example of Rama shines as an eternal star, even in the realms of the battlefield.

Hence, the story of Rama is sacred, ideal, nectarine and blissful. Love Rama, and through Love, realise Him. Be one with Him. That is true Liberation.



7. The War Begins

At all times and in all places, the Atma exists.

*But people question why the Atma remains un-
seen.*

*Can anyone obtain the butter latent in milk by
mere asking?*

Embodiments of Love!

The Universe is a mansion and all the men in the world belong to one family. Selfishness is disastrous, and yet today selfishness has become the very essence of life. The *Ramayana* teaches us not to be selfish.

It is easy to cognise the Divinity that pervades the entire universe, but as long as man is swayed by worldly thoughts, Divinity remains unrealised and unattained. As long as our secular life is marked by narrow-mindedness and parochialism, we will be lost in the world. The same worldly life, touched by sacrifice, love, and selflessness, enables one to enter into the world of *Nivritti*. Realisation and non-realisation are dependent upon the paths we follow. Unfortunately, today the outward tendencies have gained dominance over our inward tendencies. Realisation is impossible as long as one is lost in the world of *pravritti*.

Rama, the embodiment of *nivritti* tendencies, arrived at the seashore on His mission to destroy Lanka, which was steeped in *pravritti*. Evil tendencies like ignorance, egoism, and pomp do not allow man to

enter into the world of *nivritti* even though he may have intellectual eminence to his credit.

Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, and Jambavan were making arrangements for the massive action to be launched against Lanka. Rama divided His army into two sections, headed by Angada on one side and Jambavan on the other. He pretended as though He was tired and lay on the sands, resting His head on Lakshmana's lap.

It was the night of the full moon. Rama was not really tired, but He pretended that He was. He wished to impart a lesson in the *nivritti marga* to all those present. He called Angada and said, "Angada! Look at the Moon. See, how splendourously it shines! The moon is immaculately beautiful, without a spot on its face." Meanwhile, Sugriva arrived there and heard Rama's words. He said, "O Rama! I see spots in the Moon. Since the Moon is part of *prakruthi* (nature), it contains valleys, mountains, and the like. These are visible as spots." Rama then called Hanuman and asked the same question. Hanuman said, "O Ramachandra! I don't see any spot. I see only the reflection of Your face in the Moon. Since the Moon is like a mirror, Your face is reflected in the Moon." The answers given by Sugriva and Hanuman reveal their *pravritti* and *nivritti* tendencies respectively.

Vibhishana joins Rama

While Rama was busy talking to them, He saw a person rushing towards Him, calling out His name. This man was followed by four servants. The Vanara

warriors stopped them and asked them many questions. Vibhishana, who was the person in question, replied: "I come from Lanka and am called Vibhishana. I am the brother of Ravana, the Emperor of Lanka. Since my brother is indulging in nefarious activities against Rama, the incarnation of Lord Narayana, I do not wish to live with him. I am a devotee of Rama and I have come to seek His Grace." Hearing these words of Vibhishana, Sugriva advised Rama, "Lord! Vibhishana should not be trusted, since he is the brother of our enemy. He has come to spy on our activities and pass on the information to Ravana."

Different people advised Rama in different ways. Then Hanuman said, "O Rama! A king has two types of enemies, enemies who rise from his own family and clan and enemies who hail from the neighbouring kingdom. This Vibhishana is not of your clan. He does not belong to a neighbouring kingdom of Ayodhya, either. Hence there is no scope for him to harbour any evil against You, like passing on our secrets to Ravana. Observe his devotion and treat him accordingly." Rama appreciated the advice of Hanuman. He called Vibhishana to one side and asked him to relate his story.

Vibhishana said to Rama, "There is no limit to the atrocities committed by Ravana, though I advised him to mend his actions. I denounced the nefarious activities of Ravana and advised him not to enter into war with you. Ravana and his son Indrajit became furious and commanded me to leave the kingdom. They have branded me a traitor. I prayed for the welfare of

Lanka and left the kingdom. I seek none else but God. I wish to sanctify my life at the feet of God. I have been chanting the name of Rama for a long time. It is the name of Rama that brought Hanuman and me close to each other in Lanka. I don't need anything in my life except Your Feet. I do not want kith and kin. All I desire is Your proximity." Rama then said, "Vibhishana, do not be frightened. Your brother will be punished for all his misdeeds. You will soon see this with your own eyes." He then summoned Sugriva and Lakshmana, and commanded them to anoint Vibhishana as the future King of Lanka. Vibhishana prayed, "Lord, I have not come here with an eye on the Kingdom of Lanka. All that I seek is the Kingdom of God. Make me a citizen in that Kingdom or even a servant there." But Rama crowned him as the Emperor of the Kingdom of Lanka, even though the war against Ravana had not yet commenced. Despite this, the Vanaras kept a watchful eye on Vibhishana, lest he betray their secrets to Ravana. But Rama trusted Vibhishana to the core since Vibhishana's heart was immaculately pure. Rama accepted Vibhishana and declared, "You are Mine."

The Bridge Across the Ocean

Hectic preparations were made for the battle against Ravana. It was decided that a bridge be built across the ocean to reach Lanka. Then, Vibhishana said, "Oh Ramachandra, this ocean was dug by Your ancestors, the sons of Sagara. It will be very hard to build a bridge across the ocean. Why don't You pray to the Lord of the Ocean to make a way for the army to pass through?" Rama thought this to be good advice

and decided to pray to the Lord of the Ocean. Despite the intense prayers of Rama, the God of the Ocean did not appear. Rama lost His temper and wished to teach a lesson to the Ocean. As He was preparing to shoot an arrow into the ocean, the God of the Ocean appeared and said, "Oh Ramachandra, you are verily the incarnation of Narayana. You know for sure the secrets of the Universe. As the five elements perform their respective duties, I too perform my duties, abiding by rules and regulations. I have in me crores [a crore is ten million] of living species, and all of them abide by the rules of the Ocean. I cannot give way for a huge army to pass through, but I can render one help to You. Build a bridge and I will see to it that it does not sink in the water. You have in Your army Nala, the son of Vishwakarma. Since he is an expert in engineering, he can easily build the bridge across the Ocean." Rama summoned Nala and asked him whether it was possible for him to build the bridge. Nala replied in the affirmative and said that he was capable of building a bridge stretching even thousands of miles if only he had Rama's Grace. Rama then fixed the auspicious time for the construction of the bridge on the next day.

The Vanara warriors brought hundreds of boulders and hurled them into the ocean, but all of them sank in the water. Ramachandra became angry with the Ocean God, feeling he had lied. Then the Lord of the Ocean appeared and said, "Ramachandra, there is nothing in the world that does not sink except Your name. Everything will vanish in the womb of time except Your name. Let the warriors write the name of Rama on the stones and throw them into the ocean."

The Vanara warriors wrote the name of Rama and hurled the rocks into the water. The boulders floated, no doubt, but got scattered about in different directions in the ocean. Hanuman then advised the warriors to write 'Ra' on one rock and 'Ma' on another so that they get attracted to each other. In this way, the boulders were kept together and the bridge was built.

Bhakthi (devotion) is of three types: *sadharana* (ordinary), *madhyamika* (medium), and *ananya* (one-pointed). Ordinary devotion is marked by ego. Here the egoistic feeling 'I' dominates all actions and thoughts. The medium type of devotion is marked by the feeling, "I am in you; you are in me." *Ananya bhakthi* is marked by the feeling, "You alone exist. I do not exist at all." Hanuman one day said to Rama, "Oh Lord! When I think that I am the body, I am overcome by the feeling that I am Your servant. When I think that I am the individual self, I am overcome by the feeling that You are the object, and I am your reflection. When I know I am the *Atma*, then I feel that You and I are one." Thus, Hanuman revealed the depths of his devotion.

The bridge was constructed in four days.

Ravana, the trickster

Meanwhile, Ravana made great efforts to inflict more pain on Sita. He commanded Vidhyut Jihva, an expert in magic, to make an artificial head like that of Rama, so that he could subject Sita to great anguish and sorrow. He also ordered him to make arrows that were of the exact make as those of Rama. Vidhyut Jihva did as he was told. The head and arrows were

placed in front of Sita. Ravana then went to Sita and said, "Sita, see the fate of Rama. You have always set your hopes high on Rama. He is dead now." Sita could not endure all this. She was filled with deep agony. She joined her hands and said, "Oh Ravana! Do me the favour of chopping off my head and burning my body along with the head of Rama. I cannot survive without Rama. This is my last wish." Sita started weeping. At that time Ravana received the news from Indrajit that he should see him immediately to discuss an urgent matter, and Ravana left the spot at once. Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, said to Sita, "Mother, there is none in the world who can slay Sri Rama. Ravana has many magicians who resort to trickery and deceit. The head of Rama is not the real head. Ramachandra is safe and happy. This is simply an artificial head and you should not worry." She then placed her hand on the artificial head of Rama. The head vanished instantly.

On the second day, Ravana came to Sita and said, "Sita, Rama is going to die in a few hours. You will be my Queen, and my palace will be yours. No one can satisfactorily describe my wealth, my glory, and my valour. I am omnipotent and omniscient. Make up your mind to marry me." Sita plucked a blade of grass under her foot and said, "Ravana, your wealth in comparison with Rama's opulence is as small as this blade of grass. Rama is Immortal, Effulgent, Wise and Eternal. There is a world of difference between you and Rama. You are as low as this lowly blade of grass." At these words of Sita, Ravana became furious and screamed, "Sita, I am giving you only two months' time; if you do not yield to me, my cook will come here,

cut you up into pieces, and serve you as a flavoured dish to me. I will eat your flesh. This is my last warning to you.” So saying, Ravana withdrew.

The next day, a fierce battle raged between the forces of Rama and Ravana. Thousands of soldiers belonging to both the sides fell dead. Lanka trembled with fear. At one time, all the *vanaras* (monkeys) fell unconscious on the battle ground. Vibhishana who watched the scene, consoled the *vanara* forces saying that it was due to the magic spells cast by the demons. Vibhishana countered them with his own magic formula, whereupon the fallen heroes arose from the ground. Ravana then saw to it that the head of Sita fell in front of Rama. Just as Sarama had earlier consoled Sita in her plight and fear, Vibhishana now started consoling Rama, saying, “Oh Rama, who in this world can kill Sita? Who can touch Sita, the embodiment of chastity? This head of Sita is not the real one but an artificial one.” Enraged at the tricks of Ravana, Lakshmana plunged into the battlefield and fought fiercely, but in the end he fainted. Rama then started lamenting, “Oh Lakshmana, I considered you as my sixth vital breath. Today, my sixth vital breath is gone.” Rama pretended as though He wept. Vibhishana came to the spot and directed Hanuman to bring the herbs of the Sanjeevani plant from the Himalayas. Since Hanuman could not identify the plant, he lifted a big chunk of the mountain and brought it to the battlefield. As soon as the herbal medicine was given, Lakshmana regained consciousness.

The next day, Rama plunged into the battlefield. This time, Ravana could not withstand the attack made by Rama and became exhausted. Rama, the Compassionate One, stopped fighting with Ravana on that day, told him to take rest and come on the following day to resume the fight. Rama had compassion even for his enemy, and the battle He fought was a righteous one.

Mandodhari, the Queen of Ravana, strove hard to change the wicked ways of her husband. “You do not know who Rama is. He is the very incarnation of Lord Narayana and Lakshmana is the incarnation of Adishesha. Return Sita to Rama and fall at His feet,” she said, but Ravana refused to pay heed to her advice.

It is very hard to change the ways of evil people. They are swayed by the power of their senses and succumb to them. The six evils of desire, pride, greed, anger, infatuation, and jealousy constantly plague such people. These evil tendencies are our enemies and it is these enemies that destroy our lives. Jealousy is a cancer and anger is a demon. In fact, demons are not a separate species. Rather, people with evil qualities are indeed demons. Demonic tendencies cling tightly to us and it is very difficult to get rid of them. As the body has many parts, the mind, too, has its own parts, which assume perverse forms. The mind outlives the body and finds a habitation in the human body in the next life. Hence, it is necessary to direct the mind toward *nivritti* and not toward *pravritti*. That alone will help.

What is the *nivritti marga*? The essence of the *nivritti marga* lies in performing all deeds for the pleasure of the Lord. This is the easiest way by which man can find his fulfilment. Unfortunately, man does not follow the obvious and the easiest path but instead takes recourse to difficult paths. Though man's intelligence has increased by leaps and bounds, his character has declined considerably. One may be a scholar, but one is a zero without common sense and general knowledge. These people have high degrees to their credit, but they are ignorant of ordinary things. The cause for all this is the absence of general knowledge. For want of general knowledge, people are not able to discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong, and fair and foul. Man has to change his worldly tendencies. He must develop the inner sight.

Lanka was enveloped in great sorrow as the warriors started killing the demons. Even the people who did not commit any wrong became victims of this war. The sinner may be one, but the punishment falls on all those around him. Does the roaring fire in a forest burn only the neem trees and spare the mango trees since they are sweet? The forest fire consumes every tree that comes in its way. The Jasmine in a forest wafts its fragrance to all those around it. Similarly, war kills the good as well as the bad people.

One day, while Lakshmana was fighting in Lanka, he shot an arrow, which accidentally killed a child who was in the arms of its mother. The child was killed in an instant. The mother dropped the child then and there and started fleeing from the place.

Lakshmana, who noticed this, said to Rama, “Brother, see the selfishness of this lady. Though she is the mother of the child, she has dropped the child and is running away to save her skin. These people of Lanka are selfish to the core. They do not have any mercy at all.” Hearing these words, Rama replied, “Oh Lakshmana, you are mistaken in your assessment of this lady. There are good people even in Lanka. This woman is running away with a noble intention. See for yourself.” They stopped the lady from running away and asked her, “Why are you running away, leaving your child mercilessly?” To this the lady replied, “I do not attach any importance to the body. The dead do not come back to life. Rama has laid siege to the city to destroy Ravana. Rama, after killing Ravana, may take the people of Lanka to Ayodhya. I wish to live, so that I can enjoy the proximity of Divinity. I wish to be a citizen in Rama’s Kingdom and I want to serve Rama. That is why I wish to keep my body alive. And I do not have any attachment toward this body.” Lakshmana was stunned noticing the sublime feeling of the lady.

The righteous Vibhishana

Next day, both the armies prepared themselves for the battle. At the break of dawn, Ravana’s forces sounded battle drums, and Rama’s forces too sounded their battle drums, fiercely. This time, the second son of Ravana entered the battle. He cast magic spells which caused much confusion in the *vanara* flanks. Vibhishana, who knew all the tricks of the demons, countered the magic spells employed by the demons, and saved the forces of Rama. Rama said, “Oh Lakshmana, all of you did not want to accept Vibhis-

hana as a friend in the beginning. But today, he is of the greatest use to us. He is great. He is unique.” Rama correctly assessed the greatness of Vibhishana. Vibhishana was a staunch supporter of *dharma*. When he found that his brother Ravana was indulging in unrighteousness, he denounced his ways and tried to correct him. He did not want to be a party to sin and unrighteousness. When he failed to correct Ravana, he gave him up, joined the forces of *dharma*, and surrendered himself to Divinity. Vibhishana stands superior even to Bhishma in this respect. Though Bhishma was a virtuous one, he did not give up the Kauravas when they resorted to foul and unjust ways. In fact he became a party to sin and unrighteousness, by becoming the commander-in-chief of their forces.

Hatred is the cause of war, and desires are the cause for hatred. Anger arises if desires are not fulfilled. Ego arises if desires are fulfilled. Hence, an effort should be made to cut down one’s desires, give up one’s hatred, and strive for Divine Grace. This, for man, is the foremost duty.



8. The Supreme Devotion of Vibhishana

*When divine feelings do not surge in the heart,
Man becomes infected with two flaws.
He conceals his countless blunders, and
He criticises even minor mistakes of others.*

Embodiments of Love,

The portraits of two personalities are very striking in the *Ramayana*. They are those of Sugriva and Vibhishana. Vibhishana went in quest of Rama, while Rama Himself went in search of Sugriva. Sugriva realised Rama's greatness and goodness only after meeting Him, while Vibhishana knew of Rama's excellence even before he met Him.

The Kurukshetra war lasted for eighteen days, but the war between Rama and Ravana lasted for seventy-five days. Though the warfare, in a physical sense, lasted for seventy-five days at Lanka, the inner war between Rama and Ravana, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, truth and untruth, and righteousness and unrighteousness is being fought endlessly in the human heart. No one can tell for certain when the conflict and the clash between the positive and the negative forces will come to an end.

It is not possible for everyone to understand Divinity. The one who misappropriates the wife of another and the one who mocks the noble ones can never

understand Divinity. Only those who are pure and compassionate can hope to understand Divinity.

Vibhishana's gift

Indrajit, the eldest son of Ravana, was bent upon burning Rama to ashes by performing certain sacrifices and rituals. The magic tricks employed by Indrajit wrought much havoc and confusion amongst Rama's army. Vibhishana who was well versed in the tricks of the demons, employed counter tricks and nullified the power of their magic rituals. Vibhishana drew the attention of Rama and Lakshmana to the blackberry tree under which Indrajit performed the magic rituals. The entire place under the tree was littered with bodies of sacrificed humans. Vibhishana cautioned Rama and Lakshmana about the magic practices of Indrajit and told them that they should see to it that Indrajit was drawn away from that tree. He informed them that Indrajit's power and strength multiplied immensely when he was in the proximity of that tree.

Indrajit who watched Vibhishana helping Rama's forces on the battlefield, raged in fury. His fury increased when he found Lakshmana coming toward him, carried on the shoulders of Hanuman, and guided by Vibhishana. He said to Vibhishana, "You are the betrayer of Lanka, you are the destroyer of your own people." Vibhishana retorted, "Indrajit, it is a quality of bad people to waste time by indulging in tall and unnecessary talk. Many a time I advised your father Ravana to desist from evil ways. But he never paid heed to me. I tried to put sense into the head of your

father by advising him that it is a sin to misappropriate another's wife. I also told him that he would bring dire disaster to himself and his people by resorting to *adharma*. I forewarned your father, in the presence of Kumbhakarna and Surpanakha. It is your father who, by deliberately indulging in evil, has brought himself and Lanka to this state. My good words had no effect. To your father, unrighteousness is the dearest thing. Untruth is his joy, wickedness is his life. How can the heart of a person laden with so much evil ever change? It is your father who is the architect of this misfortune to Lanka. The destruction of Lanka is his own doing. I am in no way the cause for all this." Unconvinced by these words, Indrajit screamed, "If you did not want to support my father, you could have at least remained neutral without joining the ranks of the enemy." To this Vibhishana replied, "You don't have the wisdom to distinguish between truth and untruth, righteousness and unrighteousness. Having realised the difference between them, I joined the side of Sri Rama. It is unjust and unrighteous on the part of a person to remain neutral when *dharma* is in danger. Society should be saved from Ravana. I enjoy the divine proximity of Rama and that is my greatest treasure."

The example of the tongue

Vibhishana conducted himself with the utmost truthfulness, righteousness, and piety in Lanka. When Hanuman first landed in Lanka, he encountered Vibhishana at the latex's palace. He said to Hanuman, "Oh Hanuman! I am conducting myself carefully amongst these demons like a tongue amidst the teeth. How long can I live like this? When will I earn Lord

Rama's Grace? When will I enjoy the proximity of the Lord?" Then Hanuman said to Vibhishana, "Oh Vibhishana, the good people in this world are harassed by the wicked demons, who are like the sharp teeth that surround a tongue. But mark one thing. The tongue was born along with you, while the teeth came in the middle and will fall away in the middle. But the tongue which was born with you will last until your death."

The tongue is a sacred organ. It is virtuous too. It is an embodiment of sweetness and truth though surrounded by the vile, the vicious and the wicked. The teeth do not allow the tongue to come out but in times of necessity it comes out and helps. When the lips run dry, the tongue comes out and moistens the lips.

The devotion of Tulsidas

There were many sages and *sadhakas* who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Rama. Tulsidas was a great devotee of God who lived on the Chitrakoota mountain. Every day after his bath, he would offer holy water to a tree. One day, a spirit appeared in front of him and said, "Oh master, while you discourse on the *Ramayana*, there is a person, an old man, who comes here first and is the last one to leave. Tomorrow, you must cling to his feet and ask for a boon." The spirit told him this and disappeared.

On the next day, Tulsidas was busy preparing sandal paste and singing the name of Rama. After some time, the old Brahmin came there. Tulsidas began discoursing on the *Ramayana*. At the end of the

discourse, everyone went away except the Brahmin. Tulsidas went to him and fell at his feet. The Brahmin asked Tulsidas what boon he wanted. Tulsidas replied, "I want to have the *darshan* of the beautiful form of Sri Rama." The Brahmin then said, "You will have the *darshan* of Sri Rama in a few days." Who was this Brahmin? It was none else than Hanuman. He would present himself wherever the glory of Rama is sung. Hanuman always passes into rapture while listening to the glory of Rama.

A few days later, a boy of tender age came to Tulsidas when he was preparing sandal paste for the Lord. He approached Tulsidas and said, "Oh grand sire, will you give some paste to me?" Tulsidas readily agreed to do this favour for the boy. While he was giving the paste to the boy, the birds on the tree felt pity for Tulsidas, since he did not recognise that the boy was the same Lord Rama, for whom he had been pinning for so many years. The Lord is everywhere.

*Whether you are in the forest or in the de-
sert,
Whether you are in town or village,
Whether you are on the mountain top or
midstream,
The Lord helps the hapless ones.*

Two days after this incident, the old man asked Tulsidas whether he had seen the Lord on the previous day. Tulsidas replied in the negative. The old man said, "Who do you think came yesterday in the form of a boy to take sandal paste from you? All forms are His

and all names are His. It is foolishness to worship Him in one form only. Ramachandra is the In-dweller of your heart. Your heart is the altar of God. Don't install anyone in the altar of your heart except the Lord. My son, you may give room to your kith and kin in any part of your house, but do not install them in the altar of your shrine. Kith and kin come in the middle and go away in the middle. Serve them, but do not give your heart to them. Fill your heart with compassion. A heart laden with compassion is the temple of the Lord. *Hrudh + daya makes hrudaya.*" Hanuman taught this lesson to Tulsidas and disappeared.

Never give up

Hanuman fought the battle, his mind absorbed in Rama. He exchanged spiritual ideas with Vibhis-hana very often. He said,

Having grasped what ought to be grasped, Hold on till you succeed;

Having desired what ought to be desired, Hold on till you succeed;

Having asked what ought to be asked, Hold on till you succeed;

Having thought what ought to be thought, Hold on till you succeed.

Disgusted with you, He should yield to you!

When you ask, ask with fervour.

That is what a devotee should do.

A devotee should never accept defeat and go away.

Vibhishana was an aspirant par excellence. Even while he was a tender boy, he performed penance and propitiated the Lord. Lord Brahma appeared in front of him and said, "O Vibhishana! Ask whatever you want." Vibhishana said to the Lord, "Lord! Bless me so that I lead a life of righteousness, charity, and sacrifice. My heart should overflow with compassion and it should never be hard." Brahma blessed him. Kumbhakarna, who was of demonic nature, performed penance and Lord Brahma asked him to pray for a boon. Kumbhakarna wanted to ask him the boon of a heart bereft of compassion, that is, *Nirdaya* (devoid of compassion). But due to the thick tongue typical of demons, he uttered the word *nidra* (sleep) instead. Then onward, Kumbhakarna became a great sleeper. A person devoid of compassion is not human (*manava*), but a demon (*dhanava*). We should not be devoid of compassion at any time. It is said:

It is by dint of devotion that one should find fulfilment in life.

*Whether he is a prince or a pauper, a fool or a scholar,
It is by dint of devotion that he should find fulfilment.*

Whether he performs penance holding his nose,

Whether he dons ochre robe or holds his breath,

Whether he is adorned by ornaments and necklaces,

It is by dint of devotion that he would find fulfilment.

By constant effort, Vibhishana filled his heart with the quality of compassion. That is why he could understand the Rama Principle. He lived a life of devotion, observing truth and righteousness. The name and form of the Lord correspond to truth and right-

eousness. *Sathya* and *dharma* are the very core of the *Ramayana*.

God's main address

Rama held spiritual discussions with the Vanara warriors and imparted to them many great lessons. He told them to behave like the tongue surrounded by rapier-like teeth. Obstacles litter the way of an aspirant at every stage. The tongue outlasts the teeth. Wicked people will fall off like the teeth that surround the tongue. Wicked people will leave you as the teeth leave the tongue. God is your Protector. Protection by God is the talisman for you. God will do anything for you. Thyagaraja said:

*O Lord! who can adequately praise you?
I am waiting and waiting for your compassion.
Feel compassion for me.
You restored to Your preceptor his son.
You released Vasudeva and Devaki;
You blessed Draupadi with an endless supply of
cloth.
You protected the Pandavas.
You quenched the yearning of Kuchela.
You transformed the ugly Kubja into a beauty.
Even Lord Brahma cannot satisfactorily describe
Your glory.
I am waiting and pining for Your Grace.*

Once, Narada went to Lord Narayana and asked, "O Lord! Where do you live? Which is Your main address?" The Lord replied, "Vaikunta, Kailasa, and Swarga are My temporary branch-residences. My per-

manent residence is the place where My glory is sung by My devotees.”

The Lord is the resident of our hearts. Let us find Him there.



9. Ravana Falls

*Man toils and moils for feeding his belly.
He sweats and struggles for education
but fails to be happy.
Why should humans be steeped in sorrow
like this?
Would not the Lord help if only you pray
sincerely?*

Embodiments of Love!

Truth, righteousness, peace, and love constitute the foundation of the scriptures, the essence of all religions, the destination of all paths, and the essence of all essences.

Man indulges in finding fault with others, oblivious to his own flaws. The cause for this can be traced to his materialistic tendencies. Man is made of *Atma* (Self) and *anatma* (non-self), *shariram* (body) and *shariri* (embodied one), *kshetra* (field) and *kshetra-jna* (knower of the field), and *sthira* (permanent) and *asthira* (ephemeral). You cannot find anything else in this Universe except these dualities.

The entire world is a play of the *pravritti* and the *nivritti*, the outward and inward. Body (*kshetra*) and matter belong to the realm of *pravritti* whereas *Atma*, consciousness, the embodied one, belongs to the realm of *nivritti*. Even the Avatars are subject to *pravritti*, since they have to assume a human body. Rama was no exception to it. Though He was the Omnipotent and the Omniscient One, since He had as-

sumed the human body, He had to behave as if He too was under the spell of illusion.

Ravana beheaded

Rama prepared himself to battle with Ravana. Ravana had lost everybody, including his son Indrajit, his brother Kumbhakarna, and a host of others. Now, Ravana alone was left as a relic of Lanka. The battle between Rama and Ravana lasted seven days and seven nights. Indra who felt delighted that his enemy, Indrajit, had been killed, sent his heavenly chariot equipped with the most powerful weapons, to the battlefield for Rama's use. It was a sight to see the heavenly chariot driven by Mathali, shining splendourously, coming down to the earth. The *vanaras* (monkeys) mistook it to be one more trick of the demons. As the wheels of the chariot touched the earth, Mathali got down and said to Rama with folded hands, "Oh Lord, Indra has sent this chariot and is himself prepared to fight against Ravana."

Rama displayed great practical sense and alertness while fighting on the battlefield. Some people ask why Rama took recourse to war and why He caused the death of so many. The One who creates has also the right to punish. In fact, it is not God who punishes or protects. Your virtues protect you, and your vices punish you. Man cannot escape the consequences of his actions. Ravana had to face the consequences of his notorious deeds. The punishment may not come upon man immediately but it is bound to come for certain. The time had now come for Ravana to face the consequences of his evil deeds.

Once, his Queen, Mandodhari, tried to din sense into his head. She said, “Oh Ravana, you are indulging in heinous and lowly deeds. You are bringing untold suffering and misery to many pure and noble ladies. The heinous sins in which you are indulging will boomerang on you.” She continued, “You cannot escape the inexorable law of *karma*. I am plagued by all sorts of apprehensions about you and about us, though I am the daughter of a great emperor, my son Indrajit an invincible hero, and you are my master. Be careful, for women are like fire. Do not insult women by evil looks, evil words, and evil deeds, for it is great sin.” Ravana did not take the words of Mandodhari seriously. On the other hand, he laughed at her.

The battle between Rama and Ravana was fierce and terrible. Ravana released *sarpastra* (serpent arrow). The entire space was covered by serpents. Rama replied by discharging the *garudastra* (eagle arrow) which ate all the serpents in an instant. Ravana was surprised how a mere human, prowling in the forest, had such immense power and prowess. He now remembered the words of Mandodhari. Mandodhari had once said to him, “You are underestimating the power and prowess of Sri Rama, Oh Ravana! Rama is no ordinary human. He is verily the incarnation of Lord Narayana. Would it be possible for anyone to build a bridge across the ocean with the help of mere monkeys? You have abducted Sita, the paragon of chastity and virtue. It is not too late. Go to Rama. Return Sita to Him, and seek His forgiveness.” Ravana had re-

torted at that time, “I may lose my life, but I will not seek Rama’s forgiveness.”

On the seventh day of the battle, Rama launched the *kantastra* which He had received from Indra, and beheaded all the ten heads of Ravana. The great demon collapsed and fell.

Service to God: the vehicle for liberation

The ten heads of Ravana signify the four *Vedas* and six *Sastras*. Though Ravana had mastered all these texts, he could not benefit from them. Practice is more important than mere mastery of the texts. A speaker who spoke earlier related to you how Hanuman advised Vibhishana. Hanuman, while searching for Sita in Lanka, heard in the corner of a palace the chanting of Rama Nama. He immediately went into the room from which the sound of Rama Nama came. On entering, he found Vibhishana and exchanged pleasantries, for both of them were devotees of Rama. Vibhishana said to Hanuman, “Oh Hanuman, though you met Rama just a few months ago, you have advanced very high in the realm of the Spirit. And you are enjoying the sweet proximity of Rama. But I have been chanting Rama Nama for so many years; yet, Rama has not showered His Grace on me. I have not had the *darshan* of Rama even once.

To this Hanuman replied, “Oh Vibhishana, it is not that you ought to participate in the mission of Rama and serve his cause to obtain the full benefit of chanting Rama Nama. You must not only perform penance and do *japa* and meditation, but you must

also participate in *seva*. Service is the very boat of life. It is not enough if you see a fruit. Your stomach will not be filled merely by looking at the fruit. You must eat the fruit and digest it.

There are three steps that lead to transformation: *jnatum*, *drashtum*, *praveshtum*. *Jnatum* means to experience. Consider a book. First you must know about the book. Then you should acquire it. Finally, you must read it; only then will you enjoy the book. Similarly, it is no use if you simply repeat the name of God. You have to translate the *Ramasmarnam* into actual life. Ravana mastered the *Vedas* but did not practice even a single word of it. The entire Lanka used to reverberate with the chanting of *Vedas*. Many demons were well versed in *Vedas* and used to recite them. But these people did not practice even an iota of what they repeated. Though all the *Sastras* proclaim HELP EVER HURT NEVER, Ravana did not practice the teaching.

Practice more important than scholarship

Man has many extraordinary powers at his disposal but he is not able to realise them. The reason for this is that man is dominated by the worldly tendencies. He spends his time from morning to night merely in seeking out a living.

*From dawn to dusk without any rest,
A struggle to fill your belly.
You are wasting your life in useless learning
And frivolous pursuits.*

*What have you gained, oh man, in this scramble,
Ignoring the lotus-eyed Lord?
Think deeply on this, oh man.*

The world today is marked by unrighteousness, and we are defiling our time by indulging in falsehood. When we contaminate our mind with untruth, our life also becomes untruthful. Our sight, learning, and deeds also will be untruthful. What is in the mind comes out through eyes, ears, tongue, and deeds. What is inside alone can come outside. You must fasten yourself firmly to the scriptural commandment: *sathyam vada*. When you give your word to do a thing, you MUST do it. Failure on your part to do it is tantamount to falsehood. Such an act is not only untruthful but betrayal and deceitful too.

The second scriptural commandment is: *dharma chara* (practice *dharma*). Many people say they do not know what is *dharma* and what is *adharmam*. Swayed by self-interest and selfishness, man performs activities as he likes. Though he knows what to do and what not to do, he pretends as though he does not know anything. Though you have been listening to many good things, how many of them have you practised?

*Will darkness be extinguished by hearing about the
lamp?
Will a patient be relieved of his disease by hearing
about the power of medicine?
Will a poor man's poverty vanish by hearing about
the power of money?*

Unless we practice what we learn, we cannot gain much in this world. The world will not improve, unless man practices good things in life. Who is a man? Man is one who has a mind. What is mind? It is a bundle of thoughts. Our tendencies spring from our thoughts. We will be worthy of the name “man” only when we drive away evil thoughts.

*What is the use of our higher learning?
Who can erase fate's writings on the forehead?
When evil thoughts arise in the mind,
Man becomes blunt and useless.*

Did Ravana gain anything by mastering the sixty-four disciplines? Learning should lead to wisdom. But the educational system today merely prepares the students for a job. Man is the architect of his own misfortune. When Ravana collapsed on the battlefield, Mandodhari, his Queen, went to the dead body and lamented, “Oh Ravana! What has happened to all your learning now? I was telling you very often to mend your ways. It is shameful for a great emperor like you to be troubled and tortured at the hands of monkeys. However, I am happy that you have died by Rama's hands.” Vibhishana came at that juncture to see Ravana's body. At first, Mandodhari started scolding Vibhishana. Then, realising her mistake she said, “Oh Vibhishana, there is no use in scolding you. Very often, you counseled your brother well, but your advice did not enter his head.”

When the head is empty, anything can be filled in it?

*How can one fill a head that is already filled with
stuff and nonsense?*

*Unless the dross in the head is drained away, how
can one fill it with pure feelings?*

Mandodhari wanted to run to Sita and seek her forgiveness. She then said to herself, "I ought to have gone to Sita a long time back, what is the use of my going to her now?"

Nip evil in the bud

Ravana died. It was a piteous scene. Men and women were weeping over the dead, and the women who were widowed were weeping over the corpses of their husbands. Likewise, the children who were orphaned in the battlefield were weeping over the bodies of their parents. Grief was writ large on the faces of everybody in Lanka. What was the cause for all this? It was Ravana's lust that was the cause for the calamity that befell Lanka. Even a single fly is enough to bring a catastrophe. A whole potful of milk turns into poison if you mix in it even a drop of poison. Although there were good people in his kingdom, Ravana contaminated it totally by his venomous behaviour. Even a small flaw can be fatal. The ants may be small, but they can kill a big serpent.

Similarly, the mistake may be minor, but it can be disastrous. The seed may be small, but it has the potentiality of growing into a gigantic tree. The seed has the capacity to grow into a tree, to yield fruits and thorns as well. Hence, caution should be exercised to sow only a seed that yields fruits and not thorns. Simi-

larly, a flaw should be eliminated in the initial stage itself, since it is difficult to exterminate it when it assumes gigantic proportions. That is why the Upanishads laid down: *Tasmai namah karman*—salutations to the work. Why should we salute *karma*? We should make our actions pure, sacred and pleasing to the Lord. The *Vedas* also laid down that all work must be performed only for the pleasure of the Lord. Actions performed for the pleasure of the Lord will protect us one day or the other.

Perform good actions only

Speak the truth and perform good action. If you cannot speak the truth throughout the day, at least set apart a certain period during which you will compulsorily practice truth. We live in the *Kali* age, which has the potentiality to compel even noble souls to tell a lie! What is the cause for this? Evil company. It is said, “Tell me your company and I shall tell you what you are.” You beget the qualities of the company in which you move.

Good company causes detachment, and detachment causes non-delusion.

Non-delusion causes steadiness, and steadiness leads to Liberation.

You must always cultivate good company and severely shun bad company. Run away from bad company at any cost. Once you become aware that you are developing a bad quality, you must give up that bad quality immediately. One should not commit sin, when one is aware that it is a sin. This was the fatal flaw of

Ravana. He committed sin, with the full knowledge of it. Action, if performed innocently, is not a sin.

Tell your mind, “Oh Mind! Contemplate on the name of Rama in full awareness of it. The same substance can be used for mundane as well as sublime purposes. A boulder can be used as a stepping stone, as a building block, and also for carving an idol. The stepping stone is used for walking, the stone block for building a mansion, and the idol for worship. The stone is the same but is used for different purposes.

Students! Adopt excellent behaviour, whether in the *mandir*, school, college, or hostel. Students should behave so well that everybody is impressed.

For mind, mind is the testimony.
For body, virtue is the testimony.
For stupid, stupidity is the testimony.
For everyone, Swami is the testimony.

No evil accrues if good actions are performed. Therefore, go on performing only good actions. That kind of behaviour lends value to human life. A real man is one who has humanness in him. As soon as you get up in the morning, say to yourself, “I am a human, not an animal or demon.”

Today, the entire world is steeped in untruth and unrighteousness, causing endless *asanthi* (want of peace). Truth and righteousness lead to *santhi*, whereas untruth and unrighteousness cause *asanthi*. The combination of the brown betel, green leaf, and

white lime gives rise to the red colour. The new colour arises due to the mixture of the three ingredients. Truth is purity, and *dharma* is selflessness; the combination of the two leads to peace in the human heart. It is by this harmonious combination that *santhi* can be harvested in the human heart. *Sathya* and *dharma* are like the two wings of the bird; they are like two wheels of the cycle. It is not possible to ride a cycle with only one wheel. Ravana, instead of upholding *sathya* and *dharma*, followed and upheld only *asathya* and *adharma*. That is why his life was wrecked.

Both Rama and Ravana were scholars. While Rama mastered only thirty-two disciplines of learning, Ravana had mastered sixty-four disciplines. The difference between Rama and Ravana lies in their practice. While Rama practised whatever He learnt, Ravana did not practice even an iota of what he had learnt, resulting in distortions in his personality.

Inner significance of the *Ramayana*

The *Ramayana* is not a mere compilation of incidents, like the abduction of Sita, the fury of Rama, the death of Ravana, etc. This is not the real *Ramayana*. We must understand the spiritual undertone of the *Ramayana*. Who was Dasaratha? He was not merely the Emperor of the Kosala Kingdom. Dasaratha signifies the chariot of the human body, which has five organs of action and five organs of perception. Ayodhya is not a mere city, the capital of Kosala. Ayodhya signifies the impregnable fortress, i.e. the heart. The capital is in the centre surrounded by the ten organs. The three wives—Kausalya, Sumithra, and Kaikeyi—signify the

serene, (*sathwic*), dull (*tamasic*), and passionate (*rajasic*) respectively. The three Queens signifying three attributes gave birth to Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrughna, who symbolised righteousness (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), desire (*kama*), and liberation (*moksha*). *Dharma* seeks *prajnana*. Rama, who is the embodiment of *dharma*, married Sita, who was the embodiment of *prajnana*. Rama, accompanied by Sita (*prajnana*), went into the forest of ignorance (*ajnana*). There, Ravana the embodiment of evil (*durnaya*) stole Sita. This then led to Rama coming into contact with Sugriva, the embodiment of discrimination (*viveka*) and Vali, the embodiment of indiscrimination (*aviveka*). Rama befriended *viveka* (discrimination), and killed indiscrimination.

Since He had to cross the ocean of *samsara* (worldly attachments) He took the help of Hanuman, the embodiment of courage (*dairya*). After crossing the ocean of *samsara*, He came face to face with Vibhishana, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, who were the embodiments of the serene, the passionate, and the dull temperaments respectively. *Dharma* destroyed *tamas* (Kumbhakarna) and *rajas* (Ravana) and crowned *sathwa* (Vibhishana). After crowning the *sathwic* temperament, He got back Sita, the embodiment of *anubhavagnana* (experienced knowledge). *Prajnana* was ultimately transformed into *anubhavagnana*. The transformation of *prajnana* into *anubhavagnana* is real wisdom. One has to grow through trials and tribulations to achieve true education.

Since, we are in the world of *pravritti*, even a *sathwic* person can change into a *rajasic* person. Since Vibhishana (*sathwic*) was in the company of Ravana (*rajasic*) and Kumbhakarna (*tamasic*), he had to lament a lot. Vibhishana waited and waited for the hour of God. At last, that hour arrived, and he was crowned by God Himself. Ramakrishna Paramahansa also waited for a long time for God with unbearable agony. It was his intense yearning and agony, which lifted Ramakrishna to his sublime nature. He waited for the vision of Mother Kali until night, and when the night was about to pass, he lamented sadly "Oh! this day is also wasted, without seeing Mother." Though in the same city of Calcutta there lived great intellectuals like Aravinda Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal, it is the name of Ramakrishna that is more remembered in the hearts of people today. It is the intense faith of Ramakrishna in Divinity that earned for him an immortal place in the hearts of people. It was the unshakeable faith of Ramakrishna that lifted him to lofty heights. Since Ravana had no faith (*Atma vish-wasa*), he plunged into abysmal depths. Even his *tapas* (penance) turned into *tamas* (dullness). *Tapas* should strengthen one's faith, but this did not happen in the case of Ravana.

The *Ramayana* unfolds the conflict and the clash between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, righteousness and unrighteousness, good and evil. This is an eternal clash, which rages continually in the human heart. Blessed is the one who transcends this clash and scores eternal victory. When such victory is achieved, *Ramarajya* will dawn on earth.



10. Sita, The Embodiment Of Purity

I am neither the merit nor the sin, neither the pleasure nor pain.

I am not the holy hymn, nor the fruits of pilgrimage, charity, and sacrifices.

I am neither the food nor the body formed out of the essence of the food.

*I am the embodiment of Sath-chith-ananda—
Truth, Beauty and Auspiciousness.*

Fear of sin has disappeared and atrocious acts are on the ascent.

Devotion towards God has dwindled and has been replaced by evil activities.

Rare indeed it is to come across someone chanting the name of the Saviour of the pious.

O mind! Chant the name of God and derive endless peace.

Students, Embodiments of Love,

Man has been taken over by an overpowering desire to investigate and conquer Nature. To this end, he has relied upon his physical prowess, intellectual capacity, power of position, and strength of sheer numbers. What has he achieved in the process? Without God's grace and support, he cannot taste even an iota of success. It is only when God condescends that a person can attain victory in any issue. Nature is not any-

one's property. It belongs to God alone. Hence, only by first attaining God's Grace can it be conquered.

Prakruthi and Paramatma

Nature is not merely a conglomeration of the five elements, nor is it an assortment of the five life principles, or the five sheaths, or the five senses. Nature is the very Embodiment of Divinity. Man is making every effort to dominate beautiful Nature. Plato described Nature as truth, goodness, and beauty. Alexander, the disciple of Aristotle, also propounded the same truth to the world. However, wherefrom have this beauty and elegance come? God is Beauty! Hence, Nature also is beautiful. God is reflected in Nature. In trying to overcome Nature without the permission of God, man experiences failure and hardship. In turn, this leads to troubles, obstacles, and sorrows. This truth is propounded in the *Ramayana*.

Ravana defied Lord Rama and tried to acquire Sita. Who can hope to win over Nature, which is God's property? It is an exhibition of ignorance to dream of winning over Nature. None can obtain success in this task. What was Ravana's situation at the end? He was the cause for the total destruction of his family, brothers, sons and the kingdom itself. Hence, prior to acquiring Nature, one must secure God's Grace. If the Nature is the body, God is the soul residing in it. A body without soul is of no use. The body has value only as long as the soul remains in it. Whenever there is any ailment in any part of the body, is it able to set it right by itself. Not at all! God controls all the three —the doer, the task, and the action as well. Amongst His many

names, God is also called as the One who bestows the fruits of actions. You are merely performing the task assigned, but it is God who is presenting you with the results of the action. Fools who do not recognise this truth conjure up dreams of winning over Nature. They think that their physical, intellectual, and scientific prowess is sufficient to achieve this task.

Yama and Rama

Hiranya Kashyapa was a great scientist. Aeons ago, he succeeded in obtaining some control over all the five elements. Nevertheless, he failed to secure total mastery over Nature. His son Prahlada told him, “You might have conquered all the worlds, but you have not been able to conquer your own senses.” It means that if you are unable to control your mind, of what use is your achievement? Only when you quell the mind can you win over Nature. And the prerequisite is to realise the Lord and be the recipient of His Grace. He is the Master and the One who bestows. He allows Himself to be captured easily by his devotees. To those who entertain negative feelings in them, He appears as an enemy. Purandharadasa sang, “O Rama! To Vibhishana who believed in You, You appeared as God. But to Ravana who defied You, You became the very lord of death, Yama. You are not only Rama but You are Yama as well. There is no Yama other than You in this world. You appear as Rama to those who love You. To those who oppose You, You appear as Yama. To Prahlada, who prayed to You at all times and under all circumstances, You appeared as Lord Narayana. But to Hiranya Kashyapa who opposed You, You appeared as death.”

Hence, He is the Lord as well as the god of death. To Kamsa, who, without a trace of compassion for his sister, was prepared to kill her, Krishna appeared as Yama. To Ugrasena, the pious father of Kamsa, He appeared as the Lord Himself. Hence, good and bad are both decided by our own feelings.

A devotee must constantly be chanting the name of the Lord. Devotion has no fixed limits. At all times and under all situations, the Lord must be remembered. In this age of *Kali*, people have started making distinctions between tasks that are theirs and those that are for God! They think that doing meditation, contemplation of the Lord, and performing rituals of worship are all tasks to be performed for God, whereas all household chores, business, jobs, agriculture, and other such tasks are believed to have no connection with God. This kind of division obstructs man from realising Divinity. Devotion implies that which sees no divisions. Hence, there are no dominions like 'yours and mine.' This is because in this body there is only one God, residing as the life-force.

Praanopasana

This has been called *praanopasana* by the sages of yore, which means worshipping God constantly, irrespective of your activities. You must have seen that when police officers go on duty, they put on their uniforms befitting their ranks. But when they go off duty, they come back home and wear their own clothes. Similarly, when devotees go on pilgrimage to such Badrinath, Kedarnath, Amarnath, Manasa Sarovar, and

such other places, they put on a dress called devotion. Upon their return from the pilgrimage, they forget devotion and revert to the worldly view; thoughts related to the household enter into their minds. This is not devotion. Devotion is the constant contemplation of the Lord at all times, places, and circumstances. Every effort must be made to experience and enjoy the bountiful joy of devotion with the help of this physical body.

*In this heart reside both the human and the
Divine;
Both play with each other and separate
themselves;
But there is a Director who directs this play.
In the same dummy are placed both evil
and good.*

God is One. Though there may exist good and bad, it is God alone who is in both of these. If Divinity is to be comprehended, it is the principle of the heart that must first be understood. Only then will Nature be ours. Is it possible to control our habits, feelings, and senses? It is. Krishna declared, "You are My own aspect, My son! You are not someone far separated from Me. I am in you and you are in Me." Today, man is seized with the urge for travel and the desire to see many places. To whichever place he may or may not go, it is inevitable that at some point he must visit the city of death. A fish cannot survive even for a moment without water, its place of residence. It is eager to go back into the water if taken out of it. However, man has forgotten his place of origin and is still living without a bother. What a shame it is, then, that man has

not the wisdom of even a fish! We must not forget our place of origin. That is the place of the *Atma*. That is the residence of God. Man must strive to understand this principle.

The *Vedas* have compared all the limbs of the Lord to the lotus. The face, hands, feet, eyes—these have all been compared to the lotus flower. Where is the lotus born? It is born in the mud and it stands in water. It cannot survive even a second without water or this mud. And yet, it does not allow either of them to enter into itself. Here lies an ideal for man. He is born in the mud of the cycle of rebirth. He floats on the water of life. He is allowing both this mud and water to enter into him and not making any effort to remain aloof like the lotus. Instead, he is developing intense attachments, which is wrong. Actions will have to continue but in the midst of these, the taste of Divinity latent in the human must be experienced. Though several have made the effort, none of them appear to have been successful. What is the reason? The answer is that God's Grace has not been prayed for.

*Man cries at birth and then again at the
time of death.
In between, he cries many times.
But has he ever cried for the practice of
Dharma, which is languishing.
Does he cry for God?*

These two are what we must cry for: the languishing of *dharma*, and for God.

*Do you know why eyes have been given to you?
Is it to look at the sinful activities around you?
No! It is to satisfy yourself by looking long at the
resident of Kailasa (God).*

Why have these eyes been given? Is it to see everyone? Is it not enough if you examine yourself? Everything is there within you. This truth ought to be realised first.

The good tidings

After Ravana had been killed in the battle, Rama bade Hanuman to convey the glad tidings to Sita. Hanuman reached the Ashoka gardens in one mighty leap. He was eagerly awaiting the day when he could communicate such joyous news to Sita. Upon his arrival, he placed before Sita this news. Vibhishana followed Hanuman and said, "Mother! You must prepare yourself to see Rama. I shall get the aerial chariot ready for you." So saying, he left to make all arrangements. His spouse Sarama and daughters Trijata and Ajata made Sita wear various ornaments and decorated her. Sita was shedding tears. Though this was a happy moment, she recollected all the events of the past. She was looking forward to seeing Rama again and thought:

*I am being released from this prison and am going to see Rama with my eyes.
I am going to see Sri Rama with my eyes soon.
Lord Rama, who had wedded me, could not keep me with Him.*

It has been ten long months since we were separated.

I am now being released from this prison. I shall be seeing Rama again.

O my dear Lakshmana. How much I had derided you, virtuous one!

How deep must have those words hurt you, my son, that you had to leave me.

These thoughts made her feel very sad. At such a time, the news of Rama's victory came like a cool shower. She was struck dumb with joy and could not even speak to Hanuman. She could hardly move. She did not know what to do. She had been waiting eagerly for this good news for ten months. After having been decorated by Sarama and others, she was led into the aerial chariot. What was this chariot? It was the Pushpaka chariot. She had been abducted in that very vehicle. When she sat in it, she recollected the past events. In a moment, she was by Rama's side.

The ordeal

But, Rama did not even look at her. He said, "I cannot look at Sita. I have taken birth to redeem this world. I have to set an ideal to this world. People may point an accusing finger at Me for taking back Sita, who had spent ten months in Lanka. I cannot take her back without first putting her to a test." Sita was shattered. She looked at Hanuman and said, "Oh Hanuman! Had you conveyed this news to me, I would have gladly taken my life there itself. Why did I have to be brought here amidst these *vanaras* (monkeys) and *rakshasas* (demons) to be humiliated thus?"

Students, householders, elders, and youngsters must look at the ideal here. When Sita got down from the aerial chariot, Angada, Sugriva, and the others sat respectfully with bowed heads. But there were some amongst the monkeys who were of low character and they strained their necks to have a look at Sita. Rama then stated that the behaviour of Angada and the others is the character of the virtuous while that of the other *vanaras* is the character of the wicked. The former is the aspect of the human, while the latter is the aspect of the monkeys. What is the attribute of a human being? He bows his head in respect to the elders. Sita is the very incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi herself. She is the spouse of Sri Rama. She should not be looked at with open eyes. Even Lakshmana himself bowed his head. Though he had stayed with her for ten years, not once did he look at her face. It is the look that prompts the thought. Today, the vision is full of spite and venom. You must have heard many people say that they have been struck down with fever due to someone's evil eye. Hence, the vision must be under one's control.

Meanwhile, Rama sent word through Lakshmana to light a fire into which Sita was to jump. She was to be affirmed by the God of fire himself as a precondition for Him to take Sita back to Ayodhya. At these words, Lakshmana flared up. He had never spoken against Rama before. Now he said, "Rama! Have You gone mad? Has Your intelligence dwindled? What are You saying? You might have been affected by some fault, but there is none in that great lady Sita. She is a

highly chaste lady. She is an ideal for all women, and You are talking so degradingly about her! If this is what You had in your mind, why did she suffer for ten months? Have You considered that?"

Rama knew Lakshmana's heart and Lakshmana knew Rama's heart. Upon hearing Lakshmana's outburst, Rama replied, "Lakshmana, we are now living as ideal men. We have to set standards for men to follow. I know her greatness. But her goodness must be brought out. People say that so and so is a great man. But being good is far more important than being great. Hence I must prove to the world that she is a great lady, but more than that, she is a good lady." Sita meanwhile heard Rama's command. With tears flowing down her eyes, she went around the fire and prayed, "If I am indeed the embodiment of Truth, if at any time there has been no evil feelings in me, may this fire cool down. Except for Rama's name, at every point of time, I had no other thought or name in my mind. But then, when Ravana was taking me away from Chitrakoota, he had caught hold of me and put me on the chariot. What could I do to prevent him from touching me? Even then, I thought of only Rama. If You have decided to test me after all that, I shall obey Your command." So saying, she jumped into the pyre.

All the gods and goddesses appeared there. They were critical of Rama's action. They remonstrated with Him for knowing everything and yet doing such a foolish deed. But the fact was that Rama was totally satisfied with Sita's innocence. Otherwise, why would He subject himself to so many difficulties, give up food

and drink, come to Lanka and be injured by the Rakshasas? Once, after a battle with Indrajit, Rama's body was covered with blood. Lakshmana fainted unable to bear the sight. Such was the love that bound the two. Why would the two face so many obstacles together? Why would they have built the bridge across the ocean? Was it not for Sita? Rama knew Sita's purity. He said, "I may know your nature. But people are like crows that keep cawing about imaginary things."

Then Sita said, "Will the koel bird give up its lovely singing just because the crow would caw in between. O Rama! People may gossip like crows. But You are the koel. Why must You be wary of what the people say?" Everyone present supported Sita by saying, "She speaks the truth!" People never spot the defects within themselves, but the defects of others appear magnified to them. Rama was not like that. Rama had absolutely no faults within Himself. But He had to behave thus to set an ideal to the people. The lord of fire appeared when Sita jumped into the fire, and handing over Sita to Rama, said, "Sita is a lady of the highest chastity. She is the very embodiment of the Goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth). She possesses a heart which is spotless and free of all defects and blame." When the god of fire spoke thus, Rama accepted Sita.

Sita's compassion

Here, there is another story. When Hanuman went to Sita to convey the glad news, he said, "Mother! I have to convey glad tidings to you. But I must also seek your permission to carry out a task. These demons, who had troubled you so long, must also be

killed. I shall tear them to pieces. Pray, grant me permission to do so." Sita then said, "Son! There is nothing to blame them for. They have only been executing the command of their master. So, it is the fault of their master, not theirs."

She then narrated a story to Hanuman. A hunter once went shadowing a tiger. But it caught sight of him and started to chase him. The hunter ran and climbed up a tree. The tiger kept a patient vigil below while the hunter waited for it to move away. The hunter then looked up and saw a bear on the higher branches. The tiger addressed the bear, "O bear! This is my prey that I have been chasing for such a long distance. It has now climbed the tree. Send my prey down to me, so that I may feed on it. The bear then said, "O tiger! This tree is my residence. The hunter has sought shelter here as a guest. It is my bounden duty to protect him. Hence I cannot push him down." But the tiger still did not give up and leave. Soon, the bear fell asleep. The tiger then addressed the hunter, "O hunter! I am interested only in my meal. It does not matter if it is you or someone else. I shall spare you and let you go, provided you push down that sleeping bear to me. I shall eat him and then go my way." This hunter was infested with evil feelings. Out of sheer selfishness, and in order to save himself, he pushed down the sleeping bear. The poor bear, while tumbling down, managed to hold on to a branch and saved itself from death. This is the protection that good people are always given. The bear was a kind soul, and its goodness saved it. It is not good to repay kindness with harm. The bear slowly climbed back. The tiger then told the bear, "O bear!

Despite your having shown such kindness to this man, he has repaid it by harming you. He is one without any sense of gratitude, having forgotten the good done by you. Hence, it is wise to send him down.” Then the bear answered, “Son! Each man’s sin is his own, his merits are his own. He will reap the consequences. Doing good is my nature, doing bad is his nature. He will suffer for his sin. I shall reap the benefits of my goodness. I cannot push him down.”

Sita then continued, “Similarly, my nature is that of compassion. Hanuman, though they have put me to much trouble, I cannot wish to put them to death for that. Giving trouble is their nature. Suffering with tolerance is my nature. Hence, do not punish them.” Hanuman was thrilled on listening to this. In this world, there are several who have obtained kindness and yet repaid kindness with harm. Such people are demons. But he who returns good for harm is the very embodiment of Divinity.

After accepting Sita, Rama started back for Ayodhya. En route, they stopped at the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. They had halted there on their onward journey too. Sage Bharadwaja was very happy. He gave away all the weapons he had to Rama, and blessed that the coronation may take place soon.

By the time Rama approached Ayodhya, the fourteen years were just about to conclude. True to his vow that he would immolate himself if Rama did not return within the stipulated time, Bharatha was ready to give up his life. Since Rama had halted at Bharad-

waja's hermitage, He was delayed a little. Bharatha lit a pyre. He was getting ready to jump into it. Just then, Rama sent Hanuman with a message. The wind is much faster than aircraft. Hanuman was therefore assigned the task of conveying to Bharatha the news that Rama was on His way. Bharatha became joyous, and eagerly awaited Rama's arrival, keeping everything ready.

Bharatha's supreme devotion

Here, two facts must be pondered upon. Bharatha was a devotee par excellence, while Lakshmana was a dependable and faithful servant of Rama. Lakshmana took into consideration the physical manifestation, while Bharatha looked at Divinity without any form. Without resting his eyes even once, Lakshmana took care to see that Rama and Sita were always comfortable. He did not know what sleep was for fourteen years! Such a great renunciate was he, a worshipper of the form of the Lord.

Bharatha, who on the other hand, was a worshipper of the formless God, stayed away from Ayodhya. He set up a small Hermitage at Nandigrama and constantly kept chanting the name of Rama. He focused his entire mind on Rama while Lakshmana was the one who had given up his body in Rama's service. This is the difference between them. Lakshmana prayed, "I am Your servant, to be used according to Your wish. I have no life other than this. I shall be Your sixth *praana*." Bharatha, on the other hand, prayed, "I do not have a body. I am entirely in You." With this thought, he constantly kept chanting the name of the

Lord. This is what is spoken of as '*Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi*'—think of the Lord and the Lord you become. After constantly thinking of Rama for fourteen years, Bharatha too assumed the dark blue complexion of Rama.

Bharatha took the chariot and went to the banks of river Sarayu. He received Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana there, made them sit in the chariot, and drove to the city of Ayodhya. The residents of Ayodhya stared in astonishment, "Who was Rama and who was Bharatha?" Both looked to be Rama! Both were dressed in the garbs of an ascetic, their hair was matted and both were of similar complexion! The citizens, who had come to give a grand welcome to Rama, stood gaping! Everybody came forward to garland Bharatha, thinking he was Rama. Bharatha realised their predicament and pointing to Rama, directed them to garland Him. Only then did the citizens realise who was Rama and who was Bharatha. Bharatha and the other two brothers, were all aspects of the divine incarnation.

On arrival in Ayodhya, all of them had a ritualistic bath. Vasishta, Vamadeva, and the others brought all kinds of grains and jewelry. They were all taken and decorated with ornaments. Here, a miracle occurred. All the monkeys were transformed into human beings and came into the city riding on horses, elephants, and camels. Who is a *vanara* and who is a *nara*? He who has intelligence is man (*nara*). He who has stupidity is a *vanara*. A *vanara* is associated with

restlessness. *Nara* (man) is characterised by his steadiness.

The coronation took place. Numerous gifts were given away. Rama distributed hundreds of crores of gold coins to the Brahmins. Not one crore (ten million) but hundreds of crores! Lakhs (a hundred thousand) of cows were given away in charity. Bharatha could not contain his joy. He thought: "For whom should I keep my property? It is my good fortune that Rama has come; that is more than enough for me. I shall give all of this away in charity." So thinking, he too indulged himself in giving away various items in charity.

Hanuman, the supreme devotee

In the hall, all the vassal kings and allies sat on one side, and the ministers sat on the other side. The sages and hermits were seated in another enclosure. Rama's sense of honour and respect were impeccable. He bowed humbly toward the sages, indicating His humility. He saw the kings and gave them a smile—that was His gift bestowed upon them. He then saw the citizens and raising His hands, blessed them. He saw some ladies as well and gave a short nod of His head. In this way, He showed His respect to everyone in different ways. On that day, He handed over to Sita an exquisite pearl necklace that could be valued at several crores. He told her, "You can give away this necklace to whomever you like. I know that you like Me. But I would like you to give this necklace to whomever you like in this congregation." Sita gave the necklace to Hanuman, who was pressing Rama's feet, and praised him thus, "You are the supreme devotee who faithfully

carried out every command of Rama. You are the one who strained so much to search for me.”

In this way, she praised Hanuman. But Hanuman was not listening to any of these praises. Instead, he was busy taking out each pearl from the necklace, keeping it near his ear, biting into it and then throwing it away. Rama saw this and asked Hanuman if his old habits had still not died. Hanuman replied, “Not at all, O Rama! I am constantly immersed in the feeling of Rama. I repeatedly chant the name of and hear the name of Rama. Amongst the nine paths of devotion, this is most important for me. That is why I have become Your servant. The nine types of devotion are *sra-vana* (listening), *keertana* (singing), *vishnusmarana* (contemplating), *padasevana* (pressing the Lord’s feet), *vandana* (offering obeisance), *archana* (worshipping), *dasya* (servitude), *sneha* (friendship) and *Atmanivedana* (offering oneself to the Lord). Hence, by qualifying to be Your servant, I have also become Your confidant. Without this servitude to You, I could not have become Your friend. After becoming Your friend, I am now offering myself to You. I do not like to listen to anything other than the name of Rama. Therefore, I am listening intently to see if the name of Rama is resounding in these pearls.”

In order to show to the world the great devotion of Hanuman, Rama said, “Foolish one, can there ever be Rama’s name resounding in the pearls?” Hanuman replied, “Even the pearl must have Your name in it. A pearl without Your name is as good as stone to me. Hence, I have thrown it away. My entire body vibrates with Your name, Oh lord Rama.” He then plucked out a

hair from his arm and kept it close to Rama's ear. Even that hair was chanting 'Ram, Ram'! Such was the great devotion of Hanuman. That is the reason why he could become such a close confidant and trusted friend of Rama. Anybody else may be far away, but Hanuman was never far away from Rama. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, Satrughna, and even Sita were, at some-time or the other, a little distant. But never was Hanuman away from Rama, even for an instant. What was the reason for this? It was the constant chanting of Rama's name and constant service of Rama that elevated Hanuman to lofty heights. He constantly served Rama with body, mind and soul.

Rama was very pleased with Hanuman. He got up from His throne and said, "Hanuman! What boon can I give you? Nothing would be a worthy enough gift for you. I shall hence give Myself to you." So saying, Rama embraced Hanuman. Hanuman lost himself in Bliss at this boon. This state is also called *nirvikalpa samadhi*. What is this *samadhi*? If we concentrate intently at an object for twelve seconds, it is called a *dharana*. Twelve such *dharanas* make one *dhyana*. Twelve such *dhyanas* make a *samadhi*. This is the relation among the three states of *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. Hanuman was instantly in this state of *samadhi*.

The *Ramayana* is the holy text that has shown to the entire world the extraordinary and immense devotion of Hanuman.



11. Rama Rajya, The Reign Of Righteousness

*That day is indeed the day,
When sincere devotees sing the
glory of the Lord in mellifluous tones.
That day is indeed the day,
When you go to the succour of the poor
and be their brothers.
That day is indeed the day
When you serve the devotees with
sumptuous dishes and rid their hunger.
That day is indeed the day
When you approach the venerable ones
and listen to the tales of the Lord.
Such days are indeed real and true; all
others are, like funeral days.*

Ayodhya was gaily decorated for the coronation of Lord Sri Rama. Joy and jubilation were writ large on the faces of everyone. The crown that Manu, the first Ikshvaku Emperor, had worn would now be placed on Sri Rama's head. The venerable priests of Ayodhya, namely, Vasishta, Vamadeva, and Jabali were waiting eagerly to place the sacred crown on the head of Rama. Kings, viceroys, deputies, etc., thronged to the capital from the far flung corners of Aryavarta. A big board was hung across the main gate, with the statement: "Those who abide by *sathya* and *dharma* are free from the fear of death."

Lord Rama devoted Himself to the task of the spreading of truth and righteousness. In His reign, the people of the country, big or small, young or old, men or women, the enlightened or the unenlightened, were steadfast in their adherence to truth and righteousness. As the king, so were the subjects (*yatha raja tatha praja*). As the king, so were the ministers. As the ministers, so were the administrators. As the administrators, so were the people. The three brothers Bharatha, Lakshmana, and Satrughna exercised great care and attention in the practice of *dharma* throughout the kingdom. Reports regularly reached the King about the people who transgressed *dharma*.

The reign of Rama was called *Rama Rajya*, the reign of Righteousness and Truth. People were not afflicted by diseases. Children did not die at tender ages. Women did not suffer from widowhood. Rains came on time and people prospered. *Rama Rajya* was marked by peace, prosperity, and harmony. All these, i.e. *Rama Rajya* are assured in a kingdom where there is a ruler like Rama, priests like Vasishta and Vamadeva, and able guardians like Bharatha, Lakshmana, and Satrughna.

The value of gratitude

The people in the Kingdom of Rama were always full of gratitude and thankfulness. Any good turn done to them never went unacknowledged. Even Rama, on the day of coronation, expressed His deep gratitude to all those who rendered help to Him. First and foremost, Rama expressed his gratitude to the great Vanara hero, Hanuman, who traced the whereabouts of

Sita and rendered invaluable help. Secondly, Rama expressed His deep debt of gratitude to the bird Jatayu, who gave up his life while trying to rescue Sita. Thirdly, Rama thanked the *vanara* king, Sugriva, who had placed his army and himself at the service of Rama during the search for Sita and in the battle against Ravana. Next, Rama thanked Vibhishana, who had helped Rama in wading through the webs of illusions created by the demons and who had done great service to Rama. The *vanaras* belonged to another kingdom. They had nothing in common with either Rama or Sita. Yet, they willingly sacrificed their lives in the battle. To these *vanaras*, Rama did not fail in expressing His gratitude. In this way, Rama extended His heartfelt acknowledgement to each and every one who had helped Him in the battle.

Herein lies an important lesson that the *Ramayana* teaches. One must be grateful throughout life to one's benefactor. He alone is qualified to be called a man who extends this kind of thankfulness. An ungrateful person is a demon. Demons and humans do not differ in physical forms. They are categorised based upon their behaviour. Demons are those who possess evil feelings and do bad actions. Those perverted people who disregard the kind deed done to them and indulge in only harming others are demons. Those foolish ones who consider falsehood to be their very life breath have been called as demons. In the world today, man finds untruth to be very dear to him. He is behaving most unrighteously. Yet, our *Vedas* have declared: "*Sathyam vada dharmam chara.*" They call us to speak the Truth and practice Righteousness. But today, the

words Truth and Righteousness hardly feature in daily conversation.

The value of truth and righteousness

Righteousness has an objective existence of its own, and does not depend upon your belief. It has its own quality and form. We call as fire that which has the capacity to burn. The capacity to burn is the natural quality of fire. Whether you believe it or not, fire will have the capacity to burn. This capacity to burn does not depend upon your convictions about what fire can or cannot do. Whether you touch it knowingly or unknowingly, it will still burn you because that is its quality. Similarly, consider ice. Coldness is the natural attribute of ice. Whether you believe it or not, it would still display its coldness. If this feature is absent in it, it cannot be termed ice any longer because it has lost its quality. Take another example. The Sun shines. Shining brilliantly is its natural attribute. You may not be able to see the Sun shining brightly. But the Sun will still shine, and this capacity is not based upon your belief. You may be unable to see it due to the clouds covering it, or you may be blind. Just because you cannot see, you cannot say that the Sun is incapable of shining.

Similarly, man is also characterised by a quality. What is this quality? It is to undertake every task with *trikaranasuddhi*, which means the unity of mind, speech, and body. This is the feature that qualifies one to be called a man. *Trikaranasuddhi* is the *dharma* of man. To think something in the mind, speak something else, and do something totally different from

both is *adharma* (unrighteous). Today, if unrighteousness is rampant, it is due to the lack of unity in thought, word, and deed. Starting from the educated ones to the illiterates, there is no sign of anyone observing this unity.

He who believes not but acts as if he believes is sure to be destroyed, sometime or the other. Such a person is one with the demonic attributes. Today, Truth and Righteousness have totally disappeared. Virtuous and ideal men and women must strive to protect Truth and Righteousness. The country in which the men and women live as followers of Truth and Righteousness will always be bountiful. Truth and character are most important. If such men and women come up, Bharath will sparkle with prosperity and auspiciousness. Since ancient times, Indian culture has handed to the world the wealth of spiritual lore. It has always blessed the entire world to be peaceful and happy (*Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*).

Kings, citizens, chaste women, sages and prophets strove to safeguard Righteousness. Even the common householder lived by the principles of Truth and Righteousness. What is the reason? The king was himself a strict follower of Truth and Righteousness. Hence, there was ample opportunity for the people also to live like that. Today, the rulers themselves are not adhering to these principles. How then can the people be expected to do so? This is not the fault of the people. These are all the defects of the rulers. It is because they are not proper that the world has to suffer the present situation. Everyone is selfish. Each is bothered

about fulfilling their own evil desires. Each person hankers after power and position. Everywhere, one comes across only rulers who are selfish. None is concerned about the welfare of the people, their happiness and comfort.

If the country is to prosper, then the ideals of the great souls must be followed explicitly. It is by following the sages of yore that our country has been able to survive at least in this state until now. The great ones gain nothing out of this. What was the reason for Sage Vasishtha to reside in the palace of Dasaratha? He did not need the riches, mansions, and gold of the Emperor. Sita too told Hanuman the same. She said, "Hanuman! It is not possible to satisfy you with wealth, gold, mansions, and other such items. Even if I were to bring the three worlds and give it to you, I will not be able to repay my debt. You are such a great renunciate and devotee. Because of these two qualities, you can go around all the three worlds. Because of your travels, all the three worlds will be secure and prosperous."

Today, Truth and Righteousness must be developed. On the other hand, there are people who question and argue with others as to what Truth and Righteousness are. There are others who lend willing support to such fools. How can you become a human being without knowing what Truth and Righteousness are? If you do not know what these two are, you are not a human being! Truth and Righteousness are your natural qualities. Your life is itself Truth and Righteousness. What kind of a fool you must be if you admit that you are unaware of what Truth and Righteousness

are all about! These are the very embodiments of *trikaranasuddhi*. Truth means to speak what you think. To put into action what you speak is *dharma*. The unity of all these three is essential. That is the reason why it has been said that, "The proper study of mankind is man." Mankind is characterised by this unity of thought, word and deed.

Narasimhamurthy said (in his speech earlier) that we must earn Truth and Righteousness. These are not materials that can be earned. They are already present in you eternally. They were born along with you. Did you earn your head after taking birth? Have you purchased your hands after being born in this earth? Just as these have all appeared with you at the time of your birth, so too, Truth and Righteousness have appeared with your life, during your birth. They need nor be searched for, nor need they be earned. It is not a commodity that can be supplied. They spring naturally from the heart. They are as essential to you as your life. All you have to do is to protect what you already have. You need not earn anything else. Truth and Righteousness are your birthrights.

Today, rights are being demanded without adequate responsibility being discharged. A person who does not discharge his duty has no rights. It is sheer ignorance to create a hullabaloo for rights. What are the rights you are demanding? You do not even have the right to demand anything. In fact, if you have discarded Truth and Righteousness, you do not even merit living on this earth. You can live on this earth only if you live with Truth and Righteousness; otherwise, you

may build your house in the city of Lanka! A true man is he who believes and follows Truth and Righteousness.

It has been said that renunciation is essential for this. What is renunciation? People define it as giving up house, wife, family, and wealth and retiring to the forests. This is a grossly mistaken definition. Renunciation is to be able to consider sorrow and joy with the same vision. It is to be able to experience criticism and praise with the same feeling. It is to be able to endure and enjoy both loss and gain in the same light. True renunciation is the destruction of the feeling of duality. Renunciation is marked by faith in Divinity. Hence, renunciation does not mean giving up everything. Let anyone praise you or censure you; receive both with the same poise. Do not be ecstatic with joy, nor be crushed when sorrow strikes. Do not weep when censured, nor laugh when venerated. This is true renunciation. Many do not understand the real meaning of renunciation and take it as meaning giving up everything. Nothing need be given up, except for the differences and duality.

Duality in life occurs for our own welfare. Sorrow and joy are both for our own good. At this moment, you may be suffering from some sorrow. Who knows what joy this sorrow is going to present in the future? While traveling, you may climb a small hillock. You are deluded that you are at a height. But you have to descend again. Do not get worried that you have reached the plateau. Continue with your journey, you will once again encounter another ascent in the road. These joys

and sorrows are like the ups and downs. A sense of equanimity must be developed; this is true renunciation.

The source of joy

During her separation from Rama and her captivity in the Ashoka gardens, Sita was feeling despondent. Ravana had decorated the gardens in a most pleasing manner, in the foolish hope that by seeing these decorations, Sita would accept him. Sita did not succumb to this worthless and temporal beauty around her. However, when a small monkey sat on the branches and sang the glory of Rama:

*Rama, Rama, Rama, Sita;
Having taken birth in the Solar race and earning
the love of Sita,
Releasing Ahalya from the Rishi's curse and
blessing His devotees
This is Lord Sri Rama...
Rama, Rama, Rama, Sita.*

Sita heard it with great delight. She was anxious to know who was singing the glory of her Lord in this land of *rakshasas* (demons). She lifted her head and looked around. Is a monkey a pleasing sight? Does it have any beauty? It has a funny appearance. But at that time, the monkey looked most beautiful to Sita. That beauty lay in the singing of the name of Lord Rama. When she heard the name of her beloved, she was delighted. That is why it is said that 'Beauty is joy.' That joy lends substance to life. Beauty without

joy is of no use. In this way, the *Ramayana* teaches the value of beauty and joy.

What gave Sita and Rama enormous joy? It was nothing but the happiness of the people that gave extreme joy to them. The practice of Truth and Righteousness by the people gave joy to Sita and Rama. They never asked anything else from the people. They were always giving away to people several things and looking after them with much love. Down the ages this has been the feature of all Avatars. It was always so.

Even now, what am I asking from all of you? Not even a small coin! All the students are being given free education and free medical treatment. The library facilities and the laboratory facilities are free. I am not desiring even a little from anybody. There is only one thing which makes Me truly happy. When you develop into ideal students, that is enough to give Me happiness.

Today in the world, dedication and devotion are found where money is paid for education. More devotion and dedication are there when money is paid and treatment taken from the hospital. For a heart operation, a sum of rupees two lakhs is demanded. The right to admission into a hospital comes only with that amount. People think that the doctor there must be a very great specialist to charge such a large amount. Such is the foolish belief of people! In the operation theatre, they are cut open like a pumpkin and the patient is then thrown into the Intensive Care Unit. The patient is not bothered about after that. Here, not even

a pie is collected by way of any fees. Surgeries are performed with care and the patients are shifted into nice comfortable cots with springs and cosy mattresses. Appropriate food is given to them with love, as in their own house. And yet, some people say it is nothing big. Why has this feeling come? Because fees are not collected here! In the opinion of the common man, he who charges the maximum fees is the best and the biggest of the doctors! Such Institutes and Schools are also considered to be the best. You will develop interest only at such places. Today, people have been overtaken by such stupidity! It appears that because they are getting everything free, there is no value. In truth, it does not matter what they think. Whether they see it as valuable or not, the value will always remain. But I always wonder and feel sad at their ignorance.

Character, the end of education

If education breeds such stupidity, what is the use of such education? Do you require to strive and struggle so much and study just to fill this small belly? You go madly after earning money. There is nothing great in earning money. Bandits and thieves are earning money in huge amounts. Even the beggar in the street is earning well. There was once a beggar who used to bury all his earnings in a pit, cover it up, and then sit over it. How long could he protect his money? When the time came, he had to leave his body. The Corporation workers came to collect his body for disposal. They spotted the pit on which he used to sit. They were curious and dug up the pit. In it was found a sum of rupees three lakhs (three hundred thousand)! Do you need to run abroad to earn these lakhs of ru-

pees? Do you have to study something special for earning this amount? Why must you study? You must study to acquire wisdom and not wealth and prosperity. Wealth will come and go. He who aspires for wealth will not foster character. All students must strive to develop character. Wealth is not important. So many emperors have passed through this earth. So many kings have ruled and passed away. They were not short of strength and prowess, yet they earned a bad name because they had no character.

During the past ten days, you must have realised what kind of character Ravana had. None could equal him in wealth. Kubera (the treasurer of the gods) was his own brother. He had a fortress of gold. There were wide avenues in his kingdom, and tall mansions. Pearls decorated the walls. Such was the wealth that he had. But of what use was it all? He had no character. Ultimately, he had to leave all his riches and go. Hence, you must first develop character. True education develops this character. There is absolutely no use of wealth in the hands of a person without character. He will experience the same fate as Ravana.

*He who enjoys not happiness,
Will find a long life useless to him.
Even if a lake full of water is placed before
the dog,
The miserable creature will not derive any
satisfaction!*

You must have seen a dog drink water. It does not gulp the water but licks it slowly. It will continue to

drink like that, even if it were to go near a big stream. Similarly, a wealthy person will neither enjoy the wealth nor allow others to enjoy it. He derives no peace and joy because protecting his hoarded wealth turns out to be a big problem for him. Then why have such wealth? One definitely needs money. It must be enough for your daily life. You must not be under somebody's debt and control. You must be able to run your family comfortably. You must be able to discharge your responsibilities. But desiring wealth much in excess of this causes one to miss the goal of life. Bad qualities, bad feelings and thoughts are direct consequences of excessive wealth.

You see everywhere that it is only the wealthy and their children who enter into evil activities. Those who befriend such people also will suffer the same fate. Hence, though money is essential, to consider it equal to very life and the goal of life is wrong. Everything must be thought over, weighed carefully, and only then experienced.

God is the Supreme Master

At some time or the other, death must be submitted to. Realise this truth before death overtakes you. It is not great for you to consider yourself to be a great man. You must prove your greatness through your actions.

*Will all green birds chant like the parrot?
Can all the insects droning over flowers be called
bees?*

*Can the pig that is fattened enormously be called
an elephant?*

Similarly, only when he has the correct behaviour will a person be called man. In him must rise the Divine feelings. He must lead his life with the constant remembrance of God. God is the support for this life. The body is merely an instrument. A life-force propels this body. That life-force is T. Hence T am the Master. You are getting joy merely by looking at the instruments. In the process, you are forgetting the Master. This is a big mistake. True education is that which will enable you to forget these instruments and concentrate on the Master. The body is merely the field (*kshetra*). While traveling, you visit a spot for some time only. Later, you move away. During the entire process of traveling, staying, and leaving, the Indweller of the body (*kshetrajna*) is present. It is only the place that has been visited had left.

Efforts must be made to realise this principle of *Atma*, which is the eternal truth. Instead, you may decide against bothering about this *Atma* and be happy with the body. You may think that this body can be useful to attain pleasures and joy. If you think deeply about this matter, you will realise that the same pleasures, comforts and enjoyment that you are desiring with your body are also experienced by dogs and monkeys. What education have they obtained? Which university have they attended? They have not earned any degree. Is it then the kind of happiness that you must earn with your education? It is a gross mistake. You must study about the *Atma*. You must take as

your basis that which remains invisible to the eye. Foster that, and your worldly happiness will also be taken care of.

A small example. There is a gigantic tree. There are several branches to this tree. Each branch has several fruits in it. You desire to have the fruit. You are able to see the fruits, branches, and the tree itself. You believe that the tree is the reality. That is ignorance. Hidden away from sight are the roots. Unless these roots are manured and watered regularly, they cannot give you the fruits and flowers that are seen. Similarly, you are able to see the pleasures and joys of the world outside. All of these are dependent upon the power of the *Atma*. You are inhaling air. Where has this air come from? It is from God alone. The Sun and the Moon are shining. Which scientist is able to get them shining like that? None of them can do it. It is possible only through Divinity. The heavy downpour you see and all the five elements are under the control of God. He is their Master and is also the sixth element! Today, we are forgetting such Divinity and considering the temporal objects to be the real thing. This is a gross mistake. Students must understand an important point. Do not go for the external. There is a Divine power existing, which is unseen by you. It is this power that gives you everything for experiencing.

Virtues—the true wealth

Sita was imprisoned in the Ashoka gardens. There was none there whom she could call her own. She was a helpless and weak woman. She gave up food and sleep. Though in a weak condition, she did not give in

to the mighty Ravana. Her innate strength protected her from any harm. Ultimately, Ravana's strength turned out to be highly inferior in comparison to Sita's inner strength. Her strength was associated with Divine effulgence. That strength is inherent in everyone and not merely in Sita alone. That is the reason it is said, "*Mamatma sarva bhutantaratma.*" Starting from the millionaire to the pauper, everybody has this power latent in him. Why must not man utilise this power? When the lamp is shining in your own house, how foolish it is to go for the light in your neighbour's house! You would be called a fool. Similarly, you need not conduct any investigations. You need not banish yourself to the forests. You need not perform meditation. All you have to do is to turn your vision inward. Follow the divine command. There is no greater wealth than that. Good virtues alone are the true wealth in this world.

*Good virtues, good intellect, dedication, devotion, discipline,
And duty consciousness—these are the
qualities taught by true education.
These are the things that a student ought to
learn.*

Where are these good qualities? What is this body that you are so proud of?

*The bowels are full of excreta, the support is
entirely by bones;
All this is covered by the dirty skin.
At every moment, it gives foul odour.
Never does it generate pleasant smells.*

This is the body you are so proud of! What is your true Self? It is not this body. Do not consider the *swaropa* (form) as the reality. It is the inner nature (*swabhava*) that is important. If the inner Self is developed, the outer body will enjoy happiness by itself.

There are, however, some fools who claim to surrender everything to God and then undergo all kinds of discomforts to safeguard themselves! A villager, wanting to travel to some place, arrived at the railway station with his luggage. He purchased a ticket and boarded the train. Several other passengers also boarded the train with their luggage. This villager was innocent as well as ignorant. It is not that he was egoistic; he was highly concerned that the train may find it extremely difficult to carry so many people along with their luggage. He was doubtful whether his own luggage would be carried or not. Hence, he grabbed his baggage and kept it on his own head! It failed to register in him that the train was carrying both himself and his luggage. You may keep your luggage on your head or by your side. It is still the train that will carry both of you. Hence, keep your luggage aside and relax. In this way, you must offer everything to God. You can stop exerting yourself. He will take care of everything. He will Himself carry everything for you. Such sacred thoughts must develop in you. Without this kind of faith, nothing can be achieved.

Faith is the root cause for anything to happen. It is this firm belief that shapes the correct type of ideal. We must foster faith in Truth and Righteousness. We

must develop faith in the command of God. We must not be like the pendulum of the clock, moving to and fro. Man has only one tongue. He must utter and stand by only one word. One day you consider something right, and the very next day you call it wrong. Indeed one minute you call this right, and the very next minute you consider it wrong. Did you speak both of these or was it someone else? You are one! Only one among both can be the truth while the other must be wrong. Both the truth and the untruth reside in you and not outside you. You must not become like the serpent with the forked tongue. You must be like Rama, who always followed the principle of a single word. Rama was characterised by one word, one arrow, and one wife. Hence, one must strive to attain this principle of Rama (*Atma Rama*). It is not needed to follow the Rama who is Emperor Dasaratha's son. Follow the conscience. If you are unable to satisfy your own conscience, whom else can you satisfy? Satisfying God means to satisfy your own conscience. Everyone who is the follower of Truth and Righteousness must foster them, spread them in the world, experience them and derive the joy.

Students—the architects of the future

Students! You are the ones who will assume the leadership of the country in future. The future of the nation depends upon you. Your nature and character will decide the character of the nation. You should work for the prosperity of the nation, welfare of the world, and universal happiness. First of all, you must follow the command of the Lord. Therein lies your welfare, as well as the security of the nation and society. Only then will your prayer of "*Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu*"

(may the entire world be at peace) be sanctified. Today, you are uttering the words of this prayer. You are unable to make our own neighbour happy. Then how can you aspire for the happiness of the world? Hence, you must strive for the satisfaction of your own *Atma*. You must experience the joy of your own *Atma*. Only then must you distribute that joy among others.

God's command is the most important one to be followed. Contemplation of the Lord is important. This must be the scripture of your life, and this teaching must be put into practice. Scriptures are those whose teachings must be practised. They must be obeyed. If it tells that a particular action must not be performed, then you must refrain from doing it. If it advises you not to talk much, then you must control your talk. By your talking less or more, I gain or lose nothing. Both the loss and the profit out of this will be yours alone. When you incur a loss, you weep. When you get profit, you laugh. You see so many wealthy men in this world. Though the rich man might have gained a few crores as profit, he is unable to experience joy out of it. Why is it so? It is because of the fear of the Income tax bureau!

Hence, Nature may give you happiness; but on the other hand, it will give you sorrow as well. This is so because in Nature, the *pravritti* and *nivritti* paths are intermingled. You must no doubt reside in the *pravritti* principle, but take care to base your life upon the *nivritti*. That is your primary education.

Today, you may study any course, and earn any degree. Ultimately, your job has very little to do with what you have studied. Can you show me someone who

is doing a job that is related to what he has studied? One passes IPS and joins the University as a Registrar! Is there any sense in this? What a great difference lies between the two fields! Another person does MBA and settles down in a job at a petrol filling station. Is there any relation between the two? The ultimate aim is to get into some job or the other. Must you study so much to attain this objective? There is absolutely no connection between what one studies and the job one does. Few are able to obtain a job suitable to their learning. You must not study in order to struggle for jobs. You must instead earn the “yoga” of Divinity.

That alone will confer all the necessary qualifications and comforts. In order to obtain Divine grace, you must constantly chant the name of the Lord, remember Him and install Him in your hearts. You must constantly obey His command, spend your time in tasks that will benefit others, and rigorously adhere to Truth and Righteousness.



12. Sathya and Dharma: The Hallmarks Of Humanity

*Without Truth, Righteousness, Love, and Peace
The efficacy of all charity is nil.*

*Without Truth, Righteousness, Love, and Peace
The fruit of all positions is nil.*

*For the eternal heritage that is standing today,
These four qualities are the foundations.*

*What more can I say to you,
Students endowed with virtuous qualities?*

*Is it possible to decide that this is good and that is
bad in this Creation?*

*Both that and this have been made by the same
God.*

Who has realised this principle today?

Students,

In the world today, you find only clashes and agitations. Feelings of equality and brotherhood are totally absent. Starting from the individual right up to the country, agitation, clashes, and feelings of diversity are rampant. Clash between individuals, agitation between houses, fights between families, villages, differences of opinions between districts, conflicting ideas between states —these have become the order of the day. What is the cause for this? It is the craze for power and position, evil desires, and selfishness that have caused this unrest in the world today. Added to this is the slackening of the strength of the governing bodies and their neglect of Truth and Righteousness, which

has caused the Government to neglect its responsibilities. In turn, this has led to much unrest, agitation, lawlessness, and chaos.

People have said that God, who is the Embodiment of Truth and Righteousness, is present everywhere. They call Him Omnipotent and Omniscient. They neither understand the meaning of these words nor make efforts to experience the meaning of these words. Of what use is it to keep pots of nectar outside, without sipping even a couple of drops? In the world today, several people are talking about God, who is the Embodiment of Truth and Righteousness. How many of them have witnessed this Truth? How many have practised Righteousness? Have they experienced at least a little of it? Has any attempt been made to bring to experience at least a minute fraction of the Sacred Truth? Without first understanding and experiencing them, merely lecturing about them is contrary to spiritual practices.

Great saints like Goparaja, Thyagaraja, and Ramadasa and many others aspired to have the grace of the Lord and enjoy Bliss. To this end, they involved themselves in various kinds of *sadhanas* (spiritual practices). They never desired any position or power of authority. They firmly believed that God's grace would grant them everything that they needed. They believed that God's love was their only property. It is the effect of the age of *Kali* that, unfortunately, today's devotees are mainly after pelf, position, and power and, in the process, have brought ruin upon themselves. They believe only in their own welfare and care not for the

benefit of others. The protector is God alone. No power or position can offer any kind of protection. Discarding such a protection and relying upon other mundane means to live is a perversion.

Brahma Sutra—the thread of God

Man is spending thousands of lakhs on petty comforts and joys. However, not even a fraction of the amount goes into righteous acts, charity, or saintly purposes. When the lady of the house asks for some money to buy some flowers and incense sticks for the worship, you hesitate to spend money for this. Further, questions are asked as to what are the benefits of all these rituals! You enjoy so many comforts and pleasures. What happiness have these actually given you? These worldly, temporal, and mundane pleasures are all transitory. Charity, righteousness, and sacrifice are the qualities that are Divine.

Human life is a long garland. One end of the garland is birth and the other end is death. In between these ends are the flowers of clashes, agitations, doubts, lack of self-confidence, and other such qualities, which are threaded together. The effect of these flowers in between is predominant. People look at, and believe, only in these negative qualities of restiveness, lawlessness, and atrocities but do not recognise the underlying truth: without the thread, these flowers cannot be strung together. That thread is the *Brahma Sutra*—the law of Brahman. It is the very thread of Brahman. Woven about this thread are the flowers called obstacles, pleasures, sorrows, abuses, accusations, gains, and the like.

Why have so many types and colours of flowers been strung together? Only when the flowers are of various hues and types does the garland become beautiful. What is it that lends beauty to life? Difficulties lend one kind of charm; sorrows lend another kind of attractiveness. Obstacles add their own beauty to life. Joy is another source of beauty for life. All these can be compared to the flowers that lend beauty to the garland. When man develops this kind of equanimity, he can be said to have assimilated the essence of education. However, today man does not spot the defects within himself, but he is eager to spot the faults in others.

One time, a village woman was traveling in a train that was crossing the river Krishna. The beliefs of the villagers are very sacred. If the culture of India is surviving to some extent, it is only in the villages. The presence of culture in the towns and cities is almost negligible. When the train was passing over the river Krishna, she prayerfully offered two coins to the river and threw them below. An Indian youth was seated by her side. He saw her action and at once derided her by saying, "In our country, there is much poverty. Why are you foolishly wasting money by throwing it into the river? What is the benefit? Though she was a villager she was not short of intelligence. For that matter, the wisdom and acumen possessed by the village folks is absent amongst town dwellers. These villagers have a lot of common sense. Modern education, on the other hand, makes people living in the towns lose common sense.

This young man, after berating the village woman, took out a cigarette and started to smoke. The woman then said, "Son! I gave away just two coins as my sincere and devoted offering to God. In my lifetime, it is only once in a while that I get to travel like this. When once in a lifetime I have thrown away just two coins, you have called it a great waste. Have you realised how much money are you wasting and burning away by smoking so many cigarettes every day? What is the benefit of smoking? You are exposing yourself to cancer, lung infections, and TB. You have failed to recognise such a monumental mistake in you. Instead, you are finding insignificant faults in me. First set right your own faults, correct your actions and seek your own welfare. It is not the mark of true education to criticise and ridicule others." In this way, the village woman, taught a valuable lesson to the young man.

The Hidden Treasure

The Divinity hidden in man is immense, but no one is making any effort to understand this. At one time, in order to make Pothana rise high in Society, Srinadha came to him with a suggestion. He said, "Brother-in-law, you are wasting your valuable poetry by offering it to Rama. You are committing a major mistake by doing so. Is Rama providing you with food, shelter and clothing? Is He looking after your general welfare? Is He protecting your family? Far from it! Hence, offer your poems to the king. The king will shower upon you a torrent of gold. Your family can live happily."

Pothana replied, “Brother-in-law, you are mistaken. The protector is Rama and not the king. How long will the kings survive? For how long can they foster you? My real mother is this Mother Earth. By placing my faith on this Mother and constantly chanting Rama’s name, I shall sanctify my life. It is futile to offer this sacred story of Rama to the kings and feed on the crumbs thrown at me. I would rather believe in Mother Earth to protect me and my family. My poetry is the embodiment of Saraswathi—the goddess of learning. Saraswathi must be offered to Brahma alone and not to mere mortals. How inappropriate it is to offer such a holy text to these wicked kings! I cannot condescend to do such a thing.”

Srinadha became furious on hearing these words and conveyed all this to the king. The selfish king became livid with anger. It has been appropriately said that a king is one who is full of *rajoguna* (emotional aspect). He dispatched some soldiers to burn down Pothana’s house. The entire house was soon aflame. Pothana was meditating on Rama in front of the sacred *Bhagavatha*. He prayed, “Lord! You are my Mother, You are my Father. You are my Well Wisher and Trusted Friend. You are the essence of education and all wealth, You are my everything.” Soon, the entire house was burnt down. But the *Bhagavatha* and the prayer room were both safe!

Those who sincerely believe in God will never suffer any want. People are only uttering God’s name with their lips and not their hearts. This too, with only worldly desires in mind. Instead of praying with the

lips, it is much better to work and render service with the hands. The same was conveyed by Hanuman to Vibhishana. He said, “Vibhishana, you are indulging in only purifying your word. You must aim at purifying your mind. That should be the aim of all actions. All our actions must be performed with the aim of purifying the mind.”

Today, man is only running after education, position, and power and not making any effort to learn the essence of all learning, namely, the education of the Self. Money may come and go in this world. Neither money nor secular education are permanent.

*One may proclaim proudly that he has plenty of
wealth,
But there is not even a bit of happiness on this
earth.
One may strut about proudly that he is highly
educated,
But there is not even a bit of peace on this earth
It is only the virtuous one with character
That finds a place on this earth.*

Only the virtuous ones will find a place to stay. One might wonder and ask how come so many people are seen living in this world. They are not all virtuous, and yet all seem to have a place. The space they have is external. Worldly space is their dominion. A virtuous one, on the other hand, has space within the heart of God. We must make efforts to secure a place in the heart of the Lord. Ancient Indians understood this, and they lived with such sacred, spiritual ideals that they

could provide peace and prosperity to the world. Present day intellectuals are no match to the educated ones of those days. In the olden days, the educated ones offered their learning to God. Today, we are selling our learning and education for wealth. It is not money, but the mind that is important. The mind must be kept under control and humbly offered to God.

All is Brahman

Today, people quite often ask about the relationship between the external world and Brahman. Actually, both are the same! This world is the effect while God or Brahman is the cause. In this world, there is nothing except Brahman. Here is an example. You have planted a seed in the soil and it has sprouted into a sapling. Soon it grows into a tree, with branches and leaves. In the tree are flowers and fruits. Where have these flowers, fruits, branches, and leaves come from? They are all born out of the small seed. It is the seed that became the branches. It is the seed that became the tree. It is the seed that has become the fruits and flowers. You are hence seeing the same seed in various forms and sizes. That is why it has been said in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “*Bijam maam, sarva bhuta naam*” (I am the seed, I am also the various shapes originating from the seed.)

The mud is one, pots may be many.

Milk is one, cows may be many.

Gold is one, ornaments may be many.

God is one, His forms are many.

Everything is God alone. Only the bodies are different; their names and forms vary. This truth must be understood by everyone who has ventured into the path of spirituality. Unfortunately, today all the educated ones hanker after money and give prime importance to money alone in their lives. Wealth is essential no doubt. Without money, one cannot live long in this world. However, the desire for money must be well within limits. Money must be spent in tasks that would be of some benefit to others. If it is simply stashed away, money will be just like the stones buried in the ground. Do not hide it. There are several valuable stones embedded in the ground without our knowledge. Of what use are they to us? They must be dug out, polished, and brought into the world if they are to have some value and use. They must be put to good use. Similarly, if the precious stone of humanness is not taken out and put to good use, it would become rotten and useless.

*When wealth increases, pride grows.
When pride grows, bad qualities grow.
If wealth is limited, pride is controlled.
If pride is controlled, the bad qualities
would leave.*

O man! You must remember and understand this truth. Wealth is essential. However, remember to use it for charity, righteous acts, and welfare of the world and learn to sacrifice. This great spirit of sacrifice is also seen in the *Ramayana*. Rama gave up everything. The *Vedas* have declared, "Neither by actions, nor by progeny, nor by wealth but by sacrifice alone can

one attain immortality.” This is why the Kingdom of Rama earned such an everlasting fame. Rama gave up His royal robes and was prepared to go away to the forests. He gave away in charity a number of cows. He was prepared to give Himself away if need be. It is because of this quality of sacrifice that the Principle of Rama has become immortal. He did not take anything with Him and even gave away His footwear. That is an ideal example for *vairagya*, or renunciation, that is born of total sacrifice.

Feelings depend on possessions

There is a tendency to confuse renunciation with totally giving up everything. Renunciation actually means attaining a state of perfect equanimity. People may criticise you or they may praise you; take them both with a sense of equanimity. One may try to harm you while another may try to do you a good turn; treat both situations with equanimity. In one business venture, a loss might be incurred, while a profit might be made in another; treat them both alike. Equanimity is the hallmark of *yoga*. That provides true safety and security for our lives. To the extent possible, one must make efforts to protect and foster those who have none to help them. If this sense of sacrifice has to be developed, divine feelings must first be developed within. All other feelings are useless if divine feelings are absent in the heart.

Feelings depend on our possessions, be it arms or wealth. Sita once told Rama, “Lord, these animals living in the forest have done You no harm. Is it not a great sin to harm these creatures when they have not

disturbed You in any way? The *rakshasas* (demons) are moving about in the Dandaka forest. None of them have crossed Your path. Then why have You taken upon Yourself to harm them? These thoughts of killing and harming them are fostered in You because of the weapons You carry. If You put these weapons away, such thoughts would also not occur. In You are present Truth and Righteousness, but there is also the quality of violence that appears to negate the good qualities. Keep violence at a distance. You will then become an embodiment of non-violence.”

Sita illustrated this point with a good example. Indra once saw a sage meditating. He wanted to test if the mendicant was in deep meditation or was just pretending superficially. He transformed himself into a soldier and appeared before the sage with a huge, sharp sword. He said, “O sage, I am going on an urgent mission. This sword is highly valuable. I propose to leave it in your custody. I shall collect it upon my return. Please keep it safe until then.” The sage agreed and gave his word to guard the sword. From that moment, his entire mind was only on the sword. He had to take the sword along with him wherever he went. This was because he had given his word to protect it. However, because he had the sword with him, certain violent thoughts started invading his mind. Gradually, the good effect of all his penance was diminished. What is the reason? It is the effect of the object.

Cultivate virtues, not vices

Hence, when the weapons of bad qualities are with you, wherever you may be, these will always

prompt only bad feeling and thoughts. Fill your heart with the good quality of the Lord's name. Wherever you may be, you must remain a paragon of good virtues. You must indulge only in good actions and tread only the right path. These are the important qualities of man. You must cultivate tolerance and develop selfless love. These two are the essence of education.

*Without Truth, Righteousness, Love, and Peace,
The effect of all education is a big void.*

Secular education is needed no doubt. It is for that purpose that this Institution has been established. But your education must also be directed towards helping the needy. It must be utilised for the prosperity of the world. It must be put to good use for the welfare of the Society. This is not to say that one must neglect oneself. The senses that have been given to you must be utilised not merely for selfish but also selfless purposes. It is only when man lives with both the feelings of the selfish and the selfless that he deserves to be called a man. The *Ramayana* has propounded truth and righteousness throughout its chapters. When these two qualities are absent, one loses the right to be called a man. When fire loses its capacity to burn, it is called a piece of coal; nobody would call it fire anymore. Fire, when touched, burns. Coal, on the other hand, will only make you dirty. Fire becomes coal when it has lost the faculty of burning, and it blackens.

When the values of truth and righteousness disappear, a kind of dirt begins to form within. The main cause for man's heart to become maligned and soiled is

the destruction of his natural qualities. Humanity or humanness is the confluence of the mind, speech and body. The same is also termed *trikaranasuddhi*. It may also be looked at by saying “The proper study of mankind is man.” Without the unity of the three, he cannot be called as man. You must, therefore, develop the unity of the thought, word, and deed. If you do so, honour and glory will come searching for you not only in your house, but also in society, in the country and wherever else you may go.

God must acknowledge your devotion

You need not go in search of Truth. Be pure, and truth will come searching for you. Righteousness also need not be looked for. Going in search of it is a sign of weakness. They must come searching for us. That is strength. God must come searching for you. If you go looking for God, it is a mark of foolishness. This is because God is present everywhere. If He is present at some particular spot, one may carry out an investigation to ascertain if He is there or not. How do you search for the Omnipresent God? Annie Besant once remarked, “Today, devotees are all on the lookout for God. This is not true devotion. It is God Himself who must come looking for His devotee. Making God do that is real devotion.” There is no point in proclaiming yourself to be a devotee of Rama or Sai. It is God who must declare you to be His devotee. This point has been well illustrated in the *Bhagavad Gita*. You may consider yourself to be My devotee. That is not proper. From God must come the reply, “You are mine.” You have posted a registered letter to your friend. Your friend must send the acknowledgement that he has re-

ceived your letter. That acknowledgement is the sign that your letter has reached your friend. Similarly, if you wish to ascertain that your prayers have reached God, you must make God declare that you are His devotee. Only then can you know that your prayers have reached Him.

Do you know what types of letters are being posted by the educated people today? They write very good letters. But, they do not write the address. Neither is there the “from” address, nor is there the “to” address. The letter itself is written in flowery language and flowing style. What is the use of that letter? Similarly, you must be aware of at least the “from” address—the place of your origin. If not, you must know at least the “to” address—where you will be going eventually. You are aware of neither of the addresses. The exercise is then futile.

*Birth again, death again;
In between, sojourn in countless wombs.
Life is an endless saga of misery;
O God! Show mercy and save me!*

This endless process is for one who knows not both the addresses. In your youth, the mind is subjected to all kinds of bumps and jumps. You must realise that this stage of youth is transient. It has not come with you during your birth and it will not remain with you at the time of death. Sage Sankara declared:

*Mother, teacher, progeny, family and the
pride of youth*

These are all destroyed in a trice by time.

What is this pride of youth? Your entire life passes away in such a short span. Why then be so arrogant and proud about this transient phase? Why this ego? When ego is destroyed, happiness develops in you. God has a very good name: Madhusudhana. It means one who has killed the demon called Madhu. Who is this Madhu? Madhu means sweet like honey. What is sweet for man today? Ego and pride! You will not find anybody in this world who is free from desire and ego. Man wants to become famous and wealthy overnight. Man desires things that have no meaning. God is one who destroys that sweet ego. Hence, He is called Madhusudhana. The names of Gods have tremendous inner significance associated with them. No one is reading the sacred texts. Instead, people hanker after stupid books and novels. Consequently, their lives also become nonsensical.

*What is the use of having studied so much?
Who can erase the scroll on one's forehead?
When evil thoughts and feelings enter the head,
Wisdom becomes dry and useless.*

God is your true friend

Students must primarily foster and develop good ideas. Reduce excess talk. Do not enter into friendship overly. What is this friendship? Who is the true friend? These worldly friends are not the real friends. As long as you are rolling in wealth, position, and power, they swarm over you, saying, "hello! hello." As long as there is money in the pocket, they say,

“Come on, let’s go to the cinema.” As you gradually lose your money, power, and position, you will find that there is none to even say good-bye to you! They will try their best to avoid you. These are not your friends. God alone is your real friend. Wherever you may go, He is the friend who will never leave you.

*You may be in the forests or the skies;
You may be in the city or the village;
You may be on the hill or on the plateau below;
To those who see no direction to their life,
God is the only succour.*

Your earthly friends will desert you when all is lost. As long as there is water in the pond, the frogs croak. The instant the water dries up, there will not be even one frog left there. Earthly friendship and relations are all like that. You are experiencing it daily. How many such friendships have you developed in your life? Where are all those friends today? As long as you are in the college for two or three years, they will move about with you, saying “hello!” After the college studies are over, they disperse in various directions. One friend is in the east and one is in the west. If they want to meet, north and south block the path in between! That is not the type of friendship to be developed. Certainly, you must speak well to all and move about with them amiably. But do not become attached and excessively friendly. You cannot always oblige, but you can always speak obligingly.

Do not develop hatred; at the same time, excessive friendship must also be avoided. Be as close as is

required and no more. Friendship must be within limits. Friendship beyond limits must be with God alone for He will not let go at any time.

*All the relations will come only to the doorstep;
The Lord's name is your only saviour that will
never leave you.*

Wherever you may go, the Lord is always behind you. No friend on earth will ever be able to keep up with you like that. The *Ramayana* gives an illustration. In the battlefield, Lakshmana fainted. Rama then began to lament, "Oh Lakshmana! One may be able to find a wife like Sita and a mother like Kausalya. But it is impossible to find a brother like you! I do not want to live without you. I also would like to embrace death. Jambavan, Sugriva, Angada, and Hanuman —you may all return to Kishkindha. If Lakshmana does not regain consciousness, I shall drown Myself in the ocean." Such a bond of friendship exists only between the soul and God.

The Vice-chancellor said that Rama is God and Lakshmana is the human soul. Lakshmana is divine as well. All are divine. There is nobody human. What is divinity? Effulgence is divinity. God resides in everybody in the form of this Effulgence. Love is the sacred ingredient that brings out this Effulgence. God is the very Embodiment of this Love.

