

17. Greatness of Vibheeshana

THE lives of two noble, meritorious and righteous personalities stand out in the Raamaayana. One is Sugreeva. The other is Vibheeshana. The lives of these two are very sacred. Raama sought the association with Sugreeva. Vibheeshana came seeking Raama only. After securing the friendship of Raama, Sugreeva realised the greatness of Raama. But Vibheeshana realised the compassionate nature of Raama even before coming to him. Raama was supremely pleased that he had been able to secure such noble friends.

The Mahaabhaaratha war lasted 18 years, but the war in Lanka between Raama and Raavana lasted 75 days. These battles have become memorable. But even today in the heart of every individual the Kurukshethra battle is being fought between the forces of evil (as represented by the Kauravas) and the forces of God (as represented by Paandavas). Equally the battle between Raama and Raavana is going on symbolically in everyone. This means that the war between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, is a perennial one. In the battle in Lanka many died on both sides. I do not relish dilating on wars. What we should seek to understand is the nature of the forces ranged against each others, what forces stood for truth.

Even among Raakshasas there are good people

Even in Lanka (ruled by Raavana) there was no lack of good people. While the battle was going on, one Raakshasa woman was running along, carrying a child in her arms. Hit by an arrow released by Lakshmana the child fell from her arms. Abandoning the child to its fate the woman continued to run. Seeing this Lakshmana remarked to Raama: "Brother! look at the callousness of these Raakshasas. Without caring for the fate of her infant child, the Raakshasa woman is running away to save herself." The all knowing divine Raama told Lakshmana: "Lakshmana! you are making a mistake. That woman is not selfish. She is full of devotion." Immediately Lakshmana sent a monkey to fetch the woman. He asked her: "How is it you went on running, caring only for your own safety, without bothering about the fate of the child that fell from your arms?" The woman replied: "I was not running for the sake of saving myself. It is not as if I had no love for my child. I am clinging to my life with the sole desire 'to serve Raama if he takes us to Ayodhya after the destruction of Raavana. I pray for the advent of Raamaraajya. I want to serve Raama." Then Raama remarked: "Do you see, Lakshmana, how mistaken you were? Even among Raakshasas there are good people. Vibheeshana is the supreme example. Such persons do not need any protector. They are protected by their own Righteousness."

The next day, the battle started in the morning. Both sides blew their trumpets. That day Raavana's son Indhrajith used all his magical powers to inflict injuries on the monkey hordes. Vibheeshana knew well the wizardry of the Raakshasas. He shattered all the special missiles used by Indhrajith and infused courage among the monkeys. Noticing this, Raama observed: "When Vibheeshana came to me seeking asylum, all kinds of objections were raised against our accepting him as one of us. Do you see how helpful he is to us now?"

Indhrajith and Vibheeshana in the battlefield

Indhrajith began performing a *yajna* to destroy Raama, and Lakshmana. Earlier, in the battle between Indhrajith and Lakshmana, the latter had fallen unconscious after being hit by Indhrajith's *Asthra* (missile). Lakshmana regained consciousness after the application of a herb from the Sanjivini mountain brought by Hanumaan from the Himaalayas. Lakshmana resumed the battle with Indhrajith, carrying himself on the shoulders of Hanumaan. Vibheeshana took

both of them to the place where Indhrajith was performing his *Yajna*. Indhrajith was offering many human beings as sacrifice at the *Yajna* that was being performed at the foot of a blackberry tree. So long as Indhrajith remained under that tree he could wield extraordinary powers. Vibheeshana told Hanumaan and Lakshmana to see that Indhrajith was kept away from that tree as much as possible. Hearing this, Indhrajith got very angry. He burst out: "Oh Vibheeshana! Are you betraying my secrets and the secrets of Lanka to the enemy? You are a traitor to your race." He went on berating Vibheeshana in this manner.

Vibheeshana makes Indhrajith understand the Truth

Vibheeshana retorted indignantly: "Indhrajith! It is natural for Raakshasas to be abusive as they like. But, remember that Raama is the very embodiment of peace. He is pure of heart, utterly free from selfishness. It is not possible for Raakshasas to understand the truth about such a Divine Being. Raama has entered Lanka for rescuing Seetha and not for seizing the country. How can one who gave up Ayodhya itself voluntarily covet Lanka? Raama has no desire for anything. For a long time I had been warning Raavana that is a grievous sin to kidnap another, man's wife and appealed to him to restore Seetha to Raama. However, Raavana, paid a deaf ear to my word. He is destroying by his own hands his kingdom and his clan. Who is to be blamed for this? Is it me or your father?"

Indhrajith asked, "If my father did not listen to your words, you should have remained silent and not allied yourself with our enemies. Is this kind of treachery justified?"

Vibheeshana gave a fitting reply: "Indhrajith! You are an ignorant fool who knows nothing about truth and untruth, right and wrong. I am one who is well aware of the rules of right conduct. It is unworthy for a person to remain silent in the face of wickedness. Such inaction can destroy an entire society."

A comparison of Bheeshma and Vibheeshana

In this context, it is interesting to study the conduct of Bheeshma and Vibheeshana in similar situations. It is clear Vibheeshana is a greater person than Bheeshma. Why? Knowing that the Kauravas were committing a grievous wrong, Bheeshma remained silent without condemning them. Moreover, he accepted the role of Commander-in-chief of the Kaurava armies in the Kurukshetra battle. Vibheeshana acted differently. He roundly condemned the wrong action of his brother. He advised Raavana to return Seetha to Raama. Ultimately he renounced everything and sought surrender at the Feet of Raama.

Lanka had many such high-minded persons besides Vibheeshana. But cowed down by the wickedness of the Raakshasa, they were unable to protest against the bad persons.

When Hanumaan entered Lanka he noticed Vibheeshana. Vibheeshana told Hanumaan: "Hanumaan! I am living in the midst of the wicked Raakshasa like the tongue surrounded by sharp teeth, How long am I to live like this? How will I secure the grace of Raama? When will I be blessed with the bliss of being in His Divine presence? I have long been waiting for that great moment." Vibheeshana lamented in this manner.

Hanumaan gave a significant message to Vibheeshana then, "Vibheeshana! Do not think that you are alone in being subject to these ordeals. There are many great souls who experience similar troubles.

The Raakshasas constantly harass the Sages, the *Avathaars* and all good men. However, take note of one fact. The tongue came first and the teeth emerged later. The teeth which emerged in the middle drop away in due course! Likewise these Raakshasas also will fall away soon. Do not have any doubt on this score.

Hanumaan then went on: "Vibheeshana! You have been attracted to the Lotus Feet of Raama. Cling to them firmly. Either He should bless you because of your perseverance, or you should merge in Him in course of time. There is no other way. It is wrong to give up the Lord in the middle. This is not the mark of a true devotee. What is devotion? It is not mere repetition of Raama's name endlessly. While contemplating on Raama, you must take part in service to Raama."

Vibheeshana desired only to promote the prosperity of Lanka and the welfare of the Raakshasas. He was not interested in getting the crown. Raavana and Indrajith derided such a high-minded noble person.

The three boons granted by Brahma

Once Raavana, Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana performed a severe penance to invoke the presence of Brahma. Brahma appeared before them and asked them what they wanted. He said he would grant them whatever boon they wanted. Kumbhakarna wanted to ask that he should be never at anyone's mercy--*nirdhaya*. But by a slip of the tongue he asked for *nidhra* (sleep). Brahma declared: "So be it." Raavana asked freedom from death at the hands of all deities, but did not ask for freedom from death by humans because he considered them trivial beings. Vishnu then decided to come in human form to put an end to Raavana. What did Vibheeshana pray for? "Oh Lord! Fill my heart with compassion and make me lead a righteous life." Because of this boon, Vibheeshana remained totally unaffected in spite of all the raillery and abuse by Raavana and his sons. Vibheeshana always remained compassionate, never yielding to hatred or anger. Because his heart was full of compassion, he secured God's grace and proximity to the Divine. One without compassion is a demon and not a human being.

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Scriptures are endless; Saadhanas are countless; opportunities are few; time is already overstocked. But you can easily win the battle of life, in spite of these handicaps, provided you arm yourself with Love, which is the essential teaching of all Scriptures, the goal of all varieties of Saadhana, the best use to which all opportunities can be put and the most profitable way of utilising the precious capital time.

Baba