

## 10. True Nature Of Rama

Virtue, or right conduct (*dharma*), is not a matter of time and space, to be modified and adjusted to the needs and pressures of the moment. It means a number of fundamental principles that should guide mankind in its progress toward inner harmony and outer peace. A person who strays away from *dharma* meets with greater harm than even physical slavery. There is a dread now about invasion and bondage to the enemy if you are not alert enough and united enough. But the loss of *dharma* is an even greater calamity, for what is life worth if one cannot live up to the talents with which one is endowed?

These principles are called eternal (*sanathana*) because their origins are not dated, their author is not identifiable; they are the revelations made in the clarified intellects of impartial sages. They are basic and eternal. They do not represent temporary vagaries.

India stood unshaken and undaunted against the onslaught of attitudes that were bred in other lands to suit the needs of limited societies because she stuck to the *dharma* that was laid down for all time and all people. Indian rulers also respected the rigours of *dharma* and took the advice of the repositories of *dharma* and the interpreters of *dharma*—those who were purified in the crucible of penance and austerities (*tapas*). They recognised the Ruler of Rulers and sought His guidance by prayer and penance. They knew that their Master was the Eternal Indweller or Onlooker. They were taught that He was in full sympathy not only with the king but even with the lowliest of his subjects. Therefore, the rulers of this land were warned to care for the happiness and cure the misery of every single individual in the State.

### The Divine Is An Indivisible Entity

*Dharma* (righteousness, virtue) is the code of conduct that will promote the ideals of each stage of a person: student, householder, earner, master, servant, spiritual aspirant, renunciant (*sanyasi*), etc. When the code is distorted and mankind undermines its earthly career, forgetting the high purpose for which one has come, the Lord incarnates and leads people along the correct path. That is to say, He comes as a human being to restore the principles and reestablish the practice of *dharma*. This is what is referred to as *dharma-samsthapana* in the *Gita*.

Among these forms assumed by the Lord, there is no higher or lower, though pandits may argue who is better or greater among, say, Rama and Krishna! That is but a type of intellectual gymnastics, which gives the pandits the keen joy of a pugilistic encounter! Verabhadhra Sastry posed a similar problem now. Let me tell you at the outset that the Divine is an indivisible entity, whatever form it may assume, here or elsewhere.

### Rama never deviated from dharma

Rama appeared as an illusory human form; He stuck to *dharma* in daily practice, even from His infancy. He is the personification of *dharma*. There is no trace of vice (*a-dharma*) in him. His divine Nature is revealed in His calm temperament and feeling of love and affection. Meditate on Him and you are filled with love for all beings; dwell on His story and you find all the agitations of your minds quietening in perfect calm. When Thataki, the female demon, had to be killed, Rama argued, hesitated, and desisted, until Sage Viswamitra convinced Him that she had to be liberated from a curse by His own arrow. That is a sign of His love and affection.

Rama never provoked another in order to create a convenient excuse to destroy him; on the other hand, He gave the adversary every chance to be saved. He carried the message of *dharma* to the monkeys and demons (*vanaras* and *rakshasas*), as well as to sages like Jabali. He accepted the homage of Vibhishana without demur, and He announced that He was prepared to accept even Ravana, if only he would repent his iniquity. “Speak the truth,” says the sacred revelation (*sruthi*); Rama stuck to truth, in spite of all temptations. “Practise virtue,” says the sacred revelation. He never deviated from the path.

For example, as you know, He had to live 14 years in the forest to fulfil His father’s behest. During that period, He did not enter an inhabited town or village. He avoided Kishkindha and Lanka even when the coronations of Sugriva and Vibhishana took place. Vibhishana pleaded with Him very plaintively, saying that only a few days remained out of the 14 years, but Rama sent Lakshmana instead. He did not waver or overstep. That was the strictness with which He kept the vow.

### **Make Rama your Atma Rama**

Rama is the Embodiment of Virtue (*Dharma-swarupam*); Krishna is the Embodiment of Love (*Prema-swarupam*). Rama was ever aware of the obligations of *dharma*. When Dasaratha, running after His chariot in mortal anguish, cried out, “Stop, stop” and called on Sumanthra to stop, Rama told him not to. He said, “If he chides you, tell him you did not hear him.” Sumanthra was in a fix. How could He say something not true? But Rama explained, “This order to stop the chariot comes from a grief-stricken father, whereas the order to take Me to the forest came from the king, whose minister you are. Do not hear the ravings of a man who has lost his reason through sorrow; you must listen only to the commands of the king.”

Even before the advent of the *Avatar*, the stage is set to the minutest detail; Kaikeyi is ready with her two indefinite boons; Dasaratha is ready with the curse of the ascetic on his head, entailing upon him a death due to anguish at the separation of his son, and the monkeys (*vanaras*) are ready to help the divine purpose. Sita is ready, risen from the earth, to provide the cause for the downfall of evil. Just as a garland is made of flowers gathered from many plants, flowers of many hues and fragrances, so too the garland of the divine Story is made up of a variety of incidents, a boon, a blessing, a curse to provide the wonderful plot of His Story.

Some say that Rama shows man how to suffer! Well, if a king arranges a play in the palace and takes delight in enacting the role of a beggar, and acts it very realistically, do you therefore declare that he is suffering the miseries of beggary? Rama is bliss (*ananda*). Bliss is Rama. If it is not sweet, how can it be sugar? If Rama is suffering, He cannot be Rama. A ball of iron cannot burn the skin, but make it red-hot and it does. That is but an assumed role. When the heat subsides it is as cool as ever.

Repetition of Rama’s name (*Ramanama*) will save you if you have at least the devotion to father and to mother that Rama had. If not, repetition of Rama’s name is merely a movement of the lips. Meditate on Rama’s form and true nature when you recite or write His name. That will give exercise to the mind, and it will be made healthy and strong, in the spiritual sense. Make this the Embodiment of Virtue your Eternal Bliss (your *Atma Rama*), on this birthday of Rama. That is My advice and My blessing.

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