

## 10. The Rama Path

*See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil:*

*Bear in mind the image of the three monkeys*

*Which impart this message.*

*There is no wiser counsel than this.*

*Studying thoroughly the Vedantic texts*

*And becoming an expert in expounding them,*

*Without cultivating good qualities,*

*Can a person be a true human being at all?*

From days of yore, Bharath, by upholding spirituality and propagating the Divine message, has been the preceptor of mankind, promoting their well-being and setting a shining example to the world. "Let all the worlds be happy" has been the basic principle governing the Hindu way of life. The ancient rulers, sages, scholars and even women who were exemplars of chastity led lives of renunciation and sacrifice to uphold the *Dharmic* culture and heritage of the country.

The *Ramayana* story illustrates the greatness and sacredness of this culture. The *Ramayana* is not merely a story of Rama. Rama + Ayana is *Ramayana*. *Ayana* means Path. The inner meaning of *Ramayana* is that the path shown by Rama should be followed.

From the moment of birth man is engaged in a variety of activities for preserving his way of life and achieving his goals. At birth, man, as a child has no bad qualities and is wholly innocent. But as time passes, because of the type of food he consumes and the changes in his lifestyle, and the kind of association he develops, his dress and manners undergo changes. Along with these, he develops likes and dislikes. After getting "educated," he develops ego and pride, passion and other bad qualities from head to foot. They acquire a strong hold over him.

### **Man becomes a slave of his desires**

As a consequence, he starts deluding himself that he is all-knowing and that there is none other greater than him. Filled with the arrogance of youth, he looks with contempt on others. If man, however, seeks to live as a human being, he has to face many difficulties and vicissitudes in life. He has to overcome the obstacles and impediments he faces.

Today man appears to relish only pleasures derived from the senses. Every man is filled with various desires. As he grows, the surging vigour of manhood makes him headstrong. He fails to realise the true purpose of education. He develops ambition to become a great scholar, singer, actor or businessman. He is caught up in the bewildering maze of desires. As a result, despite his inherent divinity, he becomes a slave of his impure desires and forgets his true human worth. While birds and animals are content to live on whatever they can get, man alone has insatiable desires and is filled with greed. There should be a limit to one's acquisitiveness and desires. Excess of anything is harmful and should be avoided.

The principle message of the *Ramayana* is that there should be rigorous control over desires. Human life should be sanctified by control of the senses, regulation of the mind and utilisation of the intellect.

### **The example of Lakshmana**

Every notable character in *Ramayana* stands out as an ideal for the world. All of them are embodiments of *Dharma*. Consider the example of Lakshmana. Valmiki has described Lakshmana in many ways. He has called him "Rama's other self." In the *Kamba Ramayana*, Lakshmana is described as the "second virtue of Rama." Tulasidas characterises Lakshmana as "Rama's right hand." Rama and Lakshmana were associated inseparably as "Bimba and Pratimba"--one was just the reflection of the other. In his great quality, his immaculate purity and spirit of sacrifice, Lakshmana is his own example.

In accordance with his father's commandment, Rama had to go to the forest. Lakshmana was under no such compulsion. Making the supreme sacrifice of his own accord, he elected to accompany Rama. *Ayanam* (Rama's path) was the apple of his *nayanam* (eye). Hence Lakshmana had a key role in *Ramayana* (Rama-ayana). Leaving his mother, forsaking his wife and rejecting royal pleasures, Lakshmana chose to follow Rama as the be-all and the end-all of his life. By his sterling quality and exemplary character, Lakshmana stands out as an ideal to the world.

In the forest while Rama and Lakshmana were going in search of Sita, they came to the Rishyamooka mountain. There they made friends with Sugriva and Hanuman. A bag containing ornaments was given to Rama by Sugriva, who told Rama that the bag was dropped by a woman who was going in an aerial chariot. Rama handed the ornaments to Lakshmana and asked him whether he could identify any of Sita's ornaments amongst them. Lakshmana said: "I cannot recognise the bangles. Nor can I recognise the head ornaments in this bunch. I can recognise only the anklets among these jewels. They are the ones worn by Sita. I can recognise them because everyday I had been prostrating at her feet for years."

### **Lakshmana revered Sita as a mother**

Rama lived in Ayodhya for twelve years after his marriage. After that, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita spent 13 years in the forest. During all the 25 years he had been with Rama, Lakshmana had not looked at Sita's face even once. Nowhere in history can you find an example of one with the character of Lakshmana. He revered every woman as a mother.

Rama directed Lakshmana to leave Sita in a forest near some sage's *ashram*. Sita was pregnant at that time. When Lakshmana was about to leave, Sita said to him: "Lakshmana! It may be fitting for Rama to send me to the forest to appease public opinion. The duty of a king is to protect his subjects and be an ideal ruler to them. Eschewing completely all ideas of "mine" and "thine," the ruler should be concerned solely for the well-being of the people. Sri Rama's reputation is the source of my joy. I do not grieve because he has sent me away. Rama's glory and fame should be everlasting. But, you, who are my brother-in-law, how can you agree to abandon me in this forest? Pregnant as I am, how can you have the heart to leave me alone in this wilderness? Please stay with me at least for some time and then you may go."

### **Lakshmana's devotion to Rama and Sita**

Lakshmana replied: "Revered mother! All these years I have not even seen your face. In spite of the complete innocence and purity of your character, you have been the victim of calumny by thoughtless people. If now I were to stay with you, your good name will be subject to reproach. In these circumstances I am prepared even to give up my life for you, but I cannot suffer your reputation being sullied in any way. Moreover, I have to carry out Rama's orders. Rama means everything to me. I cannot live for a moment going against the commands of Rama. Therefore, Oh mother! forgive me and allow me to return." He prostrated at Sita's feet and entreated her to let him go.

In this manner, Lakshmana dedicated his entire life to upholding the glory of Rama and Sita. He thereby demonstrated to the world his own great qualities.

Now, look at Bharatha. Refusing to accept the kingship that was offered to him, looking upon Rama as the only fit person to rule the kingdom. Bharatha set out for the forest to meet Rama and persuade him to return to Ayodhya.

### **Nature of *Dharma***

Both Lakshmana and Bharatha dedicated all that was theirs to the Divine. They had no trace of selfishness or self-interest in them. They adhered to Rama's path of *Dharma* (Rama-ayana). As all the brothers followed the path laid down by Rama, the *Ramayana* vindicates its title.

"*Ramo Vighrahavaan Dharmah*" ..... (Rama is the very embodiment of righteousness,) says Valmiki. What is *Dharma*? Today all kinds of worldly *Dharmas* are proliferating. When we try to find out what is *Vaidik Dharma* (*Dharma* according to *Vedas*), there are confusing and conflicting opinions. "*Dhaarayiti iti Dharmah*," it is said. (*Dharma* is that which sustains the world, that which upholds the world.) Every object in the world has got certain unique qualities. The quality that is the vital essence of the object reveals its *Dharma*. For instance, it is the basic quality of fire to burn--burning is its *Dharma*. When the fire loses its capacity to burn, it ceases to be fire and becomes mere charcoal. Sweetness is the inherent quality of sugar. If sugar loses its sweetness, it is no longer sugar but sand. The Champaka flower has the natural quality of exuding fragrance. If there is no fragrance in it, it is not Champaka.

In the same manner, for man the quality of *Ananda* that flows from his heart is his inherent *Dharma*. But man today, for the sake of external achievements, forgets this inherent nature. For all, whether they are educated or not, there is one common *Dharma*: They should extend to others the same honour and regard which they expect others to show towards them so that they may feel happy. We should not do to others anything which if others do to us will cause pain and unhappiness to us.

### **Do unto others as others do unto you**

This means that we should not cause harm to others because we do not want them to do harm to us. This is the natural *Dharma* which is relevant to all people in worldly life. Not everybody can understand or follow *Vaidik Dharma* (Laws of Eternal Religion). Hence, in our ordinary daily life, the simple principle to be adhered to is do unto others as you would like others to do unto you.

However, what we notice among most people today is rampant selfishness and self-centredness. While they want to be respected and honoured by others, they will themselves show no respect or regard to others. *Dharma* is not a one-way traffic. It calls for "give and take."

Today the spirit of sacrifice is absent among people. The foremost lesson of the *Ramayana* is readiness for sacrifice. It is only through *thyaga* (renunciation or sacrifice) that one attains *Yoga* (oneness with Divinity). The *Ramayana* proclaims the ideal of sacrifice. Obeying the commands of his father, renouncing the kingship and wearing the bark of the tree, Rama went to the forest as an exile. He was complying with what he regarded as *Aajna* (divine command). He demonstrated to the world what adherence to truth means.

### **Dangers of disobedience of divine command**

*Aajna* is a great injunction. If it is disobeyed, there will be no joy. Transgression of *Aajna* leads to many hardships and difficulties. (There are episodes in the *Ramayana* which point out the serious consequences of disobeying the *Aajna*).

Before leaving the hermitage in search of the golden deer (Maricha in disguise), Rama issued a stern order to Lakshmana not to leave the hermitage in any circumstance or any situation. Rama told him that whatever difficulties or pressure he might have to face, under no condition should he leave Sita alone. This was Rama's command to Lakshmana. But Lakshmana, because he was subject to some extent to ordinary mortal failings, became weak in his resolution. When Sita heard the cry, "Ha! Sita! Ha! Lakshmana!" uttered by Maricha by a voice resembling Rama's, she urged Lakshmana to go immediately to the rescue of Rama.

However much Lakshmana pleaded that according to the orders of Rama, he could not leave her alone, she used the harshest words to compel Lakshmana to go. Sita's words deeply pained him. Unable to bear her harsh words, violating Rama's instructions, Lakshmana left Sita and set out in search of Rama. The subsequent tragic developments---the carrying away of Sita by Ravana and all the troubles that had to be gone through to find and recover Sita--all these caused deep anguish to Lakshmana. He lamented: "Is it not because I transgressed Rama's orders that these troubles overtook Sita and us?" All his life Lakshmana was distraught by these thoughts. He often felt: "This was the only occasion in my life that I had acted against Rama's orders."

But, there came another occasion when he was faced with a cruel dilemma: whether to adhere to or act against Rama's orders.

### **Lakshmana's second transgression**

When Rama was on his way back to Ayodhya, the Lord of Time, *Yama*, came to Rama. While conversing with *Yama*, Rama had issued a strict order to Lakshmana not to allow anyone inside during his talks with *Yama*. Rama said if he allowed anyone, he (Lakshmana) would lose his head.

Lakshmana was a courageous and resolute person. He was guarding the door scrupulously. At that time, the sage Durvasa arrived there. He told Lakshmana: "I have to go in urgently for a talk with Rama." Lakshmana firmly refused to let him in. Enraged at Lakshmana's stand, Durvasa angrily declared: "I will utter a curse on Ayodhya. I will destroy your entire dynasty by my curse. Beware, Oh! Lakshmana!"

Lakshmana was shaken by the irate sage's threat. He was caught in a profound moral dilemma. "If I let the sage in, my head will be cut off. If I do not let him in, not only the city of Ayodhya

but my whole race will be ruined by the sage's curses." Lakshmana could not reconcile himself to the destruction of *Raghuvamsa* (his dynasty). Nor could he suffer the prospect of the people of Ayodhya being destroyed. He resolved the dilemma in this way. "By disobeying Rama's orders I shall be losing only my head. But, thereby I shall be saving my dynasty and the people of Ayodhya." Coming to this decision, he allowed Durvasa to go in. Lakshmana felt: "It will be a supreme good fortune to have my head cut off at Rama's hands. I will be the only sufferer. If I do not yield to this sage, my entire race will be wiped out."

Lakshmana thus deeply considered the pros and cons of his decision and chose to sacrifice himself rather than allow others to suffer.

### **Code of duties**

The *Ramayana* is full of such illustrious and exemplary characters. Unfortunately today those who discourse on the *Ramayana*, indulge in all sorts of interpretations. The *Ramayana* is a great text which indicates what should be the ideal relations between brothers, how the members of a family should earn the love of parents, what should be the ideal relations between husband and wife and what are the duties of any specific person in any specific situation. Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna adhered to the Rama-path and lived strictly according to his injunctions. Their example should be followed by every family in the country. Sita was prepared to face any trouble and make any sacrifice for the sake of her husband. She sought no comfort for herself. She dedicated her life to the service of Rama.

### **Consequences of lust, hatred and greed**

*The Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavatha* are three monumental works which point out the disastrous consequences which result when one is a victim of *Kama* (lust) or *Lobha* (greed) or *Krodha* (hatred). In the *Ramayana*, Ravana exemplifies lust. The entire *Ramayana* story happened because of Ravana's lust. Rama's advent as *Avatar* was for the purpose of destroying Ravana.

In the *Bhagavatha*, Hiranyakasipu is the personification of hatred---hatred towards Hari. He went about asking: "Where is that Hari? There can be none greater than myself." Because of this hatred for Hari, the Lord appeared in the form of Narasimha (Man-Lion) to destroy Hiranyakasipu. The Lord vanquished the demon of hatred.

In the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana symbolises greed. As a result of his greed his entire clan was destroyed.

Ravana, Hiranyakasipu and Duryodhana are examples of the disastrous consequences of lust, hatred and greed. Besides containing these warnings, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavatha* and the *Mahabharata* indicate what is *Dharma* and how it is to be honoured and adhered to.

Duryodhana, whose avarice knew no bounds, went to his mother, Gandhari, on the eve of the Kurukshetra battle, to seek her blessings. In keeping with the ideals of mothers in those days, Gandhari told Duryodhana: "*Yatho Dharmah, Thatho Jayah*" (Where there is righteousness, there is victory). She did not wish victory for her son.

Duryodhana then went to his preceptor Dronacharya and prostrated before him. Dronacharya told him: "*Yatho Dharmah, thatho Krishnah: Yatho Krishnah Thatho Jayah.*" (Where there is *Dharma*, there is Krishna. Where there is Krishna, there is victory).

The same message is contained in the last *sloka* of the *Bhagavad Gita*: "*Yathra Yogeswarah-Krishna Yathra Paartho Dhanurdharah Thathra Sri Vijayobhutih Dhruvaneethih mathih Mama*" (Where there is the Supreme Lord of *Yoga*, Sri Krishna and where there is the mighty archer, Arjuna, there are to be found all prosperity, success and justice).

The *Ramayana* relates how before leaving for the forest, Rama went to Kausalya to seek her blessings. Kausalya told Rama: "Your *Dharma* will protect you during your exile in the forest."

### **Sumitra's illustriousness as a noble mother**

Lakshmana prostrated before his mother Sumitra. The noble lady told her son: "Only the place where Rama is not is the forest. The forest in which Rama stays will be your Ayodhya. Without Rama in Ayodhya, we will be living in wilderness. Redeem your life to the service of Rama."

Because there were such illustrious mothers, fathers and preceptors in those days, the *Upanishads* could exhort the people to revere the mother as God, the father as God and the *Guru* as God and the guest as God.

The life stories of Rama and Krishna are indeed treatises on righteousness. They are sacred works. They taught mankind how to sublimate human life. The message is clear: adhering to Truth, practising Righteousness, spreading Love everywhere, remaining ever peaceful, life should be sanctified.

This day should not be celebrated merely as the anniversary of Rama's birth. The day we install in our hearts the path laid down by Rama is the real birthday of Rama. Celebrating of holy days should not mean having a good feast on those days. We should seek to make the teachings, of the *Avatars* concerned, a part of our lives. We should follow the path laid down by them. Only then, celebration has any meaning. Our lives also get sanctified. All studies, recitations and listening to discourses are of no value if practice does not follow precept.

### **Only those who sacrifice all can enter heaven**

Once three persons reached the gates of *Swarga* (heaven). One of them declared that he was the master of all scriptures and therefore the gates should be opened to let him in. The guardians of the gate said: "You are familiar only with the texts. You have no practical experience. You may leave."

The second man said: "I have performed many *Yagas* and *Yajnas*" (sacrificial rites and rituals). The guardians told him: "You have performed the sacrifices for selfish aims. You have no place here."

The third person, a farmer, neared the gates and said: "I am a poor farmer, owning a hut on two acres of land. I have been offering food and drink to passers-by and giving them shelter when necessary. I have shared with them whatever little I had. This is all the *sadhana* I have been able to practice." The guardians said: "You may enter."

The story illustrates the truth that only those who are prepared to sacrifice what little they have for relieving others in need, are entitled to enter heaven. Many have read a great deal and listened to innumerable discourses. What effect have these had on them? Has there been any change in their lives? If they examined their lives, they will find that the answer is negative.

While listening to a discourse they may be inclined towards renunciation. They welcome the teaching. But after a few moments, they return to their original selves.

Hence, the first requisite is a change in mental attitude. Without a change in the mind, other changes in a man are of no use. It is one's qualities that should be transformed, not the attire he wears. *Ramayana* conveys a great message. It is a compendium of qualities such as *Thyaga* (renunciation), *Daya* (compassion), *Karuna* (kindness), *Sahana* (forbearance), *Saanubhuthi* (empathy).

### **Body is the result of *Karma***

Man today is bound by seven types of bondage: 1. *Deha* (Body); 2. *Karma* (action); 3. *Raga* (attachment); 4. *Dweshha* (hatred); 5. *Ahamkara* (ego); 6. *Aviveka* (foolishness); 7. *Ajnana* (ignorance). These are the seven bonds that bind man. Wherefrom has ignorance emanated? It is the product of *Aviveka* (lack of discrimination). *Aviveka* is the outcome of *Ahamkara*. Hatred is the cause of ego. Attachment gives rise to hatred. Attachment arises from action. The body is the result of *Karma*. In this chain of causes and effects, the starting point is *Karma* and the culmination is in ignorance. How is ignorance to be removed? Ignorance is like darkness. Any amount of struggle with darkness will not serve to remove it. But the moment a lamp is lit, the darkness will disappear. For dispelling human ignorance the lamp that is needed is the Divine name.

Today, to acquire *Jnana* (the Higher Wisdom) you have to have recourse to the Name of God. In the *Kali Yuga* two things are most important. *Nama* and *Dhaana* (Divine Name and Charity): *Annadhaanam* (the gift of food) and *Harinaamam* (chanting the name of Lord Hari). These are the primary requisites. If you have these two basic qualities, they will serve as two wings to take you to heaven.

I desire that you should all cultivate a spirit of sacrifice and render to your fellowmen whatever little help you can give and with this I bless you all.

*Discourse at the Kalyana Mantap, Brindavan, on Sri Rama Navami Day, 26 Mar 1988*

*Do not blame the Lord for your ignorance or foolishness or perversity. Just as underground water wells up in a gushy stream when a bore is sunk down to the depth, by constant Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, touch the spring of Divinity and one day it will gush out in cool plenty and bring unending joy.*

*Sathya Sai Baba*