

6. Ideals of the *Rama Avatar*

Whenever you look, you must only see God;

'Tis folly to see anything else.

When you walk, you must walk with God;

'Tis foolish to take any other path.

When you speak, speak only the Truth;

All other talk is futile.

When you sing, sing about the greatest truths;

All other singing is an aberration.

When you hear, you must listen only

to the Lord's bhajans.

You must seek only to see God.

God must be your only Goal.

What greater truth is there than this,

Oh good people that are assembled here?

Sweeter than sugar,

Tastier than butter

More sweet than pure honey,

When you utter the Name

It is like nectar itself:

Reflect on it always Oh mind!

On the name of Rama.

Life is impermanent in this world

Youth and wealth are also transient;

So are wife and children,

Only Dharma and Fame endure for ever.

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! All objects in the world are liable to change. All living beings must pass some day. But ideals and sacred objectives established in human hearts shine forever.

If one has to live upto an ideal, he must be prepared to face many ordeals, difficulties, calumnies, trials and tribulations. These ideals have continued upto the present day to glow in the hearts of the people because they have been upheld inspite of vicissitudes and ordeals. Aeons may come

and go, continents may appear and disappear, people may pass away, but ideals and values remain a perennial source of inspiration to the world.

What cannot be achieved through physical prowess, the strength of numbers or the power of wealth, can be accomplished through the power of *Buddhi* (intelligence). *Viveka* (wisdom) is the hallmark of intelligence. Man acquires wisdom only by adherence to Truth and the pursuit of *Dharma* (righteousness). Wisdom cannot be nourished without following Truth.

The sun and the moon are shining in the world. People imagine that each of them is shining by its own luminosity. They do not realise that there is an effulgence which transcends the light of the sun and the moon and accounts for their brilliance. The physical sun is regarded as self-luminous. The moon shines because of the reflected light of the sun. The moon is not self-luminous; it derives its light from the sun.

Likewise, people imagine that *Viveka and Buddhi* in man are *sui generis*. But the light of wisdom is derived from the *Buddhi*. The illumination of the *Buddhi* is due to the *Atma* (the Indwelling Spirit). Human beings in their ignorance consider only the illumination emanating from wisdom and intelligence, forgetting the basic source of their effulgence, the *Atma*; as a consequence they forfeit their essential human quality. That *Atma* is the foundation. It is *Brahmam*. It is *Paratatwa* (Supreme Cosmic Principle). It is the *Paramatma* (Omni-Self). It is the *Avataric* principle.

The Divine appeared in human form

The common people can derive no benefit if the Formless Absolute remains in Kailasa or Vaikunta. It is not possible to worship the Formless Absolute. Hence, *the Rama-Avatar* appeared in human form to enable humanity to experience the Formless in a form which is accessible to them and helpful to them. An *Avatar* assumes the form that is beneficial to and within the reach of human beings. Men cannot comprehend the Formless and the Attributeless Absolute. Unfortunately, even when the Formless Absolute assumes a form, there are persons, who impelled by their own attitudes, attribute their own human foibles to the *Avatar*. "When he has the same form as ours, the same physical features, and eats, talks and moves about like any of us, what is the difference between the *Avatar* and ourselves?" they ask. Because of this narrow-minded approach, these persons are distancing themselves from the Divine.

An effort must be made to understand the nature of divinity. "*Daivam maanusharoopena*," declares the scripture (God in human form). It is only when God comes in human form can human beings have the full opportunity to experience and enjoy the Divine. When human life is sublimated, it gets divinised. Life X Infinity is God. *Virata Swaroopa* (the Cosmic Form) is: Body X Infinity. Mind X Infinity is *Hiranyagarbha* (the Cosmic Consciousness). God, *Virata Swaroopa* and *Hiranyagarbha* are not distinct entities located in specific places. They are immanent in man. All religions have come into existence to make man realise the source from which he has come and to which he should return.

Aim of religion is to unite man with God

By all kinds of misinterpretations and wrong meanings, the great religion of the *Bharatiyas* has been rendered meaningless and valueless by sectarians and perverse exponents. The basic meaning and purpose of religion is to lead man to his source. Students should grasp the root meaning of the word Religion. It consists of two parts' *'Re,'* meaning 'again,' and *'ligio'* meaning 'come together' or 'unite.' That is to say, "Reuniting with God" is Religion. People consider religion as a bundle of doctrines and of rigorous do's and don'ts prescribed for people. This is

totally wrong. The sacred aim of Religion is to remind man of his divine origin and help to lead him back to God.

This profound truth is contained in the *Upanishadic* dictum: "*Tat Twam Asi*" (That Thou Art). "Uniting That with This" is the meaning of this declaration. "*Prajnanam Brahma*" (*Brahmam* is Cosmic Knowledge) is another declaration which is designed to remind man of his divine essence and enable him to merge in the Divine. "*Ayam Atma Brahma*" (This *Atma* is *Brahmam*) is another declaration expounding the same basic purpose of Religion, namely, to make the individual realise his oneness with the Supreme. The dictum "*Aham Brahmaasmi*" (*I am Brahmam*, the absolute), is the final declaration by the Self-realised person, that in reality, there is no difference between him and the Absolute.

The essence of the religion of *Bharatiyas* as proclaimed in the *Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana Vedas*, is the attainment of the unity of the individual with the Divine by the recognition of his inherent divinity. The *Avatars* come to teach humanity this principle of oneness so that they may get rid of the idea of diversity and manifest their inherent divinity, realizing their basic spiritual nature.

Avatars come to teach principle of oneness

The descent of the *Avatar* means the Divine coming down to the level of the human. No blemish attaches to the Divine as a result of this descent. There is no diminution in His puissance. Here is the example of a child playing on the ground. If the mother feels it is beneath her dignity to bend and calls upon the child to leap into her arms, the child cannot do so. But out of her love for the child, the mother herself stoops and picks up the baby. By bending down to take the child, does the mother bow to the child? Likewise, the *Avatar* descends to the level of the human to bless and rescue those who cannot rise to the level of the Divine. The ignorant assumes that because the Divine has descended with a human form God has lowered Himself to the human level. This is a case of bending and not kneeling down. It is an act of benediction and not of submission.

The manifestation of Divine Powers

The attributes and powers of the Divine remain unaltered in their pristine amplitude. The Divine manifests His powers according to the needs, the circumstances and the conditions prevailing at a particular time or place. Take, for example, the case of a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He has the power to inflict the supreme penalty on any number of persons, according to the law. He has also the power to protect the rights of citizens. He has both the power to protect and to punish. These powers can be exercised only when he sits in his judicial chair. The same Chief Justice, when he is at home, confers joy on his grandson by letting him ride on his back! By allowing this grandchild to play in this manner, does he forfeit his powers as a Chief Justice? Similarly, the *Avatar* does not forgo any of His supreme powers merely because He lives and moves among human beings as a man. Narrow-minded persons view these things differently.

This phenomenon could be noticed in several instances in the case of the *Rama-Avatar*. In the *Ramayana*, Rama is depicted as one who, like other ordinary human beings, experienced the pangs of separation from Sita. For what reason did Rama exhibit such feelings? Rama behaved in this manner to serve as an example to the common people how individuals should behave in similar circumstances.

The *Ramayana* is a work which holds out ideals for every home and every family. What should be the relations between a father and a son, how should a husband and wife conduct themselves,

how should brothers behave towards each other, what should be the relations between the rulers and the citizens, how should sisters-in-law conduct themselves--all these are exemplified in the story of the *Rama-Avatar*.

Sri Rama's example of an ideal life

Rama was prepared to honour a boon given by his father to his step-mother in fulfilment of an old promise. He renounced the throne at the moment of coronation and elected to go to the forest as an exile. Eminently qualified as he was to become the ruler, nevertheless he chose to go to the forest to honour his father's plighted word. This is a glorious example of an ideal life.

Today people would set at naught promises given by the father and place their self-interest in the forefront. Rama demonstrated to the world that men born in the *Ikshvaku* dynasty were unflinching in honouring the pledges of the fathers. Rama was prepared to face any ordeals and troubles in upholding this sacred principle. Rama was ever active in fulfilling the wishes and responding to the opinions of the people. Highly sensitive even to the remarks of a petty washerman, Rama sent away Sita to the forest out of a feeling that the washer-man's comment might be an indication of the unspoken feelings of many others among his subjects.

Rama stands out as an ideal ruler intensely responsive to the wishes of the people. *Today persons who are incompetent and unworthy are aspiring for positions of power. This is utterly wrong. This is the reason for the nation finding itself in the doldrums today. The disastrous decline of Bharat is entirely due to the incompetence of those in power. Men of character, who are totally free from self-interest should occupy the seats of power.* Rama demonstrated the ideal relations that should exist between the ruler and the ruled.

Lakshmana's devotion to his brother

Turning to the harmonious relations that existed between the brothers' Complying with his step-mother's words, Rama might don the bark of trees, wear the mantle of an ascetic and leave for the forest. There was no such obligation on Lakshmana's part. But as a younger brother he felt that it was not proper for him to stay and enjoy life in Ayodhya when his brother was leaving for the forest. He was ready to renounce his mother and wife and accompany Rama, whom he considered as his life-breath.

Thus he followed Rama as an ascetic, treating Ayodhya without Rama as a jungle and a forest with Rama as Ayodhya. Indefatigably he served Rama and Sita night and day. The behaviour of brothers today in similar situations would be entirely different. They are likely to indulge in litigation over the sharing of property and lose them all in carrying the dispute upto the Supreme Court. They will not agree to enjoy the property in common and will ruin themselves through litigation. To such brothers, Rama should serve as an example.

How Sita convinced Rama

Rama also exemplified the ideal relationship between husband and wife in a family When Rama decided to leave for the forest, Sita wanted to accompany him to serve him. Rama tried in many ways to dissuade her, telling her about the dangers in living in the forest, infested by wild animals and demons on the prowl. Sita replied: "When I am with the lion among men, what can any animal do to me?" Rama argued with her that the *Rakshasas* were capable of assuming any form and that it would be difficult to safeguard her. Sita retorted: "Can't you, who are the protector of the fourteen worlds, protect a lone Sita!" By these arguments, Sita tried to make Rama agree to her going with him.

Rama then employed a different argument. He told her that she should stay behind to render service to his aged parents. Earlier Sita had listened to the advice Rama had given to his mother Kausalya when she wanted to go with Rama to the forest. Rama had told her about her duties towards her husband and said that in no circumstance should she leave him and follow Rama. He had told Kausalya: "For a wife the husband is the Lord. The son cannot take the husband's place. The husband is primary. Your first duty is to serve my father and not come with me." Sita reminded Rama of the advice he had given to his mother and told him that he could not lay down one rule for his mother and another for herself with regard to a wife's duties towards her husband. She urged Rama to act up to his own words and take her with him. "You are going to the forest to honour your father's words. I am following you to act up to my husband's words," she said. In this manner the Ramayana demonstrates the proper relationship between husband and wife and their respective duties.

Example of Bharata to stand by traditions

If you consider the conduct of Bharata, you find that even though the kingdom was offered to him by his father and mother, he did not desire to enjoy what belonged by right to the eldest son, Rama. He considered it immoral and opposed to the traditions of the *Ikshvaku* family to accept the kingdom in such circumstances and firmly renounced it.

When Dasaratha decided to take Kaikeyi as his third wife, with the consent of Kausalya and Sumitra, so that he could have a son to succeed to the throne, Kaikeyi's father imposed a condition that he would offer his daughter in marriage only if the son born to her would be made king, without regard to the claims of the son that might be born to the eldest queen. Dasaratha was not willing to accept this condition, but Kausalya and Sumitra persuaded him to accept it, saying that no one born in the *Ikshvaku* line would go against *Dharma*. This was amply borne out by the conduct of Bharata.

Bharata not only refused to ascend the throne, but he took a vow to stay out of the capital till Rama returned to the kingdom. He declared he was not prepared to sully the good name of his great ancestors for the sake of the throne. "When Rama has gone to the forest to honour his father's command, I shall also go to the forest," said Bharata. Ultimately, he secured the sandals of Rama, installed them on the throne and himself led the life of an ascetic in Nandigram, a village outside the capital. Is it conceivable that anyone would give up a great good fortune that came his way in the manner Bharata did? Will anyone spurn the windfall that comes to him? But, Bharata did not regard the kingdom as a blessing. He felt that it would be infamous to succeed to the throne.

Lessons that the Ramayana teach

The Ramayana, thus, must be looked upon as a great work from which one can learn how each member in a family should conduct himself or herself righteously and lead an ideal life.

Take, for instance, the example of sisters-in-law. In families today, there is no harmony between the wives of brothers. But, look at how Lakshmana's wife, Urmila, behaved. She told Lakshmana that he was fortunate to have the opportunity to serve Rama, which had been denied to her. She said: "I would also like to come with you. But if I come, my presence will detract your single-minded service to Rama and Sita. I shall stay back, while you dedicate yourself whole-heartedly to their service." Urmila thus made a greater sacrifice than even Sita.

Lakshmana's mother, Sumitra, when her son fell at her feet and sought her blessings before leaving for the forest with Rama and Sita, rejoiced in giving him her blessings. She told him: "The forest where Rama is will be Ayodhya for you." Will any mother send her son to the forest in this manner? These examples show how pure-hearted were the members of Sri Rama's family.

How did Kausalya bless Rama when he prostrated before her prior to leaving for the forest? She declared: "May that *Dharma* for protecting which you are going to the forest protect you always. May you have for your protection all the *raksha* (amulets) which Gouri and other great mothers gave to their sons when they went out to fight the forces of evil!" Thus Rama received the blessings of his mother, step-mother and all others when he set out for the forest to honour his father's word.

Unity in family leads to nation's prosperity

The foremost lesson to be learnt from the Rama-story is how to foster unity and harmony in a family. When each family is united, the village enjoys unity. When the villages are united, the nation basks in prosperity. "Be ready to sacrifice the son for the sake of the village and the village for the sake of the nation." This was the dictum taught by Vidura in the Mahabharata.

The reign, of Rama was marked by concern for justice and morality. Today the people are bedevilled by distrust and suspicion at every step. "Why should God do like this?" Such questions are asked out of narrow-minded doubts. There will be no room for such doubts if the infinite nature of the Divine is properly understood. The petty-minded folk who cannot grasp the omniscience of the Divine raise such questions. Their entire life is wasted in this manner. Hence, people should get rid of such pettiness.

God can protect as well as punish. He may impose trials or confer joy. Krishna destroyed Dantavakra and Sisupala. He protected the Pandavas all through. God (in His earlier *Avatars*) destroyed Hiranyaaksha and Hiranyakasipu and protected Prahlada. In the *Rama-Avatar*, He punished Ravana and Kumbhakarna and crowned Vibhishana as King. As Krishna, He teased the *Gopikas* and made them weep. He gave delight to His *gopala* companions. All these are different aspects of the Lord's *leelas* (sport). "Why should He do this and why should He behave differently?" Such questions are irrelevant in the context of the Lord's utterly selfless actions. God's deeds are free from blemish. There is not an iota of selfishness in the Lord.

Preceptor and the faithful disciple

There is a story which points out the difference between a genuine disciple and others who behave in one way when they are with the preceptor and differently when they are away from him. The preceptor, when he was nearing his end, sent word to all his old disciples to come to the *ashram* for a last meeting with them before he passed away. All the disciples had arrived except one who had to come from a long distance. While he was coming, he had to cross a river in spate before reaching the *guru's* village. Despite warnings from the villagers not to get into the swollen river, he walked on, in his anxiety to reach the *guru*, reciting the *mantra* the *guru* had taught him.

Miraculously the river was only knee-deep while he was crossing it. Everybody was struck by the miracle. On reaching the *ashram*, the other disciples felt that *the guru* had imparted a different *mantra* to this disciple which had enabled him to wade through the swollen river with ease. They even accused the *guru* of partiality. The *guru* told them that the *mantra* imparted to all of them was one and the same, but there was a difference in the spirit in which it was uttered by the disciples and that made all the difference in its protective efficacy. The disciple who had

crossed the river was saved by his faith in the *guru*. There was no difference in the message imparted to the disciples.

Strengthen your faith to acquire bliss

If the name of the Lord is not recited in the proper spirit, of what use is all the *sadhana*? Faith is the primary requisite. Chanting the name endlessly without faith is utterly useless. Where there is faith, there is Love. Where there is Love, there is Peace. Where there is Peace, there is Truth. Where there is Truth, there is Bliss. Where there is Bliss, there is God. If faith is lacking how can Bliss be experienced?

Therefore, strengthen your faith. Alas! this is the *Kali* age. People are blind, lacking the eyes of faith. A rich man will trust a gurdhara watchman for the safety of his home. One will trust a driver for the safe driving of his car. A man will trust a dhobi for washing valuable clothes. One submits his head for tonsure to a barber wielding a sharp razor.

But, unfortunately, in spite of all their studies, educated persons do not have faith in God. People are prepared to place their trust in an array of inferior beings, but have no faith in the Supreme. That accounts for all their troubles.

Above all, develop faith in the ideals of Rama. Faith in these ideals has been responsible for their survival after aeons. What you must aspire after is a life governed by ideals. Everyone must aim at becoming an ideal person. Ideals, not ostentation, should be the watchword.

The Rama-Era will come into existence from the moment we give up ostentation, develop faith in the Self, and lead a godly life. Then everyone will be a lover of Rama. Rama does not mean the son of Dasaratha. The *Atma* is Rama and hence Rama is referred to as *Atma-Rama*.

Discourse on Sri Rama Navami Day in the Prashanthi Mandir, on 24-3-1991.

Celestial spheres are revolving and disintegrating; time is fleeting; age follows age; era succeeds era; bodies that have taken birth, grow and end; but, the urge to sanctify life with good works and good thoughts is nowhere evident; the fragrance of sincere sadhana is not traceable anywhere. Through the process of 'giving up' great things can be achieved. Cultivate detachment, and the Lord will attach Himself to you. The past is beyond recovery; those days are gone. But, tomorrow is coming towards you. Resolve to sanctify it with Love, Service and Sadhana.