

1. Opening Address

Pavitratma Swarupas:

One may have great physical strength. One may also be a great man by his achievements. One may possess many such qualities, but if unfortunately one gets into difficulties, his weaknesses will show up and he will not be able to achieve anything. There are several instances in the epic of *Ramayana* to illustrate such a situation. Ramachandra gets into many difficulties, and at such times, it appears that everything is against him. We should say that unlike many ordinary people, even in those situations, he faced all of them with great courage, and demonstrated by his example to humanity at large how such situations are to be met in our daily life.

Although by *sadhana*, one can get the grace of Lord Rama, yet, if one does not understand and recognise the human qualities in Him, one cannot comprehend the divinity in Him either. It is very necessary, at the present time, to look upon Rama as an ideal human being who is an example for all people rather than simply believe Him to be an incarnation of God. When we cannot understand Rama as an ideal example of a human being, how are we going to understand Him as God?

In every family, the kind of relationship that should exist between mother and son, between husband and wife, between brother and brother, has been amply demonstrated by Ramachandra during His life. The entire story of Rama is such that all of it can be related to the daily experience in the life of all individuals. To forget this essential aspect of the sacred

story, and to attach more importance to the trivial matters in that story, is not something which is correct.

When we meet with difficulties and when we come across sorrow, we should take courage and we should use whatever strength we have, in a good and appropriate manner, and face the situation bravely. Man's life consists of ups and downs, man's body also consists of ups and downs. This is only natural. It is a characteristic feature of things in nature that they go on changing continually. If there is no change, human nature itself has no value. If there are no difficulties in one's life, life itself will not work. If there is no sorrow, if one does not meet with sorrow, there is no value for one's life. If there is no death at all, even a mother cannot show affection and love to her child.

Sorrow, pain, difficulties and situations which could bring losses, come to us in many different ways and on different occasions in our lives. In such situations, we should not sink. In situations which give pleasure, we should not be elated. We should have an equal mind and face all situations with equanimity. We must take these things with an unwavering mind and attain bliss. In every life, good and bad are always present together. When we look at the good, the bad things, that always exist alongside, appear to defeat the good. A bad man, when he looks at the prosperity of others, gets jealous. When a bad person looks at the happiness of other people, he always feels sorry. These are qualities which show up naturally in those circumstances.

We know that in the same tank full of water, we can have lotus flowers and we can also have animals like fish and frogs. Lotus attracts the vision of man and pleases him. On the other hand, animals in water do not please us but give us

sorrow. The place where both are born is one and the same thing, and that is water.

Amritha comes out of water. *Amritha* is born out of water. So also, poison is born out of water. Here we see that the birth place of *Amritha* as well as poison is one and the same. It is in this context that it has been said that for both the bondage and for the liberation of man, his mind alone is responsible. It becomes necessary that we should recognise the nature of the mind, if we wish to understand this dual part played by our mind.

In the story of Rama, we come across many situations where He starts as an ideal human being and as the situation develops, He shows us His divinity. But many *rishis* took care to see that the human quality of Rama is made clear to the world, and that the divinity of Rama is hidden under the facade of this outward human form. We should note that if Rama was recognised as divinity, as God, in the very first instance, then the killing of Ravana would not have taken place and the rest of the story would not have followed.

This is the reason why, when Vishwamithra took Rama and Lakshmana for help, he argued with Dasaratha that the abundant strength possessed by Rama and Lakshmana are known only to a few people. He said that the infinite glory of Rama and the great power He had can be understood only by great men and not by ordinary individuals.

Rama is all-knowing, all-powerful and omni-present. For ordinary people, it is difficult to understand this infinite nature of divinity. To recognise and understand *Brahman*, we should ourselves be able to experience *Brahman*. One who comprehends *Brahman* becomes identical with *Brahman*.

If we want to understand this aspect of the *Ramayana*, we should ourselves experience what is contained in the *Ramayana* and the story of Rama. In this world, there are many people who claim to be devotees of Rama. Is it possible to decide and to proclaim that they are all devotees of Rama? Some of these people are devotees of *Raama* (pleasure), some of them are devotees of Rama and some of them are devotees of *Raama*. There are devotees and devotees. In this manner, people only claim and describe themselves as devotees of Rama; but in truth, to justify the claim, they do not promote and develop that connection and that closeness with the aspect of Rama.

Without any reason, we create havoc for our-selves during our life. But during our lifetime, the mansion of hope that we create for ourselves is going to break and fall down sooner or later. Life is like a flower which opens out in fair weather and is bound to fall when there is a storm. During our life, in order that we can face such storms and survive them, we should develop courage and mental strength. All the great people and great saints, who understood Rama's divine aspect, took care to hide it from the general public. Vishwamithra and Vasishta were not ordinary people. They were great saints. They were people with great courage and strength. In fact, they had acquired proficiency in all the different aspects of learning and wisdom. It is not as if Vishwamithra was unable to protect his own *yagna*. He told Dasaratha, "It is not as if I do not have the strength to protect my *yagna*, but I have come to you with the specific purpose of letting the world know the great Rama, your son, and of spreading His reputation and your reputation." Vishwamithra is not taking Rama just for the protection of his *yagna*. We should see him only as an instrument for a higher purpose. He has no doubt prepared the ground for the

destruction of the various demons, but he has also prepared the ground for the marriage of Rama and Sita. Having done all that, at a crucial time, Vishwamithra goes out of the scene. Not only this, the situation then was such that we cannot easily determine whether Rama is truly divine or is an ordinary human being with great qualities.

Great people are often such that their attention to every one is the same. The same attitude is displayed by them to good as well as bad. They are truly equal-minded. If we take a good flower which gives fragrance, its fragrance is not going to change whether we pick it up with the left hand and put it in the right hand, or pick it up with the right hand and put it in the left hand. It does not matter in which hand the flower is put; it gives the fragrance. The hand may change but the fragrance does not change.

In the same manner, good and bad give a lot of trouble to the mind of an ordinary human being and make his mind suffer. But to great people and great saints, good and bad are exactly the same. In that context Rama is an *Avathar*, for He could look at the good and bad with complete equal-mindedness. In the *Ramayana*, there are not only instances where Rama has displayed this quality of equal-mindedness but also instances where he displayed the absence of such a quality and thus appeared like a weak, ordinary human being. But how long could such a facade last? Only so long as he wanted to demonstrate to ordinary beings the weakness which is characteristic of such human beings. In such situations, he could give courage and strength to others. All the other great men are also like that. Just for the sake of man, for the sake of *dharma*, for the sake of setting an example, great god-like saints do things as if they were ordinary human beings to illustrate how people should behave in such trying situations.

It is only when God comes amidst men as an *Avathar*, that He will be close to man, and will be able to set an example to human beings. Only then, he will be able to correct the ways of human beings. The real connection that should exist between man and man is always demonstrated by an *Avathar*. Because God comes as an *Avathar* in human form, man is able to see and experience some ideal examples, in real-life situations. It is natural in that context that God takes the human form in Rama and creates situations where man learns the virtue of adherence to *dharma*.

Valmiki, the great poet, was essentially projecting Rama as an ideal example to human beings. However, in many cases, he was also showing the sacredness and divinity that is contained in Rama. In the same manner, the poet Tulsidas wrote the beautiful story of *Ramayana* for the sake of propagating the great name of Rama to the world, as an example of an ideal human being. In the lives of these poets, there were several incidents in which the strength of the name of Rama is seen. On one occasion, gods began to quarrel amongst themselves as to who among them was greater than others. In order to get a decision, they all approached Brahma.

It was decided that whoever goes round the world first will be adjudged as the greatest amongst them. As soon as they heard the decision, each one took his own chariot, and started going round the world. Vigneswara (Ganesh) by tradition has a mouse as his chariot, and because of this small vehicle, he was lingering behind and making very slow progress. At this stage, Narada appeared and asked him how long he would take at that slow pace to go round the earth. Narada suggested that Vigneswara (Ganesh) should write the word Rama and just go round that word Rama and quickly go to Brahma.

Vigneswara wrote the name Rama, went round the same and immediately went back to Brahma. Brahma decided that he was the best form of god. It is our tradition that whenever good work is undertaken, we first worship Vigneswara. This is the reason why Vigneswara is also called Gananatha; the superior one amongst all the *ganas*. It is believed that he will remove all obstacles in the work that we undertake. This has now become a part of our culture.

Tulsidas demonstrated the fact that wherever you go, whatever you feel, the name of Rama is contained therein. Thus, Tulsidas reached the end of his life by proclaiming the greatness of the name of Rama. In the *Ramayana*, there are several instances which enable you to derive the strength that is necessary for facing various situations that come up in one's life. Not only in worldly matters and in spiritual matters, but in daily life, every human being can perceive the grace of this name Rama.

There are three important reasons for the birth of a human being. These three reasons are sin, agitation and ignorance. Because of the sin that we commit we get a rebirth as punishment. Because of lack of peace in an agitated mind, we get rebirth. Because of ignorance and lack of knowledge, we get rebirth. If at one stroke, we want to get rid of sin, agitation in our mind and ignorance, the only way is to constantly think of the name of Rama.

Students:

In the word Rama, there are three letters. They are 'Ra,' 'aa' and 'ma.' These three components can be described as *Amritha Beeja* and *Agni Beeja*. In these three letters are also contained the *Surya* and *Chandra*, the sun and the moon. The

letter 'Ra' is the letter which can be connected with the sun. The letter 'aa' can be connected with the moon and 'ma' with fire. The letter 'Ra' which we have connected with the sun, has got the potency by which to shed light and remove all ignorance. 'Aa' which has been connected with the moon, removes your agitation and gives peace. 'ma' which is connected with fire, burns out all your sins. This one name Rama will thus remove, in one stroke, all your sins, the agitations in your mind and your ignorance.

Valmiki established that there is nothing greater than this one single name, Rama. He has also given us a way by which ordinary people can understand and get the benefit out of it. The way by which we utter the word Rama is such that first we open the mouth; and out of the mouth we then send out all that is within us, which is sin; and then we close the mouth to say Rama. Nothing thereafter enters that way into your body.

Truly, all are not able to recognise the great strength that is contained in this name Rama. Some-times, we wonder whether the utterance of this one simple name will remove all our sins and all our troubles. This inability comes from the weakness in us and not because of the weakness in the name of Rama. The first thing which one has to do is to strengthen one's own faith.

Today, a doubt about the existence of God is prevalent, to a large extent, in the world. We are now conducting a seminar on the *Ramayana*. There are many people who ask why we need conduct any seminars on the *Ramayana* in this modern age. There are people who ask why we are concerned with the *Ramayana* at all. *Ramayana* has no antiquity or modernity. They seem to be arguing about the compatibility of

ancient traditions, and modernity and the usefulness of thoughts about God and divinity. Why do they not argue whether eating food, sleeping, etc., are modern ideas or old ideas? Why do they argue only about matters relating to God and divinity?

We are eating food today which we have been doing all these days. We are looking at faces today which we have been looking at all these days. Are we telling ourselves, this is the face we have seen yesterday and the day before yesterday? Why do we see the same face again and again? Do we ask such a question? This is the same stomach which we have fed with food yesterday and the day before yesterday. Do we ask ourselves why we have to feed the same stomach once again today? In this context, there is no difficulty in understanding why we have to think of our traditions and customs and pray to God everyday.

The sacred stories from our ancient lore are the only stories which are going to save us either today or tomorrow. Times may change. New epochs may come. The world may change, but the aspect of divinity is one and the same and is unchanging. “*Ekam Eva Adwiteeyam.*” Truth is only one and there is no second parallel. At the present time, we are only seeking things which keep on changing. Why do we not seek things which are permanent and unchanging?

Students:

You are the future citizens of this country. I am hoping that you will respect ancient culture, that you will study the life-stories of divine personalities who had come from time to time to re-establish *dharma* in this ancient land. When we talk

of *Rama Rajya*, it does not mean going back to old times. It means that we are wanting our present rulers to rule the country according to *dharma*. As in the saying “*Yatha Raja, Tatha Praja*”—“people will be like the king and the king has to be like the people.” Just as the ruler protects the people, looks after them, sees to their welfare; so also the people should take care of the ruler, make him take the right path, look after him and his spiritual *dharma*. The people are like the body with different organs making up the body. The close connection between the people and the ruler should be one like that between the body and heart. Without the body, we cannot have heart. Without a heart, the body cannot survive. The connection between the ruled and the ruler should be such that they are inseparable from each other. That will be called the *Rama Rajya*.

People in those days were pure and sacred. This is the reason why they showed great reverence to Sita. A wrong was never condoned. Untruth was never accepted. This shows the sacred strength that was present in the people. That is why, the beginning of the destruction of the *Rakshasas* was established in those times.

Several such great and sacred situations are present in the story of the *Ramayana*. We should make an effort to understand the qualities of each individual character in the epic and try to get the lessons that *Ramayana* gives us. Every individual and every character that is depicted in the story of the *Ramayana* has stood forth as an example of an ideal person to all humanity.

Even in Ravana, who is generally taken to be a bad person, Valmiki has shown certain good qualities. In some places good qualities of Vali also were described by Valmiki.

As has been stated earlier, great saints are equal-minded. Because of the saintly character of Valmiki, he showed the weaknesses in Rama and he showed the good qualities in Ravana. He was a selfless person. He was called *Maharishi*, because he could see the past, present and future. It is only a great saint or a *maharishi* that is entitled to write poetry. Poets like Valmiki and Vyasa were *maharishis*. Because of this, whatever they had written has come to be regarded as permanent truth and it remained so for all time.

The poetry of today has in it lots of selfishness. It is used for the purpose of promoting the selfish interests of the poet. In the ancient days, there were several great saints who had looked upon poetry as an instrument for achieving the prosperity of our country and the good of our people. In the following few days, during which there will be lectures on the *Ramayana*, I am hoping that our students will take some of the great examples from that sacred story and get them deeply imprinted in their minds and become ideals to others.