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Rama – The Ideal Hero

*Sadayam hridayam Yasyabhashitam
Sathyabhushitam*

Kayah parahithe Yasya kalautasya karothikim

*The one whose heart is laden with compassion,
The one whose words are marked by truth,
The one whose time is spent in performing beneficial
deeds for the welfare of others,
Such ones are not affected by influence of
the age of Kali.*

(Sanskrit Verse)

Do not Delay Good Deeds

Embodiments of Love!

REALISING that Ravana would pass away in a few minutes, many sages, scholars and noble men came to Ravana and asked him, “O Ravana! You performed many good deeds as well

as evil deeds. What is it the most memorable thing that you have discovered in your life?" To this Ravana replied, "Sirs! Do not delay the noble acts you want to perform at any time. Put into action whatever noble thoughts and feelings that arise in your heart instantaneously. Procrastination is the thief of time. It is dangerous to delay. At one time, I thought of connecting the earth and heaven with a ladder. I wished to turn the saline water surrounding Lanka into sweet water. I wished to bring comfort and solace to the residents of Hell. Though I decided to do these things, I delayed acting. Thereafter, I could never succeed in doing them. Translate into action whatever good resolve arises in your minds. We waste our time in postponing the good deeds. We should be ever ready to put into action all the good thoughts that arise in the mind." This is the noble advice that Ravana gave to the people who came to him at the fag end of his life. Since he delayed the performance of good deeds, it brought disaster to him.

The Story of Kabandha

While Rama and Lakshmana were moving in the forest in search of Sita, they accosted a strange person who had his face in his stomach. Seeing his form, they concluded that this person was a demon. Rama and Lakshmana went to the demon and asked him, "Who are you? You don't have any head. How do you live? How is it that you don't have a neck as other people

have?" The strange creature answered, "O sir! My name is Kabandha. I have hands that can extend to ten miles. They can grasp any prey that I desire to eat. I fill my stomach without moving much. Who are you? Why have you entered this dense and terrible forest? You seem to be tender beings. You look like princes. To which kingdom do you belong?" Rama who always spoke the truth replied, "We have come here in obedience to the command of our father. I suffer from the pangs of separation from my wife. Someone has kidnapped her. Can you tell us where she is and what happened to her?" Then Kabandha told Rama, "O sir! First burn me to ashes. I will then give you all the information you need." They killed him and burned his body. A handsome being arose out of the ashes and told them, "I was forced to assume this ugly form due to the curses of sages. I was told that whoever burnt me to ashes was verily God himself. O Rama! Your Sita is in Lanka. She is a lady of great chastity. Whoever dares touch her will be burnt to ashes. Very soon you will see Sita in Lanka and will go back to Ayodhya. My words never fail. You may seek the help of Sugriva. May you enjoy comfort and solace soon." After saying these words, he vanished.

Alliance with Sugriva

Rama befriended Sugriva, Hanuman, and other Vanara warriors. Sugriva rendered all help required to

search for Sita. He rallied his forces and reached the shores of the sea. They then encountered the problem as to who would cross the sea and go to Lanka. The veterans said that they did not have enough strength to cross over. No one came forward to cross the ocean. Hanuman volunteered to do so and accomplish Rama's mission. He was ever ready to do any work for the Lord.

In the meanwhile, let us find out about Vali and Sugriva. Vali was a very strong and powerful Vanara king; but he lacked virtue and indulged in evil deeds. Once, Vali fought against a powerful demon Dundubhi. He killed him in the fight and hurled his dead body. The body fell on the Rishyamuka Mountain where the sage Matanga was doing penance. The blood dripping from the body of the demon fell on sage Matanga and disturbed him. Enraged, he cursed that whoever killed Dundubhi would have his head broken into a thousand pieces if ever he set foot on that mountain. Vali picked up a quarrel with Sugriva, his own brother, and banished him from the kingdom. Sugriva started living on the Rishyamuka Mountain for he felt assured that Vali would not be able to touch him if he went to Rishyamuka due to sage Matanga's curse. Hence, Sugriva, accompanied by Hanuman and other well-wishers, settled on the Rishyamuka Mountain. He was contemplating on the ways and means of defeating Vali.

One day Sugriva and Hanuman noticed two handsome persons walking at a distance in the forest. He wondered as to who they were. Sugriva thought that they might have come for hunting. He sent Hanuman to find out about the two brothers. Hanuman disguised himself like a Brahmin and met Rama and Lakshmana. Hanuman's speech was cultured and gentle. He introduced himself as a Minister of Sugriva and volunteered to carry them on his shoulders and take them to Sugriva. There ensued a beautiful conversation between Rama and Hanuman in Sanskrit. Rama understood from the conversation that Vali was unjust towards Sugriva. Vali had appropriated the kingdom from Sugriva and had driven him out of Kishkinda. He accused Sugriva of criminal conduct, of which Sugriva was not guilty. In his exile, Sugriva was in need of a friend who was stronger than Vali. He wanted to test whether Rama was stronger than Vali. He wanted to make an alliance with Rama only if he proved himself to be stronger than Vali. Sugriva said to Rama, "Rama, my brother is of great power and strength. I want to find out whether you are stronger than my brother." When Rama nodded his assent, he further said to him, "Once my brother shot an arrow through the Sal trees. It pierced five sal trees in a row and emerged out of them. It is very difficult to charge an arrow through a sal tree because it is a very hard wood. Shoot an arrow and let it pierce through at least four trees." Rama smiled and

discharged the arrow. The arrow pierced seven trees. Sugriva was deeply impressed by the strength of Rama. He sought the help of Rama to defeat Vali. He also promised to help Rama in searching for Sita. Rama asked Sugriva to challenge his brother for a fight, but cautioned him that the fight should take place ten miles away from Kishkinda.

Rama told Sugriva to do this because the rules of exile prohibited him from entering into cities and villages. These rules compelled him to confine himself only to the forests. Hence, Rama wanted Sugriva to call Vali out of his kingdom so that he would be able to help Sugriva.

As advised by Rama, Sugriva roared and called Vali for a fight. Tara was the faithful wife of Vali. She wanted to restrain him from entering into a fight with Sugriva. She pleaded with him by holding his hands; “You should not go for a fight now. I have heard that Sugriva has befriended some powerful princes to help him. Do not be in haste, it is dangerous. The wise ones pause and ponder before undertaking any task. Haste can make waste. It can be dangerous too.” Tara spoke these words to Vali and took him back. She was a chaste wife who had many virtues. She was highly intelligent. However, when Sugriva persisted in his challenge the next day, Vali came out running to fight. Sugriva fought valiantly, but slowly Vali gained an upper

hand. He then beat Sugriva black and blue. Sugriva ran away from the battlefield. He felt disappointed that Rama had not come to his rescue. Sri Rama explained to him that he could not distinguish between the two brothers, as they looked very much alike. Hence Rama talked to him sweetly and consoled him. He also infused courage into him and assured him that he would kill Vali in the next fight. But he asked Sugriva that he should wear a garland around his neck so that He would be able to distinguish him from Vali. He asked Lakshmana to gather flowers in the forest and string them into a garland. Sugriva put on the garland and challenged Vali for a fight a second time.

The End of Vali

A fierce fight ensued between the two brothers. Rama, hiding behind a tree shot an arrow at Vali and brought him down. Though Vali fell down, there was still life left in him. Sri Rama went to Vali and said to him, “ You have sinned against your brother Sugriva, you have appropriated his wife. That is a sin because a younger brother’s wife is like one’s daughter. You appropriated his kingdom, banished him and appropriated his wife. You blamed him for crimes that he had not committed. I don’t like to speak untruth. I decided to kill you and hence I promised your brother that I would help him”. Then Vali said to him, “O Rama! You have come into the forest to keep up the word of

your father. But you have interfered between my brother and me. It is unjust on your part to kill a person, hiding behind a tree.” Then Sri Rama replied, “O Vali! I no longer live in Ayodhya. I am like a hunter moving in the forest and you belong to the race of animals. A hunter kills an animal hiding behind a tree. He never goes face to face with an animal to kill it. So I had to kill you hiding behind a tree”. Vali listened to him and further said, “Rama, you are of great power and strength, you could have come face to face to fight with me”. Sri Rama replied to him, “Vali, I know the boon that was bestowed on you. You have a boon that whoever fights you face to face, half of his strength will enter into you. I know this secret”. Vali entered into a long argument with Rama but Rama convinced him of his folly. Finally, Vali said, “O Rama! My life is ebbing away. Make a promise to me that you will make my son Angada, the crown-prince of Kishkinda”. Rama agreed to this and fulfilled the promise He gave to Vali. He crowned Sugriva as the king and Angada as the crown prince.

The Three Clashes

There are three clashes amongst brothers mentioned in the *Ramayana*. They are: (1) the clash between Vali and Sugriva (2) the clash between Ravana and Vibhishana and (3) the ‘clash’ between Rama and Bharatha. Vibhishana protested against the evil actions of his brother Ravana and incurred his anger. When

Ravana banished him from Lanka, Vibhishana sought refuge at the feet of Rama. He helped Rama against Ravana. Rama crowned him as the King of Lanka after killing Ravana. Sugriva sought the help of Rama to kill Vali; he then became the King of Kishkinda.

In the first two cases, one brother became the King by standing against his own other brother. But the ‘clash’ between Rama and Bharatha was of a different kind! Neither of the brothers wanted to become King of Ayodhya! Bharatha told Rama, “Rama, you are the eldest and you alone have the right to become the king.” But Rama protested, “ I will not step into Ayodhya as I want to respect the promise given to my father. You have to rule over the kingdom, as it is mother’s wish”. Thus Rama refused to yield to the request of Bharatha and rule over the Kingdom. Both brothers wanted to convince each other to rule over Ayodhya.

Rama adhered to truth at all times “*Sathyaanasthi Parodharmah*”. For him observance of truth was the highest Dharma. He clung to Dharma tenaciously and believed that truth would be triumphant at the end. Rama was steadfast in his observance of Sathya and Dharma.

Ramayana is HIS-Story, it is Unique

At last the battle between Rama and Ravana started. Rama had respect for Ravana though he was his enemy. He even praised the virtues of Ravana. He

knew that Ravana was under the curse imposed on Jaya and Vijaya.

Rama had to act by public opinion also. Since some people may raise doubts about the chastity of Sita, He had to make Sita undergo the ordeal by fire. Sita was unhurt by the fire god who said to Rama, “Sita is pure and faultless”.

Rama acted justly at every step. We have discussed about it earlier. *Ramayana* was a drama in which Sri Rama was the *sutradhari* (director). He was also a *patradhari* (actor). The people also had their parts to play in the drama. Rama performed his role excellently. *Ramayana* has survived the test of time. It has survived even though thousands of years have passed. Sri Rama was dear to everybody. He was an ideal that mankind needs to emulate.

The people of Mithila were fascinated by the appearance of Rama. They went into ecstasy watching the conduct and beauty of Rama. They thought that Rama and Sita made an excellent match. They sang songs inviting people to see the marriage of Rama and Sita. One such song goes like this:

*Welcome to all for Rama's wedding;
together we shall witness the joyous scene.
Many have gathered already,
decked up in all their finery.*

*With necklaces the ladies are adorned
of jewels pure and gleaming.
Rama shall tie the knot today
to beautiful Sita, oh what a fine match
they make.*

*Father Dasaratha has made ready
bounteous feasts.*

*All learned sages are assembled with
Vasishta presiding.*

*Oh, what a multitude has assembled
to rejoice, hearts with joy overflowing.*

Wedding of the holy pair

Rama and Sita, such a sight is indeed rare.

The sight shall confer great merit.

*Rama looks the cool full moon,
and Sita is a matching double.*

*The compassionate Rama who loves all
will confer his grace on us all.*

*Come quickly to see the holy wedding of
Rama and Sita.* (Telugu Song)

People sang songs like this, rejoicing at the marriage of Rama and Sita. The people of Ayodhya as well as Mithila were greatly delighted. They rejoiced immensely.

There are always some who lack faith and suffer thereby, but those who have faith in Rama and surrender to Him would never be put to any harm. *Ramayana* is the history of Rama. It is HIS-story. The *Ramayana* is full of noble characters. The four brothers and their wives hold out great ideals for mankind. The mothers, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi were also great women. They were embodiments of virtue and right conduct. People blame Kaikeyi saying that she was responsible for the suffering of Rama and Sita. She was actually a divine instrument in the mission of Rama. She was not the kind of lady who would be swayed away by the words of Manthara. She was instrumental in sending Rama to the forest so that He could punish the wicked and protect the good. There are great subtleties and secrets in the *Ramayana*. We will try to know them in the days to come.

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