

Chapter 33

Rama Avatar

Sage Suka resumed his narration. “First, I’ll describe the *saumya* quality of Sri Rama. By ‘*saumya*’, I mean his gentle, soft, and mild nature. He wore a leaf-green gown and had yellow cloth round his waist; he had on a golden diadem. But he walked with his eyes on the ground, as if he was ashamed to look up; the scene melted the hearts of all who saw. No one caught him in the act of casting his look on others. He had always the inner, not the outer, vision. Whenever anyone offered him anything, he didn’t accept it entirely but just broke off a bit or took out just a portion, in order to please them. Or, he just touched the offering with his fingers and gave it back to the person who brought it.

“With his father-in-law and mother-in-law, he moved not as a son-in-law but as a son. He seldom opened his mouth to speak to his sisters-in-law or their maids. He never lifted his face and cast his eyes on them.

“He revered all women older than himself as he revered his mother, Kausalya. He considered all who were younger than him as his younger sisters; those of his own age he treated as his step-mothers.

“He stuck severely to truth. He surmised that if his father broke his word, the dynasty would earn great dishonour, so, in order to uphold the plighted word of his father and to maintain his reputation, he exiled himself in the forest for fourteen years. His father didn’t ask him to do it; he learned of it from his stepmother, Kaika. He never argued or gave a reply; he gave up the kingdom and started straight to the jungle. He acted correctly according to the words spoken by him, and he suited the action strictly to the word.

Rama: embodiment of compassion and dharma

“Rama’s heart was filled with compassion; he gave refuge to anyone who took shelter in him and surrendered to him. When the monkey (*vanara*) hordes and ogres (*rakshasas*) were engaged in deadly combat during the battle in Lanka with the wicked Ravana, some ogres changed themselves into monkeys and penetrated behind the lines; they were promptly caught by the monkey scouts and brought before Rama, for drastic punishment. But Rama stopped the monkeys from torturing them. He told them that they had come to take refuge in him and declared that it was his vow to pardon all those who surrender to him, whatever their wrongs. He had thus given refuge to Ravana’s brother and treated him as his own brother Lakshmana. ‘If he says once, I am yours, he is mine forever,’ Rama announced.

“Rama lived and taught right action (*dharma*) through his every act. He established right action by practice and precept. He fostered and guarded good men (*sadhus*). He removed the sufferings of the godly; he drew them near himself, and their lives were fulfilled through his grace. He recognised no distinctions of high and low. He was a master of all the scriptures (*sastras*), and he knew the meaning of all the *Vedas*.

“Rama transformed the world into a realm of righteousness through his varied activities and example. During the great horse sacrifice that he performed, all the sages and scholars of ritual who had assembled honoured him as a great upholder of tradition and culture. His compassion and softness of heart are beyond description; no words can convey their depth and extent. He placed the dying eagle, Jatayu, a bird, which no one will ordinarily

honour, on his lap and wiped the dust that had enveloped it with his own flowing hair. And when Jatayu breathed its last, he performed the obsequies even as a son does when his father dies!

“His very appearance cast a charm on all who saw him. Love, beauty, and virtue emanated from him and spread to all around him. He treated the monkey tribals (*vanaras*) with as much affection as he had toward his brothers, Bharatha, Lakshmana, and Satrugna.

“Rama was the full manifestation of righteousness or right action (*dharma*). Sages extolled him, saying that *dharma* Itself had taken that human form! There is no need to dilate and speak of a thousand details. For all householders, Rama is the ideal. His advent was for restoring spiritual values and saving the world from moral disaster. How affectionately he moved with his brothers!

Rama’s sterling virtues and excellences

“Everything was ready for his coronation. At the last minute, when he was exiled to the forest, the populace of Ayodhya wailed in uncontrollable anguish, but Rama moved out of the city and kingdom with as much joy and equanimity as he had when he moved toward the throne for the coronation! What greater example is needed than this for the person whose consciousness is calm and beyond all agitations?

“Rama felt that the plighted word was worth the sacrifice of even life. He suffered grievous hardships with perfect equanimity in order to preserve his father’s plighted word. His sincere persistence in carrying out the promise made by his father is an inspiration and example to every son of man.

“Sita insisted on accompanying her husband to the forest, since the true wife can keep alive only in the company of the husband. She had never before exposed herself to sun and rain, but she spent her days in the terror-striking forest, since it was her duty, and in unsullied joy.

“‘He who is born with you is more worthy of affection than she who joined you later,’ that was Lakshmana’s view when he joined his brother, Rama, leaving his wife Urmila, back in Ayodhya.

“Bharatha could only obey Rama’s wish, and he came back to the capital with a heavy heart, since Rama declined to come and enthrone himself. Bharatha created an artificial ‘forest’ for himself—that is to say, out of inner compulsion, he led an ascetic’s life, since he felt he must live like his exiled brother.

“Dasaratha, the father, and Rama, the son were as different as earth and sky! To please his wife, to make her happy and contented, the father was prepared to bear the utmost agony, and he even sent his dear son as an exile to the jungle! The son sent his wife into the jungle as an exile, in order to respect the opinion of a commoner in his empire! Think of the different ways in which the two carried out their duties to the people over whom they ruled. Dasaratha was overwhelmed by the illusion that he was the physical body; Rama was moved by the realisation that he was the *Atma*.

“Ah! The virtues and excellences of Rama! I am incapable of describing them to you, O King! What greater task and mission in life can a man have than the contemplation of that Supreme Person? To save oneself from downfall, the only exercise needed is this: Listen to the glorious narrative of the lives of *Avatars*. When you do so, all sin is washed away,” said Suka.

Parikshith was delighted; his face flushed with excitement. “Master, while your account of the life and activities, the virtues and charm of Rama—the embodiment of *dharma*—is bestowing on me such great spiritual bliss

(ananda), I wonder how much greater would be my bliss if you described Krishna’s career! He is dark-blue beauty personified. How sweet must be the account of Krishna’s childhood pranks, His boyish adventures, His divine pranks (*leelas*), His Divine prattle! I pray to be kept immersed in the thought and contemplation of the might and majesty, the charm and beauty of Krishna Himself in my final days. I pray that I may thereby be saved from the cycle of birth and death.”