

## Chapter 4. An Ally Accepted

The brothers continued their journey through the forest, moving like twin lions, talking about the devotion and immeasurable dedication of the aged aspirant, Sabari. Traveling fast, they approached the Rishyamuka mountain range.

Amidst the hills of that range, Sugriva resided as a refugee, with his ministers and courtiers. He saw the two brothers nearing the hills and was astonished at their noble mien and mighty stride. They appeared to be divine. Sugriva was ever on the watch for strange faces nearing his habitat, for he was afraid that his elder brother, Vali, might torment him, even in his present home, by sending emissaries of death or distress. He had his eyes on all lines of access to his craggy residence. He was frightened at the gait and the glory of the two strangers and was anxious to know quickly who they were and what their mission was.

So, he called Hanuman. “Mighty hero!” he said. “Have you noticed those two effulgent personalities? Go and find out who they are, why they have come, and from where. Bring me all the news you can gather. If by some chance they happen to be sent by Vali, give me a signal. I will be watching for it —bend your head low over your chest. That will do. I will immediately arrange to give up this hill for another.” Sugriva gave him various directions and suggestions to meet all contingencies and sent him on his way.

### Hanuman meets the brothers

Hanuman hurried toward the strangers by leaps and bounds. Reaching their presence, he fell at their feet in great reverence. He said, “O shining ones! You arouse deep wonder and curiosity in me. Your charming forms attract my mind with a strange yearning. You look so tender and innocent. Indeed, you are not mere men. Of that, I am convinced. I guess you are the divine pair Nara-Narayana, come down on earth. Won’t you tell me why you are going through this jungle with no others to serve or guide you?” Hanuman questioned them in great humility and reverence.

Rama appreciated Hanuman’s devotion and humility. There was a smile on his face when he replied, “We are sons of Emperor Dasaratha, ruler of Ayodhya. This is my brother, Lakshmana. My name is Rama. We entered the forest. My wife also came with us into the forest, but while we were residing at Panchavati, she was carried away by some demon (*rakshasa*) when both of us were absent from our cottage. Now, we are looking for her, intent on knowing her whereabouts and on regaining her.”

Rama spoke to Hanuman without any inhibitions, giving the plain facts that could explain their presence near their range of hills. He said, “Well! I have given you my story. I would like to know about yours, too.”

Hanuman realised that the brothers were his own Overlords, and he fell at their feet once again to pay respectful homage. Rising up, and standing before them on one side, shedding streams of tears in sheer joy and devotion, he could not speak at all.

At last, gathering courage, and standing with folded arms, he said in a faltering voice: “Lord! I am a stupid ignoramus; that is why I questioned you so; pardon my audacity and foolishness, O monarch of monarchs! You are asking me to tell you my antecedents and present condition, as if you are ordinary mortals who can know them only when told. Is this just? I could not know who you were, bound as I am by the delusion that you yourselves

spread over us.

“Lord! You are mighty and unconquerable. How can the servant be on a par with the Lord and Master? All beings are overcome and deluded by your strategy and plan! I want to make a declaration, for which my Lord is witness. I know no activity other than adoring my Lord. When the servant is fostered and guarded by his Lord, why should he fear? The might of the Lord is the shield of the servant.” And Hanuman assumed his real form.

Rama was filled with delight at the sight of Hanuman. He embraced him, saying, “You are as dear to me as Lakshmana is.” He drew him to himself and fondled him, lovingly stroking his head and gently touching his forehead and face. He said, “Hanuman! I shower my love most on those who serve me and who deem that service as the highest means of liberation.”

Hanuman said, “Lord! Sugriva, the ruler of the monkey (*vanara*) hordes, has drawn the enmity of his elder brother, Vali, upon himself through various circumstances. He was driven out of the kingdom as an exile into this forest, where he has taken residence. He too is your servant. He deserves your affection and blessings. Confer grace on him and release him from the disgrace in which he is now immersed. He has the capacity and authority to send millions of monkeys all over the world to look for Sita. He is the monarch of monkeys. He can achieve victory in that undertaking.”

Hanuman detailed the manifold excellences and capabilities of Sugriva and persuaded Rama to seek his friendship. When Rama agreed, Hanuman offered to carry them on his shoulders, right to the top of the mountain range where Sugriva was.

### **The brothers meet Sugriva**

Sugriva was delighted at the sight of Rama and Lakshmana. He understood why Rama had come into the forest and to him. They sympathised with each other and appreciated each other’s distress. They felt bound by common bonds of comradeship. Sugriva fell at Rama and Lakshmana’s feet and offered reverential hospitality.

Rama assured Sugriva that he would destroy his fear and remove his distress, for he was the embodiment of compassion itself. And, Sugriva promised to sacrifice everything, even his own life, in the service of Rama. The vow of everlasting friendship was solemnised with ritual fire as witness. For fire is present as warmth and light in the heart of every living being; fire that is present in the inner consciousness can burn away any wavering or waywardness that might affect the vow.

In fact, fire (*agni*), the subtle divine effulgence and illumination (that is, the core of fire), is the chief element in the *Ramayana*. Rama was born of the nectarine gift brought by the god of fire from out of the sacrificial altar. Sita was wedded to Rama with Agni as the witness. Lanka was destroyed by Agni. It was in Agni that the Reality, the principle of Sita, was kept in deposit while she was taken by Ravana to Lanka, and it was from Agni that she was again redeemed, when the war with Ravana ended in victory for Rama. The implication is that Rama’s heart was cleansed and rid of alloy with each contact with Agni. For Rama is the symbol of the most supreme wisdom (*jnana*), as well as the symbol of the most supreme morality.

So the pact with Sugriva was affirmed and sanctified by invoking Agni (Fire) as the witness.

Lakshmana sought to deepen faith and tighten the bond by telling Sugriva the truth of Rama and the mission on which he had come. He also told him of Sita and her divinity. She was daughter of the King of Mithila,

he said, so she could be won and her blessings secured only by untiring churning (*mathana*) or spiritual exercise (*sadhana*).

Listening to him, Sugriva shed tears of contrition. He said, “Master! One day, while I was engaged in exchanging counsel with my ministers, I heard the cry, “Rama! Rama!” from the sky, from within the *Pushpaka* chariot, which we saw flying through space. While we were watching this strange scene, Sita threw a bundle tied in cloth down to where we stood. It was a bundle of jewels, so we preserved it intact and safe. It is very likely that the demon (*rakshasa*) Ravana carried her away. For there is no iniquity that Ravana has not committed so far.” Sugriva gnashed his teeth in anger at the monster whom he suspected as having done this foul deed.

### **Lakshmana identifies some of the jewels**

Rama asked for the bundle of jewels. Sugriva retrieved it from the cave where he had hidden it and placed it before Him. The cloth in which the jewels were bundled was a part of the fibre cloth that Rama’s stepmother had thrown to Sita, to wear while in exile as a recluse in the forest. Recognising it, Lakshmana shed tears. Seeing him overcome, Sugriva and Hanuman also became sad.

Rama loosened the knots and undid the bundle; he showed the contents to Lakshmana in order to confirm that the jewels were those of Sita herself.

Lakshmana declared that he could not identify them all, for he had never raised his eyes and looked at Sita. “I have seen only the toe-rings that sister-in-law wore, for I used to prostrate at her feet every day. Yes. These are the toe-rings she wore; I can vouchsafe for that. While moving through the jungles, I used to follow her and walk in her footsteps. You know that you always walked in front and I followed behind Sita. I was walking, watching her feet, so I know these rings quite well.”

Sugriva and Hanuman looked on wistfully at the brothers as they acted their roles and were deeply moved at the sight of the jewels dropped by Sita. Sugriva couldn’t bear it any longer. He said, “Lord! Don’t give way to sorrow. This day itself I will start planning to find Sita and destroy the wicked Ravana. I will bring Sita back and make you both happy. This is my plighted word, my sacred promise.”

### **Sugriva tells his story**

Rama expressed great satisfaction at this promise. He said, “Tell me in detail why you are residing in this forest and not in your capital.”

Sugriva described consecutively and in clear concise terms, as beads are strung on a string to form a garland or rosary, who his parents were, which his real place of residence was, the reasons for the enmity that grew between himself and his elder brother, and so forth. Rama felt that Sugriva’s story was more or less akin to his own, especially the separation from the wife and the exile from the kingdom. He felt that Sugriva was upright and just and that Vali deserved punishment, since he had carried away his brother’s wife, a crime that the code of monkey morals will not excuse.

Rama asked Sugriva to tell him the story of his birth. Sugriva replied, “Yes. I seek to place at your feet the chronicle of the origins and fortunes of my entire clan. Once upon a time, Brahma, the Creator, created a monkey form. It was endowed with great might, but it was ever wayward in movements and activities. So, Brahma named it Ruksharaja. When it demanded to be told where to live, Brahma said, ‘Live in the forest, for there you can move

as your waywardness dictates. And, when you catch a demon, kill him and save the area from his misdeeds.’

“Ruksharaja migrated to the southern region and followed Brahma’s instructions. One day, the monkey Ruksharaja went to a lake to slake its thirst. When it dipped its face on the surface of the clear water, it saw its image in the lake. It was much concerned, for evidently there was an enemy hiding in the lake, lying in wait for him! It roamed all round the shore of the lake, eager to catch the enemy when it popped out of the waters. The enemy inside the lake roared when he roared, gnashed its teeth when he did so; it echoed and reflected all noise and all gestures. Unable to control himself any longer, Ruksharaja jumped into the lake to strangle his rival. That jump transformed him into a female!

“Struck with amazement, she came on shore. Turning to the Sun, she prayed for grace. She also prayed to Indra with great mental anguish. Through the grace of Surya (the Sun God) she had a son, that is, Sugriva, myself; and through the grace that Indra bestowed on her, she had another son, Vali, my brother. Immediately after the birth of the two children, she became Ruksharaja once again!

“Ruksharaja took the two babies with him and approached Brahma for instructions. He told Brahma his entire story so that He could recollect the facts of his decision. Brahma told them, “O Vali and Sugriva! Go into the southern regions and establish yourselves in Kishkindha. The Lord of all the worlds, the supreme sovereign of the universe, He who is known by many names, will take birth as Rama, as the son of Emperor Dasaratha of the Raghuvansha dynasty. Rama will come into the forest according to his father’s command. He will engage himself in many superhuman achievements, but he will also behave like an ordinary mortal. During his wanderings, he will arrive at Kishkindha where you are and form a friendship with you. Seek the fortune of securing his sight (*darshan*), hearing him speak, and touching his feet. Your lives will be rendered blessed thereby.”

“We listened to the voice of Brahma addressing us thus. We were delighted at the prospect that lay before us. We did not undertake any prayers, austerities, or rituals (*yajna*); all our talents and accomplishments were the direct result of the grace that Brahma showered on us that day.

“When that voice ceased, we offered homage in our minds to Brahma and reached Kishkindha. We destroyed the demons (*rakshasas*) who infested the forests there.

One day, a demon named Mayavi, the son of Maya, proceeded against us in order to wreak vengeance against us. He besieged us at midnight and created tremendous confusion. My elder brother could not tolerate his audacity even for one moment. Vali rose and fell upon him with all his might, and Mayavi fled in terror. Mayavi hid himself in a cave, and Vali pursued him to the very last.

I was also pursuing the wicked demon, close behind Vali. As Vali entered the cave where Mayavi had taken shelter, he directed me, ‘Brother! I’m going into the cave to kill him; watch the entrance and remain here, lest he escape.’ When I asked him how long, he replied, ‘Even fifteen days and nights! Keep close watch that long. If I don’t emerge on the sixteenth day, you may take it that he has killed me; you can then return.’

I waited and watched for a full thirty days. Then, the smell of blood emerged from the cave, a smell that I inferred was from my brother’s blood. Fearing that Mayavi might emerge alive from the cave, I blocked it up with a huge boulder. Knowing that it was foolish to wait any longer, I returned home. I gathered my companions and well-wishers and consulted them about the next step. We felt that Mayavi, who could kill the redoubtable Vali, must indeed be a formidable enemy, so I spent the days in perpetual fright.

“The inhabitants of the capital realised that they must have a leader in these hard times, when they were beset by foes on all sides. They pleaded that since Vali had died, I must step into his place. I had no inclination to accept the authority, but they forced me into it.

Shortly after, within about two or three days, Vali returned to the capital—he had slain Mayavi and rid the land of that vile foe. On finding me holding the position of ruler, Vali was filled with uncontrollable anger. He inferred that I had shut the exit of the cave with a boulder to prevent him from coming out alive and that I had deliberately sought the position that was thrust on me.

Vali decided to wreak vengeance on me for this. He began treating me as the lowest of the low and to impute motives for even the slightest fault or mistake. He deprived me of all powers and positions and looked down on me as if I were less than a menial of his household. He forced me out of the family home. He took my wife into his custody.

One day, determined to destroy me, he fought with me ferociously. I could not stand up to his prowess, so I left Kishkindha and took refuge here. Vali insisted that those who supported me or befriended me should not stay behind, so they have joined me here. My wife tried hard to come back to me, but however much she tried, he did not allow her to come away. He treated her as his own wife.” Sugriva’s eyes were streaming tears as he related his sad story.

Rama consoled him and sympathised with the plight. He assured him once again that he would protect him from harm and guard him against evil.

Sugriva said, “I live on this hill, helplessly, for this is the only place where my vengeful brother, Vali, cannot come. A curse laid on him by a sage effectively prevents him from entering this region. Or else I would have died at his hands long ago.”

### **The story of the curse on Vali**

Rama asked, “Friend! How did Vali become cursed?”

Sugriva explained, “Master! Dundubhi, the brother of Mayavi, was a mighty hero. No one could equal him in valour and physical strength. He reveled in confrontation with mountains and the sea, in sheer joy at demonstrating his might! One day, while he was exulting on his daring exploits, standing in front of a mountain peak that he had pulverised, he heard an unseen voice announce: ‘Dundubhi! Don’t allow your head to swell so! Beware! There lives one who is mightier than you. He is gaily wandering on the shores of Lake Pampa, assuming leadership and asserting his power. His name is Vali.’

“When Dundubhi heard this, he changed himself into a formidable buffalo and rushed into Kishkindha, where Lake Pampa is situated. He ploughed the earth with his horns and bellowed his way through hill and dale, parading his impregnable power in lofty pride. His fury got wilder at every step; he cast terror all around. When he dug his horns into the earth, huge trees were uprooted. His ferocity quaked all hearts.

“While he was thus invading his region, like Rahu venturing to swallow the Moon, Vali perceived him and, that very instant, fell upon him. The two strange-looking foes struggled for victory, like wild tuskers entangled in mortal combat. The fight lasted more than six hours! Finally, Vali gave Dundubhi a mortal blow. Staggering with pain, he fell dead on the ground, like a mountain peak reeling to the ground during a violent earthquake. The

impact was so unsettling that giant trees lay flat on the ground along with him!

“Vali was so intoxicated with success that he tore the corpse apart and threw the halves far into the distance, one to the south and the other to the north. But one bleeding mass of flesh and bone fell on a hermitage, showering a rain of blood over the holy area and polluting ascetics who were peacefully engaged in meditation and recitation of sacred hymns. It was the hermitage of the great saint Mathanga. He had gone to the river for his ritual bath. When he returned, he noticed drops of blood all over the place and soon came near the half-corpse of a terror-striking monster.

Mathanga couldn't contain himself. His disciples and pupils, yearning to be bathed in bliss, were bathed in blood. His forbearance gave way; he halted a moment, wondering who could have dared commit such a sin. His anger could not be kept under restraint; it did not allow him to look back or peer into the future. He pronounced a terrible curse! ‘If that vicious, sinful Vali approaches or even casts his eye on this hill, may his head be broken in two.’ That was the curse he uttered.

Scared by the curse, Vali keeps away from this hill. He can't approach it or even look upon it. That's why I live here, unhampered—but robbed of my wife and deprived of my kith and kin.” Sugriva told his plight to Rama, with nothing held back.

### **Rama exhibits his power**

Rama was disturbed by the story of Vali's wickedness, which had been tormenting Sugriva for so long. He could not listen any more to all his atrocities. Rama could not tolerate unrighteous acts and didn't relish the description of vice. He comforted Sugriva and assured him that Vali could not escape punishment for relying solely on physical strength and material power and ignoring the strength and power one should earn through righteousness and devotion to God. He vowed that with one arrow he would fell Vali to the ground and put an end to his wicked life, even if all the fourteen worlds opposed the fulfilment of the vow.

Rama said, “Don't cast your looks upon the face of a person who is unaffected by the sorrows of his friend, or by the absurd boast of his enemy. Don't choose a friend merely to win some temporary gain, or to satisfy some urgent desire, or to plunge into some foul behaviour. Friends must have deep love toward each other, and he who has no love filling his heart, moving his mind or lighting up his face, can only be a bad undesirable 'friend'. The hearts of such false friends will be crooked and contaminated. A wily servant, a greedy, miserly and evil-minded wife or husband, a false friend—these four make life painful, as when pierced by spears and spikes.

“Therefore, O Sugriva, don't grieve. I will come to your rescue to the fullest extent of my physical, verbal, and mental capabilities. What does it matter how strong Vali is? You are not aware of your own strength; you are bewildered by your estimate of his strength, that is all. That is at the bottom of your doubts and fears. Well. Perhaps, you want to be assured of my powers before you develop confidence and courage. Ask me to do any task so that your faith in me can take deep root. I will demonstrate my strength and fill your heart with courage. When that is done, I will fight with Vali and destroy him.” Rama gently stroked Sugriva's back, in order to induce Sugriva to trust him and be rid of fear and anxiety.

Sugriva was eager to see Rama's prowess—and he also wanted some prop for faith. He said, “Rama! Once upon a time, I and my brother agreed to test our strength and skill on a line of seven giant palm trees, trying to fell them one after the other, shooting a single arrow right through all of them. I felled only three, but Vali hit five, and

they all rolled on the ground. His capacity had that maximum measure. To defeat Vali, one needs strength beyond his. I am most eager to find out whether you have that extra might and to see how many palm trees you can fell with one arrow.”

Sugriva and his courtiers then took Rama to a place where seven mammoth palms in a row pierced the sky. They asked him to try to shoot them down, talking among themselves that, since those monstrous trees were four or five times larger than the five that Vali felled, Rama must be considered strong enough to overpower Vali even if he felled even two of these giants.

Looking at that row, Rama smiled. Calling Sugriva near him, he told him, “Sugriva! In my eye, these palms are the weakest and tiniest.” Then he fitted an arrow on his bow and felled all seven. His arrow carried all the fallen palms up a mountain that was in the distance, blasting rocks on the way!

### **Sugriva pours out his feelings**

Sugriva was overwhelmed with wonder and devotion. He prostrated at Rama’s feet, exclaiming, “Rama! A hundred Valis couldn’t have done that. I’m indeed fortunate; I have no more worries in life, since I have your friendship! Though I am estranged from one Vali, today I got a hundredfold Vali as my thickest comrade! Pardon my mistake. I’m ashamed that my small-mindedness persuaded me to test your powers like that.

“O! I am indeed lucky to be blessed with the friendship of God Himself, in this form. My tale of woe has ended this day. Hope has dawned in my heart that I can soon regain my Kishkindha; I’m really happy that I can again live happily with my wife and children. I am only tossed in doubt about when and how soon it can happen—within minutes, hours, or days. Of course, that depends on Rama’s will, on His grace. It will be fulfilled the moment He decides.”

Sugriva knew that only Rama could help him and that only Rama had to be relied upon. He prostrated at Rama’s feet, saying, “Rama! Your will and compassion, are my sole refuge. When do you intend to put an end to my sorrows?”

Rising again from his seat, Sugriva declared, “Listen Rama! For so long, I had labeled Vali as my greatest enemy and shivered in fear of him. Now, I find he is my greatest benefactor. For fear of him, I took residence on this mountain range; since I was here, I could notice your arrival and meet you and be blessed by this friendship! Therefore, Vali is the root cause of all these developments. He is indeed my benefactor.

“Rama! We fight with someone while in a dream. We hate him to the utmost and adopt all methods to ruin him, but as soon as we awaken and rise from bed, we know that the hatred and the struggle were false and baseless. Your sight (*darshan*) has awakened me from my dream. While in that dream, I hated Vali and interpreted all his actions as inimical to me; in my ignorance, I fought with him. Now that I have seen you and had the benefit of listening to your counsel, I have risen, conscious from my dream. The touch of your holy feet has imparted the vision of truth.

“My long fostered hatred and envy, my greed and egotism, my enmity toward Vali, and my plans for vengeance—these made me weaker and weaker. I was sunk in my single-minded yearning for a favourable moment to pay off old scores. This was the austerity (*tapas*) that granted me your grace; I got you, and my agony was reckoned as asceticism, my anger was transformed into love.

“Lord! Bless me, pour grace on me. I have no more desire to regain my kingdom. My wife and children have their careers marked out for them by destiny; what can I do to change the course of events? I won’t worry about them any more. It is enough for me if you confer on me the joy of serving you and being with you, in your presence, for the rest of my life.”

When Sugriva prayed in this strain, Rama tenderly stroked his head and said, “Son! The words you utter are indeed true. Kingdoms and power, joy and grief, anger and anxieties, properties and privileges, good and bad — all are of the stuff of which dreams are made. The proximity to God, the God-Principle in you, only that is real. But remember, my vow, my word, can never prove false. Whatever might happen, I shall grant you the kingdom, and you cannot escape the responsibility of ruling over it. You cannot evade the fight with Vali, which must take place tomorrow. Come, get ready.”

### **The battle between Vali and Sugriva**

Rama and Lakshmana moved forward, armed with bow and arrow and with Sugriva by their side. Hanuman and others were permitted to remain in the hill-residence. Along the way, Sugriva was given necessary instructions. At last, he was told to go forward alone and shout a challenge in front of the main gate of the city. Following Rama’s command, Sugriva stood before Kishkindha City and shouted so fiercely that the walls of the fort shook and the earth quaked in fear. No sooner did that call fall on his ear than Vali rose from his bed, as a cobra does when it is trodden upon. He knew it was Sugriva who had challenged him, and he came out ready to fight and put Sugriva to flight.

At this, Tara, Vali’s wife, clasped his feet and reminded him of the words spoken by his own son some days earlier. She said, “Lord! The brothers who have sought his help are no ordinary men. They are endowed with mighty powers. Sugriva, who was in hiding all this time, has come now with new confidence and courage. He has even dared to challenge you. He wouldn’t venture to do so without looking before and after. He must have received conviction about their capabilities and won the promise of their assistance. The princes, Rama and Lakshmana, have divine powers, and it’s not propitious for you to enter into battle with them.”

Listening to her pathetic importunities, Vali burst into a jeering laugh. “Cowardly woman!”, he said. “It is said that Rama is equal-minded. If that is true, he will certainly look upon both of us with an equal eye. Moreover, I haven’t done him any harm, have I? In spite of this, if Rama kills me, well, I shall believe my birth and years of life have been fulfilled thereby!”

On the one hand, Tara was happy that he had such an outlook; on the other hand she couldn’t entertain for a moment the idea of separation from her lord. So, she pleaded again, “Lord! It’s considered a bad omen when a woman objects. Don’t accept the challenge rashly.”

But Vali set all her pleadings aside. “When battle calls, no one cares for omens. Either the enemy should die or one’s own life should end.” So saying, Vali pushed Tara aside and rushed toward the main entrance to the fort, roaring in terror-striking rage.

He saw only Sugriva there, so he jumped on him, and they began a heavy fight with their fists, inflicting hammer-blows on each. Sugriva couldn’t bear the rain of fierce hits. Vali, with many a kick and pull, caused such agonising pain that Sugriva tried to and managed to escape, leaving Vali victor! Vali retired into the fort, patting his thighs exultingly.



Rama and Lakshmana followed the fleeing Sugriva. When they reached the hill-resort, Sugriva fell at Rama's feet, his heart heavy with the burden of disappointment, despair, pain, and fear. He said, "Lord! I don't understand why you caused this disgrace to me. I went on this venture buoyed up with a huge pile of hope that you would come to my rescue. All the while, I was watching for the moment when your arrow will hit Vali and finish him. But that never happened. I couldn't bear the weight of those blows, so I had to take the shameful course of fleeing for sheer life. My brother is a mighty hitter; I could not stand those blows."

Rama consoled him, "Sugriva! Don't grieve. Listen to the reasons. You are so like each other, so indistinguishable one from the other, so much the same in appearance and attainments, that I could not take correct aim at him." Those words had a deep inner meaning, too. They meant that Vali was also devoted to His feet. "He is my also votary. He has yearned for my grace as much as you have."

But Sugriva could not grasp the hidden import of the declaration. He prayed, "Knowing so much, couldn't you discover who Vali was and who Sugriva was? I cannot believe your words. I don't know why you couldn't. Perhaps you wanted me to display my ability to the utmost. If that was your intention, I could have taken note of it from the beginning. What really happened was that I was so confident that you would bring about his downfall that I took the fight rather easy and light-heartedly."

Rama drew the down-hearted, dispirited Sugriva to him and consoled him profusely. He passed his divine hand over Sugriva's body, and the pain disappeared in a trice. The wounds and contusions were instantaneously healed. Sugriva was overwhelmed with surprise. He exclaimed, "Rama? Your hand can achieve anything; it contains everything. Creation, preservation, destruction—all three are subservient to your will. I have no desire to rule over this kingdom. Compared to the joy your grace can confer, that joy is nothing at all."

Rama did not pay heed to his words. He said, "Your words are but reflections of passing thoughts. You spoke like this when you had a vision of my power and glory. I don't attach much value to them, for I care more for feelings that rise in the heart. Many great devotees forget everything when they experience the sport and supreme might of God and believe that there is nothing higher than God. But, after some time, or when their mental cravings don't bear fruit, they develop doubts even about what they experienced or saw! These are the veils that hide, the curtains that distort the truth in the minds of those with weak faith. I know how it all happens, so I don't attach much value to these sentiments. You have to get ready to confront your brother again." Thus, Rama forced Sugriva into the fray.

Sugriva had no liking for the fight, but he was certain that this time Rama would keep his promise and kill Vali. He walked boldly on, with confidence in his heart.

Rama got some wild flowers and had them strung as a garland, which he put around Sugriva's neck. What Rama meant was: Vali had already told Tara that Rama looked upon all as equal. It was this "equal" sight that prevented him from killing Vali. "Now, I have put this garland of flowers around his neck to show that my love toward Sugriva is greater. So, I can, with justice, deal with Vali differently. Sugriva's extra garland indicates that he wears the symbol of divine love. Love needs no reason for its flow; it comes from no selfish urge."

Thus encouraged and filled with heroism, Sugriva was persuaded by Rama and Lakshmana to shout the challenge again at the gate of Vali's fort. They hid themselves behind a nearby tree.

When Vali rushed out, eager for the fight, and when the earth quaked under the weight of his impact, Sugriva was frightened. He prayed to Rama with all his heart to come to his succour soon and went forward to meet his

foe. To justify his own attainments and capacity, Sugriva fought to the best of his ability. When his strength gave way and the first signs of exhaustion appeared in him, he called out “Rama” just once.

### **Rama kills His devotee, Vali**

Rama has as his favourite task the guarding of his devotees. So, when he heard the call, he placed an arrow on his bow and shot it straight into the proud heart of Vali. Vali swung round helplessly and slid until he fell flat on the ground. At that moment, Rama came near Vali and granted him the divine vision of Himself.

Though struck by the fatal shaft, Vali rose and assumed a sitting posture; he was strong and courageous beyond compare! With folded palms, he cast his lingering looks on that cloud-blue complexion, those lotus-petal eyes, and shed streams of tears in his ecstatic exhilaration. He could scarcely contain his joy.

Vali exclaimed “O Rama! Being such a divinely auspicious embodiment of beauty, being the very Lord of all creation, why did you have to perform this questionable act? Had you but told me and then killed me, I would have been extremely happy to die. Would I have refused to render you the good that Sugriva could? No. No. There is some justifiable reason for this act. For the Lord would never undertake any task without just reason. Seen from the outside, the task might appear contrary to our idea of divinity but with the inner view, the fact that it is based on truth would become evident.

“I know that the deeds of the Lord should not be interpreted from the common worldly point of view. The Lord is above and beyond the attributes (*gunas*) that limit and regulate human conduct. So, His deeds can be understood correctly only when viewed from a position unaffected by emotion, passion, or prejudice. Acts done with perfect equanimity can be understood only by perfect equanimity. If you are swayed by characteristics and attributes, you would naturally see only kindred characteristics and attributes, even when they are absent!”

Vali was endowed with a very clear intellect. So, he argued thus and said “Rama, I know full well your prowess and skill. With one arrow, you can destroy not only this Vali but the entire universe. You can create the universe again. Nevertheless, I want to learn from you the sin for which you have killed me. Please tell me the error for which I was responsible. You have come upon earth in human form in order to reestablish righteousness, haven’t you? What’s the meaning and purpose of this action —hiding behind a tree, like a common hunter, to kill me.”

Rama graciously sat by the side of the dying Vali and said, “Vali! You know that my deeds are not motivated by selfish ends. Give up your wrong notion that I sought and secured the friendship of Sugriva in order to search the whereabouts of Sita. Why, you yourself said just now that I have assumed this human form for the purpose of reestablishing righteousness on earth! Now, tell me, if I simply witness your wrong, unjust, and vicious deeds, what would you call it? Service or disservice to the world? Righteous or unrighteous? The brother’s wife, the sister, and the daughter-in-law are all three equivalent in status to one’s daughter. To cast sinful eyes on them makes one a heinous sinner. No sin affects one when such a sinner is killed.

“How unjust was it for you to infer that Sugriva closed the entrance of the cave with the evil intention of killing you! You said you would come out at the end of fifteen days, at the most, and asked him to wait at the mouth of the cave until then. Yet, he waited there, anxiously awaiting you, for a full month! Finally, when he was assailed by the smell of blood, he was grieved that his brother was killed by the ogre. He hesitated to enter the cave, for he would certainly be no match for the ogre who destroyed you. When Sugriva placed the boulder up against the

mouth of the cave, his intention was to prevent the ogre from coming out and to see that he was confined within that cave. The citizens pressed on him the rulership, and he had to accede to their wishes.

What crime had Sugriva committed when he acted thus? You did not stay to ask. He never disobeyed your commands and directives, even to the slightest extent, for he loved you and revered you. He adheres strictly to the path of truth. But you treasured vengeance against him in your heart, for no reason at all; your overweening pride drove him into the forest. When you sent him out, you should have allowed his wife to go with him. Instead you chose her to be your wife, the person whom you should have treated as your own daughter. Do you call this a sin or don't you? There is no sin more heinous than this.

“Besides, you occupy the position of ruler of this region. You have to protect and foster your subjects. How can you punish those who commit crimes when you yourself revel in the same crime? ‘As the king, so are the subjects,’ says the proverb. The people will be such as their rulers are. Therefore, what you have done becomes more heinous and more reprehensible. Doesn't it?”

Thus, Rama out of His infinite love, clarified to Vali the crimes and sins he had committed.

Vali listened with attention and thought over what he heard. At last, he realised his error, and said, “Lord! My cleverness has failed to make you pronounce my acts as right. Now hear me! I am not a sinner at all. Had I been a sinner, how could I be floored by an arrow from the Lord's own hands, and how could I pass my last moments looking on the face of divinity, listening to the sweet words of the Lord?”

Rama was highly pleased at these words, spoken with such high wisdom, out of the depths of love and devotion, delight and dedication. Then Rama wished to announce to the world the genuine spirit of renunciation that Vali had at heart. He said, “Vali! I am restoring you to life. I am freeing you from the obligation of old age and senility. Come. Have your body back again.” He placed His hand on Vali's head.

But even while Rama was blessing him so, Vali intervened with a prayer, “Ocean of compassion; give ear to my appeal. However many attempts one might make throughout life, when breath deserts us, death cannot be avoided. At that moment, even the sovereign sages don't get Your name on their tongues! I have secured unique good fortune now, here, when I pronounce Your name, look on Your form, touch Your feet, and listen to Your words. If I miss this chance and let it slip away, who can say how long I may have to wait for these again? Continuing to breathe, what great achievement will I accomplish? No. I do not wish to live any longer.”

“Lord! Even the *Vedas*, the source of all knowledge, speak of you as only ‘Not this, not this’. Thus they proceed until they declare finally, ‘This, This.’ I have now secured ‘This’ in my grasp; shall I let it slip? Is there in this world a fool who would give up the divine wish-fulfilling tree that he has in his grasp for the sake of a wild weed? This Vali, born out of a mental resolution of Brahma Himself, endowed with strength of body and sharpness of intellect and renowned for these qualities, cannot yield to the temptation of clinging to the body as if it is real and valuable. No. If I yield, I will become the target of infamy. Why elaborate? When there is no self-satisfaction, what do other types of satisfaction matter?”

“Lord! As a result of Your sight (*darshan*) and words, I have overcome all sense of duality and distinction. I have acquired the vision of the One, apart from all the rest. The mass of ‘consequence’ I had earned through my sins has been destroyed; let the body that is burdened with the consequence be destroyed along with it. Don't allow another body appear to bear the burden.”

Vali declared his determination to give up his breath and called his son to his presence. He said, “This fellow grew up until now as the lust-born son of this body. He is strong, virtuous, humble, and obedient. Now I wish You would foster him as Your love-deserving son. I place him in Your hands.” With these words he placed his son’s hands in the hands of Rama.

Rama drew Angada, the son, near Him and blessed him, with great love. Pleased at the acceptance, Vali shed tears of joy; his eyes were fixed on the divine face before him. His eyes slowly closed in death. Will an elephant worry or take any notice of flowers that fall away from the garland round its neck? With the same unconcern, Vali allowed his breath to slide away from him.

### **Rama consoles Tara**

The inhabitants of Pampa Town gathered in sad groups when they heard the news of Vali’s demise. His wife, Tara, came, accompanied by her retinue; she fell upon the body and lost consciousness. Her agonising wail was so poignant that stones melted in sympathy. When she recovered consciousness, on and off, she looked on the face of her lord and cried in utter grief. “In spite of all my protests and the arguments, trying to stop you, you rushed forward to this doom. The wife should ever be vigilant about the security and happiness of her lord; no one is more concerned about the welfare of the husband than the wife. Others, however eminent, will always have some little egotism mixed in the advice they give.

“Lord! On account of the mischief of destiny, my counsel could not prevail. Lord! How am I to foster and bring up this son? Will those who killed you desist from harming your son? Who will guide us now? How did your mind agree to leave us behind and proceed to the next world? For whose sake must I continue this life?”

Tara turned to Rama and poured out her heart. “You sent my dear lord, my very breath, to the next world. Do you want us, who are left behind, to live at the mercy of strangers? Is this the right thing for a noble person, a person devoted to right conduct, to be proud about? Is it appropriate? If you don’t desire our progress, if you have no wish to alleviate our sorrow, then kill me and my son; the arrow that killed the mighty hero will not quail before a weak woman and a stripling lad. Let us join him in his journey.” She fell at Rama’s feet and wept in inconsolable anguish.

Rama said, “Tara! Why do you weep so? You are a heroic wife. Don’t behave in this manner, for it brings your role into infamy. Be calm. Control yourself. The body is a temporary phase; it is contemptible. Vali himself regarded this body as debased! Its fall, its end, might happen any day and cannot be avoided. It is but an instrument to achieve the supreme goal, and if that end is not kept in view and attained through it, the body is but a lump of coal whose destiny is the fire.

“Weeping for Vali as this body is foolish, for the body is here. Do you then weep for the *Atma* that was in this body? That *Atma* is eternal; it cannot die or decay, diminish or disintegrate. Only those who have not realised the *Atma* principle suffer from the delusion that the body is themselves; until then, even the most learned are led into error. Being enamoured of the body as if it is you is ‘ignorance’; being aware of the *Atma*, which you really are, is ‘wisdom’. Getting the knowledge of the *Atma* is as precious a piece of good luck as getting a diamond in the dust. The *Atma* is the gemstone embedded in this mass of flesh. The body carries urine and feces, bad odours and bad blood; it is pestered by pests and problems. Its decay cannot be arrested; it must die some day. The achievement that one can realise through it is its justification. That is the crown of human life.

“Your husband achieved many heroic and honourable victories through his body. While ruling this kingdom, he protected and promoted his servants and faithful followers as if they were his very breath. He destroyed the demons. He had deep devotion toward God. But he inflicted injury on his brother. Besides that sin, he did not commit any other. His death at my hands was the consequence of that sin. Therefore, believe that it too has been washed away. Now, you have no reason to grieve.

When Tara heard these words of counsel and consolation wisdom dawned in her mind and she was calmed. Rama said that there should be no more delay. He asked Tara to go back and have the funeral rites for Vali performed by Sugriva. He advised Sugriva to bring up Angada with love and care.

### **The search for Sita is delayed by weather**

When the rites were over, Rama sent Lakshmana into the capital city and had Sugriva installed on the throne. Hanuman and others also entered the city and helped him, as friends and followers, to carry on the task of governing successfully. As soon as he assumed the reins of office, Sugriva called the elders and leaders of the community together; he ordered them to make all proper arrangements to seek and find the whereabouts of Sita. He asked them to initiate all steps necessary for the purpose.

“Sugriva was not happy that he became ruler and was honoured by that responsibility; rather, he was sad and morose, because he had been the cause for the killing of his brother. “Alas! Anger leads one to perpetrate the direst of sins; it breeds hatred, and murders love. Shame on me! To what depths have I fallen, allowing anger and hatred to enter my heart.

“My heart is torn with anguish by the words of adoration Vali addressed to Rama. I never realised, even in my dreams, that Vali had such a deal of devotion and dedication in him. Ah! His wisdom is boundless. His furious anger did not allow that wisdom to express itself! Yes, anger suppresses the divine in one; lust and anger drag life into disaster.”

Though much depressed by these thoughts, Sugriva learned the guidelines of government from Lakshmana. He prayed for Rama to enter the city and bless him and his subjects. But Rama said that he had to live only in the forests and not enter any town or city. Otherwise he would be disobeying his father’s wish.

Sugriva held a conference of leaders and announced that, since the season was late autumn, rains were imminent, and the monkey hordes would be hard put to move about in the cold and in storms. So he suggested that as soon as the autumn passed, they must set about the task of searching for Sita. He presented this information to Rama and Lakshmana also. Rama realised the truth of these statements and acceded to the proposal. The brothers retired to the Rishyamuka Hill and took residence there.

The rains started soon; it poured as if a potful were emptied from the sky on every square inch of space! It became a hard task for Lakshmana to procure even tubers and fruits for sustenance! They could not come out of the shelter of the hermitage. Sunlight was scarcely to be seen.

Rama spent the time administering valuable counsel to Lakshmana. “Lakshmana!” he would say, “When a wicked child is born, the code of morality will be corroded. When a cyclone starts its career, the clouds shudder in fear. The company of bad people is the prelude to the disappearance of wisdom. The company of good people makes wisdom blossom.” Thus, they spent their days learning and teaching matters concerned with spiritual wisdom and its acquisition and preservation.