

## Chapter 12. The Coronation

As soon as they entered the palace, Vasishtha, the royal preceptor, announced the date of the celebration of Rama's coronation as the emperor of Ayodhya, giving details of the auspicious attributes of the day that had persuaded him to choose it for the great event. He also invited all the pundits and priests to take part in the ceremonies that the *Vedas* had enjoined, to consummate the coronation. They appreciated Vasishtha's decision, for they said, "a coronation so celebrated would confer peace and prosperity on all mankind."

Vasishtha called Sumanthra and addressed him, "Assemble the armed forces —cavalry, elephantry, chariotry, and infantry— at the city, for Rama's coronation is to be celebrated."

The words filled Sumanthra with extreme delight; he arranged for the presence of the army with all its components. The elephants, horses, and chariots were decorated grandly for the occasion and posted in serried ranks outside the city gate. The horsemen and foot-soldiers wore colourful uniforms and stood at attention, ready to march into the city for the festival. Messengers were sent in all directions to gather the various auspicious articles necessary for the rituals that formed part of the celebrations. The entire city was agog with joy; citizens vied with each other in decorating their houses and streets. People felt their two eyes were not enough to imbibe the charm of the city.

Rama was specially considerate toward the people who had accompanied him from beyond Ayodhya —Sugriva, Vibhishana, Angada, Nala, Nila, and others. He ordered that proper arrangements be made for accommodating them and looking after their needs. Accordingly, servants from the palace rushed to perfect the arrangements designed for the comfort of the guests.

Rama called Bharatha. With His own hands, he combed his hair, which was matted since he hadn't paid any attention to it for years. The three brothers personally poured holy water and attended Bharatha while he bathed. Then, Rama received Vasishtha's assent to disentangle his own matted hair and had his auspicious bath. Meanwhile, the queen mothers had Sita go through her bath also. The mothers carefully combed her matted hair and dressed her in yellow silk; they made her wear jewels in plenty. She shone like Goddess Lakshmi. She went to Rama and took her seat to the left of her Lord.

The three mothers experienced the highest bliss, looking at Rama and Sita seated together. "Isn't this our luckiest day? Today, our lives have achieved fulfilment. Today, our dearest wish has come true. Today, our eyes have had their purpose realised," they said to themselves. They lost all consciousness of their bodies or surroundings, watching Rama and Sita and taking them to be the God Narayana and His divine consort, Lakshmi.

Vasishtha, the great sage, was moved by the splendour that shone in Rama's face. He was delighted beyond measure at the divine effulgence of the Rama form. "Today, I achieved the goal for which I have been waiting so long, he felt, and he ruminated on that joy and remained blissful and silent. He called the servitors and instructed them to bring the great throne and install it in the Coronation Hall. The throne was set with multifarious gemstones, which shone like the sun, with dazzling brilliance.

Rama prostrated before Vasishtha and other sages and fell at the queen-mothers' feet. Then, he prostrated before the entire assembly of elders and citizens and ascended the throne, with Sita following him closely. The vast gathering rejoiced at the unique sight, so full of majesty and glory. The sages (*rishis*), the elders, the lead-

ing citizens, and the saintly well-wishers were filled with gratefulness and joy. The *brahmins* recited appropriate *Vedic* hymns. The populace shouted victory, victory (*jai jai*) so loud and so often that the sky threatened to fall. It was the seventh day of the dark half of the moon in the month of *Vaisakh* (April-May). Taking permission of the assembly and the assent of the *brahmins*, Vasishta wound the insignia of imperial authority round Rama's brow.

Kausalya, Rama's mother, turned her eyes on Rama every now and then and felt supremely happy. And what can be said of the joy of the brothers Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrugna! It was beyond words. They were holding whisks and the umbrella and standing behind the throne, as Rama's attendants. In fact, all through the years, they were doing penance for the culmination they were enjoying that day!

The gods beat drums of victory in the sky; the celestial musicians sang hallelujahs, the celestial dancers danced in joy. Vibhishana, Sugriva, Angada, Hanuman, Jambavan, Nala, Nila, Dadhimukha, Divida, Mainda — these heroes bore bows, arrows, scimitars, and spears and stood on both sides of the throne in reverential humility.

With Sita sitting on his left, Rama manifested the beauty of a billion Manmathas (Manmatha is the God of Love) rolled into one. The gods were fascinated by the divine charm of the Lord of the Raghu line. Rama wore silk interwoven with gold, and he had pendants on his ears brilliant with precious gems. He wore ornaments on his ankles and wrists, which derived beauty from his entrancing charm. The three worlds exulted at the sublimity of the event and the personal grandeur of Rama. Really, those who witnessed that scene were the fortunate ones among the living.

### **Hanuman and the silent gems**

Vibhishana came forward with a dazzling necklace of gems, which the lord of the sea had offered to Ravana. Sita accepted it. Its brilliance shone all over the vast hall and struck every one as a unique string of gems. But with the necklace in her hand, she cast a questioning glance at Rama.

Rama knew what was passing in her mind. He said, "Sita! You can grant it as a gift to anyone among those here who deserves your grace."

Sita thought just for a second and looked at Hanuman. Becoming aware of the compassion in the look, Hanuman approached Sita in great humility and stood before her with bowed head. Sita gave the necklace to Hanuman.

Hanuman turned it around many times in his hand, its dazzle enrapturing everyone in that vast assembly. He was struggling to discover its specialness, with unslaked curiosity. He plucked every gem, put it between his teeth, and placed it adjacent to his ear, and with a face indicating disappointment, he threw the gem away in disgust!

All eyes were watching this peculiar behaviour with increasing amazement. They were stunned into silence and inactivity. Until he treated the last gem in the same cavalier manner, no one dared interrupt or condemn. They could only protest in whispers among themselves! "Who is this monkey that so badly treats the diamond necklace that was so lovingly and so compassionately presented to him by Sita?" was the question on most lips.

Even Vibhishana was sad that Hanuman had so brazenly insulted the priceless jewel that he had brought. "He pulled it to pieces and cast the gems aside," he told himself.

Everyone in the hall surmised the reason for the strange behaviour in his own way. At last, one vassal ruler could not restrain himself. He rose and gave vent to his resentment: "Peerless hero! Why did you break that necklace into so many bits? Was it right to do so? Tell us why. Give us some explanation and remove our doubts."

Hanuman listened to him patiently and replied. “O King! I examined each gem in order to discover whether each had in it the sacred name of Rama. I could not find it in any gem. Without Rama’s name, they are but stones and pebbles, so I cast them on the ground.”

The ruler was not silenced by this. He asked, “Hanuman! If you want Rama’s name in every article and particle, aren’t you asking for something impossible?”

Hanuman replied. “Of what good, of what profit, is anything that doesn’t have Rama’s name in it? I don’t need such.” The valiant hero, Hanuman, dismissed the argument of the ruler thus.

The ruler, however, continued his objections. He said, “You wouldn’t wear anything that doesn’t have Rama’s name in it. Well. You are wearing your body. You are carrying it about with you. Prove to us that you have the name in it.”

Hanuman laughed aloud; he said, “I’ll prove, see!” He pulled a single hair from off his forearm and held it very near to the ruler’s ear. He could hear the name, Rama, Rama, Rama uttered by the single hair! The ruler was overcome with a sense of wonder; he fell at Hanuman’s feet and prayed for pardon.

Rama called Hanuman and warmly embraced him. He asked him, “Hanuman! What can I offer you on this occasion? I have no gift worthy to be given to you. I am giving you myself as my gift to you.” Then, he offered his body to be clasped by Hanuman’s hands. The assembly was moved into shouts of hurrah hurrah (*jai, jai*)! at this unique act of grace. They praised Hanuman and declared that there was no one in all the worlds to equal him. They praised his devotion and dedication.

Rama rose from the throne and moved into the open, where vast congregations were awaiting his appearance. He gave them the divine sight (*darshan*) of His charming majestic form. They were all thrilled as never before with the bliss the sight conferred. All who were in the city were provided festive reception and given lavish food and luxurious shelter. Rama arranged for the distribution, as charity, of gold and money, of vehicles, household utensils and clothing, of houses and other amenities in plenty.

### **The guests depart**

Vibhishana and the monkeys were wonder-struck at the magnificent elaborateness of these events. They stayed on for six months, serving Rama both day and night, in full exultation. The time sped away as a single day for them. They had no memory of their homes, their families, or their kingdoms during all that period of time.

At last, Rama called all the companions and comrades who had accompanied him into the audience hall and seated them in appropriate places. He addressed them in soft, sweet accents. “Friends! You have all toiled hard on my behalf. Of course, it is not proper to praise you to your face. You confronted various difficulties for my sake, giving up your homes, not worrying about your wives and children and unconcerned about your properties and possessions. I have no friends other than you all. Therefore, I have special love and compassion toward you. More than my parents, more than my brothers, more than my kingdom, more than my subjects, and more than even my Sita, you are my loved ones. This is my firm assertion.

“I require you to go to your homes. Serve me, after installing me in your hearts, with faith and devotion. I shall grant you the fortune of seeing me beside you, behind you, before you, and in your homes. I’ll grant you grace.”

They listened to these words so full of grace and love, and they were so overcome by gratefulness and joy that they forgot themselves and their surroundings. They did not allow their eyes to stray away from Rama's face; they shed tears of delight abounding. They could not utter a single word in reply; their tongues were unable to pronounce any.

Under Rama's orders, the servitors brought large quantities of clothing and jewels. Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrugna were asked to offer them to the members of the party and to personally help them put them on. The monkeys and Vibhishana shone with added charm and brightness. But the monkeys were unaffected by what was done; they stood unmoved and stiff, looking only at the feet of their adored Lord. All bowed their heads and fell at those lovely feet. Rama lifted them gently and embraced them with great affection.

Rama told the departing groups of monkeys and others, "Children! Friends! I am awarding you the embodied stage of liberation, by which you are endowed with powers and attainments approximating my own. Go back and carry out your duties with success and fulfil the responsibilities with which you are involved. Rule over the lands and peoples entrusted to your care and enjoy peace and prosperity." Rama provided them valuable counsel of various kinds and gave them leave to depart.

Bharatha and Satrugna were struck with admiration by the devotion that shone in the hearts of the monkeys and others. As Rama commanded, Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrugna accompanied the party for some distance until they reached the outskirts of the city. Even as they sat in the chariots provided for them, the monkeys turned back wistfully and shed tears at the thought of leaving Rama. The brothers saw the anguish in their faces and could not bear the sight. They knew the meaning of those streams of tears and those sad looks and praised the spirit of dedication that filled their hearts. They gave them company until the river bank and supervised arrangements for ferrying them across.

Then, the brothers returned to Ayodhya. Hanuman returned with them. He had prayed and pleaded with Sugriva, his ruler, and promised to return after about ten days for, as he said, "I cannot bear the pang of separation." Though Sugriva was not very happy, and in spite of his protests, Hanuman returned along with Lakshmana and others to Rama.

### **Rama discourses on good and bad**

One day, Rama went to a garden with his brothers and his dear Hanuman in order to spend some time strolling through it. The place was replete with flowers and fruits. Rama sat on an elevated seat, with the brothers on his side. The brothers hesitated to ask some questions, though they wanted to. They looked at Hanuman and communicated their feelings to him. They knew that if Hanuman asked those questions, Rama would fain give the answers.

The omnipresent Rama recognised the situation. "Hanuman! What do you seek to know? Ask," he said.

Hanuman replied, "O protector of the weak! Bharatha wanted to ask you a question. But he was stricken by doubt; he is downcast with a sense of fear." He folded his palms and fell at Rama's feet for having answered his query so bluntly, and in thankfulness that he was commanded to speak in the presence.

Rama then spoke. "Hanuman! You know full well my nature. There is no difference between me and Bharatha, nothing to make either feel distinct."

When Bharatha heard these words, he fell at Rama's feet and said, "O healer of the miseries of those who surrender to you! Listen. Pardon my errors and protect me. I have no doubts lurking in my mind. I have no griefs and no attachments, even in my dreams. Of course, I owe all this to your grace and compassion. You are the treasure-house of all the virtues. I desire to learn the distinction between good people and bad."

Rama deigned to reply. He said, "Brother! The qualities that mark out the good are endless in number, as the *Vedas* and *Puranas* say. The distinction that separates the good and the bad is as wide as that between the sandal tree and the axe. Note this: Even when the axe cuts the sandal tree, the tree confers the fragrance it possesses on the axe. The axe is killing it, but the tree does only good to its executioner. Hence, the sandal is appreciated by all. The Gods love to have sandal paste on their foreheads.

But see what happens to the axe that does harm to the tree that wishes it well. It is kept in fire and, while red-hot, it is hammered into shape and sharpness. Wicked persons cause grief to good people in this manner. But the good always wish well and do good to the wicked, whatever harm is done to them. And what is their gain? They certainly attain heaven. That is to say, they are in constant bliss. The bad people, on the other hand, are constantly struggling in sorrow and discontent. That is to say, they are subject to hellish agony; though they may appear happy to observers, they are tortured inside by the infamy and the hatred they invoke.

"I'll tell you the characteristics of good men. Listen. They aren't fascinated by sensual pleasures. They possess all the best virtues and modes of behaviour. They will be happy at the happiness of others and sad when others are sad. They look upon all with equal affection. They consider no one an enemy and aren't bothered even if foes exist. They are endowed with wisdom, knowledge of the objective world, and a deep sense of detachment. Their hearts are tender; they have compassion toward the weak and helpless. They adore my feet with purity of thought, word, and deed. They delight in serving me. They have no concern with fame or infamy, honour or dishonour. They are always interested in serving others; they never yield to the urge of selfishness, even in dreams. Their actions are transparently simple; their hearts are ever cool and unruffled. They yearn for opportunities to renounce; they are every moment soaked in joy. For them, praise and blame are the same. Brother! Whoever has these characteristics in him, take it that they are of my own nature. They are myself, I am them. Take that to be the truth.

"Now, I shall tell you of the qualities of bad people. Listen. You should avoid their company, by all means. Grief will descend upon you as a result of that companionship. Their hearts will be pained at the prosperity of others. They will delight as much in scandalising others as in welcoming a fortune. The six foes of good people—lust, anger, greed, desire, pride, and hatred—are fostered by them and are ever at their beck and call. They move about and act according to the commands of these six. Pity and charity are absent in their makeup. They pick quarrels with others for no reason or on no provocation. They develop enmity even toward those who do good to them. Their actions are false; their utterances are false; their dealings of give and take are false. Their attitudes are hard; they have hearts of stone.

"The peacock is charming to behold; its cry is pleasant to hear. But it kills snakes. So too, wicked men are eager to harm others and crave others' wives. They relish damaging the reputation of others. They revel in evil; they are evil-minded all the time. They are the meanest among people. They have no fear of retribution. When they see or hear about the progress of another, they are possessed by so much envy that they are afflicted with unbearable headache. But when others are caught in calamity, they exult over their sufferings. When others are suffering, they are elated as if they have been crowned kings of the realm. They are dominated by the ego; they don't have any thought of helping others, even in their dreams! Their hearts are the birthplaces of lust, anger and



other passions. They have no consideration toward parents, preceptors, or elders. They feel disgust at the very mention of good personages or God. Their intellects are dull; their conduct is reprehensible. They can be observed in large numbers during the *Kali yuga* (the age of ‘sin’).

“Brother! Of all righteous acts, help rendered to those needing it is the most righteous. Of all evil acts, there is nothing worse than causing harm to others. Know that this is the essence of the teachings of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. This is the ideal held forth by good people everywhere. Those who are benefited by birth as people, and yet indulge in injuring others, are degraded into lower bestial levels and have to be born and die as those beings. Or, when they are born again as people, they commit further evils through their ignorance and the blindness it causes. For such, I meter out *karma*-consequences, and it is only after a long passage of time, during which they have to struggle out of the darkness, that I vouchsafe a vision of Myself. I throw them again and again into the vortex of life and make them experience the ups and downs so that they might be educated.

“Bharatha! The gods, sages, and great personages don’t engage in acts involving dualities; they are ever engaged in adoring me in a dedicated state of mind. They engage in activities without any desire or attachment to the consequence of those activities. If austerities are taken up in order to gain some ends, if activities are undertaken with a view to earn the fruits they yield, people have to be born with bodies so that they may be awarded the good and the bad that those activities deserve. When the fruits are not craved, and acts are still done sincerely and rightly and correctly, they don’t bind; instead, they confer wisdom on the doer. The person will have their devotion and dedication advanced a great deal. And as a result, the person will be nearer to the Supreme and merge in the Supreme. When you are able to distinguish between the good and the bad on the basis of these characteristics, and act accordingly while choosing company, you will be able to extricate yourselves from the coils of the sea of change, the ocean of life (*samsara*).

Brother! Know that all distinctions between good and bad are basically the result of attachment and development, due to considering the world as real, although it is neither real nor unreal. Those who have escaped this ‘illusion’ and this duality are the great souls (*mahatmas*). They have realised that their reality is the unchanging *Atma*. They know that there are no two; they experience always only the One. Others are the ignorant lot.”

Those who listened to this clarification attained equanimity. Their hearts were delighted with the upsurge of love. They acknowledged Rama’s kindness by gratefully prostrating before him. This they did for each point that was clarified. Hanuman felt the ecstasy more than all others.

Later, Rama went to the palace, accompanied by the brothers and Hanuman. This became the normal routine every day —conveying counsel and then carrying on the duties of administration.

### **Rama discourses to the citizens**

One day, Rama asked the citizens of Ayodhya to assemble in the palace, with the preceptors and *brahmins*. They met at the reception hall and were provided comfortable seats. Rama came into the hall and addressed them.

“Citizens! Preceptors and *brahmins*! Prostrations to you. Listen to my words in peace and to the very end. I am not discoursing to you in pride or selfish conceit. It is also not to declare that I am your monarch. Nor is it to lead you to journey along evil paths. If my words appear good to you, then, follow the path I indicate. But I must say this: those who listen to my words and walk accordingly, only those are dear to me. Only they are my brothers. If I utter anything wrong, point it out instantly, without hesitation.

“Well. Birth as a human being is hailed in the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and by wise ones of all lands as the rarest chance of all. The human birth cannot be achieved unless a great deal of merit is built up in many previous lives. Even gods yearn for the chance and find it hard to get born as people. Birth as a human opens the door to liberation. It provides wide opportunities for undergoing spiritual disciplines (*sadhana*) and benefiting by them.

“The human body is not to be used for enjoying sensual pleasures. It is not to be treated as an instrument for reaching heaven and delighting in heavenly toys and joys. These pleasures are all momentary. They bring you back again into the tangle of change, the toil of birth and death. Therefore, these pleasures bring about sorrow. Only fools will be led away into the pursuit of these sensual pleasures. Such pleasures are as poison to man; is it proper to seek poison in preference to nectar? Those who crave poison cannot be good people. They are like the fools who discard the wish-fulfilling gem (*chintamani*) and prefer a bead of glass.

“Being endowed with the human body, if a person does not use it to cross the ocean of illusory existence (*samsara*), the person is indeed to be pitied as unfortunate and of dull intellect. The person is the slayer of their own self, the enemy of their own progress. Therefore, those who are born as people have to realise that God resides in all people as the *Atma* within; they should serve everyone as divine and regard that service as the most proper worship of God. Observe the dictates of God with full heart. Carry out all activities as if you are dedicating them to God.

Citizens! Those who yearn to be happy here and hereafter! Listen to my words. Have them as your guides and your goals. Follow this path. Of all paths that lead to God and self-realisation, the path of devotion (*bhakti*) is the easiest; it is a path full of delight for the mind. The path of discrimination and elimination of illusion (*jnana*) is fraught with difficulties and packed with obstacles. It is well-nigh impossible to extinguish the mind. And even those who travel along the hard path of intellect (*jnana*) can become dear to me only if they have devotion and love in their hearts.

There is nothing equal to devotion (*bhakti*). Devotion is not bound; it is free. It endows man with all joys and delights. And it must be emphasised that you can progress in devotion only when you seek and stay in good company (*sathsanga*).”

Continuing his discourse to the assembly, Rama said, “Listen, O people of my kingdom! I wish to tell you one very important truth, often not clearly grasped by you. Do not attribute any distinction between Siva and Kesava. Believe that God is one. The name and the form are distinct, but the Universal Absolute Entity (*divyatma*) is the same. That divine *Atma* is in everyone in equal potency.”

Hearing these nectarine teachings from Rama’s lips, the citizens bowed their heads in reverential homage. One of them came forward to express their gratitude. He said, “Lord! We are attached to you more than to our own lives. Our bodies are healthy and hardy because of you. Our homes are resonant with joy and happiness because of you. It is all due to your grace. You have rid us of sorrow and drawn us near you. *Maharaja!* Who else can teach us so lovingly as you do? Our own fathers and mothers seek from us the fulfilment of their selfish desires; that is all.

“Of what use are we to you? Yet, you train us to attain the bliss of heaven. This gives us full contentment. You and your excellent followers have done magnificent service to the world by destroying the demonic race. We can never acquire a Lord, a friend, a father, as kind and considerate as You.” The people expressed their joy and the sense of enlightenment plentifully before Rama. Rama brightened at their loyalty and eagerness to learn more about spiritual matters. The citizens took leave of Rama and returned to their homes. They reminded themselves

of the valuable truths they had been taught.

### **Ayodhya was heaven on earth**

In the city of Ayodhya, every house had a flower garden attached to it. The residents tended the garden with love and care. It was perpetual spring in Ayodhya, for the plants were heavy with fruits and fragrant with blooms throughout the year. Clusters of bees hovered over the blooms, and their murmur could be heard all over. A cool breeze, heavy with the scent of flowers, greeted every one. Children of the city had many species of birds as pets; their songs, twitters, and chirps mingled to make charming music to the ear.

The wealth and prosperity of the citizens under Rama's benign reign cannot be adequately described by even a thousand thousand-tongued divine serpents (*seshas*). This was the result of the righteousness (*dharma*) that Rama fostered and guarded. Rama celebrated many a horse sacrifice (*aswamedha*). Millions and millions of *brahmins* were granted generous gifts and were made happy and contented. Rama, the promoter of *Vedic* rites and ceremonies and the guardian of the codes of *dharma* (but yet, above and beyond all obligations and attributes), and Sita, replete with all auspicious attributes and intent on helping all who craved to fulfil their beneficial obligations —both were vigilant in their task of keeping themselves and their subjects on the path of *dharma*.

Physical illness, mental anxiety, and moral downfall were totally absent when Rama ruled. People had deep love and affection for each other. Everyone struck gladly to the duties and rights sanctioned by the *Vedas* to the community and the profession. Austerity, charity, sacrifices, spiritual ritual, and studies continued unabated and even enthusiastically all over the land. Sinful thoughts dared not peep into minds of people, even in their dreams. Women, men, old people, children —all were at all times reveling in thoughts of Rama.

“No calamity or natural catastrophe was evident anywhere. During the Rama age, there were no poor, no grief-stricken, no one humbled or crestfallen, no one cruel or hateful, no one ugly or ghastly to behold. Everyone had all the marks of charm. No one hurt another with their pride and pomp. No one envied another. All were versed in *Atmic* wisdom; all were eager to practise and protect *dharma*, all were compassionate and intent on serving others. Each one was eager to extol the good qualities of another; no one gave room for egotism in their heart.

The entire globe, with its seven world divisions (*dwipas*) bordered by the oceans, was under the shade of the single umbrella of Rama's sovereignty. Over this entire region, Rama was the sole undisputed Lord. In this imperial domain, people enjoyed mutual love and mutual help. There was no trace of faction or fight; apartness and the big stick were not evident at all.

Of course, distinction came to the fore in dance and the arts. The stick was evident in the hands of ascetics and monks. Fighting was to be seen only when used against the senses by spiritual seekers (*sadhakas*). Attachment (*raga*), also meaning, tunes) could be noticed as attachments only in music. When no one had an enemy, how could “killing” be done? People killed the vagaries of the mind instead and won victories over their own lower natures.

The city and environs shone with incomparably attractive wells, lakes, and tanks. O the pure waters! O the beautiful landing places! Their sublime charm drew admiration from sages and seers. They blamed themselves for being so attracted. The lakes and tanks had lotuses of many colours blossoming on their surface. Many birds were singing on the trees growing thick on their banks. Parrots, peacocks, and others clustered on the branches and made merry. The city was more splendid than even heaven, and people were wonder-struck at its uniqueness.



## Vasishta asks for a boon

One day, Vasishta entered the palace in order to see Rama, the grantor of prosperity in all fields. Rama received him in true traditional style, washing his feet and offering sanctified water as drink.

Vasishta raised his folded palms and said, “O ocean of compassion! I have a request to make. I have been watching most delightfully your ‘play as man’. Now, I am beset with a big doubt. Your potency is limitless. Even the *Vedas* don’t know your nature fully. Lord! How can I describe you or decipher you?”

“This profession of family preceptor or priest is rather derogatory. The *Vedas*, scriptures (*sastras*), and *Puranas* declare that priesthood is inferior in status, since it is a mean occupation. He has to officiate at all the ceremonies in his master’s household, both auspicious and inauspicious. Therefore, it is contaminated.

First I did not agree at all to enter this profession, but Brahma saw me and understood my plight. He told me, ‘Son! You don’t know what lies in the future. Accept the profession without demur. You stand to gain enormously in the coming years. The Supreme Brahman (*Parabrahman*) will incarnate in the Raghu dynasty.’ Hearing this, I bowed my head to this profession and became the family priest of the Raghu dynasty. As a result of that decision, I have now attained that Supreme Principle, which can be won only by means of countless years of repetition of the name (*japa*), austerity (*tapas*), offerings (*yagas*), and sacrifices (*yajnas*), without putting myself into the hardship involved in these. All those good actions (karmas) have You as the goal to be won, and I have won You.

“What better work do have I than the one I have chosen? Lord of Lords! Repetition of the name, austerities, sacrifices, offerings, vows, rites, and ritual rules have been laid down in the *Vedas*. Through the cultivation of wisdom, compassion toward living beings, and virtuous conduct, your presence and grace can be attained.

“Lord! I pray for a boon. Grant me that boon in your infinite mercy. Shower your grace on me from the corner of your compassion-filled eye. Let my devotion for you be undiminished, however many lives I have to live hereafter; this is the boon I crave.” Later Vasishta took his leave of Rama and returned to his residence.

## More on the heaven that was Ayodhya

The subjects of the kingdom spent their time singing the thrice-holy captivating story of their ruler, Rama. One might have achieved success in *yoga* or performed many ritual vows but if one has no love in his heart, one could not get the sight (*darshan*) of Rama. The wise man, the ascetic, the hero, the poet, the scholar, the accomplished —no one of these were afflicted with greed in Rama’s empire. No one strayed into wrong, urged by pride of wealth. The intoxication of authority did not render anyone deaf. Where was the young man who suffered from the fever of youth? Or where could be found the man who lost his fame through yielding to the pull of selfishness? Where was the person tainted by enmity? Where was the person suffering from the paralysis of grief? Where was the person bitten by the serpent, anxiety? There was none such. Rama himself stood above and beyond these as an example for all to emulate. He was the embodiment of the *Atma* (*Atmaswarupa*), God Himself.

The redoubtable armies of illusion (*maya*) roam all over this world. The soldiers are passions —lust, greed, etc.; the commanding officers are pride, unbelief, etc. But the same illusion is the bond-slave of the Lord of the Raghus, Rama. She is ‘unreal’; yet, unless you have Rama’s grace, you can’t escape from capture and bondage. Only the grace flowing from the corner of His eye can liberate you from her grip.

Illusion “possesses” all movable and immovable things in the universe; no one can be free from her hold. She imitates the earthly glory of the Lord. Like a skilled actress, she enacts her role with lust, greed, and others as

supporting cast. Rama, however, as the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*), as the personification of the deep blue that characterises the sea and sky, the phenomenon that has no birth, as the highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*) Itself —Rama has no trace of illusion in Him.

In the city of Ayodhya, every day was a new festival, and every festival was marked with some novel features of entertainment. Each day, Rama gave away riches as charity. It was laid down that no one should blame another or scorn another. No bad word should be uttered. In every home, there were daily readings of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. No community of people looked on another or considered another as inferior. Each carried on its traditional occupation and respected the norms laid down. Therefore, compassion and affection toward the subjects grew quick and large in Rama's heart.

Observing the devotion and dedication with which wives in Rama's kingdom served their husbands, even the gods grew envious of men. The husbands also shone as people deserving such service; no one brought a single tear from the eyes of those wedded to them. Husband and wife had the feeling that each was half the body of the other, so they got on as one, desiring each other's best interests and devoted to their realisation.

In Rama's time, no one tried to have recourse to falsehood under any circumstance. Boys and girls honoured the commands and directions of parents and preceptors. Everyone was as happy as the lord of gods in heaven, Indra. Grain and riches were as plentiful in every home as in the place of the God of Wealth, Kubera. The *chakora* birds were as glad as if they were looking on at the moon in autumn.

Women watched Rama from behind the doors of their enclosed apartments and were delighted. Bharatha, Lakshmana, and Satrugna were thrilled continuously in mind, filling their eyes with the divine charm of Sri Rama. The entire world was filled with full splendour while it was ruled by Rama.

There was no trace or mention of "sin". The monks and ascetics wandered about fearless in the wildest woods. The mutual affection between the king and his subjects grew more and more from day to day. The earth shone with love and light. The forests were shimmering in perpetual green. Birds and beasts had lost their instinctive hatred for one another. Not even an iota of hatred was to be found anywhere; nor was there even a whisper indicating its existence. All were bound by the thickest of comradeships. Every individual evinced great enthusiasm in describing Rama's excellences and achievements.

### **A disaster happens!**

One day, Rama was on his throne, in the audience hall, along with his brothers. A *brahmin* entered the hall in great distress. He spoke many harsh words and pleaded angrily for redress. "Alas!", he cried, "the fame of the solar dynasty has ended today. I remember the glory of the great kings of the past —Sibi, Raghu, Dilipa, Sagara— for such iniquities would not have happened when those kings were ruling. Would a son ever die during his father's lifetime? Could such a disaster happen if the ruler is good? But today I saw this thing happen!"

Rama, who is omnipresent, knew what had happened and was affected by the words spoken by the *brahmin*. He probed within himself the reason for the death and assured himself that it had not occurred as a result of any administrative fault. He was aware that it was the consequence of evil thought, so he set about prescribing limits and regulations that would prevent such thoughts from arising in people's minds.

Rama paid great attention even to such small matters and designed measures to prevent their recurrence. He laid aside all concern about himself and sought to realise the goal he had set before himself, viz. the happiness of

his people. He cared for his subjects as if they were as dear to him as his own body. The people also valued the affection and happiness of the king; he was to them as dear as his heart.

The ruler never worked against the wishes of the people. They, too, did not overstep Rama's orders even by a hair's breadth. The Rama kingdom of those days was resplendent thus for many years. Rama was Narayana Himself. So his reign redounded to the glory of the earth and its history. For, truth and righteousness are the real guardians of mankind.