

19. The Raamaayana family

THE Raamayaana is the very life-blood of the *Bhaaratheeyas*. Down to a few years ago, it was difficult to find throughout the length and breadth of India a village without a temple for the worship of Raama, a home where a picture of Raama was not adored, or a tongue whereon the name Raama did not dance. The entire country was saturated with the fragrance of Raama. Such a fortunate land has degenerated in recent times into a region fouled from top to bottom with the contagion of *kaama* (lust). Seek to be filled with Raama; you will be saved. Seek, on the other hand, to be fouled by *kaama*; you will be damned.

In the *Thretha* Age of human history, the Formless, Attributeless Principle of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss was so overcome with compassion that It assumed the human form, as the very embodiment of *Dharma* (*Raamo vighrahavaan Dharmah*), manifested various examples for man of correct righteous conduct, re-established the supremacy of *Dharma* and its inherent might, and merged again in the Absolute, from which It had appeared.

The *Vedhas* describe the Divine entity as *Maadhava*: *Maa* meaning *maaya* and *dhaya* meaning Lord. That is to say, He is the Master of all that is born and therefore dies, changes and therefore, false! Life and death are a part of *maaya* (delusion), of which He is sovereign. So, all who are bound by this dual chain have to be loyal to God, and pay homage to Him and obey His order. That is the path to happiness. But, the agent of *maaya* that is in the human, namely, the mind, does not usually help him in this endeavour. It runs after the shadow, the reflection, the unsubstantial glitter, and discards the gold. It runs through the senses into the outer world and neglects the call of reason for discriminating analysis and renunciation. Man is thus everywhere living a life of shame, far below the level that he can well attain and enjoy.

Tread the path of truth laid down by Raama

To meet a person living on the tenth floor, you have to go up nine floors. To experience the joy of being with *Maadhava* (God), you have to rise to that purity, that love, that truth, that peace. Become full of compassion; love all; serve all; do your duty sincerely and with joy; be good, do good, and thus deserve God. Raama will be pleased when you tread the path of truth, for, that is the path laid down by Him. A cursory reading of the Raamaayana will give you only the husk; the kernel can reveal itself only when you reflect over each word and incident. Indian culture has always encouraged this reflection on the meanings of symbols, parables, and names. It is stated, "Dhasharatha had four sons: Raama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Sathrugna." Well. Who is the Dhasharatha? Which kingdom was he ruling over? If in some City called Ayodhya, there was once a ruler named Dhasharatha and he had a son called Raama, how are we related to that episode? Why should we celebrate that event, at this distance of time and space?

No one can escape living with the three *gunas*

Go a little deep into the story and you will realise that Dhasharatha is not the ruler of a far off land, that his capital city is not on the map of Northern India, and that the four brothers are not people who lived and passed away! Ayodhya means a city that is unconquerable, into which the enemy cannot penetrate, an impregnable fortress. It represents the *Aathma*, the heart where the Lord resides, which is proof against temptations, the subtle foes of passion and emotion, impulse and instinct. And Dhasharatha? The person who has as his ratha (chariot) the ten entities namely,

the body with the five senses of action and the five senses of knowledge! He married three brides, this individual, who is the symbol of all individuals.

Now, though each married man may have a wife with a physical existence of her own, he has also wedded to him, inseparable from him, till death 'do separate,' three attributes: *Sathwa*, *Rajas* and *Thamas*, the three natures---balanced, passionate and dull. The three queens represent these *Gunas*---*Koushalya*, the *Saathwik* (balanced) *Guna*, *Sumithra*, the *Rajas* (the passionate, active) and *Kaikeyi*, the *Thaamasik* (ignorant, indiscriminating) No one can escape living with these three *gunas*, and experiencing the varied reactions which that contact involves. In due course, the yearning arose in the mind that it must have a Master whom it can obey and revere. The agony became so acute that the transcendent divine actualised itself in Grace that took the form of *paayasam* (rice pudding), brought by a messenger of God from the sacrificial fire. That gift of Grace was shared by the three *gunas* (qualities) and four sons were born, representing *dharma*, *artha*, *kaama* and *moksha* (virtue, wealth, desire fulfilment and liberation), the four prime ends of man. Raama the eldest is *dharma* and the other three stand for the rest.

You will have to sacrifice a great deal, if *dharma* must be born in your heart. That is why Dhasharatha had to do the *Puthrakaameshtiyaaga* (a great sacrifice for obtaining sons). The Divine is the very embodiment of *dharma* and it is only by means of *dharma* that He can be worshipped. And *Dharma* is a garland of the flowers of holy deeds, holy words, holy thoughts. Earn the reputation; of being good, serviceable and efficient in doing good. Children who do not render their parents happy, by such good conduct are remembered by their mothers only through the pain they gave them at birth.

Make every act reflect the Divine splendour

At the present time, every one is moaning that they have lost peace, security and happiness. There is a loud clamour from all the quarters. But, no one seeks to discover why this tragedy has taken place. The reason is this: what has to be done is not being done; what has to be observed is not being observed. There is no co-ordination between what is said and what is done. Hypocrisy is rampant in the homes, the villages, in the offices, the council-halls of the nation. It is raised to high positions even in the spiritual field. Those who turn beads with God's name on their lips are engaged in ungodly pursuits. With the Bhagavath Geetha in their hands, they talk scandal and hatch evil plots. With rosaries on their fingers, they fume at servants, losing temper on the slightest pretext. This is no vow, no discipline of the spirit!

The *Bhaktha* who poses to be sincere has to exercise constant vigilance and practise the discipline of being ever in the Divine Presence. God who is now dormant in your consciousness has to be recognised and made resurgent so that every act of yours will reflect the Divine Splendour. *Vyaktha* means patent; the individual man is called *vyakthi* in Samskrith; for, he has to make patent the latent Divine.

Consider the ideal examples Raamaayana provides

When you have achieved the consciousness that God is in you, with you, for you, that awareness must re-shape every thought, word, and deed, and make you wish good, speak good, and do good. Men who have ostensibly dedicated themselves to the religious discipline are only play-actors strutting on the stage of the world. Others wear their devotion very thin; the smallest trouble or disappointment turns them against faith in God. But, real devotion has to withstand whatever misfortune may bring.

Just consider the series of ideal examples that the Raamaayana provides: the family of Raama is itself an invaluable gallery of Supreme *Dharma*. When a son is as loyal as Raama, accepting even exile as his father's will and gladly walking into the forest as gladly as he moved towards the throne for his coronation, he will be the ideal son indeed. Consider how that great lady, Seetha, revered her husband as her Lord and God, and herself persuaded him to take her with Him into exile in the forest, braving all the deprivations in her desire to be by his side. If all wives were so steadfast and loyal and loving as Seetha, India will certainly be full of happy homes resounding with hearty joy of contentment. Every door will be green with festoons.

As for brothers, who can equal Lakshmana or Bharatha? His mother had secured the throne of the vast empire for him, but Bharatha spurned it, since it belonged, as of right, to the eldest of the brothers. Everyone is struggling to secure positions of authority, by hook or crook. But, here is a man who gave up what was very correctly won for him by his own mother from his own father, gave it up so that the person to whom it morally belonged, might return from exile to receive it and enjoy the status and power! And, Lakshmana, how he forsook food and sleep, in order to stand guard over his brother and sister-in-law, in the thickest jungle; how he surrendered his will fully and gladly at the feet of his brother!

Grand examples of renunciation

The women? When Lakshmana went to his mother, Sumithra, to take her blessings before accompanying Raama into exile, she did not argue, "Why should you go? Your father has not asked you to leave. Stay on and be happy in the palace and make me and your newly wedded bride happy." She said, "Son! Do not imagine that you are leaving for the forest and that we are remaining in the city of Ayodhya. Without Raama, this city is the jungle; with Him the jungle is Ayodhya." What did Urmila, the young wife, tell her Lord Lakshmana? She did not plead for permission to accompany her husband as Seetha did and for very good reason. She said, If I come, you will not be able to pay undivided attention to the service of Raama and Seetha. I shall remain here awaiting your arrival after 14 years!" What a grand example of renunciation, this! If, in each family, we have such sons, mothers, brothers and wives, the land will have no anxiety or sorrow. It will be resplendent with joy and peace.

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The worst action is to do the opposite of what you preach: to deny by the hand what you dole out of your mouth.

If you cannot act up to your declarations, keep quiet; do not go about advising and advertise that you are hypocrite?.

Do not preach dharma (virtue) while decrying it in deed. Dharma is steady, unchanging, it can never decline.

What happens is: those who have to practise dharma decline in faith and steadfastness.

Sri Sathya Sai