

11. Raamaayana for everyman

THE Raamaayana is a guide book, a sacred text, an inspiring scripture, for everyman in all lands, at all times, whatever his creed or condition might be. For, it imparts poise, balance, equanimity, inner strength and peace. Peace is the best treasure, without which power, authority, fame, fortune are all dry and burdensome. Thyaagaraaja has sung that there can be no happiness, without inner peace.

To earn this peace and to be unshakably established in it, man must develop *Abhyaasa* (steady practice) and *Vairaagyam* (full detachment). From birth to death, man is the slave of habits and practices. One must examine these and rely more and more on those that lead him towards subjective joy rather than objective pleasure. Subjective joy can be acquired by harmony in the home, mutual co-operation among the members of the family and community, acts of service to others and concern for the welfare and prosperity of the society in which one is living.

The Raamaayana holds up the ideals to be pursued by the father, the son, the mother, the brother, the friend, the servant, the master, the teacher, the pupil, etc. The happy home is the basic cell of the national organism. It ensures a happy world, for mankind is one family, and if any one unit is sad or struggling in distress, how can, the rest be safe or satisfied?

There is no object without fault or failing

Vairaagyam (detachment) does not imply renunciation of family ties and fleeing into the loneliness of the jungle. It means our giving up the feeling that things are permanent, and capable of yielding supreme joy. The mind plays tricks with man and believes that some things are good and some bad, some eternal and some transitory. You might have a plateful of nice eatables before you and they might appear to be delicious and fine; but, if the cook announces that a lizard had fallen into cooker when it was on fire and has been boiled alive, all the fascination for the food disappears in a trice! There is no object without fault or failing; there is no joy that is unmixed with pain; there is no act that is not tainted with egotism. So be warned and develop the detachment which will save you from grief.

The Raamaayana instils this wise, valid, valuable detachment, or *thyaaga* (sacrifice). Raama gladly journeys into the forest as an exile, the moment he knows that his father's wish was that he should do so; and, remember, he was to be crowned Emperor just that moment by the very same person who ordered him to go into exile. When those who have full powers and claims, renounce positions of authority in the Raamaayana, we see today persons with no powers or claims, clamouring to occupy position of authority!

The lesson Raamaayana teaches about Duty

Duty is God, that is the lesson the Raamaayana teaches. The word duty is today used to indicate the methods by which one exercises his authority. No. Duty is the responsibility you have to respect and revere others and to serve them to the best of your ability. You claim to have the freedom to walk, waving your walking stick around you; but, the man coming behind has as much freedom to use the road as you have. To exercise your freedom so that you do not limit or harm the freedom of others---that is the Duty, which becomes Worship.

When Raama, Seetha and Lakshmana reached the banks of the Ganga, Sumanthra, the aged Minister of the Court who had taken them so far in the Royal Chariot, could not follow them; he had in duty bound to return to the Capital. So, he turned back with tearful eyes; Guha rowed

them across the river, they entered the forest and started walking in single file through the thick jungle---Raama, Seetha in the middle and Lakshmana following behind. They reached the hermitage of Vaalmeeki soon; when the Sage came forward to welcome them, Raama asked him to indicate a place where he can reside. Valmeeki said, "We sages reside in You; you reside in us. Where else can I request you to reside? Though you have assumed this human form, "You give yourself away by the Beauty that shines in You."

Man is doomed when evanescent overcomes him

The Beauty of Raama was the Beauty of Inner Peace, the Splendour that fills one when he is conscious of living in *Dharma* (righteousness). Raamaayana teaches also the need to give up the false identification with the body. When Raama saw Tharaa wailing over the corpse of Vaali, he gives her lessons on the evanescence of the body and the foolishness of identifying a person with that vehicle he uses for the purpose of his journey to Divinity.

When desire for the evanescent overcomes man, he is doomed; he becomes distant from the goal. Consider Seetha. She renounced everything that she thought would give her comfort in the palaces of her father and father-in-law and preferred to follow Raama into the forest. So, she secured the Proximity and Presence of the Lord. But, alas, when she saw the false form of the Golden Deer, she yearned for it, and sent both Raama and Lakshmana after it, so that she might fondle it and feed it and have it as a pet. What was the result of this fatal desire? She was forced to live far away from the Lord and to pine for Him in great anguish.

When Raama is installed in the heart, everything will be added unto you---fame, fortune, freedom, fullness. Hanumaan was a mere monkey leader until he met Raama; he was a minister in the court of his master; but, when Raama gave him the commission to seek Seetha and sent him, that is to say, when Raama was installed in his heart as guide and guardian, Hanumaan became immortal, as the Ideal Devotee.

The Raamaayana has a deep undercurrent of significant meaning. Dhasharatha means, he who rides in a chariot of ten, that is to say MAN. He is tied up with three *Gunas* (qualities), or three wives, as in the Raamaayana. He has four sons, the *Purusharthas*---*Dharma* (Raama) *Artha* (Lakshmana), *Kaama* (Bharatha), and *moksha* (Sathrugna). These four aims of man have to be systematically realised, always with the last one, *Moksha*, clearly before the eye. Lakshmana represents the *Buddhi* (Intellect) and Seetha is Truth. Hanumaan is the Mind, and it is the repository, if controlled and trained, of courage. Sugreeva, the master of Hanumaan is Discrimination. With these to help him Raama seeks Truth and succeeds. That is the lesson of the Epic to everyman.

Ideals underlying the ancient culture of India

The culture of this land is based on the high ideals of Righteousness enshrined in the Raamaayana and the Mahaabhaaratha, in both of which God has led mankind in the garb of man. There is a story of Alexander the Great, which illustrates the glory of Indian Culture. It seems Alexander used to go incognito to the villages around his camp, in India, in order to learn the habits and manners of the strange new land into which fate had brought him. One day, he found a man pleading with another to accept a pot of gold, which the other was refusing even to look at! He came to know that the pot of gold was discovered under the soil of the field purchased by the man from the man who refused to accept it. The buyer argued that he had bought only the land

and was therefore not entitled to own the pot of gold; the seller said, he had no more right for anything found on or in the plot, that he had sold.

Alexander watched this contest for some time; both did not yield. At last, the village elders were called in to decide the issue. And, even as Alexander watched, the elders found a happy way out—the buyer's son shall marry the seller's daughter and the pot of the gold shall be given to the bride as dowry! Alexander felt elated at the heights to which human virtue could rise; he was also ashamed at his own adventurous ambition to conquer another's property by force of arms. The ideals underlying the ancient culture of India have to be studied and practised by every Indian at least, so that the world might have the benefit of the great examples this can provide.

Turn your sight inside, to purify and clarify

This day, when you are celebrating the birth of Raama, you have to dedicate your activities to these ideals propounded in the life of Raama. The fact that you are alive this day is a blessing, for, you can know of these ideals and also the means by which you can realise them in actual daily life. There are many who spend much time in mechanically reciting the name Raama or systematically reading the entire Raamaayana according to a fixed time-table, or who worship the images of Raama, Seetha, Lakshmana, and Hanumaan, as a daily ritual, with pomp and pedantry; but, like the person who puts a foot forward only to draw it back again these persons do not progress at all, though years might elapse. Without gaining purity of thoughts and intentions, compassion and the urge to serve, these outward expressions and exhibitions are but ways of cheating the society which applauds you as a great devotee. Your sight must become insight; it must be turned within and used to purify and clarify.

People talk glibly of *Saakshaathkaara* (Vision of the Divine), the vision that liberates. The Seer and the Seen have to merge and become One and experienced as One only, without a second. That is the *Saakshaathkaara* that is worthwhile. You may have a fruit. You may earn the fruit of *thapas* (penance) in your hand. But, unless you eat it, digest it, and make it part of your own nature and derive strength therefrom, you are not saved at all. Merge into the Divine which you really are; that is the consummation.

In order to reach this goal, you have to proceed far. First examine your present equipment; find out its defects, for example, whether it is damaged by egotism, greed, insincerity, waywardness and sloth. *For*, with these faults, it is difficult to concentrate on thoughts of God, either within or without. You must also cultivate the positive quality of Prema (Love) for the Embodiment of Prema can be realised only through Prema. That is the message the Raamaayana gives all those who study it with sincere desire to learn. That is the message I wish to give you today.

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