

### 32. The brother among brothers

THE ideal of brotherhood as depicted in the Raamaayana is without parallel in any other epic anywhere in world literature. When, during the battle with the *raakshasa* (demon) hordes in Lanka, Lakshmana fell unconscious and could not be revived, Raama lamented the calamity, saying, "Alas! Lakshmana is the source of my breath; there is no brother like him on the whole earth." Lakshmana's life and relationship with his brother Raama are shining examples for mankind.

It can be said that Lakshmana is the A in the sacred syllable *AUM*; Bharatha, the second brother, is the U; Sathrughna, the third, is the M and Raama, the eldest, is the full *AUM*. Raama is the concretisation of the *Brahman* (Universal Absolute) that first emanated as the Primeval Sound, *AUM*. When Raama and Lakshmana were wading through the Jungle after the loss of Seetha, the sages who saw them described them as the 'Sun and Moon,' so majestic and magnificent was their mein. They shone with the splendour of courage and determination. When strength of body and steadfastness of mind reinforce each other, one's mein becomes attractive. Youth today has neither physical strength nor mental steadfastness, so young people appear old very early in life. When the body is weak, the mind, too, gets weak. You must try to develop physical well-being and health, for a gem has to be treasured in a safe, strong box. The gem of Divinity that is your reality also has to be kept in a strong box, namely, the body.

#### **Lesson for today's youth from the life of Raama**

Even during their boyhood Raama and Lakshmana were careful about how they dressed. During the period of their early spiritual apprenticeship, they discarded princely robes, even though Dhasaratha tempted them to wear costly jewels and clothes. When in the forest as exiles, they wore deerskin and had their hair knotted on top. They argued that a dress must be worn for one's own satisfaction and not in order to imitate someone else. They were never slaves to fashion or convention. They laid down the norms for others and never imitated others just to earn their favour.

Heroism was the hall-mark of the brothers. They met every obstacle squarely and exhibited the necessary enterprise and ability to meet and overcome opposition. The youth of today have to learn this lesson. They quaff before the tiniest obstacle and lose heart at the first difficulty they encounter. Like the heroes of the Raamaayana they should march forward bravely, whatever the handicap, in either the secular, the moral or the spiritual fields of activity. When the truth of One Reality in all, the Reality of God, is revealed, then there will be no more room for anger or hatred. They will seek and see only the good in every one. At present the passion in their eyes colours their version.

#### **Lakshmana could not tolerate separation from Raama**

Thulsi Dhaas, while composing his epic poem, *Raamacharithaamaanas*, wrote that the flowers in the gardens of Lanka were white. Hanumaan, who was present unseen, manifested himself, his face full of dissent, for he said that they were red and not white, as he had himself seen them: Thulsi Dhaas refused to amend the adjective, but Hanumaan insisted that the error be corrected. The argument almost turned into a scuffle and Raama Himself had to intervene. He told Hanumaan that since anger against *raakshasas* (demons) had reddened his eyes, the white flowers appeared red to him.

Lakshmana had a pure heart from his very birth. As he grew up he was able to overcome the urges of his senses and establish himself as their master. His character was above reproach. He eagerly welcomed any order from Raama and enjoyed fulfilling it to the best of his ability. Lakshmana spent the first two days of his life wailing aloud in the lap of Sumithra, his mother. She tried all remedies, magical and ritual, to console him, but the baby would not be consoled or persuaded to eat or to sleep. She consulted Vashishta, the Royal Preceptor, who advised that Lakshmana be laid beside Raama in the palace of Kausalya. She did as directed, and in the company of Raama Sumithra's child slept soundly and played most happily. He could not tolerate separation from Raama. His greatest desire was to be in Raama's presence. He followed Raama like his shadow, never residing in a place where Raama was not present. Raama was all that he wanted, all that he cared for.

### **Steadfast loyalty of Lakshmana to Raama**

When Raama started out into exile in the forest wearing garments of bark, Lakshmana, too, did the same. For fourteen years he watched over his brother and his wife, guarding them day and night without any regard for his own comfort or even for sleep or food. Thulasi Dhaas pays great tribute to Lakshmana for this devoted service. According to him, when Raama returned to Ayodhya after his period of exile, the citizens in lakhs cheered at the distant sight of the flag on top of the chariot which was bringing him. But they did not know, he says, that the pole which carried the flag of Raama's triumph was Lakshmana, the devoted brother. How could the flag fly so splendidly without the dedicated service, the undaunted courage and the steadfast loyalty of the brother who gladly shared the travails of exile with Raama?

In the course of Naaraayana's enactment as a *nara* (man) named Raama on earth, He had a crucial role to play. Lakshmana laid down his life for the purpose of realising the Mission of the *Avathaar* (divine incarnation). He never transgressed by as much as a step, the boundary laid down by Raama. When Raama ordered him to raise a fire into which Seetha was advised to step as part of the fire-ordeal to prove her chastity to the world, Lakshmana obeyed with a bleeding heart. When Raama ordered him to take Seetha out into the forest and leave her alone and unguarded there, Lakshmana obeyed, though his heart was wrung with pain.

### **Lakshmana gave up everything to serve Raama**

There were two occasions when Lakshmana had unfortunately to go against the specific orders of Raama. When Maareecha, after enticing Raama a long distance away by assuming the form of a golden deer, was finally killed by him, he imitated Raama's voice and cried out before dying, "O Seetha! O Lakshmana! Help me, Help Me!" Lakshmana, knowing this to be a trick of the *raakshasa* (demon) Maareecha, and in accordance with Raama's instructions, did not leave Seetha's side. However on Seetha's firm insistence to trace Raama's cry for help and on being accused by her of ulterior motives, he finally left her alone at the hut and went in search of Raama.

The second instance occurred towards the end of the *Avathaar* period. The Gods sent Yama himself to Raama, to remind him that his life as an *Avathaar* could be ended and all the Divine participants could return to their Heavenly abode. When Yama came into the audience hall, Raama directed Lakshmana to be at the entrance and not allow any one to enter and interrupt the conversation. He told him to be vigilant, on pain of death. While Lakshmana was keeping watch, the short-tempered sage, Dhuurvaasa, approached him and demanded entry. He was furious on being stopped and threatened to lay a terrible curse of destruction on Ayodhya, its inhabitants

and. on the entire Raghu clan. Lakshmana weighed the pros and cons and concluded that his death would indeed be a lesser calamity than the destruction of the entire population of Ayodhya. So he admitted Dhuurvaasa and gladly received the punishment.

Lakshmana decided every act of his on the touch-stone of either Raama's wish or the general good. He gave up everything---his wife Urmila, his mother Sumithra and the princely life at Ayodhya---for the chance of serving Raama and furthering His mission. When he killed Indhrajith in battle, Raama embraced him with unbounded joy, and exclaimed, "Ah, dear brother! What a great victory you have achieved today. Now I feel as if I have already got Seetha back."

### **Humility, heroism and noble character of Lakshmana**

Between Raama and Lakshmana there was never any trace of envy or suspicion. Lakshmana was supremely indifferent to what was happening around him if it did not affect Raama. His greatness is immeasurable. He served Seetha every day for fourteen years, but never once raised his eyes to her face. His conduct was the height of righteousness.

When the bundle of jewels that Seetha had thrown along the way while being abducted by Raavana was retrieved by the *vaanaras* at Rishyamuka Hill, they handed it over to Sugreeva. Sugreeva brought it before Raama and Lakshmana for identification. When Raama asked Lakshmana whether he could identify any of the jewels as belonging to Seetha, Lakshmana said that he could vouchsafe for the genuineness of only one jewel---that which Seetha wore on her ankles. He saw it every day when he fell at the feet of Seetha and so could recognise it as unmistakably hers. Such was the noble character of Raama's brother.

When Lakshmana fainted during the battle with Indhrajith, the latter wanted to lift his unconscious body and carry him into Lanka as a hostage. But since Lakshmana was the incarnation of the cosmic serpent, Sesa, he was tremendously heavy and could not be moved. So Indhrajith gave up the idea and went away. Meanwhile Hanumaan arrived there, and on his uttering the name of Raama, Lakshmana's weight was reduced to that of a feather, so responsive was he to *Raamanaama* even in his unconsciousness. This is a measure of the humility and the heroism of this great-brother of Raama.

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*Give the body the attention it deserves, but not more. Some people advise that you should cultivate disgust towards it; but, that is not beneficial. Tend it as an instrument, use it as a boat, as a raft. Disgust is not a desirable attitude towards anything in creation. Everything is God's handiwork, an example of His Glory, His Majesty.*

*Sri Sathya Sai*