

6. Rama, the Indweller

EMBODIMENTS of the Divine Atma! Every man takes birth in this world to discharge three kinds of debt. The first is the debt to God. The second is the debt to the *Rishis* (sages). The third is the debt to one's parents. The Divine permeates every cell in the body, endowing it with divine energy. It is the power of the Divine which keeps every limb in the body functioning through the action of this Divine energy.

It follows from this that man has to be conscious of this energy and be grateful to the Divine for sustaining and protecting him. If he fails to do so, his life is a waste. Discharging the debt to the Divine means engaging oneself in sacred actions and in serving others and thereby dedicating every action of the body to the Divine. It is when such a divinely endowed body is consecrated for holy purposes, by constant performance of sacred, sublime and dedicated actions, that the debt to the Divine is discharged.

Debt to the sages and parents

Next comes the debt to the *Rishis*. The ancient sages, by devoting all their energies to penance and spiritual enquiries, have bequeathed to mankind the great scriptures which should serve as guides for ordering their lives in the world and beyond. It is the sages who have offered to mankind the *Upanishads*, the *puranas* and the epics for the proper regulation of their conduct in life along ideal lines. We must recognise the supreme significance of the scriptures for making our lives sublime. The paths laid down by the *Rishis* show what are the actions to be avoided and what are the right actions which are obligatory for everyone and their injunctions should be scrupulously respected. The prescribed duties should be performed and the prohibited actions should be eschewed. It is only then that the debt owed to the *Rishis* gets discharged.

The third one is the debt to the parents. One's body is derived from the flesh and blood of the mother. How much sacrifice is involved in giving birth to a child and rearing him with continuous care and love is beyond description. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the life you lead are all the gift of your parents. It is one's primary duty to please one's parents. Only thus is the debt to the parents discharged. Nor is that all. The debt to the parents has to be repaid by acting properly and rendering service to society.

It is for these reasons that Emperor Dasaratha paid his debt to the Divine and through *his yagas and yajnas*, he discharged his obligations to the *Rishis*. But he was unable to discharge the *Pithru runa* (debt to his parents). He did show due reverence to them. But owing to the lack of a worthy son capable of sustaining *Dharma*, he could not fully discharge the obligations he owed to his parents. Dasaratha was one who realised the supremacy of *Dharma*. Hence, to overcome the lack of a son, he decided to perform the *Putrakameshti yaga* (the special sacrifice for getting blessed with a son).

Why Dasaratha performed *Putrakameshti yaga*

The desire to have a son should not be for the protection of one's possessions and properties. Nor should it be for ensuring the performance of one's funeral obsequies. Nor for rendering any type of service to oneself. The main purpose should be to have sons who will practise righteousness in the service of society. It was with this aim that Dasaratha decided to perform the *Putrakameshti yaga*.

The sages Vasishta and Jabali and others heartily welcomed the Emperor's decision. At this stage, the Emperor's Prime Minister Sumantra recalled to him the advice which the Sage Sanatkumara had given previously. Sumantra said: "Oh King! You have forgotten what Sanatkumara told you. Sanatkumara had enjoined on you to get the blessings of the great Sage Rishyasringa and perform the *yaga* with Rishyasringa as Brahma at the sacrifice."

Thereupon, Dasaratha, accompanied by a number of priests, proceeded to the *ashram* of Rishyasringa. Rishyasringa readily responded to the Emperor's appeal and came for the *yaga* together with his spouse *Santha*. Conforming to the procedure laid down for the *Putrakameshti yaga*, Dasaratha first embarked on an *Aswamedha* (Horse) sacrifice. For this sacrifice, a horse that has certain specific characteristics is required. It should bear all the prescribed insignia. In the season of *Vasantha* (Spring) the search for a suitable horse was started. It was only by the return of the next Spring season that it could be found. Another year went by before the horse could be appropriately prepared for the *yaga*. Then, the horse was released to go round the realm. It returned from this sacred mission in the next Spring season. This means that the preparations for the *yajna* were spread over three years.

Brahma then appeared. Who is this Brahma? He is described as a deity with four faces. The four-faced Brahma told Dasaratha: "Oh king! Your desires will be fulfilled. Complete the *yajna* with expedition." Heartened by the deity's assurance, Dasaratha distributed largesse to one and all generously and completed the *yajna*. The scriptures declare, "*Yajna* is the very form of Vishnu." Who is Vishnu in this context? It is not the form bearing *Sankha* (Conch) and *Chakra* (Wheel). Vishnu refers to the Supreme One who permeates everything in the cosmos.

The four Vedas born as four children

At the completion of the *yajna*, a deity rising from the sacrificial fire appeared before. Dasaratha carrying a bowl of *Payasam* in his hands. What is the unique greatness of this *Payasam* (a sweet liquid)? It represented the essence of all the *Vedas*. When Dasaratha's three queens drank the *payasam*, the four *Vedas* were born as four children for Dasaratha Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna. Rama represented *Yajur Veda*, which is the embodiment of *Dharma*. Lakshmana, who was always immersed in reciting the name of Rama and ever dedicated to his service, represents the *Rig Veda*. Bharatha, who loved always to sing the name of Rama and revelled in chanting the Divine name, represents the *Sama Veda*. Satrughna, who was ever devoted to serving the other three brothers and who had conquered the internal and external foes, represents the *Atharvana Veda*. The four brothers thus represented the four *Vedas*. It is only when the Ramayana is studied for its esoteric significance, rather than from a superficial point of view, that the full meaning of the epic be clear to us.

Manifestation of Pranava

The significance of the advent of the four brothers may also be realised from another point of view. The *Pranava mantra* "*Aum*" has been equated with the Supreme *Brahman*. In this three-letter word "A" stands for Lakshmana, "U" stands for Bharatha and "M" stands for Satrughna. The *Om* that emanates from the combination of these three sounds represents Rama. Hence the scriptures have declared that the Rama Principle symbolises the primordial *Om*. Moreover, Valmiki brought out the unique significance of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita as a manifestation of *Om*. Lakshmana, representing "A", stands to the right of Rama; Rama,

representing "U" is in the middle; and Sita, representing "M", is to the left of Rama. Valmiki described the combination of the three as the embodiment of divinity.

The symbolism of the Ramayana may be viewed from another angle. The human body, with the five organs of *Jnanendriyas* (perception) and the *Karmendriyas* (five organs of action) represents the chariot, Dasaratha. The heart is Ayodhya, that which is not easily penetrable. The heart is, however, subject to pleasure and pain. The body is related to the three *gunas*--*Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Symbolically, of the three wives of Dasaratha, Kausalya represents *Satwa*, Sumitra represents *Rajoguna* and Kaikeyi represents *the Tamoguna*. This means that the human body is wedded to the three *gunas*. What is the *Dharma* that should be followed by this body? The fourfold *Purusharthas* (goals of life) are the goals prescribed for man: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. The four brothers may be regarded as symbolising these four goals. *Artha* (the acquisition of wealth) should be related to *Dharma* (Righteousness) and *Kama* (desires) should be related to *Moksha* (liberation). Man today ignores *Dharma* and *Moksha* and goes only after *Artha* and *Kama*. Consequently he becomes a prey to sorrow and misery.

Anything can be achieved with purity of heart

Of the four *Purusharthas*, *Dharma* is most important. What is this *Dharma*? It is essentially *Trikarana suddhi*--purity in thought, word and deed. The complete harmony between thought, word and deed is the mark of a *Mahatma* (high, souled being). Without unity of thought, word and deed, there can be no fulfilment in life. It is the duty of every man to achieve such fulfilment by leading a life of triple purity as Dasaratha did. The consummation of all *sadhana* (*spiritual practices*) is purity of the heart.

It should be realized that there is room in the heart for only a single person. It should not be regarded as a long sofa or as a musical chair. God alone should be installed in the heart. It is because today men change their loyalties from moment to moment that their devotion gets diluted and their aspirations remain unfulfilled. With a pure heart and one pointed devotion anything can be achieved in this world.

Always keep Lord by your side

Sita demonstrated her complete disregard for all worldly pleasures when she chose to accompany Rama to the forest. All arguments of Rama about the hazards of life in the forest, with wild animals roaming about, were of no avail. She said when she had the Lord of all beings by her side what danger could befall her. However, when on seeing the golden deer in the forest, she expressed a desire for it, she distanced herself from Rama and her troubles started.

As long as you are attached to the things of the world, whatever worship you may do, you will not have God-realisation. It is not necessary to give up everything; it is enough if you enjoy everything as a gift from God and offer everything to God. Everything is a manifestation of God. You can enjoy anything with that awareness.

Even some of the *rakshasas* understood the Divine Reality of Rama. Maricha was one of those who realised the omnipresence, the omnipotence and the Divine greatness of Rama. The sage Vishwamitra took Rama (and Lakshmana) for the protection of his *yaga* from the depredations of Tataki and her sons. Maricha was one of the sons. After Rama had killed Tataki, Maricha appeared to disturb the *yaga*. Rama aimed an arrow at him which threw him off miles away. That experience made Maricha realise the Divine puissance of Rama. He declared that he had not seen

anyone who could equal Rama in power. Going to Ravana, he explained to him the unique powers of Rama even as a young lad. He told Ravana: "Oh Ravana! There is no one in this world who is as powerful as Rama. There is no parallel to him anywhere. His unexcelled beauty is beyond words. His form fascinates even men. I have beheld his divine beautiful form." Ravana kept in mind all that Maricha had told him.

Surpanakha's description of Rama

Later, Ravana's sister came to Ravana with a bleeding ear and nose, wailing before him. Ravana asked her: "How is it, sister, that anyone could cut your ear on one side and the nose at another place? With all your powers, what were you doing when the ear was cut first and the nose later? It is impossible for anyone to cut both of them at the same time." Surpanakha replied: "Oh brother! What shall I say? All the time I was looking only at the beautiful form of Rama. While I was gazing on his face, I was not aware of what was being done to me. All my senses were paralysed while I was lost in seeing the charming form of Rama. After Rama left, I realised my plight. That is not all. Even more beautiful than Rama is Sita." She told Ravana that after seeing the beauty of Sita she got the feeling that Ravana alone was worthy of Sita and that she did not deserve to stay in the forest.

As she spoke in this strain, Ravana's passion was stirred. He again summoned Maricha and told him that he needed Maricha's help in an important undertaking. He told Maricha: "You are a pre-eminently capable person. You can understand demons and deal equally with the Divine. You are capable of assuming any form. You must therefore go to the Dandakaranya forest and separate Rama from Sita." At that stage, Maricha told Ravana: "This is a disastrous proposal. It is said that men who are destined for destruction develop disastrous ideas. No one can conquer Rama. You can never hope to acquire Sita in all your life. Rama is God incarnate. Give up this suicidal idea."

Inflamed by passion, Ravana paid no heed to Maricha's warning. He told Maricha that if he did not act as Ravana wanted, he would be beheaded. Maricha thought within himself. "Either way, my life is in danger. Rather than die at the hands of this wicked Ravana, it is better for me to meet with my death from the Divine hands of Rama." It was with the desire to be slain by Rama that Maricha agreed to obey Ravana's command. It was thus a Rakshasa who first recognised the divinity of Rama. It was later that Viswamitra announced Rama's divinity.

Rama is embodiment of the three *gunas*

The Rama Principle is manifested in the *Gayatri mantra*. Rama is the embodiment of the three aspects of Time. He is the Lord of the three worlds and is the embodiment of the three *gunas*. Hence Sri Rama is the indwelling spirit in every human being. To realise this truth, it is not necessary to be a great scholar or scientist. However great a scholar may be, if he has no eyes, he cannot see the world. However great a scientist may be, when he is fast asleep he cannot see anything. But a man with open eyes if he is no scholar or scientist, can see the world when he is awake. The power of sight is not derived from scholarship or science but is a gift of the Divine. Moreover, scholarship does not enable a *pandit* to understand his own true nature, though he can teach others. True scholarship consists in cultivating a pure heart.

Every person who has a purified heart experiences the Divine some time or other. We have any number of examples of such realised souls. Valmiki was originally a highway robber. By the grace of sages he became the author of the Ramayana. Nanda experienced the Divine though he

was an outcaste. Kuchela, steeped in poverty, secured the grace of the Lord. Gajendra, the Lord of the elephants, and Dhruva, a mere stripling, could get the grace of the Lord by their devotion. Sabari, an illiterate denizen of the forest, became a great devotee by the constant remembrance of Rama's name. Through her devotion she could get the blissful experience of welcoming Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in the sage's *ashram*.

Appeal of the Ramayana is inexhaustible

There are in the world many such devotees who have achieved God-realisation without profound scholarship or elaborate austerities. Hence the Divine Rama Principle is not something to be remembered once a year but every moment of our life.

Ramanavami falls in a period of the year when Nature puts on her new vesture after shedding the old. Rama thus represents all that is beautiful in Nature.

The Ramayana has been divided into two parts *Purva Ramayana* and *Uttara Ramayana*. *Purva Ramayana* (the earlier part) deals with the prowess of Rama as a *Dheera* (hero) who destroyed Vali, Ravana and others. The *Uttara Ramayana* reveals the compassion of Rama. (It is filled with *Karuna Rasa*). Valmiki has compared the sweetness of the Ramayana to the sweetness of the sugarcane juice. The sugarcane has a hard rind and is full of knots. Nevertheless the juice from it is sweet. Likewise despite the many evil characters in the story and the sad episodes in it, the epic maintains its sweetness. The appeal of the Ramayana is inexhaustible.

When the Ramayana story is understood in its inner essence, it will transform human nature. Rama should be regarded not as the Prince of Ayodhya, but as the *Atma-Rama*, the Indweller in every heart. Dedicate your mind, speech and body to the Divine and thereby raise yourselves from the level of the human to that of the Divine.

Proper interpretations of various acts of Rama

Some of Rama's actions have been criticised by scholars on various grounds. Seen, however, in the right perspective, it will be found that Rama acted in each case according to the nature of the person. In killing an ogress, Rama is accused of committing *Strihathya* (the sin of killing a woman). But it is not so. He was destroying the *Tamo guna* which she symbolised. He gave liberation to Sabari, who represented the *Rajo guna*. He purified Ahalya, who represented the *Satwa guna*, absolving her of all her lapses, and restored her to Gautama. In the case of the *Rakshasa* brothers, he destroyed Kumbhakarna and Ravana, who represented the *Tamo* and *Rajo gunas*, and made Vibhishana, who symbolised the *Satwa guna*, the ruler of Lanka. It is only when we destroy the *Tamo* and *Rajo gunas* within us that we can make the *Satwa guna* reign in our hearts. This is the primary duty of every human being. This should be our ideal. It is by imbibing these great qualities of Rama and regulating our lives in this way, we shall be able to divinise ourselves.

A student had referred to the advice given by Siva to Parvathi to chant Rama's name. The term *Manorame* used in the *sloka* has two meanings. One refers to Parvathi. The other signifies that one should "enjoy in the mind" the name of Rama. The Rama Principle is one which delights the heart.

Discourse at the Kalyana Mandap, Brindavan, on 3-4-1990.

Spend every second of your life usefully and well. If you possibly can, render service to others. Engage yourself in nursing the sick, but when thus engaged in service, don't worry about either the result, or the act of service, or the person to whom it is rendered. The service is made holy and pure if you ignore both the good and the bad, and keep on silently repeating in your heart the Manthra that appeals to you.

BABA