

4. Prakruthi Marries Paramatma

*Truthful speech earns respect and honour,
The truthful one lives in happiness and com-
fort,
There is nothing more eternal than truthful
life,
This is the truth which I wish to tell you.*

*Can a tree ever taste the sweetness of its own
fruit?
Can a creeper ever enjoy the honey latent in its
flowers?
Can a worldly scholar ever enjoy the sweet es-
sence of spiritual lore?
Can a sheet of paper enjoy the sweet wisdom
contained in the book?*

Embodiments of Love!

The paths in the world are twofold: The path of *pravritti* (worldly way), and the path of *nivritti* (inward way). People think that the materialistic phenomena perceived and enjoyed by man belongs to the realm of *pravritti*, and everything that transcends it, embracing the blissful and the immortal, is the realm of *nivritti*. Actually, both are one and the same, for they arise from the same source. The outward tendencies are nothing but the resounds and the reflections of the feelings within.

How is it that man is not able to free himself from the shackles of *pravritti* and follow the path of *nivritti*? The tendencies of the past accumulated over

many lives is the cause for this. It is not possible for anyone to plunge headlong into path of *nivriddhi* all of a sudden. The changeover from the path of *pravrittis* to *nivriddhi* should be gradual and steady.

Sita Kalyanam

The marriage celebrations at Mithila lasted four days. Though to us our marriage rituals appear to be merely materialistic, they are laden with deep, spiritual significance. On the first day of the marriage, the bridegroom's party proceeded to the house of the bride, accompanied by pundits and priests, to hand over the wedding invitation. On the same day, the bride's party, accompanied by Sumangalis (women whose husbands are alive), proceeded to hand over the wedding invitation to the bridegroom's house. On the second day, the history of the dynasties to which the bride and the bridegroom belonged was read out aloud, and due gratitude was expressed to their respective ancestors. The names of the great Kings who brought glory to Kosala and Mithila were read out and their virtues extolled. The great Emperors who adored the Ikshvaku dynasty were remembered, and their virtues were praised. Similarly, the names of the great ones who reigned over the Kingdom of Videha were read out, beginning with Emperor Nimi who founded the great city of Mithila. These rituals bring out the truth that gratitude is an important aspect of life, and should be expressed towards all those who had contributed to the glory of one's lineage and country.

On the third day, great acts of charity were performed. Cattle and cows, beautifully decorated with

ornaments and golden linen, were given away in charity to the deserving ones. Giving away cows in charity is significant, for the cow is one of the four mothers of man (*Dehamata Gomata, Bhoomata, and Vedamata*).

On the fourth day, the ritual of *Kanyadana* took place. Janaka brought his daughter Sita, followed by Urmila, Mandavi, and Srutakeerti. These three were the daughters of Janaka's brothers Saaka and Kushadhawaja. Urmila was the daughter of Saaka, while Mandavi and Srutakeerti were the daughters of Kushadhawaja. In the meanwhile, Dasaratha brought his four sons. The curtain between the brides and bridegrooms was raised.

Rama was looking elsewhere and refused to look at Sita. Janaka noticed this and said to Rama, "*Mama puthri idam Sita*" (this is my daughter Sita). To this Rama replied, "I have not yet tied the *mangala sutra* (wedlock thread). It is sinful to see the lady before marriage to her, I do not wish to bring disrepute to the great Ikshvaku lineage by my misconduct." This statement of Rama testifies to the fact that He was the Embodiment of *Dharma*. Rama observed the principle of one wife, one word, and one arrow. While the priests were chanting *mantras* and the musicians were playing on the musical instruments, Rama tied the *mangala sutra* around the neck of Sita.

It was then the time for the bride and the groom to garland each other. Rama stood much taller than Sita, and it was difficult for Sita to reach Rama's height and garland Him; so she stood silently, holding

the garland in her hand. Rama then made a sign to Lakshmana. Lakshmana alone knew the meaning of this sign, as he was extremely intelligent. Understanding the sign made by Rama, Lakshmana replied via another sign signifying that what Rama wanted was not possible. Rama had conveyed through His sign that since Lakshmana was Aadhissha (the serpent upon whose coils Lord Narayana reclined) he should raise the ground where Sita was standing. Lakshmana, by his sign, indicated that if he were to raise the ground on which Sita stood, the entire ground around them would be raised. Rama was unwilling to bend down His head, for He had vowed that He would not bend His head to a lady, though He was ready to bend down His head for His devotees. Lakshmana who was very resourceful, immediately fell at the feet of Rama. Rama now had to bend down to raise Lakshmana to his feet. Sita immediately took advantage of the situation and garlanded Rama! The four bridegrooms, accompanied by the four brides, then circumambulated the sacred fire.

Revelations of Divinity

A servant maid then brought a vessel filled with the water of the Sarayu river for Sita to wash the feet of Rama. Sita was hesitant to do so, for she thought that the golden wristlets that she wore might turn into women, as did the petrified Ahalya rise as a full-blooded woman, on contacting the feet of Rama! Lakshmana who read the thoughts of Sita, wiped the feet of Rama with a towel. He then asked Sita to wash the feet of Rama with the waters of the Sarayu river. Sita did so and sprinkled the water on her head.

At the time of *Kanyadana* (giving away the daughter as charity) Janaka, in accordance with the injunctions of the Scriptures said, “I am giving my daughter as charity to You.” The groom was then expected to say, “I accept your daughter”, but Rama remained silent without uttering a single word. The priest who was officiating at the marriage said to Rama, “Oh Rama! The auspicious moment is getting over; hurry up and say, I accept your daughter.” Rama then replied, “Those in the Ikshvaku lineage never accept charity. Since you have used the word *dana* after the word *kanya*, I cannot accept her. Those in the Ikshvaku dynasty only give charity and never accept it. If you remove the word *dana* after *kanya*, I am prepared to accept her.” Janaka who understood the mind of Rama, withdrew the word *dana* after the word *kanya*. Then, Rama said, “I accept your daughter.”

According to the Indian tradition, the bridegroom should make the promise *arthecha, kaamecha, dharmecha, naathi charmi* (I will please her with regard to wealth, desire, and righteousness). Rama refused to give such a promise for He felt that one should be ready to renounce one’s partner in life if she came between Him and His people. So, He vowed, “The welfare of my subjects is of Supreme importance to Me. If I find that she displeases My subjects, I will renounce her.” That is how Rama set high standards of conduct as a ruler. The rulers of those days were particular about every word they uttered, for they would never go back on their word.

Vishwamitra Departs

While they were busily engaged thus, Vishwamitra came close and said, “Oh, Rama and Lakshmana! I am bestowing on you my last blessing, for I am going to the Himalayas right now. The mission on which I came to the world is already fulfilled. I was waiting to see marriage between *prakruthi* and *Paramatma*. I have been instrumental in bringing about the marriage of Lord Narayana and Lakshmi. It is high time I shed the body. That is why I am going to the Himalayas.” On hearing these words of Vishwamitra, everyone felt sad and stunned. Vishwamitra thus played a pivotal role in the early part of the *Ramayana*. Before departure, Vishwamitra gave away all his powerful weapons to Rama and said, “You are the original source of all weapons. I am returning them to You. The welfare and well-being of the world rests with You. That is why I am delivering these weapons into Your hands.” Shedding profuse tears, Dasaratha said, “Sage Vishwamitra, I cannot forget the good that you have done to my Son. I shall be ever grateful to you.” Vishwamitra received the salutations of all the people there, consoled the crying ones, and went to the Himalayas. After this incident, there is no mention of Vishwamitra anywhere in the *Ramayana*.

All arrangements were made for the return journey to Ayodhya, but Mandavi and Srutakeerthi hesitated to start on that day. Srutakeerti, who was an expert in the science of reading the omens, felt that it was not an auspicious day for the journey. But they could not tell it openly to everybody, so they said that they would join the group later. However, Dasaratha

refused to agree to the suggestion and wanted them to get ready for the journey. Urmila who heard from Mandavi the cause for hesitation, said to Sita that the day was not auspicious for starting the journey. Sita replied to her, "Why should you worry when the Lord Himself is coming with us? Lord Rama is an Embodiment of Time. When the Lord Himself is coming with us, we should not wait for any such auspicious time. Rama will look after us if anything untoward happens on the way."

The return trip to Ayodhya commenced, and the people of Mithila felt intensely sad. Even Emperor Janaka who was a great *karma yogi*, himself shed tears. The people of Mithila were stunned when they saw that Janaka, who had no attachment, was crying. Explaining himself, Janaka said, "These tears of mine are not tears of sorrow, they are indeed tears of bliss."

Janaka sent a large retinue of chariots, horses, and elephants along with the four brides. While they were traveling, they heard a loud voice saying, "Stop!" Parasurama appeared on the scene, much to the shock and surprise of everyone. Parasurama said to Rama, "Oh Rama! I have heard that You have broken the bow of Shiva. The bow of Shiva is of no consequence, and it is not at all hard to lift it. If You really have strength, You should break this weapon of mine." So saying Parasurama hurled his weapon at the feet of Rama. Rama calmly picked it up and broke the weapon. Parasurama at once fell at the feet of Rama.

People have a distorted opinion about Parasurama, describing him as a very egoistic sage who itched to fight with Rama. Parasurama actually came there for the divine purpose of handing over to Rama one of the sixteen splendours (*kalas*) he had with him. A *Poornavathar* has sixteen splendours. Lord Rama possessed twelve *kalas* and his brothers had three *kalas*. The remaining one *kala* was with Parasurama. While bowing to the feet of Rama, he passed on the sixteenth *kala* to Him. The caravan then continued toward Ayodhya, where a magnificent reception awaited them. Men and women sang and danced, and offered *arathi* to the princes and their wives. There was joy and jubilation everywhere. The celebration lasted for ten full days.

For twelve years, Rama and Lakshmana assisted their father in the administration of the kingdom. They conducted themselves in a most exemplary manner, much to the delight of everyone in the kingdom.

The Emperor's Decision

One night, Dasaratha felt thirsty and wanted to drink water. When he picked up the jug containing water, he found that his hand was trembling. He realised that he was no longer as strong as he once was, and it dawned upon him that having become weak, he was unworthy of ruling the kingdom any longer. This thought deeply disturbed him, and he could not sleep the rest of the night. Dasaratha felt he had become weak and his conscience told him that he was no longer fit to rule. He then and there decided to hand over the

kingdom to a worthy successor. The next morning he summoned his Ministers to hold deliberations about the prospective ruler of Ayodhya. How magnanimous and noble was the conduct of Dasaratha! The conduct of Dasaratha is in sharp contrast with the conduct of modern politicians who wish to cling on to power despite their many disabilities.

It was decided in the meeting that Rama, the eldest son, was the worthy successor to the throne of Ayodhya. He was able, efficient, ideal and Omniscient. The citizens greatly rejoiced at the prospect of Rama becoming their ruler. Rama was very dear to them. They called Him *Priya darshana*. The citizens were yearning to have Rama as their ruler, for He was the very Embodiment of Love. Grand arrangements were then made to celebrate the great event with all magnificence.

Manthara's Mischief

Manthara, the servant-maid of Queen Kaikeyi, was smitten to the quick when she heard that Rama was to be crowned as the Emperor of Ayodhya. She bore a grudge against Rama from the day she had been hurt by a ball hit by Rama, which struck her on her back. It so happened that Manthara happened to be at a place where the four brothers were playing with a ball. When Rama kicked the ball, it went straight to Manthara and hit her on the back. Manthara jumped up as soon as the ball struck her. All the brothers, except Rama, laughed aloud at the action of Manthara. She felt deeply insulted, and from that day harboured ill-feeling toward Rama. When she heard about

Rama's impending coronation, her anger increased by leaps and bounds, and she desperately sought an outlet. The *krodha* (anger) of Manthara and *kama* (desire) of Soorpanakha are the cause for the entire *Ramayana*. The anger of Manthara sent Rama to the forest and the desire of Soorpanakha sent Sita to Lanka.

The hard-hearted Manthara then went to Kaikeyi and gave her the news. Kaikeyi felt overjoyed when she first heard from Manthara that Rama, who was dearest to her heart, was going to be crowned as the Emperor next morning.

Manthara became furious when Queen Kaikeyi gifted a pearl necklace on receiving the good news of Rama's coronation. She immediately flung it away, for she could not brook the idea that Rama, who had once insulted her, was going to be crowned as the Emperor of Ayodhya. Inflamed with anger, she began poisoning the mind of Kaikeyi, though the queen had nurtured deep love for Rama. Indescribable is the damage done by anger.

*When anger seizes a person,
He cannot perform any work successfully.
He gathers sin and is humbled.
Anger extinguishes one's reputation,
And separates him from people who are
near and dear.*

Manthara ultimately succeeded in changing the mind of Kaikeyi and caused the departure of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from Ayodhya. The hour at which

Rama was to be crowned became instead the hour of His departure from Ayodhya.

Some people say that the time set for the coronation was not an auspicious one, and it was that which caused the departure of Rama from Ayodhya. Such a contention is wrong. The time for the coronation was set by no less a person than the enlightened Sage Vasishtha. All said and done, it was the will of Rama that ultimately caused His departure from Ayodhya. Rama had long ago prepared the mind of Kaikeyi in this regard, for He had been very close to her. One day during the course of His conversation with Kaikeyi he said to her, "Mother, be prepared for My departure to the dense forests. I have to go there to bring about the destruction of the demons. You may earn an evil reputation due to this, but be strong in mind. Ask father the boon that Bharatha should be crowned as King and that I should be sent to the forest." That was the intimacy and understanding which existed between Queen Kaikeyi and Rama. She was an embodiment of virtue. She loved Rama more than her son Bharatha.

At last, the hour for the departure of Rama from Ayodhya arrived. Rama was all smiles, though the hour of coronation turned out to be the hour of His departure to the forest. Rama could behave like this because He was no ordinary human but the Embodiment of Divinity. Kausalya could not take the sad news with equanimity like Rama. She said, "Oh Rama! I had never dreamt even in my wildest dreams that You would go to the forest. What is destined to happen will happen. For You, the forest will be Ayodhya, and for

me, this Ayodhya will be a forest. Succeed in Your mission and come back home.”

Journey to the Forest

As Rama was leaving for the forest Lakshmana joined Him, for it was impossible for him to live without Rama. Separation between Rama and Lakshmana is unthinkable, because Lakshmana was the incarnation of Adishesha, on whom Lord Narayana reclines. Lakshmana accompanied Rama without speaking a word to anybody. He simply told Rama, “Oh Rama, I came to this world to serve You. I cannot live without You even for a moment.” Since Rama knew the heart of Lakshmana, He allowed him to accompany Him. Meanwhile, the people came to know of the departure of Rama. They were plunged into inexpressible grief and cried out heartrendingly, “We cannot live without Rama. It is better to be dead than alive, for we cannot endure the agony of separation from Rama.” Rama consoled them and made His way to the forest. Back in Ayodhya, Dasaratha died of the grief of separation from Rama.

At the time Rama went into exile, Bharatha and Satrughna were away in the Kingdom of Kekaya, having been taken there by their uncle. Sage Vasishta, the high priest, sent word to the King of Kekaya that Bharatha and Satrughna should be sent back to Ayodhya immediately. He did not inform them that Dasaratha had died. It took fifteen days for Bharatha and Satrughna to reach Ayodhya, though they sped fast in chariots. The two brothers were shocked to see the lustreless face of Ayodhya. Birds and beasts hung

their heads in sorrow, and were crying disconsolately. Dogs were roaming on the roads, whining loudly. Bharatha stopped the chariot in front of the mansion of Kaikeyi and rushed to see his mother but was shocked to see her condition. She told Bharatha that Dasaratha had passed away and that he should perform the obituary rites. Bharatha felt sad that he did not have the good fortune of seeing his father when he was on his deathbed. He consoled himself that at least Rama and Lakshmana merited the good fortune of being with their father at the last moment.

Bharatha, the ideal brother

Bharatha then rushed to the mansion of mother Kausalya. There, Kausalya related to him the chain of events that led to the departure of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita from Ayodhya. Bharatha's sorrow at the death of his father receded into the background when he heard the more sorrowful news of the departure of Rama from Ayodhya. His grief at the death of his father turned into fury when he heard that it was his father who had commanded Rama to leave Ayodhya. Flushed with anger and fury, he refused to perform the obituary rites to his father and decided to go to the forest to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. But Sage Vasishta pacified him and convinced him that it was his duty to perform the last rites of his father. Eventually Bharatha performed the last rites to the body, which had been preserved in oil for fifteen days.

Bharatha now resolved to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. Accompanied by his mothers, ministers, and the royal entourage, he proceeded to the forest. Even Manthara accompanied him. Saint Thyagaraja has

paid tribute to Bharatha by describing him as an “intelligent” one. The Saint sang,

*Would the monkey cross the bridge?
Would goddess Lakshmi adore You
and Lakshmana worship You?
Would the Intelligent Bharatha salute You
If You are not really Divine?*

Bharatha followed the trail left by Rama’s chariot. Deep in the forest, he found flocks of birds moving about. Looking at them, Bharatha concluded there must be water in the neighbourhood because birds usually flock in large numbers near water sources. He also concluded that Rama would not be far away from the source of water, for He too would require water. The huge procession of men, soldiers, horses, and elephants that followed Bharatha created a commotion and kicked up clouds of dust high into the sky. Lakshmana was curious to find out the source of all this commotion. Climbing to the top of a tree, he found that Bharatha was coming with an army and the people of Ayodhya. Since he was the incarnation of Adisesha (the thousand-hooded serpent), he was immediately smitten by anger and burst out, “Oh Rama! Bharatha is coming here to drive us deeper into the forest. He has come with his army to fight us.” Rama smiled at Lakshmana and said, “Lakshmana! Though you have moved with Bharatha you have not understood him. He is the embodiment of peace, and he loves Me deeply. Do not harbour any ill-feeling toward him. Wait and see.”

Bharatha came running to Rama and fell at His feet. He wailed and wept, and sought His forgiveness for all that had happened. Rama caressed His brother and said, "Oh Bharatha! Are mother and father doing well? Is everyone safe at home?" Doubting Thomases may wonder, "If Rama was really God, why did He ask about His father's welfare when Dasaratha had already died?" We should realise that the *Avatar* who comes in a human form behaves in a human way. At the same time, He conducts himself with exemplary excellence, so that mankind may learn from Him.

Bharatha gave Him the news of the death of Dasaratha. Rama, who heard the sad news of His father's death, went to the river Sarayu accompanied by His three brothers to offer oblations. After this, Bharatha pleaded with Rama to come back to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. But Rama refused for He would never break the word He had given to His father. Bharatha told Rama that he would not live in Ayodhya without Him, because Ayodhya sans Rama was a forest. He would install the sandals of Rama on the throne, and he himself would live in Nandigram outside Ayodhya. He would carry out the affairs of the state from there. He would await Rama's arrival for fourteen years at Nandigram. If Rama did not arrive in Ayodhya at the end of the term, he would immolate himself. Rama told Bharatha to rule over the kingdom justly, and assured that He would surely return to Ayodhya at the end of fourteen years. Counseled thus by Rama, Bharatha left for Nandigram with a heavy heart. All the brothers of Rama were most obedient to Him. For them, His word was a commandment.

One day, Rama asked Lakshmana to build a hut on the Chitrakoota mountain. Lakshmana asked Him to select the spot for the hut. Rama said, "Lakshmana! Build the hut wherever you like." Hearing these words Lakshmana was struck speechless and felt deeply pained. When Sita asked him the cause for his grief, Lakshmana said, "I don't have a will of my own. The liking of Rama is my liking. What sin have I committed to merit such words from Rama?" Rama, who understood the heart of Lakshmana, caressed Lakshmana and said, "forgive Me for having hurt you. Build a hut here, on this spot."

The *Ramayana* demonstrates to us how one should live in the world, in the society, and in the family. Rama provides the example of an ideal brother, ideal son, ideal husband and ideal ruler. The ideal of Rama is most relevant to the world, at a time when it is fraught with chaos and confusion. We live today in a world where misunderstanding is driving a wedge between husband and wife, father and son, teacher and student, rulers and citizens. The remedy for all this lies in following the ideal set by Rama.