

5. The Abduction Of Sita

What we think to be non-existent actually exists;

What we think to be existent does not really exist.

It is only Divinity that exists forever.

It is the world that does not exist.

Students, the Embodiments of Love:

Human life is most sublime and sacred. Of all the species that exist on the earth, man is the highest, not only by virtue of his intellectual eminence but also by dint of the sanctity he possesses. He is endowed with many talents and abilities. Unfortunately, man wastes his life by misusing his capabilities. There are two avenues open to man: the *Sreyo Marga* (the path of Welfare) and the *Preyo Marga* (the path of Enjoyment). The path of Welfare is nothing but the path of inward life, whereas the path of Enjoyment is the path of outward life.

During the course of His stay on the Chitrakuta mountain, Rama had many deliberations with Sages and Seers. These aspirants, who had been eagerly awaiting a rendezvous with Divinity, made good use of the opportunity by discussing topics like *pravritti*, *nivritti sreyas*, *preyas*, etc. However, the serene atmosphere of the Chitrakuta mountain soon gave way to agitation and turbulence. The demons, having got wind of the spiritual activities in progress, intensified their attacks on the sages and troubled them. The sages wished to leave the mountain and go to a safer place.

An old sage came to Rama and said, "Rama, the nefarious activities of the demons are increasing day by day. They are harassing the aspirants more and more. Hence, they wish to leave the place. It is not advisable for You to live here because You are leading a family life. It may be dangerous to live here, though You are endowed with enormous strength." The sages and Rama then held consultations and decided to enter Dandakaranya, a dense forest area.

Rama in Dandakaranya

Trouble surfaced as soon as they started living in the Dandakaranya forest. One day, a demon by name Viradha abducted Sita and refused to hand her over to Rama. He warned Rama and Lakshmana of dire consequences if they tried to retrieve Sita from him; but unmindful, Rama and Lakshmana attacked Viradha. The enraged Viradha then grasped Rama and Lakshmana one in each hand and started running. Seeing this, Sita bewailed her misfortune and appealed to the demon to take her away also. Rama and Lakshmana then cut off both the hands of Viradha, wanting to kill him; but Viradha did not die. Viradha said to Rama, "You cannot kill me as I am protected by a boon. You must dig a pit and bury me there." Viradha then added, "Not far away from here is a hermitage, where Sage Sharabhanga is waiting for You day and night." Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, then made His way to Sharabhanga. When Sharabhanga saw Rama he became ecstatic. He said, "O Rama! Today I have found fulfilment and I need not live any longer. I was about to leave my body many a time, but then I remembered that Narayana

would one day come into the forest. Thus, I wished to live to see God in human form. Today I have seen God. Please wait a little.” After uttering these words in the presence of Rama, he made a pyre and plunged into the burning flames, saluting Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita for the last time. From the burning flames arose Thumburu, the celestial musician, who had lived his life as Sharabhanga due to a curse. Thumburu advised Rama and Lakshmana to go to the ashram of sage Agastya so that they could get help from the venerable sage.

The brothers along with Sita then went to the hermitage of sage Agastya, who directed them to go to a place called Panchavati, which was situated on the banks of the river Godavari. Agastya added that fruits and roots were available in abundance in Panchavati and the temperate climate was most conducive for living there. The Sage deliberately directed them to Panchavati so that the abduction of Sita, which was so important for the killing of the demons, could occur there. He did not keep Rama and Lakshmana in his own hermitage since the abduction of Sita would then be impossible.

Sita’s Advice

The three exiles started living in Panchavati. Sita, however, was not happy in Panchavati, because almost every day Rama and Lakshmana indulged in violence. One day, while Lakshmana was away collecting fruits and tubers, Sita approached Rama and said, “Lord, those who have desires commit three evils: uttering falsehood, eyeing other ladies, and committing

violence. Certainly, You are free from the first two evils. I firmly believe that You can never utter falsehood, for You are the Embodiment of Truth.” Rama felt happy at these words of Sita and said, “It is certainly a qualification for a man to be described as a virtuous person by his own wife. Sita, I am happy that you have recognised My affinity to Truth.” Sita continued, “You are also free from the weakness of looking at the wives of others. This is another great virtue in You. But I cannot appreciate Your committing violence on the beasts and demons. These demons are in no way harming You.” Rama smiled at these words and said, “Sita, though you have spoken the truth, My conduct is in consonance with the promise I gave to the sages and aspirants here. I am bound by My duty and want to stand by My promise. Though these demons are not harming Me personally, they are subjecting My devotees to untold suffering. They ruthlessly disturb the sacrifices performed by the sages. The sages perform sacrifices for the welfare and well-being of mankind. I cannot but resort to violence for the well-being of mankind.” Sita realised her mistake and sought the forgiveness of Rama by touching His feet. The conduct of Sita is in consonance with the scriptural injunction:

*The wife should advise her husband well
when he indulges in evil;
She should be like a Minister who advises
the King properly.*

In fact women should follow the example of Mandodhari, who always struggled to mend the ways of her husband, Ravana.

Spring arrived, trees sprouted green leaves and cool winds blew softly. There arrived on the scene a golden deer. Sita, who had never asked Rama for the fulfilment of any desire, pleaded with Him to capture the golden deer for her. Rama agreed. Though Lakshmana volunteered to do the task, Rama did not allow him to do so; for He knew that if He were to be present there in the hut, the abduction of Sita could not take place. Everything had its place in the master plan, which He had drawn up long ago. Rama then went in pursuit of the golden deer. When He found that the deer was eluding him, He shot an arrow at it.

The golden deer was none other than the demon Maricha, who had assumed the form of a deer to draw Rama away from Sita. While dying, Maricha, imitating the voice of Rama, cried out aloud, "Oh, Lakshmana, Oh, Sita!" Sita heard these words, became agitated, and asked Lakshmana to go and find out what had happened. She was overcome by the fear that something dangerous had happened to Rama, since the voice sounded like that of Rama. Lakshmana said to Sita, "Mother, the voice you have heard is not the voice of Rama. It is but the trick of the demon, who wants to deceive us. Nothing dangerous can ever happen to Rama, as He is the incarnation of Lord Narayana. Do not worry in the least." Sita, who knew the master plan of Rama, was determined to send Lakshmana on one pretext or the other. She knew that soft and gentle words would not make Lakshmana leave the place. Hence, she used stern words and said, "Oh Lakshmana! Perhaps, you wish to have me as your

wife, when Rama dies.” Unable to bear the words uttered by Sita, Lakshmana decided to go in search of Rama. But before leaving the place he told Sita not to cross the line that he drew around the ashram. Lakshmana then went in search of Rama.

Meeting with Jatayu

In the meantime, Ravana came in the guise of an ascetic and abducted Sita. When Rama and Lakshmana returned to the hut, they found the hut empty. The two brothers now went in search of Sita in Dandakaranya. While searching for Sita, they found the bird Jatayu badly mutilated. Rama had earlier met the bird and mistaken it for a demon. The bird then said to Rama that it was a friend of his father, Dasaratha. It prayed to Rama to give it the duty of looking after Sita in their absence. At the time of Sita’s abduction, Jatayu encountered Ravana in the sky and fought bravely to prevent Ravana from carrying her away. But Ravana axed its two wings. The helpless Jatayu was now dying. It was at this juncture that the brothers approached Jatayu and learnt about the abduction of Sita. Rama felt deep pity and gratitude for the bird Jatayu, which had sacrificed its life for His sake. He placed Jatayu’s head on His lap and poured cool water down its throat. Drinking water from Rama’s hand, the bird breathed its last. While Dasaratha did not have the good fortune of attaining *Shubagathi*, the heavenly state, Jatayu did while resting its head in Rama’s lap. That is why it is said:

*Oh Mind! do not ask for anything.
The more you ask, the longer will it be delayed.*

*If you do not ask,
The sooner will it be done.
Did not the Lord bless Jatayu and Shabhari,
Though they never asked for their last moments
to be spent in His proximity?*

God knows for sure when, where, and how He should bless His devotee. Divine Grace is in proportion to the meritorious deeds that one performs.

While dying, Jatayu told Rama to seek the help of Sugriva, who lived on Mount Matanga. Rama performed the last rites of Jatayu and started toward the Matanga mountain.

Living for God

During the course of their journey, Rama and Lakshmana had to inflict much violence on the demons. Though Sita had tried to restrain them, eventually she herself became a victim of the evil ways of the demons. Sita had rightly said to Rama that the three evils, namely, untruth, lust, and violence, are the causes of all the evils in the world. Sita, the symbol of *prakruthi* and the embodiment of truth and righteousness, possessed noble conduct. Her example is worthy of emulation by every woman of India. That is why the *Ramayana* is also described as the story of Sita.

The *Ramayana* is replete with many lessons for mankind. It tells us that worldly tendencies lead us to sorrow, whereas spiritual tendencies lend contentment and happiness to mankind. Sensual pleasures are like passing clouds. These pleasures give temporary joy, whereas *Atmic* realisation bestows eternal Bliss.

There is no sorrow for those people who live in the Bliss of God. But unfortunately, people today do not wish to follow the example of the great devotees of God, who live in eternal Bliss. To people, *abheesta* (desire) has become dearer than *adarsha* (ideal). Desires are ephemeral, whereas ideals are eternal.

It is really tragic that people do not strive to benefit, though God has come down in human form to help mankind. People do not have the good sense to follow the ideals of the *Avatar*. They take delight in conducting themselves contrary to the commands of the *Avatar*.

Fortunate are those who live for God. To these people, the satisfaction of God is of paramount importance. These people observe the principle of *Sarva karma Bhagwat prityartham* (all deeds should be done for the joy of the Lord). Such people who live for God are rewarded with eternal Bliss. The life of Sharabhanga stands as a supreme testimony to this. Sharabhanga lived only for God. In this country, there were many sages and saints who lived like Sharabhanga and dedicated their lives to God.

But man today is oblivious of the great ideals contained in the *Ramayana*. People have no individuality of their own. They have become highly imitative and heavily dependent on others. In fact, they have become slaves of others. These persons see with the eyes of others, hear with the ears of others, and think with the minds of others. They cannot achieve anything in life. It is said:

*Though endowed with eyes, they are stark
blind,
Since they did not wish to see the auspicious
form.
Though endowed with ears, they are stone-
deaf,
Since they do not wish to listen to His en-
chanting music.*

It is very difficult to attain human life. You are born as a human because of actions performed in the past, over many lives. You should foster the feelings of the oneness of *Atma* and the unity of mankind. The *Ramayana* abounds in episodes and illustrations that demonstrate the Divinity in man. It abounds in lessons for mankind, whatever may be the episode or chapter you take for study. Hence, imprint on your heart the story of Rama and thereby find fulfilment in life.

