

7. The War Begins

*At all times and in all places, the Atma exists.
But people question why the Atma remains un-
seen.
Can anyone obtain the butter latent in milk by
mere asking?*

Embodiments of Love!

The Universe is a mansion and all the men in the world belong to one family. Selfishness is disastrous, and yet today selfishness has become the very essence of life. The *Ramayana* teaches us not to be selfish.

It is easy to cognise the Divinity that pervades the entire universe, but as long as man is swayed by worldly thoughts, Divinity remains unrealised and unattained. As long as our secular life is marked by narrow-mindedness and parochialism, we will be lost in the world. The same worldly life, touched by sacrifice, love, and selflessness, enables one to enter into the world of *Nivritti*. Realisation and non-realisation are dependent upon the paths we follow. Unfortunately, today the outward tendencies have gained dominance over our inward tendencies. Realisation is impossible as long as one is lost in the world of *pravritti*.

Rama, the embodiment of *nivritti* tendencies, arrived at the seashore on His mission to destroy Lanka, which was steeped in *pravritti*. Evil tendencies like ignorance, egoism, and pomp do not allow man to

enter into the world of *nivritti* even though he may have intellectual eminence to his credit.

Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, and Jambavan were making arrangements for the massive action to be launched against Lanka. Rama divided His army into two sections, headed by Angada on one side and Jambavan on the other. He pretended as though He was tired and lay on the sands, resting His head on Lakshmana's lap.

It was the night of the full moon. Rama was not really tired, but He pretended that He was. He wished to impart a lesson in the *nivritti marga* to all those present. He called Angada and said, "Angada! Look at the Moon. See, how splendourously it shines! The moon is immaculately beautiful, without a spot on its face." Meanwhile, Sugriva arrived there and heard Rama's words. He said, "O Rama! I see spots in the Moon. Since the Moon is part of *prakruthi* (nature), it contains valleys, mountains, and the like. These are visible as spots." Rama then called Hanuman and asked the same question. Hanuman said, "O Ramachandra! I don't see any spot. I see only the reflection of Your face in the Moon. Since the Moon is like a mirror, Your face is reflected in the Moon." The answers given by Sugriva and Hanuman reveal their *pravritti* and *nivritti* tendencies respectively.

Vibhishana joins Rama

While Rama was busy talking to them, He saw a person rushing towards Him, calling out His name. This man was followed by four servants. The Vanara

warriors stopped them and asked them many questions. Vibhishana, who was the person in question, replied: "I come from Lanka and am called Vibhishana. I am the brother of Ravana, the Emperor of Lanka. Since my brother is indulging in nefarious activities against Rama, the incarnation of Lord Narayana, I do not wish to live with him. I am a devotee of Rama and I have come to seek His Grace." Hearing these words of Vibhishana, Sugriva advised Rama, "Lord! Vibhishana should not be trusted, since he is the brother of our enemy. He has come to spy on our activities and pass on the information to Ravana."

Different people advised Rama in different ways. Then Hanuman said, "O Rama! A king has two types of enemies, enemies who rise from his own family and clan and enemies who hail from the neighbouring kingdom. This Vibhishana is not of your clan. He does not belong to a neighbouring kingdom of Ayodhya, either. Hence there is no scope for him to harbour any evil against You, like passing on our secrets to Ravana. Observe his devotion and treat him accordingly." Rama appreciated the advice of Hanuman. He called Vibhishana to one side and asked him to relate his story.

Vibhishana said to Rama, "There is no limit to the atrocities committed by Ravana, though I advised him to mend his actions. I denounced the nefarious activities of Ravana and advised him not to enter into war with you. Ravana and his son Indrajit became furious and commanded me to leave the kingdom. They have branded me a traitor. I prayed for the welfare of

Lanka and left the kingdom. I seek none else but God. I wish to sanctify my life at the feet of God. I have been chanting the name of Rama for a long time. It is the name of Rama that brought Hanuman and me close to each other in Lanka. I don't need anything in my life except Your Feet. I do not want kith and kin. All I desire is Your proximity." Rama then said, "Vibhishana, do not be frightened. Your brother will be punished for all his misdeeds. You will soon see this with your own eyes." He then summoned Sugriva and Lakshmana, and commanded them to anoint Vibhishana as the future King of Lanka. Vibhishana prayed, "Lord, I have not come here with an eye on the Kingdom of Lanka. All that I seek is the Kingdom of God. Make me a citizen in that Kingdom or even a servant there." But Rama crowned him as the Emperor of the Kingdom of Lanka, even though the war against Ravana had not yet commenced. Despite this, the Vanaras kept a watchful eye on Vibhishana, lest he betray their secrets to Ravana. But Rama trusted Vibhishana to the core since Vibhishana's heart was immaculately pure. Rama accepted Vibhishana and declared, "You are Mine."

The Bridge Across the Ocean

Hectic preparations were made for the battle against Ravana. It was decided that a bridge be built across the ocean to reach Lanka. Then, Vibhishana said, "Oh Ramachandra, this ocean was dug by Your ancestors, the sons of Sagara. It will be very hard to build a bridge across the ocean. Why don't You pray to the Lord of the Ocean to make a way for the army to pass through?" Rama thought this to be good advice

and decided to pray to the Lord of the Ocean. Despite the intense prayers of Rama, the God of the Ocean did not appear. Rama lost His temper and wished to teach a lesson to the Ocean. As He was preparing to shoot an arrow into the ocean, the God of the Ocean appeared and said, "Oh Ramachandra, you are verily the incarnation of Narayana. You know for sure the secrets of the Universe. As the five elements perform their respective duties, I too perform my duties, abiding by rules and regulations. I have in me crores [a crore is ten million] of living species, and all of them abide by the rules of the Ocean. I cannot give way for a huge army to pass through, but I can render one help to You. Build a bridge and I will see to it that it does not sink in the water. You have in Your army Nala, the son of Vishwakarma. Since he is an expert in engineering, he can easily build the bridge across the Ocean." Rama summoned Nala and asked him whether it was possible for him to build the bridge. Nala replied in the affirmative and said that he was capable of building a bridge stretching even thousands of miles if only he had Rama's Grace. Rama then fixed the auspicious time for the construction of the bridge on the next day.

The Vanara warriors brought hundreds of boulders and hurled them into the ocean, but all of them sank in the water. Ramachandra became angry with the Ocean God, feeling he had lied. Then the Lord of the Ocean appeared and said, "Ramachandra, there is nothing in the world that does not sink except Your name. Everything will vanish in the womb of time except Your name. Let the warriors write the name of Rama on the stones and throw them into the ocean."

The Vanara warriors wrote the name of Rama and hurled the rocks into the water. The boulders floated, no doubt, but got scattered about in different directions in the ocean. Hanuman then advised the warriors to write 'Ra' on one rock and 'Ma' on another so that they get attracted to each other. In this way, the boulders were kept together and the bridge was built.

Bhakthi (devotion) is of three types: *sadharana* (ordinary), *madhyamika* (medium), and *ananya* (one-pointed). Ordinary devotion is marked by ego. Here the egoistic feeling 'I' dominates all actions and thoughts. The medium type of devotion is marked by the feeling, "I am in you; you are in me." *Ananya bhakthi* is marked by the feeling, "You alone exist. I do not exist at all." Hanuman one day said to Rama, "Oh Lord! When I think that I am the body, I am overcome by the feeling that I am Your servant. When I think that I am the individual self, I am overcome by the feeling that You are the object, and I am your reflection. When I know I am the *Atma*, then I feel that You and I are one." Thus, Hanuman revealed the depths of his devotion.

The bridge was constructed in four days.

Ravana, the trickster

Meanwhile, Ravana made great efforts to inflict more pain on Sita. He commanded Vidhyut Jihva, an expert in magic, to make an artificial head like that of Rama, so that he could subject Sita to great anguish and sorrow. He also ordered him to make arrows that were of the exact make as those of Rama. Vidhyut Jihva did as he was told. The head and arrows were

placed in front of Sita. Ravana then went to Sita and said, "Sita, see the fate of Rama. You have always set your hopes high on Rama. He is dead now." Sita could not endure all this. She was filled with deep agony. She joined her hands and said, "Oh Ravana! Do me the favour of chopping off my head and burning my body along with the head of Rama. I cannot survive without Rama. This is my last wish." Sita started weeping. At that time Ravana received the news from Indrajit that he should see him immediately to discuss an urgent matter, and Ravana left the spot at once. Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, said to Sita, "Mother, there is none in the world who can slay Sri Rama. Ravana has many magicians who resort to trickery and deceit. The head of Rama is not the real head. Ramachandra is safe and happy. This is simply an artificial head and you should not worry." She then placed her hand on the artificial head of Rama. The head vanished instantly.

On the second day, Ravana came to Sita and said, "Sita, Rama is going to die in a few hours. You will be my Queen, and my palace will be yours. No one can satisfactorily describe my wealth, my glory, and my valour. I am omnipotent and omniscient. Make up your mind to marry me." Sita plucked a blade of grass under her foot and said, "Ravana, your wealth in comparison with Rama's opulence is as small as this blade of grass. Rama is Immortal, Effulgent, Wise and Eternal. There is a world of difference between you and Rama. You are as low as this lowly blade of grass." At these words of Sita, Ravana became furious and screamed, "Sita, I am giving you only two months' time; if you do not yield to me, my cook will come here,

cut you up into pieces, and serve you as a flavoured dish to me. I will eat your flesh. This is my last warning to you.” So saying, Ravana withdrew.

The next day, a fierce battle raged between the forces of Rama and Ravana. Thousands of soldiers belonging to both the sides fell dead. Lanka trembled with fear. At one time, all the *vanaras* (monkeys) fell unconscious on the battle ground. Vibhishana who watched the scene, consoled the *vanara* forces saying that it was due to the magic spells cast by the demons. Vibhishana countered them with his own magic formula, whereupon the fallen heroes arose from the ground. Ravana then saw to it that the head of Sita fell in front of Rama. Just as Sarama had earlier consoled Sita in her plight and fear, Vibhishana now started consoling Rama, saying, “Oh Rama, who in this world can kill Sita? Who can touch Sita, the embodiment of chastity? This head of Sita is not the real one but an artificial one.” Enraged at the tricks of Ravana, Lakshmana plunged into the battlefield and fought fiercely, but in the end he fainted. Rama then started lamenting, “Oh Lakshmana, I considered you as my sixth vital breath. Today, my sixth vital breath is gone.” Rama pretended as though He wept. Vibhishana came to the spot and directed Hanuman to bring the herbs of the Sanjeevani plant from the Himalayas. Since Hanuman could not identify the plant, he lifted a big chunk of the mountain and brought it to the battlefield. As soon as the herbal medicine was given, Lakshmana regained consciousness.

The next day, Rama plunged into the battlefield. This time, Ravana could not withstand the attack made by Rama and became exhausted. Rama, the Compassionate One, stopped fighting with Ravana on that day, told him to take rest and come on the following day to resume the fight. Rama had compassion even for his enemy, and the battle He fought was a righteous one.

Mandodhari, the Queen of Ravana, strove hard to change the wicked ways of her husband. “You do not know who Rama is. He is the very incarnation of Lord Narayana and Lakshmana is the incarnation of Adisesha. Return Sita to Rama and fall at His feet,” she said, but Ravana refused to pay heed to her advice.

It is very hard to change the ways of evil people. They are swayed by the power of their senses and succumb to them. The six evils of desire, pride, greed, anger, infatuation, and jealousy constantly plague such people. These evil tendencies are our enemies and it is these enemies that destroy our lives. Jealousy is a cancer and anger is a demon. In fact, demons are not a separate species. Rather, people with evil qualities are indeed demons. Demonic tendencies cling tightly to us and it is very difficult to get rid of them. As the body has many parts, the mind, too, has its own parts, which assume perverse forms. The mind outlives the body and finds a habitation in the human body in the next life. Hence, it is necessary to direct the mind toward *nivritti* and not toward *pravritti*. That alone will help.

What is the *nivritti marga*? The essence of the *nivritti marga* lies in performing all deeds for the pleasure of the Lord. This is the easiest way by which man can find his fulfilment. Unfortunately, man does not follow the obvious and the easiest path but instead takes recourse to difficult paths. Though man's intelligence has increased by leaps and bounds, his character has declined considerably. One may be a scholar, but one is a zero without common sense and general knowledge. These people have high degrees to their credit, but they are ignorant of ordinary things. The cause for all this is the absence of general knowledge. For want of general knowledge, people are not able to discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong, and fair and foul. Man has to change his worldly tendencies. He must develop the inner sight.

Lanka was enveloped in great sorrow as the warriors started killing the demons. Even the people who did not commit any wrong became victims of this war. The sinner may be one, but the punishment falls on all those around him. Does the roaring fire in a forest burn only the neem trees and spare the mango trees since they are sweet? The forest fire consumes every tree that comes in its way. The Jasmine in a forest wafts its fragrance to all those around it. Similarly, war kills the good as well as the bad people.

One day, while Lakshmana was fighting in Lanka, he shot an arrow, which accidentally killed a child who was in the arms of its mother. The child was killed in an instant. The mother dropped the child then and there and started fleeing from the place.

Lakshmana, who noticed this, said to Rama, “Brother, see the selfishness of this lady. Though she is the mother of the child, she has dropped the child and is running away to save her skin. These people of Lanka are selfish to the core. They do not have any mercy at all.” Hearing these words, Rama replied, “Oh Lakshmana, you are mistaken in your assessment of this lady. There are good people even in Lanka. This woman is running away with a noble intention. See for yourself.” They stopped the lady from running away and asked her, “Why are you running away, leaving your child mercilessly?” To this the lady replied, “I do not attach any importance to the body. The dead do not come back to life. Rama has laid siege to the city to destroy Ravana. Rama, after killing Ravana, may take the people of Lanka to Ayodhya. I wish to live, so that I can enjoy the proximity of Divinity. I wish to be a citizen in Rama’s Kingdom and I want to serve Rama. That is why I wish to keep my body alive. And I do not have any attachment toward this body.” Lakshmana was stunned noticing the sublime feeling of the lady.

The righteous Vibhishana

Next day, both the armies prepared themselves for the battle. At the break of dawn, Ravana’s forces sounded battle drums, and Rama’s forces too sounded their battle drums, fiercely. This time, the second son of Ravana entered the battle. He cast magic spells which caused much confusion in the *vanara* flanks. Vibhishana, who knew all the tricks of the demons, countered the magic spells employed by the demons, and saved the forces of Rama. Rama said, “Oh Lakshmana, all of you did not want to accept Vibhis-

hana as a friend in the beginning. But today, he is of the greatest use to us. He is great. He is unique.” Rama correctly assessed the greatness of Vibhishana. Vibhishana was a staunch supporter of *dharma*. When he found that his brother Ravana was indulging in unrighteousness, he denounced his ways and tried to correct him. He did not want to be a party to sin and unrighteousness. When he failed to correct Ravana, he gave him up, joined the forces of *dharma*, and surrendered himself to Divinity. Vibhishana stands superior even to Bhishma in this respect. Though Bhishma was a virtuous one, he did not give up the Kauravas when they resorted to foul and unjust ways. In fact he became a party to sin and unrighteousness, by becoming the commander-in-chief of their forces.

Hatred is the cause of war, and desires are the cause for hatred. Anger arises if desires are not fulfilled. Ego arises if desires are fulfilled. Hence, an effort should be made to cut down one’s desires, give up one’s hatred, and strive for Divine Grace. This, for man, is the foremost duty.

