

CHAPTER 33

RAMA AVATARA

Sage Suka resumed his narration, “First, I shall describe the *Soumya* quality of Sri Rama. By ‘Soumya,’ I mean his gentle, soft and mild nature. He wore a leaf-green gown and had a yellow cloth round his waist. He had on a golden diadem; but he walked along with his eyes on the ground, as if he was ashamed to look up. The scene melted the hearts of all who saw. No one caught him in the act of casting his look on others. He had always the inner, not the outer, vision. Whenever anyone offered anything to him, he did not accept it entirely. He used to break off a bit or take out just a portion, in order to please them. Or, he just touched the offering with his fingers and gave it back to the person who brought it.

“He moved with his father-in-law and mother-in-law, not as a son-in-law, but as a son. He seldom opened his

mouth to speak to his sisters-in-law or their maids. He never lifted his face and cast his eyes on them.

“All women older than himself, he revered as he revered his mother, Kausalya. He considered all who were younger than him as his younger sisters. All of his own age, he treated as if they were his step- mothers.

“He stuck severely to Truth. He surmised that if his father broke his word, the dynasty will earn great dishonour. So, in order to uphold the plighted word of his father and to maintain his reputation, he exiled himself into the forests for fourteen years. His father did not ask him to do so; but he learnt it from his stepmother, Kaikeyi. He never argued or gave a reply—he gave up the kingdom and started straight to the jungle. He acted correctly according to the words spoken by him, and suited the action strictly to the word.

“Rama had a heart filled with compassion. He gave refuge to anyone who took shelter in him and surrendered to him. When the *Vanaras* (Monkey hordes) and the *Rakshasas* (Ogres) were engaged in deadly combat during the battle in Lanka with the wicked Ravana, some Rakshasas changed themselves into Vanaras (Monkeys) and penetrated behind the lines. They were promptly caught by the Vanara scouts and brought before him, for drastic punishment. But Rama stopped the Vanaras from torturing them. He told them that they had come to take refuge in him and declared that it was his vow to pardon all those who surrender to him, whatever their wrongs. He had thus given refuge to the

brother of Ravana and treated him as his own brother Lakshmana. ‘If he says once, I am yours. He is mine forever,’ Rama announced. Rama lived Dharma and taught Dharma through his every act. He established Dharma by practice and precept. He fostered and guarded good men (*Sadhus*). He removed the sufferings of the godly. He drew them near himself. Their lives were fulfilled through his grace. He recognised no distinctions of high and low. He was a master of all the Sastras. He knew the meaning of all the Vedas.”

“Rama transformed the world into a realm of righteousness, through his varied activities and example. During the great Horse Sacrifice that he performed, all the sages and scholars of ritual who had assembled, honoured him as a great upholder of tradition and culture. His compassion and softness of heart are beyond description; no words can convey their depth and extent. He placed the dying eagle—Jatayu—a bird, which no one will ordinarily honour—on his lap. He wiped, with his own flowing hair, the dust that had enveloped it. When it breathed its last, he performed the obsequies, even as a son does when his father dies!

“His very appearance cast a charm on all who saw him. Love, beauty and virtue emanated from him and spread to all around him. He treated the Vanaras (monkey-tribals) with as much affection as he had towards his brothers, Bharatha, Lakshmana and Satrughna.

“Rama was the full manifestation of Righteousness or Dharma. The sages extolled him, saying that Dharma Itself

had taken that human form! There is no need to dilate and speak of a thousand details. For all householders, Rama is the Ideal. His advent was for restoring spiritual values and saving the world from moral disaster. How affectionately he moved with his brothers! Everything was ready for his coronation; but at the last minute, when he was exiled and had to go to the forests, the populace of Ayodhya wailed in uncontrollable anguish; but Rama moved out of the City and Kingdom, with as much joy and equanimity as he had, when he moved towards the throne for the coronation! What greater example is needed than this, for the *Sthithaprajna* (the person whose consciousness is calm and beyond all agitations)?

“He felt that the plighted word was worth the sacrifice of even life. He suffered, with perfect equanimity, grievous hardships, in order to preserve the plighted word of his father. His sincere persistence in carrying out the promise made by his father is an inspiration and an example to every son of man.

“Sita, too, insisted on accompanying her husband to the forest, since the true wife can keep alive only in the company of the husband. She had never before exposed herself to sun and rain; but she spent her days in the terror-striking forest as, in duty bound, and in unsullied joy.

“‘He who is born with you, is more worthy of affection, than she who joined you later,’ that was the view of Lakshmana, when he joined his brother, Rama, leaving his wife Urmila, in Ayodhya itself.

“Bharatha could not but obey Rama’s wish. He came back to the Capital with a heavy heart, since Rama declined to come and enthrone himself. Bharatha created an artificial ‘forest’ for himself (that is to say, he led an ascetic’s life, out of inner compulsion, since he felt he must live like his exiled brother).

“Consider the difference between Dasaratha, the father, and Rama, the son. They are as different as earth and sky! To please his wife, to make her happy and contented, the father was prepared to bear the utmost agony. Finally, he even sent his dear son as an exile to the jungle! The son sent *his* wife into the jungle, as an exile, in order to respect the opinion of a commoner in his empire! Think of the different ways in which the two carried out their duties to the people, over whom they ruled. Dasaratha was overwhelmed by the illusion that he was the physical body. Rama was moved by the realisation that he was the Atma.

“Ah! The virtues and excellences of Rama, I am incapable of describing to you, Oh King! What greater task and mission in life can a man have than the contemplation of that Supreme Person? To save oneself from downfall, the only exercise needed is: listening to the glorious narrative of the lives of Avatars. When you do so, all sin is washed away,” said Suka.

At this, Parikshit was delighted. His face flushed with excitement. He said, “Master, while your account of the life

and activities, the virtues and charm of Rama—the embodiment of Dharma—is bestowing on me such great Ananda, I wonder how much greater would be the Ananda I can derive when you describe the career of Krishna! He is dark-blue beauty personified. How sweet must be the account of Krishna’s childhood pranks, His boyish adventures, His Divine Leelas, His Divine prattle! I pray that I may be kept immersed in the thought and contemplation of the might and majesty, the charm and beauty, of Krishna Himself, during the days that I still have to live. I pray that I may be saved from the cycle of birth and death, thereby.”