

AN ALLY ACCEPTED

Thus, Rama and Lakshmana fulfilled the deep yearnings of Sabari and filled her departing soul with bliss. They continued their journey through the forest, moving like twin lions, talking about the devotion and immeasurable dedication of the aged aspirant, Sabari. Travelling fast, they approached the Rishyamuka Mountain Range. Amidst the hills of that range, Sugriva was residing as a refugee, with his Ministers and Courtiers. Sugriva espied the two brothers, nearing the hills and was astonished at their noble mien and mighty stride. They appeared to be Divine. Sugriva was ever on the watch for strange faces nearing his habitat, for he was afraid, his elder brother, Vali, might torment him, even in his present home, by sending emissaries of death or distress. He had his eyes on all lines of access to his craggy residence. He was frightened at the gait and the glory of the two

strangers. He was anxious to know quickly who they were and what their mission was. So he called Hanuman to his presence and said, “Mighty hero! Have you noticed those two effulgent personalities? Do not delay any longer, go. Inquire who they are and why they have come and from where. Bring me all the news you can gather. If by some chance they happen to be persons sent by Vali, give me a signal. I shall be watching for it—bend your head low over your chest. That will do. I shall immediately arrange to give up this hill for another.”

Sugriva gave him various directions and suggestions to meet all contingencies. Hanuman hurried towards the strangers by leaps and bounds. Reaching their presence, he fell at their feet in great reverence. He said, “Oh Shining Ones, You arouse deep wonder and curiosity in me. Your charming forms are attracting my mind with a strange yearning. You look so tender and innocent. Indeed, you are not mere men. Of that, I am convinced. I guess you are the Divine pair Nara-Narayana, come down on earth. Won’t you tell me why you are going through this jungle with no others to serve or guide you?” Hanuman questioned them in great humility and reverence.

Rama appreciated the devotion and humility of Hanuman. There was a smile on his face when he replied, “We are the sons of Emperor Dasaratha, ruler of Ayodhya. We entered the forest. This is my brother, Lakshmana. My name is Rama. My wife too came with me into the forest; but while we were residing at Panchavati, she was carried

away by some Rakshasa when both of us were absent from our cottage. Now we are moving around in this area, searching for her, intent on knowing her whereabouts and on regaining her.” Rama spoke to Hanuman without any inhibitions, the plain facts which could explain their presence near their range of hills. He said, “Well, I have given you my antecedents and story. I would like to know about yours, too.” Hanuman realised that the brothers were his own Overlords. So he fell at their feet once again to pay respectful homage. Rising up, and standing before them on one side, shedding streams of tears in sheer joy and devotion, he could not speak at all.

At last, gathering courage, and standing with folded arms, he said in a faltering voice: “Lord, I am a stupid ignoramus. That is the reason why I questioned you so. Pardon my audacity and my foolishness, Oh, Monarch of Monarchs! You are asking me to tell you my antecedents and present condition, as if you are ordinary mortals who can know them only when told. Is this just? I could not know who you were, bound as I am by the delusion which you yourselves spread over us. Lord, You are mighty and unconquerable. How can the servant be on a par with the Lord and Master? All beings are overcome and deluded by your strategy and plan! I desire to make a declaration, for which my Lord is witness. I know no other activity than adoring my Lord. When the servant is fostered and guarded by his Lord, why should he fear? The might of the Lord is the shield of the servant.” Saying so, Hanuman assumed

his real form. Rama was filled with delight at the sight of Hanuman. He embraced him, “You are as dear to me as Lakshmana is.” He drew Him to himself and fondled him lovingly stroking his head and gently touching his forehead and face. He said, “Hanuman, I shower my Love most on those who serve me and who deem that service as the highest means of liberation.” At this, Hanuman said, “Lord, Sugriva, the Ruler of the Vanara hordes, has drawn upon himself through various circumstances, the enmity of his elder brother Vali and he has been driven out of the kingdom as an exile into this forest where he has taken residence. He too is your servant. He deserves your affection and blessings. Confer Grace on him and release him from the disgrace he is now immersed in. He has the capacity and authority to send millions of monkeys all over the world to seek and find Sita. He is the Monarch of Monkeys. He can achieve victory in that undertaking.” Hanuman detailed the manifold excellences and capabilities of Sugriva, and persuaded Rama to seek his friendship. When Rama decided on that step, Hanuman offered to carry them on his shoulders, right to the top of the mountain range where Sugriva was.

Sugriva was delighted at the sight of Rama and Lakshmana. Sugriva understood the reasons why Rama had come into the forest and to him. They both sympathised with each other and appreciated each other’s distress. They felt bound by common bonds of comradeship. Sugriva fell at the feet of Rama and Lakshmana, and offered reverential

hospitality. Rama assured Sugriva that he would destroy his fear and remove his distress, for he was the embodiment of compassion itself. Sugriva too promised to sacrifice everything, even his own life, in the service of Rama. The vow of everlasting friendship was solemnised with ritual Fire as witness. For Fire is present as warmth and light in the heart of every living being. Fire that is present in the inner consciousness can burn away any wavering or waywardness that might affect the vow. In fact, Fire or Agni (the subtle Divine Effulgence and Illumination which is the core of Fire) is the chief element in the *Ramayana*. Rama was born of the nectarine gift brought by the God of Fire from out of the sacrificial altar. Sita was wedded to Rama with Agni as the Witness. Lanka was destroyed by Agni. It was in Agni that the Reality, the principle of Sita was kept in deposit while she was taken by Ravana to Lanka. And it was from Agni that she was again redeemed, when the war with Ravana ended in victory for Rama. The implication is that the heart of Rama was cleansed and rid of alloy with each contact with Agni. For Rama is the symbol of Jnana or the Most Supreme Wisdom. He is the symbol of the most supreme morality, too. So the pact with Sugriva was affirmed and sanctified by invoking Agni (Fire) as the Witness. Lakshmana sought to deepen faith and tighten the bond by relating to Sugriva the Truth of Rama and the mission on which he had come.

He told him also of Sita and her Divinity. She was the daughter of the King of Mithila, he said, and so she can be

won and her blessings secured, only by untiring *Methane*, or churning, or Sadhana. Listening to him Sugriva shed tears of contrition. He said, “Master, One day, while I was engaged in exchanging counsel with my ministers, I heard the cry, “Rama! Rama!” from the sky, from within the Pushpaka chariot, which we saw flying through space. While we were watching this strange scene, she threw a bundle tied in cloth down to where we stood. It was a bundle of jewels and so we have preserved it in tact and safe. It is very likely that the Rakshasa called Ravana has carried her away. For there is no iniquity that Ravana has not committed so far.” Sugriva gnashed his teeth in anger at the monster whom he suspected as having done this foul deed. Rama asked that the bundle of jewels be brought. At this, Sugriva himself rose and proceeding to the cave where he had hidden it. He carried it to the Presence and placed it before Rama. The cloth in which the jewels were bundled was a part of the fibre cloth which his step-mother had thrown towards Sita, so that she might wear it while in exile as a recluse in the forest. Recognising it as such, Lakshmana shed tears. Seeing him overcome, Sugriva and Hanuman also became sad. Rama loosened the knots and undid the bundle. He showed the contents to Lakshmana in order to confirm whether the jewels were those of Sita herself. Lakshmana declared that he could not identify them all, for, he had never raised his eyes and looked at Sita. “I have seen only the toe-rings that sister-in-law wore, for I used to prostrate at her Feet every day. Yes, these are the toe-rings she wore. I can vouchsafe for that. While moving through the jungles,

I used to follow her and walk on her footsteps. You know that you always walked in front and I followed behind Sita. I was walking, watching her feet and so, I know these rings quite well.” Sugriva and Hanuman looked on wistfully at the brothers, when they acted their roles and were deeply moved at the sight of the jewels dropped by Sita. Sugriva could not bear it any longer. He said, “Lord, do not give way to sorrow. This day itself I shall set on foot plans to discover where Sita is, and for destroying the wicked Ravana. I shall bring Sita back and make you both happy. This is my plighted word, my sacred promise.”

Rama expressed great satisfaction at this promise. He said, “Tell me in detail the reason why you are residing in this forest and not in your capital.” At this, Sugriva described consecutively and in clear concise terms, as beads are strung on a string to form a garland or rosary, who his parents were, which his real place of residence was, what were the reasons for the enmity that grew between himself and his elder brother, etc. Rama felt that the story of Sugriva was more or less akin to his own, especially the separation from the wife and the exile from the Kingdom. He felt that Sugriva was upright and just, and that Vali deserved punishment since he had carried away his brother’s wife, a crime which the code of monkey morals will not excuse.

Rama asked Sugriva to tell him the story of his birth. Sugriva replied, “Yes, I seek to place at your feet the chronicle of the origins and fortunes of my entire clan. Once upon a time, Brahma, the Creator, created a monkey form.

It was endowed with great might; but, it was ever wayward in movements and activities. So Brahma named it Ruksharaja. When it demanded to be told where it should reside, Brahma directed, ‘Live in the forest, for there you can move as your waywardness dictates. And when you catch a Rakshasa, kill him and save the area from his misdeeds.’ Ruksharaja migrated to the southern region, and followed Brahma’s instructions. One day, the monkey Ruksharaja went to a lake to slake its thirst and when it dipped its face on the surface of the clear water, it saw its image in the lake. It was much concerned, for evidently there was an enemy hiding in the lake, lying in wait for him! It roamed all round the shore of the lake, eager to catch the enemy when it popped out of the waters. The enemy inside the lake roared when he roared, gnashed its teeth when he did so. It echoed, reflected, all noise and all gestures. Unable to control himself any longer, Ruksharaja jumped into the lake to strangle his rival. That jump transformed him into a female! Struck with amazement, she came on shore; and turning to the Sun, she prayed for Grace. She also prayed to Indra, with great mental anguish. Through the Grace of Surya (the Sun) she got a son, that is, Sugriva, myself; and through the Grace that Indra bestowed on her, she got another son, Vali, my brother. Immediately after the birth of the two children, she became once again, Ruksharaja! Ruksharaja took the two babies with him and approached Brahma for instructions. He related to Brahma his entire story so that He could recollect the facts of his decision thus: “Oh Vali and Sugriva! Go into the regions of

the South and establish yourselves in Kishkindha. The Lord of all the Worlds, the Supreme Sovereign of the Universe, He who is known by many Names will take birth as Rama, as the son of Emperor Dasaratha of Raghu Dynasty. He will come into the forest according to his father's command. He will engage himself in many superhuman achievements. He will also behave like an ordinary mortal. During his wanderings, he will arrive at Kishkindha, where you are, and form friendship with you. Seek the fortune of securing his darsan, hearing him speak and touching his feet. Your lives will be rendered blessed thereby.”

“We listened to the Voice of Brahma addressing us thus. We were delighted at the prospect that lay before us. We did not undertake any *japa*, austerity, ritual or yajna. All our talents and accomplishments were the direct result of the Grace that Brahma showered on us that day. When that Voice ceased, we offered homage in our minds to Brahma and reached Kishkindha. We destroyed the rakshasas who infested the forests there. One day, a rakshasa named Mayavi, the son of Maya, proceeded against us in order to wreak vengeance against us. He besieged us at midnight and created tremendous confusion. My elder brother could not tolerate, even one moment, the audacity of the foe. Vali rose and fell upon him with all his might, and Mayavi fled in terror. Mayavi hid himself in a cave, and Vali pursued him to the very last. I was also engaged in the hot pursuit of the wicked rakshasa, close behind Vali. As he entered the cave where Mayavi had taken shelter,

Vali directed me, ‘Brother! I am going into this cave to kill the enemy. Watch the entrance and remain here, lest he escape.’ When I asked him how long, he replied, ‘Even fifteen days and nights! Keep close watch that long. If I do not emerge on the sixteenth day, you may take it that he has killed me. You can then return.’ I waited and watched for full thirty days. By that time, the smell of blood emerged from the cave, a smell that I inferred was that of my brother's blood. I feared that Mayavi might emerge alive from the cave. So I placed a huge boulder at the mouth of the cave and knowing that it was foolish to wait any longer, I returned home. I gathered my companions and well-wishers and consulted them about the next step. We felt that Mayavi who could kill the redoubtable Vali must indeed be a formidable enemy and so, I spent the days in perpetual fright.

“The inhabitants of the capital realised that they must have a leader in these hard times when they were beset by foes on all sides. They pleaded that since Vali had died, I must step into his place. I had no inclination to accept the authority, but they forced me into it. Shortly after, within about two or three days, Vali returned to the capital. He had slain Mayavi and rid the land of that vile foe. On finding me holding the position of ruler, Vali was filled with uncontrollable anger. He inferred that I had shut the exit of the cave with a boulder to prevent him from coming out alive, and that I had deliberately sought the position that was thrust on me. He decided to wreak vengeance on me

for this. He began treating me as the lowest of the low and to impute motives for even the slightest fault or mistake. He deprived me of all powers and positions and looked down on me as if I were less than a menial of his household. He forced me out of the family home. He took my wife into his custody. One day, determined to destroy me, he fought with me ferociously. I could not stand up to his prowess. So I left Kishkindha and took refuge here. Vali insisted that those who supported me or befriended me should not stay behind and so they have also joined me at this place. My wife tried hard to come back to me; but however much she tried, he did not allow her to come away. He treated her as his own wife.” Sugriva’s eyes were streaming tears as he related his sad story. Rama consoled him and sympathised with the plight. He assured him once again that he would protect him from harm and guard him against evil.

Sugriva said, “I am residing on this hill, helplessly, for this is the only place where my vengeful brother, Vali, cannot come. There is a curse laid on him by a sage which effectively prevents him from entering this region. Or else, I would have died at his hands long ago.”

Rama inquired, “Friend, how did he incur that curse?” Sugriva explained, “Master, Dundubhi, the brother of Mayavi, was a mighty hero. No one could equal him in valour and physical strength. He revelled in confrontation with mountains and the sea, in sheer joy at demonstrating his might! One day, while he was exulting on his daring

exploits, standing in front of a mountain peak that he had pulverised, he heard an unseen Voice announce: ‘Dundubhi! Do not allow your head to swell so! Beware! There lives one who is mightier than you. He is gaily wandering on the shores of the Pampa Lake, assuming leadership and asserting his power. His name is Vali.’ When these words fell on his ears, Dundubhi changed himself into a formidable buffalo and rushed into Kishkindha, where the Pampa Lake is situated. He ploughed the earth with his horns and bellowed his way through hill and dale, parading in lofty pride his impregnable power. His fury was getting wilder at every step. He cast terror all around. When he dug his horns into the earth, huge trees rolled uprooted, on the ground. His ferocity quaked all hearts. While he was thus invading his region, like Rahu venturing to swallow the Moon, Vali perceived him; and that very instant, he fell upon him. The two strange-looking foes struggled for victory, like wild tuskers entangled in mortal combat. The fight lasted more than six hours. Finally, Vali gave a mortal blow to Dundubhi. Staggering with pain, he fell dead on the ground, like a mountain peak reeling to the ground during a violent earthquake. The impact was so unsettling that giant trees too lay flat on the ground along with him! Vali was so intoxicated with success that he tore the corpse apart and threw the halves far into the distance, one to the south and the other to the north. But one bleeding mass of flesh and bone fell on a hermitage, showering a rain of blood over the holy area, which polluted the ascetics who were peacefully engaged in meditation and recitation of

sacred hymns. It was the hermitage of the great saint, Mathanga. He had gone to the river for his ritual bath. When he returned, he noticed drops of blood all over the place and soon came near the half-corpse of a terror-striking monster. He could not contain himself. His disciples and pupils, yearning to be bathed in bliss, were bathed in blood. His forbearance gave way. He halted a moment wondering who could have dared commit such a sin. His anger could not be kept under restraint. It did not allow him to look back or peer into the future. He pronounced a terrible curse! 'If that vicious, sinful Vali approaches this hill or even casts his eye on this hill, may his head be broken in two.' That was the imprecation he uttered. Scared by that curse, Vali is keeping away from this hill. He cannot approach this place or even look upon it. Emboldened by this circumstance, I am living here, unhampered, robbed of my wife and deprived of my kith and kin." Sugriva related his plight to Rama, with nothing held back.

Rama was disturbed by the story of the wickedness of Vali which was tormenting Sugriva since long. He could not listen any more to the list of his atrocities. Rama could not tolerate unrighteous acts. He would not relish the description of vice. He comforted Sugriva and assured him that Vali could not escape punishment for relying solely on physical strength and material power, ignoring the strength and power that one should earn through righteousness and devotion to God. He vowed that with one arrow he would fell Vali to the ground and put an end to his wicked life,

even if all the fourteen worlds oppose the fulfilment of the vow. He said, "Do not cast your looks upon the face of a person who is unaffected by the sorrows of his friend, or by the absurd boast of his enemy. Do not choose a friend merely to win some temporary gain, or to satisfy some urgent desire, or to plunge into some foul behaviour. Friends must have deep love towards each other. He who has no love filling his heart, moving his mind or lighting up his face can only be a bad, undesirable 'friend.' The hearts of such false friends will be crooked and contaminated. A wily servant, a greedy, miserly and evil-minded wife or husband, a false friend—these four make life painful, as when pierced by spears and spikes. Therefore, Oh Sugriva, do not grieve. I shall come to your rescue, to the fullest extent of my physical, verbal and mental capabilities. What does it matter how strong Vali is? You are not aware of your own strength. You are bewildered by your estimate of his strength, that is all. That is at the bottom of your doubts and fears. Well, perhaps you desire to be assured of my powers, before you develop confidence and courage. Ask me to accomplish any task so that your faith in me can take deep root. I shall demonstrate my strength and fill your heart with courage. When that is done, I shall fight with Vali and destroy him."

Rama gently stroked the back of Sugriva, in order to induce him to trust him and be rid of fear and anxiety. Sugriva was eager to see the prowess of Rama. He was also wanting some prop for faith. He said, "Rama, once upon a time, I and my brother agreed to test our strength

and skill on a line of seven giant palm trees, trying to fell them one after the other, shooting a single arrow right through all of them. I felled only three, but my brother Vali hit five and they all rolled on the ground. His capacity had that maximum measure. To defeat Vali, one should have strength beyond his. I am most eager to find out whether you have that extra might and to see how many palm trees you can fell with one arrow.”

Sugriva and his courtiers then took Rama to a place where seven mammoth palms were piercing the sky in a row. They asked him to attempt to shoot them down. They talked among themselves that since those monstrous trees were four or five times huger than the five that Vali felled, Rama must be considered strong enough to overpower Vali even if he felled two of these giants. Looking at that row, Rama smiled and calling Sugriva near him, he told him, “Sugriva, these palms are in my eyes the weakest and tiniest.” Then he fitted an arrow on his bow. He felled *all* the seven. His arrow carried all the fallen palms up a mountain that was in the distance, blasting the rocks on the way!

Sugriva was overwhelmed with wonder and devotion. He prostrated at the feet of Rama, exclaiming, “Rama, a hundred Valis could not have achieved this feat. I am indeed fortunate. I have no more worries in life, since I have secured your friendship! Though I am estranged from one Vali, I have today got a hundred fold Vali as my thickest comrade! Pardon my mistake. I am ashamed that my small-

-mindedness persuaded me to test your powers in this manner. Oh, I am indeed lucky that I am blessed with the friendship of God Himself, in this form. My tale of woe has ended this day. Hope has dawned in my heart that I can soon regain my Kishkindha. I am really happy that I can again live happily with my wife and children. I am only tossed in doubt about when and how soon it can happen—within minutes, or hours or days. Of course, that depends on the will of Rama, on His Grace. It will be fulfilled the moment He decides.”

Sugriva knew that Rama alone could help him and that Rama alone had to be relied upon. He prostrated at Rama’s feet and said, “Rama, Your Will, Your Compassion, they are my sole refuge. When are you intending to put an end to my sorrows?” Rising again from his seat, Sugriva declared, “Listen Rama, for so long, I had labelled Vali as my greatest enemy, and shivered in fear of him. Now, I find he is my greatest benefactor. For fear of him, I took residence on this mountain range. Since I was here, I could notice your arrival and meet you and be blessed by this friendship! Therefore, Vali is the root cause of all these developments. He is, indeed, my benefactor.” “Rama, we fight with another person while in a dream. We hate him to the utmost. We adopt all methods to ruin him; but as soon as we awaken and rise from bed, we know that the hatred and the struggle were false and baseless. Your Darsan has awakened me from my dream. While in that dream, I hated Vali and interpreted all his actions as inimical to me. I fought

with him, in my ignorance. Now that I have seen you and had the benefit of listening to your counsel, I have risen, conscious from my dream. The touch of your holy feet has imparted the vision of Truth. My long fostered hatred and envy, greed and egoism, my enmity towards Vali and my plans for vengeance, these made me weaker and weaker. I was sunk in my single-minded yearning for a favourable moment to pay off old scores. This was the *thapas*, the austerity, that granted me your Grace. I got you and my agony was reckoned as asceticism, my anger was transformed into love. Lord, bless me, pour Grace on me. I have no more desire to regain my kingdom. My wife and children have their careers marked out for them by destiny. What can I do to change the course of events? I shall no more worry about them. Enough for me if you confer on me the joy of serving you and being with you, in your presence, for the rest of my life.”

When Surgiva prayed in this strain, Rama tenderly stroked his head and said, “Son, the words you utter are indeed true. Kingdoms and power, joy and grief, anger and anxieties, properties and privileges, good and bad, are all of the stuff of which dreams are made. The proximity to God, the God-Principle in you, that alone is real. But remember, my vow, my word, can never prove false. Whatever might happen, I shall grant you the kingdom. You cannot escape the responsibility of ruling over it. You cannot evade the fight with Vali which must take place tomorrow. Come, get ready.”

Rama rose. Both he and Lakshmana moved forward, armed with bow and arrow, with Sugriva by their side. Hanuman and others were permitted to remain in that hill-residence itself. Sugriva was given necessary instructions, while on the way. At last, he was directed to go forward alone, and shout a challenge in front of the main gate of the City. Following this command given by Rama, Sugriva stood before Kishkindha City and shouted so fiercely that the walls of the fort shook, and the earth quaked in fear. No sooner did that call fall on his ear than Vali rose from his bed as a cobra does when it is trodden upon, and came out, ready to fight and put Sugriva to flight. He knew it was his brother who had challenged him to combat.

At this, Tara, Vali’s wife, clasped his feet and reminded him of the words spoken by his own son some days earlier. She said, “Lord, the brothers who have sought his help are no ordinary men. They are endowed with mighty powers. Sugriva, who was in hiding all this time, has come now with new confidence and courage. He has even dared challenge you. He would not venture to do so without looking before and after. He must have received conviction about their capabilities and won the promise of their assistance. The princes, Rama and Lakshmana, have Divine Powers. It is not propitious that you enter into battle with them.” Listening to her pathetic importunities, Vali burst into a jeering laugh. “Cowardly woman,” he said. “It is said that Rama is equal-minded. If that is true, he will certainly look upon both of us with an equal eye. Moreover, I have

not done him any harm, have I? In spite of this, if Rama kills me, well, I shall believe my birth and years of life have been fulfilled thereby!" Tara was happy on the one hand that he had such an outlook. On the other hand she could not entertain for a moment the idea of separation from her lord. So, she pleaded again, "Lord, it is considered a bad omen when a woman objects. Do not rashly accept the challenge." But Vali set aside all her pleadings. "When battle calls, no one cares for omens. Either the enemy should die or one's own life should end." So saying Vali pushed Tara aside and rushed towards the main entrance to the Fort roaring in terror-striking rage.

He saw only Sugriva there. So, he jumped on him and both began a heavy fight with their fists, inflicting hammer-blows on each. Sugriva could not bear the rain of fierce hits. He felt a desire to flee. Vali with many a kick and pull, caused such agonising pain that Sugriva managed to escape leaving Vali victor! Vali retired into the Fort, patting his thighs exultingly. Rama and Lakshmana followed the fleeing Sugriva. When they reached the hill resort, Sugriva fell at the feet of Rama, his heart heavy with the burden of disappointment, despair, pain and fear. He said, "Lord, I do not understand why you caused this disgrace to me. I proceeded on this venture, buoyed up with a huge pile of hope that you would come to my rescue. All the while, I was watching for the moment when your arrow will hit Vali and finish him. But that event never happened. I could not bear the weight of those blows. So, I had to take the

shameful course of fleeing for sheer life. My brother is a mighty hitter. I could not stand those blows."

Rama consoled him and said, "Sugriva! Don't grieve. Listen to the reasons. You are so like each other, so indistinguishable one from the other, so much the same in appearance and attainments, that I could not take correct aim at him." Those words had a deep inner meaning, too. They meant that Vali too was devoted to His Feet. "He too is my votary. He has yearned for My Grace as much as you have." But Sugriva could not grasp the hidden import of the declaration. He prayed, "Knowing so much, could you not discover who Vali was and who Sugriva was? I cannot believe your words. I do not know the reason why you could not. Perhaps, you wanted me to display my ability to the utmost. If that was your intention, I could have taken note of it from the beginning itself. What really happened was, I was so confident that you would bring about his downfall, that I took the fight rather easy, and in a light-hearted manner."

Rama drew the downhearted, dispirited Sugriva to his presence and consoled him profusely. He passed his Divine hand over the body of Sugriva, so that the pain disappeared in a trice. The wounds and contusions were instantaneously healed. Sugriva was overwhelmed with surprise. He exclaimed, "Rama? Your hand can achieve anything. It contains everything. Creation, Preservation, Destruction, all three are subservient to Your Will. I have no desire to rule over this kingdom. Compared to the joy Your Grace can confer, that joy is nothing at all."

Rama did not pay heed to his words. He said, “These words of yours are but reflections of passing thoughts. You spoke like this when you had a vision of my Power and Glory. I do not attach much value to them, for I care more for feelings that rise in the heart. There are many great devotees who forget everything when they experience the Sport and Supreme Might of God, and believe that there is nothing higher than God. But after some time, or when their mental cravings do not bear fruit, they develop doubts even about what they experienced or saw! These are the veils that hide, the curtains that distort the truth in the minds of those with weak faith. I know how it all happens and so I do not attach much value to these sentiments. You have to get ready to confront your brother once again.” Thus, Rama forced Sugriva into the fray.

Sugriva had no liking for the fight, but he was certain that this time Rama would keep his promise and kill Vali. He walked boldly on, with confidence in his heart. Rama got some wild flowers and had them strung as a garland which he put round Sugriva’s neck. What Rama meant was: Vali had already told Tara that Rama looked upon all as equal. It was this “equal” sight that prevented him from killing Vali. “Now, I have put this garland of flowers round his neck to show that my love towards Sugriva is greater, and so, I can with justice, deal with Vali differently. Sugriva has a garland extra, indicating that he wears the symbol of Divine Love. Love needs no reason for its flow. It comes from no selfish urge.”

Thus encouraged and filled with heroism, Rama and Lakshmana persuaded Sugriva to shout the challenge again at the gate of Vali’s Fort. They hid themselves behind a tree that was near by. When Vali rushed out eager for the fight, and when the earth quaked under the weight of his impact, Sugriva was frightened. He prayed to Rama with all his heart to come to his succour soon, and went forward to meet his foe. To justify his own attainments and capacity, Sugriva fought to the best of his ability. When his strength gave way, and the first signs of exhaustion appeared in him, he called out “Rama” just once. Rama has as his favourite task the guarding of his devotees. So, when he heard the call, he placed an arrow on his bow and shot it straight into the proud heart of Vali. Vali swung round helplessly and slid until he fell flat on the ground. At that moment, Rama came near Vali and granted him the Divine vision of Himself.

Though struck by the fatal shaft, Vali rose and assumed a sitting posture. He was strong and courageous beyond compare! With folded palms, he cast his lingering looks on that cloud-blue complexion, those lotus-petal eyes, and shed streams of tears in his ecstatic exhilaration. He could scarce contain his joy. He exclaimed “Oh Rama! Being such a divinely auspicious embodiment of beauty, being the very Lord of all Creation, why had you to perform this questionable act? Had you but told me, and then killed me, I would have been extremely happy to die. Would I have refused to render you the good that Sugriva could? No. No.

This has been thus done, not without some justifiable reason. For the Lord would never undertake any task without just reason. Seen from the outside, the task might appear contrary to our idea of Divinity; but, with the inner view, the fact that it is based on Truth would become evident. I know that the deeds of the Lord should not be interpreted from the common worldly point of view. The Lord is above and beyond the Gunas, attributes that limit and regulate human conduct. So, His deeds can be understood correctly only when viewed from a position unaffected by emotion, passion, or prejudice. Acts done with perfect equanimity can be understood only by perfect equanimity. If you are swayed by characteristics and attributes, you would naturally see only kindred characteristics and attributes, even when they are absent!" Vali was endowed with a very clear intellect. So, he argued thus and said "Rama, I know full well your prowess and skill. You can with one arrow destroy not only this Vali, but the entire Universe. You can create the Universe again. Nevertheless, I desire to learn from you the sin for which you have killed me. Please identify for me the error I was responsible for. You have come upon earth in human form in order to re-establish righteousness, haven't you? What is the meaning and purpose of this action—hiding behind a tree, like a common hunter, in order to kill me."

Rama graciously sat by the side of the dying Vali and said, "Vali! You know that my deeds are not motivated by selfish ends. Give up your wrong notion that I sought and

secured the friendship of Sugriva in order to search the whereabouts of Sita. Why, you yourself said just now that I have assumed this human form for the purpose of re-establishing righteousness on earth! Now, tell me, if I simply witness the wrong, the unjust and vicious deeds of yours, what would you call it? Service or disservice to the world? Righteous or unrighteous? The brother's wife, the sister and the daughter-in-law are all three equivalent in status to one's daughter. To cast sinful eyes on them makes one a heinous sinner. No sin affects one when such a sinner is killed.

"How unjust was it for you to infer that Sugriva closed the entrance of the cave with the evil intention of killing you! You said you would come out at the end of fifteen days, at the most, and asked him to wait at the mouth of the cave until then. Yet, he waited there, anxiously awaiting you, for one full month! Finally, when he was assailed by the smell of blood, he was grieved that his brother was killed by the ogre. He hesitated to enter the cave, for to the ogre who destroyed you, Sugriva would certainly be no match. When he placed the boulder up against the mouth of the cave, his intention was to prevent the ogre from coming out, and to see that he is confined within that cave itself. The citizens pressed on him the rulership and he had to accede to their wishes. What crime had Sugriva committed when he acted thus? You did not stay to inquire. He never disobeyed your commands and directives, even to the slightest extent; for he loved you and revered you.

He adheres strictly to the path of Truth. But you treasured in your heart vengeance against him for no reason at all. Your overweening pride drove him into the forest. When you sent him out, you should have allowed his wife too to go with him. Instead you chose her to be your wife, the person whom you should have treated as your own daughter. Do you call this a sin or don't you? There is no sin more heinous than this. Besides, you occupy the position of the ruler of this region. You have to protect and foster your subjects. How can you punish those who commit crimes when you yourself revel in the same crime? 'As is the King, so are the subjects,' says the proverb. The people will be such as their rulers are. Therefore, what you have done becomes more heinous and more reprehensible. Doesn't it?"

Thus, Rama out of His infinite love clarified to Vali the crimes and sins he had committed. Vali listened with attention and thought over what he heard. At last, he realised his error, and said, "Lord, my cleverness has failed to make you pronounce my acts as right. Now hear me! I am not a sinner at all. Had I been a sinner, how could I be floored by an arrow from the Lord's own hands, and how could I pass my last moments looking on the Face of Divinity and listening to the sweet words of the Lord?" Rama was highly pleased at these words spoken with such high wisdom, out of the depths of love and devotion, delight and dedication. Then Rama wished to announce to the world the genuine spirit of renunciation that Vali had at heart. He said, "Vali,

I am restoring you to life. I am freeing you from the obligation of old age and senility. Come, have your body back again." He placed His hand on the head of Vali. But even while He was blessing him so, Vali intervened with a prayer, "Ocean of Compassion, give ear to my appeal. However many attempts one might make throughout life, at the moment when breath deserts us, death cannot be avoided. At that moment, even the sovereign sages do not get Your Name on their tongues! Unique good fortune I have secured now, here, when I pronounce Your Name, look on Your Form, touch Your Feet and listen to Your Words. If I miss this chance and let it slip away, who can say how long I may have to wait for these again? Continuing to breathe, what great achievement will I accomplish? No, I do not wish to live any longer."

"Lord, even the Vedas, the Source of all Knowledge, speak of you as only 'Not this' 'Not this.' Thus they proceed, until they declare finally, 'This.' 'This' I have now secured in my grasp. Shall I let it slip? Is there in this world a fool who would give up the Divine Wish-fulfilling Tree that he has in his grasp for the sake of a wild weed? This Vali, born out of a mental resolution of Brahma Himself, endowed with strength of body and sharpness of intellect and renowned for these qualities, cannot yield to the temptation of clinging to the body as if it is real and valuable. No, if I yield, I will become the target of infamy. Why elaborate? When there is no self-satisfaction, what do other types of satisfaction matter? Lord, as a result of Your Darsan

and Your Words, I have overcome all sense of duality and distinction. I have acquired the Vision of the One, apart from all the rest. The mass of 'consequence' I had earned through my sins has been destroyed. Let the Body which is burdened with the consequence be destroyed along with it. Do not allow another body appear to bear the burden." Vali declared his determination to give up his breath, and called his son to his presence. He said: "This fellow grew up until now as the lust-born son of this body. He is strong, virtuous, humble and obedient. Now I wish You would foster him as Your Love-deserving Son. I have placed him in Your hands." With these words he placed the hands of his son in the hands of Rama. Rama drew Angada, the son, near Him, and blessed him, with great love. Pleased at the acceptance, Vali shed tears of joy. His eyes were fixed on the Divine Face before him. His eyes slowly closed in death. Will an elephant worry or take any notice of flowers that fall away from the garland round its neck? With the same unconcern, Vali too allowed his breath to slide away from him.

The inhabitants of Pampa Town gathered in sad groups as soon as they heard the news of Vali's demise. His wife, Tara, came to the place, accompanied by her retinue. She fell upon the body and lost consciousness. The agonising wail of Tara was so poignant that stones melted in sympathy. When she recovered consciousness, off and on, she looked on the face of her lord and cried in utter grief. "In spite of all the protest I made and the arguments I used to stop you, you rushed forward to this doom. The wife should ever be

vigilant about the security and happiness of her lord. There is no one more concerned about the welfare of the husband than the wife. Others, however eminent, will always have some little egoism mixed in the advice they give. Lord! On account of the mischief of Destiny, my counsel could not prevail. Lord, how am I to foster and bring up this son? Will those who killed you desist from harming your son? Who will guide us now? How did your mind agree to leave us behind and proceed to the next world? For whose sake must I continue this life?"

Then, Tara turned to Rama and poured out her heart. "You sent my dear Lord, my very breath, to the next world. Do you want us, who are left behind, to live at the mercy of strangers? Is this the right thing for a noble person, a person devoted to right conduct, to be proud about? Is it appropriate? If you do not desire our progress, if you have no wish to alleviate our sorrow, then kill me and my son. The arrow that killed the mighty hero will not quail before a weak woman and a stripling lad. Let us join him in his journey." She fell at the feet of Rama and wept in inconsolable anguish. Rama said, "Tara, why do you weep so? You are a heroic wife. Do not behave in this manner, for it brings your role into infamy. Be calm. Control yourself. The body is a temporary phase. It is contemptible. Vali himself regarded this body as debased! Its fall, its end, might happen any day, it cannot be avoided. It is but an instrument to achieve the Supreme Goal and if that end is not kept in view and attained through it, the body is but a lump of coal

whose destiny is the fire. Weeping for Vali as this body is foolish, for the body is here. Do you then weep for the Atma that was in this body? That Atma is eternal. It cannot die or decay, diminish or disintegrate. Only those who have not realised the Atma principle suffer from the delusion that the body is themselves; until then, even the most learned are led into error. Being enamoured of the body as if it is you is 'ignorance.' Being aware of the Atma, which you really are is 'wisdom.' Getting the knowledge of the Atma is as precious a piece of good luck as getting a diamond in the dust. The Atma is the gemstone embedded in this mass of flesh. The body carries urine and faeces, bad odours and bad blood. It is pestered by pests and problems. Its decay cannot be arrested. It must die someday. The achievement that one can realise through it is its justification. That is the crown of human life. Your husband has achieved many heroic and honourable victories through his body. While ruling this kingdom, he protected and promoted his servants and faithful followers as if they were his very breath. He destroyed the Rakshasas. He had deep devotion towards God. But he inflicted injury on his brother. Besides that sin, he did not commit any other. His death at my hands was the consequence of that sin. Therefore, believe that it too has been washed away. Now, you have no reason to grieve.

When Tara heard these words of counsel and consolation wisdom dawned in her mind and she was calmed. Rama said that there should be no more delay. He asked Tara to go back and have the funeral rites for Vali

performed by Sugriva. He advised Sugriva to bring up Angada with love and care. When the rites were over, he sent Lakshmana into the Capital City, and had Sugriva installed on the throne. Hanuman and others too entered the City and helped him, as friends and followers, to carry on the task of government successfully. As soon as he assumed the reins of office, Sugriva called together the elders and leaders of the community. He ordered them to make all proper arrangements to seek and find the whereabouts of Sita. He asked them to initiate all steps necessary for the purpose. Sugriva was not happy that he became the ruler and was honoured by that responsibility. He was, on the other hand, sad and morose, because he had been the cause for the killing of his brother. "Alas, anger leads one to perpetrate the direst of sins. It breeds hatred, and murders love. Shame on me! To what depths have I fallen, since I allowed anger and hatred to enter my heart. My heart is torn in anguish by the words of adoration Vali addressed to Rama. I never realised, even in my dreams, that Vali had such a deal of devotion and dedication in him. Ah, his wisdom is boundless. His furious anger did not allow that wisdom to express itself! Yes, anger suppresses the divine in one. Lust and anger drag life into disaster." Though much depressed by these thoughts, Sugriva learned the guidelines of government from Lakshmana. He prayed to Rama that He should enter the City and bless him and his subjects. But Rama said that he had to live in the forests only and not enter any town or city. Otherwise he would be disobeying his father's wish.

Sugriva held a conference of leaders and announced that, since the season was late autumn, rains were imminent and the monkey hordes would be hard put to it to move about in the cold and in the storm. So he suggested that as soon as the autumn passed, they must set about the task of searching for the place where Sita was. He presented this information to Rama and Lakshmana also. Rama realised the truth of these statements and he acceded to the proposal. The brothers retired to the Rshyamuka Hill and took residence there.

The rains started soon. It poured as if potsful were emptied from the sky on every square inch of space! It became a hard task for Lakshmana to procure, in time, even tubers and fruits for sustenance. They could not come out of the shelter of the hermitage. Sunlight was scarcely to be seen. Rama spent the time in administering valuable counsel to Lakshmana. "Lakshmana!" he would say, "When a wicked son is born, the code of morality will be corroded. When a cyclone starts its career, the clouds shudder in fear. The company of bad men is the prelude to the disappearance of wisdom. The company of good men makes wisdom blossom." Thus, they spent their days, learning and teaching, matters concerned with Wisdom and its acquisition and preservation.