

SUCCESS IN THE SEARCH

The rains stopped. The Sarad season dawned on the world. The earth shone resplendently green. Grass sprouted everywhere and soon the earth decked itself with many-coloured floral dress. Greed weakens when gladness grows. So too, the waters evaporated when the star Agasthya appeared in the sky. The mind is rendered pure and pellucid when desire and delusion disappear. So too, the rivers were rendered clear and clean. Rama told Lakshmana, “Brother. it is desirable to give a warning to Sugriva now.” Lakshmana paid heed to that command, and requested Hanuman, who was a daily visitor to the hermitage, to remind Sugriva of the promised task. Hanuman was most earnest and anxious to fulfil the orders of Rama. So he warned Sugriva immediately and effectively. He called together the leaders of the monkey hordes and initiated the arrangements. Sugriva gave

everyone the determination and courage needed for the execution of the task assigned. Urged by the resolution that the mission must succeed, he sent them to all the four quarters. He entrusted the overall leadership to Hanuman himself. Led by Hanuman, the entire assembly of monkeys shouted, “Jai” to Sugriva and “Jai” to Rama, the Lord. Dancing and jumping in glee, the monkeys hurried on their different demarcated paths, inspired by Hanuman and the holiness of the mission.

Hanuman went East with a group of followers. Sushena and Mandava proceeded North. They searched the Gandhamadana Mountain Range, the Sumera Peak, the Arjuna Mountain, and the Nilagiri Ranges, and the caves therein, until at last they reached the shore of the Northern Sea. The group led by Hanuman were also equally earnest in their search. They cared nothing for sleep or food. They were ready to offer their very lives at the feet of Rama. They desired only one thing, success in their task of serving Rama. From the least to the highest, everyone had the same loyalty and spirit of dedication. Reciting the Name, “Rama” “Rama” “Rama,” they peeped into every nook and corner, every peak and promontory, every cave and cove, every valley and riverbank, for they could penetrate into regions and places where men cannot enter.

One day, they reached the shore of a broad lake. There they espied a woman deeply engaged in austerities. They prostrated before her from a distance. She opened her eyes

and seeing their exhausted condition, she said, “Monkeys, you appear very tired and hungry. Refresh yourselves with these fruits,” and she supplied plenty of food. When they sat around her, she heard from them the mission on which they were moving about. She said that she was proceeding to the holy place where Rama was in residence. “Listen to my story,” she said. “My name is Swayamprabha. I am the daughter of a Celestial Gandharva. I have an Apsaras friend called Hema. While engaged in austerities, Brahma appeared before me and asked me what I needed. He assured me that he would grant me my wish. Then I replied, ‘I wish to see God as man, moving on earth!’ He said: ‘Be here alone. In due course, a number of mighty monkeys will arrive here and halt at your request. From them, you can know of Rama, who is God come in human form. Later, you can look on Rama himself.’ Ah! That boon is being realised. The first sign and the second, of its fulfilment are already evident. The first is your arrival. The second is your account of Rama’s story and the place where He is in residence. Now, I am as happy as if I have already attained the third, namely, the Darsan of Rama.” The woman was immersed in unbounded ecstasy and delight and shedding tears of joy. The monkeys too were deeply moved and shed tears of delight. Meanwhile, the woman began introspecting with eyes closed. She broke the silence with the announcement, “Monkeys! On a seashore, in a beautiful City, at the centre of a charming garden, alone, all by herself, Sita is bewailing her fate. You will see her without doubt. Be assured of this. Proceed in confidence and with courage.”

One day, during their journey, the monkeys sank in gloom and sighed, “Alas, of the period allotted to us by our Master, Sugriva, only two days remain. And we have not traced Sita!” Angada and the rest lamented their fate and were lost in despair. Tears rolled down their cheeks. They had come to the shore of the sea and were sad that not one of them could cross it to continue the search. So, they sat in groups on the sands and were pining in disappointment. Jambavantha, the old leader, counselled Angada in many ways. “Why do you grieve? We have put forward our best efforts. We have searched all places without the least dereliction of duty. We have not wasted a single moment in idling. We have not worried even about food and drink. We have been engaged ceaselessly in the search for Sita. Our Master and ruler, Sugriva, might not be a witness to our activities; but believe me, Rama is witnessing them! Therefore, Rama will not be a party to the infliction of any punishment on us. We have no reason to fear the anger of Sugriva. Since this is His Task, let us carry it out with His Name on our tongue and His Form in our minds.”

While Jambavantha was thus consoling and comforting Angada, a huge aged bird hopped up to the shore, in order to perform the last rites for its dead brother, and offer water sanctified by sesame grains, in the holy sea. The monkeys gathered around the new arrival and wondered whether it was a Rakshasa who had transformed himself into that form. The bird, however, started speaking

first. It said, “Monkeys! My name is Sampathi. Jatayu and I are brothers. Eagles as we are, we both raced towards the sun in competition, years ago. My brother could not bear the scorching heat as we neared the Sun. He flew back. But a sense of pride induced me to continue the flight. As I proceeded stage by stage, my wings were burnt, and fell off. I dropped like a stone from the depth of the sky. A sage named Chandrama happened to pass that way and see my plight. He sat by my side and taught me a good deal of wisdom through his lessons. Listening to his precepts, my pride was destroyed. He told me, ‘Oh King of Birds! Listen to my words. In the Thretha Yuga that is coming, God Narayana is incarnating in human Form. His Consort will be carried by Ravana to an unknown place. An army of Vanaras (Monkeys) will proceed to trace her whereabouts. Your life will be rendered holy and worthwhile on seeing those emissaries of God engaged in their holy mission. You can assure yourselves that it has been rendered so, because at that very moment, your wings will grow in strength. Your duty will be to communicate to them information regarding the place where Sita is kept.’ This day I came to this place by the sea in order to perform the last rites of my brother, Jatayu. Seeing you, I recollected the words of that sage uttered so long ago. Why? As soon as I recollected, see, his words have come true!” At this, the Vanaras exclaimed excitedly, “Sampathi! Keep aside the story of your life. Our term is fast ending. Tell us quickly the clues to know where Sita is. Tell us what you know, what happened to her?”

Sampathi lost no time in elaboration. He said, “Oh Vanaras! One day, when I was afflicted with uncontrollable hunger, I called my son, Suparna, to my side and told him, ‘Son, fly quickly. Get me some food. I am old. I am hungry. My wings too have fallen off.’ Seeing my plight, he flew into the forest, but did not return. My anxiety for him suppressed the pangs of hunger. At last, he appeared with some quantity of venison. My hunger made me forget the restraint natural to a wise being. I was enraged at the inordinate delay and I decided to pronounce a curse on my son. Fearing this, my son caught hold of my feet in supplication and said, ‘Father, I did not waste a single moment while away. Please listen to my prayer. Pardon me for the delay that was unavoidable.’ He placed the venison before me, and when my hunger was appeased by eating it, I asked him to relate to me the cause for the delay. He said, ‘When I was flying into the forest a person with twenty hands and ten heads was hurrying along. With him was a woman of indescribable beauty. She was weeping and wailing most pitiably. I knew it was a monster, and so I attacked him and saw the woman inside the chariot. She was crying out just one Name, Rama! Rama! Rama! No other word emerged from her mouth. My futile attempts to stop his progress and to save that woman caused this delay.’ When I heard these words, I felt terribly ashamed that I had lost my wings and that I had grown old. I was overcome with grief. I guessed he must be a Rakshasa. So, I asked my son, in which direction that ten-headed monster was proceeding. He answered that he had taken the southern

direction. Immediately, I exclaimed, ‘Alas! That monster is the Ravana, whom the sage had mentioned. That woman is the Divine Mother, Sita! There can be no doubt in this. That monster has stolen her like a dog, a fox, and he is running away with his prey.’ I gnashed my teeth in anger. What else could I do?” Thus, Sampathi explained what had happened and what he knew of the incident. “I have been awaiting the arrival of the army of Vanaras, as the Sage had informed me. I was hoping every day that they would be passing my way. Today, my prayer is answered. My life has been sanctified.”

Then, Sampathi announced, “Oh Vanaras! The City of Lanka is situated on the Triple-Peak-Hill by the shore of the sea. That City has many charming gardens and parks. There, Sita is in the Asokavana, moaning her fate. She is awaiting your arrival. So, proceed further south.”

Angada asked the bird, how it came to know that she was in the Asokavana, under a tree grieving over her misfortune. Sampathi answered that the vision of the eagle does cover an area of 400 yojanas and that, had he not been handicapped by age, he would certainly have helped them even more in their mission. The problem now was crossing the ocean! Sampathi said, “Oh Vanaras, you can achieve success in the task allotted to you by Rama if there is one among you who has the strength and the skill to leap a distance of 100 yojanas.” As he was saying thus, the wings of Sampathi grew and flapped a little. He could hop a slight

distance and within a short time, he could actually fly. The words of the sage had proved true.

Sampathi was wonder struck at the regaining of the wings. He said, “Oh Brave Vanara heroes! To fulfil the command of Rama, you have carried out the search with great efficiency and enthusiasm, without allowing even hunger and thirst to hinder your efforts. You have evinced steady faith and deep devotion. You have risked your lives often, while engaged in the search. It is Rama who has been conferring endurance and strength on you. He is having His task executed by you. Your duty now is to contemplate on Him and pray to Him with a full heart. When that is done, you can see Sita without fail and give satisfaction to Rama. You can, with His Grace, leap over the ocean with ease, see Sita and bring joy to Rama’s heart. The joy that we cause in the heart of God is the only worthwhile achievement. What can we say of lives that do not offer this gift to God? Only those who live on the lines laid down by God and who by their acts carry out His Wish are valid. The rest are barren and futile. They only consume precious food and move about, burdening the earth.” With these words, Sampathi took wing and flew away.

The Vanaras who watched him fly aloft were struck with pleasant surprise at the sudden recovery of his powers. They said among themselves that Ramanam can achieve the impossible; as the saying goes, the dumb can speak, the lame can climb hills. The wingless Sampathi could get back

its wings and fly into the sky only through the Grace won by recital of the Name. By means of Sampathi's words the Vanaras were enabled to see and know things correctly. Each of the monkey leaders started estimating its strength and leaping capacity. Meanwhile, Jambavantha addressed them thus. "Friends, old age has overwhelmed me. My skill and strength have declined. Somehow prodded by the joy of executing the commands of Rama and encouraged by His Blessings, I have been able to stay on till now and move about with you. I was in full possession of my strength and intelligence, and in the best adult stage of life, when the Lord incarnated as Vamana and demonstrated His Trivikrama Form."

Hearing this, the Vanaras gathered around the Crown Prince of their kingdom, Angada. "Oh Prince," they pleaded, "Search for some feasible means. Decide who amongst us has to attempt to leap over the ocean." Then, Angada called together a full session of all the Vanaras and announced that he would like to know the capacity of each for this enterprise. At this, Vikata rose and said, "I can leap over thirty yojanas at the most." Nila declared, "Prince, I can manage to leap at one jump forty yojanas, but I regret I will not be able to exceed the distance by even a finger-breadth." Durdhara rose next and said that he could easily jump a distance of fifty yojanas. Nala came forward and with great flourishing of hands, he said he could jump sixty yojanas. While such competitive boasting and parading of skills were going on, Angada declared, "Listen, I can leap

over this ocean once, but I have my doubts whether I would have enough strength left to leap back. One has not only to reach the other shore, one has to fight with the Rakshasas there if need arises. That would make me still weaker and I would have no strength left. I am afraid my resources won't last long enough for all these three operations."

When Angada spoke in these depressing terms, the leading Vanara elders rose as one and pleaded, "Prince, you are the heir-apparent to our kingdom. The discussion whether you are capable or not, to take up this mission is irrelevant. It is not right and proper that you should cross over to the land of Rakshasas. It is against the canons of royalty. This is a task which you have to assign to some servant of the kingdom. When you have millions of servants eager to do what you bid, it is not right that you should consider undertaking this task." Jambavantha suggested that someone else might be charged with the errand and Angada looked around, and looking at Hanuman, he said, "Oh Son of the Wind-God, you are the dedicated servant of Rama. Your devotion is indeed deep. You were blessed first among all of us with the Darsan of Rama. Through your intelligence, diplomacy and moral pressure, you established friendship between Rama and our ruler, Sugriva. And now, you are observing silence, when we are involved with difficulties in the execution of the mission of Rama. I find it difficult to understand the meaning of this silence." Angada extolled Hanuman still further and said, "There is no adventure that you cannot tackle successfully. You are

strong, you are highly intelligent. You are endowed with all the virtues. Evaluate your own skills, capacities and excellences, and rise.” The words of Angada filled Hanuman with his erstwhile strength. He rose with a sudden gesture and said, “Oh Vanaras! Wait here, all of you, awaiting my return. Wandering all these days through hills and dales, jungles and plains you have had no time to rest awhile. Eat the fruits and tubers available in this area and station yourselves here. I shall, this instant, leap over the ocean, enter Lanka, see Sita and come back. I have no other work than carrying out the command of Rama. How else can we make our lives worthwhile than by earning His Grace?”

With these words, he raised his folded palms in salutation before the vast gathering of monkeys. He took leave of Angada, the Crown Prince. The monkey hordes were raising in unison the exultant cry, “Jai Rama,” “Victory to Rama.” Hanuman pictured in his mind the glorious Form of Rama, and with one leap into the sky, he was off over the sea. Unable to withstand the tremendous airflow caused by his leap and flight, trees on the hills were uprooted and carried along. The impact of his leap was so great that the peak on which he stood sank into the nether regions.

Seeing him fly across, the sea thought within itself thus: “This Hanuman is a servant of Rama. He is proceeding on the mission of Rama. Ah, how lucky is he! He has the strength and intelligence necessary to win victory in that mission of Rama. He is indeed the foremost among the

devotees of Rama.” The sea was boisterous with the joy it felt at the sight of Hanuman going over and across. The Mainaka Peak, which was submerged in the sea, rose over the waters, for he wished to serve the person who was engaged in the service of the Lord. He said, “Oh Son of the Wind-God! It will be exhausting for you to cover the full distance in one leap, please take rest for a while on my head and confer on me the good fortune of having a share in the service you are devoted to.” Hanuman gave ear to the prayer of Mainaka, but did not halt. He touched the peak as a token of halting and sped on. He bowed to the hospitable peak in gratitude. “Mainaka! I am going on Rama’s errand. Till I fulfil it, I can have no thought of rest or even food and drink. It is not proper for me to stay awhile on the way,” he said. A little further on, a Serpent-demon called Surasa and an Ogress named Simhika obstructed his passage, but Hanuman overcame them all and reached the Lanka shore.

There, splendid in the sunlight, he found many gardens and parks as well as pleasure centres which made Hanuman forget where he was. He was amazed at the variety of multicoloured birds that fluttered to and fro in clusters within the parks. Hanuman climbed onto a charming mound that was nearby and thought within himself, “This success is not due to my skill or strength. It is entirely due to the Grace and Blessings of Rama only.” Seeing the uniquely grand houses, the long wide streets, the attractive gardens, etc., in that City, Hanuman was moved with wonder and

doubt—doubt whether it was a replica of Heaven itself. Wherever one cast his eye, one saw well-built Rakshasa soldiers parading the streets, Rakshasa women, famed for their skill and powers to assume whatever form they wanted were found by Hanuman indulging in licentious sports. Deva, Naga, Gandharva and human damsels enslaved by Ravana were pining and wailing in the palaces, awaiting the day of release. Hanuman concluded that it would not be wise to move about in his native form among the vast crowds that filled the streets. He assumed a subtle imperceptible form and entered the City.

There was at the very entrance gate of Lanka a demoness, named Lankini, placed there on purpose to prevent any foreigner, whatever his intentions may be, from entering the City. She saw the strange figure of Hanuman, venturing to enter and accosted him in a threatening manner. “Who goes there? Where do you come from? Who are you? We have never before seen such a creature in this region. You could not have come from outside the bounds of Lanka, for Lanka is surrounded by the sea. Ah! did you, by any means, come across the sea? How can you avoid me and enter the City? Halt! Stop where you are!” Hanuman paid no attention to her vapourings. He moved forward, dragging his tail behind him as if he had not heard her threats. Lankini became even more furious and ferocious. She roared in anger, “Oh, ill-fated fool! Do not my words fall on your ears?” Hanuman brushed aside her protests and questions. He walked towards the gate, with a smile on his face.

Lankini shouted, “Ugly beast! Whoever goes against my orders will be eaten up. Remember, I will chew your bones in seconds. Be warned.” She rushed forward to catch the tiny monkey that Hanuman had become, while he sought to enter Lanka City. When she came right in front of him, Hanuman tightened his little fist and hit her a mighty blow. She rolled unconscious on the ground. Blood flowed in streams from her mouth. She recovered after a while and rushed madly forward to catch hold of Hanuman. But when Hanuman dealt another blow, she could not bear the impact. She fell and could not rise again. But she managed to sit up after great struggle, and with folded palms, she supplicated, “Oh Person of wonderful Form! Long ago, when Brahma, the first of the Trinity, was turning away from Ravana, after granting him many boons, he faced him all of a sudden and said, ‘The day your Guardian of the Gate is fatally hurt by a blow from a monkey’s hand, know that your downfall begins. Your powers can no longer help you. Be warned by that incident that death is drawing near. That monkey will enter Lanka at the command of God for fulfilling His Mission. His arrival heralds the destruction of the Rakshasas. Be conscious of this.’ You are the messenger indicated. How fortunate that my body was sanctified by contact with your sacred hand! Ah! How soft and thrilling was the blow you gave me.” Saying thus, she fondled the spot where Hanuman had hit her.

Meanwhile, paying no heed to her words, unmoved by praise and unconcerned with blame, Hanuman entered

Lanka, repeating “Rama” “Rama” “Rama” with every breath. Still a thought tormented him. Who would give him the clue about where Sita was? How to identify Sita when one sees her? He adopted a subtle form to escape notice and moved from one treetop to another. He roamed in the bazaars and among groups of Rakshasas, unknown to anyone. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a building that seemed a temple of Hari (Vishnu, whose Avatar Rama was). It had a garden of Tulsi plants all around it. Over the entrance door, the name Hari was carved beautifully. The house was undoubtedly a Temple of God Vishnu. Hanuman was surprised. “How came the name of Hari over this door?” he wondered, “Surely, this is a holy spot,” he decided.

The curiosity of Hanuman was awakened. He jumped on to the roof of that place and peeped through the window to find out what exactly was happening. Just at that moment, a person was stretching his limbs prior to rising from bed, pronouncing the Name of Hari. When that fell on his ears, Hanuman was extremely delighted. He was also emboldened when he knew that even in Lanka there were people reciting the name of Hari. So he felt like searching for Sita with greater courage and less apprehension. “The man of this house appears to be devout and good. Perhaps he may be able to tell me the whereabouts of Sita. He might be persuaded to befriend me since we are both loyal to the selfsame Form of God.” With this idea, Hanuman changed himself into a priest of the Brahmin caste, and made his entrance into that house. Though for a moment he had some

doubt regarding the stranger, Vibhishana, the owner of the house, decided that, whoever he is, he surely must be honoured since he was a Brahmin. So he came forward and prostrated before Hanuman. “Master! which is your native place? Where are you coming from? How could you avoid being noticed and harassed by the Rakshasas in the streets?” Vibhishana asked. He described to his guest the horrors indulged in by the Rakshasas and extolled the audacity and fearlessness of Hanuman. Hanuman replied, “I am a servant of Hari. My name is Hanuman. I have come because Rama sent me,” and he spoke thereafter of the virtues and excellences of Rama in some detail. Hanuman noticed that while he was describing Rama, tears rolled down the cheeks of Vibhishana. “Oh, what a happy day! How great is my fortune! As soon as I rose from bed, I could hear today these glorious words which bring peace and joy,” thought Vibhishana to himself.

Hanuman interpreted these incidents as the Grace of Rama. He was wonder struck that in Lanka, the Land of Fear, there could be one such person soaked in Hari. He asked him, “Sir, how is it that you live without fear in this vile atmosphere?” Vibhishana replied, “It is due to the Grace of God. For however long He resolves that we should live, we have to live that long. There is no escape. He is the master of the objective world and so, His law cannot be overruled, or changed by anyone. Does not the tongue move about incessantly in the cavity of the mouth where teeth with sharp edges surround it? Who helps it to escape being

bitten? So too, I am living here. Enough about me. Tell me on what task you have been sent here.” Hanuman realised that he was a good man and that association with such men would without doubt yield good results. Before answering the queries of Vibhishana, he repeated the Name many times in joyful gratitude, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, and prayed for permission to disclose his mission to the pious pure-minded Vibhishana. He felt it would not be correct to hide things from him. As a preliminary, he asked, “Sir, what is your name? What are you doing in this Lanka?” Touched by the humility and good manners of Hanuman, Vibhishana replied, “Sir, I am an unfortunate person, the brother of Ravana. My name is Vibhishana. I am in a pathetic fix, for I am unable to recite the Name of Hari, to my heart’s content.” Hearing this Hanuman felt he had his answer. He performed one high skip in joy and said, “I am a Messenger of Rama. I have come in search of Sita.” In an instant, Vibhishana fell at the feet of Hanuman and asked, “Sir, where is my Rama now? I am yearning long to see Him, but I lack the virtues that alone can entitle me to that gift. My tribe is the demonic Rakshasa tribe. Can I have the chance to have His Darsan? I have not engaged myself in Sadhana. I have no freedom here to practise austerities and rites. I have earned no right to the good fortune. Will I be blessed by Rama?” Listening to his appeal, the heart of Hanuman melted in sympathy.

Hanuman consoled Vibhishana a great deal. He said, “Vibhishana, Rama heeds only the heart. He will not be

affected by family affiliations, religious affinities, or Sadhana attainments. He is pleased best by feelings and their purity. He will bless you for the loftiness of your ideals and the cleanliness of your daily life. He will grant you the Darsan you are yearning for; do not grieve. Why, you can take me as the best proof for what I am saying about His compassion and grace. I am a monkey. Waywardness is the hallmark of my tribe. The word ‘monkey’ has become a byword for a prankish, playful, petty mind. I am not versed at all in the Sastras. As for asceticism, I have no idea what it means. I have not repeated, according to prescribed rules, the Name of God, nor have I gone on pilgrimages seeking holy rivers! How then has Rama blessed me? Because He heeds only the love which animates and the feelings that activate people. In your case also, He will pay attention only to the Purity of Feelings. Be confident. Do not doubt.”

Relieved by these words, Vibhishana informed Hanuman details of how Sita was brought to Lanka. Hanuman refused to partake of any food or drink, since he had resolved to refrain from both until he could see Sita and communicate to her the message of Rama. He was eager to renew the search without delay. But Vibhishana advised him to proceed cautiously and slowly, and inform himself of the strength and weakness of Ravana’s Empire before he left. He himself acquainted him with these points in some detail. Thereafter, he permitted Hanuman to leave on his errand. Hanuman was so delighted to learn that Sita *was* in Lanka that he actually forgot to ask where she actually was!

He entered many mansions to find out whether she was anywhere therein. He saw bebies of women, fallen on their beds, intoxicated by drink and dance and floored by the banalities of luxury. Keeping in mind the characteristics and excellences of Sita that Rama had described to him, he observed closely every woman in those houses; but he could not find Sita. In near despair, he jumped on a peak of a hill and thought over the situation, deeply, for long. "How can I go back to Rama, without completing my mission, meeting Sita and consoling her? Better far to drown in the sea yonder. Alas, mine is a wasted life. Fie upon it," he said to himself.

That very instant, he saw a beautiful garden, trim and green, shining in the distance. Coming down the peak, he realised that since the garden was in a valley surrounded by tall mansions, he could not discover the place from the ground. Not knowing what to do next, he hied fast to the house of Vibhishana and discovered him immersed in reciting the Name of Rama. Seeing Hanuman, Vibhishana rose and approached him in a friendly and pleasing manner. He asked, "Hanuman! Did you see Sita?" Hanuman expressed his disappointment, but Vibhishana gave him the information. "Hanuman, there is in this City a garden named Asokavana. There, in the midst of terrible and mighty Rakshasas, Sita is kept. My wife and daughter are with her, doing service." He also disclosed to him the route by which he could reach the garden and the spot. Hanuman could not stay a moment longer. He reached the garden in a trice. Those who saw him began shouting and accosting, for his

figure was strange and peculiar to them. Noticing this, Hanuman felt that his figure was making him too prominent and public, and so he assumed a diminutive size. Jumping unnoticed from branch to branch, hiding himself behind clusters of leaves, he reached the Asokavana.

There he saw a woman, sitting under a tree, weak and worn, through want of food and sleep. The fierce Rakshasas sitting guard around her were threatening her, to change her will and to break her determination. Meanwhile, a grand cavalcade neared the place heralded by the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets. Behind them Hanuman could see a royal personage, bejewelled and berobed in magnificent style. Hundreds of maidens followed him, carrying plates full of jewels, sweet and fragrant presents and soft silks. Ensconcing himself within the green shade of leaves, Hanuman watched the scene from the top of a nearby tree. It was Ravana, evidently, for he pleaded before Sita and prayed to her that she might offer her love to him. He tried to extract a promise by threats of cruel punishment. Hanuman heard him exhort those around him to inflict pain and injury on her. That frail feeble woman did not raise her eyes towards Ravana even once during all the tirade. She only said, "Fool! Vile vicious fellow! Rama alone has rights over me. No one other than Rama has any. I shall reduce this body to ashes in the flames of sorrow at separation from Him. I shall never stray from my resolve. Believe in this and beware!" Hanuman heard these emphatic words and realised that the woman was Sita and no other. His

mind gained peace and calmness when he knew this. Very soon, Ravana stung by disappointment and angry at the discomfiture, became even more violent in speech. He gave her a month's respite, to think over and accede. The cavalcade and the maids with the plates also accompanied him out of the garden. When they had all left, Sita raised her head towards the heavens and sighed: "Rama! Has not compassion yet entered your heart? Why have you condemned me to this torture? When am I to be freed from this?" and she burst into weeping.

A Rakshasa named Thrijata was one of the warders of Sita. She was deeply attached to the Lotus Feet of Rama. She was a pious devotee, who had both worldly wisdom and spiritual experience. She spoke to her companions keeping watch over Sita, "Comrades, last night, I had a dream, which I must relate to you. But first, let us serve and revere Sita and win her grace. For listen to the story that revealed itself to me in my dream. A monkey entered Lanka, slaughtered the Rakshasas and set the city on fire! Ravana had no clothes on. He was riding, of all animals, a donkey and moving fast in the southerly direction. And his head, I noticed, was shaven close. Besides, I found that his arms were severed from the body. Vibhishana was crowned the emperor of Lanka. Throughout the length and breadth of the land, the name of Rama was resounding. Then Rama sent for Sita. Sisters of the Rakshasa clan! Take note. I never get dreams. I haven't seen any so far. So if I dream at all, know it will certainly come true. It will happen just as in

the dream. Moreover, the realisation, in actual fact, of this dream will not take long. Things must happen just as I dreamt, within four or five days." The Rakshasa women were amazed at the revelation. They forthwith prostrated at the feet of Sita and silently resumed their routine duties.

Seeing the behaviour of Thrijata, Sita addressed her, "Thrijata! Rama Himself must have sent you here to be one of this group that is around me. Truly, it is because there are a few women like you in this Lanka that unfortunate persons like me are able to sustain our chastity and virtue. Or else, what will be the fate of women like me? You heard didn't you, the expressions Ravana used just now? He has given a month's respite. If Rama does not come within that month, I, or rather, this body, will be cut to pieces and it will be plucked and eaten by vultures and crows. Being the consort of Rama, I can never tolerate that horrid fate for this body. Tell me some plan through which I can get rid of this body sooner." Hanuman heard these words from the branch of the tree. He was overcome by sorrow, when Sita spoke in that strain of despair. At this, Thrijata fell at Sita's Feet and assured her, "Mother! Do not lose hope, Rama is no ordinary being. His might and majesty are unequalled. It will ever be so. You are certain to be saved by him. He will arrive very soon and hold your hand in his. Do not lose courage." She consoled her by loving words and left for home.

Availing himself of this chance, Hanuman jumped from his perch to a lower branch. He dropped right before

Sita the ring that was given by Rama. It fell shining like a flame of purest ray. And he kept on repeating “Rama! Rama” in ecstatic bliss. When her eyes fell upon the ring, Sita was astonished at what she saw. “Is this true, or am I dreaming? Can it be true? How can this golden ring worn on the golden finger of my Lord be found in Lanka? Is this Rakshasa magic or mere hallucination? No, I should not hesitate any longer, after recognising it as my Lord’s, to take it in my hand. It will be a sin if I refrain from handling it.” So saying, she took it and placed it on her eyes in reverence. Tears of gratitude flowed from her eyes. “Rama! Are you granting me your Darsan, the joy of your presence through this ring?” she said and raised her head.

There she saw a small monkey sitting on a branch of the tree and reciting in deep devotion, “Rama, Rama,” continuously. In a flash, she remembered the incidents in Thrijata’s dream as related by her. “Ah! Good days seem to be fast approaching. For ten long months, I have not heard the name of Rama pronounced in this Lanka. This day, I am able to see a living being reciting the holy name. I also received the dearly loved ring of my Lord,” she exulted. She could not keep her joyful excitement down. Sita, who had not talked to any stranger for long, looked at the monkey-form and addressed it thus: “Oh monkey! Who are you? Wherefrom is this ring?” She could not put full trust in the monkey, for, she had been deceived for months by tricks of impersonation. She interrogated the monkey in various ways in order to verify his credentials. Off and on,

she would ask the monkey about the welfare of Rama and at the very thought of His being alone, in the forest, tears would flow profusely from her eyes. Sita swung alternately between joy and grief. Hanuman watched her plight. He could not keep away from her the bond of love and loyalty that was holding him onto Rama. He related the dynastic story of Rama and His exploits, as well as his own story until he met Rama. When she listened to that story, she felt as happy as when Rama stood before her. She could picture Rama standing beside her at Ayodhya and in the forest retreats. She felt so thrilled that she forgot herself and her condition.

Soon, she recovered consciousness and knew where she was. She said, “Oh Monkey! I am glad you told me all this, but let me ask one question: “How were you able to enter this heavily guarded city, in spite of your being only a weak little monkey? How could you escape being caught by these Rakshasas and succeed in spotting out this place and coming to me?” Hanuman replied, “Mother! What skill and strength have I? I am the servant of Rama, His slave. He makes me do everything He wants or likes. Without Him, I cannot survive even a moment. I am a doll in His hands. I play as He pulls the strings. I have no will of my own.” Then, Hanuman elaborated on the glory of Rama and manifested his devotion and dedication in the most impressive manner. It was most thrilling to hear those words of his.

Rama had told Hanuman, for communication to Sita, some incidents which no one else knew. He had said, “It

may so happen that Sita may not believe your words. She may doubt your genuineness. Then, you can remind her of these events, which are known only to her and me.” So, Hanuman began relating those special incidents. “Mother Sita, He has asked me to tell you of the attempts made by the wicked Crow to cause injury to you and of His attempt to save you and to kill that demon.” At this, Sita wept aloud, saying, “Hanuman! Why is Rama who was so kind to me then delaying to release me from this torture? Rama is the ocean of mercy. Yes, but why has He become so hardhearted at my fate? No! No! I am wrong. Rama is the embodiment of compassion. He has to play a role that involves all this apparent hardheartedness, that is all. Hanuman! You are no ordinary individual. For, Rama will not associate Himself so closely with ordinary individuals. Nor will He send His ring with inferior persons. How fortunate you are to be His messenger! Show me once your full stature and form.”

Then, Hanuman landed on the ground and stood before Sita with palms folded in adoration. When Sita saw him growing into a huge and terror-inducing size, she half suspected it to be some demonic trick. She closed her eyes and turned aside! Realising her fear and the suspicion that was at the basis of that fear, Hanuman said, “Mother! I am neither Ravana nor any one of his devilish Rakshasas. I am the faithful servant of Rama with the pure sacred body of unequalled splendour. He is the very breath of my existence, believe me. I am speaking the Truth. Guessing that you may not have faith in my being His authentic messenger,

He took off His finger this golden ring and placed it in my hands to be given to you. With me, there came Jambavan, Nila, Angada and thousands of others of extraordinary heroism. But I alone was able to cross the ocean through the Grace of Rama. The others are all on the other shore. We were able to hear from Jatayu and Sabari the story of your having been brought here by this villainous Rakshasa King. When we came to know, three days ago, from Sampathi news confirming your being here, we felt as happy as when seeing you before our eyes. Rama and Lakshmana are awaiting my return with the good tidings. If you permit me, I shall get back immediately and communicate to them news about your welfare.”

Sita pleaded, “Hanuman! I do not know whether you will be back at this place or when. Please stay for a day more and delight me, by telling me about Rama and Lakshmana.” But since the demonesses gathered around in groups to carry out their separate assignments, Hanuman resumed his miniature size and hopped onto a branch of the tree.

Sita sat under the tree, ruminating on all that Hanuman had related to her. She derived delight while doing so, and she cast her eyes showering benediction on Hanuman sitting on the branch above her head. That day, she had no thirst or hunger. She did not touch the fruits and drinks that the women-guards brought for her. Her pathetic condition hurt the kind heart of Hanuman. She appeared to him as the

very picture of misery. Hanuman heard the harsh and sharp-pointed words used by the women-guards, and he gnashed his teeth in anger, for he could not deal with them as he wished to. Sita alone could give him orders what to do.

After some time, Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana and her daughter, Thrijata, came to the tree and fell at the feet of Sita sitting disconsolate thereunder. They enquired about her health. Since they were partial towards her, Sita spoke to them about how the dream of Thrijata had come true, and how a monkey had actually entered Lanka in accordance with it. Sarama and Thrijata showed extreme enthusiasm and excitement when they heard the account of what had happened. They plied Sita with questions, in their eagerness to know all details. Sita showed them the monkey perched on the branch and the Ring it had brought. They both pressed the ring on their eyes in reverent adoration. Hanuman was watching for an opportunity to see Sita while alone and very soon he got it. Hanuman jumped to the ground and whispered to Sita, “Mother! Do not be anxious and grief-stricken. Sit on my back, and I will transport you in a trice to where Rama and Lakshmana are awaiting news about you.” Hanuman pleaded in many ways for acceptance of this plan. Sita replied, “Hanuman, I am indeed very glad to hear you speak thus. I am sunk and struggling in the sorrow of separation. Your sweet words give me solace like a boat on a stormy sea. But do you not know that I will never contact a person other than my Lord? How then can I sit on your back, consider that.” These words of Sita were a sharp repartee

which hit Hanuman in the heart and exposed his pettiness and pride for having suggested a dishonourable step.

But Hanuman recovered soon and said, “Mother! Am I not your son? What is wrong when the son carries the mother on his back? What evil consequence can follow from that?” He supported his idea with various pleadings and points. In reply, Sita declared, “Hanuman! Of course, for me and for you, the feelings of mother and son are real; but, imagine what the world will think of it. We have to consider that aspect also, haven’t we? We must so live that we are ideals for the lives of others. We should not draw upon ourselves by our acts the ridicule, contempt or condemnation of others. No one should point the finger of scorn at us. Above all, we must derive self-satisfaction, as a result of our acts. When I know I cannot derive that satisfaction I will never attempt such acts. Even if my life departs, I don’t need or crave for another’s assistance.

“Moreover, my Rama has to destroy this vile demon who tortures me. He is the person who has to discharge the responsibility, no one else can. He must come himself into this Lanka, kill this Ravana, and lead this Sita back holding her in His hand—that is the sign of the true hero that He is. That is the sign of genuine valour. Look at this Ravana. He came like a thief in a false form and stole me from my Lord. But Rama is the embodiment of Righteousness. He observes the norms of right behaviour. He honours the spoken word. When news spreads that Rama sent a monkey and brought

away Sita without the knowledge of Ravana, it would be dishonouring him. Getting out of here in the way you suggest will surely be treason. We should not resort to mean stratagems. We should guard the fair name of Rama as our very breath. His fame is the deity we adore in our hearts. We have to preserve it unimpaired by thought, word and deed. Your proposal has not given me satisfaction for this reason.” Hanuman admired her untarnishable virtue and her steadfast adoration of her Lord, and the loftiness of the ideals she maintained. He extolled her in his mind and recollected her words, in order to draw inspiration therefrom. He said, “Mother, pardon me. Since I saw with my own eyes the tortures you are undergoing and the pangs of separation which Rama is suffering, I entertained this idea to take you as quickly as possible to the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Pardon me if it was wrong,” and fell at her feet, again and again, in great remorse.

At this, Sita questioned him many times on the condition of Rama and Lakshmana and how they were faring in the forest. “Why worry about men? They can bear any burden or travail. They can bear separation from women with fortitude. Women suffer most, for it is terror for the wives to live apart from their husbands.” Hanuman told her, “Mother, Rama and Lakshmana are keeping well, of course; but, do not compare them with ordinary males. It is not fair. Alas, every moment, Rama is spending in thoughts of you and of separation from you; and so, He is not paying heed to either thirst or hunger. He does not eat or drink,

unless pressed lovingly by Lakshmana to partake of a few fruits or a little drink. I do not remember a single occasion on which Rama drank a gulp of water on His own initiative. Do not be under the impression that they have forgotten you or are neglecting you.

“Lakshmana is spending his days watching over Rama as the lids guard the eye. He is the breath of the Breath of Rama. He is overcome by the agony of separation from you and of witnessing the anguish of his brother. He has become a rock, unaffected by any feeling other than concern for Rama. He is the source of courage and sustenance that is unfailing and full. He has not slept these ten months, nor has he taken food.”

When Hanuman was describing the pathetic condition of the brothers, Sita acted as if she was amazed at the love and affection that Rama had towards her. Again and again, she said, “Yes, you too describe only the misery of the men. What do you know, how can you gauge the sorrows of women?” She pretended not to believe all that Hanuman related to her. She watched Hanuman and appreciated his wisdom and powers. She recalled the story of how Rama and Hanuman had met and came to be bound in love and loyalty, and derived great joy and content therefrom. At last, she got firm faith in Hanuman and his mission.

Again and again, Hanuman pleaded, “Mother! Why this feeling of separateness? Why spend days and months in agony and pain? Please sit on my back and I shall take

you in a trice into the Presence of Rama.” Sita noted the anxiety of Hanuman to win his point in spite of her arguments, moral and spiritual, legal and worldly. She decided therefore to stop further conversation on this score by a sharp repartee. She said, “Hanuman! Are you or are you not one who obeys strictly the commands of Rama?” Hanuman replied, “Yes, I would rather give up my life than go against the commands of Rama or disobey His orders.” He banged his chest with his fist in order to lend emphasis to his declaration. “Well, consider this. Did Rama command you to seek me out and bring him information about where I am after seeing me, or, did He ask you to bring me with you?” Hanuman was rendered dumb by this question. He could not continue his pleadings. He said, “Mother! I did not think so deep into the consequences of my proposal. I ask pardon again.” From that moment, he never broached that matter.