

7. All The Characters In The Story Of Ramayana Are Ideal Examples

There is no birth and there is no death for the Atma. There is no beginning, there is no end, there is no interval separating the beginning and the end for this eternal spirit. Atma does not die, Atma is not born nor is it killed by any one else. It will remain as a witnessing consciousness, witnessing everything that goes on in this world.

Divya Atma Swarupas:

Man must learn to face the ups and downs of life with equanimity and equal-mindedness. Then, alone, life will have a meaning for him. Forbearance and peace will become available only in the ordinary run of life. In order to promote these qualities of forbearance and peace in life, the *adhyatmic* way, or the spiritual path, is very necessary. Because we have forgotten the ancient traditions and the ancient scriptures outlining the spiritual path, life has become devoid of character.

Truly, by claiming that we know everything, we are bringing some blemish on our own life. We cannot find people who know everything about life. Man, who now claims to know how to fly in the sky, has no happiness in him. What is the reason for this?

This is because he does not know himself and who he really is. One may jump at the stars and fly in the sky, but if that individual does not understand his own nature, he will never be happy. If we really want to be blissful and happy, we

must know the true nature and meaning of bondage. It is only when we know what bondages are binding us, can we make an attempt to find the way to break those bondages. The biggest bondage for man is ignorance because of which he does not know his own nature. So long as such ignorance remains with him, he cannot get rid of sorrow. So long as he is steeped in sorrow, he cannot have happiness in life. It is important to get rid of the sorrow and be happy. This process is described as *sadhana*.

Bharatha, in the *Ramayana*, for the sake of bliss, was searching for the path of truth. He was in no way inferior to Rama. For the protection of truth, or for the following of the right kind of *dharma*, or for making sacrifices when they were necessary, Bharatha was equal to Rama.

In the ordinary sequel, we regard Bharatha as the third stage. We first take the part of Rama, then Lakshmana, then Bharatha and then Satrughna. But if we look with care at the type of faith each one had, we find that Bharatha comes second in the series. In all these four brothers, we do find some apparent changes at the time of birth. It is not possible for us to determine and say, this one is greater and that one is smaller. It is just for man's satisfaction that these minor differences are created. We are not able to recognise the divinity that is present in three brothers: Bharatha, Lakshmana and Satrughna.

When Bharatha was at his grandfather's place, *Guru* Vasishta sent him a letter asking him to come back to Ayodhya. As soon as Bharatha saw the letter, he felt very happy that he was being asked to return for Rama's coronation. But quickly he began wondering, because if Rama's coronation were to take place, his grandfather would also have been invited. He began worrying as to why he alone was called

back. In this agitated frame of mind, he and Satrughna started for Ayodhya. They reached the entrance of Ayodhya. Bharatha was a very smart person, and he had a keen sense of observation. He noticed that at the main gate there were no fresh welcoming arches. The mango leaves were all dried up, and this was symbolic of a dreary atmosphere instead of proclaiming prosperity. He started seeing bad omens and began wondering as to what the matter was. He found all the streets littered with dirty pieces of matter and all the houses appeared very unclean. This unusual situation made him think that something was drastically wrong, and that some tragedy had come over Ayodhya.

His chariot was taken straight to the mansion of Kaikeyi. As soon as he saw Kaikeyi, he could not understand the meaning of the perplexed look which Kaikeyi had. After a few minutes, he realised that the death of his father had taken place, and Rama had been banished to the forest. Without being able to bear the sorrow as a result of the two events, he ran to his *Guru* Vasishtha. Vasishtha described to him, in detail, all that had happened.

As soon as he got the details of what had happened, Bharatha became very upset. His eyes became very red. He became so excited that he used very harsh words to his mother. He could not stay there even for a moment. He went straight to Kausalya. Unable to bear the death of her husband and the separation from her own son, Kausalya was in deep sorrow. Bharatha ran to Kausalya, fell at her feet and asked her to pardon him, and said that he was innocent, and that he was not responsible for what had happened. In many ways, he asked for her pardon. Both Kausalya and Vasishtha told Bharatha that he should first perform the last rites of his dead father.

It was already fourteen days after the death of his father. The body was carefully preserved. The kind of preservatives and methods by which the body was preserved in those days were not such as we have in these days. Bharatha came to the conclusion that he does not deserve to perform the last rites of his father. The first son, Rama, alone should perform the last rites. Bharatha said that in Ayodhya where Rama does not live, he cannot stay for a single moment.

Here, we should see that Bharatha even forgot the grief caused by the death of his father. Grief caused by the separation from Rama was much more to him than the death of his father. But somehow, he adjusted himself to the orders of Kausalya and Vasishta and performed the last rites of his father. The very next day, all the necessary ingredients were collected in order to perform the coronation of Bharatha. But Bharatha would not agree for his coronation. Bharatha said that whatever arrangements had been made for the coronation should be taken along with him to the forest. He proclaimed that, in the Ikshvaku Dynasty, it is only the eldest son that had the right to the throne. He being younger had no right at all.

He recognised that this was the *dharmic* way of doing things, and he requested Vasishta and others to let him go to the forest. He thought that Rama's coronation could be performed even in the forest. He always looked to the ideas of people and wanted to follow the ideas of people. So he took some of the people of Ayodhya with him. In this manner, along with the people of Ayodhya, he undertook the journey to the forest.

From some distance, Bharatha saw that Rama was having his hermitage on the Chitrakoota Mountain. His heart melted at the sight. The sorrow that came from his heart was

something which he could not bear. He noticed that Ramachandra was having unkempt hair. He was shocked to see that Rama-chandra, who was used to sleeping on a bed of silk, was lying on a bed of leaves, bark and the ground. Rama, looked at the sorrow of Bharatha and in many ways tried to console him. But all the attempts made by Rama to console Bharatha did not give him any satisfaction. Bharatha fell at the feet of Rama and said that he would not leave his feet until Rama agreed to return to Ayodhya and accept to become the king.

Even in that sorrowful situation, Rama was asking questions in a very peaceful manner. Is every-one well at home? Is the kingdom going on well? Are the people of the kingdom well? He was asking questions with an unparalleled peace of mind.

During that conversation, Bharatha told Rama that their father was dead. Although Rama was the in-carnation of Narayana, because he was in human form and in order to proclaim how one in human form should conduct himself in that situation, Rama also appeared as if he suffered very much at the news of the death of their father. Rama and Bharatha consoled each other.

A potter cannot make a pot with hard clay. The clay must be wet and used as soft paste. In the same manner, after creating a body, God has to put life into it. For putting life into the body, the parents are made responsible. For the birth of a human being, the father and mother are responsible. God functions only as a witness to that. To such parents, to such father and mother, one should repay one's debt of gratitude. This is the reason why we are taught that mother should be regarded as God, father should be regarded as God, teacher

should be regarded as God and the guest should be regarded as God.

Immediately thereafter, Rama and Bharatha went to the river and performed the traditional rites which they do at the death of the father. They returned home and were talking about various things. The very next day Bharatha arranged a big congregation. All the people were requested to pray. The prayers were that either Rama should return to Ayodhya and take charge of the kingdom or, since all the sons were on the same footing, Bharatha should also be permitted to stay in the forest along with Rama. Preparing himself for such a task, Bharatha was determined that by some means or the other, he should take Rama back to Ayodhya. He was repeatedly saying that for the sins committed by his mother, he was in no way responsible.

Rama told Bharatha that even his mother Kaikeyi was not responsible for this situation. In fact, they proposed to install Rama on the throne the very next day. Overnight, due to pressure, this decision had been changed. The change in such a decision overnight must be because of divine will. It was not a human decision. In this manner Rama was giving some explanation or other to Bharatha. In spite of all explanations, Bharatha did not give up his determination. When Bharatha left Ayodhya and went to the river Ganges, even Guha had some doubt about the intentions of Bharatha. Guha asked Bharatha if he was taking all the attendants with him to Rama with a view to cause some harm to Rama. Bharatha was not in a position to give any reply. Bharatha accused his mother and said because he was born to this woman Kaikeyi, he was submitting himself to all this humiliation.

From there, he went to the *ashram* of Bharadwaja. He also exhibited some suspicions about Bharatha's motives. Here it became very clear how much Bharatha was devoted to Rama. Bharadwaja wanted to test Bharatha. He had a big throne chair prepared and was arranging for a feast. The feast that was arranged by Bharadwaja was not creating any interest in Bharatha. When his brother Ramachandra was living on roots in the forest, he would not participate in this feast. We should recognise the close relationship and affection that existed between the brothers of those days.

Recognising the connection between Rama and Lakshmana, Bharatha felt very sorry that Lakshmana alone deserved to be close to Rama and that he did not get that opportunity of being close to Rama. In this way Bharatha's ideal was to serve Rama all the time and thereby derive the grace of the Lord. We can describe in this manner Bharatha's devotion and faith, and we can come to the conclusion that Bharatha's devotion and faith were even more than those of Lakshmana. Brothers, between whom such devotion, faith and affection exist, are very rare in this world. These brothers were serving Rama all the time, and in that service they were setting an example to mankind. In each family, how should brothers conduct themselves? How should they treat each other? Answers to these questions were being furnished by these brothers.

Students:

It is necessary for you to recognise the kind of close affection that existed between the brothers in the family of Rama. You should draw a lesson from this and put this ideal into practice. We should understand the kind of ideals that should bind a family together. We should make an attempt, to some extent, to remove our selfishness and practice self-

sacrifice. The main teaching of *Ramayana* is to ask you to throw away your selfishness and promote selfless sacrifice and good qualities in you. Every individual character in *Ramayana* has been preaching this kind of ideal life. Such an ideal example of life is very necessary today. In such an ideal example of life, we should give some respect to disciplinary measures. Without discipline, whatever ideal examples you may give to your life, there is no value for them.

Bharatha was not in a position to overrule Rama's orders. Bharatha did not like to become the king and rule the kingdom. In this conflict, Rama tried to console Bharatha. Vasishta then gave a small advice which would give satisfaction to Bharatha. Vasishta said, "You can take the sandals of Rama, and regarding those sandals as symbolic of Rama, perform the coronation for the sandals and carry on the rule of Ayodhya." He could not throw away the orders and suggestions given by the *Guru*. He could not also contradict the orders of Rama. So, with a very heavy heart, he agreed to receive the sandals.

The people of those days were also such that they will obey good orders immediately. So, they recognised the sacred heart of Bharatha and they accepted these suggestions. He took Rama's sandals, put them on the throne, and with a heavy heart, went to the village Nandigram. In that village, he announced that he would stay without food and without rest till Rama returns to Ayodhya. He decided and began to live a life of austerity in the village Nandigram in the same manner in which Rama was living in the forest. In this context, the *rishis* and elders have been telling us that the attributes and aspects of Rama and Bharatha became one and the same. This exemplary conduct of Bharatha, by which he had accepted fully the orders

of his brother, and was carrying on the rule of the country, demonstrates his greatness.

If we carefully look at the main characters in the story of *Ramayana*, we will come to the conclusion that God has put all this together as a drama on the stage of the world. People can learn from the numerous examples which God has given through *Ramayana*. God will also bend Himself to help His devotees. For the sake of happiness to devotees, God will be prepared to undertake any kind of trouble. Even if we blame God, He does not feel so unhappy as when His devotees are blamed. God is above *gunas*. He is not affected by *gunas*. So He does not attach importance to blemish. God is omnipresent. Because He assumes some form, we believe that God is of a particular form. That God is omnipresent is the Truth. How can we demonstrate this Truth? Here is a small example for this.

We know that earth, water, fire, air and space are the five elements. For these elements, there are attributes. Amongst these five, the most important one is earth. Earth has got all the five attributes, the qualities of sound, form, touch, taste and smell. Because of these five qualities, the earth becomes immobile, becomes stationary and heavy.

When we go to the second element, water, it gets some mobility. In water, one of the qualities, namely smell, has disappeared. Only four attributes remain. Because one of the attributes has disappeared, it has acquired some mobility.

When we go to the third element of fire, it has got the attributes of sound, touch and form only. Since two qualities have disappeared, fire has become even lighter and fire is able to move faster than earth or water.

When we go to air, it has lost three of the attributes. It has got only two of them, namely sound and touch. It has no form. Since three of the attributes have disappeared, air has become much lighter and moves faster and freely occupies the whole space.

The last one, the fifth element is space, or *akasa*. This space has lost all the qualities. Neither form nor touch, nor smell nor taste are present in *akasa*. So it has become omnipresent. It is so light that it is present everywhere.

God has no attributes or *gunas* at all, and therefore, is able to be present everywhere. If space or *akasa*, which has only one quality, namely sound, is present everywhere, then God, who has no quality or no attribute at all, can be present everywhere. One may at this point get a doubt that if God is omni-present and is above *gunas*, how is it that the *gunas* are not in Him but He is in the *gunas*?

The moment we say that He is everywhere, it follows that He is present in the *gunas* also. He is in the *gunas*, but the *gunas* are not in Him. How is this possible? For example the mud is present in the pot, but the pot is not present in the mud. The pot is created. The pot has a form. The form has been given in an artificial way. However, if God is in His formless aspect, it is not possible for people to easily recognise the formless aspect. So, He takes a human form, and comes to the world. In this way, He wants to demonstrate to the people the ideal path they should follow.

Students:

I am hoping that you will take at least one or two of the great ideals that are contained in the story of *Ramayana* and imbibe them and put them into practice in your daily life.