

Shata Shloki Ramayana



**Translations of
Pujya Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji's
Shata Shloki Ramayana on ETV in Telugu
Feb 2013 – May 2013**

**Translations of Pujya Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji's explanation
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Episode 1

Om Seeta raamaa bhyaam Namaha

Within the very first section of the Baala Kaanda (the section that deals with the childhood of this Lord) of Srimad Ramayana, Maharishi Narada has preached the entire Ramayana in brief to Maharishi Valmiki in 100 shlokas (hymns). These 100 shlokas are popularly known as Baala Ramayana, Samskipta Ramayana and as Shata shloki Ramayana.

From today let us learn about this Bala Ramayana. Merely listening to this condensed version of the Ramayana bestows the merit (fruit) of listening to the entire Srimad Ramayana.

Let us begin with a prayer to Lord Ganapati

**Shuklaam bharadaram vishnum sasivarnam chaturbhujam
Prasanna vadanam dhyaayet sarva vighnopasaantaye**

Meaning- With an intention that He should remove all the obstacles in my path, I contemplate on Maha Ganapati who wears white clothes, who is all-pervading, who is in the colour of the moon (white), who has four hands and whose face is peaceful (shanti) and pleasant.

**Shaarada shaaradaambhoja vadanaa vadanaambhujе
Sarvadaa sarvadaasmaakam sannidhi sannidhim kriyaat**

Meaning- Mother Goddess Sharada's face glows like the fresh bright white lotus. May such a Divine Mother, who is dear to everyone, remain eternally in our face.

As the Divine Mother is worshipped primarily during the Sharad rutu (autumn), She takes on the name Shaarada. During this season, the sky is crystal clear. Due to this crystal clear sky, the moon on the full-moon night (Purnima) appears incredibly bright and luminous. Mother Goddess Sharada eternally radiates like the full moon of this month (Sharad Purnima). Her face glows/illuminates eternally like the white lotus.

Only those who have been ardently and reverentially worshipping Her for past many births possess the abilities to compile/author sacred treatise/texts (grantha rachana), give detailed knowledgeable commentary about these sacred texts (vyakhaana), compose poetry (kavita shakti) and the like. Occasionally in life we come across people who are proficient in these arts. We have developed friendship with such persons too. We are astounded at their poetic skills and derive great delight in listening to them.

Such is the value behind right/proper education. Purely for this reason, the elders in our homes constantly prod us to study. When Mother Goddess Saraswati (Goddess of Learning) showers Her blessings upon us, we can walk on the right path of true knowledge for the rest of our life.

An uneducated, ignorant person could earn name, fame and money and emerge victorious in this worldly life. He could possess many virtuous traits too. Yet, he will be helpless in progressing on the path of reaching Paramatma through the path of jnana (knowledge). He will fail in this path.

Assume that a sumptuous feast has been organized which has in it every form of delicacy. The host is of a calm and pure mind and the guest has the right appetite for providing justice to this sumptuous meal. The ambience is pleasant. However water for drinking has not been organized. Under such circumstances, can the meal be enjoyed? Without water, the guest will not be able to chew and swallow even one mouthful properly. For this reason, provision of water for drinking purposes is ensured at the beginning of the meal.

Likewise, a person could be a multi- billionaire with great name, fame, power and reputation. He could own plenty of assets. Yet, if the small spark of knowledge is lacking within the person, of what use is all that money and fame?

Sharada (Saraswati, Goddess of Learning) is worshipped for this reason. To us all, She is a great treasure house. Through this prayer, we seek that this Divine Mother shines eternally in our face. We pray that She should eternally reside on our tongue.

Om Seeta Raamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 2

It is customary to worship Lord Ganapati, at the beginning of any new task. This holds good for each and every task. Thereafter Goddess Saraswati, who is the Goddess of entire knowledge (Jnana Devata) is worshipped. Thirdly, our Guru, who teaches us this knowledge and who puts us on this right path is worshipped.

Who is a Guru? The one who takes the being from darkness to light is the Guru. Ignorance is the complete darkness within which the being is wholly enveloped. The Guru shows the light and takes the being on that path.

At first, prayer is offered to Ganapati, so that the obstacles on the path would be cleared, thereafter blessings are sought from the Divine Mother so that the offering would be error-free, now Guru is being prayed to so that He will lead us from darkness to light.

This ocean of samsara, together with all its bondages, is the utter darkness within which we are submerged. It is absolute ignorance. This darkness is extremely chill which means that it is dreadfully fearful. The one who shows the path out from this terribly fearful darkness is Guru.

Absolute faith in Guru is a must. Merely having darshan is inadequate. Guru should be worshipped too. The more He is worshipped, the better. We are now worshipping such a Guru.

Akanda mandalaa kaaram vyaptam yena caraacaram Tatpadam darsitam yena tasmai sri Gurave namaha.

Meaning- I offer my obeisance to that Guru, whose tattva (essence/nature of Guru) has, akin to the sky, enveloped the entire creation and which has enabled me to visualize the Brahma who is known as 'tat'.

It is said that there can be no knowledge (Vidya) without a Guru. Be it any form of knowledge, a teacher (Guru) who shows the path/direction is essential. No doubt one can learn through the aid of books. But learning directly from a Guru is completely different.

One can treat the book as a Guru and learn from it. But even then, like Ekalavya, one should strive to get a direct visible Guru (pratyaksha Guru).

Even Ekalavya, who indulged in self-study, earnestly aspired and longed for a visible Guru (pratyaksha guru). Circumstances prevented Guru Drona from imparting any teaching to Ekalavya. Ekalavya returned home and made a statue of his Guru Drona. He worshipped the statue diligently. He believed that his Guru was physically present there and that he was talking and preaching to him directly.

The same logic should be applied when learning directly from book. When reading the material from the book, one should believe that there is a teacher who is teaching through the written medium. In the absence of this belief and feeling (bhavana) that what is being read is actually a lesson being taught by someone, the

knowledge acquired through the reading will never be fruitful. Such knowledge will never ever be obtained completely.

That Lord Subrahmanya is a Maha Jnani (very knowledgeable) is a well-known fact. Lord Datta taught Subrahmanya the essence (tattva) of Omkaara. That's all. Datta did not preach to him anything else except explaining the meaning behind the word 'OM'. For this tiny teaching, Lord Subrahmanya addressed Datta as his Guru.

So it is enough if the Guru just teaches a word/alphabet or merely initiates the person into education (aksharabhyasam) or if He asks the person to undergo aksharabhyaasam. We should accept him as the Guru. It is immaterial to us whether he is a master in the subject or not. What is important to us is that he has guided us in the right direction. We should offer obeisance to Him, for being our guide.

Om Seeta raamabhyam namaha.

Episode 3 – Feb 9th

Kujantam raama raameti madhuram madhuraaksraam Aaruha kavitaasaakhaam vande Valmiki kokilam

Meaning- I offer my obeisance to the sweet cuckoo named Valmiki, who has seated himself atop the branch named poetry and who melodiously, sweetly and poetically sings the name 'Rama, Rama'.

Ajnanananadanam veeram jaanaki soka naashanam Kapeesam akshahantaaram vande lanka bhayankaram

Meaning- I prostrate to Hanuman, who is the son of Anjana Devi, who was the leader of all the Vanaras, who killed the demon named Aksha, who drove away the sorrows of Mother Sita (Janaki) and who caused a fright amongst all the demons in Lanka.

Veda vedye pare pumsi jaate dasarathaatmaje Vedaha praacheta daaseet saakshaad ramaayanaatmanaa

Ramaaya raamabhadraya ramachandraaya vedhase Raghunaathaaya naathaaya seetaayah pataye namah.

Meaning- I bow down to Rama who is Ramachandra and Ramabhadra. He is the Lord of the entire universe. He is the most superior in the clan of Raghu (Raghu vamsha). He is the husband of Sita.

With these prayers, we are now stepping into Shata Shloki Ramayana.

Tapassvaadhaaya niratam tapasvi vaagvidaam varam Naaradam paripapraccha Valmiki rmunipungavam.

Srimad Ramayana is the very first composition in this creation (Adi Kaavya). The greatest amongst the mantras is the Gayatri mantra. To emphasize that this Ramayana is as powerful as the Gayatri mantra, Maharishi Valmiki begins this Ramayana with the syllable 'ta' (ta-kaara). Let us recollect here that the Gayatri mantra also begins with the syllable 'ta'.

A person who is ever absorbed in penance (tapas) and in study of the Vedas (Veda adhyayana) can be said to be the greatest among the Vedic pundits and orators. Maharishi Narada is the best among all the Veda scholars. Maharishi Valmiki, who was ever interested in penance (tapas) approached Maharishi Narada and asked him in the following manner. This is the meaning behind this hymn.

Now let us understand the deeper hidden meaning (antaraardham) of this hymn. This great composition known as Ramayana, has begun during tapas (penance) and has begun with the word 'tapas' (penance).

Every one should have the burning desire (tapana) to know about the God. Every one should perform tapas (penance). Recitation of the mantra (japa) received from

the Guru should mandatorily be performed every single day without fail. There should be no negligence. Those who have not received any initiation (upadesha) from the Guru should recollect and recite the names of God every single day without fail.

Japato naasti paatakam means that sins will not attach to those who undertake nama japa and tapas (penance). All our shastras (scriptures) re-iterate this.

'Swaadhyaaya' means swa+adhyaya. 'Swa' means self or that which relates/concerns to one's self. 'Adyaaya' means study. It means that each one should mandatorily, without any negligence and without fail engage in self-study.

Here, study means, not only re-collecting that which has been learnt in the past, but also acquiring new additional knowledge. Association with highly knowledgeable beings (jnani) should be developed. What is learnt should as far as possible be shared with the others.

These are the important lessons that are hidden within the phrase **tapassvaadhyaaya niratam**.

The next word in the hymn is 'tapasvi'. On the face of it, it may appear as if Valmiki Maharishi is indulging in self-praise by addressing himself as 'tapasvi' (great ascetic). This is incorrect. It was only after performing intense tapas (penance) for an exceptionally long period of time, that Valmiki Maharishi could get the chance to compose the wonderful epic Ramayana. Penance is a very essential pre-requisite for acquiring the grace (anugraha) of Rama.

Narada was Valmiki's Guru. We have discussed many a time that without a Guru a person cannot reach his goal (guri). Not everyone can become Gurus.

Narada is a storehouse of tremendous and infinite knowledge (jnana rashi), a great devotee (maha bhakta) of the Supreme Lord and who is modest and unegoistic (nirahankaari).

Maharishi Valmiki put forth his questions to Maharishi Narada. It is not right to put forth our doubts in front of everyone that we come across. For our clarifications and doubts, we should approach only that person who can resolve/clarify them completely and thoroughly.

'Naaraa' means one who distributes knowledge to all the planes (worlds, loka). Hence Narada who forever distributes His knowledge across all planes has been named thus.

Hence very wisely, Maharishi Valmiki approached Narada. Upon approaching him, Valmiki did not display the disrespectful attitude, "Anyway you are always passing on your knowledge to others. Give me a little". On the contrary, Valmiki approached Narada with feelings of humility and devotion. He served Narada with devotion and then put forth his questions. For this reason, the term 'Paripa praccha' has been used.

Valmiki was not the real name of this Maharishi. It was a title that was bestowed upon him.

It is said that unless the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' (ahamkaara) are totally given up, Guru's grace cannot be procured.

Om Seeta raamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 4

Konvasmin saampratam loke gunavaan kascaveeryavaan Dharmajnasca krtajnasca satyavaakyo dhrdhavrtah

Valmiki asks-

O Maharishi! In this present era, on the earth, who is that great personality who has in him the following – good traits, virtues (guna), valour (parakrama), complete knowledge of dharma (rules of righteousness), gratitude (krtajna), truthfulness (satya vak) and firm determination?

Only that knowledge which is acquired through the Guru's preaching i.e. learnt from the Guru (Guru upadesha) is the highest knowledge (uttama vidya). It is unsurpassed. Hence Valmiki put forth these questions to the supreme most Guru, Narada. The desire that the entire world should benefit from these answers also weighed on his mind. This is the trait of the greatest and the best disciple.

Hence the efforts of the greatest Guru and the greatest disciple resulted in the creation of the world's first epic, the Srimad Ramayana. It came as a blessing to this entire universe.

Maharishi Valmiki, in his mind, desired to know about the form of Brahma (Brahma swaropa). He expressed this desire in the form of questions put forth before his Guru.

In the beginning of this hymn Valmiki Maharishi uses the word bhu loka (earth) Through this he very tactfully makes it clear to Guru Narada that he is not seeking to know about the Vishnu who resides in Vaikuntha (abode of Vishnu). He further emphasizes and uses the term 'in the present era'. Through this term he is specifying that he seeks to know about the present, and not about the past incarnations, of Lord Vishnu, such as Narasimha and others. Thus at the outset, Maharishi Valmiki is very clear about what he seeks to know.

After having said this, Maharishi Valmiki now proceeds with his questions. He seeks to know about that person who possesses the entire kalyana gunas (auspicious traits).

The only one who has in him all the auspicious traits (kalyana gunas) is Paramatma. Therefore, through these questions, Valmiki clearly asks Narada to reveal to him about Paramatma. Let us now understand in detail about the traits (gunas) that Valmiki specifies in this hymn.

Gunavaan - This is the first trait. Who can be addressed as a virtuous being (gunavaan)? He who, even though being extraordinarily great, does not recollect his greatness and be egoistic about it, is a truly virtuous being.

Such a person will not display any arrogance (ahamkara) nor will he show/ maintain any form of differentiation between himself and those who are inferior to him. For example, just because he is a great jnani (highly knowledgeable) he will not

discriminate against those who are unequal to him. He will mingle with one and all easily. For all the above reason, such person can be said to be truly courageous.

Does such a person exist on earth, asked Maharishi Valmiki?

Veeryavaan - The next trait refers to valour (veeryavaan). A valorous person is he who is very knowledgeable and is replete with all the virtuous traits and yet behaves in the manner depicted above as in 'gunavaan'.

Dharmajna - This refers to the knowledge of dharma. Dharma is that which concerns both this world (plane of existence, loka), and outside of it (aloukika). Further it shows the right path. Only he who has the complete knowledge of dharma (righteousness) and adharma (unrighteousness) can lead others on the right path. Only such a person will cause the welfare of the universe. At the first step itself, such a person will root out adharma (unrighteousness) and inauspiciousness.

Does such a person exist, asked Valmiki Maharishi?

Krtajna - The fourth trait is gratitude. One should never forget help received from others, however trivial/insignificant it could be. Feelings of gratitude towards the person who offered help should remain at all times.

He who considers any trivial help as profound and significant, and therefore in return helps the person, who had helped him, in a way that promotes his welfare is known as krtajna. Such a person can never entertain evil thoughts/feelings about others and forever seeks others' well-being. This is the intention behind explicitly seeking for a person with this trait.

Satyavaan - Next, the Maharishi seeks to know about a person who is eternally truthful in speech.

A truthful person will never utter a lie even when the worst problems land on his head. To him, truth (satya) reigns supreme. He believes that everything is dependent on this truth and that truth should always emerge victorious. To emphasize all these points relating to truth (satya), Valmiki Maharishi has used the term 'satya vakyo' here.

Drdavrata - This is the last question in this hymn. Drdavrata means to possess an unflinching/ unwavering and absolutely firm determination (intent, sankalpa). Such a person will not change his mind mid-way, but will stick to his intent till the very end.

What beautiful questions these are! When these questions are applied to this world and analyzed, then the preaching being given by Maharishi Valmiki to us through this hymn becomes very clear.

The person who devotedly adopts and adheres to these above mentioned traits, will unquestionably walk on the path of God. He will understand about God. He will become God (Madhava).

Om Seetaraamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 5

Caaritrena ca ko yuktah? Sarvabhootesu ko hitah Vidvaan kah? Ka sammarthasca? Kaisaika priyadarsanah.

Meaning- Who is the person- who possess a good conduct, who brings about the welfare of all the creatures/beings, who is very well-learned (vidvaan), who has the ability to accomplish even most impossible deeds, who possesses great capacity and efficiency (saamarthya) and who, at all times, causes the same kind of bliss and happiness to the onlookers?

Let us now go in depth into the meaning of this hymn.

Charitra vaan - In this hymn, Maharishi Valmiki at first seeks to know about that person who is of excellent conduct (sadaachara).

Abiding by sadachara (good conduct, customs & traditions) means to complete the designated duties, that have been laid down, at the designated hour, systematically without even the slightest deviation. 'acharo prabhavo dharma dharmasya prabhurachyutaha' means good and proper conduct (aachara) is the first and foremost among all the dharmas (rules of righteous living) to be followed.

Having this single dharma amounts to having everything in life. Through this adherence, all the difficulties can be overcome easily. The unattainable (durgama) becomes easily attainable (sugama).

Therefore, Maharishi Valmiki seeks to know if any person with this trait of excellent conduct (sadachara) exists in this world.

Sarva bhootesu hitah - Next, Maharishi Valmiki seeks to know about that person who seeks/causes the welfare of every being and of everything in creation (universal love). In the eyes of such a person, everyone, including his kith and kin, is equal. At no time and under no circumstances will he ever show feelings of differentiation/discrimination.

Being sama darshi (he who sees everyone in the same light) he would have taken a firm vow to bring about the welfare of one and all and he strives to fulfill it. It is very important to note that he will never harm even his enemy. All these factors weighed in the mind of Maharishi Valmiki when he used the term 'sarva bhutesu ko hitah'.

This should be the primary and predominant trait of a king. This is also one of the very important characteristics/traits of Paramatma.

Vidvaan - Coming to the next trait, Maharishi Valmiki enquires about that person who is well versed in all forms of knowledge (vidvaamsa).

Here he refers to that person who is proficient with the entire knowledge contained in the shastras (scriptures). He knows everything that ought to be known and hence is aptly addressed as a Pundit. Such a person brings about the welfare (kshema) of the world. During difficult/troubled times, he will act in the proper/right manner and

thus will triumph over those difficulties. He possesses the skill to transform even adverse situations into favourable ones.

Samartah - The next trait mentioned in this hymn is skillfulness (saamarthya).

It is knowledge that bestows dexterity upon the individual. Due to knowledge, the person possesses the ability/dexterity to accomplish those deeds that others consider impossible.

Eka priya darsanah - It means he who appears equally pleasing to one and all, at all times.

Objects dear to us cause immense joy at some times and sorrow at other times. That which causes happiness to one may be the source of sorrow for another. Such situations cause aversion in the person towards both joys as well as sorrows.

When we stare at the same face for a long time, we tend to get fed up and bored. We think, 'enough is enough. I hope I don't have to see this face again'.

Without risking such a possibility, the person should be able to create feelings of love and affection in the mind of those who look into his face. The desire to keep looking into his face at all times should emerge in the heart of the onlookers, says Valmiki.

Kshane kshane yan navataam upaiti tad eva roopam ramaniyataavah – that which assumes a new fresh look every second and leaves the onlooker in wonder is the nature/trait of beauty. Even though people look at him all the time, at each second he should look new and refreshing, much to the amazement of the onlooker. This is a deeper meaning embedded in this phrase

Valmiki Maharishi was referring to such a person through the usage of this phrase.

Such deep meanings are embedded within the thoughts and words of great saints. To them, welfare of the world is the only thing that matters.

Episode 6

Aatmavaan ko? Jitakrodho dyutimaan ko nasooyakah Kasya bibhyati devaasca jaatarosasya samyuge

Meaning- Who is the person – who has his mind under his complete control, who has conquered anger, whose illumination/brightness causes astonishment to others, who has in him no trace of jealousy and whose aggressiveness in war causes fear even among celestials?

Aatmavaan - Great heroes, who have conquered everything in this universe, fail to conquer the mind that is inside them and which in fact is very close to them. Even after acquiring control over every thing, they suffer from lack of mental peace, the reason being their inability to control their mind. Great ancient seers (Maharishis) and eminent poets have always compared the mind to huge animals.

Hence, conquering the mind (mano jayam) is said to be the greatest victory that one can achieve. This is the true proof of a person's courage and strength (parakrama). Controlling the mind is true yoga; it in itself is yaaga.

Hence Valmiki Maharishi explicitly questions about this.

Jita krodhah - Next, Valmiki wants to know a person who has controlled anger in totality. We may speculate as to the necessity of posing this question separately, when, we have said earlier that controlling the mind amounts to controlling everything?

Here, what we should understand is that Valmiki Maharishi, does not seek to know merely about a yogi, but is desirous of knowing about that Supreme Being (uttama purusha) who considers every being as his kith and kin, and therefore, with such feelings, treats everyone equally.

Therefore, he asks- who is that person, who, having achieved complete mastery over the inner mind, has in addition, also conquered the inner and the outer anger in totality?

Often we notice Mahatmas exhibiting feelings of anger. This is not their natural/ inherent anger but something that they have willingly taken upon themselves. Releasing this, we too should aim to scale to those heights.

Dyutimaan - Coming to the next trait, who is the person who possesses dazzling illumination/lustre that is astonishing?

The Sun's illumination is the brightest illumination that surpasses every other form of illumination known. Valmiki Maharishi enquires about an illumination that eclipses even the Sun's illumination. This is the illumination of the self (atma kaanti). Hence, the question here is a prayer to teach about this atma kaanti.

Anasooyakah - Asuya (jealousy) means to scan the faults (dosha) in others and accuse them of it. Going over and above this trait, means to be non-jealous (Anasuya).

One should acknowledge the good deeds that are performed even by his enemy. If merely because he is an enemy, one scans and finds faults in his good deeds, then such mistakes (dosha) will attach to him.

Instead, if the good trait within him is appreciated, then there is a great chance for even an enemy to transform into a good being.

Bibhyati devaah - This is the last trait being asked by Maharishi Valmiki. He wants to know about that person who causes fear even among Gods.

Among the Gods, Rudra, Agni (Fire God), Yama (God of death), Lord Narasimha, Veerabhadra, Sharabha and Kali Devi are said to be the most fearful and ferocious (maha ugra). If they get angry, they can swallow the entire creation as if it were a drop of water. Hence it is mandated that deeds that displease them should never ever be performed.

It is only adherence to dharma (righteousness) that pleases them. Here, Valmiki Maharishi seeks to know about that person who causes even these greatest Gods to abide by the dharma that he is following. The person who can cause even the greatest Gods to abide by his dharma is none but Paramatma.

Bheeshaasmaat vaatah pavate says the Taitareeya Upanishad. It means- He, out of whose fear, the fire burns, the Sun rises and blazes, the wind blows, Indra and other Devatas discharge their duties in the prescribed manner and the God of death being scared runs away, is none other than Paramatma.

Valmiki Maharishi ends his questioning with this. In all, he has enquired about 16 traits/qualities. The number 16 symbolizes completeness (poornatvam). The number 16 instantly brings to memory the 16 avatars of Dattatreya and the Shodasi (16 syllable) vidya of the Divine Mother. Paramatma, the complete being (Poorna Purusha) is known as Shodasha kalaha.

From this, it is absolutely clear that Maharishi Valmiki is enquiring about Paramatma.

Om seetaraamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 7

Eta dicchaamyaham srotum param koutuhalamhi me Maharse! Tvam samartho si jnatu mevam vidham naram

Meaning- O great Maharishi! I am full of curiosity and am eagerly awaiting to listen to the answers to all my questions. You possess this eligibility to reveal to me about that person who has in him all these above mentioned traits.

There is a Telugu proverb - **adigevariki cheppevaru lokuva**, which means – the person who asks, considers the one who answers, as inferior.

Here however, the person who is asking the question is an elevated sage (Maharishi). The one to whom the question has been put forth to is yet another eminent sage. The seeker is questioning in all humility after giving due respect and due reverence to the enlightener and addressing him as 'Maharishi'. The seeker also makes it clear that through this questioning, he is not seeking to display his learning and cleverness, nor is he trying to test the intelligence of his teacher.

Through the usage of the word 'shrotum' the seeker explicitly clarifies that he is questioning with the sole intention of listening and learning. 'I am the shrota, You are the vakta' he implies here. This means, 'I am the student, the listener and you are the teacher and the orator'. This is the way to ask.

'O master, I am eager to learn. You please take your time and teach me when appropriate' – this respect that Maharishi Valmiki has towards his Guru is visible in his words.

Complete trust and faith in the Guru are a must. Doubts regarding his abilities, capabilities and knowledge should never ever be entertained. Once you have accepted a person as your Guru, then you should treat whatever he says as nectar (amruta). Only then will all the doubts be dispelled from the mind. To highlight and teach this, Valmiki Maharishi uses the words- 'tvam samartho si'.

Samarthah means he who is competent and capable. This is the ordinary meaning. He who has thoroughly and completely understood the deeper meaning of the entire Vedas is the special meaning for this word 'samarthah'. The word artha also means wealth. Therefore samartha is he who possesses the wealth called knowledge (jnana dhana). He is none other than Narada. He is the Supreme Guru.

Valmiki Maharishi has questioned about the 16 traits. To clarify that he is not enquiring about Paramatma, but about a human being, the word 'naram' (human being) has been used in the hymn.

Subtly, through the usage of this word, the absence of differentiation (abheda) between the individual soul (jeevatma) and the supreme soul/being (Paramatma) is being highlighted.

We have discussed earlier that only Paramatma, the Supreme Being, can have in him these 16 traits. Now, Valmiki Maharishi enquires about a human being who has in

him all these 16 traits. Thus, the oneness (abheda, lack of distinction) between the individual being (jeevatma) and Supreme Being (Paramatma) is clearly being highlighted.

When seen from this point, the entire Ramayana is a wonderful (adbhuta) treatise (Shastra) about the theory of advaita (non-dualism).

Now we shall discuss the reply given by the Supreme Master, Maharishi Narada.

Om seetaraamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 8

Shrutva chaitya ttrilokajno valmike rnaarado vacah Sruyataamiti caamantrya prahrstovaakyamabravit

Meaning- Narada Maharishi, who knows all the happenings of all the three worlds, was pleased with the words spoken by Maharishi Valmiki. He then said, "I will tell. You please listen".

Narada Maharishi is a Deva rishi. He is precisely aware of the traits possessed by each and every being within all the 3 worlds. The words spoken by Maharishi Valmiki brought great happiness to his mind. He knew that these 16 qualities that Valmiki was enquiring into, are the qualities/traits of Paramatma.

Narada himself is very passionate about singing the glories of the Lord at all times and Valmiki was clearly asking for preaching about Sriman Narayana, the Supreme Lord. It was purely due to the grace of Lord Narayana, that Narada could be His sevak (offering services). He could set the Narayana mantra as his supreme aim only due to the mercy of that Lord.

At this juncture, it is apt and essential to know the story of this Divine Maharishi, Narada, in detail.

Narada was one of the mind born sons of Lord Brahma. After creating him, Brahma entrusted him with the task of becoming a householder and furthering the creation. Narada was not inclined towards this and he showed his disgust. He refused. This angered his father Brahma, who cursed him. "Be born as a Gandharva and take on many wives".

As a result of this curse, Narada was re-born as a Gandharva and lead a family life, taking on several wives. He was a dedicated worshipper of Lord Narayana. Once he was blessed with the rare opportunity of singing the glories of Lord Krishna, in the presence of the Supreme Father Lord Brahma. He was singing melodiously. All of a sudden, he erred in the musical beat (taala). This angered Lord Brahma who cursed him to be born as a son of a daasi (maid).

This Gandharva was re-born as a maid's son. As his mother used to work in the ashram of some saints, from a very young age, Narada had a chance to observe the worship being offered to Lord Srihari (Vishnu) and he developed a deep inclination towards it. He began to intensely worship Lord Srihari. After a certain period of time, Srihari appeared before him and said, "As there are a few doshas (ills) remaining in your samskaras (past impressions), in this birth you will only be able to hear my voice. In your next birth you can see me. You will become one among my troops (parivaaram)."

As foretold by the Supreme Lord, Narada took on one more birth. He went on to become a deva rishi, great naadopaasaka (worshipping the Divinity through music) and one of the members in the troop (parivaaram) of Lord Srihari (Vishnu). Eternally he recites the mantra **Narayana' Narayana**. This is his story.

To obtain the vision of the Supreme Almighty, unyielding determination coupled with rigorous efforts are essential. Narada took on a firm vow to reach this goal and with great patience achieved it. He became a Guru for the Devatas themselves.

To listen and to read (parayana) the stories of the Divine Lord, feelings of devotion (bhakti), dedication (shraddha), love (prema) and patience (sahana) should necessarily exist within the person. Valmiki Maharishi had all these in abundance. Let us now discuss the story of the disciple Valmiki Maharishi.

A very long time ago, Pracheta was blessed with a son Praachetasa, who had in him an aspect of Brahma (brahma amsa). They were in the lineage of Brighu (brighu vamsa) and the real name of Prachetasa was Rukshaka. He was seated immobile in deep penance for an extremely long period of time and during this period an anthill completely enveloped him. An anthill is known as 'valmika' in Sanskrit. As he broke upon this anthill and emerged from it, he was titled Valmiki.

The story of Valmiki is beautifully elucidated in the Skanda Purana. Many eons ago, there lived a boy named Agni Sharma. No matter how hard his parents struggled to impart the basic education to him, it was of no use. Hoping that marriage would reform him, they got him married. Even this could not bring about any change in his educational skills. Exactly around that time, there was a great famine and, unable to withstand it, all of them moved to the forests. To support the family, Agni Sharma turned into a wayside robber who ruthlessly looted passersby. At one point he confronted the seven great sages (Sapta Rishis) so as to loot them. At that point, Sage Atri asked him, "Having selected this looting as your profession, you are committing a lot of sins. Will your family take a share of these sins?"

Upon going home and enquiring, Agni Sharma realized that none of them was willing to take any share of his sins. With this, Agni Sharma was frightened. He held on to the feet of the Maharishi and begged him for a way out. Atri Maharishi initiated him into dhyana yoga (yoga of meditation) and together with the other Maharishis, left that place.

13 years passed by. The seven great sages (sapta Rishis) were once again passing by that place. From a huge anthill a loud sound was audible. They pondered about it and were surprised when they came to know that Agni Sharma was seated immobile within the anthill. His dedication and discipline pleased them immensely. They asked him to come out of the anthill. They bestowed him the title 'Valmiki'.

Due to the grace of the Lord, Valmiki could get the blessings of Guru Narada. He secured the eligibility to hear from his Guru the leelas (plays, stories) of the Parabrahma.

Om Seetaraamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 9

Bahavo durlabhaa scaiva ye tvayaa kirtitaagunaah Mune! vaksyaa myaham buddhvaa tairyuktassryuyataam narah

Meaning- Says Narada, "O Valmiki, the traits that you are seeking to know are ananta (infinite). It is impossible to find all of them in any one ordinary human being. I have learnt about a great personality who has in him all these traits. I shall now explain about him to you. Please listen."

Narada Maharishi had approached Maharishi Valmiki at the behest of Lord Brahma. When Valmiki enquired of him, exactly that which he had been ordained by Brahma to preach, Narada became very delighted. Earlier, Narada had received initiation (upadesha) into this same subject, from the Supreme Lord Brahma himself. This is why Narada says, "I will preach to you that which I have learnt in the past."

This was a wonderful opportunity to drink in the nectar (amruta) called 'Rama'. Narada was overflowing in joy for having obtained this excellent fortune/ opportunity and also for having secured an eligible disciple in Valmiki.

Stories of God cannot be understood by a person, unless and until he has in him, the feelings of deep faith, reverence and dedication. In its absence, it is impossible. These feelings create in the person a deep desire and inclination to know more about the Supreme Lord. They make the person desirous of hearing the same stories again and again. Innumerable doubts are dispelled through listening to the divine stories. The right direction and path in which the person should proceed will become visible. Everyone will find it beneficial in some way or the other. Listening to divine stories has multifold benefits.

All of us know that the Supreme Lord has infinite traits (ananta guna). We should understand that within his stories every event/ sequence is inter-linked with another.

When Narada uses the word 'listen', he is implying that one should listen with complete concentration. The mind should not entertain any other thoughts and other distractions. This lesson is also applicable to one and all.

Narada says to Valmiki- "All the traits that you are seeking to know, exist in one great personality (Maha Purusha). I have learnt about Him in the past and now I am going to relate the same to you."

Both Narada and Valmiki were eminent saints who had mastered the Vedas and Vedanta. Both of them were aware of all the happenings in totality. They were always engaged in thoughts about the Supreme Entity. What was the logic in one of them being accepted as a teacher and the other as a student, to speak about that matter, which both already knew in eternity? This could be puzzling to many.

The secret lies in the fact that this was an extraordinary subject, far beyond common knowledge and understanding (lokottara vishaya). This was the subject that could grant liberation (loksha) in totality. Hence both the saints were deeply interested and inclined towards it. They took great delight in speaking/listening to it.

In the previous hymn it was Valmiki who used the word 'nara' and now in this hymn, Guru Narada uses the same word. Behind this usage, a deeper meaning is hidden. A speciality (vishesham) as well as a subject (vishayam) exists within this.

Through the usage of this word 'nara', Narada re-assures Valmiki that he has understood the motive with which Valmiki had used the word initially.

Narooje manujerjune means- the one who takes the humans (nara) to the highest destination is none other than Paramatma. This is the meaning behind the usage of this word 'nara'. For this reason, both saints have used the word 'nara'.

apo vai narasoonavah - means that water (jala) has been created by Nara. Water is the offspring of Nara. Our Vedas emphasize that Nara who initially created all water bodies (jala) is none other than Paramatma. He, the Supreme Parabrahma, is Nara. When seen from this point of view it is clear that Nara, who has assumed the form of a human being, is none other than Paramatma.

Instead of enquiring about Paramatma and His existence, why was Valmiki Maharishi enquiring only about His traits? To understand this in a proper manner, let us take the example of a mango.

Upon seeing a mango one cannot decipher whether it is sweet or sour in taste. To know its taste, it has to be mandatorily tasted.

Likewise the traits (gunas) of the Supreme Almighty should be contemplated upon. They should be analyzed. In this lies our wellbeing.

In Bhagvatam, Maharishi Narada says to Maharishi Vyasa, "You are the author of many sacred texts and treatise. You have preached many dharmas. However you have never glorified the Lord. You have never experienced Him. You should experience Him. Sing His glories. Praise His pastimes. Recollect all this traits (gunas). Your mind will get that peace which you are seeking".

Here, Maharishi Narada was enthusiastic to glorify the traits of that Supreme Lord and at the same time, Maharishi Valmiki was eagerly waiting with dedication and devotion to listen to the same. What a beautiful combination! Each is speaking out of their experience.

Om Seetaa raamaabhyaam namaha

Episode 10

Ikshvaakuvamsa prabhavo raamo naama janai srsutah Niyataatmaa mahaaveeryo dyutimaan dhrimaan vasi

Meaning- A very famous person by name Rama, has been born in the Ikshvaaku dynasty (vamsa). He possesses extreme self-control, is exceptionally valourous and has a bright illumination. He has complete control over his senses.

It is common knowledge that Lord Rama belongs to the solar dynasty (Surya vamsa). Why then is He being referred to as belonging to the dynasty of Ikshvaaku (Ikshvaaku vamsa) here?

There is a secret behind the usage of this term by Maharishi Narada. Vaivasvata Manu is Lord Sun's son. Ikshvaaku was the eldest son of Vaivasvata Manu. Being an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu (Srihari), Ikshvaaku pleased Srihari by performing rigorous penance. The Supreme Lord, Sriman Narayana appeared before Ikshvaaku and asked him to choose any boon. To this, Ikshvaaku requested, "O Lord, Please remain as a worshipful idol (archana murti) in my house, in this eternally auspicious form of yours (Divya mangala roopa). In this divine form please accept the daily worship that I shall offer to you".

From then on, the Supreme Lord Srihari remained as a worshipful idol (archana murti) in their house and was being reverentially worshipped by all the members of this Solar dynasty (Surya vamshi). For having pleased the Supreme Lord Himself and for having secured Him as a worshipful idol, Ikshvaaku undoubtedly became the greatest in the Solar dynasty. Hence, Narada Maharishi began the Ramayana with reference to the dynasty of Ikshvaaku.

The Supreme Lord is very fond of his true devotee and is very partial towards him at all times. Also keeping this in mind, Narada Maharishi began the Ramayana by referring to the devotee 'Ikshvaaku'. He further said that in this dynasty, a king by the name Rama was born, who attained great fame and who is living amongst its citizens.

Yet another fact is that the Supreme Lord, Sriman Narayana loves the Sun very dearly. As such He decided to incarnate in this Solar dynasty.

Why did the Supreme Lord choose to incarnate in the family of kings? Let us delve into the reason behind this. The Supreme Lord in His incarnation as Parashurama wiped away the entire Kshatriya race (warrior race, which is one of the 4 social orders in Hinduism) from earth. The next incarnation of the Supreme Lord was that of Rama. He now took birth within the Kshatriya race and caused a growth in this race (vamsa vriddhi). He established the Kshatriya dharma (rules of righteousness to be followed by this warrior clan).

When the meaning contained within the name 'Rama' is thoroughly understood, then His greatness will be automatically understood. It will also be clear as to why people choose to listen about Him.

ramaya teeti raamaha – He who causes everyone to be blissful is Rama. 'raamo ramayataam varaha' – he who is adept in making others' blissful is Rama. Great yogis (saints) undertake the Rama naama japa and enjoy the subsequent bliss. Just listening to this name 'Rama' showers bliss upon the person. Such is the greatness contained within this name!

Rama has been described as **niyataatma**. It means that He is self-controlled and is without any change (nirvikara) i.e. under no circumstances will any change be visible in Him. Such changelessness is the characteristic of Parabrahma. Sri Raamachandra Parabrahmane namaha- salutations to Ramachandra Parabrahma!

Mahaaviryo suggests that His prowess and might are beyond all forms of comparison.

Narada Maharishi is describing the incarnation of Rama (Rama avatar) and through this he is detailing the story of Ramayana. In this shata shloki Ramayana the entire story is explained in a concise manner and hence it is essential to delve into the story that is hidden behind each word.

Through the usage of the words **ikshvaaku vamsa prabhavah**, it is implied that the Supreme Lord has incarnated as King Rama of the Ikshvaaku dynasty.

Among those emperors who had conquered the earth and ruled it successfully, were many emperors who belonged to the Ikshvaaku dynasty. Their kingdom was on the banks of River Sarayu with Ayodhya as the capital. It was the land of Kosala.

The city of Ayodhya was initially built by Vaivasvata Manu. Emperor Dasharatha brought to Ayodhya, the grandeur that was equivalent of Lord Indra's capital Amaravati. Emperor Dasharatha was a great dharmatma who sincerely abided by the rules of righteousness. He had acquired great renown in all the three worlds (lokas). He was so valorous that even the most powerful heroes and emperors could not conquer Ayodhya during his rule.

As the king, so are his people. Under the leadership of Emperor Dasharatha, all the citizens of Ayodhya perfectly abided by the rules of dharma. Each citizen diligently discharged all the designated duties at the designated hour, based on dharma, without fail. In short, they lived a life of dharma, artha (material prosperity) and kaama.

To this righteous Emperor Dasharatha, Maharishis Vashistha and Vamadeva were priests. Dhriti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhartha, Arthasaadaka, Asoka, Mantrapala and Sumantra were his 8 ministers. All these 8 were well versed and highly efficient.

Emperor Dasharatha had 3 wives Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. However he did not have any progeny. Upon the advice of his ministers, the emperor decided to perform the Ashwamedha Yaaga. At that point of time, Minister Sumantra very greatly praised Sage Rishyasringa. Hearing the praises being showered upon this great sage, Emperor Dasharatha invited the Sage Rishyashringa along with his wife Shanta Devi to Ayodhya. With the help of the priests, Emperor Dasharatha majestically performed the Putrakameshti yaaga (for begetting progeny) along with the Ashwamedha yaaga.

Exactly at that time, in the land of the Gods (Deva loka), discussions about demon Ravana and his destruction took place. They arrived at a conclusion and as a part of the plan, many Gods incarnated as Vanaras.

The Fire God (Agni) was pleased with the rituals being performed by Emperor Dasharatha. He offered a cup of payasam (a traditional dish akin to milk pudding) and asked the queens to consume it. Dasharatha divided the dish and gave it to his wives who happily partook it.

On a very auspicious day, Dasharatha was blessed with 4 sons- Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Narada Maharishi had this long story of the birth of Lord Rama, in mind, which he explained in a concise manner through the usage of the term 'ikshvaaku vamsa prabhavah'.

However much we speak about Rama and his traits, it always falls short.

Om SeetaRaamaabhyaam namaha

Episode 11

Buddimaan neetimaan vaagmi sreemaan shatrunibarhanah Vipulaamso mahaabaahuh kambugrivo mahaahanuh

Meaning- (Narada is continuing the description of Rama's traits)- Rama is intelligent and wise (buddhimaan), is virtuous and is of high moral conduct (neetimaan), speaks only good and well meaning words at all times (vaagmi), is prosperous (srimaan), he destroys all enemies (shatru nibarhanah), has a raised nape (back of the neck), possesses beautiful conch-like voice, has fine cheeks the upper portion of which is raised.

Buddhimaan is a person who is intelligent and wise. Buddhimaan also means that the person is 'all knowing' (sarvagjna). All-knowing means to know every thing that happens in every time period i.e. to be omniscient. Omniscience is a characteristic of Parabrahma.

We should be aware that every minute the Supreme Lord is watching each and every action of ours. When this is properly understood, the person will be inclined only towards good deeds.

Being omniscient, King Rama did not have the necessity to get the information of the happenings in the kingdom through spies. This enabled him to be a very great and efficient king.

Neetimaan - Rama predominantly adhered to the most accepted and known ethics and code of conduct (neeti) as stipulated by the Vedas and Shastras (scriptures).

The term neeti has many meanings. It includes the rules of righteousness that apply to a king (raja dharma), code of conduct applicable to him, his limitations and many more. Rama was completely aware of His real identity, the reason behind his incarnation, and the duties that he had to execute. Due to this, He could perfectly comply with the neeti and be termed neetimaan.

Vaagmi is He who speaks good and meaningful words. This ability of Rama is visible in many instances in Ramayana most specifically in the words that He spoke at the time of Vali's death. At all times and in all instances Rama only speaks that which is good and beneficial to one and all. The term 'Good and beneficial speech' refers to the Vedas. Vedas are the words of Parabrahma (Parabrahma vak). As at all times Rama speaks only in accordance with the Vedas, He is addressed as Vaagmi.

Controlling speech is a great spiritual exercise (sadhana). Through the usage of the word vaagmi, Narada emphasizes that Rama possesses this trait and that He is teaching this wonderful trait to others.

Srimaan - This is very commonly understood to mean a person who owns a lot of money. The word 'Sri' has many in-depth meanings. 'Sri' also means vibhuti. Vibhuti in turn means aishwarya (prosperity). Aishwarya means 'to have the quality/trait of Eshwara' (eshwara guna). Rama has in Him this trait of Eshwara in totality and hence is Srimaan.

He who playfully creates this entire world is the real Srimaan. He is Parabrahma. He is Rama. He is said to be together with Lakshmi Devi (Goddess of prosperity). Mother Sita was none other than Goddess Lakshmi. Whenever Lord Vishnu incarnates, the Goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi also incarnates. This should be clearly understood.

Shatru nibarhanah - He who destroys those who go against the dictates of the Vedas is known as Shatru nibarhanah. As everyone is equal in the eyes of God, He, in reality, has no enemies. Only those who harm and torture the saints and the true devotees (who have taken refuge in the Supreme Lord) are His enemies. He protects his devotees and saints from such people.

Rakshate bhagavaan Vishnu : bhaktaanaam aatma shareeravath- means that Vishnu protects his devotees as He would protect his own body. At certain times He protects them with feelings of compassion (krpa drishti). At certain other times, He protects through his mahima (greatness). At other times He protects through the medium of other persons.

At few other times, where necessary, He himself enters the war field, wages the war and rescues his devotee. Prahlada's story is an example of this. The body features that are required to achieve this feat are being described in the 3rd and 4th portion (pada) of this hymn. He has wide and strong shoulders, long arms and the nape of his neck is sturdy and raised. His voice is clear and resonant like a conch. All these are the characteristics of a brave and excellent hero.

Episode 12

Mahorasko mahesvaaso goodhajatru rarindamah Aajaanubahu ssusiraah sulalaata ssuvikramah

Meaning- Rama has a broad and strong chest. He carries with Him a strong, supreme and splendid bow. His collarbones, that are very strong, are not visible (finely covered). He overcomes his enemies easily. His hands are long enough to touch his knees. His head as well as his forehead are sturdy and beautiful and proportionate. His possesses great valour (parakrama).

There are many hymns which proclaim that Parabrahma who has no form, no shape, no weapon and no fixed location (nirguna, niraakaara) takes on a form, shape (saakaara) for the convenience of his devotees. This same statement is re-affirmed by our Upanishads.

For our convenience, Maharishi Narada is describing the physical features/form of Parabrahma Rama, in the following manner.

Mahoraskah - Rama has a massive, broad, rigid, tough, prominent and upright chest. The Saamudrika Shastra (a scripture that interprets the features of the body and foretells the future based on that) states that a person with these physical features will become a king. In the case of Rama, He was not only a king for this visible world, but in addition he was also the emperor of the inner kingdom called atma (atma samrajyam).

Mahesvasah - His body is so well-built and firm that he can support the most powerful bow. The bow that Rama wears on his body is no average one; it is the mighty Kodanda. Even to just hold it one should possess a very powerful body and should be extremely energetic.

The bow that Rama broke, at the time of His marriage, was a bow that belonged to Shiva (Shiva dhanus). This was a bow that Lord Shiva had worn on His body. All of us know that Lord Shiva retains the mighty, forceful and gigantic River Ganga on His head. How powerful and mighty should the bow of this Lord, who has the capacity to retain a massive river on His head, be? It is beyond imagination.

Moreover Shiva has a divine body (daiva shareera). Rama had a human body (manava shareera). If with the human body, Rama broke Shiva's bow, then it was a feat that was accomplished purely due to the power of His atma shakti (power of the inner self). In another instance, He calmly and easily took over the Vaishnava bow from Parashurama. Both these instances teach us the Shiva- Kesava abheda (oneness of Shiva and Vishnu (Kesava) that exists within Rama.

Goodha jatruh - Gudhajatru is one whose collarbones (jatra) are not visible due to the fleshy muscular chest. According to the Saamudrika shastra, the person in whom the collarbones are imbalanced or are very minute (sookshma) will face great deprivation (daridra) in life. When they are even and balanced, the person will enjoy all luxuries in life (bhogi). Where these collarbones are deep, the person will be poor. Where the person has tough and strong collarbones, as in the case of Rama, the person will be a king.

Arindamah - He who subjugates his enemies is arindamah. In the earlier hymn a similar term 'shatru nibarhanah' was used. What could be the purpose behind this repetition? The term 'enemies' (shatru) includes both the inner as well as external enemies of a person. The term 'ari' in this word 'arindamah' instantly brings to memory the 'arishadvargas'. (Arishadvargas are the 6 internal enemies of a person such as kaama (desire), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (infatuation), mada (pride) and matsarya (jealousy)). This word in turn helps us recollect Yoga. Rama has conquered all his arishadvargas and He helps those, who have placed implicit faith in Him, to reach the similar state.

Ajaanubaahuh – Rama has long arms that reach up to His knees. Hence He is addressed as Ajaanubaahu. Samudrika shastra declares that such a person will be a sarvabhooma (universal monarch of the highest degree).

Susirah- His head will be round and even in shape. Our scriptures state that He who has a uniform and even head that is round in shape with the head that is in the shape of an umbrella, will have long life and be an absolute monarch of the land. This proved to be true in the case of Rama.

Sulalaata- The beauty of His forehead is beyond every form of comparison. It is as beautiful as the crescent moon.

Suvikramah- His gait is beautiful. Noiselessly He releases the arrow from His bow. When he enters the field and wrestles, the dust does not rise even by a fraction. Even in the midst of a terrible war, the smile on His face never fades. Without even the subtlest change, He accomplishes the greatest feats with ease. Hence He is addressed as Suvikramaha.

His gait is far more superior than the elephant's or lion's gait. So noiselessly He walks. Even walking very swiftly does not tire him in the least. Hasn't the graceful and delicate gait of a woman been compared to that of a swan (hamsa)? This is beautifully expressed in Lalita Sahasranama in the verse- maraali mandagamana mahaa laavanya sevadhah. Rama's walk is profound and deep (gaambhira). Hence He is – mahaa gaambhira sevadhah.

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 13

Sama ssamavibhaktaangah snighdavarناه prataapavaan Peenavaksa visaalaaksho laksmivaan subhalakshanah.

Meaning- He is neither too tall nor too short- He is of optimal height. His body is proportionate, symmetrical and flawless. He has a lovely complexion. His chest is broad and strong. His eyes are wide. He is prosperous. All his bodily features symbolize auspicious.

The bodily features of Rama have been delightfully brought out in this hymn. Every body part of His is of the right proportion. He can be described the ideal, greatest and best man on earth. The Saamudrika shastra stipulates that both the eyes, holes of the nostrils, both the ears, lips, elbows, wrists, knees, legs, and ankles should be symmetrical (absolutely equal in proportion). This is the body structure of the ideal man.

Arjuna, of the Mahabharata fame, had beautifully proportioned ankles. It is said that due to this he had to face many difficulties in life. Krishna too had to face many hurdles in life.

Even Rama had to live in the deep forests and face so many hardships in life. In the case of Rama, however, the hardships were taken upon by Him wilfully. His father did not send him to the forests. To ensure that the promise made by His father to his mother Kaikeyi is kept up and thereby to make sure that dharma is not transgressed, Rama Himself decided to go and live in exile for fourteen years. Such was His greatness! Not even once did He find the life in the forest as troubling and tedious. He ruled the forests as He would have ruled his kingdom. He took it as His dharma and lived by it.

Snigdah varnah - His body glows with a divine complexion and radiance. His eyes shine. The glow in the teeth symbolize that the person will get good food. The glowing of the feet indicates that the person will enjoy the comforts of a vehicle.

Such was His valour (prataapa) that enemies trembled upon hearing His name. He has a massive and wide chest (pinavaksha).

Visaalakso- Many poets have glorified the beauty of His wide eyes in their varied poetic compositions. Nevertheless, however much they are praised, it can never suffice. They are beautifully shaped like lotus petals and are red in colour.

Saamudrika shastra stipulates that such a person shall enjoy all luxuries of life (bhogi). It is said that Mother Sita, when in captivity in Lanka, would recollect Rama's beautiful eyes and grieve. Hanuman, when He had to describe Rama's physique to Mother Sita, began with the description of Rama's eyes. When demonesess Surphanaka had to describe the distinguishing features of Rama, to her brother Ravana, she described Him as a person Who had wide beautiful eyes and who was long limbed.

In the earlier hymn, the term **shatru nibarhanah** subtly referred to the killing of demoness Tataka and defeating Maricha. In this hymn, the word **Lakshmivaan** refers subtly to the story of Mother Sita. Let us now discuss this story.

Emperor Nimi was the foremost emperor of Mithila. Due to the blessings of the Devatas (Gods), Devaraatha, the sixth emperor in the lineage of Nimi, obtained the custody of the Shiva's bow.

During Daksha's yagna, Shiva was enraged with the Devatas who did not offer to Him a share in the Yagna offerings. He fixed the arrow to his bow and threatened to behead them all with one single arrow. At this, the Devatas fell at Shiva's feet at begged His forgiveness. Shiva, who was pacified with this, in turn gave to them the bow that He had been holding in His hand. These Devatas in turn gave that bow to Devaraatha, the emperor of Mithila, for safe custody. From then on, the kings of Mithila were offering their worship to this Shiva's bow.

Years rolled on. Janaka became the king of Mithila. One day when he was ploughing the field for conducting a yagna, he found a female infant. She was Sita. For this reason, Mother Sita is addressed as ayonija (not born in the normal course from a mother's womb). This is the story of Her divine birth.

Subhalakshanah - Rama has in Him all the auspicious traits and physical features that is uniformly appreciated by everyone. His appearance itself is so auspicious that He has remained in the hearts of one and all!

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 14

Dharmajna satyasandhasca prajaanaam ca hite rataha Yashasvi jnanasampannaha sucirvasyasamaadhimaan.

Meaning- He has complete knowledge of dharma and is eternally truthful. He is forever inclined towards ensuring the welfare of his citizens. He is of great renown (keerti). He is a repository of entire knowledge (jnana) and is very pure (suchi). He is under the sway of his devotees.

Dharmajna - Rama is perpetually dharma-oriented. Every action of His is purely towards dharma. Even killing of Ravana was for dharma only. Dharma (rules of righteous living) is very subtle and minute (sookshma). It is extremely complicated to understand its true essence and its principles. Rama who was well versed in all forms of knowledge, forever acted only as per the tenets of the Vedas. Only when this fact is deeply understood, will His actions become clear to us. In its absence, it is likely that we may question his decisions and actions.

Rama has made it his primary dharma to offer protection to those devotees who have sought complete refuge in Him. Although Demon Vibhishana, belonged to the enemy camp, Rama ensured him of protection and gave him refuge, as soon as Vibhishana prayed for it. He further declared that instead of giving protection (Abhaya) to the one who seeks refuge (sharana), if his faults and mistakes (doshas) are counted, then it amounts to great adharma.

Satyasandha - Satyasandha is He who is eternally faithful to truth and keeps up to it.

Rama is forever inclined towards ensuring the welfare of all his citizens. He taught through his actions that wellbeing of the citizens is the real wellbeing of the king.

Yashasvi - He was very famous for offering protection to those who had taken protection under Him. The manner in which he subdued the demons and his valour brought him great fame (yasas).

Jnanasampanna means Rama is well versed in all branches of knowledge. More importantly He is well versed even in that knowledge which is the root for the entire knowledge i.e. the knowledge of the self (atma jnana). Only because of his mastery in this root knowledge, He could grant liberation even to the bird Jataayu.

Rama is totally pure (suchi). Be it in His speech, in His mind, in His body or in His actions, total purity is visible.

He allows himself to be held in the total sway of those devotees who have placed implicit faith in Him. He will be under their control. He has the complete knowledge of the type of protection that he should offer to any devotee in distress. When it comes to dealing with elders such as his father or His Gurus, He is obedient.

Rama acquired self-realization (atma tattva) through spiritual practices (sadhana). Neither when He was a prince nor when He became the monarch of this universe did

He forget His Adhyatmic chintana (contemplation of the self) even slightly. From Him we should learn to spend at least a little part of the day in Adhyatmic chintana.

Om Seeta ramaabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 15

Prajaapati sama srimaan dhaata ripu nishudhanah Rakshita jeevalokasya dharmasya parirakshita

Meaning- Rama is equal to the creator, Lord Brahma. He is over and above everyone else. He is the protector of one and all. He is the one who nourishes all the lokas (planes of existence, worlds). He protects and propagates dharma at all times.

Prajapati samaha - Rama is equal to the creator. Although in reality He is a step higher than Brahma and all the other Gods, for the sake of protection of the people (praja rakshana), He assumed a human form and acquired fame as one who is equal to Brahma.

While it was Maha Vishnu who incarnated as Rama, Maha Lakshmi incarnated as Sita. When Maha Vishnu (Narayana) incarnated as Krishna, Maha Lakshmi incarnated as Rukmini. A similar pattern is followed in all incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Lakshmi Devi never lets go of Vishnu's hand and incarnates every time He incarnates on earth. This is confirmed in the Vishnu Purana.

'Sri' is Lakshmi. Srimanta is Rama, the one who nourishes (sustains) every being. In the phrase 'prajaapati samaha' the Brahma aspect in Rama was highlighted, now the Vishnu aspect within Him, of sustenance (nourishment), is being brought out.

After having firmly established dharma within his kingdom, Rama personally set upon performing yagnas and yaagas. A combined effect of both these (dharma + yagnas) ensured that the kingdom was bestowed with timely and adequate rainfall. Through this rainfall, He nourished his people.

It is natural for a person to become egoistic when everything is going in accordance to his wishes and planning. That Rama was not egoistic is understandable. But during Rama's rule (Rama rajyam), even the citizens of his entire kingdom were not egoistic! That was the effect of Rama raajyam. People would willingly go to Rama's kingdom. Just stepping in there, ensured that they turned dharmic. Wasn't this Rama's greatness (mahima)?

Rama is ripu hara (ripu nisudhana). This phrase brings out the aspect of Shiva that exists within Rama. If there is one person who has absolutely no enemies, then it is Sri Rama. He subdues the ego/pride of those who troubles saints (sadhus). More importantly, Rama drives away the feelings of enmity from within the person. He takes the person to this state wherein he finds no enemies anywhere.

Coming to the third part of this hymn, the reason/cause behind Rama's incarnation on earth is being explained. Rakshita jivalokasya- protecting the jivaloka (world of beings) is the primary objective behind His incarnation.

Rama's nature is to ensure protection to all the living beings. He was concerned about the welfare of each and every being. More often than not, people tend to protect only their kith and kin. Rama, on the other hand, protected the entire universe. Mother Sita herself declared that Rama protected every single living being in this creation.

Now you should not question- since Rama protected everyone, did he also protect sinners? The answer to this is given in the last part of this hymn- dharmasya parirakshita. It means that while He himself follows dharma strictly, he also makes sure that everyone perpetually adheres to path of dharma. He then protects them.

A clean golden vessel is preserved in the cupboard. However the same golden vessel, if it is unclean, is kept aside for washing. If someone were to ask, 'what is this? Why is a golden vessel lying outside?' the reply will be 'it needs to be cleaned and then kept in the cupboard'. Here the vessel is treated (cleaned) first and then protected. Likewise, the being has to be taught (sikshana, punished) and then protected (rakshana). Rama thus followed the policy of sikshana-rakshana which means He firstly punished the adharmic persons (those who did not abide by the rules and regulations of righteousness) and thereafter he gave them his protection.

Rama has no feelings of raga-dvesha (love-hatred, like- dislike). His sole motive was that beings in entirety should prosper. May all the feelings of hatred/ dislikes (dvesha bhava) be destroyed in everyone by the grace of Rama!

Om Seeta Ramaabhayaam namaha.

Episode 16

Rakshita svasya dharmasya svajanasya ca rakshita. Veda vedaanga tattvajno dhanurvede ca nishthitah.

Meaning- While He diligently abides by His dharma, Rama ensures that all his people are protected. He has mastered the in depth essence of the Vedas and the Vedangas. In addition, he has achieved absolute mastery in archery (dhanurveda).

In this hymn, the traits of a ruler are being highlighted. A king should necessarily abide by the rules and regulations of dharma (righteousness) at all times. Further he should mandatorily ensure protection to all those who have sought shelter under him. More importantly, he should make sure that all his citizens abide by dharma without fail.

Being the most supreme and excellent ruler, Rama practised all these above-mentioned traits in totality. He was very conscientious and meticulous in the practice of His own dharma (swadharma).

Dharma differs based on caste (varna) and the stage of life (ashrama). Rama safeguarded the dharmas of all the varnas and ashramas.

When it comes to matters pertaining to dharma, almost everyone is ready to preach. However when it comes to the practical implementation /practice of the same, very few will be seen adhering to it. Rama practises the dharma that has been laid down and more importantly He makes sure that others around him (citizens) also put it into practice. This makes Him all the more special. For this reason, the world quotes Him and states – We should behave like Rama.

Rakshita svasya dharmasya also means that Rama protected his bow (dhanus), his horses, chariot, charioteer and His flag. Such a person is titled 'ati ratha sreshta'. Rama breaking the Shiva dhanus (Shiva's bow that He broke to win the hand of Sita) is a very popular story. Defeating Parasurama was yet another extraordinary feat displayed by Rama. Through these He protected His avatara dharma (dharma of His incarnation).

Svajanasya ca rakshita - protecting the people is the primary dharma of a kshatriya (warrior). He zealously protected all his citizens. More importantly He made it His primary dharma to protect those who had surrendered and sought refuge in Him (sharanagata rakshana dharma).

Veda vedaanga tattvajno - Rama has a thorough and in depth knowledge of all the Vedas and the Vedangas. Veda is that which teaches all dharmas in entirety. Vedas are classified into 4 – Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Saama Veda and Atharvana Veda. Vedangas (limbs of the Vedas) play a very crucial role in helping the person understand the true essence/meaning of the Vedas. They are 6 disciplines – Siksha, Kalpa, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Chandas and Jyotisha.

Siksha - this teaches the swaras , phonetics and their positioning, and proper articulation of the Vedic texts. Vyakarana means grammar. It teaches the gentleness (saadhutvam) of the Vedic word. Chandas is the meter (protects the verse through

accurate measurement of syllables). Niruktam teaches the etymology of the word. Jyotisha teaches about the karmas that are to be followed as per the dictates of the Vedas. It also teaches the time period for the performance of the karma. Kalpa teaches about the anushtana rituals that should be followed based on the Veda.

Rama was proficient in all this knowledge. He had mastered all the 18 branches of knowledge.

Dhanurvede ca nishtitah - His knowledge in archery was undoubtedly extraordinary. He possessed the fine/ minute knowledge about how the bow should be handled, how the arrow should be placed and how it should be aimed so as to never miss the target. To a person of the warrior caste (kshyatriya), knowledge of Dhanurveda (knowledge of archery) is the primary and most important dharma.

Upavedas are 4. They are Dhanurveda, Ayurveda, Gandharva Veda and Artha shastra. Through using of the phrase 'dhanurvede ca nisthitah' in the last part of the hymn, His expertise in all the 4 upa-vedas has been highlighted.

Om Seeta Raamabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 17

Sarvasaastharaatha tattvajnah smritimaan pratibhaanavaan Sarvalokapriya ssaadhuh aadinaatma vicaksanah

Meaning- Sri Rama is a master in all various arts. He has a very sharp memory and never forgets anything. He takes a great interest in all activities. He is dear to everyone. He is eternally happy. He is of good nature (pious). He possesses great yukti.

Rama is a great scholar. Not only does he have outstanding and expert knowledge in Vedas and Vedangas, but also He possesses supreme expertise in the various Puranas, Dharma Shastra and other Shastras (treatise) such as Nyaya, Mimamsa, Saankhya, Vaisheshika and Yoga Shastra. He is proficient in the opinions as well as in the doctrines/principles (siddhanta) contained in each of these treatises.

Dharma Shastra elucidates the meaning contained in the earlier part (purva kanda) of the Vedas. Puranas explain the meaning of the Vedantas. Nyaya and Mimamsa are very helpful in understanding of the deeper meaning behind every sound and every word. Yoga Shastra enlightens totally about the Ashtanga yoga including Dhyana, Dharana and Samadhi yoga. Saankhyam teaches the various tattvas (essence). Uttara Mimamsa teaches about the union of the individual and supreme (jeeva-Paramatma aikya). Rama was extremely adept in particularizing and describing them individually as well as in explaining the in depth essence contained in each of these treatises. He was a great learned pundit.

What is the use of learning all the Shastras and acquiring deeper knowledge when the person does not have in him the ability to retain them in his memory? The knowledge becomes a sheer waste. Moreover, it is important that the knowledge that is acquired should be put to good use. The person should be very sharp in retaining all that is learnt. In its absence, the entire learning process would be an absolute waste. This will be more clearly elucidated in the next hymn.

In matters of learning (education, Vidya), Rama's retentive memory (Dharana shakti) was unfathomable. He had the ability to remember every minute detail that he had learnt or understood.

He possessed the special ability to efficiently manage all transactions/dealings (vyavahara).

Because of all His good traits, people adored and loved Him very dearly. Being an efficient ruler, he completely stole away the hearts of all his citizens. They placed implicit trust and faith in Him. Never once did He let them down. Never did He misuse their faith. Even when the most severe problems landed on His head, He did not lose His mental balance and get disturbed. Even at such times, He spoke lovingly to all and would take care not to hurt others' feelings. He would make others happy even at such times.

He was extremely adept in discharging the right duties at the right times.

Ramayana has become an ideal treatise. Irrespective of whether people consider Rama as man or as God, they find it hard to comprehend the humanly impossible tasks that he had accomplished. How could He build a bridge across an ocean? How could He kill the mighty demon Ravana who had caused limitless panic amongst all the inhabitants of earth? How did He protect Mother Sita? Doubts regarding this keep arising at all times. This is because none of these tasks can be accomplished by humans. They are even beyond our imagination. Yet, Rama, a human being, accomplished all of them.

Om Seeta Raamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 18

Sarvadaabhigata ssadbhiih samudra iva sindhubhiih Aarya ssarvasama scaiva sadaiva priyadarshanah.

Meaning- Just like an ocean that is always associated with all rivers, Sri Rama always maintains the association with good people. Everyone is equal in His eyes. He is affectionate at all times.

Just as the rivers always flow towards the ocean, good and holy persons (sat purushas) always are always drawn towards Rama. **nadeenaam saagaro gatihi** - the ocean is the sole refuge for all the rivers. Likewise for all the venerable persons Rama is the sole refuge. There is no one apart from Him who can offer them protection.

As Rama is a storehouse of innumerable good traits, He has been compared to the Ocean. All the venerable persons who approached Him have been compared to the rivers. Rivers from every direction come and merge into the ocean, yet the ocean does not get disturbed. In a similar manner, irrespective of the number of people who came, the direction from which they came, Rama always remained undisturbed. In Chitrakoot, even though Bharata pleaded with Him in many ways to take back the reigns of the kingdom, even when Jabali vehemently argued with Him for the same purpose, even though Vashista Maharishi preached him extensively about neeti (morals), even though He noticed the grieving and distraught faces of his three mothers, Rama remained unperturbed. He was least distressed. Even major rivers do not maintain the same calmness at all the times.

Rama was a great Satpurusha (great holy person). Many different types of people, from different directions and from different countries come to meet the holy persons. It was the same with Rama. With love, He treated everyone who approached Him. Without debating/ arguing, without scolding or hating them, he helped each and every person. People too gave Him the same love. He nipped the pride of those who were arrogant. He respectfully treated all those people, who approached Him with feelings of surrender and love. He made sure that He did not hurt the feelings of those who approached Him. While speaking lovingly without hurting their feelings in any way, He pointed out to them their mistakes and corrected them. He answered in a way that made them blissful and made sure that they left only after they were satisfied.

While He was at home, ignorant and the uneducated people would come and take His darshan. Both the educated as well as the uneducated always had something or the other to learn from Him. Rivers that merge into the sea are known as Maha nadi (major rivers). Similarly, all those who interacted with Rama turned into very great persons. In turn it increased their fame. However Rama was neither affected by their interaction nor by their absence.

Every great river that merges into the sea loses its identity and is addressed as the sea itself. To highlight this fact, Rama has been compared to the ocean/sea.

The person who performs actions purely based on the dictates of the Vedas (veda hita karma), and who ensures that others around him also follow the same is known as 'Arya'.

It is natural to presume that very select few people will have had access to a great emperor like Rama. To remove this misconception, the term **sarva samaha** has been used in this hymn. Through this it is clear that without maintaining any forms of differentiation, Rama spoke and treated everyone equally.

At every moment Rama looks new, pleasing and refreshing, such that the person watching Him desires to keep looking into that face forever. He is priyadarshanah.

Om Seeta raammaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 19

Sa ca sarvagunopetah kousalyanandavardanah Samudra iva gaambheerye dhairyena himavaaniva

Meaning- Rama is replete with every sadguna (good and auspicious traits). He causes joy to mother Kausalya devi. His personality is as deep as the ocean. In courage, He is like the Himalaya mountain.

There is no end to the good virtues that Rama has. Hence the phrase **sarvagunopetah** is used which means every good virtue exists within Him. The person glorifying/praising the Supreme, has to stop at some point or the other because he runs out of words as well as the energy to describe Divinity and not because of shortage of good traits in Divinity.

Kousalyaananda vardanah - Rama through His behaviour always brought supreme happiness and joy (Paramananda) to his mother Kousalya. This phrase contains a very important lesson. One should never trouble or cause pain to his mother and father. He should give them the due respect and look after them lovingly. With an intention of passing on this important teaching, this trait in Rama is being explicitly mentioned.

Old age is a very painful stage of life that cannot even be explained about. Many children presume that old people do not serve any purpose and hence send them away from home or put them in old age homes. Both are absolutely wrong.

Once a king was annoyed with all the old people. This foolish king called his minister and ordered that all the old people within the kingdom should be killed. The minister was pained at this decision of the king. However he was not in a position to go against the king's orders. So left with no choice, he killed all the old citizens of that land barring one. He took this old man and hid him secretly at a far away place.

The sin of killing old people will not simply vanish, will it? This kingdom now was affected by terrible drought and famine. For 5 years there was not a drop of rainfall. When it doesn't rain for one year, we are desperate for water. To be frank, when the monsoon gets delayed by a month we feel the pinch and begin to get restless. Then imagine the situation that they would have faced with no rain continuously for a period of 5 years. There was no crop and hence citizens were starving. To buy food from the neighbouring lands, the king did not have sufficient money in the coffers.

In complete desperation, the king called the minister and asked him for a solution. The minister in turn asked the king to give him a little time. The minister now directly approached the old man and said, "You are a very aged person. You knew the king's father and grandfather as well. Are you aware of any treasure that had been hidden secretly by the king's father or grandfather? Our kingdom is sinking under severe drought and famine. Could you please save us?"

The old man with tremendous difficulty recollected the past happenings and then finally said, "Don't waste your time searching throughout the kingdom. You will not find anything there. Dig the place where the king's throne has been kept. A lot of wealth had been buried there in the past."

The minister returned to the king and said, "O King, I had some expert make predictions. Based on it, I can tell you that a lot of wealth is hidden right beneath your throne. If you have faith in my words, then kindly shift the throne and take the wealth". Here the minister had to lie a bit.

The king trusted this minister. Anyway, the situation was such that the king had no choice but to trust his minister. So he agreed to the proposal. Within half an hour, the throne was shifted and the place was dug up. Limitless wealth was found. There was enough money to repay all the loans. In addition, the kingdom could now sail through easily for another 10 years even with no rainfall or harvest.

The kingdom was restored to its glory. There was happiness everywhere. The king was also peaceful and happy. One day, when he was calm and peaceful, the king sent for the minister and said, "You have helped me overcome this major problem. You have rescued the entire empire. I trust you. But yet, I am not able to have faith in this prediction that you had obtained. If you don't mind, I seek to know the details. What is the method used for getting this prediction (anjanam). Who is the person who does it? Can you give me all the details."

The minister replied, "O King, you had ordered that all the aged people be killed. It is a terrible/worst sin. Yet, to comply with your orders, I had all of them killed. But, without your knowledge, I had spared one old man. Old people have tremendous knowledge that comes out of experience. In this time of difficulty, I approached the old man and asked him about the secret wealth, if any, which was hidden in the empire. It was because of his knowledge that you were able to get hold of this wealth. So far I did not dare to tell you the truth about the old man. I feared that you would kill both of us. So I lied about this prediction."

At this the king felt great remorse at his past deeds. He now called the old man and honoured him.

Rama loved his parents and always gave them the due respect. With His blessings, may love and devotion towards parents sprout in every heart!

Om Seeta Raamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 20

Dhanadena sama styaage satye dharma ivaaparah Ta mevam gunasampannam ramam satya parakramam

Meaning- In valour Rama equals Vishnu. He is as charming and pleasant as the moon. In anger He is as fierce as fire (kaalagni). In patience, He is like the earth. He can be compared to Kubera for His charitable disposition. In truth, He is like Dharma Devata (The Lord of righteousness).

The extraordinary deeds accomplished by Rama are parallel to the deeds accomplished by Lord Vishnu. Hence in valour Rama has been said to be equal to Vishnu.

In the story of Ambarisha we have heard that Durvasa Mahamuni was angry with Ambarisha and was about to curse him. Ambarisha, the ardent devotee, sought refuge at the feet of the Lord. At once, Vishnu sent forth His Sudarshana Chakra (discus). This discus chased Durvasa Mahamuni endlessly. The sage fell at the feet of the Lord who told him that He was helpless in this situation. The sage was asked to go back to Ambarisha and seek refuge in him. The sage pleaded with Ambarisha, who in turn prayed to the Sudarshana chakra to withdraw. Thus the sage was saved. Such is the power of the Sudarshan chakra. If the discus of the Supreme Lord has in it so much power, then what will be the power of the Supreme Lord who owns it? Needless to say, it is unimaginable.

A similar incident took place in Rama's life. The crow-demon Kakasura once attacked Sita. Angered at this, Rama empowered a blade of grass with the requisite mantras and directed it at Kakasura. To escape from this blade of grass, Kakasura ran everywhere. Yet it continued to chase him. Kakasura covered all the three lokas (worlds) but to no avail. He pleaded with everyone, but none could protect him. In the end he sought protection from Rama himself. Rama then protected him.

Terrified of Rama's valour, the ocean permitted him to build a bridge across the ocean. Rama was thus equal to Vishnu in valour.

Somavat priyadarsanah - Rama is eternally pleasant and charming like the moon. He showers happiness and bliss upon everyone who approaches him. More important than this is the fact that He drives away the grief of everyone.

The moon has a stigma by which it cyclically waxes and wanes every alternate fortnight. Rama has no such faults. In radiance and shine He surpasses the moon in showering bliss upon people.

If such a radiant and pleasant Lord gets angry then it is only against those who atrociously trouble those devotees of His, who have sought refuge in Him. His anger at such times is comparable to the fire at the time of destruction of the universe (pralaya kaalagni). Rama who is otherwise pleasant and calm, turns fierce and fearful in anger.

Ordinary people experience this anger at times of insult or defeat. Rama does not get angry when He is insulted or defeated. On the other hand, He gets intensely

angry when someone troubles or attacks those persons who have placed implicit trust in Him.

Patience is a virtue. In patience, Rama has been compared to the earth. The earth patiently tolerates all the atrocities and the sins that are being committed by the people living on it. Rama likewise exhibits great patience against those who insult him.

Rama, the storehouse of virtues, has been compared to Kubera in matters pertaining to charity. Kubera is a large-hearted and great philanthropist. To be rich is not great. To be of a charitable nature is true greatness. It is a great virtue. Happily and willingly Rama was ever ready to give away in entirety every possession of His. This is a truly admirable trait. Due to this He has been compared to Kubera.

The one who has renounced everything does not have the necessity to tell lies. Rama was eternally truthful. He protected truth in all situations. For this He has been compared to the Dharma Devata (God of righteousness).

In this world, people like Harishchandra can only adhere to their vow of truthfulness (satya vrata) at all times but they cannot absolve others from the sins/ mistakes due to their falsehood (asatya dosha). Rama however protected zealously his vow of truthfulness (satya vrata) and at the same time he was able to protect the others from their sins/mistakes due to uttering falsehood (asatya dosha). In other words, Rama had in him the capacity to protect others from the sins that arose from their own mistakes of uttering lies. For this reason He protected the satya vrata (vow of truthfulness) of his father.

When all these traits are critically and deeply analyzed, then, in our eyes Rama ceases to appear as a mere king. He will appear to us as God. We will understand that He is Paramatma/ Parabrahma. Sri Ramachandra Parabrahmane namaha.

With this we have completed the Bala Kanda part of the Shata Shloki Ramayana. May Lord Rama shower his grace upon everyone so that they can go in depth into the analysis of His traits!

Om Seeta raamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 21

We have so far completed the Bala Kanda of the Shata Shloki Ramayana. In this, Narada Maharishi while explaining the traits of Rama, has subtly explained the birth and the story of Rama. We shall now seek to understand those subtle details.

One day, Valmiki who had heard the complete story of Ramayana from Narada Maharishi, went to the River Tamasa. There he saw a couple of birds enjoying. Meanwhile a hunter came there, and mercilessly killed the male bird. Valmiki Maharishi was distraught and he instantaneously cursed the hunter. The curse came out from his mouth in the form of a hymn (shloka). Valmiki himself was utterly astonished at the hymn.

At that minute Lord Brahma appeared before him and said, "O great sage! I got that hymn uttered from your mouth. Please compose the entire story of Ramayana in hymns of this similar pattern. You will come to understand thoroughly the secretive and hidden messages within them. There will be no error of any kind in your composition. Your composition will remain on earth as long as the mountains and rivers exist on earth. In earth and in Oordhvaloka, as long as your composition of Ramayana exists, you will live". Saying so, Brahma disappeared.

Abiding by the orders of Lord Brahma, Valmiki set upon the task of composition of Ramayana. He sat down with his palms joined and focused his attention. He was able to see the entire happenings of Ramayana in minute detail. He could see Dasharatha, his conversation with his queens, Rama, Sita, their exile, and their movements completely. What a lucky soul!

After Rama had been crowned as the king and during his rule, Valmiki Maharishi composed the Ramayana. The future story was composed under the heading 'Uttara Kanda'. He even taught this entire story to the twins Kusha-Lava, who were growing up there. He made them render the entire composition in the form of a song.

With the permission of their Guru Valmiki, these twins began singing and spreading the story of Rama in all directions. Rama came to know of this fact. He had learnt that these twins had arrived in Ayodhya as part of their tour. He invited them to the palace and together with his brothers, sat to listen to their rendition. Mesmerized by their song, Rama got up from his throne, came down and sat on the floor amidst all the citizens and began to listen attentively to it.

This is how the story of Ramayana was born.

Among the greatest rulers of the earth were the kings who belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty. They ruled the kingdom of Kosala with Ayodhya as their capital. This city was built by Manu and developed by Dasharatha. Dasharatha was childless for a very long time. When he was about to begin the Ashwamedha yaaga, his minister Sumantra spoke to him about Sage Rishyashringa and his greatness. Dasharatha invited the great sage to his palace and also conducted the Putra Kameshti yaaga (ritual conducted for begetting children) under the able guidance of the sage. The Gods were pleased and from the homa fire, Dasharatha received a bowl of payasam (a type of Indian milk pudding) with instructions that it should be consumed by the queens.

Exactly at this time, the Gods had assembled in front of Vishnu and prayed to Him, "O Lord, the atrocities of Demon Ravana are beyond tolerance. This demon has procured the most difficult boons. It has made it impossible to slay him. In his opinion humans are trivial and insignificant. Hence he has chosen that his end should be at the hands of a human being. So we request you to kindly incarnate as the son of Emperor Dasharatha".

Srihari agreed to this request. The Devatas were happy and they immediately incarnated as Vanaras. On an auspicious day, the three queens gave birth to 4 sons. Vashistha Maharishi named the eldest amongst them, the son of Kaushalya as Srirama. The son of Kaikeyi was named Bharata. Sumitra had twins- the eldest amongst them was named Lakshmana and the youngest was Shatrughna. This is the story of Ramayana contained in the Bala Kanda.

Om Seeta raamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 22

Rama and Lakshmana were inseparable from infancy. Likewise Bharata and Shatrughna were inseparable. These boys were taught all the Shastras and they excelled in all that was taught to them. When the boys reached the appropriate age, Dasharatha decided to get them married.

Just around that time Maharishi Vishwamitra arrived there and said, "O King! You are a very righteous ruler who rules under the able guidance of Maharishi Vashistha. You protect your vow of truthfulness (satya vrata) very zealously. I have undertaken a yagna with the objective of attaining certain specific results. Two demons however are causing obstacles in my mission. Kindly send your eldest born Rama with me. He is a great fearless warrior. I know a lot about him. He can help me. In return I will also teach him deeper knowledge of weaponry (Astra Vidya). I will ensure that he will acquire fame in all the three worlds. I seek to keep him with me for just 10 days. That's all. Have faith and send him with me."

Hearing these words, it is said that Dasharatha fainted. He thereafter pleaded with Vishwamitra in various ways. Observing that the situation was going out of hand, Maharishi Vashistha intervened and said, "O King. This Vishwamitra has in him the ability to destroy all the demons in this universe. Maintaining apprehensions and doubts with respect to him is uncalled for. Please send Rama with him".

The words of his Guru gave Dasharatha the needed confidence. Happily he sent Rama and Lakshmana. While they were travelling, Maharishi Vishwamitra taught Rama the knowledge of Bala and Atibala. Soon they reached the Anga desha (region). There they sighted an ashram. Explaining to them about this ashram, Vishwamitra said, "this is the ashram of Shiva. For having disturbed Shiva's meditation, Manmatha was reduced to ashes at this place. For this reason, this place has acquired the name 'Anga desha'."

The next day while they were crossing the Ganga in a boat, they heard a thunderous noise. Then Maharishi Vishwamitra said, "Manasa sarovara is a lake that has been created by the sankalpa (intent) of Lord Brahma. River Sarayu, which flows past Ayodhya, is its branch. This thunderous noise that you heard is on account of the merger of Sarayu with Ganga".

From here they entered a very thick, deadly and fearful forest. Rama was surprised upon seeing it and asked the sage to divulge some details about the forest. Vishwamitra then said, "For having killed Vrittasura, Lord Indra was tainted with a terrible sin (brahma hatya paapa). This was the region where he was absolved of his sins. As such, the great saints and Devatas constructed two great regions (desha) here. They were vast provinces and were named Malada and Kurusha. After some time a Yakshini by name Tataka arrived here and destroyed both the cities. She kills everyone who enters this land and spares no one. Kindly kill her and relieve the suffering of the people here. You should also restore these provinces to their earlier glory".

Thus Vishwamitra prepared the ground for the destruction of the demoness.

Om Seeta Raamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 23

Vishwamitra continued, "Rama, long ago, with the grace of Lord Brahma, the Yaksha Suketu was blessed with a daughter Tataka, who had in her the strength of a thousand elephants. She was exquisitely beautiful. She married Sunda and begot a son by name Maricha.

Once Sunda harassed Maharishi Agastya. The resultant curse of this sage led to his instant death. To avenge the death of her husband, the enraged Tataka, along with her son Maricha, rushed at the sage. At this the sage cursed her son, "May you transform into a wicked demon (rakshasa)". With this Tataka was even further infuriated. At this, the sage cursed her, "Turn into an ugly terrible demoness".

From then on, Tataka no longer adheres to dharma. For no reason she attacked these townships of Malada and Kurusha, terrorized people and has mercilessly devoured many innocent persons. Rama, you need to kill this demoness and restore dharma to this land".

Being ever compassionate, Rama began to ponder whether it was right to kill a woman. At this time of conflict, Vishwamitra explained to him the entire dharma sookshma (the minute principles underlying the adherence to dharma), "Tataka is a demoness. Even minutely she does not have the stri tattva (essence of a woman) in her".

Hearing the words of this sage, Rama instantly readied his weapon and pulled its string. The loud thunderous sound that it produced echoed across the vast forest causing Tataka to tremble. In mad rage she began to rush towards the sound, raising heaps of dust and covering the entire place with it. Along with it she also showered a rain of huge rocks upon Rama and Lakshmana. In anger, Rama with his arrows cut off both her hands. Lakshmana chopped off her nose and ears. Undeterred by this, Tataka made herself invisible, resorted to sorcery and continued to attack the brothers. She continued to rain gigantic rocks upon them. Standing amidst this rock shower, Rama steadied his bow and hit her with his powerful arrow. She fell down dead.

All the Devatas accompanied by Lord Indra arrived there and showered praises upon Rama. Lord Indra saluted Maharishi Vishwamitra and said, "O great sage, Rama has to carry out a very specific divine deed. Hence please impart to him the knowledge of weaponry in entirety". Saying so Indra disappeared.

Agreeing to the command of the Lord, early next morning, Vishwamitra imparted to Rama this knowledge of weaponry in totality. Thereafter they resumed their journey and soon afterwards sighted the Siddha ashrama. Vishwamitra said, "This is the ashram of Vamana murti. After gifting away the three planes (worlds) to Indra, Lord Vamana resided here for sometime. This is the place where I am conducting my yagna. The demons Maricha and Subahu are creating obstacles for my yagna. You please kill them and thus ensure the success of my yagna."

Rama and Lakshmana rested for that day. Early next morning, the yagna commenced. The smoke of the homa enveloped the entire place and began to spread

in all directions. The sight of this smoke incensed the demons Maricha and Subahu and they rushed to the homa place. With their bows readied, Rama and Lakshmana were awaiting the arrival of these demons. The demons began to shower large quantities of blood into the sacrificial altar.

Angered at this, Rama fired his manavastra (weapon) at Maricha. At unimaginable speed the arrow took Maricha and threw him 100 yojanas away into the ocean. Maricha did not die. He was swirled round and round and finally thrown into the ocean. To Maricha, it was as if he had lost his life itself. He could not even return from here. After hitting Maricha, the next instant, Rama picked the weapon Agneya astra and attacked Subahu with it. Subahu was instantaneously killed.

The hordes of demons who witnessed this, ran away in various different directions. Rama used the powerful and extra-ordinary weapon Vayuvya astra and killed all of them.

In this manner, Vishwamitra's yagna was successfully conducted. Vishwamitra praised Rama profusely.

Om Seetaramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 24

All the sages of Vishwamitra's ashram entertained a desire to visit Mithila accompanied by the brothers Rama and Lakshmana. They began to explain the story of the Shiva dhanus (bow) to the brothers. Conceding to the wishes of the sages, Vishwamitra handed over the Siddha ashram to the Vara Devatas and all of them began the journey to Mithila.

For a little distance, the birds and the animals of that land too accompanied Rama, who in turn affectionately greeted and spoke to them all. The sages rested on the banks of River Shona. Rama sought to know the speciality of this land and hence Vishwamitra explained it in detail.

The next evening they rested on the banks of River Ganga. At that time Rama learnt about the story of Mother Ganga. In addition, Vishwamitra also taught Rama the Skanda Charitra, Emperor Sagara's story, Baghiratha's story and the efforts that he undertook to bring River Ganga on to earth and way in which River Ganga actually descended to earth. As it was dark by then, they rested there for the entire night. The next morning they continued their journey and reached the land of Vishala desa.

To fulfill Rama's desire, Vishwamitra explained the significance of this land. He said, "Long time ago, the churning of the milky ocean (Ksheera sagara mathana) took place. When the nectar (amrita) finally emerged, a terrible war broke out between the Devatas (Gods) and the demons in which the demons were slaughtered in huge numbers. Diti, the mother of demons, distraught upon seeing this, prayed to her husband Maharishi Kashyapa to bless her with a valorous son who could overpower Indra, the Lord of Heaven.

What a strange twist! After some time Diti was pregnant. Indra meanwhile came to know her intentions and devised a plan. Finding a suitable time, He entered her womb and cut the foetus into 7 parts. The foetus began to shriek piteously. To console it, Indra said, "maa rudaha" which means 'do not cry'.

He emerged out of Diti's womb, paid his obeisance and said to her, "Mother, you became impious by letting loose your long braid (hair) and sleeping in the wrong direction. Your head was positioned in the direction where the legs ought to be. This would render your vrata impure and hence I acted in this manner. Please excuse me. Your seven sons will be the seven wind-gods (presiding deities of cosmic air divisions) who will rule in all the seven periods of time. They will acquire fame and will be known as 'Sapta Marut'. Being Devatas they will enjoy all the comforts."

The term 'seven time periods' means 'at all times'.

Diti was immeasurably pleased upon hearing this. Indra returned back to his abode. O Rama, this land of Vishala is the province where this incident took place in the past. To the couple Ikshvaaku and Alambusa, a highly righteous son by the name Vishaala was born. He constructed this city. Presently, from his lineage, a king by name Sumati is ruling this vast kingdom.

The speciality of this lineage is that all the successive kings enjoy longevity, they are all extremely righteous and highly valorous".

Around that time, King Sumati, having heard about the arrival of the great Sage Vishwamitra, came to them and extended a warm welcome. He also learnt about the heroism and lineage of two brothers Rama and Lakshmana and lovingly greeted them.

Having rested there for that night, Vishwamitra, together with Rama and Lakshmana resumed the journey early next morning. As they were walking, they came across a dilapidated hermitage. Rama was curious to know, in complete detail, about this place.

In response to this request from Rama, Vishwamitra detailed the entire story of Maharishi Gowtama and Ahalya and as to how Ahalya was cursed to turn into a rock. He told them that this was the hermitage of Maharishi Gowtama. Vishwamitra said, "Rama, only you can redeem her of her curse. Go ahead and do the needful".

Rama entered the ashram. With just the darshan of Rama, Ahalya was totally relieved of her curse. She was also completely absolved of all her sins. At that minute Maharishi Gowtama appeared at the ashram. In great elation, he, along with his wife Ahalya, reverentially welcomed Sage Vishwamitra and the brothers Rama and Lakshmana and offered them the due worship. The sound of the divine drumbeats could be heard from Heaven and the Devatas, who were watching this, showered flowers upon Rama.

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam namah.

Episode 25

Having set right the household of Maharishi Gowtama, Rama, together with Lakshmana and all the other sages resumed His journey and in a short while set foot into the kingdom of Mithila.

Already by then many great kings and sages had assembled in Mithila to witness the yagna that was taking place. The entire city was bustling with people. Upon hearing that Maharishi Vishwamitra had arrived into the kingdom, King Janaka together with his chief priest Maharishi Shatananda, arrived personally to welcome them. They offered the sage the customary worship.

Janaka then enquired about the brothers, Rama and Lakshmana and found out their story in detail. He was very happy when he understood that they had come to see Shiva's bow (dhanus).

Maharishi Shatananda was overjoyed to know of the heroic deeds performed by Rama while on the way to Mithila. Shatananda was the son of Gowtama and Ahalya and hence the news that his mother was relieved from her curse brought him unimaginable joy. Grateful to Vishwamitra for having united his parents through the medium of these two brothers, Maharishi Shatananda joyfully explained to Rama the spiritual greatness of Maharishi Vishwamitra. He told them the story of Trishanku, the method in which the Trishanku Swarga (heaven) was created, the story of Ambarisha, the methods adopted by Vishwamitra to scale up the spiritual ladder and emerge as a Brahmarishi and many other relevant episodes pertaining to Maharishi Vishwamitra.

The next morning Vishwamitra explained to the brothers Rama and Lakshmana, the history and the greatness of the Shiva's bow. He also told them that King Janaka had vowed to give his daughter Sita in marriage to that person, who could bend and string it.

Rama was eager to see this bow. King Janaka then ordered that the bow should immediately be brought forth to the Yaaga shala. His ministers in turn called for many mighty, muscular and able-bodied persons and asked them to collectively fetch the sacred bow. This bow was enclosed in a gigantic iron casket/carriage that had 8 wheels. Hundreds of able-bodied persons dragged it and with difficulty managed to bring it.

Showing the bow, King Janaka said to Rama, "This bow has been reverentially worshipped by all my ancestors. No Devata, Yaksha (celestial beings), human nor demon has been able to bend and string it to date. No one had the strength to even bend it".

The sight of this bow created in Rama, a desire to string it. He expressed the same to Maharishi Vishwamitra. Both Vishwamitra and Janaka happily approved of it. Effortlessly Rama held the bow and lifted it up. The greatest emperors, kings, sages and all those who had assembled there were simply wonder-struck. In the presence of one and all, Rama easily pulled the rope and stretched it with an aim of stringing the bow. That's all! All of a sudden, with an ear shattering and deafening noise like that of lightening, the bow broke into two. The earth shuddered violently. All the

people present there, barring Rama, Lakshmana, Vishwamitra and Janaka swooned on the spot.

Janaka's happiness knew no bounds. In great jubilation he said to Vishwamitra, "O Sage, Rama is the only true valorous person in this entire world. I never even imagined that such a gallant hero exists within this creation. I will give my daughter Sita's hand to him in marriage".

Janaka called his ministers and immediately sent them to Ayodhya with this auspicious news. Dasharatha was very thrilled to know about Rama's marriage and together with all his relatives, friends and retinue, eagerly set forth to Mithila.

Dasharatha received a very warm welcome from King Janaka. The learned pundits, the wise great sages as well as the family priests of both the kings assembled and after the due discussions, fixed the date and time for the marriage.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namah.

Episode 26

Janaka said to his family Guru Shatananda, "O sage, for this auspicious occasion, I seek that my brother Kushadhwaja should be by my side. Please invite him. Let him also share this happiness."

Upon receiving this news Kushadhwaja arrived immediately and offered his obeisance to all the elders present there. He took his seat next to his brother Janaka. In accordance with the invite received from Janaka, Dasharatha, together with his entire retinue and under the guidance of Maharishi Vashistha arrived at the court of King Janaka.

In the court Dasharatha announced, "O King Janaka, in our family we always follow the guidance and path laid down by our Guru, Maharishi Vashistha. Now, if Vishwamitra Maharishi permits, our Guru Vashistha will read out our entire lineage".

In the presence of everyone, Vashistha Maharishi read out the entire lineage of Ikshvaaku dynasty beginning from Surya (Sun God). This is known as Maha Sankalpa. He concluded by saying, "Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna are all great valorous personalities. Hence a marriage alliance with this family is worthy".

Thereafter Emperor Janaka read out his entire lineage beginning with King Nimi. In the presence of all the respected elders, both the kings gave their consent for this wedding. Maharishi Vashistha and Vishwamitra discussed between themselves and thereafter Vishwamitra addressed Janaka and said, "Your daughter Sita is being given in marriage to Rama and your second daughter Urmila is being given to Lakshmana. This is good. Your brother Kushadhwaja too has two daughters Mandavi and Shrutakeerti. It would be wise to give them in marriage to Bharata and Shatrughna respectively. At this auspicious moment we desire that both your families should merge to become one family".

This news delighted Janaka and Kushadhwaja and they happily gave their consent. The air was filled with happiness. They offered their obeisance to all the sages assembled there.

Dasharatha proceeded to complete all the rituals that should precede the wedding ceremony. 4 lakh healthy, milk yielding cows, each with a calf were brought to Mithila. In those days, maintaining and gifting of such large number of cows was considered extremely great. Emperors would rear cows in plenty. Only kings and emperors could maintain such a large population of cows. Dasharatha ordered that the horns of the cows be adorned with golden jewels. He even gave away an equivalent number of vessels that would be needed to milk them. Seeking the welfare of his sons, Dasharatha gifted these cows to Brahmins assembled there.

Exactly at that time, the maternal uncle of Bharata, Yudhaajit, arrived there and said to Dasharatha, "O King, my father seeks to see his grandson Bharata. He sent me to fetch him. Upon reaching Ayodhya I got the news of this marriage and I hastened to this place. I thought that by coming here I can attend the wedding and also get the opportunity to meet you."

Dasharatha warmly welcomed Yudhajit. Meanwhile the brothers took the customary holy bath (mangala snana) before the marriage, adorned themselves in royal clothes and arrived at the marriage hall. Maharishi Vashistha approached King Janaka and said, "O King! The groom has arrived and now you have to fulfill your dharma".

Janaka arrived there with his daughter Sita and placed her hand in Rama's hand. Simultaneously, Urmila was given away to Lakshmana, Mandavi to Bharata and Shrutakeerti to Shatrughna. The priests recited the holy Vedic hymns at that time. All the 4 couples circumambulated around the holy fire.

The Devatas who were witnessing this incident from Heaven showered flowers. Sounds of drumbeats from Heaven could be heard. The newly weds took the blessings of the elders present there.

The next morning, in great jubilation, Dasharatha, along with his sons and daughters-in-law began the journey back to Ayodhya. He generously gave away many valuable gifts to all the servants who had attended upon them. Janaka accompanied the marriage party up to some distance and then bidding them farewell, he returned to Mithila.

Sita Raama kalyana (marriage) is no ordinary marriage. It is a divine event; an extraordinary and wonderful event. However much is spoken about it, it always falls short.

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 27

The marriage party was calmly proceeding towards Ayodhya. The trees and the woods were all unruffled and peaceful. There was great merriment in the hearts of everyone.

From here begin the plays (leelas) of Rama.

All of a sudden, many evil omens became visible. The birds began to shriek horrendously and fearfully. Normally, when the deer are grazing peacefully in the forest and if suddenly a wild animal were to approach the precincts, the birds begin to chirp loudly and differently. Whether they do so to warn the deer or out of fear is unknown but what is known is that suddenly a disturbance is caused in the otherwise peaceful surroundings. In the similar manner, the sudden frightful shrieking of the birds brought about a grave apprehension in the minds of all.

To add to this, sudden powerful and strong winds that had the capacity to shake up the entire earth began to blow. Huge trees came crashing down to earth. A huge screen of dust covered everything. The next instant darkness enveloped the earth. Unable to withstand this fury of nature, Dasaratha's entire army was scattered. Almost everyone swooned. Barring the great sages, the 4 brothers and their father everyone else was nervous. Unable to even move, they were helplessly standing.

Why were ill omens being heard at an auspicious hour? They had left Mithila at an auspicious hour and the newly weds were still in their marriage attire. Could it be that some demons were coming to attack them, they wondered.

All of a sudden, from that impenetrable darkness, a bright illumination like the pralaya kalagni (the huge fire at the time of dissolution) was visible. A person as huge as the Mountain Kailasa was now approaching them. He had large curly locks of hair. From his shoulders a huge axe was hanging. The arrows in his hand were glittering like lightening. He was holding an enormous bow. He was none other than Parashurama!

Seeing him, the sages were dismayed. 'O God, why did he arrive at such auspicious time' they thought. To be quiet was meaningless and would not solve the problem on hand. Hence all the sages reverentially worshipped him.

Parashurama however behaved as if they were nonexistent. His gaze was entirely focused on Dasharatha's son Rama. Addressing Rama, he shouted, "Rama, I have heard a lot about your prowess. I have come here solely to see you. I have with me a mighty bow that belonged to my father, Sage Jamadagni. If you can hold my bow and string it, only then I shall accept your greatness. I seek to combat with you."

Dasharatha was now totally perturbed. Folding his palms, he appealed to Parashurama in various different ways, trying to secure the safety of his son, but it was of no use. Parashurama was undaunted and without even caring for the pleas of the emperor, he continued to address Rama, and said, "Rama, the bow that you broke and this bow that I hold are equally mighty. Vishwakarma created both of them. Of the two bows, one was given to Shiva for the destruction of the demon

Tripurasura. The second bow was handed over to Lord Vishnu. That which you broke was Shiva's bow. That which I hold is Vishnu's bow.

This mighty bow was given to my ancestor Sage Ruchika. Thereafter my father the revered Sage Jamadagni had it in his possession. He was a great sage. Kartaviryarjuna mercilessly killed my revered father. In uncontrollable anger, I went around the globe and killed all kshatriyas (warrior clan). I conquered the entire earth. Thereafter I gifted away this entire earth to Maharishi Kashyapa.

While I was seated in Mountain Mahendra in penance, I came to know of you. I heard that you had broken the Shiva's bow. If you are a true Kshatriya (warrior), take this bow and string it. Come and battle with me". Parashurama thus commanded Rama.

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 28

Rama was the human incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Calmly he heard all that was said so far. He replied, "I have heard a lot about you in the past. For no apparent reason you are demeaning and insulting me and are asking me to prove my prowess as though I am timid and incapable to handle the bow. Never mind. See for yourself my power and might".

Saying so, Rama forcefully seized the bow as well as the arrows from Parashurama. Effortlessly he bent the bow and tied its string. He positioned the arrow in the readied bow and challenged, "O Bhargava Rama, you are a Brahmin by birth. Moreover you are a relative of Vishwamitra. Hence I do not seek to destroy you with my arrows. Yet, at the same time, the arrow that has once been fixed to the string has to be released. Hence let me know, what should I destroy. Should I take away the speed of your movement (motility) or shall I eliminate those unparalleled realms of heavens that you have earned due to the power of your penance? I leave the choice to you".

At that minute all the worlds became insentient (without any movement). All the Gods were silently witnessing this incident. Parashurama lost his sheen and his vitality/energy. In fact, he trembled. He politely said, "Rama, it is already getting dark. I have to reach my residence Mahendragiri immediately. Hence do not take away the speed of my movements. If you desire, you can take away all my punya lokas (unparalleled realms of heaven) that I have earned through penance".

The next second Rama let out his arrow and did so accordingly. Parashurama circumambulated around Rama and left for Mahendragiri.

The darkness disappeared. The surroundings were once again rendered calm and peaceful. The Devatas glorified Rama in many ways. Rama handed over that bow and arrows to Lord Varuna and paid his obeisance to all the great sages there. Everyone was pleased and they praised Rama in many ways.

The marriage party reached Ayodhya. All the citizens welcomed them joyously. There were celebrations in the city. The queen mothers Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra warmly welcomed their daughters-in-law and took them into their respective palaces. In addition they also gave away many items in charity to the Brahmins.

After some days, Dasharatha called Bharata and said, "Your grandfather wants to see you. Go with your maternal uncle Yudhaajit, who has come to take you. Your grandfather will be pleased". Bharata took Shatrughna along with him when he left for his grandfather's house.

Rama and Lakshmana remained in Ayodhya serving their father. In accordance with the wishes of his father, Rama occupied himself in the matters pertaining to the welfare of the kingdom. He redressed the grievances of the citizens.

Rama and Sita were living harmoniously. With Sita by his side, Rama was glowing like Maha Vishnu who glows radiantly when Goddess Lakshmi is by his side.

With this, the Bala Kanda of Ramayana comes to an end.

**Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.
Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Jaya Rama.**

Episode 29

Jyeshthamshreshthagunairyuktam priyam dasharathassutam Prakrteenaam hitairyuktam prakriti priyakaamyayaa

Meaning- With a view that all the citizens of Ayodhya should benefit, King Dasharatha sought to appoint Rama, his eldest born, who was an embodiment of all virtues (sadgunas), who at all times sought the welfare of his citizens and who was very dear to him, as the crown-prince.

Rama with his abundant good traits was just like that garden replete with every variety of flower and fruit trees, each of which is completely laden with fruits ready for consumption. A person entering the garden can choose any fruit or flower based on his desire/need. Such a garden has the capacity to satiate the hunger of all the beings in totality. Thus it is useful to the society. Likewise, Rama possessed every good trait (sadguna), each in a permanent and completely ripened state, and thus was truly useful to everyone.

There is another speciality here. Similar to the Kalyana gunas (16 auspicious traits) of Paramatma, Rama has in Him every good/auspicious trait (sadguna). As fragrance naturally abides in a flower, all the good and auspicious traits existed inherently (naturally, innately) in Rama.

A tree/plant bears flowers or fruits purely with the intention that it should be of use to others (paropakara). The good traits in Rama were likewise, purely for the benefit of others. Every person who sought shelter in Him, benefited from Him.

Due to the prowess and might possessed by Rama, He became innately capable of protecting all the citizens of the land. Such a person is truly deserving of being crowned the king. Such a person has in him the capacity to handle the responsibilities and the pressures of a ruler.

Amongst the 4 sons of Dasharatha, Rama was the eldest. Added to this, all the traits required for handling the responsibilities of kingship existed within him. He was a master in the Kshatriya techniques of sama, dana, bheda and danda (these were the 4 prevalent ways of dealing with opponents). In addition he was well versed in the knowledge of Sandhi, Vighraha, Yaana, Asana, Dvaidhibhava and Samashraya. (These can be commonly understood to mean 6 techniques of foreign policy). Just as there are 8 fold steps in yoga (ashtanga yoga), there are 6 techniques that are essential for safeguarding the kingdom. Only a ruler had a complete knowledge of these techniques.

Dasharatha was aware of the depth of knowledge and expertise possessed by Rama. Therefore he was inclined towards appointing him as the crown prince. With this idea in mind, he sought to find out the opinion of the citizens. Dasharatha was greatly pleased to know that the citizens held Rama in high esteem and that they loved him very dearly. He also understood that Rama in turn loved his people very deeply. There was not even one person in the entire kingdom who disliked Rama. In fact, they were eagerly awaiting the day when Rama would begin to rule. This news brought great happiness to Dasharatha.

To fulfill the desires of the citizens is the responsibility of the king. Nevertheless, to be appointed a ruler, just obtaining the appreciation of the citizens is in itself inadequate. One should have earned the appreciation of even the ministers. Only then can the person be truly eligible for the post.

Rama's speciality was that the persons surrounding him appeared like Him. It means that all the persons who mingled with him absorbed his good traits. This was the speciality of Rama Rajya. It is said that any person who entered his kingdom automatically acquired good traits.

Here, in this instance, the ministers themselves were praying that Rama should be appointed as the king.

Rama was ignorant of all these developments. He had never craved to be appointed as the king of the land. In his eyes, His position remained the same whether he was appointed a king or not.

Only he who entertains desires is affected by its outcome. Such a person grieves when his desire is unfulfilled. To one who is unattached and who has no desires, how can there be grief due to non-fulfillment of desires?

One day, seated in his court, Dasharatha expressed his desire and sought the opinion of all the ministers. The ministers were overjoyed upon hearing these words from the King and unanimously and happily they gave their consent. They praised Rama profusely.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 30

Sa satya vachanachaiva dharmapasena samyatah Vivaasayaamaasa sutam raamam dasharathah priyam.

Meaning- With the intent that truthfulness should rule, King Dasharatha was tied down by the noose called dharma (righteousness). He sent his dearest son Rama into the forest.

Dasharatha trembled upon hearing these cruel words from Kaikeyi's mouth. He fell down in a swoon. He regained his consciousness a little while later. He was in great agony.

After sometime he cried, "O cruel woman of wicked conduct. Do you seek to annihilate my family? What harm has Rama done to you? Rama has always loved you more than his own mother. Yet you are being unjust to him O demoness. He always serves you first and only then attends to his own mother. You too cannot live even for a moment without him. You would always leave your own son and choose to carry Rama when he was little. Now why are you behaving in this manner? Who has taught you all this? Who has fed you all this? What a fool am I! I brought a poisonous snake and was lovingly feeding it all these years and now I have brought about my own self-destruction".

After this outburst, Dasharatha pleaded with her in many more ways. He said, "I beg of you, my dearest wife. Choose any other boon apart from this. I plead you. I will grant you any other desire apart from this one. If you persist, Bharata will be made the king of this land. But please do not abandon Rama. I cannot imagine sending him away to the forest for so long. I cannot even live for a moment without seeing him".

Dasharatha thus begged of her. He even touched her feet and prayed. The more he pleaded, the more defiant Kaikeyi was. She kicked him with her feet. Fiercely and ruthlessly she said, "O valiant king. Earlier, you had given me the choice of boons and had promised to fulfill them when I sought. Now, a little while earlier, you have taken an oath as well. Having done so, now you seek to go back on your promise. You are grieving now because you have to fulfill your promise. How can you be called truthful? You are a disgrace to the clan of Ikshvaaku. What dharma is it to break one's promise?

Let me warn you- if you go against your promise and appoint Rama as the king, then I shall consume poison then and there in your presence. How can I bear to see Koushalya being called Raaja-maata (queen mother)? If not now, then when else will I get that title? O king, I had pinned great hopes on Bharata. I want to see Rama leaving for the forest. Only that will give me peace. I will not accept any other boon in its place".

Dasharatha felt as if he was struck by a thunderbolt. In great agony, he lay weeping. Such was his pain that he could not even move his lips or open his eyes. After a while, with great difficulty, he said, "Kaikeyi, I cannot live without Rama. Lakshmana cannot remain separated from Rama even for a little while. Rama and Lakshmana are one soul in two bodies. Lakshmana loves Rama more dearly than either you or I do. If Lakshmana is pained, then naturally Sumitra, his mother, will grieve. Through

this desire of yours, you are causing grief to each and every one of us. Please re-think. The entire kingdom will be rendered sorrowful. They will say that for the sake of a woman the king has deserted his own son and sent him away to the forests. What do you know of Rama? The moment he hears that he has to leave for the forests, he will do so. He will not even question or wait to find out the reason behind this decision. How I wish Rama would go against my decision”.

‘Kaikeyi, you are hell-bent upon tormenting me. Do you know that the entire kingdom will become chaotic with Rama’s absence? Whom will Bharata rule? Kaikeyi, you are a goddess. Kindly shower your blessings upon me. Grant my wish. Let Rama remain here itself. I will once again hold your feet.” Dasharatha tried to hold on to her feet, but then before he could reach her feet, he sank and fell down like an ailing man.

The whole night Kaikeyi adamantly continued to torment and pierce him with her harsh words. She preached about adherence to truthfulness. She continued, “O King! All of you from the Ikshvaaku dynasty are said to be eternally truthful. You take great pride in this. You are all extremely righteous. How can you now go against it?’

Dasharatha wriggled in pain upon hearing these words. The rope called dharma and the vow called truthfulness bound him tightly. In anguish he lay down, agitated, helpless and pale. He choked. People despair when they fail to have a darshan of Rama. Then what would be the feelings of a father who was being forced to send away his son into the forests?

Om Seeta Ramabhayaam namaha.

Episode 31

Sa jagaama vanam veerah pratijna manupaalayan Piturvacana nirdesaat kaikeyyaah priyakaaranaat.

Meaning- The great valorous hero Rama, to bring about happiness to his mother Kaikeyi, took up his father's words as a command and in order to fulfill them, left for the forest.

Time and tide wait for no man. The night passed away and the morning dawned. It was the day on which Rama had to be ceremoniously appointed the crown prince of the land. All the arrangements were duly completed. The city wore a festive look. The recital of the Vedic hymns and of the auspicious musical renderings could be heard. People thronged in thousands to witness the coronation ceremony. All the royal paths were filled with people. Maharishi Vashistha together with his disciples bathed in the River Sarayu and arrived at the court. Vashistha summoned Sumantra and asked him to fetch the king, who had not yet arrived.

When Sumantra arrived at the palace of Kaikeyi, Dasharatha told him, "Go and fetch Rama to this place. This is my order". Sumantra approached Rama and informed him of the king's order. The next moment Rama set out to meet the king. When he approached the doorway, he found that Lakshmana was waiting for him with folded hands. Lakshmana walked behind Rama, who was on his way to meet the king.

Rama reached the quarters of Mother Kaikeyi. He went into the room where Dasharatha was lying down and offered his reverential obeisance to his father. He also offered namaskara to Kaikeyi's feet. Dasharatha could not utter any thing apart from the word 'Rama'.

Rama shuddered upon seeing the plight of his father. He was totally frightened. He was filled with grief. He turned towards Kaikeyi and said, "O Mother, it appears as if my father is deeply perturbed by something. Did I commit any mistake? Is he not in good health? What is he thinking about? Please tell me, amma. O mother, please tell me what the king seeks. I pledge that I will fulfill whatever he seeks".

Heartlessly and shamelessly Kaikeyi began to speak, "Long ago your father had give me two boons. As the first boon I have sought that you should be exiled to the forests for 14 years. As the second boon I have asked that my son Bharata should be crowned as the king. Now it is in your hands to fulfill your father's vow of truthfulness".

Upon hearing this, Rama did not grieve. He remained absolutely unperturbed. Feelings of hatred, anger or irritation were not visible in him. He was neither smiling nor laughing, neither surprised nor shocked. He remained like a statue.

His father had not commanded him to leave for the forests. It was his mother who had done so. Rama did not even discuss about it. He did not pick faults in it. He silently accepted it as their command. He had already decided to honour the command at any cost. This was his greatness. More importantly, he sought to see the delight and happiness in the face of his mother Kaikeyi.

Rama replied, "Mother, I stand by the command of my father. I will obey it. Wearing the hide and braided locks I shall leave for the forest. I will live there. For the sake of my brother Bharata, I will give away not just this kingdom, but also my life. Please ask Bharata to return. He should be crowned as the king upon his arrival".

Kaikeyi was overjoyed. Dasharatha turned pale. Overwhelmed with sorrow, he fainted. Rama hurried to leave for the forest. While leaving, he said to Kaikeyi, "Dear Mother, these riches mean nothing to me. I live by dharma. I will fulfill my father's command. Even though it was you who commanded, I respect it and accept that it was his command. I believe that both of you would have come to a consensus on this issue and then commanded me. I shall live in the forest for 14 years. This day itself I will leave for Dandakaranya (forest)".

He circumambulated His parents and left.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 32

Tam vrajamtam priyo bhraataa Lakshmano nujagaama ha Snehaadvinayasampannah sumitraanandavardanah.

Meaning- Rama's dearest brother is Lakshmana. Lakshmana has undying love for Rama. Humble Lakshmana, displaying the natural love for his brother Rama, accompanied him to the forest. Through the performance of this great deed, he brought happiness to his mother Sumitra.

Rama, who had firmly determined to execute his father's command, left Kaikeyi's palace and proceeded to his mother Koushalya's house, along with Lakshmana. Koushalya affectionately greeted her son and offered him a seat. Very humbly, Rama said, "Dear Mother, this is not the time to take this seat. This is the time for me to sit on the seat made of grass (darbha). A calamity has approached us. It brings grief to you, Sita and to Lakshmana. I am leaving for Dandakaranya now. There I have to spend 14 years living on honey, fruits and roots. King Dasharatha has decided to conduct the coronation ceremony to Bharata. I have been asked to retire to the forests for 14 years".

Upon hearing these words Koushalya fell on the floor all at once. Gently Rama lifted her up, and consoled her. Koushalya, who was completely afflicted by grief, said, "Rama, although my husband, is a great emperor, I have never enjoyed any joy or happiness in life. I had hoped that at least after my son is crowned the king, I shall enjoy some respect as a queen-mother. Even when you were by my side, I had to put up with all the insults. Now with you away, I cannot, in this old age, listen to the disagreeable words and insults thrown upon me by my co-wives. I will accompany you to the forest and spend my time looking after you".

Lakshmana became dejected and extremely pained upon seeing Koushalya's grief. His anger knew no bounds. He condemned the actions of his father. He said, "Brother Rama, I will be by your side. I will kill anyone who comes in your path. This kingdom rightfully belongs to you. The king has no permission to simply gift it away to Kaikeyi. You please be courageous. I will wash away your sorrow totally".

Rama remained unruffled. Calmly and peacefully, he acted based on dharma and consoled his grieving mother. He convinced her that he would return in 14 years time. He gently asked for her blessings and circumambulated her. He asked his brother to make all the necessary arrangements for him to leave. Mother Koushalya uttered auspicious words and blessed her son. She bid him farewell.

Lakshmana said, "Dear brother, I will come with you. I will hold the bow and clear the path for you. The lordship over the three worlds is also meaningless in your absence. Please permit me to come with you to the forest".

Rama, deeply touched by the love shown by his dear younger brother, permitted him to come to the forest.

Lakshmana was the incarnation of Adi Shesha. He had already firmly determined to protect Rama, as an eyelid guards the eye. To protect Rama zealously in this manner, it is essential to give up food and sleep. An ordinary human being cannot

accomplish this great feat. Lakshmana was a Yoga Purusha. Hence he could accomplish this feat. Just before he left for the forest his wife Urmila Devi addressed him and said, "please give away to me your share of sleep. I will compensate for it". It is said that Urmila slept for the entire period until Lakshmana returned. Lakshmana diligently performed his duties towards his brother Rama during these 14 years.

Lakshmana's decision brought great joy and delight to his mother Sumitra. She was pleased that Rama was not alone; her son would be there to look after him.

Om Seeta Raamabhyaam namaha.

Episode 33

Brataram dayito bhraatuh saubhraatramanudarshayan Raamasya dayita bhaaryaa nityam praanasamaahita.

Meaning- Rama's dearest wife, Sita, is His soul mate. She eternally seeks the well-being of her husband. She always acts in accordance with His wishes.

Sita Devi was humble and divine. She loved her husband very dearly. Rama was handsome, loving and charming and she reciprocated with similar loving feelings towards him. Rama was eternally placed within her heart. Hence for Rama, Sita was equivalent of His life force (prana shakti). She was adept in reading the mind of her husband and in acting totally in accordance with it. At all times, she behaved in a manner that suited His mental disposition. She was at par with her husband, in seeking the welfare of those who had sought shelter under her. At all times she desired the welfare of her husband.

This auspicious and chaste lady, Sita, knew no world apart from Rama. Hence she was ignorant of any of the happenings within the city of Ayodhya. She was under the impression that the coronation ceremony of her husband Rama would begin shortly. Seeking His welfare, she had performed all the rituals and had undertaken a complete fast. With complete faith and dedication, she abided by all the rituals. She worshipped the Gods seeking her husband's welfare. She recollected the dharmas that her husband, as a king, would have to abide by, once the coronation ceremony was completed. She recollected all her dharmas that she would have to follow as a queen after her husband's coronation. She arranged all the auspicious materials like sandal paste, akshata (colored rice), flowers among others. She was awaiting the arrival of her husband. All her maids and attendants within her palace were equally happy. There are no words to describe this moment of happiness of Sita. Her maids decorated all the hallways in her palace. Flower garlands adorned the entrance to the palace. Her room was beautifully decorated. They too decked themselves in the finest of ornaments.

Sita, the gentlest woman, never ever spoke in a manner that caused even a slightest pain to the heart of another. She was always humble. Even at times of extreme anger, she could never utter words that caused misfortune to another. All the ladies who were associated with her were akin to her in their traits.

No amount of words can ever justify her greatness. Both Rama and Sita were great exemplary characters. One surpassed the other in the possession of great traits. It is impossible to say who was the superior of the two in this aspect. Hence we think of them simultaneously and say Seeta Ramaabhyaam. They were like Lakshmi – Narayana. Both of them are worthy of dhyana.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 34

Janakasya kule jaata deva maayeva nirmिता Sarvalakshana sampanna naareenaa muttamaa vadhuh.

Meaning- She is born in the clan (vamsa) of Janaka. She is like the Deva maya created to trap the demons under illusion (moha). She has in her every auspicious trait as detailed in the Samudrika shastra. She is the most supreme amongst women.

We have earlier discussed the reasons that prompted Mother Goddess to incarnate as Sita. Sita was born to the most worthy family of Janaka. Every member of Janaka's lineage was of righteous conduct (dharmatma) and diligently abided by all the good traditions and customs (sadachara). She was an ayonija (not born from a mother's womb in the normal course). While ploughing the field, King Janaka found a pitcher, within which was a baby girl. She was Sita.

At the time of churning of the ocean, nectar (amrita) emerged. To acquire control over this nectar, a terrible war broke out between the Devatas and the demons. At that moment, to enrapture/ enchant all the evil minded, wicked demons of bad conduct, Lord Vishnu brought out His Maya. Through His Vishnu maya, he took on the form of Mohini and brought about the destruction of all the demons. Likewise, to destroy the demon brothers Sunda and Upasunda the Devatas created the exquisitely beautiful maiden Tilottama out of this Vishnu-maya.

Maya is one of the most fabulous and remarkable energies (shakti) of Lord Vishnu. It is impossible for anyone to comprehend, visualize or describe it. Limitless and immeasurable beauty is itself maya. Paramatma's maya is neither His magical power (indrajaala) nor some witchcraft, illusory and deceptive power. It is an extraordinary and fabulous power. The word 'maya' also refers to Goddess Lakshmi. In other words, Lakshmi is known as maya.

Lord Vishnu incarnated as Rama. Hence maya (Lakshmi) incarnated as Sita. The Upanishads declare that maya is the ultimate, absolutely astonishing and extraordinary shakti (energy) of Paramatma that is far beyond comprehension (achintya). To bring delight to that Paramatma, such a supreme energy took on a human form, served Him and acted in accordance to His orders/ wishes. She was Sita, the most divine, chaste and gentle lady. She was an epitome of virtue.

Demonic maya (rakshasa maya) causes harm. Paramatma's maya (deva maya) is beneficial.

Sita was of unparalleled beauty and charm. She was created solely to create illusion (moha) amongst demons. As She was an ayonija, she brought along with her, her sparkling beauty from Vaikuntha. That is why there is a proverb- **ati roopavati Seeta ati moorkhaschya ravanah** which means the 'the supreme most beautiful woman is Sita and the most foolish person is Ravana'.

Through this hymn, the impending death of Ravana is being subtly hinted. All the divine traits (Purushottama lakshana) found in Rama, also existed in Sita. In her, all

the auspicious traits, as defined by the samudrika shastra were clearly visible. She was a repository of every good trait.

If Rama is the ideal for all the men, Sita is considered exemplary and ideal for all the women. Those who imbibe and practise the good traits as exhibited by Rama, turn out to be virtuous men. Likewise, those ladies who adopt and follow the good traits found in Sita, become virtuous women.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 36

Sita pyanugata ramam shashinam rohini yathaa Paurai ranugato duram pitraa dasharathena ca.

Meaning- Just as the star Rohini perpetually follows the moon, Sita too followed Rama when He left for the forest. King Dasharatha and the citizens followed Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, for up to a little distance and bid them goodbye.

Rama consoled his grieving mother Koushalya and having pacified her, together with Lakshmana, reached the residence of Sita. As He entered his own house, Sita came out eagerly to receive Him. She noticed the solemn face of her husband who was entering with his head slightly bowed. Having immersed herself in the rituals for the ceremony, she was totally ignorant of the latest developments in the kingdom. She trembled seeing his face and his perturbed looks. She found out all the details from Him.

Having heard it all, Sita decided that she would accompany him to the forest. In order to dissuade her, Rama explained in great detail, all the hardships that one had to face while living in a forest. He tried hard to convince her to change her mind. But nothing could deter her. She firmly stood her ground and asserted that She would walk along with him. A great discussion ensued between the two and finally Rama gave in and agreed to take her along.

Happily Sita took off all her ornaments and set them aside. She together with Rama and Lakshmana got ready to leave for the forest. All of them went and offered prostrations to all the mothers and to their father. Addressing Dasharatha, Rama said, "O King, I am leaving for Dandakaranaya. Kindly permit me". At that minute, Dasharatha asked Rama to rule the kingdom. Rama vowed on Dharma and Satya (righteousness and truth) and declined the offer stating that he would choose to go to Dandakaranya. Everyone grieved at Rama's insistence on abiding by Dharma.

Dasharatha summoned his minister Sumantra and ordered that Rama should be sent with all due honours. Upon hearing this statement, Kaikeyi, unhesitatingly commanded, "Rama is to live like a hermit and not like a king." She brought out the clothes of fibre/jute (that are worn by sages) that she had already kept ready and asked Rama, Sita to dress themselves in it.

Rama and Lakshmana immediately changed their attire. Sita however was baffled, not knowing how to wear them. Noticing her predicament, Rama went to her and in the presence of everyone, demonstrated to her, how to wear them, upon her silken sari. Seeing this, all the womenfolk and maids of Kaikeyi's palace cursed Kaikeyi for this situation into which she had put Sita.

Maharishi Vashistha was angered and addressed Kaikeyi, "The whole kingdom, including Bharata will go away with Rama. You can enjoy all the comforts and luxuries and continue to live in this deserted city all alone".

Dasharatha then ordered Sumantra to fetch a chariot and to ensure that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were dropped off at the boundary of the kingdom. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana bowed to everyone.

Sumitra addressed her son Lakshmana and said, "Lakshmana, always remember that your brother Rama is your sole refuge. Do not even be a trifle negligent in looking after his needs. Rama is your father. Sita is your mother. Consider the forest as Ayodhya and serve him to the best of your ability. May it be auspicious".

Sita, followed Rama and happily got into the chariot. All the citizens, young and old were struck with agony. They could not hold back their tears. They were asking Sumantra to hold the reins and to drive the chariot very slowly. Rama, unable to see the grieving faces of the citizens, whom he loved so dearly, addressed Sumantra and requested that the chariot be driven fast. Dasharatha, who was following the chariot was screaming that the chariot should be stopped. Having followed the chariot for some distance, the grieving king stopped. He stood there and watched the chariot till it was out of sight. At last, in great distress, he turned back.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha

Episode 37

Sringiberapure sutam gangaakule vyasarjayat Guhamaasaadya dharmaatma nishaadaadhipatim priyam.

Meaning- Rama, who was eternally righteous, bid farewell to their charioteer Sumantra, when they reached Sringiberapura. He befriended Guha, the headman of the Nishada tribe who inhabited this area.

The chariot moved on leaving Ayodhya far behind. There are no words to describe the agony of Dasharatha. The queens held him and with difficulty took him into the palace. Sumitra consoled Koushalya who was totally drowned in sorrow.

The entire city of Ayodhya was engulfed in grief. Loud cries could be heard from every household. Many men and women were running behind the chariot following Rama. Rama was overwhelmed by the love and affection shown by the people towards him. Addressing the crowds he said, "My dear people, please shower this similar love to Bharata, when he is crowned. He will also govern reciprocating similar feelings of love".

The citizens were in no mood to listen to this. They chased the chariot. When they reached the banks of River Tamasa, Sumantra stopped the chariot. That night all of them, including those citizens who were following them, rested there. Around midnight, Rama instructed that the chariot should return back to Ayodhya. Leaving all the citizens behind, Rama sought out another route, and reached Sringiberapuram.

Sringiberapuram was on the banks of Ganga. Guha was the Nishada King who ruled this land. Guha was a dear friend of Rama. When he learnt that Rama had stepped into his kingdom, he hastened with his entire family to warmly and reverentially welcome Him.

Rama embraced Guha and enquired about his well being. Guha begged Rama to visit his capital and receive the ceremonious offerings from him. Rama gently declined stating that bound by the rules of vanavasa dharma, he could not enter any township. Rama sipped a little water from the River Ganga and slept on the bare floor.

Lakshmana and Sumantra did not sleep that night. Entire night was spent grieving about the fate of Rama and Sita. They recollected various instances of Rama's life. Lakshmana said to Guha, "I fear that, unable to bear this separation from Rama, our father King Dasharatha may not live long". Guha also was overcome with grief.

The next morning Rama expressed his intention to cross the River Ganga. In a short while, Guha got a beautiful boat constructed. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were all set to leave. Sumantra, totally overcome with grief, shed tears, beseeched him and said, "Please permit me to come with you". Rama affectionately consoled him and said, "Sumantra, please return to Ayodhya and look after the needs of the king. Listen to me. It is for your good. Please protect the kingdom".

Sumantra was the wisest amongst the ministers. He was the only one among them who had the freedom to move around freely within the inner apartments of the royal palaces. Hence, he was the only one who could freely visit the grieving king and effectively take care of his needs. Rama was therefore keen that he should return back to Ayodhya at the earliest.

Sumantra returned to Ayodhya. Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana were all set to cross the River Ganga.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 38

Guhena sahito Raamo lakshmanena ca seetaya Te vanena vanam gatvaa nadee steertvaa bahoodakah.

Meaning- Along with Guha, Lakshmana and Seeta, Rama crossed the River Ganga and stepped into the forest. He walked from one forest to another and in this process crossed many rivers.

Rama addressed Guha and said, "My dear friend, in accordance with my father's command, I am to live in a forest that is uninhabited by people. I am to eat only roots and fruits during this period and sleep on the bare floor. My attire should be like that of ascetics. Hence, first and foremost, I need to matt my hair in locks using the milk of banyan tree. Kindly organize for it, so that I can proceed on my further journey with matted hair".

Guha swiftly arranged for the milk. Rama and Lakshmana matted their hair. They accepted the Vanaprastha ashrama vrata (vow of ascetic life). They bid farewell to Guha.

Rama together with Seeta and Lakshmana boarded the boat. The boatmen were speedily rowing the boat across the Ganga.

As they reached the middle of the river, Seeta Devi folded her palms and prayed to Mother Ganga, "May Rama, after living fourteen years in exile, return safely to Ayodhya. I pray to you. Upon our return after fourteen years, I shall offer you due worship".

The boat reached the other shore. From here began the dense forest. Rama said to Lakshmana, "Dear brother, now you have to protect us. We are now entering into an unknown territory. You walk in front and we will follow you. Sita will be in the middle and I will be behind her. In this way, let us all protect each other".

Agreeing to this, Lakshmana led the way. They reached the Vatsa desa. This was a very fertile land filled with fields and crops. There was greenery all around. Crops were plentiful. They halted there for that night. Lakshmana quickly created a bed for Rama. Resting on it, Rama began to think about his mothers. He said to Lakshmana, "Dear brother, you please go back to Ayodhya for the safety of our mothers. I fear that they may have to face trouble from Kaikeyi. I am worried about their welfare and safety. Please go back".

Lakshmana would not hear of it. He immediately said, "Brother, if you grieve, I am bound to grieve. I do not have any desire to go back. Wherever you are, to me that is Ayodhya. It itself is everything to me.

A little while later Rama and Seeta drifted off to sleep. Lakshmana remained fully alert and was guarding them very carefully.

The next morning they resumed their journey. As they proceeded through the dense forests, they came across strange wild animals that they had never seen before.

They were proceeding on the path that led towards the confluence of Rivers Ganga and Yamuna. They passed by many villages and beautiful places enjoying the scenery as they passed by. They noticed different types of trees and birds.

As they were thus going, at one place, they could clearly hear the noise created by the merger of the two great Rivers Ganga and Yamuna. They also saw many pieces of timber and broken trees. They realized that this was a place inhabited by hunters. As they walked further they came across many fruit and flower trees. A hermitage (ashram) could also be seen close by.

In this manner, Rama, together with Lakshmana and Seeta, crossed many forests and rivers and were proceeding on the journey, all the while enjoying the natural beauty of the places that they passed by.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 39

Chitrakoota manupraapya bharadvaajasya shaasanaat Ramyamaavasatham krthvaa raamamaanaa vanetrayah.

Meaning- Based on the directions given by Sage Bharadwaja, Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana reached Chitrakoota. Here they constructed a comfortable hut and were living happily there.

The hermitage that they had spotted near the confluence of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna was that of venerable Sage Bharadwaja. By the time they entered into the precincts of the hermitage, it was sunset time. The animals of the ashram, terrified at the entry of these strangers, hurriedly ran towards Sage Bharadwaja who was immersed in the conduct of a homa. With the intention of securing the blessings of this great sage, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta patiently waited near the homa place.

Immediately upon completion of the fire ritual, the revered sage noticed their arrival. Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana offered their prostrations to the sage. In turn, the sage welcomed them warmly and offered them various kinds of fruits.

Rama introduced himself as the son of Dasharatha and explained to the sage all the events that took place in Ayodhya. Sage Bharadwaja said, "Rama, its been a very long time since I have seen you. I had already heard about your exile in the forests. I know that your banishment is totally unjust and absolutely without any justifiable reason. Anyway never mind. This is a very holy and pious place. You could live here for this entire period of 14 years".

Rama replied, "O Sage, this place is very near to Ayodhya. I fear that many persons may start to arrive here with a purpose of meeting us. This will create a huge hindrance to your peaceful ashram life. Hence I do not wish to stay here. Please suggest to us a place where we can live peacefully. It should have the basic comforts".

Sage Bharadwaja said, "Rama, exactly at a distance of 10 kroshas there is a mountain by name Chitrakuta. It will be an ideal place for your residence".

They rested there for the night. Early next morning, as they took leave of the sage, he said, "Rama, surely Seeta will find great delight in Chitrakuta". The sage also detailed the various types of birds, animals and the bountiful nature that they would find at Chitrakuta".

Offering prostrations to the sage, they crossed the River Yamuna and then proceeded towards Chitrakuta. At night they halted in the forest and the following morning they reached Chitrakuta. Seeing the River Mandakini flowing there in full force, they were delighted. They came to know that Maharishi Valmiki lived in that vicinity. They met the sage and took his blessings. Thereafter Lakshmana, upon instructions from Rama, got busy in building a hut for their residence. He brought timber and other required materials from the forests, and selecting a suitable place that was at a height, constructed a thatched hut in accordance with the rules of Vastu shastra. He also constructed a suitable area for the performance of yagnas, as

Rama enjoyed daily performance of yagnas. A boundary was built around the hut for protection against wild animals.

Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana enjoyed their stay in this Chitrakuta.

Om Seeta Raamaabhyaam namaha.

Episode 40

Devagandharvasankaashaah tatra te nyavasan sukham Chitrakutam gate rame putra sokatura sthatha.

Meaning- Akin to Devagandharvas, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta were spending their time happily in Chitrakuta. Back in Ayodhya however, Dasharatha was in deep agony and was grieving from pangs of separation.

Chitrakuta Mountain was the residence for various flocks of birds that chirped melodiously. Varied types of strange and unique creepers and plants with multi coloured flowers brightened the entire forest. At a distance, the sounds of the wild animals could be heard. The pure waters of the River Malyavati flowed nearby. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta would bathe in the cool waters of this river. Cool pure breeze was blowing into their thatched hut. Taking delight in all these natural wondrous settings, the three of them spent their days happily. Rama and Seeta would walk through the forests, admiring and enjoying the natural beauty at every step. Thus, like Devagandharvas they spent all their time happily in this forest.

Sumantra, whom Rama had left behind at Sringerapuram, did not return to Ayodhya immediately after Rama's departure from that place. Instead he remained there and got periodic updates about Rama's progress in his journey. He learnt that they had reached Chitrakuta. Then, dejectedly he boarded the empty chariot and in great shame, retraced his way back to Ayodhya.

Seeing the empty chariot, the residents of Ayodhya wept loudly and scolded Sumantra for coming back all alone. The entire city was joyless. This increased the anguish of Sumantra. Unable to show his face to them, in despair, he quickly rode towards the palace of Dasharatha. He approached the ailing king and passed on Rama's message to him.

Dasharatha swooned completely upon hearing this news. Recovering after some time, he once again enquired from Sumantra, about Rama's whereabouts. Sumantra, choked with tears, slowly replied, "Rama and Lakshmana changed into an attire that is commonly worn by sages. They crossed the River Ganga and walked towards Sage Bharadwaja's ashram. With the hope that they may change their mind, and return, I stayed there with Guha for a few days. However through Guha's spies we came to know that Rama met Sage Bharadwaja and that based on the sage's advice they proceeded towards the Chitrakuta Mountain".

The grieving king said, "Sumantra, I have acted based on the words of a woman. I have committed a grave mistake by not consulting my ministers and well-wishers before coming to this decision. Sumantra, if you believe that I have ever helped you in any way in the past, then please do me a favor. Take me to Rama. Now that you know where he resides, please take me to him".

No doubt Dasharatha was a king, but in the present mental condition, he was in no position to issue any command even to his minister Sumantra. Thus he continued to beg and plead with Sumantra. He continued, "Sumantra please either take me to him or please go back and bring him back to me. I do not think that I can live any longer. Without my Rama, I cannot live. I do not know how deeper into the forests

they may have reached by now. Please take me in the chariot. If I see them, I think I will live longer. I am sinking. Sumantra, I do not think that I will live longer. Please help me. Without my Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana I cannot live any longer.”

In this manner, every moment he thought of them. He grieved and lamented at this loss, kept swooning periodically. Whenever he came back to consciousness, his thoughts were entirely focused on Rama. He would say, “Of what use is this life without Rama? Oh Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta, your absence will take my life. It’s all over for me. I am going away”. So saying, he would once again fall down and swoon. When he would awaken he would say, “I am leaving this world Rama, without seeing you again. Without you all, what is the meaning of this life? Apart from you, who else is there for me Oh Rama? I am a great sinner, Rama”.

In this way, father Dasharatha agonized and grieved piteously for his sons and his daughter-in-law.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 41

Raaja Dasharatha sswargam jagaama vilapan sutam

Meaning- Unable to bear the pangs of separation from his son, Dasharatha died.

Dasharatha was grieving pitifully and Sumantra was consoling him all the time. The details provided by Sumantra about Rama's departure into the forests only worsened Koushalya's grief. She broke down and begged Sumantra to take her immediately to Rama. Sumantra tried to console her but failed to do so.

Suddenly, Koushalya who had been calm all this while, got greatly annoyed with Dasharatha for all that he had done and she began to harshly admonish him for sending Rama away to the forest. She lamented that her son and daughter-in-law would face severe difficulties and hardships in the forest due to his decision. Her words further aggravated and worsened his grief and pain. Never ever had Koushalya ever spoken in this manner to him. Now he found it hard to withstand it. He felt he was sinking. He swooned for a little while. His own evil doings of the past that had brought about this misery to him, came to his memory.

The king offered his namaskara to Koushalya and in a pitiable voice weakly pleaded with her not to rebuke him any further. Koushalya trembled upon seeing his pitiable situation. Understanding his condition, she instantly begged forgiveness, "O Lord, please forgive me. My uncontrollable grief at this separation from my son caused me to speak to you in this harsh and cruel manner. Kindly excuse my mistake". She thus consoled him.

By then, it was past sunset time. Dasharatha was periodically losing his consciousness. He was blabbering in his sleep. He was regaining consciousness only to lose it once again. This happened repeatedly. In between this, Dasharatha revealed to Koushalya a secret that he had never ever revealed to anyone in his lifetime.

He said, "Koushalya, in my youthful days, long before I married you, I had committed a serious and grave mistake. It so happened that one day I had gone hunting in the forests by the banks of River Sarayu. I was sitting under the shade of a tree eagerly trying to spot any wild animal that I could hunt. All of a sudden I could hear some gurgling sounds from the River Sarayu. It was clear that some animal had approached the banks and was drinking water from the river. Using my Sabda bheda jnana, I directed my arrow towards the direction of the sound and then ran in that direction to catch the animal. To my utter shock, instead of an animal, there lay a young hermit-boy (muni kumar) with the arrow pierced into his heart. I realized that I had committed an unforgivable sin. I had mistaken the boy for an animal. The boy, who was almost losing his life, told me about his aged and blind parents nearby who were thirsty. He begged me to quench their thirst. Within minutes, the boy passed away. I took the pitcher and carried the water to the parents. When I told them of my sin, their grief was uncontrollable. The boy's father, in his grief cursed me, "you too will die due to pangs of separation from your son". Then and there both his aged frail parents left their mortal bodies in that state of grief.

Koushalya, now I am going to die. My separation from Rama will bring to me my death. My eyes have failed. I am unable to see anything. In this hour of death I grieve that my dearest son Rama is not beside me. That curse has resulted in this happening. My senses (indriyas) are not functioning anymore."

So saying, Dasharatha again slipped into sleep. In that state of sleep, he left his body, uttering the words, "Rama, Rama".

The next morning, the king did not awaken. A few servants went into his chambers to serve him and seeing his dead body, cried loudly.

With Dasharatha's death Ayodhya lost its shine. It turned into a city of gloom. Every person was shedding tears profusely. All the citizens felt orphaned and moaned loudly.

This news mysteriously reached Bharata, who was at his maternal grandfather's place. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he felt that he should return to Ayodhya. Around that time, the messengers sent from Ayodhya reached his place. Bharata asked them, "I seek to know about the welfare of my father and of my dear brothers Rama, Lakshmana. How are my mothers Koushalya and Sumitra and my arrogant mother Kaikeyi faring? Is everything well with them? Please answer me quickly."

Without answering any of these questions, the messengers simply said, "The king seeks your immediate presence in Ayodhya. Please accompany us back to Ayodhya". The messengers did not even give the slightest hint of the happenings in Ayodhya to date.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 42

Mrte tu tasmin bharato Vashisthapramukhairdvijaih. Niyujyamaano raajyaaya naicchadrajyam mahaabalah.

Meaning- After the demise of King Dasharatha, Maharishi Vashistha and others directed Bharata to take over the reins of the kingdom. Bharata however, due to the deep regard and love that he had for his elder brother Rama, declined the offer.

On receiving the message from the messengers Bharata ascended the chariot without losing any time. The chariot in full speed raced through various forests, plains, mountains and rivers and brought him to Ayodhya.

As soon as the chariot stepped into the city of Ayodhya, Bharata noticed that the city had lost its luster. Eagerly wanting to meet his father, he directed his charioteer to quickly take him to his father's palace. Not finding his father there, he decided to go to his mother Kaikeyi's house. When he entered his mother's home, he found her seated on a golden throne. Kaikeyi was absolutely delighted to see him and she got up from her throne, welcomed him lovingly with the words, "How are you, my dear son?" After enquiring about his well-being and the well being of her father and other relatives, she casually passed on the news of her husband's death to Bharata as though it was a delightful news.

Bharata collapsed and fell down to the floor upon hearing this devastating news. He lamented uncontrollably. He covered his face with a cloth and shed profound tears. He couldn't come to terms with this grief. Kaikeyi lifted her son from the ground and said to him, "O prince, you should not be weeping. People of your stature should not sit on the floor either. Who do you think you are? You are the emperor of this land. Please stop crying needlessly. Go and change into a suitable attire that is worthy of being worn by a king".

A perplexed Bharata wanted to know the whereabouts of his elder brother Rama. When she told him that Rama was not in Ayodhya, he wanted to know in detail the reason behind this. With this, his mother began disclosing the entire happenings at Ayodhya as if they were all pleasant occurrences. She said, "Bharata, a long time ago your father had given me two boons. I sought to choose them now. What is wrong in it? As the first boon I claimed that Rama should be exiled for 14 years. My second boon was that you should be crowned as the king of this land. All this, I have done with your future in mind. Hence Bharata, now you arise. Get ready. Act in accordance with the instructions that will be given by Maharishi Vashistha and others and quickly ascend the throne. I am eagerly waiting to see you seated on the throne. Rule well."

Bharata, who thought that his mother's actions were cruel and disgusting, flew into a rage and shouted, "Oh horrible woman, you have destroyed our kingdom. What sort of a mother are you? I just wish I could kill you this very moment. Even killing you does not amount to a sin. But by killing you, if I commit an adharmic act, my brother Rama will not even look at my face. For this one reason, I am leaving you alive today. O evil-minded woman, what a grave sin you have committed".

Bharata's anger was such that he would have killed Kaikeyi that very moment. But it was the rules of dharma held him back. Killing mother is adharmic. He feared that Rama would disown him for having acted in an adharmic way. To see Rama was his goal. Hence he acted in this fashion.

By then all the ministers assembled there. Koushalya and Sumitra also arrived. Addressing Bharata, Koushalya wept, "My son, please send me to Rama at the earliest". Bharata went to Koushalya and cried, "O mother, I am sinless". He then highlighted to her his innocence in this matter. He cried his heart's content. Tired, dazed, unable to withstand his grief, that night Bharata slept in the comfort of his Mother Koushalya's lap itself.

Next morning Vashistha and other Maharishis organized for the completion of the last rites of King Dasharatha. The rites duly completed, Bharata and Shatrughna were speaking amongst themselves, when the maids caught Manthara and brought her to them saying, "O Prince, she is the evil Manthara; the mastermind behind Ayodhya's doom. What are we to do with her?"

In the heat of the moment, Shatrughna kicked Manthara with his leg. Thereafter he was about to kill her, when Bharata held his hand and asked him to stop. Shatrughna with difficulty controlled his anger and in utter disgust just let her go.

Vashistha and other Maharishis arrived there, approached Bharata and said, "O prince, please take on the kingship. This is the command of your revered father".

In response to it Bharata said, "O revered sirs! This is the lineage of Ikshvaaku. In our lineage, only the eldest son ascends the throne. This kingdom rightfully belongs to Rama and he shall become the king. In lieu of him, I will live in exile for fourteen years. I will set out right now to fetch Rama".

In this way, Bharata set out to bring back Rama. Although he had in him the capacity and the competence to rule efficiently and wisely, Bharata declined to be the king. He was not influenced by any dharma that was being preached to him at that time. He was firmly resolute to ensure that Rama is crowned as the king of Ayodhya.

What a beautiful situation! What a great and ideal personality Bharata was!

Om Seeta ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 43

Sa jagaama vanam veero raamapaada prasaadakah Gatvaatu sumahaatmaanam raamam satyaparaakramam Ayaachadbhraataram raamam aaryabhaavapuraskrtaha

Meaning of the hymn- Overcoming the dualities of likes and dislikes (raga- dvesha), Bharata set out to the forest with the sole intention of winning back Rama. In all humility, Bharata beseeched Rama, the great mahatma and satyavrata (one who strictly adhered to truth), to accept the reigns of the kingdom.

Bharata, who had decided to leave for the forest Dandakaranya, with the sole objective of meeting his brother Rama, immediately ordered that the shrubs and stones on the way to the forest should be cleared and a path should be created. At once, the attendants took up the work and within no time a beautiful road was constructed. Wells were dug up at periodic junctions.

At this juncture, Vashistha approached Bharata and asked him to get crowned as the king. These words worsened Bharata's grief and he lamented even more. He said to Vashistha, "O Maharishi, I am about to proceed to Dandakaranya and bring Rama back. Should Rama refuse to come back to Ayodhya with me, then, like Lakshmana, I too shall stay with him in the forest throughout the period of the exile".

Bharata then called Sumantra and declared that Rama's coronation should take place in the forest itself and ordered that adequate preparations for the same should be made.

Early next morning Bharata set out on his journey along with his entire army, chariots & horses, priests, and ministers. The three queens accompanied him. They arrived at Sringeripuram. Guha, who noticed that Bharata was arriving with his entire army, mistook his intentions. He was worried that Bharata was going to battle with Rama. He approached Bharata in order to gauge his intentions.

Upon hearing the noble plan of Bharata, Guha was very joyful and he extended complete hospitality to Bharata. He narrated to Bharata and Shatrughna all the events that had taken place at Sringeripuram. When he told them that Rama and Lakshmana had worn the garb of ascetics, Bharata and Shatrughna were deeply pained. Hearing that Rama had slept on the bare floor, Bharata was totally disturbed and desolate. He said, "Lakshmana and Seeta who have stood by Rama at this time of his greatest difficulty are truly elevated souls. Shatrughna and me too will live like them. We too shall change our attire into robes of bark, live on fruits and berries and sleep on the bare floor".

Guha was touched by the dedication shown by Bharata. With Guha's help, Bharata together with the army crossed the River Ganga and reached the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. They accepted the hospitality of the sage and rested there. Next morning, the entire army proceeded towards the Mountain Chitrakoota.

Every one was eagerly looking out trying to spot Rama. As the men were eagerly searching for whereabouts of Rama, they spotted a cloud of smoke coming from a distance. Bharata, Sumantra, Vashistha and other prominent members proceeded in

that direction having decided that it could be the residence of Rama. Meanwhile Guha together with his 100 attendants was combing another part of the forest, searching for Rama.

In the meantime Rama heard the clamor that was caused due to the movements of the army in the forest and asked Lakshmana to find out what it was. Lakshmana climbed up a tree and spotted Bharata approaching them with his entire army. He was deeply agitated and angered upon seeing this. He presumed that Bharata had decided to battle with them.

Rama reflects upon the situation and pacifies Lakshmana that Bharata would not be approaching them with evil intentions. He asks Lakshmana to wait and watch. Exactly at that time Bharata reached there. Rama rushed forward and embraced Bharata in great warmth. He then enquired about the well being of one and all.

Bharata piteously said, "Dear brother, unable to withstand the separation from you, our father has left for his heavenly abode. Today Ayodhya is without a king. All of us from Ayodhya, including our mothers, ministers, priests, well-wishers have all come here for your blessings. We all seek that you should return with us and accept the kingship. Dear brother, I am merely your servant. Please bless me by accepting my request".

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 44

Tvameva raajaa dharmajnah iti raamam vaco bravit

Meaning of the hymn- Rama, you have mastered all the dharmas. Hence you know the dharma that the younger brother should not rule during the lifetime of the elder brother. Hence please accept the kingdom and kingship.

Bharata thus pleaded with Rama to accept the kingdom. After hearing him Rama said, "Neither in you nor in your mother I am able to spot even the slightest fault. My father had every right to decide whether I should be a king or whether I should live in the forest wearing clothes of bark. In this case both my parents chose to send me to the forest. To obey my father's command is my dharma. Likewise you have been ordered to govern the kingdom after being crowned as the king. It is your dharma to obey his order and to act in accordance to it. After having clearly defined our duties, our father has left for his heavenly abode. It is our duty to accept his decision and abide by it.

Rama thought of his father and grieved for him. He mourned his death and cried that he could not be by his side in his last moments. He felt sorry that he could not even complete the last rites to his father. In great sadness, Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana wept. Then having decided to offer libations to her father, they collected a few plums and the pulp of the Ingudi tree and mixed them to create a few balls. They walked to the River Mandakini and overcome with grief, sobbed sorrowfully. Descending into the waters of the river, Rama and Lakshmana offered water and the food to their father Dasharatha.

By then Shatrughna, the ministers, priests and the mothers reached Rama's hut. Rama offered his prostrations to all the elders and embraced his brother. Koushalya was grief stricken and saddened to see the fate of Seeta in the hut.

Thereafter all the Sages, ministers, the 4 brothers and the respected elders of the land, all assembled at a spot.

Offering his prostrations to Rama, Bharata eagerly awaited Rama's decision. There was pin-drop silence for a while. Then Bharata said, "Dear brother, instigated by my mother, our father had to send you away to the forests. Grieving for you, he gave up his life too. Without an able king, today Ayodhya is orphaned. It is the practice in our lineage that the eldest son ascends the throne after the death of the father. You are the eldest amongst us four. You are also the most capable. It is our request that you should ascend the throne and take on the responsibility of Ayodhya.

Out of respect for my mother, you gave away to me the kingdom, which was rightfully yours. Today I am returning the same back to you. Please protect the dignity of our lineage. For having been born from the womb of Kaikeyi, I am being cursed by one and all. Rama, I am merely your servant. Please hear my prayer and oblige me. Accept the kingdom.

Just as a donkey cannot imitate a horse or an ordinary bird fly at great speeds like Garuda, I cannot rule this great land as efficiently as you can do. Right since our childhood, our father dreamt of seeing you crowned as the king. Now you should

fulfill that desire of his. All these ministers, sages, leaders and well wishers join me in begging you to return to Ayodhya.

Raama, I am not just your younger brother, but also I am your disciple and your servant. Look at these ministers who are senior to us in age. They were not just the ministers of our father, but were also guiding our great grandfathers. It is right to disobey their words?

Rama, if you do not listen to our request, then our father's dreams and efforts will all be rendered futile".

Saying this, Bharata tightly held on to Rama's feet. Bharata's words and his behaviour melted the hearts of everyone assembled there. They were greatly elated. All of them praised Bharata profusely.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 45

Ramo pi paramodaarah sumukha ssumahaayashaah Nachai cchatpituraadeshaat raajyam raamo mahaabalah

Meaning of the hymn- He who causes bliss and happiness to those who have taken refuge under him can be called the most benevolent (udaara). Such a person possesses great fame (keerti) and immense strength (balaam). Rama, who had in him such great traits, bound by the command of his father, refused to accept the kingdom.

All of them turned towards Rama to hear his reply. Addressing Bharata, Rama said, "Dear brother, at the time when our father King Dasharatha married your mother Kaikeyi, he had given a promise to her father that the son born from her womb will succeed him to the throne. As per this promise made by him, this kingdom is rightfully yours and not mine. All the ministers present here are very well aware of this secret.

In addition to this, during the war between the Gods and the demons, your mother Kaikeyi very valorously assisted our father. Pleased with her skills, our father asked her to choose any two boons. She has now sought those two boons. She has made our father take an oath that he will fulfill both the boons.

To ensure that his promise is fulfilled, I have stepped into the forests. Therefore, you please go ahead and get yourself crowned as the king. Kindly allow me to live up to my promise. It is our mandatory duty to obey our father. Both of us should make sure that his vow of truthfulness (satya vrata) is not nullified. As his sons, the responsibility to prevent him from falling into hell (naraka) also rests upon us.

These respected sages and priests got our father to conduct the sacrifice. As its outcome we were born. Hence it is even more important for us to ensure that, by our actions, he does not descend down towards hell.

Shatrughna and yourself can govern the kingdom under the able guidance of Maharishi Vashistha. Together with Seeta and Lakshmana I will shortly move into the Dandakaranya forest. You be the king for the humans. Living in the forests I will be the king for all these animals here. Shatrughna will assist you there while Lakshmana will assist me here. All the four of us are the sons of the great emperor Dasharatha. Hence collectively, let us all abide by his commands and make them worthwhile".

With these words, Rama consoled Bharata.

At that point, an aged Brahmin by the name of Jabali tried to persuade Rama to take on the kingdom by advocating an anti-dharma approach. He said, "Rama, each being is born on its own and is leaving this body on its own. In this situation, where is the concept of relationships? Who is related to whom? If so, where is the question of being bound by someone's words? So, set aside all these theories. Do not speak of promises and their fulfillment. The wise do not waste time in pondering about it. As far as Ayodhya is concerned, Dasharatha was its past ruler. Today, you are its present ruler. There is no connection, whatsoever, between the two of you. It will be

wise if you heed my words. Just accept Bharata's demands. Accept the kingdom and rule wisely".

Listening to this anti-dharma theory of Maharishi Jabali, Rama did not even waver a little bit. He continued to be resolute in his decision. In fact, he was saddened at this approach being preached to him.

He said to Jabali, "On the face of it, what you say appears very beneficial and wise. But the truth is that it will cause great harm. The world will not approve of such action. I will not perform any deed that will bring harm to the world. I will never ever go against my word. To me truthfulness is the first and foremost dharma. My father had personally instructed me to go on an exile into the forests. I have promised to him that I will abide by it and hence I will abide by it". Rama thus preached to Jabali the greatness of dharma in great detail.

At this juncture, Maharishi Vashistha stepped in and explained to Rama the greatness of Raghu vamsa (linage of Raghu) and asked him to save and protect their dignity and honour by accepting the kingdom. He states that the eldest born always becomes the king and that Rama should not violate this rule. Even then Rama did not agree.

Bharata began to mentally shrink upon hearing this resolute decision of his elder brother. He was at a total loss. He then declared, "Until and unless my elder brother agrees to take on the reins of the kingdom, I will continue to live here. I will not touch a drop of water or eat anything until such time. I will fast until death".

Rama chides Bharata that his decision was not a conduct prescribed for a Kshatriya. He said, "Bharata, return back to Ayodhya".

The elders reconciled to Rama's decision. They understood that it was impossible to change his mind. Rama was that supreme being who would stand by his words and his promise at any cost.

Rama, meanwhile said to Bharata, "Bharata, come and touch me. With this the sin of pledging to fast unto death will be wiped away from you. Come here".

Left with no other way, Bharata asked Rama to return to Ayodhya while he served the entire 14 years in exile in his place. Rama who did not want to yield even to this subtly said, "Our father should not be tainted with the sin of asatya dosha. Hence you please rule the kingdom there while I live here".

In this manner, Rama continued to decline every offer that was put across to him.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha

Episode 46

Paadukechaasya raajyaaya nyaasam datvaa punah punah Nivartayaamaasa tato bharatam bharataagrajah

Meaning of the hymn- Stating, "Please take my paadukas and as a representative, you rule the kingdom". So saying, Rama gave his paadukas to Bharata. Rama consoled Bharata in various ways and after having convinced him, Rama sent him back to Ayodhya.

Rama was deeply overwhelmed by Bharata's humility and trait of forgiveness that he possessed. Lovingly he said to Bharata, "Bharata, you please return back to Ayodhya and govern the place. I will return to Ayodhya as soon as the stipulated period of 14 years is complete. It is very important that we should obey the commands of our father".

Many Devarishis and siddhas, who were present there invisibly all the time, now made themselves visible and approached them. Addressing the 4 brothers they said, "We have heard the entire conversation that has taken place till now. All of you excel in the knowledge of dharma (righteousness). Solely with the purpose of seeing you, we have appeared here.

Bharata, it is imperative that you should abide by your father's dictates. This is also very important to ensure that Rama does not remain indebted to his father. It was Kaikeyi who demanded that Rama should live in the forests. Therefore, by completing this term in the forest, Rama will also be relieving himself of his debt (runa) towards her. Dasharatha has reached the heavens".

In that short time, Rama duly received them and offered to them the reverential worship. The Siddhas and Devarishis accepted his worship and became invisible once again.

By now, it was very clear to Bharata that Rama will not return back with him. He was desolate. Unwilling to give up, for the last time he pleaded with his brother, "Dear brother. Please reconsider your decision. You have the capability to rule this entire world. I do not have your prowess or your capability. Please return to Ayodhya and rule it". Saying so, Bharata fell at Rama's feet and held on to them tightly.

Gently lifting him up, Rama said, "You are a very wise being. Bharata, there has been a significant ripening in your wisdom. Indeed you too possess the capacity to rule this entire world. With the guidance of these able ministers, priests and sages, you can easily decipher what is right and what is wrong. Under their able guidance, you can easily accomplish even the toughest assignments. Do you know that Emperor Dasharatha had streamlined many major areas?

Also another point- Bharata, under no circumstances should you bear any grudge, grievance or hatred against your mother Kaikeyi. You should remember that she has done all this out of her pure love towards you. You should respect your mother."

Then under the advice of Maharishi Vashistha, Bharata said to Rama, "Dear brother, please wear these golden paadukas (sandals) for sometime".

Rama wore those padukas for a short time. With great reverence, Bharata offered his prostrations to those paadukas and said, "It is these paadukas that will protect me. I offer the entire responsibility of the kingship to these paadukas (sandals). Rama, until the time you return, I will live like a hermit. If you do not appear before me exactly at the end of the stipulated period of 14 years, I will jump into the fire and end my life".

Rama agreed to this. He further said, "Look after Kaikeyi respectfully. Do not get angry with her. Please take an oath that you will do so" saying thus, Rama wept and bid goodbye to his brothers.

Bharata picked up the sandals and with all the royal customary procedures, reverentially kept them on the head of the elephant Shatrunjaya. He offered his prostrations to everyone and wept profusely.

Unable to resist his anguish, Rama dashed into his hut. Bharata accompanied by all the mothers, and the entire retinue, left that place.

In this manner, Rama explicitly made known the dharma that both he and Bharata had to adhere to at this point of time and managed to successfully send back Bharata to Ayodhya. What an extraordinary and wonderful scene this was!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 47

Sa kaama manavaapyaiva raamapaadaavupasprshan Nandigrame karodraajyam raamaagamanakaankshayaa

Meaning of the hymn- Bharata who could not accomplish his desire of bringing back Rama to Ayodhya, decided to reside in Nandigrama, a place near Ayodhya. Keeping the Padukas on the throne, offering his prayerful prostrations to them, praying for the safe return of Rama, Bharata began to rule his kingdom.

Bharata reverentially retained Rama's padukas on his head and together with Shatrughna boarded the chariot. They advanced in the form of offering a circumambulation to the Mountain Chitrakuta. They reached the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. Bharadwaja asked Bharata, "Were you successful in your mission? Did you meet Rama?"

Bharata politely replied, "Revered Sage! All of us were blessed to receive his divine darshan. In many ways I begged of him to take back the kingdom. But he was very firm about his decision. He insisted upon completing his entire period of exile in the forest. As per the advice of Maharishi Vashistha, I have taken His golden padukas and am now heading back to Ayodhya".

Bharadwaja Maharishi profusely praised his noble traits and his virtues. Taking leave of the sage, Bharata continued his journey. They crossed the River Ganga and passed by Sringerapuram and entered Ayodhya.

The city of Ayodhya, devoid of the presence of Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta appeared dilapidated and lifeless. It was looking lusterless. Movement of people could not be seen. Owls could be found flying everywhere. In the place of men, cats were moving about everywhere. Ayodhya appeared like the smoky and empty fire pit (homa kunda) as it exists after the completion of the yagna (fire sacrifice). Lack of business had caused all the shops to shut down. The absence of Rama from Ayodhya had robbed the city of its splendour. Bharata expressed to his charioteer all his feelings and sentiments.

They neared the palaces and Bharata ensured that the queens were dropped safely to their homes. Thereafter he addressed Vashistha and other eminent people and said, "I find it impossible to live in my royal palace. To tell you the truth, I do not seek to stay in this city of Ayodhya itself. I have no need of these luxuries. Separation from my brother Rama and the death of my father haunt me. Until Rama returns, I will stay in Nandigrama".

Vashistha appreciated the greatness of Bharata's character and his devotion to his brother. All the elders agreed to his request. Having offered his prostrations to all the elders present there, Bharata kept Rama's padukas on his head and along with Shatrughna boarded the chariot. Even after seating himself in the chariot he did not place Rama's sandals at any place beside him. He continued to keep them on his head.

The citizens followed Bharata to Nandigrama. Addressing the crowds, Bharata said, "My dear citizens. These are the sandals of my dear brother Rama. From now on,

these sandals will be ruling you. Only they are deserving of the royal shelter upon them. I will be ruling under the orders from these padukas”

Bharata then placed the sandals on the throne and conducted the coronation to them. He changed into the attire of a hermit. From then on, he lived in Nandigrama and ruled as a representative of his brother’s padukas. Very diligently he abided by his vow. Every minute and every second he awaited the return of Rama. He read out to the padukas all the royal commands, the assignments and the administrative duties completed. All the royal gifts received were offered to them.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 48

Gatetu bharate srimaan satyasandho jitendriyah Raamastu punaraalakshyaa nagarasya janasya ca Tatraagamana mekaagro dandakaan pravivesha ha

Meaning of the hymn- After the departure of Bharata, Rama, who was self-controlled and truthful, proceeded deep into the Dandakaranya forests, with a view of preventing the citizens of Ayodhya from approaching him.

After the departure of Bharata, Rama continued to live in Chitrakuta. One day, he noticed some ascetics looking at his direction and whispering something amongst themselves. He noticed the anxiety and distress in their actions. He approached them, joined his palms and politely asked, "Respected sirs, have I or my family members committed any deed that has harmed you in any way?"

An aged and senior ascetic stepped forward and replied, "Rama, we are not speaking about you. We are discussing about the demon Khara, who is the younger brother of demon Ravana. He has come to know that you are living here. He is not happy at your arrival here. Therefore from the time you have come here, he has been sending his supporters, who are ruthlessly torturing the saints living here.

Khara is a terrible demon who is merciless, cruel and sinful. He is haughty and fiendish. He enjoys eating human flesh. He will arrive here any moment now. He will then ill-treat and harm us. Hence, these ascetics are in a hurry to leave this place and move to a safer place. In the process, they are hurrying me up. Since you are living here, one day you too will have to face his brutal attacks".

Saying this, the old ascetic hurried away from there. Rama tried his best to instill courage and confidence amongst those saints, but it was of no avail. All the saints vacated their hermitages and very soon the entire place was deserted.

The desertion caused by the departure of the saints and the increased memories caused due to the recent visit of Bharata, the citizens and the ministers drained out from Rama all the pleasures of Chitrakuta. Again and again the forlorn faces of his mothers flashed before his eyes. The memories of his brother and of Ayodhya began to cause worry and pain to him.

Rama reflected deeply and decided that it would be wiser to move away from this place. Having decided thus, the three of them left their hut and began walking deeper into the forests.

After some time, they reached the hermitage of Sage Atri. Rama stepped into this hermitage and sought the blessings of Sage Atri and his wife Anasuya. Atri received them very warmly. Maharishi Atri explained to Rama the spiritual greatness and achievements of his ascetic wife Anasuya. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta received the blessings of Mother Anasuya.

Seeta paid reverential respects to Anasuya and enquired about her wellbeing. Anasuya very lovingly treated Seeta and preached to her, "My dear daughter, do not deviate from the path of dharma under any circumstances. Always follow the

footsteps of your husband". Anasuya then brought and gifted Seeta with floral garlands that would never fade, apparel that would never get soiled and unclean, and jewellery. Thereafter, she enquired from Seeta and heard from her the entire story of Seeta's marriage with Rama.

What a lucky divine being Anasuya was! She could hear directly from Seeta, in complete detail the glory of the Seeta-Rama Kalyana (wedding). Atri and Anasuya experienced great thrill and happiness as they were listening to the events of the marriage.

Mother Anasuya then asked Seeta to adorn all the apparels and jewellery gifted by her. Seeta duly adorned herself and brought great delight to Anasuya. She offered her prostrations to Mother Anasuya. Seeta then approached Rama and showed to him all the gifts received. Rama was also delighted. Having spent the night there, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta resumed their journey early next morning.

As they were departing, Maharishi Atri said to Rama, "You need to be extremely vigilant in this Dandakaranaya. The demons who inhabit this place are treacherous, wicked and exceptionally cruel. Even a slight negligence, can turn the person into their fodder. They are bloodthirsty demons who enjoy human flesh. This is the path that the Maharishis walk when they go to Dandakaranaya to fetch the flowers and fruits. It will be safer for you to proceed on this path".

Rama, along with Lakshmana and Seeta entered the Dandakaranaya forest.

With this the Ayodhya Kanda of Ramayana comes to an end.

Om Seeta Ramabhayam namaha.

Episode 49

Pravishya tu mahaaranyam raamo raajeevalocanah Viraadham raakshasam hatvaa sharabhangam dadarsha ha Sutteksanam caapyaga styanca Agastya bhraataram tatha.

Meaning of the hymn- No sooner had the lotus-eyed Rama stepped into the Dandakaranya forest, than he killed the terrible demon Viradha. Thereafter he meet the Sages Sarabhanga, Sutikshana, Agastya and Agastya's brother.

We have now entered the Aranya kanda.

Dandakaranya, with the hermitages of eminent sages and with the loud recitals of Vedas was akin to Brahma loka (abode of Brahma). It was so blissful and delightful. There were clusters of hermitages of various sages. The entire area was reverberating with the Vedic hymns.

The sages were delighted to have the presence of Rama amongst them. They offered various kinds of fruits and roots to Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta and honoured them. They requested that as their king, Rama should give them deliverance from the atrocities of the demons. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta spent that night there itself.

The next morning they recommenced their journey. They were walking through the midst of a thick dense forest, which was the territory of many wild animals, when suddenly they came across a horrible demon. This demon had deep pit-like eyes, was dreadfully large-mouthed, had a horrific, enormous belly that was completely shapeless with many ups and downs within it and was horrendous-looking. He was very frightening to look at.

He ran towards them angrily and forcefully, seized Seeta violently and then screamed in a deafening and blaring voice, "My name is Viradha. I am exceedingly hungry. I will kill you all and satiate my hunger".

Lakshmana, hissing with anger, rushed to attack Viradha. Meanwhile Rama too was very angry and adjusting his bow, began to shower arrows upon the demon. This incensed the demon and now he madly rushed towards them, dropped Seeta and instead picked up the two brothers and began to run away in great speed. Rama and Lakshmana started to chop off his arms. With his arms mutilated, the gigantic demon fell down to the ground in a huge thud. Rama and Lakshmana showered multiple blows upon him. Rama then said to Lakshmana that this demon needed to be buried in a deep trench. During these discussions between the brothers, the demon Viradha realized the true status of Rama.

He then explained to them the curse that had caused him to transform into a demon. He also told them that death in the hands of Rama was actually a release from his curse. He suggested that he should be buried and thereafter recommended the brothers to visit the hermitage of Sage Sharabhanga.

Rama and Lakshmana dug up a deep pit and buried Viradha. Then the three of them went to meet Sage Sharabhanga. Sharabhanga joyously welcomed them. Rama

addressed the saint and said, "O Sage, I had noticed that just now Indra, the Lord of Heaven was here to meet you".

The sage replied, "Yes. He had come to take me to Brahma loka (abode of Brahma). But I did not seek to go there without your darshan Rama. Hence I stayed back and sent him away. From here, please visit the hermitage of Sage Suteekshana who will direct you to a place which will be suitable for building your residence".

While Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta were watching, Sage Sharabhanga created a yogic fire, entered into it. Thus he gave up his body and attained Brahma loka.

Thereafter the saints residing nearby approached Rama and sought relief from the havoc and tortures of the demons and to restore the forests to their natural tranquility. Rama assured them of his protection and vowed to eliminate the demons. Having granted this assurance, Rama along with Seeta and Lakshmana then walked and reached the hermitage of Maharishi Suteekshana. They rested there for that night.

Early next morning, Rama offered his prostrations to the revered sage and said, "All the saints are requesting me to pay a visit to their hermitages. Kindly permit me to leave from here".

As they were proceeding further from there, Seeta asked a pertinent doubt about the validity of using weapons to destroy the demons without any provocation from their side. Towards this, Rama gives her a rightful and suitable answer and explains to her how this was as per the law of dharma and thus clarifies her doubt totally.

The three of them crossed many mountains, rivers, lakes, valleys and after a long journey neared the precincts of Maharishi Agastya's hermitage. As they were nearing the ashrama, Rama explained to Seeta and Lakshmana the greatness of Maharishi Agastya and of his great achievements. They rested for that night in the hermitage that belonged to Maharishi Agastya's brother. They also spotted Agastya Maharishi's hermitage.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 50

Agastyavacanaacchaiva jagraahaindram sharaasanam Khadgam ca paramapritah tunicaaksayasaayakau.

Meaning of the hymn- Rama visited Maharishi Agastya who handed over to him, a powerful sword, the bow that had been given to him by Lord Indra and quivers that had the capacity to produce infinite number of arrows. Rama joyfully and reverentially received them.

Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana began to walk towards Maharishi Agastya's hermitage. They enjoyed the pleasantness of the nature, the forests abounding in greenery and admired the frolicking deer as they entered the hermitage. They also visited the Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Kartikeya dharmasthanas on the way.

Upon knowing that Rama was entering his hermitage, Sage Agastya, in great elation came forward along with his disciples, to receive him. He had been yearning to meet Rama. Sri Rama, fell at the feet of the great sage and held them tightly with profound reverence. Seeta and Lakshmana too prostrated to him reverentially. Maharishi Agastya provided all the required comforts, fruits and roots for his guests.

Each and every chapter of Ramayana has its own specialty. Within every movement and breath of Lord Rama, many deep specialties are hidden.

Addressing Rama, who was seated with his palms joined, Maharishi Agastya said, "Rama, a hermit who undertakes penance (tapas) should worship the fire, give water oblations and worship the guests who arrive. In case he behaves contrary to this tradition, then upon reaching the other world, he will have to eat his own flesh.

Maharishi Agastya's ashram was a storehouse of all the good traditions. Every person who lived there abided totally by dharma. Even before they had stepped into this sacred hermitage, Rama had informed Seeta and Lakshmana about the prominence of this sage. Great Devas, Siddhas, Gandharvas as well as the exalted seers, resided within Maharishi Agastya's ashram practising intense penance (tapas) while partaking very limited food and maintaining absolute control over the senses (indriya nigraha). Even birds, reptiles, Gandharvas and Devas that reside here abide by dharma. They totally abide by the directions given by this righteous sage and offer their services to him.

Liars, savages, cruel people, cheats, sinners, murderers or those who override the dictates of the scriptures (shastras) cannot reside. Such was his greatness. Many exalted sages after undertaking penance at this hermitage, obtain divine effulgent bodies and depart to heaven. Devas have blessed many of the upasakas of this hermitage with immortality (amaratva) or with the state of divine celestial yakshas. They have also blessed many with kingship.

Maharishi Agastya has performed many divine extraordinary deeds for the welfare of this universe. He is a Srividya upasaka (worshipper of Srividya).

Such an illustrious and exalted Maharishi, greeted Rama and said, "Rama, you are the king of all these universes. You are worthy of worship. You are a great

dharmatma. I have with me a Vishnu bow that was created by Vishwakarma, the celestial architect. This is the bow of the highest order. Lord Brahma gave this to me. Here is a quiver from which will come limitless arrows and also a golden sword. Both of these are gifts received by me from Lord Indra.

Long ago, using this bow, Vishnu annihilated the horrible and atrocious demons and ensured that the kingdom of Heaven was restored to the Devatas. You too should use these weapons towards the destruction of the mighty demons whom you will encounter. Please accept them”.

Rama was mightily pleased that he had secured the most suitable weapons. Gladly he accepted them. Agastya further continued, “Rama, please proceed towards Panchavati and set up your residence there. I know everything about you. Using my power of penance I am able to read your intentions. Understand that Panchavati is a beautiful place with exquisite flower gardens. May auspiciousness befall you”.

With this, the Maharishi bid them farewell. Rama and Lakshmana wore on their bodies this new weaponry received and together with Seeta proceeded towards Panchavati.

Receiving these divine weapons was the purpose behind their visit to Maharishi Agastya’s ashram. It can be said that Agastya returned back to Vishnu, the bow that originally belonged to Him.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 51

Vasata stasya raamasya vane vanacaraissaha Rsayo bhyaagaman sarve vadhaayaasuraraksasaam.

Meaning of the hymn- When Rama was residing in the Sarabhanga Maharishi's ashram, the saints who residing nearby, approached Rama and requested him to destroy the demons who were troubling them and to give them relief.

During this period of exile, whenever Rama visited the hermitage of any great sage, the saints who lived in the nearby territories used to approach him in large groups and list out the atrocities of the demons and how they were harassing them. They would request Rama to give them relief from their sufferings. Just with the vision (darshan) of Rama, they would feel comforted. The confidence that such difficult days were about to end, would surge in them. Even the most affected ascetics would return happily, reassured of their longevity.

Undoubtedly a divine secret rests behind all this. Else, why would so many ascetics approach Rama and seek the same thing? The divine secret was the destruction of the rakshasas (demons).

A huge difference exists between asuras and rakshasas. Kabandha and others were asuras. Ravana and his group were rakshasas. Those who misused the powers acquired through yoga and penance (tapas), consumed human flesh and indulged in heinous atrocities were termed as Rakshasas. 'Asu' means life force and 'ra' means to pull. Hence those who pulled away the life force of others were Asuras.

In those days, the population of such demons was very high. Having secured the protection of Ravana, who was invincible, these asuras and rakshasas derived great pleasure in tormenting every person whom they came across. Unhesitatingly they chewed and gulped down any person who resisted their atrocities. They damaged and destroyed the hermitages that they came across. They prevented the sages from conducting any yagnas and yaagas and caused many obstacles in their missions.

These demons were eager to wage war, but the Devatas (Gods) with whom they wanted to fight, were invisible to their eyes. If the Devatas had to be forced to descend down, it was essential to torture these sages and saints. The havissu offered through the holy yagnas and yaagas (sacrificial rituals) is the only food that is consumed by the Devatas. Therefore it was essential to see that these homas and yagnas were not completed successfully. With this, the Devatas will starve. The demons derived great delight in thus taking revenge upon the Devatas.

With this plan in mind, these demons mercilessly tortured all those who indulged in conducting yagnas and yaagas, not only on earth, but also in all the three planes of existence (three lokas). Their main targets were the sages (Rishis), Gandharvas, Yakshas (celestial beings) and the Brahmins.

The demon Ravana had very intelligently sought a boon that he could not be killed by any celestial beings such as Yaksha or Gandharva, Devata, rakshasas, asuras, Garuda and other heavenly spirits. Contemptuous of men, he did not seek

invincibility from them. Herein lied the trick. That is why Paramatma had to incarnate as a human being.

Ravana, who had thus secured invincibility from all the powerful forces, now offered protection to all demons in all planes of existence. This backing from Ravana made the demons ruthless. They recollected all the past defeats and the losses that they had suffered at the hands of the Devatas and realized that this was the most opportune time to settle scores. They wrecked havoc in all the three planes (lokas). On earth, they targeted the saints and ascetics who were highly devoted to the Gods.

The saints who were all knowing, knew that the Supreme Lord had incarnated as Rama and that all the rakshasas including Ravana, would meet their end in His hands. So, with the aim of securing the welfare of the world, all of them gathered together and approached Rama when he was staying at the hermitage of Sage Sharabhangha. There they beseeched Him to destroy the demons and to save them.

Rama was very well aware of the reason behind this appeal made to him. The decision to destroy the demons was made while he was in Vaikuntha itself. Towards this, Maharishi Agastya who was also all-knowing, gifted him with those powerful weapons. For this reason, Rama was very happy to receive them.

Om Seeta Ramabhayaam Namaha.

Episode 52

Sa tesham pratishusraava raakhasaanaam tathaa vane

Meaning of the hymn- In those forests flooded in demons, Rama consented to the requests made by the sages.

Various groups of eminent sages who were self-realized and were glowing with divine luster and who were known as Vaikhaanaasa, Vaalakhilyaa, Samprakshaala, Maarichipaah, Patraahaarah, Salilahaara, vaayu bhakshakah, akaasha nilayaah and many other types of sages approached Rama and beseeched him to save them from the demons.

(Samprakshaalas are those who wash their interior parts of their body with water, ashma kuttas are those who pound their body with stone just as grains are pounded, salila aharas are those who survive only on water, Gaatra shayya are those who sleep with their head resting on their shoulders and do not use any other kind of bed, Vaayu bhakshakah are those who live only on air, akaasha nilayah are those who stand only in air). – source Internet.

All these were very great eminent sages, who had undertaken the most stringent practices and austere upasana (worship) of the Supreme. The destruction of Viradha was a proof of Rama's skill and might. Viradha had boons due to which he could not be killed using any weapon. As a result of this, eliminating him from this earth was almost an impossible happening. Yet if Rama could kill him, then it surely meant that he was the mightiest person.

Sharabhanga was a very great sage whose spiritual accomplishments were such that Indra, the Lord of Heaven and other Devatas used to frequent his residence. When such a great sage, sought to offer all his punya (merit) to Rama, the latter very politely refused. What more was needed to prove the greatness of Rama's character? This news spread very quickly throughout the forest. The sages were convinced that only Rama, who belonged to this Raghu vamsha (clan), could give them respite from their sufferings.

Hence they approached Him and said, "O Lord, your vow of truthfulness (satyavrata) and devotion to your father (Pitr bhakti) are immeasurable. Whether you reside in Ayodhya or are in exile in these forests, to us, you are the king. You will be bestowed with everlasting fame for having protected us. We are your children who are living in the forests. You possess the might and the skill needed to tackle these demons.

Please do not presume that we are superior due to our penance. We do not touch weapons. We have overcome anger. We have complete control over our indriyas (senses). Yet, you have to protect us. In the forests, between the Rivers Mandakini and Pampa, the demons are indulging in the worst atrocities and are mercilessly killing all saints. You are our sole refuge. Please look around. Everywhere you can see heaps and piles of bones and remains of the bodies of saints. All this is the work of the demons. Rama, please have mercy on us. This is how they are taking revenge upon us. We, the forest dwellers have no other shelter. We are unable to withstand this anymore.

Please destroy these demons, Rama. This is our prayer to you. Punish the sinners. Establish the dharma. Please look at us with compassion, O Lord Rama. We seek your protection. We seek refuge under you, O Lord. Again and again we pray for relief".

From this earnest prayer made to him, Rama could understand the depth of the suffering that they were undergoing. His heart wrenched in pain. He made up his mind that, he has to grant protection to these great saints, who at all times selflessly give away their entire accumulated power of penance (tapas shakti) for the welfare of this world. It deeply pained him that those saints, who endlessly abide by dharma and achara (good traditions), and who ensure that others around them also adhere to them, had to suffer and face such a danger to their lives. He resolved that he had to bring about an end to these atrocities. Those asuras and rakshasas who were troubling these gentle saints had to meet their end.

He firmly announced to them his decision to destroy the demons and offered them his protection.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 53

Pratijnata shca raamena vadha ssamyati rakshasaam Rshinaa mganikalpaanaam dandakaaranya vasinaam.

Meaning of the hymn- Rama promised these supreme ascetics, who were glowing like fire, that he would kill the demons and give them relief.

The prayers of these eminent sages touched the heart of Lord Rama. By observing the heaps of bones, he could assess the might of the demons. He understood that he had to exercise the greatest caution in the matter pertaining to demons. He had to be very vigilant.

The sages had said that he was their king and protector. They even opined that he was the Lord himself. The demon Viradha, when leaving for his heavenly abode, had praised Rama and said that, in might and strength, he was at par with Lord Indra and that he was the Lord of this entire universe. He had even begged Rama to bless him by accepting all his tapo balam (power of penance). Maharishi Agastya had addressed him as the Lord of the entire creation and handed over to him all the weapons.

To visit our elders and to seek their blessings is a tradition (achara), practice and a way of showing our respect towards them. Everyone should put this into practice. This increases longevity. It is mandatory to stand up and receive our elders when they visit us.

In this case, aged, eminent and revered sages had approached Rama and begged him to save them. Rama was embarrassed that great saints, who shower their blessings upon the entire world, were approaching and beseeching him to save them. Immediately he fell on their feet and offered his prostrations and said, "Please forgive me. I will kill all these asuras and demons who are troubling you. I will protect you. Why do you have to beg of me for this? You can just order me and I will act in accordance to it. No doubt I came here to fulfill my father's promise. But my duties do not end with it. To punish the wicked (dushta) and protect the moral and pious persons is my dharma. Hence I will surely fulfill your desire. Through the killing of these demons, I will be blessed with a wonderful result. It is a divine secret. Please remain calm. There will be no obstacle for your yagnas and yaagas. From now on, you will witness the anxiety and fear of the demons. You will see them running for their lives".

In a profound deep voice, Rama continued, "O Great sages. From now on you will see my strength and the valour of my brother Lakshmana. I vow to free these forests from demons".

Later on, explaining to Sita, Rama said, "I will fulfill my promise during my lifetime. Sita, you know of my satyavrata (vow of truthfulness). You are aware that I do not go against my word. Moreover in this case, it is these eminent and revered saints who asked for my help. I have given them my word. I will never go back on it. Even if they had not begged of me for help, I would have protected them. It is my dharma".

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 54

Tena tatraiva vasataa janasthaana nivaasinee Viroopitaa shurpanakhaa raakshasi kaamaroopini

Meaning of the hymn- Sri Rama, set up his residence in Janasthana, which was the outpost for the rakshasas. He had the nose and ears of the demoness Surpanakha, cut off.

Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana took the weapons from Maharishi Agastya and walked towards Panchavati. On the way they came across a very huge bird. It said, "My name is Jatayu. I am the friend of your father Dasharatha." Thereafter it explained its entire story.

Further Jatayu said, "Rama, if you wish I will help you. This is an extremely dangerous forest. Whenever you brothers go out into the forests on errands, I shall look after Seeta". Rama embraced Jatayu out of love.

He thereafter proceeded towards Panchavati. At one spot they found a garden of flowers. All the trees and plants were blossoming with varied coloured flowers. Fragrance from the flowers filled the air. Deer were playfully sprinting about everywhere. Chirping of the birds could be heard clearly. Realizing that this place was Panchavati, Rama asked Lakshmana to find a suitable location and to build a cottage for their residence. He said, "Lakshmana, this place is beautiful. The blossoming flowers, the deer, the birds and the majestic River Godavari that is flowing by, makes it an ideal place to live. Let us live here with Jatayu as our companion".

Based on Vastu shastra, Lakshmana expertly and quickly built a very beautiful and comfortable cottage. Praising and admiring Lakshmana's feat, Rama said, "When I watch you, Lakshmana, I do not ever feel that our father is no more". Saying this, Rama accompanied by Seeta, entered the cottage.

Sharad Ritu (Autumn) passed and Hemant Ritu (winter) made its appearance. They were spending their days joyfully in Panchavati. One day, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta bathed in the Godavari. Rama and Lakshmana offered tarpana (water oblations) to the Devas and the pitr-devatas (fore fathers) and conducted their sandhya vandana worship. Having completed their daily worship, they returned to the cottage. Rama was engrossed in playfully spending his time with his brother and Seeta.

Unexpectedly at that time, Surpanaka, the sister of Ravana, arrived there. Her eyes fell on the handsome Rama. She was lovesick. She couldn't move her eyes away from Him. She just stood still, admiring Him and drinking in that beauty. She lost her heart to Rama. Seized by love, she walked towards Rama and enquired about Him. Rama introduced Himself and told her His entire story of exile. He then enquired about her identity. Towards this she replied, "I am Surpanaka, the sister of the mighty demon Ravana. The mighty Kumbhakarna, who sleeps all the time, is also yet another brother of mine. Virtuous Vibhishana, powerful Khara and Dhushana are all my brothers. Without a care for any of them, I fearlessly and carelessly roam about in all these forests. I have accepted you as my husband. Accept me as your

wife. This very moment I shall devour this ugly woman Seeta and your brother Lakshmana. Both of us can then, walk about all these mountains, joyfully, holding hand in hand. We can visit all the gardens here. Let us roam around the vast Dandakaranaya and enjoy ourselves”.

Rama chuckled and pointed out towards Lakshmana and said, “Do you know that this brother of mine is very handsome, possesses many great traits and is very valorous. He has never enjoyed the companionship with his wife. He has not got a chance to roam about in these forests, going about hand-in hand with a wife. He is fit to be your husband. Approach him. It will be better if you hold his hand and roam about”.

Surphanaka immediately turned towards Lakshmana and declared her love for him and made a self-declaration that she was the most charming woman. Lakshmana said, “O beautiful one! I am after all a servant here. If you marry me, you will only be a servant maid here. A lady as beautiful as you deserves to be the wife of my elder brother, whom I serve. He will keep you happy. Approach him”.

Surphanaka thought that it would be best if she could quickly devour Seeta, so that Rama would then happily accept her. She hastily rushed towards Seeta, with this intent. Rama intercepted her and loudly said, “Lakshmana, jests and jokes should not be had with those who are of base character and are cruel. Arrogance and pride have peaked in this wicked woman. Ensure that no calamity befalls Seeta. Just disfigure this wicked woman”.

Without delaying even for a second further, in the presence of his elder brother, Lakshmana chopped off Surphanaka’s nose and ears. The next second, Surphanaka turned into a ghastly demoness.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 55

Tathas surphanakhaavaakyaat udyuktaan sarva raakshasaan Kharam trisirasam caiva dooshanam chaiva raakshasam Nijaghaana rane ramah tessaam chaiva padaanugaan.

Meaning of the hymn- After seeing the disfigured Surphanaka and hearing her woes, demons Khara and Dooshana were angered, and together with their entire army of soldiers attacked Rama who killed them all at one go.

Wailing and screaming horridly in a manner that shook all the mountains, Soorphanaka with the blood dripping from her nose and ears ran from there and appeared before her brother Khara. She narrated about Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana and the treatment that was meted out to her by them. She declared that as a vengeance for this treatment, she wanted to drink their blood.

Incensed with Rama and Lakshmana, Khara immediately ordered 14 ferocious and mighty rakshasas to go and kill Rama. Soorphanaka personally led the way towards Panchavati and pointed out to them the cottage of Rama and Lakshmana. Seeing the demons at his doorstep Rama instructed Lakshmana to take care of Seeta while he tackled them.

Soorphanaka was cheering the demons and instigating them towards the war. The 14 demons rushed towards Rama who was standing there all alone, and attacked him simultaneously by throwing upon him 14 powerful spears. Rama, the brave warrior, took up his bow and suddenly sent forth 14 powerful golden arrows, which went forth and shredded the 14 spears into pieces in a matter of a few seconds. Further these arrows pierced the chests of those ferocious demons who, like huge trees, crashed and fell to the earth instantly. Blood was gushing out from their bodies. All the demons were dead and Shoorphanaka was alone in the battlefield.

Letting out a terrible roar, in seething anger, Shoorphanaka fled from there. Seeing his sister who was approaching him in uncontrollable anger and grief, Khara was surprised. He said, "My dear sister, just a few minutes ago you set out from here with 14 of my brave warriors. Why have you returned so soon? Why are you inconsolably grieving?"

Shoorphanaka said, "Brother, what do you know about the might of this Rama? He has killed all the warriors. You should set out right now and kill this Rama who has entered our Dandaka forest. If you do not kill that enemy Rama now then, here in front of you I shall give up my life". This way, and in many other ways she persuaded and instigated Khara to go to war with Rama.

This declaration of Shoorphanaka made in front of the entire assembly of demons was very embarrassing to Khara. He declared instantly, "Shoorphanaka, I will not express my anger in wasteful words. I will prove it through my actions. I will avenge your defeat right now itself".

He immediately called for 14000 demons to assemble then and there. He mounted the magnificent chariot that was brought by Dooshana. Leading these 14000 warrior demons, Khara majestically set out for a war with Rama. At the time of setting out for the war there were many inauspicious and evil omens that were very

demoralizing to the army. Yet undaunted by these, Khara enthusiastically motivated and cheered the demons and took them along. Khara himself experienced ill-omens. His left shoulder vibrated. His eyes were filled with water. He was tormented by unbearable headache. Yet he laughed them off and with full arrogance and confidence marched forward.

Around the same time, the right shoulder of Rama vibrated. He could see many auspicious good omens. He said to Lakshmana, "Take Seeta to the cave within the forest. You guard her zealously. This is the time for war. I will go and face the demons".

The fact that Rama was going to wage a war with the demons caused great excitement and commotion in heaven. All the Gods were eagerly witnessing the war from their plane. This was a war in which one man faced fourteen thousand demons.

The demons bombarded Rama and attacked him from all directions with spears, swords, boulders, rocks and the like. Rama adjusted the string of his bow and moved in a circular direction, letting out his arrows. Dooshana ran towards him in rage and Rama directed his arrow towards Dooshana and killed him. He thereafter killed many army generals and other leaders. Step by step he eliminated all the demons. Thereafter Trishiras, the three-headed demon attacked Rama. Using 3 arrows, Rama knocked out all the three heads of Trishiras and killed him. Now only Khara remained. He was demoralized by the fact that mighty and cruel demons such as Dooshana and Trishiras were killed. He shivered inwardly. Yet he fought unabatedly.

After a duel, Rama threw Khara to the ground and said, "O demon, King Bharata has instructed me to destroy all the sinners who are torturing the great saints here. All the great saints that you had earlier killed are now seated in their divine planes and will enjoy your destruction". Saying so, Rama used the arrows given by Indra and killed Khara.

Through the usage of the words 'King Bharata' Rama highlighted the righteous manner (dharmic) in which Bharata was ruling Ayodhya. He even displayed the deep love that he had towards his brother. This war has many dharma sookshmas embedded within it.

Episode 56

Vane tasminnivasataa janasthaana nivaasinaam Rakshasaam nihataanyaasan sahasraani chaturdasa.

Meaning of the hymn- While living in the place called Janasthana, Rama killed 14000 demons.

This hymn brings to light the valour and might of Rama. For this particular reason, Maharishi Narada sang this hymn.

Each of these 14000 demons had massive bodies with unlimited might and strength, resembling gigantic black clouds who possessed the speed of wind in movement. Every single demon was such that his loud shouts and screams was enough to cause turbulence in the entire Dandakaranaya. They took great delight in roaming about in the gardens of Dandakaranya and in plucking and throwing away the flowers that blossomed there. Their additional pastime was to stroll about in the forests and pluck and throw away the heads of anyone whom they came across. This was their speciality. In case of a war, they madly rush forward with their red shot eyes and attack but never ever backtrack.

When these demons heard that they were to wage a war with Rama, they immediately carried their spears, tridents, bludgeons, clubs, long knives, battle-axes, maces, batons etc. Many others carried long bows, very strong iron arrows, iron shots, daggers and other horrific weapons of assault. Eagerly they set out for war.

At the time they set out, jackals howled awfully from the eastern directions, vultures and owls flew overhead screeching horrendously, the lotuses that had bloomed in the nearby ponds withered suddenly, the fruits and flowers that had adorned the forest trees came crashing to the ground and many more evil omens could be seen in all directions. Due to the evil/bad vibrations emitted by these demons who were ruthlessly marching forward, cuckoos lost their sense of rhythm and sang horrifically. At every step they were accosted by bad omens. Yet, undeterred by all this, they reached Panchavati.

Rama was a single man confronting an army of 14000 demons. Many Devatas, Brahmarishis, Mahatmas, Siddhas, Gandharvas, Charanas, Gobrahmanas assembled in the sky and seeking the welfare of the world, prayed for success in Rama's mission. When Rama, like Apararudra, stood ferociously and valiantly facing the 14000 demons, all the living beings trembled.

Like a gigantic ocean, the swarm of demons shrieked horrendously and ruthlessly fell upon Rama. They hurled all their weapons upon him at one go. The weapons pierced and bruised Rama's body and he was drenched in blood. The Devatas, siddhas and others who were witnessing this war from heaven grieved upon seeing the injuries inflicted upon Rama by these demons.

Yet fearlessly, Rama made a circular curve using his bow (mandala akara) and released hundreds and thousands of arrows. These arrows shred the mighty weapons into pieces. Further they pierced the demons and flung them away. Moans from the demons filled the air.

The infuriated demons now began to hurl huge rocks upon Rama. It can be compared to a rain of rocks. Rama in full fury released the Gandharva astra, which is a very special powerful weapon. Due to the power of this weapon, the demons collapsed in multitudes. At one shot he killed 10,000 demons.

Thereafter 12 army generals attacked Rama. Rama destroyed all of them. Very shortly, another 100 demons fell upon Rama. Rama's weapons threw them to the ground in no time. Seeing this, another 1000 demons attacked Rama. Rama released 1000 arrows from his bow which pierced these demons and rendered them lifeless. Seeing this, all the other remaining demons madly rushed towards Rama. Rama's frightening arrows took away the life of all these demons.

In this manner, in just a short time period of one and half muhurtas, Rama extinguished 14000 demons from the face of the earth. This sight brought untold joy to all the Devatas who were witnessing this. The sound of the divine drums could be heard from the sky and the Devatas showered Rama with flowers.

It can be said that all these weapons were forms of mantras (mantra roopa astra) that were used to bring about the downfall of the demons.

Om Seeta ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 57

Tato jnativadham shrutvaa raavanah krodhamoorchitah Sahaayam varayaamaasa maaricham naama raakshasam.

Meaning of the hymn- The death of his brothers Khara, Dooshana and Trisiras along with other 14000 other mighty demons hugely infuriated Ravana. He sought the help of demon Maricha in overpowering Rama.

Janasthana was filled with corpses of the dead demons. There was no space even to walk through that place. Akampana was the only demon who escaped from that place. Terrified at the prowess exhibited by Rama, Akampana ran to Ravana and reported the death of all demons of Janasthana. Ravana, deeply incensed with this, immediately stood up and said that he will kill Rama.

Akampana stopped him and said, "Ravana, do not underestimate the might of Rama. He is unconquerable. He has a very beautiful wife named Seeta. There is no one in the three worlds who can be equal to her in beauty. She surpasses all the goddesses in beauty. Such is her beauty. Seeta is very dear to Rama. If you abduct this Seeta, then Rama will die of grief".

Ravana was impressed and deeply taken in by this plan. He was now very confident, as he had secured a way to get rid of Rama. He decided to abduct Seeta.

Boarding a chariot that was yoked by mules, he travelled and reached the residence of Maricha, the son of demon Tataka. Maricha was surprised to have Ravana as his guest, and welcomed him warmly. He enquired about his welfare and the reason behind this surprise visit.

Ravana, depicting immense love that he had never ever shown before, very sweetly said to Maricha, "Maricha, I have decided to kidnap Rama's wife Seeta. In this mission, I need your help".

Listening to these words of Ravana, Maricha trembled violently. He was stunned. His mouth dried up completely. He was shocked at this turn of events in his life. He politely said, "Oh Lord, who has given you this mean, unworthy and crooked idea. At first, the person who has instigated you towards this needs to be killed. Please understand that the one who has given you this idea is your true enemy. He doesn't seek to see you alive and happy.

O king of demons, please listen to me. Rama is no ordinary human. He is like the ferocious lion in the Narasimha avatar. The lion is sleeping at the moment. One should never wake a sleeping lion. Please listen to me and return to Lanka".

Hearing Maricha's advice, Ravana returned back to Lanka.

Here Shoorphanaka was unable to tolerate the silence and loneliness in this devastated Janasthana. She fled this place and wailing loudly she reached Lanka. She approached her brother Ravana and explained to him the prowess and might of Rama. Without conveying her own story of how she lost her nose and ears, she

prompted Ravana to secure the beautiful Seeta as his wife. She extolled Seeta's beauty. She further said, "I approached Seeta so as to abduct and bring her to you. She deserves to be your wife. When I approached her for your benefit, that Lakshmana chopped off my nose and ears". Thus She chastised and instigated him.

This time Ravana, clearly carried away by the words of Shoorphanaka, left Lanka and again approached Maricha's house. He said to Maricha, "All I seek from you Maricha, is that you should take Rama far away from Seeta. The rest of the plan I will execute myself. This will make it simple for me to defeat Rama".

Maricha said, "O demon Lord! Please understand that Dharma has incarnated as Rama. Do not create a situation wherein you have to fight him. To abduct another's wife is a great sin".

What is this? A demon was giving advice on a righteous matter. Maricha was the demon who had been flung into the ocean because of Rama's arrow. Just the touch of Rama's arrow could bring about such a major transformation in him.

Maricha continued, "Ravana, due to this deed of yours, your entire lineage will come to an end. Please return back to Lanka. Give up this idea of kidnapping Seeta".

This time Ravana was in no mood to listen. He roared, "Be quiet! Who are you to advise me? I am your king. Do not forget that. You just do as you are told. If you dare to disobey me, I will kill you here itself".

Maricha was shocked at this outcome. He reflected within himself.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 58

Vaaryamaana ssubahusho maarichena sa raavanah Na virodho balavata kshamo raavana ten ate.

Meaning of the hymn- 'O Ravana. Khara, Dooshana and other 14000 demons met their end in the hands of this mighty Rama. Do not underestimate his prowess. Stay away from him". In this and in many other ways, Mareecha advised Ravana.

Ramayana is not just the story of Rama. It contains within it many moral lessons for everyone. In this chapter, through the medium of Mareecha, Valmiki Maharishi advises that one should never maintain enmity with persons of great might and prowess.

Maricha was undoubtedly of worst demonic tendencies, nevertheless having been once hit by Rama's arrow, he had undergone immense transformation. He was now advising Ravana about the futility in seeking to overpower Rama.

Ravana was a fool. Using his position of power, he threatened Maricha. Maricha was equally irritated with Ravana's foolishness. All his advice was going down the drain. As the last straw he finally screamed, " O King! O king of Kings! O Lord of all the demons! I do not know who has advised you to take this terrible step that only leads towards the elimination of your entire lineage. You, who never ever listen to the advice of anyone, have today succumbed to unholy advice that was given to you. Let me know who is that person who is talking very sweetly to you and yet at the same time taking you towards your doom. Do you know that emperors of your stature should not listen to lowly advice that is given by people who inwardly seek your destruction?

A king who possesses good traits acquires/ achieves dharma, artha and kaama. He will then earn great fame. On the other hand, where the king himself is adharmic, then not only the king but also his ministers and citizens will suffer. As the king, so are the subjects. Where the king is immoral, the kingdom collapses. In case the king is foolish, then the charioteer who leads him will also be foolish. When the charioteer himself is foolhardy and unwise, then he will not be able to see the path ahead clearly. Holding the horses in his rein, he will be moving blindly. Should a pit come in his way, he will fall into it. Along with him he will drag the chariot, the horses, the king, ministers and all the citizens whom he was leading.

Ravana, you have not been able to keep your senses (indriyas) in check. Because of your foolishness, the entire clan of demons will perish. Many innocent demons will become victims.

Who do you think Rama is? He is a dharmatma , an embodiment of righteousness, living under the guise of an ascetic. His prowess is immeasurable and he is extremely adept. His brother, Lakshmana, is a man of highest character. He too possesses great strength. Rama's wife Seeta is a lady who is worthy of worship. Living in these forests, Rama is presently undertaking penance. With intent of ensuring the welfare of all living beings in this creation, he has stepped into Dandakaranya. It is better if you do not meddle in his affairs.

Once upon a time, together with two companions I tried to attack Rama. Mercilessly he let out 3 sharp and powerful weapons. The two weapons caught my companions, who collapsed then and there. The third arrow chased me. The story that I am telling you pertains to that period when Rama was still a very young boy. His single arrow threw me 100 yojanas away into the ocean. I was swirled round and round and then thrown down. It was almost as if I had lost my life. Only then I truly understood the real might of this Rama.

From then on, I changed. Giving up atrocities of all kind, I am now living like a hermit. I have been able to achieve control over my senses and my mind. I am now into penance (tapas) as a way of life. I have renounced everything in life.

Ravana my lord, Rama appears to me like Lord of death (yama) himself. Wherever I see, I find hundreds and thousands of Ramas. This is my experience. This is my knowledge. I know for sure that you can never ever conquer Rama. Discard your evil desires. Control yourself. Realize that you are heading towards disaster. Both of us are going to die in this process. Your impudence is leading towards this. I state this seeking your welfare. Listen.”

This advice that Maricha gave to Ravana contains a very deep lesson that is applicable to everyone in all periods of time.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 59

Anaadrtya tu tadvaakyam raavanah kaalacoditah Jagaama saha mareecha tasyaasramapadam tadaa.

Meaning of the hymn- As death was hovering over Ravana, he did not listen to the advice given by Mareecha. Taking Mareecha along with him, he arrived at the cottage of Rama.

In this hymn, the words Anaadrtya and Kaalacoditah are very important. When death is imminent and a fall is certain, the person fails to listen to good advice given to him. Not listening to the good advice given is itself the root for all bad results.

Ravana was deeply angered and vexed with Mareecha who was giving him unasked advice. He screamed, "Why are you speaking meaningless words, Mareecha? Are you trying to scare me from facing that tiny Rama, who without any reason killed your own mother? He impudently chopped off the nose and ears of my sister Soorphanaka. Listening to the words of a woman, he is a fool who has forsaken his country, his family, his kith and kin and has come away into the forests. Moreover, he has killed my Khara, Dooshana and Trishiras. Therefore I am going to abduct Rama's wife Seeta, who is dearer to him than his own life. It is impossible for me to change my decision. I will not listen to anyone. I am the king. I will do whatever I please. I did not ask you for your opinion.

The king has to be respected at all times. Any news, good or bad, should be given to him in all humility, that too only upon being asked. You do not know the Raja dharma. Out of sheer ignorance you have the audacity to speak harshly to me, the king, when he comes to your doorstep. You insult me.

At least it will be appropriate if you listen to me now. Act in accordance to my wishes. In it lies your welfare. When I, the greatest emperor, come to your doorstep asking for your help, you dare to rebuke and advise me? If you are inefficient and incapable for completing the task assigned to you, say so.

I want you to turn into a golden deer having silver spots all over the body. You roam about in the vicinity of their cottage. Make sure that you are visible to Seeta. This is all that I am asking of you. Your actions should be such that Seeta will be tempted to own you. She should be surprised and carried away by your beauty. If you do per my bidding, I will give you half of my kingdom.

I have to possess Seeta. Until then, this mind of mine will not be peaceful. Acquiring her is my goal. It is my only objective in life. I will not listen to any advice that is contrary to this.

You have to listen to me. This is the order of your king. If you do not listen to me, I will kill you now itself. The one who disobeys a king, can never ever be happy. Rama perhaps may spare you, but I, Ravana, the king, will not let you remain alive. You can think and give me your decision".

Mareecha said, "Ravana, it is now very clear that someone does not seek your welfare. He is seeking to eliminate you. He wants you to meet your end in the hands

of Rama. Therefore he is making you pierce your own eye. My words, that were meant for your welfare, are not reaching your head. Anyway, what can I say to one whose life is coming to an end? I will follow and act according to your wants”.

In his mind Mareecha reflected, “Anyway to die is certain. It is better to die in the hands of the great meritorious being (punyatma) Rama, rather than to meet death in the hands of this demon Ravana. To be killed by Ravana means I attain hell and also another birth as a demon. Being killed by Rama will help me attain salvation”.

Thrilled with Mareecha’s decision, Ravana hugged Mareecha. He took Mareecha along with him in the chariot driven by mules. Seeing the chariot driven by mules, Mareecha was sure of his impending death.

They began the journey in the chariot. They crossed many mountains, rivers, ponds and kingdoms on the way and finally arrived at Dandakaranya. Ravana got off the chariot and said to Mareecha, “My dear friend, we have now arrived near Rama’s cottage. At the earliest, we should complete the task for which we have come here”.

Mareecha immediately turned into a golden deer and began to jump about in the vicinity of the cottage, waiting for Seeta to notice him.

Om Seeta Ramabhayaam namaha.

Episode 60

Tena maayavinaa duram apavaahya nrpaatmajau Jahaara bhaaryam raamasya grdhram hatva jataayusam

Meaning of the hymn- Ravana, using the help of the illusory demon Maricha, ensured that Rama and Lakshmana were sent far away from the cottage. Thereafter he abducted Seeta. He also killed the bird Jataayu that had come to her aid.

Seeta, who came out of her cottage, saw the illusory golden deer and was deeply fascinated by it. In her excitement, she called Rama and Lakshmana and asked them to observe it and enjoy. She watched the frolicking deer in great fascination for a little while and then she asked Rama to get her that deer. She begged him in deep earnest. Rama asked Lakshmana to keep a vigilant watch over Seeta while he went to hunt that deer.

The illusory deer ran quickly and disappeared. It reappeared again at a great distance. The moment Rama would sight the deer, it would run quickly and disappear and appear once again in the deeper portions of the thick forest. In this hide and seek game, Rama wandered very deep into the forest. He was vexed up with the deer that was hoodwinking him. Finally he used the weapon that had been created by Lord Brahma and aimed it at the deer. As the weapon hit him, Mareecha gave up his illusory form of a deer and appearing in his true form fell to the ground. While battling for his life, he changed his voice into that of Rama, and screamed loudly, "Oh Seeta, Oh Lakshmana" and gave up his life.

His scream reverberated through the forest and reached the ears of Seeta and Lakshmana. Seeta, recognizing the voice of her husband, immediately presumed that he was in grave danger. Perturbed by this, she ordered Lakshmana to go and save her husband. Lakshmana tried in many ways to convince her that Rama could never be in danger. Without heeding to anything that was being said, Seeta spoke very harshly to Lakshmana. Lakshmana's heart was broken at the words used by her. Unable to do anything else, he prostrated to her and leaving her alone in the cottage went out to help his brother.

Ravana who had disguised as a sanyasi (saint), was keenly watching all the happenings at Rama's cottage. No sooner had Lakshmana left, than Ravana, in this garb of saint, approached Seeta and enquired about her. Seeta welcomed the mendicant and offered him the hospitality. Ravana, then introduced himself and declared that he was the monarch of Lanka and that he sought to make her his wife. Seeta angered at this statement, told him to refrain from such vile and unworthy thinking. She told him that even if were to be immortal, he could not escape Rama's arrow. A verbal duel followed.

An infuriated Ravana transformed into his original self and abducted her. At that moment, the grieving Seeta appealed to all the trees, birds, mountains and wept about her plight.

Jatayu who was nearby heard the wails of Seeta and challenged Ravana. In Ramayana, it is said that Ravana abducted Seeta along with the earth on which she

was standing. Not just Jatayu, all the birds, trees, mountains etc. came in the way of Ravana when he was trying to abduct Seeta.

Jatayu, although old, fought vehemently with Ravana. He tried to preach him the morals and the dharma. He told him that another man's wife is equal to a mother. In the combat, Jatayu overpowered Ravana and threw him to the ground. He pierced Ravana with his nails and injured him.

Jatayu's valour came as a surprise to Ravana. He flew up in the air with his chariot and Jatayu continued to combat with him in the air. Jatayu bit off all the ten hands of Ravana. However they emerged again. In deep fury, Ravana released his grip on Seeta and cut off both the wings of Jatayu using a sword. Not satisfied with that, he injured the bird badly and smashed both its feet. Jatayu fell to the ground. Seeing the bleeding bird that was on the verge of death, Seeta cried bitterly and hugged it. Ravana took Seeta and flew up in the chariot. All the Saints, trees, birds, animals, mountains, in fact all the elements that had witnessed this gory event of abduction were deeply saddened.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 61

Grdhranca nihitam drstvaa hrtaamsrtvaa ca maithilim Raghava sshoka santapto vilalaapaakulendriyah

Meaning of the hymn- Sri Rama noticed Jatayu, who was about to give up its life. From Jatayu he heard of Seeta's abduction by the demon Ravana. Unable to control his senses (indriyas), he wept profusely.

Addressing Ravana who was swiftly carrying her away through the medium of the skies, the distraught Seeta condemned him and said, "Are you not ashamed of what you have done, you fool? Seizing a suitable opportunity when Rama and Lakshmana were not around, you have stealthily abducted me. You are a coward. Added to this you have killed the aged bird Jatayu. Is this your greatness? Is this all your might, you horrible demon? Are you not ashamed of carrying away another man's wife?" . Saying so, Seeta denounced his actions in many ways. "Leave me alone. Send me back", she screamed.

Paying a deaf ear to all her pleas and denouncement, Ravana reached Lanka. He exhibited to her all his grandeur and his possessions. He called for the Rakshasa women and asked them to take Seeta to the Ashoka Vana, his private garden and to guard her there. He called some rakshasas and sent them to Janasthana to ensure the end of Rama.

Meanwhile, Rama, having killed Mareecha was returning to his cottage when he sighted Lakshmana. Rama frantically asked him, "Lakshmana, why did you leave Seeta alone? Why did you come here? Some demon may kidnap her there if she is alone."

In great anguish Lakshmana replied, "Seeta Mata spoke very harshly and insulted me. Hearing her words, I was forced to leave her and come to your aid".

Rama was worried about the safety of Seeta and taking very quick steps He, along with Lakshmana rushed towards their cottage. An empty cottage awaited them. Scattered puja items, strewn darbha (dried grass), shattered articles were the only things remaining there.

Rama and Lakshmana ran speedily to all the nearby possible places looking out for Seeta. She was not to be seen. Rama even prayed to River Godavari and enquired about the whereabouts of his wife. The river which itself was very unhappy was scared and did not reply. Weeping profusely, Rama enquired of every tree, plant and animal whether they had seen Seeta. Not getting any response from any of them, he was vexed and frenzied. Taking on an angry form like that of Rudra, he screamed loudly, " I will destroy this entire universe together with all the living beings in it. I will wipe away everything".

Seeing this form of his brother, which he had never ever seen before, Lakshmana shivered. He pacified and consoled his brother. He pleaded with him not to take any drastic actions but to set out in search of Seeta. Rama who was tormented by grief and was totally inconsolable, agreed to it and they both set out in search of Seeta.

On the way they came across broken chariot pieces and a damaged bow. Nearby, a blood soaked Jatayu was battling its life. For a moment, Rama mistakenly presumed that Jatayu himself would have harmed Seeta. In uncontrollable fury He fixed the arrow in his bow and steadied himself to kill Jatayu. In a feeble voice Jatayu said, "Rama, the demon Ravana has kidnapped Seeta and using the air route he has taken her away from here. Ravana has already wounded me and I am dying. There is no need for you to personally kill me now."

Hearing these words from Jatayu, Rama's grief only worsened. He lamented at the situation of the bird. He hugged the bird and patted it gently. While breathing his last, Jatayu, who was struggling even to speak, said "Rama, Ravana has taken Seeta and proceeded in the southern direction. As that Ravana has abducted Seeta in the Vinda Muhurta, you are sure to find her again. Do not be so disconsolate. You will kill Ravana in a war and you will obtain Seeta. Ravana is the younger brother of Kubera and the son of Vishravasa". Having said these words, Jatayu breathed its last.

Rama folded his palms and offered his obeisance to the departed being and said to Lakshmana, "This revered Jatayu was a dear friend of our father. For the sake of Seeta he has given up his life. He fought on our behalf. He is worthy of worship. He is as revered to us as was our father. More than the separation from Seeta, the death of beloved jatayu causes me more grief".

Rama lamented the loss of Jatayu. He wept. Although being very old, Jatayu abided by the dharma and tried to help in the task of Rama (Rama karya). Through this, he achieved blessedness. He reached very high planes (uttama gati). What a great being!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 62

Tata stenaiva shokena grdhram dagdhvaaajataayusam

Meaning of the hymn- Drowned in total grief, Rama conducted the funeral rites for Jatayu.

Upon Jatayu's death Rama grieved as much as he had, when he had lost his father.

Jatayu's dead body was like a huge motionless mountain lying there. Pointing out to it and cursing the demon Ravana who had killed it, Rama said to his brother, "Lakshmana, even among the birds and animals there are beings who are very righteous (dharmika), gentle in temperament (sadhu), valourous, courageous and principled. How beautifully they adhere to the rules of dharma. That this bird Jatayu gave up its life for my cause, brings even more grief to me.

Lakshmana, go and get some firewood. I shall personally confine it to the funeral fire and complete the funeral rites for this bird. O mighty king of birds! May you reach those exalted heavenly abodes that are designed to receive those who diligently perform yagnas, who without fail conduct daily the fire rituals (agni upasana), donors of land (bhu daata) and the highest ascetics (parivraaja). May you, who are being personally cremated by me, reach those highest planes (uttama loka) from where there is no return".

Saying so, Rama cremated the dead body of Jatayu and placed all the offerings (pinda pradana) to the deceased soul.

Rama, who could not personally perform these last rites to his own father, could now perform all these to the bird Jatayu, who was as respectable as his own father. Rama even recited all the mantras that would aid in its journey to the highest planes. As dictated by the scriptures, Rama and Lakshmana went to the River Godavari and after taking a bath offered water oblations to the departed soul.

Despite the fact that he was exceptionally old and did not possess any weapons, this king of eagles Jatayu, using his own might had fought with Ravana trying to ensure the safety of a pativrata (chaste) woman. By performing this deed that is impossible to accomplish by a being who is very ripe in age, Jatayu acquired endless fame. As Rama personally conducted its last rites, that very moment itself Jatayu reached the highest planes.

In Ramayana, the position/ value of kama (desires, lust) in life is elaborately detailed. The fact that one should not cross the limits of his fate/destiny is stressed upon. Based on the will of the Supreme Lord and based on our individual destiny, auspicious as well as inauspicious events will keep coming our way. Neither should we be overly elated at auspicious outcomes, nor be unduly sorrowful at inauspicious happenings. There is nothing that sorrow can achieve. Irrespective of the good or bad outcomes in our life, our aim should be permanently fixed upon achieving salvation.

Jatayu was not a human being but was just a bird. He was not any appointed servant of Rama. Being fully aware of the transient nature of this creation, he never aspired

for anything at any time. He knew that all these materialistic objects of this world are perishable in nature and have a fixed end point. Having renounced everything, he was living in the forests. He adopted the policy of renunciation and sacrifice (tyaga buddhi). Only that person, who intensely seeks liberation (mukti) will give up all attachments and love towards these materialistic/ worldly objects.

Jatayu was of the firm faith that only Rama can grant him salvation (mukti). He followed the footsteps of Rama. He believed that Rama himself was the ultimate goal that is sought by all beings. Hence, he even gave up his home and shifted his residence to the precincts of Rama's cottage. At all times, his gaze was fixed upon Rama. By giving up his life in Rama karya (Rama's mission), he achieved blessedness (dhanyata).

Vishnu Purana declares that having or not having the darshan of Rama is immaterial. To obtain salvation all that matters is that the being should have love and affection (anuraga) towards Rama. Having given away himself in Rama's mission, Jatayu obtained salvation.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 63

Maargamaano vane seetaam raakshasam sandadarshaha. Kabandham naama rupena vikrtam ghoradarshanam

Meaning of the hymn- As he was proceeding in the forests searching for Seeta, Rama saw Kabandha, a demon who was ugly and fierce in his looks.

Having completed the funeral rites of Jatayu, Rama accompanied by Lakshmana, walked in the southwest direction (Nairuti) of Dandakaranya searching for Seeta. Being an unfrequented and abandoned path it was impenetrable and dense with many thorns, climber plants, bushes and closely grown trees. Wild animals roamed about freely in that area. The brothers, being very valiant, vigilantly paved a path for themselves and speedily crossed this impassable forest range. They entered into the Kouncha forests. Being very alert and watchful of the wild animals that inhabited the place, the brothers quickly proceeded in the direction of Maharishi Matanga's ashram.

As they were thus walking, they entered into another impenetrable and fearful forest. Ferocious and gigantic wild animals and vultures had occupied this dense and treacherous forest. Here the brothers sighted a deep gloomy cave that was as deep as patala (hell). As they were observing the surroundings, a disfigured, ugly and horrible looking demoness, who was watching them, laughed horrendously.

Being valiant and brave-hearted, neither Rama nor Lakshmana was scared. They walked towards her. The demoness too advanced towards them. All of a sudden, this demoness caught the hand of Lakshmana and said, "O handsome man, who has stolen my heart! My name is Ayomukhi. Come, let us joyfully roam about in all these forests. You are so good-looking. I too am very beautiful. See, destiny has brought us both together. It is your good luck that you could meet me. Come with me. I will show you all the wonders of this forest. I am your lover". Saying so, this demoness embraced Lakshmana.

Lakshmana very cleverly managed to get out of her grip and in anger he chopped off her nose and ears. Wailing and bemoaning loudly, the demoness retraced her steps and disappeared into the forests.

Rama and Lakshmana resumed their journey. After they had covered a little distance, Lakshmana stopped suddenly and said, "Dear brother, my left shoulder is vibrating. My mind is very disturbed. I see evil omens. I fear that some great calamity is going to befall us shortly. Yet, as the Vanjulaka bird is screeching at this moment, I know that we will triumph through this calamity too".

People living in forests identify these auspicious and inauspicious signs. In the movement of trees, the chirping of the birds etc. they are able to recognize these signs.

Rama instantly became extremely vigilant and alert. Carefully they were walking through the forest, when suddenly they were accosted by a gigantic and massive-bodied demon on their path.

This demon who was without a head or a neck, had an inordinately-proportioned wide chest and an enormous mouth. On his chest was situated a very large forehead. Within this forehead, there was one single sharp eye. The eye was very large. As this demon was as huge as a mountain, he could sharply witness everything that happened at a distance. This gigantic ugly demon had two arms, which when stretched extended to the length of one yojana. He would stretch his hand and capture the animals in the forest for his food. He was devouring lions, bears, elephants, vultures easily. He would not move from his place.

Rama and Lakshmana saw this demon whose name was Kabandha. Lakshmana who had never seen anything like this before was flabbergasted and said, "Brother, what sort of being is this? It appears to me as if a mountain has got two long deadly arms".

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha

Episode 64

Tam nihatya mahaabahuh dadaaha svargatascha sah.

Meaning of the hymn- The mighty Rama, who possessed powerful arms killed Kabandha. When Rama cremated the dead body, Kabandha was able to reach Heaven.

Kabandha noticed the two brothers and catching them both in his long arms, threw them far away. He continued to pick and hurl them. Rama did not lose courage one little bit. However Lakshmana was deeply perturbed. Addressing Rama he said, "Dear brother. Do not worry about me. Please set yourself free from this demon's grip. Very shortly you will meet Seeta. You will regain the kingdom and will be crowned the king".

Addressing his brother, Rama said, "Oh Lakshmana. Fear not. Everyone is a puppet in the hands of time. There is no one who can go against the force of time. What is in store for us or for this demon, time will only tell. Do not lose heart".

The arrogant demon said to them, "Who are you? Why are you here holding your weapons? All your life is a sheer waste in front of my arms. I am ravenous (hungry) and now I am about to eat you up".

Hearing this arrogant demon, Lakshmana was anguished and angered. He said to his brother, "This demon has all his might in his arms, dear brother. Hence it is wise that without losing any time, we chop them off. It is with these hands that he is catching us".

Kabandha, the demon, who heard this conversation between the brothers, was infuriated and he opened his mouth wide so as to devour these two brothers. As he was quickly drawing his arms closer to his mouth, the brothers drew out their swords in order to chop off his arms. Seeing this action, Kabandha trembled. Very swiftly Rama chopped off the right arm near the shoulder while Lakshmana mutilated his left shoulder. Blood was gushing out like a great stream from this demon. Both the arms of this demon were chopped off. With a loud noise that reverberated across all the forests, this gigantic demon collapsed to the earth.

Kabandha sought to know the identity of the two brothers. In response to this, Lakshmana told him about Rama and about himself, their exile into the forests and the kidnapping of Seeta. Upon hearing their identity the demon Kabandha was deeply surprised. He now knew that the time for the redemption of his curse had neared. He was delighted.

Addressing the two brothers he said, "A warm welcome to this place. I am an accursed being. I will narrate my story. Please listen.

Once upon a time, I was a very handsome being with a great physique like Indra, the lord of heaven. I derived great pleasure in changing my form to a ghastly and hideous one, visiting the earth and moving about in these forests, scaring away the great sages here. Once I went and tried to scare a great sage by name Sthoolashira and irritated him. He cursed me to transform into a horrible and ghastly form and to

remain thus. I begged forgiveness from that great sage, he said 'when Rama chops off your arms, you will be relieved from this curse'.

I undertook penance and pleased Lord Brahma, who granted me longevity. Proud of my longevity, I dared to attack Devendra. Devendra directed his thunderbolt at me. Due to its attack, I got this headless form. I cannot move. I grab animals and devour them.

Rama, since a very long time I have been eagerly awaiting your arrival. Please cremate me. Doing so will bring about auspiciousness to you. There is no one apart from you, who can grant me liberation. When you cremate me, I shall tell you about a being whom you can befriend and who will be of help to you. When I am burnt and I regain my original divine state, I will get the divine vision. With that I shall be able to help you".

Upon hearing this, Rama and Lakshmana found a suitable place in the forests and throwing Kabandha there, they cremated him. Immediately, Kabandha assumed a divine form and seated in an airplane he addressed Rama and said, "Everything that happens is bound by time. Go in the western direction from here. You will reach the Pampa Sarovar. A sanyasini by name Shabari lives there. Please bless her by visiting her. Very close to this Pampa Sarovar, is the Rshyamukha Mountain. A Vanara King by name Sugriva lives there together with his friends. Meet him. It will bring about auspiciousness to you. You will be successful in your mission".

Saying this, Kabandha began his journey to heaven. Once again saying, "Rama, go and befriend Sugriva. It will be useful" Kabandha continued his journey.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 65

So bhyagacchamahanmahaatejaah shabareem shatrusoodanah Shabaryaa poojita ssamyak raamo dasharathaatmajah.

Meaning of the hymn- Rama, the great lustrous being who was also a fearless killer of his enemies, approached the residence of Shabari, the saintly being. Shabari reverentially worshipped Rama.

In accordance to the directions given by Kabandha, Rama and Lakshmana proceeded westwards. They halted for a night on a hilltop and resumed the journey the next morning. They reached the western side of the Pampa Sarovara and spotted the beautiful hermitage of Shabari.

The hermitage was abounding in many great trees. Rama and Lakshmana were observing all the surroundings as they walked towards the hermitage. Shabari too noticed the arrival of these two brothers. On seeing them she instinctively got up, folded her palms and offered obeisance to them. Reverentially she touched their feet.

She offered them water to wash their feet and mouth as dictated by the scriptures. Rama was deeply touched by the devotion displayed by Shabari.

Addressing her he said, "Shabari, I am very pleased to see you. You have realized that there is nothing greater than penance. In the path of your penance there are many obstacles. Have you overcome all of them? Have you conquered anger and hunger completely? You have conquered all of them. Have you successfully completed all the vratas that are to be completed? At all times are you are engaging in penance? Are you successful in your Guru seva?"

In this way Rama enquired about her well being. Wellbeing occurs only on the successful accomplishment of all the points mentioned above. Shabari was that great being who had successfully controlled anger and hunger and was eternally engaged in penance.

In response to this, Shabari said, "By just obtaining your darshan, Oh Rama, my penance has been rendered successful. I have attained accomplishment in penance (tapas siddhi). My Guru seva is now complete. You are the most supreme amongst all the gods. I have now obtained the luck to worship your holy feet. My life is fulfilled Oh, Lord. As your divine gaze has fallen upon me, I am rendered pure. Your grace will take me to the divine planes (lokas) above. The disciples of Matanga Maharishi have told me that by worshipping you and offering you hospitality that is given to a guest (athithi satkara), I will be rewarded with the best and most supreme planes of existence. Rama, I have been every eagerly awaiting your visit. I have set aside many different types of fruits. Both of you please accept my hospitality, Rama". In this way Shabari begged them.

Rama said to her, "Shabari, Kabandha has already told me about you and about the powers and efficacy (prabhaavam) of your Guru. If you wish, you could show them to me".

In great delight, Shabari showed them the sacrificial alters where her Gurus had conducted yagnas. She showed them the place where her eminent Gurus had

created a lake within which the waters of all the seven seas were drawn. Being old, the sages who could not travel to the seven seas for their bath, through their sankalpa (thought/will) brought them to this place. She also showed them the garlands made by them for the worship of the Lord, that had never withered away”

She continued, “Rama, you have seen this entire hermitage, and this entire Vana (garden) has seen the greatness of my Gurus. Now please permit me. I seek to go to the abode of my Gurus”.

With Rama’s permission, Shabari entered the holy fire. Taking on a divine body and shining like a spark of lightening, She went to the abode of Her Gurus. By procuring a vision (darshan) of Rama, by worshipping him and offering him hospitality, Shabari was rendered totally pure.

Even God praised the qualities of Shabari, who believed that Guru Seva is everything in itself and who lived in accordance with it. He came to her doorstep and accepted her hospitality. Thereafter he blessed her.

Leaving Shabari’s ashram, Rama and Lakshmana walked towards Pampa lake.

With this, the Aranya kanda of Ramayana comes to an end.

There is one noteworthy statement in this episode. Shabari could have sought Vaikuntha or Brahmaloaka. But she asked Rama to send her to the plane (loka) where her Guru resided. To her, it was more important than Vaikuntha itself! She wanted to be with her Guru!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 66

Pampateere hanumataa sangato vaanarena ha Hanumadvacanaa cchaiva sugreevena samaagatah

Meaning of the hymn- Moving further down the Pampa Sarovara, Rama met Hanuman. As suggested by Hanuman, they proceeded and met Sugriva.

As the brothers neared the Pampa lake, Rama thought about Seeta and was very disheartened. He lamented a lot. Lakshmana then consoled him saying, "dear brother, you are the Purushottama. You know everything. Good and auspicious events will come your way. Even if Ravana were to hide in hell (Patala), he cannot be saved. This is for certain".

Hearing these words from Lakshmana, Rama cheered up and both of them resumed their walk. They neared the Mountain Rishyamukha.

Sugriva, the Vanara warrior, spotted these two brothers who were approaching the Rishyamukha Mountain. He suspected them to be spies sent by his brother Vali, for his destruction. He was agitated and frightened at the same time. He became motionless. Hanuman seeing the plight of Sugriva said to him, "Why are you grieving in this manner? You are very well aware that sinners cannot step on this Mountain Rishyamukha. Vali is a sinner. There is no doubt about it. An evil-doer like Vali cannot step here. Hence leave off all your worries".

Hanuman's words brought cheer and respite to Sugriva. Hanuman, the son of wind-god Vayu, desired to see these two men who were nearing the Rishyamukha Mountain. He changed his garb into that of an ascetic and approached Rama and Lakshmana. Offering his salutations to them, he worshipped them. Thereafter, very tactfully, he enquired of them, "Both of you, with your radiance appear like great warrior or like divine saints and like Gods. How is it that you have come into these parts of the forests scaring away the animals and birds here? Could it be that you had set out for a war and mistakenly penetrated deep into the forests? Your shine has radiated this place and yet you appear distressed. You don't seem to be inclined to answer any of my questions. I seem to be the only one speaking here.

Anyway, let me introduce myself. There is a great virtuous Vanara by name Sugriva. I am Hanuman, his minister. I am the son of wind. I take on any form I want. I can travel anywhere I want".

Hearing this long speech given by Hanuman, Rama was deeply impressed. He praised him profusely and then addressing Lakshmana, he said, "How wonderfully and fluently he speaks! What clarity is there in his speech! He is so apt in the usage of words. If a king has such an efficient minister as this one, then how many accomplishments will be there to his credit! His speech is enthralling".

Then Lakshmana said, "We are searching for Sugriva and are desirous of friendship with him".

These words spoken by Lakshmana brought great joy to Hanuman. Lakshmana further told Hanuman about Seeta's abduction and how they were unable to trace

her. He told that they were on the lookout for Sugriva so that he could help them in their mission.

Hanuman told them the story of how Vali captured Sugriva's wife, and requested them to help Sugriva.

Giving up his disguise of a Brahmin, he assumed his real form. Seating Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders, he took them to the place where Sugriva was living.

This is a wonderful episode. The meeting of Hanuman and Rama, Rama introducing himself, Rama being able to see the earrings (kundala) of Hanuman, Hanuman recognizing Rama all took place in a matter of seconds.

Hanuman introduced Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva and gave him all their details. Sugriva was very pleased and placing his hand in Rama's hand, he said, "Let us be good friends".

Episode 67

Sugreevaaya ca tatsarvam samsadraamo mahaabalah Aadita stadyathaavrttam seetaayaasca vishesatah

Hanuman introduced the brothers in the following manner to Sugriva, "O Lord, amongst these two brothers, the eldest is Rama. These two are the sons of Emperor Dasharatha and belong to the Ikshvaaku clan. Dasharatha is a great emperor who has conducted sacrificial rituals (yagnas) such as Ashwamedha and Rajasuya. He has even given away plentiful dakshinas. He has also given away plenty of cows in charity.

Such a great emperor, had given some boons to his third wife. In order to abide by his father's words, Rama gave up his right over his Kingship. He moved to the forests. Rama's wife Seeta accompanied her husband to the forests.

Rama never forgets any help that has been rendered to him. He considers extremely valuable, even a small trivial help that he has received and he helps in a great way, the person who had done him the favour. Bringing about the welfare of the entire living beings on earth is his sole objective in life. He is truly worthy of worship. He should have been enjoying all the luxuries and living comfortably in the palace. But now, having given it all up, he is roaming about in the forests.

Finding a suitable time when Rama and Lakshmana were away from their cottage, the demon Ravana abducted Rama's wife Seeta. This demon has the ability to take on any form and move about anywhere he wills. These two brothers do not have any idea of where he resides. Kabandha told them about you and asked them to seek your friendship. Kabandha told them of your great valour and competence and assured them that you will help them in their mission of locating Seeta. Therefore, we now have to help Rama. Rama has come here to seek your help. That Rama, whose grace and benevolence causes delight in the hearts of all the people, is now here to seek Sugriva's grace (anugraha).

Rama is disconsolate upon losing his wife. His wife Seeta, is a very chaste woman (pativrata). She only acts in accordance to the wishes of her husband. She lives wherever Rama lives. She will never leave his side. Even if Rama were to go for penance (tapas), go to the forests or go to heaven, she will accompany him. When her husband is by her side, to Mother Seeta even the dense forests appear like enjoyable flower gardens. With Rama by her side, she does not even remember her mother's or her in-law's homes. Where Rama stays, that place itself is heaven to her.

Being a chaste woman, this separation from Rama is unbearable to her. Seeta is a very delicate woman. She does not even know how to face the hot sun. She grew up like a golden doll within a golden palace. To this Seeta, living in the absence of Rama, is equivalent of living in hell. Such is her love for her husband. Her thinking is always tuned to be in accordance to her husband's thinking.

Rama's life force (prana) is Seeta. Seeta's life force (prana) is Rama. Now, this demon Ravana has stealthily abducted this Rama's life force (prana) Seeta. Rama seeks your help in locating the place where this Ravana lives".

In this manner, Hanuman, on behalf of Rama, in a very tactful and wonderful manner, explained the entire story of Rama to Sugriva.

Sugriva was adept in all dharmas. He was very delighted to see Rama and Lakshmana. His joy was limitless. That too, hearing the entire story of Rama through Hanuman, brought him even more joy.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 68

Sugrivaschaapi tatsarvam shrutvaa raamasya vaanaraha Cakaara sakhyam raamena preetascaivaagnisaakshikam

Meaning of the hymn- After listening to the entire story of Rama, Sugriva was very happy that he had befriended a great warrior, who was also in a similar state as him. Rama and Sugriva sealed their friendship through a fire ritual and with the fire as a witness.

Sugriva was the younger brother of Vali. Having lost his kingdom and his wife, he was living on the Rishyamukha Mountain. His elder brother Vali had snatched away his wife and thrown him out of the kingdom. Trying to escape from his brother who was out to take his life, Sugriva had run all around the earth but to no avail. Finally he had sought refuge in the Rishyamukha Mountain. There was a reason behind staying in this mountain.

Rishyamukha was a very special mountain created by Lord Brahma for a specific purpose. It has intense vibrations. If the person sleeping on this mountain dreams of wealth, when he wakes up he will be greeted with wealth. A sinner cannot step foot upon this mountain under any circumstances. If he does climb this mountain, then when he is asleep, demons (rakshasas) will kill him.

Vali was a sinner and hence he did not dare to climb this mountain. For this reason, Sugriva could live fearlessly upon this mountain.

Addressing Rama, Sugriva said, "You are a brave mighty warrior and possess excellent traits. Moreover, you are extremely righteous. Hanuman has told me in great detail about you. I am a Vanara. Yet, you a great Maha Purusha, seek friendship with me. This itself will bring me great respect. It will also bring me great fortune. Rama, I am stretching my hand. Place your hand in mine. Let us remain as eternal friends. Let us abide by the rules of friendship".

Rama was greatly elated upon hearing these words from Sugriva. He was now sure of finding Seeta. He stretched his arm and placed his hand in Sugriva's hand. He embraced Sugriva.

Hanuman then brought two logs of wood and created a fire. He worshipped the fire with flowers. He kept that fire between Rama and Sugriva. Rama and Sugriva then circumambulated around the burning fire. They sealed their friendship in the presence of fire.

Sugriva then said, "From this moment, Rama, your joy is my joy and your sorrow is my sorrow. From this moment, we shed our differences".

He seated Rama and he himself sat beside him. He said, "Rama I am very happy today. Please bless me that I should not have to live in fear of my brother Vali henceforth".

Rama reassured Sugriva by saying, "I will punish Vali for his deeds. Very shortly you will see him dying".

Exactly at this moment, when these two friends were conversing, in Kishkinda Vali's left eye, in Lanka Ravana's left eye and in Ashoka Vana Seeta's left eye fluttered. When the right eye flutters for men, it is auspicious. The fluttering of the left eye of Vali and Ravana was an indication to them of inauspiciousness coming their way. For ladies, the fluttering of the left eye is auspicious. Hence Seeta was greatly reassured and peaceful with this indication. She knew that very shortly she would see her husband.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 69

**Tato vaanararaajena vairaanukathanam prati
Raamaaaaveditam sarvam pranayaadduhkhithena ca
Pratijnaatam ca raamena tadaa vaali vadham prati.**

Meaning of the hymn- Rama enquired from Sugriva the reason for the enmity with his brother. Upon hearing the story of Sugriva, Rama took an oath to kill Vali.

Rama and Sugriva were sharing their grief with each other. At that time, Sugriva brought out from one of the caves a small bundle containing jewels. He said that a lady had thrown them from the sky and asked Rama to identify if they belonged to Seeta. Upon seeing those jewels of Seeta, Rama became totally grief stricken and miserable. Lakshmana could not identify any jewel, barring her anklets. Recognizing them, he too grieved a lot.

Sugriva consoled Rama, "Rama, I do not know the whereabouts of this demon Ravana. Yet, I vow to do my best in helping you to get her back. I will destroy Ravana. Please set aside your grief. At times of difficulties, a truly wise being uses his intellect and acts in accordance to it. I offer my obeisance to you, please be brave".

Wiping away his tears, Rama said, "Sugriva, it is my great luck to have met a close relative like you at this time of difficulty. Now you tell me, how did you develop enmity with Vali?"

Sugriva replied, "Rama, Vali is my elder brother. He is a very powerful and valiant warrior. In the beginning, he treated me with great love and respect. I too reciprocated with similar feelings towards him. He was very dear to me. Being the eldest, he was appointed the king of the land. I took on the role of a servant, offered my services to him and stood by him at all times.

One night, Mayaavi, the son of demon Maya and brother of Dundhubhi came to Kishkinda in the middle of the night and roared loudly. There was a dispute between Vali and Maayavi because of some female. Maayavi challenged Vali to a fight. All of us including the women of the palace, begged Vali not to enter into a combat with that demon. But without heeding to our advice, Vali madly rushed out of the palace. I was witnessing the fight. Maayavi suddenly ran away from there and entered a cave within the mountains. An infuriated Vali chased him and before entering the cave, said to me, " I will see the end of this demon and return. Until then, you stand here at the entrance of the cave".

One year passed by. My brother was inside the cave. I had been waiting for him at the entrance. One day, blood gushed out in torrents from inside the cave. I could hear the roar of Maayavi. I also felt that I heard the cry of Vali. It was a maya (illusion) created by demon Maayavi. Mistakenly I thought that my brother was dead. I brought a huge boulder with all my might and closed the entrance to the cave. I did not want the demon to come out. In great grief I offered the water oblations to my brother. I returned to Kishkinda in great remorse. For very many days I kept this news as a secret from everyone there. Using many techniques, the ministers slowly

learnt from me the entire truth. They reflected in depth about the situation and after a great deal of thought, they crowned me the king.

I was ruling efficiently and wisely. One day, all of a sudden, my brother Vali entered the palace. He was deeply infuriated with me. He abused me in any ways. He insulted me in the presence of one and all and declared that my greed for the kingship had driven me to block the entrance to the cave and prevent Vali from reaching home. He refused to listen to me. He beat me up in the presence of everyone and snatched away my wife from me. Making sure that I do not have a shelter in that city, he drove me out into the forests. Out of fear of my brother, I ran all across the earth. He continued to chase me. At last I reached this Rishyamukha Mountain. Vali will not dare to step on this mountain. Rama, Vali has thus wronged me. Will you not help me?"

Rama then said, "Sugriva, do not grieve. Vali will be alive only as long as he is away from my sight. That's all. The moment I see him, he will be dead". In this way, Rama pledged to eliminate Vali.

Both the friends rejoiced and were hopeful that dharma will emerge victorious.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 70

Valinascha balam tatra kathayaamaasa vaanarah Sugriva ssankita scaseet nityam veeryena raaghave

Meaning of the hymn- Sugriva explained in great detail about the prowess of his brother Vali. He was doubtful as to whether Rama had in him the capacity to kill Vali. Sugriva began to explain the might and capacities of Vali in the following way, "Rama, every morning before sunrise, Vali visits the four oceans, offers the water oblations to the Gods and returns to Kishkinda. Such is his capacity.

Dundhubhi the demon possessed the might and strength of a thousand elephants. One day, this Dundhubhi challenged the ocean to come for a fight. The ocean politely declined saying, "Oh mighty and valourous hero, I am no match for your might. Himavan, the mountain, supercedes me in might. He is your equivalent. Go and fight him".

Laughing derisively at the ocean, Dundhubhi approached Himavan and challenged him. To this Himavan replied, "O mighty warrior, I am not powerful enough to combat you. Vali, the mighty Vanara lives in Kishkinda. He is equal to you in might. Go and fight him".

Dundhubhi rushed towards Kishkinda in the form of a buffalo and screamed loudly challenging Vali for a combat. When Vali came in front of him, Dundhubhi arrogantly yelled, "Vali, this night fulfill all your desires. Meet all your near and dear ones and bid them goodbye. Take a final look at your kingdom and appoint your successor. This is your last night. Tomorrow you are going to die at my hands".

Upon hearing this, Vali sent all the ladies into the inner precincts of the palace and said to Dundhubhi, "Your scream is laudable. Your words are also very appreciable. Yet, I would like to make a small change to the plan. Why wait till tomorrow? Let us battle it out this night itself".

Saying so, Vali wore the golden chain (Kanchana mala), that had been gifted to him by Indra and entered the combat. Holding Dundhubhi by both the horns, Vali flung him into the air with great ease and threw him to the ground. Blood started to gush from Dundhubhi's ears and nose. Vali began to pound him mercilessly. Dundhubhi was unable to withstand the onslaught. Dundhubhi was getting weaker and weaker while Vali's strength kept on increasing. In great anger, Vali lifted Dundhubhi and threw him fiercely to the ground. Dundhubhi was dead.

Not satisfied with this, Vali who was still furious, lifted the dead body and having swirled it many times, threw it far away. The dead body fell in the precincts of the hermitage of Maharishi Matanga. The drops of blood fell upon the great sage. Angry at this, Matanga Maharishi cursed Vali saying, "If ever you step into this place, you will meet death instantly". For this reason, Vali will not step into the place.

Rama, look there. Can you see that mountain-like structure? It is the dead skeleton of the demon Dundhubhi. Look there, Rama. Can you see those enormous seven sala trees? Vali, with his might, is capable of shaking them and making them leafless.

Rama, this is the might of Vali. Vali is unequalled. Now you assess for yourself how you can eliminate him”.

These words uttered by Sugriva brought a smile to the face of Lakshmana. Eagerly he was looking forward to what Sugriva would say next.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 71

Raghavapratyayaartham tu dundhubheh kaayamuttamam Darsayaamaasa ssugrivo mahaaparvatasannibham

Meaning of the hymn- Sugriva, who was very doubtful of Rama's competence and valour, displayed the skeleton of Dundhubhi, which was like a huge mountain, to prove Vali's might.

Having described Vali's might in great details, Sugriva looked at Rama and Lakshmana. Lakshmana smiled and said, "Sugriva, it appears as if you seem to doubt the might of my elder brother. You have described in detail about the might of your elder brother and you seem to lack confidence in the might of my brother. What is it that my elder brother should do to prove his might? What will give you the required confidence in the abilities of my brother?"

Sugriva then said, "Lakshmana, if Rama can slit these seven trees with seven arrows and if can throw this skeleton of Dundhubhi 800 square yards away, then I will get the needed confidence".

Hearing this, Rama's eyes were reddened with anger. He, who was seated until now, suddenly stood up. Seeing him Sugriva said, "Rama, Vali is extremely mighty and valiant. He is unconquerable in combat. His might is well known in all the three planes (lokas). Although he is a Vanara, he never loses a combat. Some of his feats are beyond the reach of even the Devas. Because of his might, I dread him and out of this fear I am hiding in this Rishyamukha Mountain and am not leaving it.

Vali's anger knows no bounds. Although he will not step on to this mountain, he may send someone here to kill me. Eternally I live in this fear. Rama, I am completely aware of the might and valour of my unconquerable brother and hence I am detailing all of them to you. I do not doubt your abilities, my Lord. Nor do I seek to intimidate you. You possess the might of Himavan. Yet, I have never seen you in any war. Hence I am not sure of your abilities.

Sri Rama, by seeing your might, I will get the required confidence. You are my sole refuge. O Lord, you possess unlimited good traits. You are sinless. Only with your help, I will emerge victorious. After all, we have sealed our friendship with the fire as a witness, haven't we? Only because of you, I will regain the respect of my friends and relatives. Only because of you, I will appear worshipful to them.

If the self-realized being develops feelings of love and affection towards anyone, then it will remain eternally. At all times and in all circumstances, a friend is the sole refuge. A true friend gives up his wealth, comforts and even his life for the sake of friendship. Only this can be called true friendship.

My Lord, I fear my brother's might. But under no circumstances, do I doubt your abilities. Your radiance, your words and your form, all of these appear like the bright burning fire. Please help me".

Sri Rama, who was until then very angry, now smiled pleasantly upon listening to these words.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 72

Utsmayitvaa mahaabaahuh preksyacaasthi mahaabalah Paadaangusthena ciksepa sampoornam dasayojanam

Meaning of the hymn- Rama, who possessed unimaginable might and who possessed arms that gave him the ability to accomplish these unimaginable deeds, easily flung the skeleton of Dundhubhi with his toe. The skeleton fell 10 yojanas away.

Sugriva was a mighty and righteous Vanara, who always abided by his words. For this reason, the proverb 'Sugriva ajna' has remained eternally on earth. (It means that Sugriva was a man of his words and his commands towards it, had to be carried out at all costs). He possessed great competence in successful accomplishment of tasks. He was of moral character, truthful at all times, and shone with radiance. He was very humble. He possessed a wise intellect. He always remembered the good help that he had received from others and he always helped them back. In fact he gave them back much more than what he would receive. Sugriva took take on any form he wished.

Such a great character as Sugriva was the son of the Sun God. Rama belonged to the lineage of Sun (Surya vamshi). Hanuman was the disciple of the Lord Sun. This was the relationship that these three shared. That is why these three met and stayed together.

Sugriva was well versed with the geography of the entire earth. He could accurately pinpoint the different locations and specify what existed at those places. He had the complete knowledge of all the great deep impenetrable caves, the dense impassible forests and the deep oceans on earth. Based on his knowledge of geography (bhugola shastra) he could exactly tell the temperatures and weather conditions of different places at any given point of time. He was well-versed in the various scriptures (shastras).

He was well aware of the might of his brother. Hence, he was very careful to ensure that even the slightest oversight/ error did not exist in this planning. Towards this, he was very minutely detailing the capacities and the strength that Vali possessed.

Smiling resplendently at this Sugriva, Rama said, "Let me also show you my prowess and capacities".

Rama walked towards the skeleton of Dundhubhi. Very easily, using his toe, he lifted and flung it. That's all! The skeleton flew up in the air and fell at a distance of 10 yojanas. Sugriva had sought that the skeleton should be thrown 800 square yards away but now it fell 10 yojanas away (one yojana is 8 miles).

Sugriva then said, 'Rama, at that time when Vali kicked this Dundhubhi, it was very heavy owing to the muscles, blood and flesh. Now it is just bones. Yet it is heavy, no doubt, but, at that point of time, Vali who flung this body full of flesh and blood, far away was tired after a battle and yet could achieve this feat. I am not underestimating your capacities, but just am informing you of Vali's might. I think that Vali possesses great might".

Thus Sugriva expressed his doubt. He wanted to make sure that he does not fall into a pit. Before waging a war, it is essential to assess one's own abilities as well as the capabilities of the opponent. The mighty warrior should also use his intellect in case of war. Else he will become the sacrificial goat.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 73

Bibheda ca punassaalaan saptai kena maheshuna Girim rasaatalam chaiva janayan pratyayam tadaa

Meaning of the hymn- To instill more courage into Sugriva, Rama, sent out a single arrow which felled seven great saal trees, pierced the mountain and penetrated into hell (patala).

Sugriva continued, "I am unable to gauge who is stronger amongst Vali and you, Rama. Look there. There are seven saal trees. Even if you pierce one of those trees with one single arrow, I will be able to assess your might. With your arrows, I know that the tree can be shredded into pieces. I have no doubt in this. Yet, you have vowed to kill Vali with one single arrow of yours. Therefore just fell one tree with one arrow. I can assess your might versus Vali's might. Rama, please do not misunderstand that I am testing you. You are a lion. You are Purushottama. You are the most supreme human being, Rama."

Hearing these words of Sugriva, Rama took up his bow and just pulled the string. The twang of his bowstring reverberated in all the directions. He then adjusted his arrow into his bow and having pulled the string up to his ears, let out the arrow. The arrow moved at the speed of wind and in a matter of seconds, felled all the seven great saal trees. Without stopping with this, the arrow darted ahead and hit a huge mountain nearby. The mountain was leveled due to the impact of the arrow. From here, the arrow delved straight into hell (Patala) and after returning from there, it entered Rama's quiver and settled down there.

This was one of the unfailing arrows of Rama, empowered by his mantra balam (power of mantras). Due to the grace of Maharishi Vishwamitra, Rama had acquired unsurpassed knowledge of weaponry. It can be said that this entire knowledge was under his control. Upon Rama's call, the deities of these weapons would appear and stand before him. Like servants, they awaited his orders. They acted in accordance to his wishes. Not even one arrow released by Rama ever missed its mark. Not even one went for a waste. It unfailingly hit the goal and accomplished the task. Such was the majesty of Rama! Such was his valour, might, courage and power!

He was the human incarnation of the Supreme Lord!

Episode 74

Tatah pritamanaa stena vishvasta ssa mahaakapih Kishkindhaam raamasahito jagaama ca guhaam tadaa

Meaning of the hymn- Sugriva was impressed with the mighty feats performed by Rama. He was pleased that he would regain his kingdom. Accompanied by Rama, he went to Kishkinda.

Sugriva was surprised, fascinated and delighted upon witnessing the feats shown by Rama. His joy knew no bounds. Devas displaying such achievements is a normal occurrence, but a human being performing such extraordinary deeds was truly an astonishing fact. Rama's accomplishments, in fact surpassed those of even the Devas. This, coupled with the fact that Rama was his friend, brought limitless joy to Sugriva. He could not control his happiness. In that absolutely happy state, he knelt completely on the floor and offered his obeisance to Rama.

He said, "Rama, you are undoubtedly the best archer. There is no one in the three worlds who can compete with you in archery. You are the best among the humans. In weaponry and in eliminating the enemies you are the supreme. You are extremely competent. Even if Lord Indra, together with all the Devas were to wage a war with you, you will fearlessly face them. Your arrows possess the capacity to kill them all. In front of such a great person like you, Vali is insignificant. I had told you that Vali would shake each tree and until it became leafless. You, the most competent archer, could pierce and break seven strong trees with just one arrow! You are equal to Lord Indra or Varuna. It is my great luck that a person of your stature has befriended me. My sorrows have all simply vanished. Now I am exceedingly happy. Srirama, please kill my enemy Vali right now. Please do not wait for a suitable opportunity".

Sugriva thus expressed his happiness. Now that he was confident of Rama's might, he was a bit hasty to get back his kingdom. He was now doubly sure that the kingdom would be returned to him.

Seeing this happiness on the face of Sugriva, Rama warmly embraced him. He then said to Lakshmana, "Now we should proceed to Kishkinda and kill Vali". Lakshmana agreed to this. Lakshmana was an expert in Vastu shastra and shakuna shastra. He was an eminent pundit. He had the expertise to precisely identify the future bad/good occurrences, based on the omens (shakuna) itself. For this reason, Rama would always consult Lakshmana before embarking on any new task. He would never go anywhere without Lakshmana by his side.

Now Rama addressed Sugriva and said, "You proceed to Kishkinda. We shall follow you. Go there and challenge that brother of yours to a combat".

All of them proceeded to Kishkinda. On the outskirts of that kingdom was a great forest. Rama hid himself behind a tree in that forest. Sugriva got ready to call his brother for a duel.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 75

Tato garjaddharivara ssugrivo hemapingalah Tena naadena mahataa nirjagaama harishvarah.

Meaning of the hymn- The most supreme Vanara Sugriva, who was also gold-complexioned arrived at Kishkinda and let out a terrible and loud roar, challenging Vali for a fight. Hearing this roar, Vali came out of his house, ready to fight.

Having reached Kishkinda, Rama and Lakshmana remained in the forest outside the kingdom. Sugriva went inside to challenge Vali for a combat.

Sugriva no doubt possessed a wise intellect, but yet, a visible difference could now be noticed in his behavior. If his behavior in this present situation is understood, then this difference will be clearly noticeable.

There are 4 classifications of persons in this world.

The first category are those who, just by talking very sweetly and politely to another, are able to find out all their details. They are able to precisely gauge the inherent greatness and capabilities of the other person. Both Rama and Hanuman belonged to this category. That is why, even though Hanuman approached them in the guise of a mendicant, Rama was able to accurately assess his character and described them in complete detail to Lakshmana. Likewise, Hanuman while explaining the story of Rama to Sugriva, completely detailed the character and traits of Rama. Both of these are classified as the most supreme (uttama) persons.

The second category of persons are no doubt intellectual, wise and mighty, but they arrive at a conclusion of the other person's character and greatness only after conducting a personal examination. Sugriva belonged to this category. Hence he can be addressed as mediocre (madhyama).

The third group of persons are those who do not possess this ability to assess for themselves the character and might of the other. At the same time, they refuse to listen when others tell them. Such persons, even when they are informed that Rama had easily defeated the mighty Parasurama and that he had killed 14000 demons in a matter of minutes, refuse to accept his might. Such a person understands about the might of another only after his own personal experience. Demon Ravana belonged to this category. Only after he was completely ruined in the war, he could understand who Rama truly was and what His might was.

The fourth category are the worst of the lot. Even when Rama's glory is visible in front of their eyes, they refuse to accept His greatness. They are stone-hearted.

Having understood these 4 classifications, every person should strive to reach the first category. Sugriva, who belonged to the second category, now arrived in Kishkinda and let out a loud confident roar that reverberated across the entire city. Vali heard this roar and understood that his brother was challenging him for a fight. Shining in full resplendence like the setting Sun, he immediately ran out of his palace, ready to attack Sugriva.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 76

Anumaanya tadaa taaraam sugrivena samaagatah Nijaghaana ca tatrainam sharenai kena raaghavah

Meaning of the hymn- Even though his wife Taara was compelling him not to go in for the war, Vali pacified her and arrived for the battle. Rama killed Vali who thus came for the fight.

Vali and Sugriva fell upon each other in full vengeance and began attacking in mad rage. In war, they could be compared to the planets budha (Mercury) and angaraka (Mars) fiercely fighting with each other. In looks, they were like the identical twins Ashwini kumars (celestial doctors).

Their resemblance caused bewilderment to Rama. Be it in looks, in bodily features or in the way they fought, they were totally identical. Rama could not fathom who Vali was and who Sugriva was between both of them. He hesitated to pull out his arrow from the quiver. Fearing that even a slight error could result in the death of his dearest friend, Rama refrained from letting out his arrow.

Sugriva could not withstand the onslaught of Vali. He found it hard to bear the blows being hurled at him. With a hope that Rama's arrow will come and rescue him from this plight, he continued to patiently bear with all this torture. He kept thinking of Rama and waiting endlessly. Finally, realizing his limitations, with a great effort he escaped from the clutches of his brother and hastily dashed towards the Rishyamukha Mountain.

In mad frenzy, Vali chased him but Sugriva reached the mountain as fast as he could and began to climb up. Recollecting his curse and being afraid to step on this mountain, Vali in seething anger, returned back to Kishkinda.

Sugriva had barely managed to save his life. He was badly wounded and fatigued. He was disappointed with Rama. Rama and Lakshmana neared him. Sugriva, angry that Rama did not keep his word, said to him, "Rama, you broke your promise. You made sure that I was badly thrashed by Vali. You should have told me earlier itself that you would not kill Vali. I know Vali's might. I would not have dared to challenge him and would have safely continued to remain here. After a lot of tall claims and after having shown me your extraordinary capacities, you encouraged me to go in for a combat with Vali and then did not save me. I have received so much hammering from Vali because of it".

Rama consoled Sugriva saying, "Sugriva, it is true that I have given my word. There is no doubt that I have promised to kill Vali. But first listen to me. Both of you look strikingly similar like twins. In the war I could not distinguish you from your brother. You are very dear to me. Hence, I refrained from using my arrow, lest it strikes you inadvertently. This time you wear some object so that I can distinctly identify you. Then you challenge him again. Then you will see me killing Vali".

Lakshmana brought a flower garland (gajapushpa mala) and put it around the neck of Sugriva. Once again along with Rama and Lakshmana, Sugriva arrived at Kishkinda. Akin to the previous visit, he roared loudly challenging Vali for the

combat. The intensity of his roar was such that the pancha bhootas (the five basic elements) trembled.

Vali's wife Taara trembled and shivered upon hearing this roar. A deep fear overtook her. As Vali, overwhelmed with rage, was dashing out for the duel, she approached him and said, "O king! Please do not rush out for the war at this minute. My heart trembles in fear. Please go tomorrow morning. Our son Angada has got this news from the spies that that two princes, Rama and Lakshmana have come to Sugriva's aid. No one can defeat Rama in war. His prowess is well known. It is not wise to develop enmity with such a mighty person. Why do you think Sugriva, who was so badly hammered and who fears you, has come once again to challenge you? It is purely because of some assured protection. Therefore it is unwise to rush to war at such a time without proper reasoning".

In this and in many other ways, Taara tried to dissuade her husband from rushing out for the combat. But Vali was in no mood to listen to her advice. Being very fond of duels, he, in great fury rushed towards Sugriva.

The combat began. Sugriva, who was already badly battered and drained out due to the morning combat, continued to be at the receiving end. He kept looking out for Rama's arrow but it was nowhere to be seen. He began to lose hope. What if Rama failed to release the arrow again this time? What would be his position he wondered? In the last round he had barely managed to save his life, this time he was sure of meeting his death. When would Rama come to his rescue? While he was thus losing hope and with great difficulty bearing all the blows being showered upon him, the arrow came very swiftly and sharply pierced through the chest of Vali.

Like a huge tree, Vali came crashing down to earth. He was full of praise for the warrior who had such a precise aim. He thought that he ought to meet this warrior. While he was thus thinking, his eyes fell on Rama, who, holding his bow in one hand, was walking towards him. Along with him, was his brother Lakshmana who too was holding a bow.

In this manner, Vali had the darshan of Lord Rama.

Om Seeta Ramaabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 77

Tata ssugriva vacanaat hatvaa vaalina maahave Sugriva meva tadraajye raaghavah pratyapaadayat.

Meaning of the hymn- As promised to Sugriva, Rama killed Vali and coronated Sugriva as the king of the Vanaras.

Addressing Rama who had come near him, Vali said, "O great being, you are a dharmatma (righteous person). I am a monkey. Why did you treacherously hide behind a tree and kill me? Can your action be called dharmic (righteous)?" Vali condemned Rama in various ways.

Rama then said, "O Vanara! Vali! How is it that you recollect the rules of dharma and adharma now at this hour when you did not abide by them throughout earlier? Sugriva did not choose to become the king of this land. Yet, because the ministers compelled him, he ascended the throne. Without giving him a chance to explain the situation, you mercilessly drove him out of the kingdom. You took away his wife Ruma. Yet you were not satisfied. You constantly sent your spies to gather information about him. You ensured in every way that he had no freedom of movement. Each and every act among these is adharmic.

O monkey, this entire land belongs to the Ikshvaaku race. They have the right to control and govern all the humans, animals and birds who inhabit this land. At present, Bharata is the king of this land. He is a great dharmatma. In accordance with his directions, I and all the vassal kings are trying to ensure that dharma emerges victorious. We are punishing all those who are treading the path of unrighteousness (adharma).

You however became a slave to lust and desires. Every act of yours was unrighteous. You fell from your position of a Vanara and behaved like a base animal. You displayed all animal tendencies. That is why I had to hunt and kill you (as one would kill an animal).

This is the dharma. What need do I have to come in front of you and fight you? Do you know that an animal can be killed either by facing it directly or it can be killed slyly from behind the woods? Are you aware of this law? Now you have abused me in various ways. This is yet another sin. I do hope that you are repenting for your evil deeds. At some time or the other, you have to repent your sinful actions. It is inevitable".

Due to this preaching from Rama, Vali could understand the depth of his sins. He understood dharma. He sincerely begged forgiveness from Rama.

By then, Vali's wife Taara arrived at the scene and began to wail inconsolably. Hanuman consoled her. After handing over the responsibility of Angada and Taara to Sugriva, Vali left his mortal body.

Rama consoled Taara who was bemoaning the death of her husband. He also organized for the funeral rites of Vali.

Thereafter Hanuman came to Rama and said, "O Lord Rama, please come to Kishkinda and crown Sugriva as the king".

Rama said, "Hanuma, you are aware that I am abiding by the words of my father. Bound by it I do not step into any kingdom, town or village. Therefore, all of you crown him the king".

Sugriva accepted this decision of Rama. At an auspicious time the Vanaras Gaja, Gavaksha, Gavaya, Gandhamadana, Sarabha, Mainda, Vividha, Jambhavanta and Hanuman together crowned Sugriva as the king of Kishkinda. As per the promise made to Rama, Sugriva immediately appointed Angada as the crown prince. Together with his wife Ruma, he came to Rama and sought His blessings. He ruled efficiently and wisely. His rule can be compared to Indra's rule.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 78

Sa ca sarvaan samaaneeya vaanaraan vaanararshabhah Dishah prasthaapayaamaasa didrkshu rjanakaatmajaam

Meaning of the hymn- The most supreme Vanara, Sugriva, called all the monkeys to assemble in front of him. He then ordered them to go and search for Sita.

Being the Monsoon season, the entire area was slashed by heavy rains, in the 4 months following Sugriva's coronation. Rama and Lakshmana chose to live in the Prashyavana Mountain during this season. Due to the torrential heavy rains, the forest paths were all flooded and in fact it was impossible for people to even come out of their caves. Everyone stayed in their respective homes.

Sugriva, who had seen luxuries after a very long time, was completely absorbed in it and was neglecting his duties. He had gotten back his wife, his power and his place in the kingdom and therefore was sunk in enjoyments. He forgot all about the promise made to Rama.

Hanuman, his minister noticed this slackness on the part of his king. He said to Sugriva, "O King, you have obtained this kingship purely due to the grace of Lord Rama. More important than this, is the fact that Rama is your dear friend. It is therefore time now to fulfill your duties. You have to complete Rama's task as promised. Please remember that difficulties always chase that person who is negligent in his duties. There is no more room for delay. One should always complete the tasks before the allotted time. Even the best deeds accomplished after the completion of allotted time go down the drain. Today almost a crore vanaras (10 million) consider you as their king and respect you accordingly. Please do not forget that you were able to get such great fame purely because of the grace of Rama.

Even now there is time. Please issue a commandment that all the Vanaras of the kingdom should assemble here at the earliest."

At the behest of Hanuman, Sugriva immediately called Neela and commanded that all the Vanaras, living in all the directions, should be ordered to assemble before him. Having said this, he went back into his inner apartments.

Autumn (sharad rutu) made its appearance. The time that had been agreed upon for Seeta's search was long past. Seated in the cave, Rama was grieving for Seeta and at the suffering that she would be undergoing. He also grieved that Sugriva had failed to live up to his word.

Rama was now very angry. He called Lakshmana and asked him to go and give a warning to Sugriva of the dire consequences that he would have to face on account of failing to live up to his promise.

Lakshmana, who was himself very angry with Sugriva, immediately took up his bow and set out to Kishkinda. Through the sentry he sent a message to the Vanara King about his arrival. Sugriva, was surrounded by women and was tipsy at that time. He paid no heed to the messages being given to him by the guards. They kept telling him that Lakshmana was seething in mad anger, and that his anger was such that

the entire kingdom could be destroyed, but nothing was going into the head of Sugriva.

Angada, the crown prince, arrived there and awakened Sugriva from his drowsiness. Sugriva, who was slowly aroused said, "I have not done anything that would hurt the interests of Rama and Lakshmana. Why then are they angry with me?"

Hanuman and other ministers reminded him about Rama's task that was pending completion. Exactly at that time, Lakshmana who was still waiting outside, pulled the string of his bow in intense anger. The twang of the bow string caused Sugriva to tremble profusely. He could gauge the intensity of Lakshmana's anger. He sent Taara to pacify Lakshmana.

Sugriva then said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana, this kingdom, all these luxuries and everything that I possess today, are alms that Rama has given me. I am merely his servant. It is true that I have overstepped my time limits. Please excuse me. Right now we will begin the search for Seeta".

Sugriva immediately called Hanuman and said, "Hanuman, please tell all the Vanaras who are residing near the Mountains Mahendra, Vindhya, Himavat to assemble here right now".

Hanuman immediately called the chiefs and sent them in all the directions with clear instructions to gather all the Vanaras. He commanded that this was 'Sugriva ajna'

Lakshmana and Sugriva proceeded to meet Rama. Offering his obeisance to Rama, Sugriva said, "O Lord! All the Vanaras are shortly going to assemble here. We will begin the search for Seeta now".

Even as Rama was expressing his happiness to Sugriva, it felt as though the mountains shook and the earth trembled. Multitudes of gigantic Vanaras from all the directions were heading to meet Sugriva.

Sugriva addressed the gathering and said, "All of you should help in locating Rama's wife Seeta. This is my order. Auspiciousness will befall you upon completion of this auspicious task".

The Vanaras were all set to go in search. Hanuman, Angada and a few other prominent Vanara leaders were asked to proceed towards the southern direction in Her search.

With this, the Kishkinda Kanda of Ramayana comes to a close.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 79

Tato grdhrasya vacanaat sampater hanumaan bali Satayojana visteernam pupluve lavanaarnavam

Meaning of the hymn- The mighty Vanara Hanuman adhered to the advice given by Sampati, and flew across a vast salty ocean of 100 Yojanas to reach Lanka.

Under the leadership of Angada, Hanuman and other Vanaras began their journey towards the south. They reached a place that was towards the nairuti (south-west) direction from the Mountain Vindhya.

Here they came across a cave. Tired and thirsty, they eagerly entered the cave. But to their horror there was no way to exit from that cave. The cave belonged to Yogini Mata Swayamprabha. On coming to know that these Vanaras were on Rama's mission, the divine mother Swayamprabha, who earnestly sought that this mission should be completed at the earliest, used her yogic powers and ensured that they were safely dropped outside the cave.

The Vanaras, who had thus exited from that cave, now found themselves facing the gigantic Indian Ocean. The ocean appeared rough, tumultuous and ferocious. The unusual high tides appeared as if they would swallow each and every one of them.

By this time, the one-month period of time that had been allocated for this mission by Sugriva had elapsed. Yet, the Vanaras had been unsuccessful in their mission of locating Seeta. Fearing Sugriva's wrath, crown prince Angada trembled. Being sure that he would be taken to task for having failed in his mission, he decided that it would be better to fast unto death by the banks of this mighty ocean. He lay down on the ground. Wailing and bemoaning loudly, all the Vanaras decided to follow his footsteps.

Their deafening cries fell on the ears of Sampati, the gigantic eagle that was nearby. He heard their lamentations. Sampati, the brother of Jatayu, said to the Vanaras that Ravana had imprisoned Seeta at Lanka. This city of Lanka was at a distance of 100 yojanas (1 yojana is 8 miles). Instead of lamenting, he suggested that the Vanaras should devise a plan to reach that place.

Even before Sampati could complete speaking, the Vanaras sat up in great elation. They were relieved that they finally knew the location of Seeta. In great jubilation, each of them began to boast about his own individual capability in crossing the mighty ocean. None of them had the capacity to cover the entire distance to and fro. The wise Jambavanta intervened and declared that only Hanuman could accomplish such an impossible feat. He was the only one who can return safely from that Land.

Jambavanta began to profusely praise the intrinsic capabilities of Hanuman. Because of the curse, Hanuman can recollect his innate strengths and capabilities only when they are brought to his memory. Only then he will come to our aid.

As Jambavanta and other Vanaras were singing his praises, Hanuman began to grow tremendously in size. He displayed his might in front of the Vanaras and then with his mammoth body walked up the Mountain Mahendra. He resolved that to

accomplish Rama's mission he should cross the ocean. As the Vanaras were shouting the victory slogans, Hanuman suddenly flew up in the air. He swiftly reached the height of the clouds. He was flying at the speed of wind. After all, he was the son of the wind, wasn't he?

Seeing the mighty Vanara flying in eager earnest to accomplish Rama's mission, the Lord of the Ocean, who himself belonged to the Ikshvaku lineage, decided to honour him. He approached Mountain Mainaka, who was deep within him (ocean), and asked him to provide Hanuman with the customary offerings that is given to a guest.

Mainaka instantly rose high up from the ocean and said to Hanuman, "Please be my guest and accept the customary hospitality. Please rest here for a while".

Hanuman replied that like an arrow released from Rama's bow, he had pledged to go swiftly without a break and this prevented him from halting and taking rest. He asked Mainaka to rest assured as he was pleased with Mainaka's worship and hospitality.

In this manner without stopping, Hanuman swiftly continued to fly. A little distance later he was accosted by a horrendous, ugly looking figure that had no hands and legs. She said, "My name is Nagamata Surasa. The Devatas have offered you to me as a meal". Having said this, she opened her mouth wide enough to swallow Hanuman. Hanuman, who possessed a keen sense of intelligence (sookshma buddhi), without discontinuing his flying, entered her mouth in his subtle form (sookshma roopa) and came out of it again within a fraction of a second.

Surasa was deeply pleased with the fine sense of intelligence that he possessed and profusely blessed him. Hanuman continued to fly towards Lanka. A little time later, Hanuman felt as if someone was holding his shadow and dragging him downward. He instantly recollected that she was 'chaayagraahi' the demoness about whom Sugriva had mentioned to him. She was also known as demoness Simhika.

Assuming a subtle form, Hanuman entered the mouth of Simhika. Going deep inside her, he broke all her bones, tore her muscles and having killed her, he emerged from her mouth and resumed his journey. He came back to his normal form.

He continued to fly and shortly he spotted wonderful breathtaking gardens. Figuring out that this was Lanka, he immediately assumed his subtle form. As he neared the island, he could see the Trikoota Mountain upon which the entire city of Lanka existed.

Having reached his destination, he now came back to his original form and set foot in Lanka. Hanuman, the son of wind, effortlessly and easily crossed a distance of 100 yojanas to arrive in Lanka.

How much ever is spoken about this great Lord, it never suffices.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 80

Tatra lankaam samaasaadya pureem ravanapaalitaam Dadarsa seetaam dhyaayanteem asokavanikaam gataam

Meaning of the hymn- Hanuman arrived at the city of Lanka which was being ruled by Ravana. He had the darshan of Mother Seeta, who while seated in the Ashoka vana, endlessly grieved for Rama.

Hanuman's ability to fly was not restricted to a mere 100 yojanas. He had in him the ability to uninterruptedly and effortlessly fly across distances of many thousands of yojanas at a stretch. In his eyes, the entire ocean was merely the size of a cow's foot.

Having landed in Lanka, Hanuman scrutinized the entire city from all the 4 directions. He realized that Lanka, with its gigantic walls, was such an impenetrable fortress that even a mosquito or a worm would fail to get through. So he decided to penetrate into the city in his subtle form (sookshma roopa) that was far tinier and subtler than any mosquito or bacteria.

While he was thus trying to get in, all of a sudden there stood in front of him a huge ugly-looking female. She was Lankini, the guardian deity of Lanka. She gave him a blow with her fist. Hanuman was deeply angered. Using his left fist, he hit her hard on her head. That's it! She was no match for his might. The deity was pleased with Hanuman and she moved away from there.

With the intent of bringing the downfall of Lanka, Hanuman placed his left foot first into the kingdom. Placing left foot first symbolizes total destruction and downfall of the enemy. Setting the right foot first symbolizes auspiciousness and prosperity.

Very carefully Hanuman made his way through Lanka. At every step he was praying that his master Rama's mission should be successfully accomplished. He scrutinized the entire city searching for Seeta. He noticed all the different types of demons who lived there and their habits. He entered the houses of all the commanders-in chief of the armies. He searched every nook and corner of every building. He then came across the palace of King Ravana. Many horrendous looking demons, of varied shapes and sizes were holding sharp weapons and zealously guarding Ravana's palace. Ravana's palace was named Pushpakam. It means that Pushpaka vimana (airplane) itself was his residence. This Pushpaka vimana was a gigantic mansion. He noticed a picture in which two elephants were worshipping Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. He went about the entire palace but even here Mother Seeta was not to be seen.

Yet Hanuman was unperturbed. He increased his concentration and diligence in his attempts. Without any feeling of tiredness and disgust, he patiently went through room after room and combed the entire palace. He covered every nook and corner. Simultaneously he observed the grandeur of Ravana's palace and decided that its splendor was undoubtedly far more than that of heaven. He believed that in grandeur it was comparable to Brahma Loka (abode of Brahma).

He instantly discarded all his useless thoughts and once again focused on Rama. Recollecting his mission, he continued his search. At one place he sighted a gigantic bed. Sleeping on it was the demon Ravana, who was shining in great radiance (tejas). From there Hanuman moved on to the kitchen.

He had completely scanned the entire palace of Ravana, but Seeta was nowhere to be seen. Hanuman decided to kill Ravana or to carry him away to Rama in the event Seeta was not to be found. While he was thus thinking, all of a sudden, his eyes fell upon a secretive garden located there. It was the Ashoka Vana. This was the only place in the entire city that he had not searched so far.

He quickly entered the garden. Seating himself upon a tree, he carefully and minutely began observing the entire garden. He saw a lady seated below the Simshupa tree who was piteously grieving for Rama. She was also performing japa of Rama.

Hanuman recognized her as Divine Mother Seeta.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam namaha.

Episode 81

Nivedayitvaa bhijnaanam pravrttim ca naivedya ca Samaashvaasyaca vaideheem mardayaamaasa toranam

Meaning of the hymn- Hanuman gave Rama's ring to Seeta and consoled Her. He informed her of Rama's well being. He thereafter destroyed the huge entrance-arch of the Ashoka garden.

In Seeta, Hanuman could see Rama. Striking resemblances could be seen even in their physical appearances. After all, Seeta had retained Rama in her heart while Rama had retained Seeta in his heart. As their hearts were thus intertwined, Seeta could remain alive even though she was suffering in Lanka.

Realization dawned upon Hanuman that it was Rama himself who was grieving seated under the Ashoka tree. In discipline, traits, character, behaviour, principles and lineage, both Rama and Seeta matched each other perfectly. Hanuman instantly thought that she undoubtedly was the most ideal partner for his master. Likewise, his master was ideally suited for her.

He thought, "Oh, the killing of various demons such as Khara, Dooshana, Kabandha and Vali could take place only because of this Divine Mother. It is because of Her grace that Sugriva could get back his kingdom. Today, I have crossed this ocean and reached here for Her sake. Now, after seeing Her, I realize that even if Rama were to turn the whole earth upside down in Her search, it is worth the effort. She deserves it. My Divine Mother Seeta has in her all the auspicious traits and character".

He now hopped and reached the Shimshupaa tree under which the Divine Mother was seated and hid within its branches. He noticed that time and again the ghastly and horrific demonesses were approaching Seeta and threatening her with dire consequences if She failed to marry their king. He observed Seeta shrinking in fear each time they approached and threatened her. He mentally thought of Rama and offered his mental obeisance to both Rama and Lakshmana.

Soon it was morning. Ravana was majestically walking towards Seeta. He heard Ravana threatening Seeta. Seeta was sobbing bitterly and grieving. She was saying, "Even if my body were to be shred into pieces, I will never abide by Ravana's dictates. I will never surrender to Ravana".

The time period allotted to her by Ravana had by then elapsed. So she decided that it was better to die. She was grieving, "How is that Rama and Lakshmana have failed to locate Lanka till now? Do they even know that I am alive and am eagerly awaiting their arrival here? What is the use of my living?"

At that time, the demoness Trijata had a dream that Rama had emerged victorious. She saw Seeta decked like a queen accompanying Rama and Ravana lying dead in the battlefield. She informed all her companions about her dream. Hearing this, all the demonesses began to tremble. Hanuman, seated above the Shimshupa tree observed all this.

Bad omens were now visible to the demons. After all, Hanuman had set foot into their land and hence it was apt for bad omens to come their way. At the same time, to Seeta many good omens were visible.

Hanuman now decided that he has to tell the entire story of Rama to Seeta and slowly get Her to converse with him. He began to softly and melodiously sing the entire story of Rama.

Seeta seated under the tree was overjoyed upon listening to the story of Her Lord. She looked up and spotted a monkey there. Hanuman climbed down from that tree and stood in front of Her. He introduced himself and said that his master was combing the entire land in her search. He updated her of all the accomplishments that Rama had achieved in the process of Her search. He informed her that Rama had deputed him to go and search for Her. Hanuman also handed over to Seeta, the ring that Rama had sent for Her.

Seeta enquired from Hanuman many more details of Rama. She handed over her jewel Choodamani to Hanuman and asked him to hand it over to Rama. She told Hanuman the story of Kakasura. Hanuman in turn assured Her that Rama would shortly arrive there and rescue her.

Having said this, Hanuman gave up his subtle form and now assumed his physical form once again and walked through the garden. He began to destroy all the trees in the garden, as he walked. He killed a few demons who were present there. Picking up the iron pillars he crushed to death hundred demons including Jambumalini. He broke the entrance-arch of the garden. Sitting there he began to loudly shout– Victory to Rama, Victory to Lakshmana. Victory to Sugriva. His loud slogans of victory resonated throughout Lanka. Hanuman ensured that every resident of Lanka heard it.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 82

Panca senaagrahaan hatvaa saptamantrisutaanapi Shoora makshancanispishya grahanam samupaagamat

Meaning of the hymn- Hanuman killed five army commanders, 7 sons of the minister Prahasta. Furthermore he also killed Akshakumara, the brave son of Ravana. He then willingly allowed himself to be bound by the Brahmastra used by Indrajit, another son of Ravana.

Ravana could not digest the fact that a mere monkey could kill so many of his clan and cause so much damage to his favourite Ashoka Vana. He seethed in anger. The very next moment he dispatched 7 sons of his minister, with clear instructions to catch hold of the monkey and to bring him to the court.

These 7 sons of the Prahasta showered incessant arrows upon Hanuman and covered him completely with them. Such was their expertise in archery. All of a sudden, Hanuman flew high up in the air and came down speedily. While coming down, he crushed to death the seven of them with his palm as effortlessly as one would kill insects and worms. He tore their bodies apart.

The news of the death of these brave warriors caused Ravana to be worried for the first time. He was stupefied. He called for the 5 commanders-in-chief Virupaksha, Yupaksha, Praghosa, Durdara and Bhasakarna and ordered them to catch that monkey which was causing chaos in the Ashoka Vana. Ravana was furious that this monkey was perhaps was a creation by Lord Indra for the destruction of the demon clan. Therefore he said that it was important to punish that monkey.

Ravana further continued, "In the past, I have seen the might of Vali, Sugriva, Jambhavanta, Neela and Dvididha. This Vanara seems mightier than any of them. The actions of this Vanara are more fearful than those of the others. Use any means, but you need to bring him here".

Obeying their King's commands, the commanders set out in great enthusiasm to catch the monkey. They were greeted with loud slogans proclaiming victory to Rama. Hanuman, the great Vanara, was leisurely seated at the entrance of the garden awaiting their arrival.

A war ensued. At first, the actions of Durdhara brought about limitless anger in Hanuman. He immediately flew high up in the air and came down in rapid speed and landed upon Durdhara's chariot. The chariot, the horses, charioteer as well as Durdhara were all crushed under Hanuman's weight. There was no trace left of any of them.

Virupaksha and Yupaksha then simultaneously attacked Hanuman. Hanuman grabbed a Sala tree along with its roots and hammered the two demons to death.

Each of these demons was a cursed being. This was the method prescribed by Lord Indra for their destruction.

Praghasa was enraged seeing the death of his companions and attacked Hanuman violently with his long sword/ dart. The other demon Bhasakarna attacked Hanuman with spears.

Hanuman was drenched with blood flowing profusely from his body. Such was the power contained in those weapons. An enraged Hanuman quickly grabbed a mountain, lifted it up and hurled it upon them.

With this, all the commanders-in-chief were killed. Hanuman slowly proceeded towards the entrance of the Ashoka Vana and sat once again in his original place. He continued to vociferously shout victory slogans about Rama. In intense anger, he was awaiting the arrival of more demons so that he could dispatch them to the abode of Yama (Lord of death).

Ravana was dumbfounded when the news of the deaths of his commanders was reported to him. He looked at his son Aksha Kumara. From his father's glance, Aksha Kumara knew what he was supposed to do. He grabbed his armour and his weapons and dashed towards Ashoka Vana. A terrible war ensued between Hanuman and Aksha Kumara.

Aksha Kumara's tender and innocent face deterred Hanuman from causing great harm to him. However Aksha Kumara's antics continued to increase. He started causing more damage. Finally thinking that it would be unwise to keep quiet, Hanuman grabbed Aksha Kumara by his legs and swirled him round and round in the air. Finally he flung him towards the ground. Aksha Kumara's dead body could not even be traced.

Ravana grieved the death of his son, Aksha Kumara who was his most favorite son. His other son Indrajit, who was witnessing all that was happening, paid his respects to his father and set out to capture the Vanara. During the war with Hanuman, Indrajit decided to use the powerful and deadly weapon Brahmastra. Hanuman recollected the boon given to him by Lord Brahma that this weapon could never harm him. He thought of the future plan and decided that there were a lot of tasks yet to be accomplished. Hence he willingly decided to be bound by this weapon (astra). Externally he pretended to be terrified and helpless in front of this powerful weapon.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 83

Astrenonmuktamaatmaanam jnatvaapaitaamahaadvaraat Marsayan raakshasaan veero yantrinastaan yadrcchayaa

Meaning of the hymn- Although Hanuman had in him the capacity to set himself free from the Brahmastra, he did not opt for it. He allowed himself to be bound by it and taken to Ravana's palace.

When Hanuman was a little infant and was hit by Indra's thunderbolt (vajrayudha), all the deities (Devatas) blessed him with many boons. At that time Lord Brahma had specifically blessed him that his weapon, the Brahmastra, will not harm Hanuman ever in life. He further showered him with the boon of being Chiranjeevi (living eternally).

Hanuman now recollected the boon bestowed upon him by Lord Brahma. Although he had the capacity to set himself free from this Brahmastra, which Indrajit had aimed at him, he desisted from doing so. Instead he began to think as follows, "I should personally see the demon Ravana and carefully assess his capacity and strengths. By praising the prowess of Rama, I should weaken his morale and courage. I should create a deep fear in his mind".

With this conclusion, he allowed the Brahmastra to bind him completely. Seeing the Vanara bound by the weapon, there was no limit to the joy of the demons. They brought all the ropes that were available in the city and bound him in them. They double-checked that the ropes were all knotted properly and ensured in various ways that the monkey did not escape.

Indrajit was frustrated with the acts of these demons. He kept screaming, "All of you are great fools. Please do not bind the monkey with the ropes. Once the weapon Brahmastra is used, then ropes or any other material should not be used to bind the person further. In fact such a person should not be touched at all. Now with your actions, the Brahmastra will be rendered ineffective". All his screams fell on deaf ears of the demons who were thoroughly enjoying tying up this monkey.

Indrajit was trying to figure out if any other weapon could be used upon this Vanara, now that the Brahmastra had been rendered futile due to the acts of the demons. While he was still reflecting about it, Hanuman began to calmly walk behind the demons who were pulling and dragging him. Indrajit was surprised to see this. He was happy with this outcome.

There were celebrations in the city. Every demon was approaching Hanuman and giving him a blow with his fist. Hanuman did not lose his calm. He continued to walk behind the demons who were dragging him across the streets of Lanka.

Hanuman was taken to the royal palace where Ravana, dressed in silks, was seated majestically on a completely decorated grand throne. His ministers Durdhara, Prahasta, Mahaparshva and Nikumbha, surrounded him. Seated amongst these 4 ministers, Ravana appeared like a large island surrounded by all the 4 gigantic oceans on all sides. Hanuman admired the demon's splendour, grandeur, courage, prowess and strength, all of which were unimaginable. 'If only he had not stooped to

the lowly levels of kidnapping Mother Seeta, he could have continued to majestically rule. This one deed has robbed him of his entire merit' thought Hanuman.

Ravana too was shaken up seeing Hanuman. He thought, "This Vanara appears so different from the others that I have seen. What splendour he possesses. To me he appears like the mighty Nandi (the bull attendant of Shiva), who had cursed me when I had lifted up the Kailasa Mountain in the past. In radiance this Vanara is equal to that Nandi."

Upon Ravana's order, Minister Prahasta addressed Hanuman and asked, "Hey monkey! Who are you and why did you come to our city? Tell us all about yourself".

Hanuman said, "I am the messenger of Lord Rama. I have come here solely with the intention of seeing you. I am a Vanara. Due to the boon of Lord Brahma, the Brahmastra cannot harm me. Yet I allowed myself to be bound by these ropes so that I can see you. I have come here in search of Mother Seeta and I have successfully completed that mission. I have met the Divine Mother. Now for the rest of the task, my master Lord Rama is going to come here personally.

Listen to my message O King. Return Seeta to Rama and protect your life. I have the capacity to single-handedly destroy this entire city. Mother Seeta is the form of fire (agni swaropa). Due to her power, fire is being aroused here in Lanka. It is just a matter of time before the entire city is engulfed in flames. You are seeking self-destruction. Please do not bring about the end of your own race.

Rama cannot be vanquished in war. In any war, it is He who alone emerges victorious. His arrows are infallible".

Hanuman thus praised his master and stood there contemplating about Him.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 84

Tato dagdhvaa pureem lankaam rte seetaancha maithileem Raamaaya priya maakhyaatum punaraayaanmahaakapih

Meaning of the hymn- After speaking to Ravana, Hanuman burnt down the entire city of Lanka, barring the Ashoka Vana where Seeta was living. Having completed this task, he speedily rushed back so as to deliver the good news to Lord Rama.

Enraged by the words of Hanuman, Ravana ordered that he be instantly killed. At this juncture, Ravana's brother Vibhishana intervened and said that, as per the scriptures, it was wrong to kill a messenger.

Ravana then ordered Hanuman's tail should be wrapped in old rags and torched. He further said that Hanuman should be taken in a procession throughout the city with this burning tail.

As dictated by their king, the demons quickly brought forth all the cloth and tied Hanuman's tail with it. They then poured oil and set it ablaze. Hanuman was taken in a procession along the entire city. Hanuman anyway had desired to tour the city once more and hence he quietly put up with all this insult. Men, women children and old and enthusiastically came out into the streets to watch him who was being led in a procession.

Hanuman's tail was burning fiercely. Along with it, his heart was also burning. He was extremely angry. The demons took him to the crossroads at the city centre and were making loud proclamations that he was a spy of Rama. He was goading every citizen to take a look at the monkey with a burning tail.

This news reached Mother Seeta. She was deeply saddened. She was distraught that he was undergoing all this torture for her sake. She prayed to Lord of Fire (Agni) and beseeched him to look after Her son Hanuman. She prayed that the flames should have a cooling effect on him.

The Fire God immediately responded to her prayers. Standing in the city square, Hanuman could no longer feel the heat from the burning tail. He thought that he could experience this coolness only because of the grace of Lord Rama.

The very next instant, Hanuman shrunk and became very tiny. He freed himself from all those shackles. Within a fraction he grew enormously large. Picking up a huge iron pillar near the main entrance, he smashed all those demons who had been proclaiming their victory so far.

Then observing the city of Lanka, he pondered as follows, "My mission has been accomplished. I have met Mother Seeta. I have seen the demon Ravana. I have completely assessed his valour and might. I have walked through the entire city and identified all their secrets and assessed the extent of their weaponry. I have killed a few prominent among their army and damaged their garden. Now only the beautiful buildings and the forts remain intact. Anyway my tail is burning. I can now offer some food to this fire that is seated in my tail. Let me now destroy all these buildings".

He immediately flew up again and jumped from one building to another setting them on fire. As it is these buildings were made of lac. Firstly he spotted the house of the minister Prahasta. Very happily he jumped into that house. He was moving around as if someone was chasing him and he was trying to escape. He was jumping out of one window and hopping in from another, swiftly running through the corridors, nevertheless at every step he was leaving a trail of fire behind. From that building he jumped onto another and repeated the process.

The Fire God appeared to be very pleased with this offering. The flames began to rise quickly and he began to devour all the buildings. The Fire God must have thought that no one had ever given him one entire city as food! Each house in this city was as vast as a huge city itself. The wind only strengthened the flames.

The cries of the citizens filled the air. How were they to bring adequate water to douse the fire? The entire ocean would have to be brought in to control the fire of this size. People were running helter-skelter, not knowing how to save themselves.

Hanuman however appeared like fierce Rudra at the time of the destruction/ burning of Tripura. Barring the Ashoka Vana where Seeta was living, he doused the entire city. He also spared a few houses belonging to Ravana. All the others, he burnt down.

Lanka had lost all its sheen and splendour. It was totally devastated. Only the shrieks and screams of the demons could be heard.

Having completed this task, Hanuman went to the ocean and dipped his tail into the waters. The fire on his tail was extinguished. He then stood there and contemplated on Rama. All of a sudden he recollected Mother Seeta. He was remorseful that in his hurriedly burning down the entire city, inadvertently he could have harmed Seeta as well. He was extremely sorrowful. He began to reproach himself. Exactly at that time charanas (celestial bards) who were moving about in the sky were speaking amongst themselves- "Hanuman has burnt down the entire city of Lanka. But he has spared the Ashoka Vana where Seeta resides. She is safe".

Hanuman was deeply elated upon hearing these words. Immediately he took a long leap and began to fly back home. As soon as he was able to spot the land where the Vanaras were awaiting his arrival, Hanuman, who was still flying, let out a loud thunderous roar.

The Vanaras hearing this roar jumped and danced in great jubilation. There was no limit to their excitement. Hanuman greeted Angada and all of them upon his arrival and said, "I have seen Seeta". Firstly he used the word-'seen'. He then narrated the entire story in brief to them.

The Vanaras in great jubilation proceeded back home. On the way they entered the garden Madhuvana, the private garden of Sugriva. They trashed Dadhimukha, the Vanara who tried to prevent their entry into it. Through this action, they sent an advance signal to Sugriva of the success in their mission.

Sugriva understood that Angada and Hanuman had successfully completed the mission and he gave this good news to Rama. Further he sent a message asking the Vanaras to return home.

Angada, accompanied by Hanuman and the others, returned.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 85 & 86

Shobhigamya mahaatmaanam krtvaa raamam pradakshinam Nyavedaya dameyaatmaa drstha seeteti tattvatah

Meaning of the hymn- the wise Hanuman approached Rama, circumambulated him and then said, "Seen have I Seeta".

With loud roars of victory, the Vanaras under the leadership of Angada approached Kishkinda. They greeted Sugriva and then went to the place where Rama was living.

Hanuman bowed down and offered his obeisance to Rama. The first word that Hanuman said when he saw Rama was 'Seen'. He did not even say 'Seeta' as the first word. A deep lesson on how information is to be given and how one should speak is embedded in this.

Hanuman then informed Rama that Seeta was strictly abiding by the rules of Paativratya and that she was glowing with divine radiance. Hearing these auspicious words from Hanuman, Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva were overflowing with joy. The grief on their faces was replaced with complete feelings of happiness.

Rama addressed the Vanaras and repeatedly enquired about the well being of Seeta. He did not hesitate to ask again and again. When the news is good and auspicious, we too seek to hear it again and again. At that time all the Vanaras pushed Hanuman into the forefront and asked him to give the news in entirety.

Hanuman turned towards the south and offered his obeisance to Mother Seeta. He then said, "O Lord. I leapt across the ocean that was about 100 yojanas. The kingdom of Lanka is to the south of this ocean. The ruthless king Ravana rules this land. It is he who has kidnapped Mother Seeta. The exquisitely beautiful Seeta who is also the greatest Pativrata (chaste woman) remains in his captivity. She has placed her firm belief in you and is surviving on that strength. Hordes of demonesses guard her night and day. At all times they threaten her. She sobs in fear. She prays to you all the time. Her mind is totally enveloped by your thoughts. She leads a strictly disciplined life, just like a lady ascetic (tapasvini).

She told me of the incident of Kakasura which took place while you were in Chitrakoot. She also told me the story of this Choodamani that you had presented to Her. O Lord, she has not even slightly deterred from dharma (righteousness). She had become lean and thin with grief. She shivers and trembles in fear every time the demon Ravana approaches her. She begs you to rescue her from the clutches of this demon as the earliest.

O Lord, let us not waste any more time. Let us quickly devise a way by which we can cross that ocean".

Rama received the Choodamani that Hanuman had brought. He looked at it tenderly and grieved for Seeta. Time and again, he would look at it and think about her. Thereafter Hanuman continued, "O Lord. Mother Seeta had a question. She wanted to know why Rama and Lakshmana, who were so valourous and strong could not come to Lanka until now. I consoled her that unable to trace your whereabouts both

Rama and Lakshmana are grieving. I assured her that shortly you will arrive at Lanka and rescue her. I told her that you will destroy the entire kingdom of Lanka. I also assured the Divine Mother that eminent Vanaras such as Sugriva, Angada along with the army will accompany you in the war. I told her of the might of all these Vanaras.

In fact, I asked her to sit on my back and come here with me. But she did not oblige. Then I said to her, 'Mother, you refuse to sit on my shoulder. However very shortly you will see Rama and Lakshmana seated on my shoulder'. Lanka will reverberate with the loud roars and shouts of hordes of powerful and mighty Vanaras and bears. Dear mother, these auspicious shouts will very shortly also fall in your ears.

Rama will destroy Ravana totally. Thereafter he will take you and return to Ayodhya, as soon as the period of exile is complete. You rest assured, dear mother. Soon thereafter Rama will be crowned the King of Ayodhya. Dear mother, all this will take place shortly. Please be brave. You shall shortly witness all these. By saying all this, I have given her faith and hope, O Lord".

With this Sundara Kanda comes to an end. Through his words, Hanuman was indirectly inviting Rama and Lakshmana to sit on his shoulders so that he could take them to Lanka.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 87

Tata ssugreevasahito gatva teeram mahodadheh Samudram ksobhayaamaasa sharai raadityasannibhaih

Meaning of the hymn- Along with Sugriva, Rama reached the shores of the ocean. When the ocean refused to obey him, Rama was intensely angered. He took out powerful arrows from his quiver and hit the ocean. Seeing this, the mighty ocean trembled.

Rama was overjoyed upon learning of the accomplishments of Hanuman. He openly praised Hanuman in the presence of all the Vanaras. He was touched that Hanuman had completed all the tasks assigned perfectly. Rama mentioned that Hanuman had saved the Ikshvaaku lineage by finding out the whereabouts of Seeta. He also said that he felt helpless at his inability to reward adequately Hanuman for all that Hanuman had done for Him and this saddened him a lot. Rama embraced Hanuman.

Again and again Rama enquired from Hanuman all the details about Lanka. Hanuman then elaborated in detail all the information that he had assessed about the enemy and their secrets.

After ascertaining all the information, Rama got ready for the war. The entire army of Vanaras and bears followed their King Sugriva. They marched through all the terrains. The Vanara army was unfathomably huge. Even mountains appeared buried under this large vast army.

To this mighty army, which itself appeared like an endless ocean, the real ocean appeared like an obstacle. It was an impregnable bottleneck. The ocean was splashing its huge waves and it appeared to be laughing and jeering at them.

The army was now dejected. They pondered about the various ways in which they could cross it over. However none of the ideas was practical. This ocean was such that they could not swim, not everyone could fly across it like Hanuman did, they could not sail using boats, nor could they build a bridge over it. How then were they to cross over to Lanka? Unable to find a solution, everyone was crestfallen. Everyone including Rama grieved. Lakshmana was consoling Rama.

Exactly at this time, in Lanka, Ravana called for a meeting of all his ministers. He expressed his view that Rama could easily cross over the ocean along with his army and attack Lanka. He wanted to know their suggestions in this matter. Ravana was now worried and scared.

His foolish ministers however spoke of their great strength and might and boosted the confidence of their king. They assured him of an easy victory in the war. Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana, differed from them all. He clearly voiced his opinion that Rama would bring about the destruction of the entire demon race and that the only way to escape from destruction was to hand over Seeta to her husband Rama. He said that this was the rightful way out. With this, Lanka and all its citizens would be saved, he said.

While Vibhishana was thus giving him words of advice, Ravana began to jeer at him. He criticized Vibhishana and refused to hear his words of wisdom. Vibhishana then flew up in the air and said to his brother, "My dear brother, seeking your welfare I spoke wise and just words. Nevertheless you do not seek to listen to them. Hence I am going away".

Vibhishana approached Rama and sought refuge. Rama welcomed him and that very moment got Lakshmana to crown him as the King of Lanka. Based on the advice given by Vibhishana, Sugriva and other prominent Vanaras approached Rama and said, "O Lord, please pray to the Ocean".

Around this time, Ravana sent his spy Shuka to gather all the information from Rama's camp. However Shuka got caught and when the Vanaras were mercilessly harassing him, he prayed to Rama. Due to Rama's grace, he could save his life and return back to Lanka.

Rama prayed to the ocean. He spread grass (darbha) on the shore and lay down on it. Three days and three nights passed by. Yet the ocean did not seem to budge. It retained its careless attitude. With this Rama was deeply angered. His eyes turned red and fierce. He said to Lakshmana, "this ocean thinks that I am incapable and weak. Such is his arrogance. Forbearance and kindness are not the qualities that one should display in front of such arrogance. Lakshmana, now you see my might. With my arrows I am going to dry up this entire ocean. It is my mistake to be patient."

Saying this Rama drew out powerful arrows from his quiver, and released them. Those supreme arrows, that were like a blazing fire, moved at great speed and cut through the ocean causing unimaginable turbulence and destruction. Thousands of large waves, as high as mountains, began jumping up and down carrying with them multitudes of sharks, crocodiles and other sea animals. All the animals living in the ocean were terrified. Not stopping at this, his arrows dashed to Patala (hell) at unbelievable speed and killed the demons there. The ocean god was humbled. The ocean retraced and went back for a distance of one yojana.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 88

Darsayaamaasa chaatmaanam samudrassaritaam patih Samudravacanaachaiva nalam setu makaarayath

Meaning of the hymn- Samudra, the ocean which is the husband (pati) of all the rivers, was terrified at Rama's anger. He manifested in his real form. Based on his advice Rama arranged for the bridge to be constructed by Nala.

Rama was fiercely releasing arrows into the ocean, which only increased its turbulence. The ferocious ocean was humbled and he trembled. Now Rama fixed the all-powerful Brahmastra to the string of his bow and was about to release it. Lakshmana rushed to Rama who was still uncontrollably angry, held on to his bow and beseeched him, "Rama, stop your efforts. The ocean is terrified. He is now approaching you".

From the middle of the ocean, there arose a celestial lustrous divine form in red clothing and wearing red flower garlands. He was the Samudra, the sea god. He approached Rama, folded his palms, offered his obeisance and said, "Rama, the earth, water and air have never altered from their natural path. They remain fixed in their own nature. Like them I too am unimaginably deep. It is my nature and it makes it impossible for anyone to cross over. Many animals have taken refuge in me and are surviving in my waters. Now however I will help you till you cross over to the other end. You please build a bridge across the ocean".

Rama addressed Samudra and said, "This arrow that is ready to be released from my bow is the Brahmastra. It cannot go in vain once it has been positioned in my bow. Now you tell me towards whom should I direct it?"

Samudra said, "O Lord, towards the northern direction from here is a place Drumatulya. Numerous dacoits, sinners and those who indulge in evil deeds reside there in plenty. I am unable to live along with them. I am unable to see their terrible antics. My dear Lord, please release that supreme arrow of yours in that direction. They will be destroyed in totality".

Rama released the Brahmastra due to which all the sinners who lived on that island were destroyed. From then onwards, this place lost its name of Drumatulya and was known as Maru kaantaaram. Due to the blessings of Rama, this place now abounded in milk, water, fruits and roots, honey etc.

Samudra who was very pleased with this, said to Rama, "Nala, the son of Vishwakarma is as efficient and great as his father. He is capable of building this bridge across the ocean. I shall ensure that this bridge will not collapse".

Saying this, Samudra went his way.

Nala accepted the commands of Rama and began the construction of the bridge. The entire army of Vanaras began to carry and bring huge, enormous trees, boulders and complete hillocks and throw them into the waters. Using his great expertise and skill, Nala was carefully arranging them to create a bridge and was moving forward. Every object be it a boulder, stone or tree that was touched by Nala, simply floated upon

the ocean. On the first day, they built 14 yojanas long bridge. On the second day they could complete 20 yojanas, on the third day they completed 21 yojanas, on the fourth day 22 yojanas and on the 5th day they completed 23 yojanas. Thus, within 5 days the Vanaras built a bridge covering the entire 100 yojanas!

A marvelous and sturdy bridge was now ready. Devatas, Gandharvas and even the other greatest beings were supremely amazed upon seeing this bridge and this unimaginable accomplishment. All the boulders and objects floating appeared like ornaments beautifying the ocean.

Rama accompanied by Lakshmana and the entire Vanara army began to cross the ocean using this bridge as a medium. The vast enormous army of Sugriva could not be accommodated entirely on this bridge. Therefore some vanaras were occasionally swimming and trying to cover the distance. Some others were intermittently flying in the air and then hopping back on to the bridge. They used all their monkey antics but somehow were eager to reach the other shore.

The army of Sugriva crossed the ocean and reached the other end. They found a place that was abundant in water and fruits and they camped and feasted there.

To see Rama, who had accomplished the impossible feat of building a bridge across the ocean, all the Devatas, Gandharvas, Siddhas, Charanas assembled and worshipped him with holy waters. From various directions, all great beings were arriving to see the bridge. Charanas are supremely spiritually evolved beings who conduct their tapas while they are flying in the air.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 89

Tena gatva pureem lankaam hatvaa raavanamaahave Raamasseetaa manupraapya paraam vridaamupaagamat

Meaning of the hymn- Using the bridge as the medium, Rama crossed the ocean and reached Lanka. He killed Ravana in the war and rescued Seeta. Rama thereafter felt ashamed about the rightfulness in receiving back his wife Seeta, who had for such a long period of time, lived in the house of another person.

Witnessing the good & auspicious omens in Lanka, Rama said to Lakshmana that success surely would favour them. Along with the Vanaras, Rama stood observing the city of Lanka which was located upon the Mountain Trikoota. Exactly at that time Ravana together with the ladies from the palace, was walking near the topmost peak of city. Both Rama and Sugriva noticed Ravana. Upon seeing Ravana suddenly Sugriva, on an impulse, pounced upon Ravana and flung away the crown from Ravana's head. A very lengthy combat ensued between the two of them. Sugriva then returned back to Rama.

Rama sent Angada as an emissary to Ravana. Ravana found it hard to hear the words of wisdom that Angada was trying to preach. Angada failed to put any sense into Ravana's head and he finally returned back to his camp.

The war commenced. The brave Vanara Kumuda together with his troops besieged the eastern gate, the mighty Vanara Shatabali accompanied by billions of Vanaras seized the southern gate, Vanara Sushena together with crores of Vanaras guarded the western gate while Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva stood at the Northern gate.

The Vanaras and the demons clashed with each other. There were many one-on-one duels. During the war, Indrajit attacked Rama and Lakshmana and bound them with naaga paasha (serpentine arrows). Seeing the plight of the two brothers, the entire monkey army began to grieve. Mother Seeta accompanied by the demoness Trijata was sent in the chariot Pushpaka, to see Rama and Lakshmana who were lying unconscious in the battle-field. Seeing both of them in this condition Seeta burst out crying.

While the Vanaras were grieving inconsolably, the mighty eagle Garuda appeared there and released Rama and Lakshmana from the spell of this naaga paasha. Thereafter in the war Hanuman used a mighty boulder and smashed the demon Dhumraksha to death. Angada using his sword killed the mighty valiant demon Vajradamstra. Ravana now sent the terrible Akampana for the battle. Such was his prowess that just by hearing his name, many would tremble (kampana). Akampana began to attack the monkeys and unable to bear this onslaught, the monkeys began to run helter-skelter. Using a huge tree, Hanuman crushed this demon Akampana to death. Using a mighty boulder, he smashed to death another powerful demon Prahasta.

Ravana, the king of Lanka, now arrogantly stepped into the battlefield. He suffered appalling defeat in the hands of Rama who shattered his chariot, the wheels and the horses. Ravana was weary, tired and injured. Addressing the demon King, Rama said, "Ravana, you appear tired. Go home and after taking adequate rest, you return

tomorrow in your chariot and let us resume the fight at that time. I shall not kill you at this time". These words spoken by Rama, in front of all his retinue, only added salt to the wounds of Ravana who was already totally humiliated.

Ravana now organized for Kumbhakarna, his younger brother, to be woken up and sent to war. In the war Kumbhakarna fell to the ground never to wake up again. One by one all the sons of Ravana began to lose their life. At this point Indrajit, the brave valiant son of Ravana, assuring of father of victory, arrived at the battlefield. Rama and Lakshmana swooned under the arrows released by Indrajit. Hanuman fetched the appropriate herbs and revived all of them.

Hanuman thereafter killed Nikumbha. Rama killed Mararaksha. Indrajit once again arrived in the battlefield and began an illusory battle (maya yuddha) with Lakshmana in which he was killed. News of the death of Indrajit came as a big blow to Ravana. He lamented uncontrollably. In frenzied anger, he took out his sword and rushed towards the Ashoka Vana to kill Seeta, who was the root of this entire calamity. At this point, his minister Suparshva intervened and dissuaded Ravana from killing Seeta, which was a shameful act. Instead he asked Ravana to divert this anger upon Rama in the battlefield.

By then almost all of Ravana's ministers had lost their life in the battle. His court room was therefore nearly deserted. Ravana listened to this advice given by Suprashva and returned back to his vacant court. None of the demons who had set out for war had returned back alive. The lamentations of their women-folk now filled the air. Lanka was full of gloom.

The next morning Ravana arrived at the battlefield. On this day, Sugriva killed the demon Virupaksha. Mahodara another demon now entered the war field and created havoc. Sugriva used his sword and chopped off his head. Angada using his elbow gave a fatal blow to the demon Mahaparshva and felled him.

The war between Rama and Ravana ensued. Rama boarded the chariot sent by Indra and began to fight Ravana. At that time Maharishi Agastya appeared before Rama and taught him the hymn Adithya Hrudayam. The revered Maharishi assured him that recitation of this hymn ensured victory over enemies.

Rama began to recite the Adithya Hrudayam. At this time, drops of blood began to fall on Ravana's head. Eagles began to fly in the sky above his chariot. All these were inauspicious omens. In the war that followed, Rama used his weapon Brahmastra and killed Ravana.

While Ravana's wife Mandodari was weeping inconsolably, Hanuman rushed to Seeta with the good news of Ravana's death. Having given her the good news, he came back to Rama and reported that Seeta was eager to see Rama.

Rama began to reflect deeply 'Seeta had lived in another's place for a long time. If he were to accept her now, even though she was faultless, the world would not accept his behaviour. How to resolve this problem'?

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 90

Taa muvaaca tato raamah parusham janasamshadi Amrshyamaanaa saa seeta vivesha jvalanam sati

Meaning of the hymn- Due to the aforementioned reasons, Rama, in the presence of the entire Vanara army, spoke very unkindly to Seeta. Seeta, who was a true pativrata (chaste woman), could not bear these insulting words and entered into the fire.

Rama, addressed Vibhishana, who was nearby and said, "Ask Seeta to bathe, deck herself in ornaments and jewels and appear before me without any delay".

Vibhishana sent this message to Seeta through the women of his palace. As ordered by her husband, Seeta got ready and eager to set her eyes on Rama, boarded the palanquin. Vibhishana quickly went to Rama and gave him the news, "Rama, Seeta has arrived".

Rama was very delighted and replied, "Ask her to come quickly in my presence". The monkeys and bears thronged all around, to catch a glimpse of the Divine Mother, while the demons who were bringing her, were using all their weapons to drive them away.

Rama felt a surge of kindness upon seeing the desperation of the monkeys. He said to Vibhishana, "These are my own people. A woman becoming visible to the public at times of marriage, in times of joys and sorrows is not a sin. Let her approach me in the presence of all the Vanaras".

These words of Rama brought great anguish to Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and Vibhishana. Seeta got down from the palanquin and shielding her face with her saree, slowly walked towards her husband. The grief on her face was replaced with delight and joy as soon as her eyes fell upon her husband.

Rama, in a firm voice said to her, "Seeta devi! That you were kidnapped by a demon was a matter of destiny. Using my capabilities, I have rescued you from his clutches. I have done all that was humanly possible in this matter. Hanuman burnt down the city of Lanka and helped me in this mission. Sugriva, using his might and giving his whole hearted support, stood by me in the war. Vibhishana deserted his brother and joining my side, supported me. All their efforts have borne fruit today. Please understand that my friends and myself have waged this war, not with an intention of saving you, but with the intention that sadachara (good conduct) should prevail. I have also waged this war so that no stigma should attach to my illustrious lineage. I have waged this war to wipe away the insult that was thrown upon me.

I am now suspicious of your character. Hence I cannot accept you back. Seeta, I am permitting you. You can go in any direction you seek. You are free. Your honour has been reinstated".

Hearing these unexpected words from Rama, Seeta shivered. She sobbed bitterly. She then replied, "O Lord, It was my fate that Ravana touched my body, when

taking me away in the chariot. Yet, mentally I was with you every second. Why do you speak like this to me? I do not know anything except following your footsteps. Had you abandoned me at the time when Hanuman arrived in Lanka, I would have given up my life then and there. Why did you not do so at that time? You need not have waged this war unnecessarily. You could also have avoided today's grief. Why did you not do so? In front of this grief, in front of this fire of accusations, the real fire is milder.

Lakshmana, create a fire. I shall step into it right away. In front of so many beings, my husband has deserted me."

Lakshmana looked towards Rama. From his facial expressions, gauging his intentions, Lakshmana prepared a pyre. With her head bent down, Seeta circumambulated her husband and walked towards the greatly burning fire. She offered her prayers to the Fire God and said, "If my thoughts have eternally been on Rama, if I have not been unfaithful, then let the fire protect me. If there has been no fault in my behaviour and if I am truly sinless, then, O holy fire, please protect me. If the Sun, the wind, the earth, the 10 directions, the days, the nights and the twilights, know me to be a chaste (pativrata) woman, then O fire, please protect me".

Saying this, Seeta circumambulated around the holy fire and then entered it.

These words spoken by Seeta to the Fire God, this entire conversation contains unimaginable Vedanta secrets!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 91

Tato gnivacanaat seetaam jnaatvaa vigatakalmasham Babhau raamasamprahrstah poojita ssarvadaivataih.

Meaning of the hymn- The Fire God appeared and said that Seeta was sinless and pure. Seeta emerged unscathed from the fire. Rama was delighted upon hearing the words of the Fire God. All the celestials and the Gods worshipped Rama who now was glowing with even more radiance.

As the entire creation was watching her, Seeta entered into the fire. All the beings from all the planes who witnessed her entering into the fire, began to wail and sob loudly. The divine women in heaven began to scream. The entire army of vanaras and bears was shocked and stunned. The young and the old people trembled in fear. Shrieks and wails began to be heard from the Vanaras and the demons. Rama's eyes were filled with tears.

At that minute, Kubera, Yama, Varuna, Indra, Mahadeva and Lord Brahma appeared there in their celestial chariots. Rama folded both his palms and offered his obeisance to them. All of them showed them the abhaya mudra (assurance of fear not). Addressing Rama they said, "Rama, You are the cause of this entire creation. You are the most supreme being. You are endowed with the most supreme knowledge. Why then did you not stop Seeta from entering the fire? Among the eight Vasus, you are the Prajapati by name Ritudhama. Among the Rudras, You are the eighth Rudra. You are the only one who exists at the time of total pralaya (destruction). You are the all-knowing supreme, why then did you act like an ignorant and impose this fire test onto Seeta?"

In response to this Rama said, "I am Rama, the son of Dasaratha. I am a mere human. But your statements differ from my presumption. Who am I? Why was I born? For accomplishment of which great deed was I born? I will be very happy if Lord Brahma were to explain all these to me".

Lord Brahma said, "Rama, you are the Supreme Lord Vishnu, Srihari. Your wife Seeta, is none other than Goddess Lakshmi. You are the form of divine illumination. You are the dark-complexioned, eternal Lord Vishnu. For the destruction of this demon Ravana, you donned a human body, my Lord".

Exactly at that time, the Fire God assumed a human body and emerged from the fire bringing Seeta along with him. Seeta was unscathed even after emerging from the blazing fire. Handing over Seeta to Rama, the fire god said, "Rama, here is your wife Seeta. She is of virtuous conduct. She is sinless. Sin can never touch her. In thought, word and deed she has never overstepped your instructions. She has never seen any man apart from you. Apart from you she has never even remotely thought of any other man.

No doubt, Ravana carried her away and placed her in Ashoka Vana, amidst the demonesses. Despite all the force exerted by him to win her over, Seeta remained unmoved. Her heart was firmly fixed upon you. Ravana was insignificant in her eyes. At every moment she was worshipping you. I am ordering you now. Rama, please accept Seeta. You have to abide by my command".

Rama was immensely delighted upon hearing all this. He said, "O God of Fire! The fact that Seeta is sinless and pure is very well known to me. I wanted all the beings of all the three lokas (planes) to know this fact about her chastity. Hence I had to put her through this fire test. Had I not taken this step, all the beings would have condemned my act and spoken ill about me. I was very well aware that with her Paativrata dharma, she can protect herself.

O Gods, all of you are worthy of worship. You are all great beings. You have given me words of wisdom. I will abide by your orders".

Saying this, Rama accepted Seeta and then offered obeisance to all the Gods. Brahma together with all the gods praised and sung hymns on Rama.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 92

Karmanaa tena mahataa trailokyam sa caraacaram Sa devarsi ganam tustam raaghavasya mahaatmanah

Meaning of the hymn- All the living beings in all the three planes (worlds) that consisted of living and non-living things, the Gods and the celestials were very joyous that Rama, the great Mahatma had killed Ravana, the terrible demon.

The foremost and fundamental aim behind this incarnation as Rama was punishing of the wicked (dushta sikshana), protecting the deserving (sishta rakshana) and establishing dharma (righteousness)!

The atrocities and the wicked deeds of demons such as Ravana were causing a great impediment to acquisition of devotion, knowledge and detachment (bhakti, Jnana, vairagya). Family set-ups were totally shattered. Adherence to good conduct (sadaachara), morals, disciplines (neeti, niyama) and dharma (righteousness) could not be found among people. This failure in adhering to the traditions of their respective varnas (castes) and ashramas, eroded from all the people the feelings of love, care and consideration towards parents, siblings, relatives and the aged.

Ravana, who had procured mighty boons from Brahma, brought about this calamity on the beings living in all the three worlds. This change in the society could be attributed to the evil and negative vibrations emitted by Ravana.

One should know the art of speaking based on the situation and prevailing condition at any given point of time. This is a social responsibility. Every being has to strive for the welfare of all the members of his family. He should consider this as his mandatory duty. Towards this he should sacrifice his personal comforts and be ready to face any type of setbacks and difficulties with patience. This is the moral responsibility (naitka bhadyata). In addition to patience, he should also diligently follow other supreme dharmas such as truth (satya), justice (nyayamu), good conduct (sadachara), abidance with a given promise/vow (pratijna). This is his dharmic responsibility (towards dharmic matters).

Rama taught the society all these responsibilities in entirety through His way of life. He showed it through His speech, His actions, His behavior and through His every step in life. He remained as an incarnation of religious austerities (tapo murti).

Taitareeya Upanishad teaches about tapas through the mantra- Rtam tapaha, Satyam tapaha Shrutam tapaha, shantam tapaha. Abiding by truth, studying the Vedas (veda adhyana), being calm and peaceful at all times (shanti), controlling the internal and external sense organs (antar and bahir indriya), engaging in charitable activities, stringently abiding by dharma, conducting of yagnas and other such pure auspicious deeds themselves are tapas.

By stringently and steadfastly adhering to all these, Rama could acquire the great wealth of penance (tapo dhana). He proved that through such practices, one can acquire the wealth of penance and through this achieve blessedness in life. He showed that one can go through all the harsh difficulties of life and yet emerge successful.

Lustful desires and arrogance/ haughtiness about his own strengths and capacities led to the downfall of the demon Ravana. Due to this, he lost his tapo dhana (wealth of penance) in entirety. He tortured and caused pain to all the birds, animals, trees, mountains, water, air, in fact to all the 5 elements, the revered saints, Maharishis, Muni, Devatas and others. Rama on the other hand, respected and revered each and every living being. By walking through the forests, he caused great joy to all the birds, trees etc. He brought about immense happiness to Mother Nature.

By killing this horrific demon Ravana, He became the cause of the bliss for the entire creation. For this reason, the inhabitants of the three planes which consisted of living and non-living things, celebrated this victory of Rama. Munis, rishis and all the celestials were immensely delighted. Such was the greatness of Rama! Rama established the dharma which every succeeding generation could follow.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha

Episode 93

Abhishicya ca lankaayaam raakshasendram vibheeshanam Krtakrtyastadaa raamo vijvarah pramumoda ha

Meaning of the hymn- Even before waging the war, Rama had coronated Vibhishana as the King of Lanka by the banks of the ocean. Now by actually crowning Vibhishana as the King of Lanka, he accomplished his promise. He dispelled the fear of uncertainty from the mind of Vibheeshana. Rama's vow of truthfulness is amazing.


Rama now officially handed over the kingdom of Lanka to Vibhishana. Before the commencement of the war, when Vibhishana advised Ravana about morality and correctness in returning Seeta to Rama, Ravana despised him. He said, "O Vibhishana, I am sparing your life merely because you happen to be my younger brother. Otherwise for this audacity, you should be paying with your life. Go away from here".

Then it dawned upon Vibhishana that his brother has transgressed dharma beyond limits and that it was meaningless to remain in Lanka after the many insults that had been heaped upon him. He immediately abandoned his brother and sought refuge in Rama. He stood by Rama and by dharma.

Vibhishana was a very wise person. He was very honest and frank with those who were honest and forthright with him in their speech. The conduct of a person reflects the true state of his mind. This is because what exists within is expressed externally through conduct and behaviour.

Rama observed the conduct, speech and behaviour of Vibhishana, when the latter sought refuge. Seeing his disposition, way of speech, humility and actions, Rama could conclude that this stranger in front of him was a man of good moral conduct. His face was pleasant and charming and did not display any traits of vikara. Therefore from his body features it could be understood that he was of good character. His speech made it clear that he was straightforward and honest. His actions proved that he did not have any loopholes. His speech reflected his purity. No evil words emerged from his mouth. Hanuman too noticed all these qualities in Vibhishana.

When the prominent Vanara leaders dissuaded Rama from inducting Vibhishana into their camp, Rama said, "O Vanaras, listen to me.

Sakrudeva prapannaya tavasmeeti cha yachate;  Abhayam sarvabhutebhyo
dadamyē tad vratam mama.

Meaning- If someone comes to me and seeks refuge, even if it were to be only once, then I shall protect him from all beings. This is my vow".

Vibhishana further continued, "O Lord, I will aid you in reaching the other shore. I shall be of help in the destruction of demons".

Although Vibhishana was a demon by birth, he could not tolerate the demonic behavior exhibited by people of his own clan and wanted to bring their actions to a halt. Rama was deeply touched by Vibhishana's frank opinion. Only he who has

sought complete refuge (sharanagati) can make such a profound statement. Vibhishana was worthy of being given refuge. Rama therefore gave him his assurance of fear-not (abhaya).

Srirama was immensely pleased with Vibhishana. Immediately he asked Lakshmana to bring the waters from the ocean. Using this water, Vibhishana was crowned the King of Lanka, then and there. From that moment, Vibhishana was the de-facto king of Lanka.

Immediately after the death of Ravana, Rama handed over the kingdom of Lanka to Vibhishana. He further blessed Vibhishana with the boon that neither the Gods nor Indra could ever defeat Vibhishana in war.

In this way, Rama profoundly blessed Vibhishana who had sought refuge in him. He took all steps to make sure that his promise/vow to Vibhishana would get perfectly executed. In protecting his vow of truthfulness, Rama is exalted. His actions in this regard are amazing. They prove that Rama is not manava (human), but in reality is Madhava (God).

Actions of God always amaze us!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 94

Devataabhyo varam praapya samutthaapyaca vaanaraan Ayodhyaam prasthito raamah puspakena suhrdvrtah

Meaning of the hymn- Rama received boons from the Gods. He sought that all the Vanaras who had given up their life in the battle should be brought back to life. Once this was accomplished, Rama, together with all his friends boarded the aircraft 'Pushpaka vimana' and left for Ayodhya.

Lord Shiva addressed Rama and said, "Rama, none apart from you could have killed Ravana. It is our great luck that you have completed this mission. Now please return to Ayodhya. Bharata is anxiously awaiting your arrival. Go and cheer up your mothers who are grieving. Be a support to all your friends and relatives who are eager to see you. Perform the Ashwamedha Yaaga and through this, worship the Devas. Beget good sons who will continue the lineage. Donate large-heartedly to the Brahmins. Acquire fame. Rule for a very long time and thereafter attain heaven. Look here, your father Dasharatha is seated in this special vimana (aircraft). Along with Lakshmana, please offer your respectful obeisance to him".

Rama and Lakshmana offered their obeisance to Dasharatha. Dasharatha was overjoyed and warmly embraced his son Rama. He said, "Rama, the words of Kaikeyi still ring in my ears. Seeing both of you happy, I am greatly relieved. My sorrows have been completely washed away just by seeing you today. Rama, you have successfully lived up to your vow. You have also killed the mighty demon Ravana. Through your actions, you have pleased all the deities. You have acquired limitless fame. Now please return to Ayodhya and rule wisely. Live for a very long time there".

Thereafter Dasharatha spoke to Lakshmana and appreciated him for all the services that he had been offering with utmost devotion to his brother. Dasharatha then addressed Seeta and said, "My daughter Seeta, please do not bear any anger and vengeance against Rama who wanted to disown you. He was seeking your welfare through this deed. He wanted the world to realize the depth of your purity. Only through this action (entering the fire) it could be brought out completely. Seeta, your husband is your God".

As he was saying this, Dasharatha returned to Indra loka (heaven). Rama was standing there, amidst everyone, with his palms folded in obeisance. Lord Indra now said, "Rama, it is with the intention of bestowing boons upon you that we have assembled here. Please choose your boon. We shall happily give whatever you seek".

Rama politely said, "O Lord, many in this army who had stood by me and who had placed implicit faith in me have lost their life in the war. Among the dead are many brave bears and monkeys. All of them have sacrificed their life to help me in my mission. O Lord, please bring back to life all the Vanaras and bears who have died in the battle. Secondly, all those Vanaras who have been injured in war and are suffering in pain, should be relieved of all the pain and misery. O Lord, please ensure that the places inhabited by Vanaras always abound in fruits and water. This is all that I seek".

Indra was overjoyed and said, "Rama I will fulfill all your desires".

Barely had Indra completed his sentence, than the dead Vanaras and bears sat up as if they were waking up from sleep. The wounds disappeared from the bodies of the injured Vanaras. The Vanaras marveled at this miracle and offered their respectful obeisance to Rama.

Indra said, "Rama, now please send off all these Vanaras to their respective homes. Together with Seeta you proceed to Ayodhya. Go and appear before your brothers who have been adhering to strict austerities in your absence. Bring joy to your mothers. Go and get yourself coronated as the King of Ayodhya. Rule well".

Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta offered their salutations to all the deities, who then boarded their respective aircrafts and returned to heaven. The army of bears and monkeys rejoiced in merriment.

Rama boarded the Pushpaka aircraft and seated Seeta on his lap. Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishana and his ministers, and other prominent Vanara leaders all boarded the aircraft. Pushpaka, the aircraft, began its journey towards Ayodhya. As per Seeta's desire, the aircraft halted midway at Kishkinda. The wives of the prominent Vanara chiefs boarded the aircraft and then it resumed its journey.

As the aircraft was moving, Rama was identifying all the various places at which they had resided, the various demons that had been killed, the place where Ravana had kidnapped Seeta and was explaining the specialities of these places.

Pushpaka Vimana was speedily taking them towards their destination.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 95

Bharadwaajashramam gatvaa raamassatyaparakramah Bharatasyantikam raamo hanumantam vyasarjayat

Meaning of the hymn- Rama, who eternally and firmly abided by truth and who was dear to the entire world, now arrived at the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. He sent Hanuman as a missionary to Bharata.

Pushpaka, the aircraft was zooming with great speed towards Ayodhya. Seated in the plane, Rama was observing all the places as they crossed by. He pointed out to Seeta the Rivers Ganga and Sarayu. Thereafter he spotted Ayodhya and asked her to offer her obeisance to it. All those who were seated in the aircraft, looked towards Ayodhya and offered their salutations to this land.

That day was panchami (fifth day as per lunar calendar). With this day, the 14 year period of exile had come to an end.

The aircraft stopped at the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. All of them got off the aircraft and went in to offer their respects to that great sage. Rama enquired, "O great sage, how is Ayodhya? How are the citizens faring? Is my brother ruling wisely? How are my mothers?" Rama enquired about the wellbeing of each and every individual.

Bharadwaja replied, "O Rama, everyone is fine in Ayodhya. Bharata has placed your sandals on the throne and is ruling wisely. Like you, he has given up all comforts. He wears bark clothes and matted hair just like you. He sleeps on the bare floor. Years ago, when the three of you went barefooted walking across the forests, I was saddened. Today, Rama you have vanquished the demons, completed all the tasks and have arrived with all your friends and relatives to see me. I am very blissful.

Rama, I am aware of all the joys and sorrows that you have faced during these 14 years. I also know that deliberately, after listening to the pleas of the sages, you went from Janasthana, eliminating all the demons on the path. I know about the demons you killed in Dandakaranya. I know all about the building of the bridge, killing of Ravana and bringing back Seeta.

Rama, I feel like blessing you with a boon. Choose whatever you want".

Rama replied, "O great sage! I am proceeding towards Ayodhya. I seek that all the trees on the path should be abundant in fruits".

The very next instant, Sage Bharadwaja converted all the trees into fruit bearing trees replete with fruit. Using his power of penance, Bharadwaja ensured that the entire huge forest was replete with fruits. After all, this is the main food enjoyed by the Vanaras. The Vanaras joyfully plucked and ate fruits to their hearts content. They drank the honey in full merriment. This was the feast for all the Vanaras. In this way, Bharadwaja could offer a grand feast to all the monkeys and bears of Sugriva's army. They don't need to sit and eat, do they? Each Vanara jumped on a tree of his choice and enjoyed his feast.

Rama then said to Hanuman, "Go to Shringiberapuram. Meet Guha and inform him of my well being. From there proceed to Ayodhya. Meet Bharata and inform him of my well being and that I have abided by my vow completely.

Gradually narrate to him all the events that took place in my life during this period of 14 years. Tell him that demon Ravana had kidnapped Seeta and that I have killed that Ravana. Let him know that I am presently camping in Sage Bharadwaja's ashram along with Seeta and Lakshmana. Let him know that the Vanara King Sugriva and Demon King Vibhishana have accompanied me.

While informing him of all these events, please carefully study his deeper mental feelings. If he is keen to continue ruling, then so be it. I will be very happy with the outcome. In case he is not desirous of continuing as a king, then without a minute's delay return quickly back to me".

As soon as Rama assigned him the task, Hanuman flew up in the skies and proceeded towards Ayodhya. He was flying at very high speeds. He was eager to find out what Bharata's mental inclination would be and thereby complete the task assigned.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 96

Punaraakhyaayikaam jalpan sugrivasahitashca sah Puspakam tatsamaaruhya nandigramam yayautadaa

Meaning of the hymn- Sri Rama accompanied by Sugriva and Vibhishana arrived in Nandigramam.

After sending Hanuman, Rama recounts all the events that took place during the 14-year exile period in the reverse order beginning with the killing of Ravana.

Rama said, "The city of Lanka is located on top of the Mountain Trikoota. At this place a terrible war ensued between Ravana and me. In this war I killed both Ravana and Kumbhakarna. Indrajit met his end at the hands of Lakshmana. Mandodari together with 1000 co-wives arrived at the battle field and mourned the death of Ravana.

Angada killed Vikata while Sushena killed Vidyumali. Many valiant demons such as Virupaksha, Akampana, Mahaaparshvaa, Mahodara and many others met their end in the battle. We camped for one night along with the army comprising of Vanaras and bears in Lanka, prior to the war. We constructed a bridge and crossed over to Lanka. Nala played the most significant role in the construction of the bridge. No one can replicate such a construction.

Sethubandha is a sacred & holy place. Whoever bathes in the sacred waters here is completely washed off all his sins. The beings from all the three planes take this water as teertha. Lord Shiva who resides here, casts a compassionate glance upon the beings of all the three planes. It was in this place that Vibhishana approached me and sought refuge.

The mighty turbulent and ferocious ocean cannot be crossed. It appeared to be roaring ferociously. Only Hanuman could fly cross this otherwise impassible ocean. While Hanuman was flying across the ocean, Mountain Mainaka, whose residence is within the ocean, appeared before Hanuman.

In Kishkinda, Vali was killed. Near the Pampa sarovar, I was overtaken by grief. Unable to control myself, I lamented a lot. I met Shabari, the great tapasvin. A little distance from there the gigantic demon Kabandha was killed. At Panchavati the Demon Ravana killed Jatayu. At Janasthana, mighty demons Khara, Dooshana and Trishiras were killed by me.

In Panchavati, we resided near the flower garden. It was at this place that Demon Ravana abducted Seeta. The beautiful, wide and pure Godavari River flows there. Maharishi Agastya has his hermitage close to this place. Close to it is the ashram of Maharishi Suteekshana. Near that is the ashram of Maharishi Sharabhanga. Lord Indra visited Sharabhanga a little while before. Just before this, the Demon Viradha was killed. The hermitage of revered Sage Atri, who glows with the illumination of the Sun and Fire, is very near to this place. Hermitages of many great saints are in that vicinity. A short distance from here is the Mountain Chitrakoota. It was at this place that Bharata met us.

A little distance from Chitrakoot is the place where River Yamuna flows. Near this place is the hermitage of Maharishi Bharadwaja. Near here River Ganga flows. Sringerapuram, the land of the Nishadas is by the banks of this river. It was at this place that I met the King of Nishadas, Guha. Just a short distance from this place flows the River Sarayu. The city of Ayodhya is situated on the banks of this great river”.

Hearing this description of Ayodhya, Seeta was overjoyed. Sugriva and Vibhishana were delighted.

In many ways, Rama continued to describe the events that took place during this period.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 97

Nandigraame jataahitvaa bhraatrbhissahitonagah Raama ssita manupraapya raajyam punaravaaptavaan

Meaning of the hymn- Rama, who is absolutely sinless and pure, reached Nandigrama and met his brothers. All the brothers gave up the ascetic way of living and changed into princely robes. Rama returned to Ayodhya and resumed His life as a householder. He got back His kingdom.

Hanuman who was assigned with the duty of finding out the mental perceptions of Bharata, assumed a human form. He at first approached Guha at Srngiberapuram and said, "Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana are all doing fine. Together with Seeta and Lakshmana, Rama has arrived at the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja". He thus brought joy to Guha.

From Srngiberapuram, Hanuman flew towards Nandigrama. On the way he passed by many exquisite flower gardens that resembled the celestial gardens of Indra and Kubera. He arrived at Nandigrama and observed that Bharata was wearing robes of bark and he had matted his hair exactly in a manner as worn by Rama. He also noticed that akin to Rama's body, Bharata's body was also coated with dust and dirt and that he was looking emaciated. Shatrughna the youngest brother was also dressed similarly. Hanuman was amazed to see all this love that was being shown by Bharata towards his brother.

He approached Bharata, offered his respects and said, "O Lord, Rama seeks to know about your well-being. Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana are all safe and are doing well".

Bharata who heard these auspicious words about Rama, immediately embraced Hanuman in total elation. He was eager to know more details about his brother. Hanuman then narrated all the events that had taken place in Rama's life during the period of exile. He also informed that Rama was on his way to Ayodhya.

The news of Rama's return brought untold joy & bliss to Bharata. Straight away he called Shatrughna and issued instructions that the entire city should be appropriately decorated with sweet smelling flower garlands in a manner befitting to receive Rama. He further commanded that musicians who render auspicious music and Brahmins who offer worship be brought so that Rama could be welcomed appropriately. The pathways should all be cleaned and readied.

"Let us all proceed right away to welcome Rama" said Bharata in great jubilation.

Without wasting any time, Shatrughna ensured that all the appropriate arrangements were duly completed. The news of Rama's arrival spread like a wildfire across the entire city. People thronged the streets in their eagerness to receive Rama. It was as if the entire city was proceeding towards Nandigrama. The entire city wore a festive look. There was joy everywhere. Auspicious music filled the air.

Bharata reverentially placed Rama's sandals upon his head and proceeded to receive his elder brother. All the citizens followed him. Bharata was fervently and impatiently

awaiting Rama's arrival. In a short while, Hanuman pointed towards the Pushpaka vimana that was approaching them in the sky and said, "Look, here comes Rama".

Loud welcome shouts and slogans from all the citizens filled the air. Bharata was ecstatic. The aircraft landed and Rama disembarked and stood on the ground. Bharata offered his shastanga namaskara (obeisance) to Rama's feet and welcomed him in an apt manner. Rama lovingly embraced Bharata. Bharata then offered shastanga namaskara to Mother Seeta. He embraced Lakshmana. Shatrughna too prostrated to Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana.

Rama offered his obeisance to all his mothers and to the other respected elders. Bharata brought the padukas (sandals) and placed them reverentially below Rama's feet and said that he was returning back to Rama the kingdom that he had held as a custodian.

Rama then asked Bharata and all others to board the Pushpaka Vimana and all of them proceeded to Nandigram. Upon reaching Nandigram Rama said to the celestial aircraft Pushpaka Vimana, "O Vimana, you now return to Kubera and remain as his vehicle".

The 4 brothers changed their attire and after the auspicious bath, they donned the attire that was suitable for kings. Now Rama boarded the chariot. Shatrughna held the umbrella for Rama while Bharata himself took up the reins and drove the chariot. Lakshmana stood in front of Rama and fanned him. With the other hand he held the vinchamara (white hand fan). Rama stepped into Ayodhya. Celestial chamaras and rishis, who were flying in the air sang hymns praising Rama, which was audible to all the citizens of Ayodhya. Sugriva boarded an elephant and followed Rama.

Rama and Seeta were welcomed back into Ayodhya with the blowing of conches, the rendition of auspicious music and songs & dance by the citizens. Rama shone in all splendour. Rama entered the palace and offered his obeisance to His mothers.

In this manner, Rama got back His kingdom.

Episode 98

Pravrshito mudito lokah tushtah pushta ssudhaarmikah Niraamayohya rogasca durbhiksha bhayavarjitah.

Meaning of the hymn- Rama being crowned the King of Ayodhya brought limitless bliss to the entire world. All the citizens were elated that their desire of seeing Rama being crowned as their king was duly accomplished. In His rule, the citizens duly abided by all their dharmas. Poverty, ill health, fears etc. were all driven away during his rule.

Bharata met Sugriva and said, "O King of Vanaras! Kindly organize for the waters from all the 4 oceans to be brought here quickly. We need to offer abhishekam to Rama with those waters. He needs to be crowned the King."

Immediately, Sugriva called 4 valiant Vanaras and dispatched them in 4 different directions with specific instructions that they should return with the water before sunrise.

Jambhavanta, Hanuman and Rishabha fetched the water from 500 rivers across the globe in pots (huge water jars). Sushena brought the water of the eastern ocean in a kalasa (sacred pot/ jar). Rishabha brought the water from the southern ocean. Gavaya brought the water from the western ocean while Nala went to the North sea and fetched the water from there in a golden jar.

Shatrughna then approached the great sages updated them that the water for the coronation ceremony was ready. Maharishi Vashistha accompanied by other great Brahmins went to Rama and asked Rama and Seeta to sit on a seat made of precious stones. Eight supreme Maharishis i.e. Vashishta, Vamadeva, Jaabaali, Kashyapa, Katyayana, Suyajna, Goutama and Vijaya poured the scented auspicious water and offered abhishekam to Rama. Thereafter, Brahmins, young maidens, ministers, traders, warriors and other leaders poured water and offered Abhishekam to Rama. Water from all the medicinal herbs was poured upon him as abhishekam. All the deities and celestials gathered in the sky to witness this coronation ceremony. Vanara King Sugriva and Demon King Vibhishana stood on either side of Rama and fanned him with white fans (Vinchamara).

Based on the orders of Indra, the wind God approached Rama and offered a pearl chain that had in it all the precious stones and gems. The celestial musicians, Devatas and gandharvas (celestial beings) sang while the apsaras (celestial dancers) danced.

Exactly at the time of Rama's coronation, the earth was blessed with a good harvest and the all the trees were laden with fruits. Fragrant flowers bloomed spreading their fragrance in all directions.

Rama donated to the Brahmins one lakh healthy, milk-yielding cows and 100 bulls. Thereafter he gave away 30 crores of gold coins, costly attires and jewellery to the Brahmins. He gave away to Sugriva a golden (kanchana) chain studded with gems. To Angada he joyfully gave an armlet studded with precious stones. To Seeta he gave an exquisite pearl necklace and asked her to gift it away to whomsoever she

wants. Seeta gifted it to Hanuman who wore it and shone with it. Rama thereafter suitably honoured all the Vanaras.

Sugriva and Vibhishana followed by their respective troops, returned to their capitals. Rama began to rule Ayodhya. Bharata was appointed as the crown prince.

All the citizens abided by their dharma during his rule. At every moment they thought of Him. With constant repetition of his divine name 'Rama' they rendered this entire world auspicious. This brought about untold bliss to all the living and non-living things in this universe.

With this the Yuddha Kanda comes to an end. Every event within this, be it the war, the boarding of the aircraft or the narration of the entire story to Sage Bharadwaja, the coronation ceremony has a very deep embedded meaning. Rama was also fulfilling certain promises that he had made in the ancient past.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 99

Na putra maranam kinchit drakshyanti purusaah kvachit Naaryashcaavidhavaa nityam bhavishyanti pativrataah

Meaning of the hymn- During Rama's rule, no son pre-deceased his father. No woman ever became a widow. Every woman was a pativrata (chaste).

Witnessing or even hearing about Rama's coronation (pattabhisheka) is very auspicious and special. Maharishi Valmiki composed this entire story of Ramayana. This is the adi kavya (first poetic composition). The great sage took the 24 alphabets (Akshara) of the sacred Gayatri mantra and composed 1000 shlokas for each alphabet.

The Rishis have classified each Veda into two divisions. The first part (poorva) is known as Samhita and the latter part (uttara bhaga) is known as Braahmana. The Upanishads are also a part of Veda. The Samhitas preach the path of action (karma marga) while the Upanishads preach the path of knowledge (jnana marga). Details that pertain to the three stages (ashramas) of life i.e. Brahmacharya, Grihastha and Vanaprastha are detailed in the path of action (karma marga). Jnana marga preaches those topics that pertain to detachment (vairagya).

Ramayana also goes by the name Ramayana Samhita. This is because it teaches the various paths of action (karma) that pertain to devotion (bhakti) and worship (upasana). Both Sri Rama and Seeta possessed extra-ordinary and supernatural qualities. Due to this, they remained worshipful for everyone. Through her character, behaviour and traits Seeta remained as an ideal for all women in this world. For this reason, Ramayana is also known as Seetayaa Charitam (story of Seeta).

The demon Ravana believed that subduing dharma was his priority in life. Treading the path of adharma, he tortured saints, woman and the downtrodden. As this epic pertains to the destruction of this demon Ravana, it takes the name Poulastya vadha. (Ravana was the grandson of Maharishi Pulastya).

When the twins Kusha- Lava were rendering the story of Ramayana in the form of a song, all the citizens of Ayodhya came out to listen to it. Rama sat on the floor, amidst the crowd and heard this composition.

Valmiki Maharishi is a trikaala jnani (one who knows the past, present and future). This Ramayana was composed even while Rama was ruling. Maharishi Valmiki informed Kusha- Lava about the events that would take place in future. Through the song, the boys informed about the future events also.

Due to constant recollection of the traits possessed by Sri Rama and by singing His glory at all times, the citizens of Ayodhya were eternally in a state of bliss (Ananda). Their life was untouched by sorrows. Neither the young & old, nor the birds & animals ever had to face a sorrowful experience. There were no troubles of any kind during his rule. The faces of the citizens reflected this joy and bliss. There was no confusion or commotion in their life. Their hearts were absolutely pure and their mind was solely focused on Rama. Due to this, the question of a son predeceasing his father did not arise. In other words, no father ever grieved for his son. Women

always obeyed their husband. They behaved in a manner that was joyful to their husbands. Husband was considered a form of divinity and worshipped. The women were chaste (pativrata). Therefore no woman was widowed.

Such was the greatness of Rama rajya (Rama's rule).

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 100

**Na chaagni bhayam kinchit naapsumajjanti jantavah
Na vaatajam bhayam kinchit naapi jvarakrtam tathaa
Na caapi kshudbhayam tatra na taskarabhayam tathaa**

Meaning of the hymn- During Rama's rule, fear of fire hazards, cyclones, fear of food shortage, hunger, fear of thieves and robbers, fear of fever or other diseases, fear of heat and cold waves did not exist.

Every human should perform meritorious deeds and abide by dharma at all times and through this, merit (punya) should be accumulated. Indulging in bad deeds and supporting adharma only pave the way for a person's downfall.

As this earth is a karma bhoomi (land of actions), Sri Rama has categorically declared that it is imperative for every person to engage in the performance of only meritorious deeds. All karmas that have been dictated by the Vedas should be duly abided by. In addition, every person should strive for the welfare of the world and for his individual spiritual upliftment through penance (tapas) and yagna.

Sri Rama did not even slightly deviate from his prescribed daily obligatory duties (nitya karmas) irrespective of whether he was in the city (Ayodhya) or in the forests. Even as a boy when he had accompanied Maharishi Vishwamitra for safeguarding of the Maharishi's Yaaga (fire sacrifice), He diligently conducted his Sandhya vandana, agni upasana (fire worship) and other obligatory duties. Even on that one night that he spent in the hermitage of Sage Suteekshana, He did not miss his evening Sandhya prayers and rituals. He duly offered water oblations to the Gods and forefathers (Deva, pitr tarpana) as were prescribed.

Even before he was sent out into exile, he had conducted many great yagnas. After becoming the King of Ayodhya, he conducted many supreme yagnas. He assiduously and devotionally worshipped the Sun God every morning. He emphatically declared that steadfast adherence towards truth (satya) and dharma (righteousness) frees the person from fears.

Sri Rama also very strictly abided by the periodic obligatory duties (naimittika karma) such as his father's shraadh (annual ritual performed for his deceased parents). Through conducting of the yagnas and yaagas, he completed all his kaamyas.

Gruhasta ashrama (the phase of life as a householder) is the foundational basis for all the other stages. Rama, the supreme and ideal householder, diligently performed all good karmas (deeds) that are mandated for this stage. Married life (gruhasta ashrama) is said to be a chariot. Husband and wife are the two horses that together drive it. Dharma is the charioteer who directs this chariot. Artha and kaama (material prosperity and fulfillment of desires) are the paths within this worldly life (samsara). Liberation (moksha) is the goal of life. Every householder should understand this deeply. Thereby he should fulfill his needs of artha and kaama (material earnings and fulfillment of desires) through the dharmic path only. When this is executed properly, he will attain the comforts both in this world and the next (iha loka and para loka sukha).

By participation in meritorious deeds, the mind is rendered pure. It creates an increased inclination for further participation in good deeds. It washes away the impurities that exist within the mind.

Bad traits, bad habits and bad lifestyle further push the person down the evil path. In Rama's kingdom, the person with evil habits and evil inclinations could not exist. Every person willingly performed only good, meritorious deeds. Due to this, only auspiciousness rained upon the citizens. There was no question of anyone going to hell (naraka). As all the people were righteous and meritorious, they never had to fear fire hazards of any form. Burning of the forests due to unexplained forest-fires (davagni) was unheard of. Rising of the oceans due to the increased heat within it (badabagni) was unknown. No tsunamis or floods ever occurred. Rainfall was timely, abundant and evenly distributed. Extremities of weather and suffering due to heat and cold waves were non-existent. Rivers were overflowing and there was no fear of them going dry. No person ever went hungry due to lack of food. The entire kingdom was eternally disease-free. Thoughts of stealing and robbery never entered any mind.

Every person was absolutely righteous (dharmic). So wonderful was His rule!

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 101

Nagaraani ca raastrani dhanadhaanyayutaani ca Nityam pramudita ssarve yathaa krtayuge tathaa

Meaning of the hymn- Food grains and wealth were bountiful in every village, town and city during his rule. All citizens were happy, blissful and contented as if it were Krta yuga.

During Rama's rule even the kingdoms of His subordinates and vassals were thriving. There was no shortage of wealth in any place. Every person was always contented and happy. Every variety of crop grew abundantly and hence shortage of food was not faced by any living being. Due to the economic well-being of every citizen, the question of taking loans, being indebted and paying interest thereon did not even remotely exist.

Krta yuga is the first amongst the 4 eons (yugas). In Krta Yuga, dharma stands on its four legs. Satya (truthfulness), compassion (daya), penance (tapas) and charity (daana) are its 4 legs. The speciality of this period was that every human being stringently abided by dharma and was always truthful. Due to this, he led an absolutely healthy, disease-free life. Peace and contentment prevailed amongst all the members of the society. Every human was magnanimous in nature and displayed feelings of love, affection and friendliness towards the other members of the society. Ahimsa (non-injury, non-covetousness) was the practised norm.

Terms such as quarrels and fighting were unknown in the society. Every day was spent in contemplation on that Almighty. Every person strived hard to get a good reputation in the society. At all times people engaged themselves only in good meritorious deeds. In every aspect of life, they were competent.

People of all the 4 stages of life led their life exactly as per the norms dictated to them by the scriptures. Every being was steadfast in penance (tapas). Self-centeredness was unknown. Using dharma as the support, artha (material earnings) and kaama (fulfillment of desires) were achieved. As a result of all this, all towns, cities and villages flourished abundantly. Crops were abundant.

Sri Rama ruled during the following eon (Treta Yuga). Yet, his rule was such that the living conditions of Krta Yuga were again repeated.

Treta Yuga was a period when evil-minded persons and strong valiant heroes were in great numbers. They troubled the saints as well as the noble minded persons. Quarrels and disputes were common. Unhappiness prevailed amongst the people. The society had degenerated. It was overall a treacherous period.

Rama took up the reins of the kingdom and converted the eon itself into Krta Yuga. He made sure that devotion and contemplation on the Almighty became a norm in the society. By destroying the pride of all the powerful evil-minded heroes, He was able to bring about traits of purity (sattva guna) in one and all.

The influence of demons such as Ravana had caused a decline in adherence to dharma and obligatory karmas amongst the people. To re-establish these, the

Supreme Lord incarnated as Rama. Under his able rule, he once again re-instated the supremacy of dharma. Even the birds, animals, trees and plants began to abide by dharma. With this, the villages, towns and cities all flourished. The entire earth was rendered peaceful and happy. The cumulative result was that this period turned out to be akin to Krta Yuga.

Sri Rama was a karma yogi. Even when the worst calamities landed on his head, he did not shrink under their weight. Very boldly he abided by dharma. While strictly abiding by his duties (kartavya), he followed the path of karma to emerge victorious. Through his actions, he taught the world that success can be achieved through this path.

By simply following the footsteps of such a great Lord, the mind, speech and actions of all the people were rendered pure. This helped them to be as happy, blissful and contented like their predecessors of the Krta Yuga.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 102

Ashwamedhashtairishtvaa tathaa bahusuvarnakaih Gavaam kotyayutam dattvaa brahmalokam prayaasyati Asankheyam dhanandattvaa brahmanebhyo mahaayashaah

Meaning of the hymn- The Supreme King Rama conducted hundreds of Ashwamedha Yaagas, Suvarnata yaagas (yaagas in which gold is given away) and many other supreme yaagas and through them pleased all the Gods (Devas). By giving away in charity 10000 crores of cows and limitless wealth to the Brahmins, He earned a permanent place in heaven.

This section that we are discussing is the Uttara Kanda of Ramayana. Ramayana was composed during Rama's rule and in this section, the future actions that Rama would be undertaking were being elaborated.

Gods can be pleased through the performance of yagna (sacrificial ritual). The Gods accept as food, the havvissu (sacred offerings) put in the homa fire, accompanied by the recitation of the relevant Veda mantras. Gods, who are thus pleased, render the world prosperous and protect it at all times. They ensure timely and abundant rainfall.

It is imperative to understand that people who despise Yagnas are thrown into hell (naraka). The deities are the Lords of every being. Their happiness renders the world prosperous. The boons granted by them are always supreme. Contented with the sacrifice (yagna) conducted, they cause the prosperity of not only the yajamani (one who has performed the yagna) but also of the entire world. For this reason, all those who possess the ability and competence to conduct yagnas, should unfailingly carry them out. They should strive to please the Gods. Such persons always reach heaven. The person who diligently performs yagnas glows with the divine infinite radiance of Mitra and Varuna. Those who please the Gods through the performance of these yagnas and offering of the sacred havvissu (offerings) obtain limitless fame.

Plentiful rainfall (water) is the result of successful performance of yagna. The offerings in the sacred fire reach Aditya, the Sun God. It is He who ensures proper rainfall (water cycle). Crops are dependent on rainfall. Not just the survival of the beings, but the fulfillment of all needs of every being is dependent on this harvest. Thus all desires get fulfilled only when proper produce/ harvest is available. The deities who are pleased, bless the person performing the yagna with good food, prosperity, children and the like. They shield him from sins.

Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Garutmanta, Agni, Suparna, Yama and other deities are duly worshipped through the medium of Yagna. Do not assume that they are different Gods. All of them are the various manifestations of that Supreme Paramatma. In other words, Paramatma is being worshipped through diverse names and forms.

Yagna binds a householder (gruhasta) and ensures that he abides by all the disciplines (niyama-nishta). Lord Brahma created wealth in this world solely for the purposes of yagna. He created the man (purusha) exclusively for conducting yagnas. Therefore the responsibility of protecting and nurturing the yagna rests solely on man.

The person should offer to the Almighty, those items that he has received/ earned due to the Supreme grace, and through this offer his gratitude to the Lord. He acknowledges that all the materials for the yagna are bestowed upon him by that Supreme Lord. Through this expression of gratitude, ego and pride are destroyed in the person. He becomes large-hearted. He becomes eligible for securing the grace of the Gods. He will evolve spiritually.

Being an extremely learned pundit, Sri Rama was aware of the significance and greatness of these yagnas. Hence he performed 100 ashwamedha yaagas. He also conducted many suvarnaka yaagas. Through all these Yagnas he worshipped the deities and secured their grace. He abided by all the rules and disciplines of Yagnas and magnanimously gave away gifts to the Brahmins. By giving away limitless wealth to the Brahmins, he acquired the eligibility of a permanent place in heaven.

A truly sensible person (buddhivan) aims at securing the comforts of both this world and the next (iha loka and para loka). Towards this, he will unfailingly involve himself in yagna, charity (daana) and penance (tapas). Rama, through his actions, taught this very important lesson to the world.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 103

Raajavamshaan shaatagunaan shtaapayisyati raaghavah Chaturvanyanca lokesmin sve sve dharma niyoksyati

Meaning of the hymn- Rama allotted kingdoms to the Kshatriyas (warrior clan) and augmented them 100 fold. He made sure that people of all the 4 castes abided by their respective dharmas.

Sri Rama got many kings to establish their kingdoms. These subordinate vassal kings worshipped and served Rama.

During the times of Parushurama (the incarnation of Maha Vishnu just prior to his incarnation as Rama), the earth was filled with Kshatriyas (people belonging to the warrior class). Due to the unrighteous and evil behavior of some of them, citizens of the kingdoms suffered greatly.

Parashurama's father Sage Jamadagni was mercilessly killed by Kshatriyas. Parashurama observed the evil deeds and adharmic behavior of Kshatriyas in general. Using the death of his father as the trigger, Parashurama went around the earth 21 times and eliminated almost all the kshatriyas. He literally made sure that there were no kings left on earth. With this, the lineage of the kshatriyas (warrior class people) was more or less extinguished from earth. Fearing Parashurama, those few kings who were alive, ran away from their kingdoms and sought refuge under great sages. These kings abstained from performing their dharmic duty of ensuring protection of their kingdom and its citizens. The outcome of this was that most of earth had kingdoms without kings.

With no one to control, monitor and mete punishments upon them, the number of wicked and immoral people who would torture innocent beings was on the rise in the society. Their atrocities were unabated. Places with absentee kings became even more conducive for the demons to thrive. They began to occupy such kingdoms and establish their rule. A great part of earth was thus taken up by these demons. These demons had the complete support and protection of the mighty and wicked Ravana. Hence there was no one to prevent them from their wicked deeds. The one who opposed would lose his life.

For any kingdom to stabilize and to control the atrocities of the wicked, it is essential that there should be a king who can rule effectively. The king, while abiding by dharma, should impose punishments upon the wicked evil-doers.

Due to these multiple responsibilities, Lord Maha Vishnu had to incarnate as Rama. In addition to killing Ravana, He had many other important tasks to complete. He had to remain as an ideal man and show to others the ideal way of how life should be lived. He had to eliminate all the demons from the face of the earth. He had to restore dharma once again on earth. He had to protect the downtrodden and weak. He had to motivate and ensure that people willingly conducted yagnas and yaagas. He had to protect all the 4 castes (varnas of Brahmins, kshatriyas etc.) and further make certain that they abided by their respective dharmas. The Brahmins preach about the path of karma as laid down in the Vedas, and encourage people of all castes to abide by their respective karmas. They also teach the ways to face and overcome times of difficulties and times of sorrows/losses.

In this context, let us understand the dharmas that a human being has to abide by. They are: Truthfulness (satya), compassion (daya), penance (tapas), cleanliness and

purity (soucham), sikshaa, ikshaa, sama, dama, ahimsa (non-injury), brahmacharya (celibacy), tyaga (sacrifice), daanam (charity), svadhyaya (self-study of vedas and sacred texts), arjava (honesty and sincerity), santosha (contentment and happiness), offering services to the ardent devotees of the Supreme Lord, gradually moving from the path of pravritti to the path of nivritti, realizing that all the deeds done with a sense of ego in fact beget no result, mouna (maintaining silence), atma viveka, performing annadaanam as per capacity, realizing that God resides within all the beings in this creation, approaching great saints (Mahatmas), listening to the glories and the traits of the Supreme entity, serving the Lord, thinking about Him at all times and singing His glories, worshipping and offering Him obeisance, and self-surrendering to Him.

These are the routine dharmas that every human should abide by. Learned Brahmins eternally preach these.

The duty of the Kshatriya is to ensure that the country and its citizens are always protected and safe-guarded. The Vysyas (traders) ensure that food grains and other materials are available to one and all easily. People of the 4th caste ensure that the tasks of the other three classes are duly completed. They aid them in completing their dharmas. Sri Rama made sure that all these people followed their dharma.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha

Episode 104

Dashavarsha sahasraani dashavarsha shataani ca Raamo raajya mupaasitvaa brahmalokam prayaasyati

Meaning of the hymn- After ruling and ensuring the welfare of all the citizens for 11000 years, Rama reached His real abode, Brahmaloaka.

Rama was the ideal and perfect man (maryada purushottama, who demonstrated ideal behavior and conduct). He severely punished those who tried to break the rules.

During his period of exile when he was walking about in the forests, he scrutinized and learnt the type of plants and trees that grew in different places. He figured out the locations suitable for the growth of the various different medicinal plants and herbs. He also learnt about the pattern and movements of the cruel wild animals. He studied the entire land patterns, the weather conditions of the various places. He was totally familiar with the conditions that existed in different mountains, plains, coasts etc. He was familiar with the locations of the various rivers and of the birds and animals that inhabited the various places. He also learnt about the different customs, traditions, practices, mental perceptions and way of life of all the people in the different places that he had covered.

With all this knowledge, he could gauge in advance the requirements of the people of the different regions based on the approaching season. He would make the adequate requirements well in advance, so that people were not unduly troubled.

Immensely pleased with his adherence to dharma, Mother Nature (prakriti) co-operated very well. It began to abide strictly by its dharma. Sri Rama became the irrefutable Lord of this entire earth. We had learnt in the Ayodhya Kanda that he was not subjected to the limitations of time (kaala). Due to this, the entire earth grieved at the time when He was sent in exile to the forests. Addressing Rama's mother Koushalya, her co-wife Sumitra declared, "It is Rama who gives the Sun its illumination. He possesses the capacity to burn fire itself! He is the Lord of all Lords!" Rama possesses the capacity of creation. At Panchavati, when He realized that Seeta had been abducted, He became uncontrollably enraged. In that state of intense anger, he declared that he would burn away the entire earth itself, if His Seeta were not to be found. At that point of time, Lakshmana had to console and calm him down. Building the bridge across the ocean, the killing of the mighty Ravana and the episode where the Gods sought to bestow boons upon Rama, all are instances that reflect His extreme power and supremacy. His prowess caused all the inhabitants of earth to tremble. These instances proved that Rama was a human incarnation of that Supreme Sri Hari.

At the time of granting refuge to Vibhishana, Rama declared that merely with his intention (sankalpa) he could cause destruction of pishacha (ghosts), danava, yaksha and rakshasas.

This supreme Lord, who was the Lord of all the billions of universes in this creation (akhilanda koti Brahmanda nayaka), cast his compassionate glance upon every living and non-living thing in this universe. The entire earth aspired to live under His compassionate shade. For this reason, this Supreme Lord ruled for 11000 years and showered his grace upon the entire earth. It is said in this hymn, that this Lord will win over the hearts of all the beings and will remain fixed in their heart. After ruling for this long period, He will reach his real abode.

Merely thinking of this Lord is enough to grant a place in Vaikuntha, His real abode. Therefore all those who worshipped Him at that time reached Vaikuntha.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha.

Episode 105-106

**Idam pavitram paapaghnam punyam vedaishca sammitam
Yah pathe dramacaritam sarvapaapaih pramucyate
Etadaakhyaanamaayusyam pathan raamaayanam narah
Saputra pautra ssaganah pretya svarge maheeyate**

Meaning of the hymn- This Pious story of Ramayana is equivalent of the Vedas. Listening or reading it relieves the person of all sins. The person who reads this holy book will lead a very healthy, long and peaceful life and will enjoy the company of his children, grandchildren, friends and relatives. After death, when he arrives in heaven, he will be worshipped by the Devatas themselves.

The auspicious deeds explained in the Vedas are explicitly taught in Ramayana. It teaches every human to realize the truth and to aim at acquiring the ultimate prosperity.

One should strive to be truthful in body, mind and speech. To a human being who is enveloped in total darkness, this truth will show the divine light. It will dispel ashanti (lack of peace) and will bestow peace (shanti) upon the individual.

Truth is the foundation for righteousness (dharma). Dharma cannot sustain in its absence. The good meritorious deeds in entirety (sakala sat karma) form the root for truth (satya) itself. The one who abides by truth and righteousness (satya-dharma) can never fear death. All this is taught in Ramayana.

Through the performance of meritorious deeds, the wealth called divine traits (daivee guna sampat) will be bestowed upon the individual. By imbibing/cultivating these divine traits, the human being becomes as powerful as Devatas themselves. He will wash away the impurities that have enveloped his mind. He will cultivate noble and pure feelings. With increased dedication and interest he will perform meritorious pure deeds. He will cause peace and comforts to be bestowed upon this world.

Impure deeds weaken the discriminative capacity (viveka) of a person. They cause a person to fall from the level of humans to the level of animals and demons. We are born on this earth solely for executing our karma. We should live up to it solely by performing good karmas (actions).

Adherence to dharma bestows peace and comforts on this earth. Dharma protects equally the rich, poor, weak & downtrodden orphan and every other member of the society without any distinction. Every form of being on this earth is equal in the eyes of Dharma. It ensures that everyone completely adheres to his or her respective dharma. It increases the traits of patience and tolerance amongst people. It grants the courage to fight unrighteousness (adharma) and atrocities.

Reading of Ramayana causes a spurt in the intellect of a person. It completely increases the mental as well as spiritual energies in the person. By adherence to dharma a person can acquire all powers/energies. All forms of life (samasta bhoota gana) will come to the aid of such a person. That is why all the birds, trees, animals, monkeys, rivers, mountains etc. came to His aid during the period of His exile.

Ramayana brings out the divine traits that exist within a human being. For this reason it is said that it converts man into God. Every one should mandatorily complete the parayana of Ramayana on a daily basis. By adapting the good traits of Rama, one should seek to walk on His divine path. Reading of this sacred text Ramayana will ensure that the comforts of the other world (para loka) will be showered upon him while he is in this world itself! He will lead a comfortable life on earth.

Through the understanding of the story of Ramayana, the truth about the Self will be understood. Only a compassionate man can be called the most superior (uttama) man. Ramayana teaches humans about this trait of compassion. This is a true story.

The one who listens or reads this Ramayana will live a long comfortable life and will enjoy the companionship of his children, grand children, friends and relatives.

Om Seeta Ramabhyaam Namaha

Episode 107

Pathan dvijo vagrasabhatvameeyaata syat kshatriyo bhoomipatitvameeyaata Vanigjanah panyaphalatvamiyaata janasca shudropi mahatvameeyaata

Meaning of this hymn- The Brahmin who recites this Ramayana will become a great scholar. A Kshatriya who reads it will become a great emperor of this earth. If a Vysya (trader) reads it, he will reap great profits in his business. If a Shudra reads it, he will become a great personality.

A Brahmin who regularly reads Ramayana will acquire the ability to discriminate between ignorance (avidya) and knowledge (Vidya). He will understand the reality about the Self. He will acquire the knowledge about the Self (atma jnana).

When a person who is not self-realized get stuck in difficulties due to his actions, he is in a total quandary. The losses and problems of life throw him into utter darkness. A grave danger lies even in totally abstaining from karma (actions) and involving purely in upasana. Rama's behaviour guards us against all such pitfalls. Both adherence to karmas (karma acharana) and knowledge of the Self (atma jnana) both are extremely essential for Brahmins. By diligently abiding by both of them, the forefathers (Pitr Devatas) will be immensely pleased. Therefore by reading Ramayana, Brahmins will see a spurt in their discriminatory capacities and intellect. They will become eminent scholars. They will acquire the ability to achieve expertise in the 18 forms of knowledge.

A Kshatriya who reads Ramayana will be able to learn the proper way of governing the kingdom. He will learn how to protect his kingdom. From Rama he will learn how to adhere to dharma and how to get his citizens to abide by dharma. He will learn the way to behave and show respect to other vassal subordinate kings, his relatives, friends and others. Imbibing these traits will enable him to become the king of the entire world itself. This is the fruit/ result that Ramayana will bestow upon a Kshatriya.

A trader who reads this will be able to diversify his business and reap profits. A shudra who reads this will acquire fame. He will become a great man.

God has bestowed us with this human birth, which is the most supreme birth. The ability to perform karmas has been given exclusively to humans. The birds, animals and insects do not have this ability. The Gods do not have a body (ashareera) and hence cannot perform karma. Even the beings of all other planes do not have the facility of performing karmas. From this we now clearly understand that only human beings have been given this rare chance. Utilizing this rare blessing, we should ensure that our life becomes meaningful.

Ramayana dispels the worries and tensions of the person. It frees the person from the arrogance that knowledge (Vidya mada), wealth (dhana mada) and power (adhikara mada) can cause. A human being will be transformed into a sage. He becomes eligible for attaining liberation. It enables the person to live in the society and perform karmas without getting attached to the society. He learns to remain sinless. In other words, a person learns to behave like a lotus leaf, which even when living in water does not allow the water to touch it.

Punyam paapaharam sadaa shivakaram vijnana bhaktipradam
Maya moha malaapaham suvimalam premaambu pooram shubham
Srimadraamacaritra maanasa midam bhaktyaava gaahyantiye
Te samsara patanga ghora kiranaih dahyanti no maanavaah.

Meaning- Those who recite Ramayana with full devotion will acquire punya (merit). All their sins will be washed out. It bestows all auspiciousness upon the person. It showers knowledge and devotion. It washes away the impurities such as illusion, attachments, infatuation and bondages (maya-moha) in totality. It is a very pure scripture. Like the rays of the sun that dispel darkness, Ramayana frees the person from the shackles of this samsara.

May this world be rendered peaceful! Due to the grace of Lord Rama, may the world shine with righteousness (dharma)! May truth emerge victorious! May dharma emerge victorious!

Om Shanti, shanti, shanti!

**Ityashri Srimad Ramayane adikaavye sankshepo naama prathama ssargah
Iti srimad balaramayanam samaaptam.**

Jaya Guru Datta.

Courtesy: Parimala Eshwarla