

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

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गवां कोट्ययुतं दत्त्वा विद्वद्भ्यो विधिपूर्वकम् । असंख्येयं धनं दत्त्वा ब्राह्मणेभ्यो महायशाः ॥ १-१-९५

राजवंशाञ्छतगुणान् स्थापयिष्यति राघवः । चातुर्वर्ण्यम् च लोकेऽस्मिन् स्वे स्वे धर्मे नियोक्ष्यति ॥ १-१-९६

दशवर्षसहस्राणि दशवर्षशतानि च । रामो राज्यमुपासित्वा ब्रह्मलोकं प्रयास्यति ॥ १-१-९७

gavāṃ koṭyayutaṃ dattvā vidvadbhyo vidhipūrvakam |

asaṅkhyeyaṃ dhanam dattvā brāhmaṇebhyo mahāyaśāḥ || 1-1-95

rājavaṃśāñchataguṇān sthāpayiṣyati rāghavaḥ |

cāturoarṇyam ca loke'smin sve sve dharme niyokṣyati || 1-1-96

daśavarṣasahasrāṇi daśavarṣaśatāni ca |

rāmo rājyamupāsitvā brahmalokaṃ prayāsyati || 1-1-97

Narada told Valmiki what Rama did and would do. Raghava, Rama, the son of Dasharatha, born in the family of Raghu, would re-establish order. The various families of kings who were not following their *dharma*, not following *rājadharma*, who had become bigots and despots, who thought they were beyond justice, who had failed their appointments as trustees of their kingdoms, would be brought to task. Those who rule must be more responsible; increased responsibility means their sacrifice should be more, more than that of their subjects. They should wield their power with all humility, as an instrument completely in the hands of law. Then alone kings are kings. All other political systems suffer in comparison. With Rama as king, who would want a democracy or elections or whatnot? If the king is proper, there is nothing like monarchy. There is nothing like the rule of an enlightened king. Rama would revive the *dharma* that was there in the royal families. Where there is wine and women, it will corrupt you. Riches definitely corrupt you, and power corrupts you much more. That corruption always enters a place where there is money. Where there is power, that corruption should be identified and eliminated. *Dharma* should be introduced, and Rama, as king, would do that says Narada. The ruling families had already gained a certain

stability by Rama's presence, but they were to improve a hundred times more.

The fourfold duties that were given naturally to the people would be re-established by Rama, and he would enforce them and see that each citizen could happily do his duties. Rama would create the atmosphere wherein doing one's *dharma* became a joy. In that atmosphere you cannot but enjoy your duty. That is the social climate where each one does the right thing. It is an invisible thing that only occurs in the presence of one such as Rama. Like an *āśrama*, you need not say, "This should be done; this should not be done." You need not say that. If you create that atmosphere, people will do exactly what is to be done. An *āśrama* should be like that. It is a beautiful thing; it is as it should be. It is natural, and it should be extended to the whole realm. Rama would commit each one to perform his duty. Thereby he would bless all of them. After ten thousand years plus another one thousand years, performing this *upāsana*, this worship, this duty, ruling the kingdom as *upāsana*, Rama disappeared for the time being.

इदं पवित्रं पापघ्नं पुण्यं वेदैश्च सम्मितम् । यः पठेदœ रामचरितं सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ॥ १-१-९८

एतदाख्यानमायुष्यं पठन् रामायणं नरः । सपुत्रपौत्रः सगणः प्रेत्य स्वर्गे महीयते ॥ १-१-९९

पठन् द्विजो वागृषभत्वमीयात् स्यात् क्षत्रियो भूमिपतित्वमीयात् ॥

वाणिगजनः पण्यफलत्वमीयाज्जनश्च शूद्रोऽपि महत्त्वमीयात् ॥ १-१-१००

idaṁ pavitraṁ pāpaghnaṁ puṇyaṁ vedaiśca sammitam |

yaḥ paṭhed rāmacaritaṁ sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate || 1-1-98

etadākhyānamāyusyaṁ paṭhan rāmāyaṇaṁ naraḥ |

saputrapautraḥ saganah pretya svarge mahīyate || 1-1-99

paṭhan dviḥjo vāgr̥ṣabhatvamīyāt syāt kṣatriyo bhūmipatitvamīyāt ||

vaṇigjanaḥ paṇyaphalatvamīyājjanaśca śūdro'pi mahattovamīyāt || 1-1-100

That which destroys *pāpa* and creates *puṇya*, that which is equal to *veda*, is this story of Rama. The one who reads this story, who takes a leaf from Rama's life, is thereby released from *pāpakarma* and *pāpa* too. Just as we see here, the last portion of the Indian epics expresses praise. It is a tradition. It tells what you get out of the story. This *rāmacaritam*, this story of Rama, gives the one who reads long life with sons and grandsons. The reader will be surrounded by happy fami-

ly and friends and relatives. Then, when he dies away... . This is different than the notion of dying we find in the Upanishads; there it is dying to the notion "I am the body, the senses, the mind." Here, when the reader of the Ramayana dies, he becomes *pūjya* and attains *svarga*, just because he studied the story of Rama. His life has become a study of *dharma*, and living that *dhārmika* life is itself a blessing of the grace of Rama, of *īśvara*. As Rama can become *īśvara* for you, as *īśvara* is worshipped, one enjoys the grace of *īśvara*. If in that life one gains self-knowledge also, he gains *mukta* also – no *svarga* and no coming back. Ramayana only talks about it up to *svarga*. Then, for *mokṣa*, you require *jñānam*. When that climate of tolerance and wisdom is there, naturally everybody will go for *mokṣa*.

If the one who is reading this Ramayana is a *brāhmaṇa*, twice-born, he will gain mastery over speech and communication. He will gain that capacity to convey knowledge, for to teach is a *brāhmaṇa*'s job. There are many verses and many ideas, one who assimilates them will have that mastery. A *kṣatriya* who completes study of the Ramayana will gain mastery of people. He will be a righteous king of the earth. Those who are involved in commerce, having studied Ramayana, will gain legitimate profit. The more simple people, having learned Ramayana, become glorious being what they are. By their own character and their ways of thinking they become worshipful.

This is how Narada told Ramayana in broad outline when Valmiki asked for it. Narada did not then ask Valmiki to write it down, but the intention was there. Valmiki was thrilled to hear Rama's story in Narada's beautiful words and that inspired him to compose the verses.

नारदस्य तु तदœ वाक्यं श्रुत्वा वाक्यविशारदः । पूजयामास धर्मात्मा सहशिष्यो महामुनिम् ॥ १-२-१

यथावत् पूजितस्तेन देवर्षिनारदंस्तदा । आपृच्छयैवाभ्यनुज्ञातः स जगाम विहायसम् ॥ १-२-२

स मुहूर्तं गते तस्मिन् देवलोकं मुनिस्तदा । जगाम तमसातीरं जाह्वव्यास्त्वविदूरतः ॥ १-२-३

nāradasya tu tad vākyaṃ śrutvā vākyaṃviśāradah |

pūjayāmāsa dharmātmā sahaśiṣyo mahāmunim || 1-2-1

yathāvat pūjitastena devarṣirnāradamstadā |

āpṛcchyaivābhyanujñātaḥ sa jagāma vihāyasam || 1-2-2
sa muhūrtaṁ gate tasmin devalokaṁ munistadā |
jagāma tamasātiraṁ jāhnavyāstvavidūrataḥ || 1-2-3

Valmiki and his *śiṣyas* offered their worship to Narada for the blessing of the *rāmācaritam*. Then Narada took his leave. Valmiki, an accomplished scholar, a sage, who had *śiṣyas* to teach, thinking about this story, went to the river along with his student Bharadvaja. On the river Tamasa, not far from River Ganga, Valmiki and his students noted the beauty of the pure flowing water. Valmiki used the example of the wise man's pure mind to describe the river. Usually the placid water is given as the example for the purity of a wise man, for the *antaḥkaraṇa* of a wise man, but here the wise man's mind became an example for the river. You can understand how common it was for very pure, wise people to go to the river. Later, Valmiki bathed and, walking with Bharadvaja, expressed his intention to live in this area by the river.

This is the story of how Valmiki began to write the Ramayana. He was walking, thinking about the story and about Rama's glories. Then he happened to see two *krauncha* birds, like cranes or herons, a male and a female. These birds were together, and they were happy together. The birds were singing happily.

As he watched, Valmiki saw the larger bird, the male, crumple to the ground. The bird had been shot with an arrow. Looking around, Valmiki saw the hunter who had shot the arrow into the bird. The female *krauncha* dropped down near her mate and began to do her own weeping, in its own way. The female bird was confused and distraught. She went round and round and tried to revive her mate with her beak. Valmiki empathized and understood from this how much the surviving bird was affected by this merciless killing. There was *śoka*, sorrow, a sadness in Valmiki's heart. Being moved, turning to the hunter, this *niṣāda*, Valmiki spoke these few words to that man who had caused this death. The words came from Valmiki's mouth as a verse.

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः । यत् क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकमवधीः काममोहितम् ॥ १-२-१५

mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvamagamah śāśvatīḥ samāḥ |

yat krauñcamithunādekamavadhīḥ kāmamohitam || 1-2-15

O hunter, these krauncha birds lost in love and care were helpless in their joyful union. Without a chance to dodge and flee is no time to end their bliss. One of a pair is slain by you, whereby you will earn your fate. For you there can be no peace and no long life in this place. What you have done is not praiseworthy.

The verse found a home in Valmiki's head; he repeated it. He found this verse had come out in a pleasing and balanced form. It had all the features that constitute a beautiful Sanskrit verse. It was within the meter, the words all together fell properly and lent themselves to being sung together and to be accompanied by a stringed instrument. Valmiki was fascinated by the verse he had uttered. It had flowed from him as if from some other place or from an unknown part of himself. When such a thing is done without much will on one's part, inspired in that way, one can just look at it and enjoy it. Gradually in the verse he saw another meaning. That other meaning was significant to the Ramayana's meaning. When he saw that meaning, he was transported. Though he shared the loss of the crane and felt sadness, he found in it a greater truth which lifted him.

In the verse, there is another meaning. "Mā" stands for *mahālakṣmī*. Lakshmi is called *mā*. The one who has this *mā* in his heart is called *śrinivāsan*. Shrinivasa is Lord Vishnu. Rama is called *śrinivāsan*, because Rama is Vishnu's *avatāra*. "Mā niṣāda" therefore means. "Hey, Shrinivasan, Rama, you killed that fellow, *tvam*, who was intoxicated by desire. You killed that *rākṣasa* Ravana, that one who was carried away by lust, whose actions were unrighteous." That is the other meaning. "Because of the removal of Ravana, all of the *ṛṣis*, the saints, and the good people have been praising you. You have gained *pratiṣṭhā*, fame and renown that will remain for all time, *śāśvatīḥ samāḥ*, by this one act which protects all people. You, Rama, have removed the evil and the one responsible. Rama's name will be repeated by everyone for ages to come. You will be invoked as the refuge and savior of

people.” This is the other meaning which Valmiki appreciated after he had addressed the hunter who had slain the bird. In a moment of inspiration, Valmiki had forgotten about himself and produced something which seemed as though it had just come through him.

As he approached his hut, Valmiki shared his fascination with this verse with his *śiṣya*, Bharadvaja. It was then that *brahmāji* appeared. *Brahmāji*, you know, is the creator. It is not everyday that Lord Brahmaji comes, and he was well received and prostrated to by those present. Brahmaji suggested that he himself might have had something to do with Valmiki’s inspiration at the death of the crane. Brahmaji told Valmiki that he was to write the story of Rama and that the verse that had come to him was to be the first verse. Brahmaji said that the story would be sung in all four corners of the world and would remain as long as the mountains stand and the oceans wave. Brahmaji gave Valmiki the boon that he would always see the entire story, even events that were known only to Rama and Sita, with absolute clarity in his mind’s eye. Moreover, no description Valmiki gave would ever prove false. With Brahmaji’s blessing and the boons, and with Narada’s outline, Valmiki began the work.

There in his *āśram*, while he was writing the story of Rama, Valmiki had two boys as students, Lava and Kusha. These growing boys were the sons of Rama. You see, after Rama and Sita and Lakshmana had returned to Ayodhya, and Rama had been consecrated king, Sita became pregnant. Rama, wanting to set an example for all people, declared that there should be no gossiping within his court and in his palace. But at this time there was a washerman there who maintained the rumor that Ravana had had his way with Sita when she was in his keep. The rumor went around the people and Rama heard of it. To preserve the trust of the people, Rama told Lakshmana to take Sita and to leave her in a safe place in the forest. Rama did not want her to be in the palace. Rama’s was a cruel act from the standpoint of a husband who knows everything about his faithful wife. But from the standpoint of a king, Rama had to set an example and took the sacrifice upon

himself. You must always see the value that is highlighted and place that above any seeming injustice by a specific act. Lakshmana had to do this unpleasant job, and he left the pregnant Sita in Valmiki's *āśram* in the *ṛṣi*'s custody. In time, Sita gave birth to these twin boys, Lava and Kusha. They grew up there in the *āśrama*, even after Sita returned to Rama in Ayodhya. That is the story.

These two boys were as beautiful and powerful and brilliant as their parents. In fact they excelled Rama. These two boys, as disciples, as Valmiki wrote the verses, learned by heart the story of their father along with all the wisdom and practice and tradition of the Vedas and the Vedic people. Nevertheless the boys were never told the truth of their relationship to the hero, nor did they know that Sita was their mother. They knew all of the story, and they dearly loved the mighty Rama and his great victory. But they did not understand and were never convinced why Rama, as part of the story, should send Sita to live in the forest when pregnant. Otherwise fascinated and committed to Rama, they were in fact angry with Rama for this act.

One day, when there was a gathering of sages and *sādhus*, Valmiki had the two boys recite the story of Rama. The great tale, sung in various *rāgas* by the talented boys, brought the sages to enjoy a sublime ecstasy. The Sanskrit word compounds, *samāśas*, were complex and perfect; the *sandhi*, the liason of sounds and syllables that allows the verses to flow, was sweet and perfect; the ideas and meanings were elegantly presented and supported. All the *rasas*, the range of human sensibility and feeling, the aesthetic sense that is the divine bond between author, story, storyteller, and listener, were touched and allowed to flourish in the hearts and minds of those present. Bravery and courage, sympathy and compassion and mercy, fear, fury, hilarity, peace, all these were portrayed and evoked. Generally, in Sanskrit literature, beyond entertainment, one or two *rasas* are highlighted. But in Ramayana, this *mahākāvya*, the *navararasas*, all nine, are traced and skillfully spun and offered to the audience. Those watching and the performers and the author all share and participate in the full range of spontaneous human

sentiment. Well-done, the performance serves as if to stop time and manifest a contemplative atmosphere along with a heightened sensitivity that is said to be palpable. The language and the *rasas* and the timeless allusions rhythmically throw everyone back on themselves and interrupt the linear flow. There can be a subtle individual appreciation of the inner truth of the human condition while, at the same time, the entire group appreciates the bonds of love and loss and community. It is said the gods too enjoy watching the performance. Thus Ramayana is a *mahākāvya*. Having heard this Ramayana *mahākāvya* at Valmiki's *āśrama*, the sages showered blessings upon the two boys. One *sādhu* who had a wooden seat, an *āsana* - and you must know that these *sādhus* really possessed little or nothing - gave his seat to one boy. Another fellow gave his *mālā*. Another fellow gave simple clothing made from the bark of a tree. One gave a saffron robe. Whatever they had they gave with appreciative hearts, and they gave their blessings.

The news of the magic and mastery of these boys' skill reached all the way to Rama's court. Rama wanted to hear them himself. The boys were brought and given honored seats before Lord Rama on his throne and before the full assembly of the royal court. Sages and *mantrīs* and ministers watched as the two youngsters, not yet even teens, without any books or palm leaves, began singing the twenty-five thousand verses. I tell you, even today, throughout India there are many who can repeat the epic poem from memory. From childhood they begin memorizing, and they know many other things by heart as well. The human memory is amazing, if you use it. Lord Rama, highly moved, could not sit; he had to come near and embrace the boys. He was surprised at all that was revealed. He wondered how Valmiki could know details only he knew. This is how the story starts.

सर्वापूर्वमियं येषामासीत् कृत्स्ना वसुंधरा । प्रजापतिमुपादाय नृपाणं जयशालिनाम् ॥१-५-१

येषाम् स सगरो नाम सागरो येन खानितः । षष्टिपुत्रसहस्राणि यं यान्तं पर्यवारयन् ॥१-५-२

इक्ष्वाकूणामिदं तेषां राज्ञां वंशे महात्मनाम् । महदुत्पन्नमाख्यानं रामायणमिति श्रुतम् ॥ १-५-३

तदिदं वर्तयिष्यावः सर्वं निखिलमादितः । धर्मकामार्थसहितं श्रोतव्यमनसूयता ॥ १-५-४

कोसलो नाम मुदितः स्फीतो जनपदो महान् । निविष्टः सरयूतीरे प्रभूतधनधान्यवान् ॥ १-५-५
 अयोध्या नाम नगरी तत्रासील्लोकविश्रुता । मनुना मानवेन्द्रेण या पुरी निर्मिता स्वयम् ॥ १-५-६
 आयता दश च द्वे च योजनानि महापुरी । श्रीमती त्रीणि विस्तीर्णा सुविभक्तमहापथा ॥ १-५-७
 राजमार्गेण महता सुविभक्तेन शोभिता । मुक्तपुष्पावकीर्णेन जलसिक्तेन नित्यशः ॥ १-५-८
 ताम् तु राजा दशरथो महाराष्ट्रविवर्धनः । पुरीमावासयामास दिवि देवपतिर्यथा ॥ १-५-९
 कपाटतोरणवतीं सुविभक्तान्तरापणाम् । सर्वयन्त्रायुधवतीमुषितां सर्वशिल्पिभिः ॥ १-५-१०
 सूतमागधसम्बाधां श्रीमतीमतुलप्रभाम् । उच्चाट्टालध्वजवतीं शतघ्नीशतसंकुलाम् ॥ १-५-११
 वधूनाटकसंघैश्च संयुक्तां सर्वतः पुरीम् । उद्यानाम्रवणोपेतां महतीं सालमेखलाम् ॥ १-५-१२

sarvāpūrvamiyaṁ yeṣāmāsīt kṛtsnā vasundharā |
prajāpatimupādāya nṛpāṇaṁ jayaśālinām || 1-5-1
yeṣām sa sagaro nāma sāgaro yena khānitaḥ |
ṣaṣṭiputrasahasrāṇi yaṁ yāntaṁ paryavārayan || 1-5-2
ikṣvākūṇāmidam teṣāṁ rājñāṁ vaṁśe mahātmanām |
mahadutpannamākhyānaṁ rāmāyaṇamiti śrutam || 1-5-3
tadidaṁ vartayiṣyāvah sarvaṁ nikhilamāditāḥ |
dharmakāmārthasahitaṁ śrotavyamanasūyatā || 1-5-4
kosalo nāma muditaḥ sphīto janapado mahān |
niviṣṭaḥ sarayūtīre prabhūtadhanadhānyavān || 1-5-5
ayodhyā nāma nagarī tatrāsillokaviśrutā |
manunā mānavendreṇa yā purī nirmitā svayam || 1-5-6
āyatā daśa ca dve ca yojanāni mahāpurī |
śrīmatī trīṇi vistīrṇā suvibhaktamahāpathā || 1-5-7
rājamārgena mahatā suvibhaktena śobhitā |
muktapušpāvākīrṇena jalasiktena nityaśaḥ || 1-5-8
tām tu rājā daśaratho mahārāṣṭravivardhanaḥ |
purīmāvāsayāmāsa divi devapatiryathā || 1-5-9
kapāṭatorāṇavartī suvibhaktāntarāpaṇām |
sarvayantrāyudhavatīmuṣitām sarvaśilpibhiḥ || 1-5-10
sūtamāgadhasambādhām śrīmatīmatulaprabhām |
uccāṭṭāladhvajavatīm śataghñīśatasankulām || 1-5-11
vadhūnāṭakasaṅghaiśca saṁyuktām sarvataḥ purīm |
udyānāmraṇopetām mahatīm sālamekhalām || 1-5-12

The story begins with a description of Ayodhya, the royal city of the Kosala kingdom. On this earth, since the first ruler in the royal *varṁśa*, the great King Manu, the kingdom of Kusala thrived on the banks of the Sarayu river. This was an area abounding with wealth and produce. Ikshvaku, a ruler in the line of Rama, established the city named Ayodhya. The great city grew and grew and was well known in the world. It was twelve *yojanas*, ninety-six miles, around. The downtown itself was three *yojanas*. The roads were wide, allowing the movement of armies and elephants and the crowds attending festivals. At the hub of the well-planned roads was the palace. The city sparkled with the carpet of color from the fallen leaves released from the thousands of trees that lined the streets. The streets were cleaned daily with fresh water. As the sun rules the day, in time King Dasharatha came to rule this kingdom. Just as Indra, lord of the *devas*, rules the divine order, so too Dasharatha ruled the Kusala empire. Secure walls surrounded the city, each with an arched main gate and a variety of weapons to protect the people. In the city itself there were well-organized, enclosed markets. Those who worked in and for the palace were provided with quarters nearby. The work of skilled architects and sculptors was seen everywhere. Overall it could be seen as a place where Lakshmi, goddess of riches and prosperity, ruled.

Large, multi-storied buildings ornamented with lush vines and creepers rose on both sides of the streets. There were theatres for dance and music, and parks with forests of mango trees. A deep moat surrounded the outer walls and protected the great fort within that was impenetrable by any invader. Horses and elephants were countless. There were many kinds of elephant - *mantra* and *bhadra* and *mrga* - and there were hybrids as well, each one like a mountain. Horses from the banks of the river Sindhu, horses from Arabia and from countries beyond the Himalayas were there in great number. Cows and camels and donkeys and mules roamed and grazed and carried burdens. There were elegant mansions maintained by those who paid tribute to King Dasharatha.

To be continued...