

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the eighth part of the serial article, continuation from January 2022 newsletter.

When Rama and his brothers had grown up, Kaikeyi's son, Bharata, was visiting in his grandfather's house beyond the Himalayas. At that time Dasharatha decided to enthrone his eldest son, Rama. All the arrangements were made to perform the coronation. Dasharatha was old, and he wanted to hand over the kingdom to Rama, who from an early age had shown himself worthy and capable of this position. Rama was the eldest son, and his being crowned king would be in accord with the *dharmasāstra*. From here the story is told.

ज्येष्ठम् ज्येष्ठगुणैर्युक्तं प्रियं दशरथः सुतम् । प्रकृतीनां हितैर्युक्तं प्रकृतिप्रियकाम्यया ॥ १-१-२०

यौवराज्येन संयोक्तुमैच्छत् प्रीत्या महीपतिः । १-१-२१

jyeṣṭham jyeṣṭhagūṇairyuktaṁ priyaṁ daśarathaḥ sutam ।

prakṛtīnāṁ hitairyuktaṁ prakṛtipriyakāmyayā ॥ 1-1-20

yauvarājyena saṁyoktumaicchat prītyā mahīpatiḥ ॥ 1-1-21

The lord of the country, the emperor, Dasharatha, with great love and affection, desired that, before the coronation, Rama should be given the powers of king and begin to rule under the guidance of his father. This is a tradition that the Ikshvakus followed. Out of his great love and affection for Rama, Dasharatha though it should be done this way. Though Rama was young, his father found him capable of wielding the kingly authority. Rama had all the qualifications, all those rare virtues. He was a man of truth and a man of strength. According to the laws, the eldest son should become king, unless he is incapacitated.

In the Mahabharata, Dhrtarashtra was blind, and therefore he could not be enthroned. His younger brother, Pandu, was made king. Yet the eldest son is still given all the respect due his position. His advice is sought though he does not rule the kingdom. By sheer right of birth order, according to *dharmasāstra*, Rama was to become king. Moreover, Rama possessed all these exalted virtues. Respect can be earned by age and by wisdom. Rama was not qualified by age alone. He was Dasharatha's dearest and most accomplished son. He was committed to the good of the people. Dasharatha, before he died, wanted Rama enthroned. He wanted to

guide him in the ways of ruling the kingdom.

The arrangements were afoot in the palace. The preparations were going on, painting and whatnot. Rama was to be enthroned and the word went round. The whole city gained a festive look and air. There were only a few days before the coronation. The queens, Kaikeyi, Kausalya, and Sumitra were content. Rama was dear to all of them. They were united in their joy and support for him. Now, in this situation, an old woman, a sort of a maidservant to Kaikeyi, went to Kaikeyi, the youngest of the queens. Kaikeyi was in her wing of the palace, very happy. She was wearing all her ornaments and jewelry because she wanted to greet the arriving guests in her finery. The old woman had known Kaikeyi since the queen's childhood.

The old woman said, "Hey, you seem very happy. What is going on?"

Kaikeyi replied, "Rama is being crowned king."

"That makes you happy?"

"Why should it not make me happy?"

"You are a foolish, young queen. Don't you see what it means if Rama becomes the king? Rama is Kausalya's son."

"He is my son as well," said Kaikeyi.

"You will see. As soon as Rama is king, Kausalya will change. Already she is queen; when she becomes mother of the king, you will be nobody. We will find you in some lost corner of the palace. Dasharatha will die, and you will be nowhere." The old woman went on poking Kaikeyi, making her think about the possibilities.

Even though Kaikeyi had an answer for the old woman's advice, knowing that Rama should be king, the old woman countered it with another argument. Kaikeyi began to believe what the old woman said. It was not that Kaikeyi was against Rama becoming king; she began to fear Kausalya becoming the queen mother. It was that natural weakness that the old woman played on. Kaikeyi became increasingly jealous and turned to the old woman.

"What should we do?" asked Kaikeyi.

"That is very easy." said the old maid, "You have your boon that was granted by your husband, Dasharatha. You have not encashed it yet."

At one time, Dasharatha had said that whatever Kaikeyi might want he

would give. Kaikeyi had saved that boon, and a boon given is given forever. That boon was waiting there still. The maid knew that the promise was there to be encashed. She told Kaikeyi to encash it now.

“How?”

“Ask that Rama go to the forest. Get him away from here. If he is around here, people will continue to look up to him. He should be banished from the kingdom. Send him away for fourteen years. I want to have Bharata enthroned. That should be the boon you ask. Don’t let Kausalya ruin you.”

Kaikeyi implored, “How can I ask this of my husband?”

“Change your dress and ask. Dasharatha is coming this way now. Change out of all this finery and let your hair down.” Kaikeyi did the maid suggested.

Dasharatha’s eyes had never seen his wife in such an unkempt condition. He had never seen Kaikeyi, or anybody, looking like that. It was a shock for him, and he approached and asked, “What happened to you? What happened on this day of such joy as we await Rama’s coronation?”

At first Kaikeyi would not speak. After some time she said, “I am sad, and I ask to encash my boon. You told me that you would give me a boon.”

“Yes, definitely. You can have whatever you like.” He never expected what she would ask. He had no way of anticipating what was coming. In his love and innocence he said, “Okay, what is it you want?”

Kaikeyi’s mind went blank, but then she remembered the old woman and what she had said. Kaikeyi, with great difficulty, repeated the words she had heard from the maid, “Bharata should become the king.”

“What!” cried the startled king.

“Rama should go to the forest for fourteen years.”

Dasharatha just fell down, and he could not even hear. He was in tears. He did not know what to say. He was a person committed to truth, bound by his commitment to *dharma*. But he was overwhelmed by his emotions, and he experienced a great conflict. Wrenched and racked, he said, “Kaikeyi, when did you become a person like this? I never thought you could be a woman like this. You have never asked me anything like this. What has happened to you?” He went on and on. This was the situation.

तस्याभिषेकसम्भारान् दृष्ट्वा भार्या कैकेयी ॥ १-१-२१

पूर्वं दत्तवरा देवी वरमेनमयाचत । विवासनं च रामस्य भरतस्याभिषेचनम् ॥ १-१-२२

स सत्यवचनात् राजा धर्मपाशेन संयतः । विवासयामास सुतं रामं दशरथः प्रियम् ॥ १-१-२३

tasyābhiṣekasambhārān dṛṣṭvā bhāryā kaikeyī || 1-1-21

pūrvam dattavarā devī varamenamayācata |

vivāsanam ca rāmasya bharatasyābhiṣecanam || 1-1-22

sa satyavacanāt rājā dharmapāśena saṁyataḥ |

vivāsayāmāsa sutam rāmam daśarathaḥ priyam || 1-1-23

Seeing the various preparations for the coronation of Rama, Kaikeyi, wife and queen, who long before because of her devotion and love, because she had served and helped her husband, was given a boon by King Dasharatha, asked that her boon be granted. Kaikeyi was a righteous person who changed due to the instigation of the old woman. She asked these two things: Rama should go away, be sent elsewhere, away from the kingdom, banished for fourteen years, and Bharata should be enthroned.

King Dasharatha, because of his *satyavacana*, his commitment to truth, to speaking the truth and to doing exactly what is said, being bound by the cord that bound him totally to *dharma*, could not do anything else. He could not ask her to change her request. There was no way out. His commitment is going to cost him. In fact it is going to cost him his life. He will die because of this. His dearest son was to be banished and denied the throne. Certainly Bharata was dear to the king, but enthroning Bharata went against the order. The three sons, Lakshmana, Shatrughna, and Bharata, were *rājasika*. Bharata, we will see, is as great as Rama, but these three princes could be mischievous or equivocal at the cost of someone's happiness. Whereas Rama, from the beginning, proved himself to be a man of great *karma*, endearing and virtuous. His beauty, his behavior, his courage, his knowledge, and his prowess set him apart. Anybody would fall in love with that boy.

Dasharatha loved his eldest son dearly. Dasharatha broke down when he told Rama about the banishment. He told his son that he had to tell him to go, but he also told Rama that he did not have to go. The king left it up to his son. Everybody pleaded that Rama not go. But Rama said, "No. You have given your word, and that is most important. I will not be a son who does not fulfill his father's

words. You have done your part, and now it is my responsibility to fulfill your words. Fourteen years is just fourteen years.” Rama would be a king in the forest as he would be a king here in the city. He would be a king wherever he was. Among the trees he would be the king; among the animals he would be the king; among the *rākṣasas* or the *devas* he would be the king; among the people he would be the king. Without showing any sadness, proclaiming his love and support for his brother Bharata, Rama walked out as all wept. For him, there was no sense of being banished. He welcomed his father’s words. You cannot banish a man such as Rama.

“I am going, and my father’s words will be upheld. I will go for fourteen years, and then I will come back.” Being Rama, he made it easy; he made what seemed impossible possible. He convinced almost everyone. Dasharatha, who had been the most acutely affected, was not convinced. But Rama did persuade his father to give him his permission and his blessings.

As Rama was going, Kaikeyi began to realize the mistake she had made. Others urged her to beg Rama to stay. But Rama would not hear of it. He said, “Kaikeyi, you have asked for this boon, a boon which was granted by Dasharatha, and that is enough. It is over. Those words will be upheld by me. I will not renege on my father’s vow, and I am going.”

At that time, Kaikeyi’s heart was not complete. She thought that when Bharata was made king, his happiness would be her happiness. She thought she had done a great thing for Bharata. But when Bharata came back, her son made her realize what a mistake she had committed. But that is another scene. When it happens, you see Bharata’s character, and you do not know who is greater, Bharata or Rama.

To be continued...

“Our problem is that we think that thought is I, which is correct, and also that “I” is thought, which is incorrect. I erroneously identify with the thought and become sad and unhappy. The solution is recognizing that while thought is I, I am not thought.”

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati