

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

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अस्त्रेणोन्मुक्तमात्मानं ज्ञात्वा पैतामहादœ वरात् । मर्षयन् राक्षसान् वीरो यन्त्रिणस्तान् यदृच्छया ॥ १-१-७६
ततो दग्ध्वा पुरीं लङ्कामृते सीतां च मैथिलीम् । रामाय प्रियमाख्यातुं पुनरायात्महाकपिः ॥ १-१-७७

*astreṇonmuktamātmānaṁ jñātvā paitāmahād varāt |
marṣayan rākṣasān vīro yantrinastān yadṛcchayā || 1-1-76
tato dagdhvā purīm laṅkāmrte sītām ca maithilīm |
rāmāya priyamākhyātum punarāyātmahākapiḥ || 1-1-77*

The great Hanuman in the form of a monkey, strong and brave, because of the boon gained from his grandfather Brahmaji the creator, easily released himself from the *brahmāstra*. He went on to burn down the city of Lanka. Then, across the sea he leaped in order to tell Rama the pleasing words that Sita had been seen and was well enough. His fellow monkeys became ecstatic when they saw his mighty form burst through the sky. As Hanuman and the joyful monkeys went back to Rama they came upon Madhuvana, a place of many honeycombs. The monkeys forgot themselves for the time being and ate their way through the place before moving on again to tell Rama the news.

सोऽभिगम्य महात्मानं कृत्वा रामं प्रदक्षिणम् । न्यवेदयदमेयात्मा दृष्टा सीतेति तत्त्वतः ॥ १-१-७८

*so'bhigamya mahātmānaṁ kṛtvā rāmaṁ pradakṣiṇam |
nyavedadayadameyātmā drṣṭā sīteti tattvataḥ || 1-1-78*

He whose memory, whose knowledge in various disciplines, whose *jñanam*, whose *antaḥkaraṇa*, whose strength is immeasurable, this Hanuman, properly, according to his character, as a great devotee, approached the great-soul Rama, went around him - did *pradakṣiṇa*, and prostrated. In temples you do that. For *mahātmās* also they do that. It is a way to honor the elderly too. Outside the temple and in the temple you go all around, keeping the Lord on your right side. Outside you pass the different deities and have their *darśan*. When you do *pradakṣiṇa*, with every step they say you expiate *pāpakarma* from this life and the previous life. That devotee might be called a *yāni kāni*; the *mantra* means that he goes round and round his wife. He is an obedient servant. *Yāni kāni* can take on a few meanings. In the villages we say that. That is a masculine problem. Properly Hanuman came, showing his humility; properly Hanuman carried the news to his lord. Perhaps

Rama wished Hanuman would do this *pradakṣiṇa* quickly. Hanuman spoke, “It is because of your grace I could go there and find Sita. I bring you good news.” Before even hearing, seeing Hanuman’s bearing, Rama knew there was good news.

“Seen was Sita,” said Hanuman. The first word was not “Sita,” for that would create doubt about the second word. Properly, “*dr̥ṣṭa*” was the first word. If Sita were the first word, anything could come next, any undesirable thing could come. The object of the search was Sita, therefore “*dr̥ṣṭa*.” The way Hanuman talks is always of interest. In fact Valmiki changes the style of writing for Hanuman’s sake and for Rama’s sake. Hanuman told Rama the whole story of what had happened in Lanka.

ततः सुग्रीवसहितो गत्वा तीरं महोदधेः । समुद्रं क्षोभयामास शरैरादित्यसंनिभैः ॥ १-१-७९
दर्शयामास चात्मानं समुद्रः सरितां पतिः । समुद्रवचनाच्चैव नलं सेतुमकारयत् ॥ १-१-८०
तेन गत्वा पुरीं लङ्कां हत्वा रावणमाहवे । रामः सीतामनुप्राप्य परां व्रीडामुपागमत् ॥ १-१-८१

tataḥ sugrīvasahito gatvā tīraṁ mahodadheḥ |
samudraṁ kṣobhayāmāsa śarairādityasannibhaiḥ || 1-1-79
darśayāmāsa cātmānaṁ samudraḥ saritāṁ patih |
samudravacanācchaiva nalaṁ setumakārayat || 1-1-80
tena gatvā purīṁ laṅkāṁ hatvā rāvaṇamāhave |
rāmaḥ sītāmanuprāpya parāṁ vṛīḍāmupāgamat || 1-1-81

Remember that in this first section each verse holds an entire *kāṇḍa*, an entire episode. Thereafter, Sugriva and his retinue, his entire army, all these Vanara fellows, along with Rama, reached the beach at Rameshvaram on the shore of the ocean between the Indian mainland and Lanka. All these fellows had to get across to wage war against the *rākṣasas*. How to get across? They were not all Hanumans. They decided to make a causeway, to cross over the span. But there was some problem with that. Rama became angry with Samudraraja himself. Rama disturbed the lord of the ocean and then invoked him. Rama sent arrows to the Samudraraja, the presiding deity of the seas. Every phenomenon in the creation has a presiding deity, *īśvara*. Any city, any place, anything that is there has a presiding deity. You look at the thing as *īśvara*, then there is a presiding deity. *Īśvara* becomes the presiding deity with reference to a given thing. These are the various *adhiṣṭhāna devatās*.

Rama sent arrows as scorching as the sun, arrows emitting fire, arrows that could dry up water like the rays of the sun, into the sea and invoked Samudraraja. All rivers are considered to be women who reach the ocean, the lord of all the riv-

ers, husband of all the rivers. The lord of rivers was invoked and he arose and showed himself. Engineered by Nala, a commander in Sugriva's army, a great berm was built which filled in the span between the mainland and the island. Samudraraja got it done through Nala and the entire army. A bridge was made. Reaching the city of Lanka, in the great battle that followed, the ten-headed monster Ravana was slain, and Rama was reunited with Sita.

The whole thing was over. Sita came back. But Rama felt rather shy. It was a feeling unknown to him, one that did not belong at all. Sita was coming from another kingdom now. She had been handled by Ravana. She had been taken away, and now Rama was to receive her again, and for a king it is unnatural to take back. It was a kind of shyness that Rama felt. He was thrown into a peculiar kind of a state. He was hesitant to receive Sita. There were all these others around, and he did not immediately know what was the right thing to do. In order to convince all the others that she was and always was his faithful wife, that nobody could touch her, Sita entered into fire. She entered fire to show how pure she was, and she came out of the fire untouched. That was for the sake of the people. Rama welcomed her back and they went to Ayodhya where they rejoined Bharata and Rama was enthroned.

Hanuman lived on after all the other major characters passed away. He lived in a forest to a very old age. In terms of the ages of earth, Dvapara Yuga was over and Treta had come. Hanuman is a sort of immortal. In the forest he was met by Bhima, one of the Pandavas who are the subject of the Mahabharata. There is, then, a connection between the two epics. Bhima was walking in the forest, and across his path trailed the end of Hanuman's tail. In the tradition you are not supposed to just cross over a person like that. Bhima asked that monkey to please remove his tail. Hanuman, who knew who this Bhima was, knew that both he and Bhima were born of Vayu's grace, the grace of the lord of air and wind. In that way the two are brothers. But Bhima does not know anything about this. When he heard that voice ask him to move his tail, Hanuman knew it was mighty Bhima. He knew it was that strong, proud fellow. Hanuman said, "Okay, but I am old. In fact, now I am almost at my death. I cannot really even move my tail. That is why I am lying down here. You had better just lift it and then walk on by."

Mighty Bhima reached down to lift the tail and he could not lift it. It is one of those stories. Everything Bhima tried failed to move the tail. Afterward Bhima asked, "Who are you?" They talked, and Bhima found out who it was - a venera-

ble one left over from the previous *yuga*.

Hanuman was asked to come and fight in the great Mahabharata battle. He said he could not fight, but he said he would come and sit there and watch. He sat on the top of Arjuna's chariot and watched the battle. The ferocious war between members of one family is described in the other epic's tens of thousands of verses. Hanuman was actually bored. Sitting there, he nearly fell asleep. He had seen the fight between Rama and Ravana, and nothing could compare. The battle between Rama and Ravana is exactly like the battle between Rama and Ravana. There is no comparison for it. Sky is sky, ocean is ocean, *brahman* is *brahman*, Rama-Ravana is Rama-Ravana. Hanuman thought of Kumbhakarna, Ravana's brother. When one of Kumbhakarna's hands was severed by Lakshmana, it fell down and took out hundreds of the battling monkeys. Just the one hand falling down slew hundreds. It was like a mountain landslide. This was the magnitude of the Rama-Ravana battle. They would pull trees as big as redwoods out of the ground and fight with each other. This was the *yuddha* that Hanuman had seen. Watching the combatants shoot arrows at each other, Hanuman did not consider war in the Mahabharata to be *yuddha*. Only when Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son, fought was there a flicker that got to Hanuman, something that was like a *yuddha*. Or when Arjuna and Bhishma fought it was like a *yuddha*. But only a short while these lasted. Hanuman would open his eyes and say, "Not bad." There was only one Rama-Ravana *yuddha*.

The slaying of ten-headed Ravana was not easy. Every time Rama turned to pay attention to a second head the one he had just dealt with came up again. They cropped up again and again. Arrow after arrow with the same result, and the fellow did not die. Again and again the mighty *rākṣasa* came back. Underneath all is Vedanta. Rama was slaying these heads which are exactly like desires. You remove one desire and in its place something else comes up. But that is not the only way to live. In fact the well-lived life is elsewhere; it has a cause. The cause is in the heart. Ravana's life is in the heart. For that, Rama had to use *brahmāstra*, and *brahmāstra* is *tattvamasi*. *Āstra* means that which goes from you is *āstra*. The teaching *tattvamasi* always goes from the teacher; it goes and strikes the heart.

To be continued...