

DASHAVATAR - Rama Avatar - Part 1



Sri Rama is the 7th incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the central figure of epic Ramayana. Ramayana is the immortal tale of Lord Rama that teaches us the value of ideology, devotion, duty, relationships, dharma, and karma. The ideals of man are beautifully portrayed in it. Everyone should emulate those ideals and grow into ideal human beings, and ideal citizens.

Dasharatha was the king of Kosala, an ancient kingdom that was located in present day Uttar Pradesh in India. Ayodhya was its capital. Dasharatha was loved by one and all. His subjects were happy and his kingdom was prosperous. Even though Dasharatha had everything that he desired, he was very sad at heart; he had no children.

During the same time, there lived a powerful Rakshasa king in the island of Lanka, located just south of India. He was called Ravana. His tyranny knew no bounds, his subjects disturbed the prayers of holy men.

The childless Dasharatha was advised by his family priest Vashishtha to perform a fire sacrifice ceremony to seek the blessings of God for children. Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, decided to manifest himself as the eldest son of Dasharatha in order to kill Ravana. While performing the fire worship ceremony, a majestic figure rose from the sacrificial fire and handed to Dasharatha a bowl of rice pudding, saying, "God is pleased with you and has asked you to distribute this rice pudding to your wives - they will soon bear your children."

The king received the gift joyfully and distributed the payasa to his three queens, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. Kausalya, the eldest queen, gave birth to the eldest son Rama. Bharata, the second son was born to Kaikeyi and Sumitra gave birth to the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Rama's birthday is celebrated now as Ramanavami. The four princes grew up to be tall, strong, handsome, and brave. One day, the revered sage Viswamitra came to Ayodhya. Dasharatha was overjoyed and immediately got down from his throne and received him with great honor.

Viswamitra blessed Dasharatha and asked him to send Rama to kill the Rakshasas who were disturbing his fire sacrifice. Rama was then only fifteen years old. Dasharatha was taken aback. Rama was too young for the job. He offered himself, but sage Viswamitra knew better. The sage insisted upon his request and assured the king that Rama would be safe in his hands. Ultimately, Dasharatha agreed to send Rama, along with Lakshmana, to go with Viswamitra.

The party of Viswamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana soon reached Dandaka forest where the Rakshasi Tataki lived with her sons Maricha and Subahu. Tataki came to know about their arrival, and came to kill them but Rama pierced her heart with a deadly arrow. Viswamitra was pleased. He taught Rama and Lakshmana several Mantras (divine chants), with which both brothers could summon many divine weapons in order to fight against evil.

Viswamitra then proceeded, with Rama and Lakshmana, towards his ashram. When they started the fire sacrifice, Rama and Lakshmana were guarding the place. Suddenly Maricha and Subahu arrived with their followers. Rama silently prayed and discharged the newly acquired divine weapons. It killed Subahu there itself, and Maricha was thrown many, many miles away into the sea. All other demons were slain by Rama and Lakshmana. Viswamitra completed the sacrifice and the sages rejoiced and blessed the princes.

The next morning, Viswamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana headed towards the city of Mithila, the capital of the kingdom of Janaka. Janaka received a bow from Lord Siva. It was strong and heavy. He wanted his beautiful daughter Sita to marry the bravest and strongest prince in the country. Sita was an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu. Janaka arranged a Swayamvaram that he would give Sita in marriage only to the one who could string that great bow of Siva. None of the suitors was able to even lift Lord Siva's bow.

Rama then stood up in all humility, picked up the bow with ease, and got ready for the stringing. He placed one end of the bow against his toe, put forth his might, and bent the bow to string it-when to everyone's surprise the bow snapped in two. Dasharatha was immediately informed. He gladly gave his consent to the marriage and came to Mithila with his retinue. Janaka arranged for a grand wedding. Rama and Sita were married. At the same time, the three other brothers were also provided with brides. Lakshmana married Sita's sister Urmila. Bharata and Shatrughna married Sita's cousins Mandavi and Shrutakirti. After the wedding, Viswamitra blessed them all and left for the Himalayas to meditate. Dasharatha returned to Ayodhya with his sons and their new brides. People celebrated the marriage with great pomp and show.

For the next twelve years Rama and Sita lived happily in Ayodhya. Rama was loved by all. He was a joy to his father, Dasharatha, whose heart nearly burst with pride when he beheld his son. As Dasharatha was growing older, he summoned his ministers seeking their opinion about crowning Rama as prince of Ayodhya. They unanimously welcomed the suggestion. Then Dasharatha announced the decision and gave orders for the coronation of Rama. During this time, Bharata and his favorite brother, Shatrughna, had gone to see their maternal grandfather and were absent from Ayodhya.

Kaikeyi, Bharata's mother, was in the palace rejoicing with the other queens, sharing the happy news of Rama's coronation. She loved Rama as her own son; but her wicked maid, Manthara, was unhappy. Manthara wanted Bharata to be the king so she devised a heinous plan to thwart Rama's coronation. As soon as the plan was set firmly in her mind, she rushed to Kaikeyi to tell her.

"What a fool you are!" Manthara said to Kaikeyi, "The king has always loved you more than the other queens. But the moment Rama is crowned, Kausalya will become all powerful and she will make you her slave." When Kaikeyi ignore her, Manthara repeatedly gave her poisoned suggestions, clouding Kaikeyi's mind and heart with suspicion and doubt. Kaikeyi, confused and distraught, finally agreed to Manthara's plan. "But what can I do to change it?" asked Kaikeyi with a puzzled mind.

Manthara was clever enough to chalk out her plan all the way. She had been waiting for Kaikeyi to ask her advice. "You may recall that long ago when Dasharatha was badly wounded in the battle field, while fighting with the Asuras, you saved Dasraratha's life by swiftly driving his chariot to safety? At that time Dasharatha offered you two boons. You said you would ask for the boons some other time." Kaikeyi readily remembered. Manthara continued, "Now the time has come to demand those boons. Ask Dasharatha for your first boon to make Bharat the king of Kosal and for the second boon to banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years." Kakeyi was a noble-hearted queen, now trapped by Manthara. She agreed to do what Manthara said. Both of them knew that Dasharatha would never fall back on his words.

The night before the coronation, Dasharatha came to Kakeyi to share his happiness at seeing Rama the crown prince of Kosala. But Kakeyi was missing from her apartment. She was in her "anger room". When

Dasharatha came to her anger room to inquire, he found his beloved queen lying on the floor with her hair loose and her ornaments cast away. Dasharatha gently took Kakeyi's head on his lap and asked in a caressing voice, "What is wrong?" But Kakeyi angrily shook herself free and firmly said; "You have promised me two boons. Now please grant me these two boons. Let Bharata be crowned as king and not Rama. Rama should be banished from the kingdom for fourteen years."

Dasharatha could hardly believe his ears. Unable to bear what he had heard, he fell down unconscious. When he returned to his senses, he cried out in helpless anger, "What has come over you? What harm has Rama done to you? Please ask for anything else but these." Kakeyi stood firm and refused to yield. Dasharatha fainted and lay on the floor the rest of the night. The next morning, Sumantra, the minister, came to inform Dasharatha that all the preparations for the coronation were ready. But Dasharatha was not in a position to speak to anyone. Kakeyi asked Sumantra to call Rama immediately. When Rama arrived, Dasharatha was sobbing uncontrollably and could only utter "Rama! Rama!"

Rama was alarmed and looked at Kakeyi with surprise, "Did I do anything wrong, mother? I have never seen my father like this before." "He has something unpleasant to tell you, Rama," replied Kakeyi. "Long ago your father had offered me two boons. Now I demand it." Then Kakeyi told Rama about the boons. "Is that all mother?" asked Rama with a smile. "Please take it that your boons are granted. Call for Bharata. I shall start for the forest today."

Rama did his pranamams to his revered father, Dasharatha, and to his stepmother, Kakeyi, and then left the room. Dasharatha was in shock. He painfully asked his attendants to move him to Kaushalya's apartment. He was waiting for death to ease his pain. The news of Rama's exile spread like a fire. Lakshmana was furious with his father's decision. Rama simply replied, "Is it worthwhile to sacrifice your principle for the sake of this small kingdom?" Tears sprang from Lakshmana's eyes and he said in a low voice, "If you must go to the forest, take me along with you." Rama agreed. Then Rama proceeded to Sita and asked her to stay behind. "Look after my mother, Kausalya, in my absence."

Sita begged, "Have pity on me. A wife's position is always beside her husband. Don't leave me behind. I'll die without you." At last Rama permitted Sita to follow him. Urmila, Lakshmana's wife, also wanted to go with Lakshmana to the forest. But Lakshmana explained to her the life that he plans to lead for the protection of Rama and Sita. "If you accompany me, Urmila," Lakshmana said, "I may not be able to fulfill my duties. Please take care of our grieved family members." So Urmila stayed behind on Lakshmana's request.

By that evening Rama, Sita and Lakshmana left Ayodhya by a chariot driven by Sumantra. They were dressed like mendicants (Rishis). The people of Ayodhya ran behind the chariot crying loudly for Rama. By nightfall they all reached the bank of the river, Tamasa. Early the next morning Rama awoke and told Sumantra, "The people of Ayodhya love us very much but we have to be on our own. We must lead the life of a hermit, as I promised. Let us continue our journey before they wake up."

So, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, driven by Sumantra, continued their journey alone. After travelling the entire day they reached the bank of the Ganges and decided to spend the night under a tree near a village of hunters. The chieftain, Guha, came and offered them all the comforts of his house. But Rama replied, "Thank you Guha, I appreciate your offer as a good friend but by accepting your hospitality I will break my promise. Please allow us to sleep here as the hermits do."

Next morning the three, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, said goodbye to Sumantra and Guha and got into a boat to cross the river, Ganges. Rama addressed Sumantra, "Return to Ayodhya and console my father."

By the time Sumantra reached Ayodhya, Dasharatha was dead, crying until his last breath, "Rama, Rama, Rama!" Vasishtha sent a messenger to Bharata asking him to return to Ayodhya without disclosing the details.

Bharata immediately returned with Shatrughna. As he entered the city of Ayodhya, he realized that something was terribly wrong. The city was strangely silent. He went straight to his mother, Kaikeyi. She looked pale. Bharata impatiently asked, "Where is father?" He was stunned by the news. Slowly he learned about Rama's exile for fourteen years and Dasharatha's demise with the departure of Rama.

Bharata could not believe that his mother was the cause of the disaster. Kaikeyi tried to make Bharata understand that she did it all for him. But Bharata turned away from her with disgust and said, "Don't you know how much I love Rama? This kingdom is worth nothing in his absence. I am ashamed to call you my mother. You are heartless. You killed my father and banished my beloved brother. I will not have anything to do with you for as long as I live." Then Bharata left for Kaushalya's apartment. Kaikeyi realized the mistake she made.

Kaushalya received Bharata with love and affection. Addressing Bharata she said, "Bharata, the kingdom is waiting for you. No one will oppose you for ascending the throne. Now that your father is gone, I would also like to go to the forest and live with Rama."

Bharata could not contain himself any further. He burst into tears and promised Kaushalya to bring Rama back to Ayodhya as quickly as possible. He understood the throne rightfully belonged to Rama. After completing the funeral rites for Dasharatha, Bharata started for Chitrakuta where Rama was staying. Bharata halted the army at a respectful distance and walked alone to meet Rama. Seeing Rama, Bharata fell at his feet begging forgiveness for all the wrong doings.

When Rama asked, "How is father?" Bharata began to cry and broke the sad news; "Our father has left for heaven. At the time of his death, he constantly took your name and never recovered from the shock of your departure." Rama collapsed. When he came to senses he went to river, Mandakini, to offer prayers for his departed father.

Lingashtakam

Brahma Murari surarchita Lingam
Nirmala bhasita sobhita Lingam
Janmaja dukha vinasaka Lingam
Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (1)

Devamuni pravaraarchita Lingam
Kamadahana karunakara Lingam
Ravana darpa vinasaka Lingam
Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (2)

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

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D G A L

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F S I T W

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D Y A D L E

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O H K S C

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N A D G R

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T C L N E R A

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Coloring Exercise

