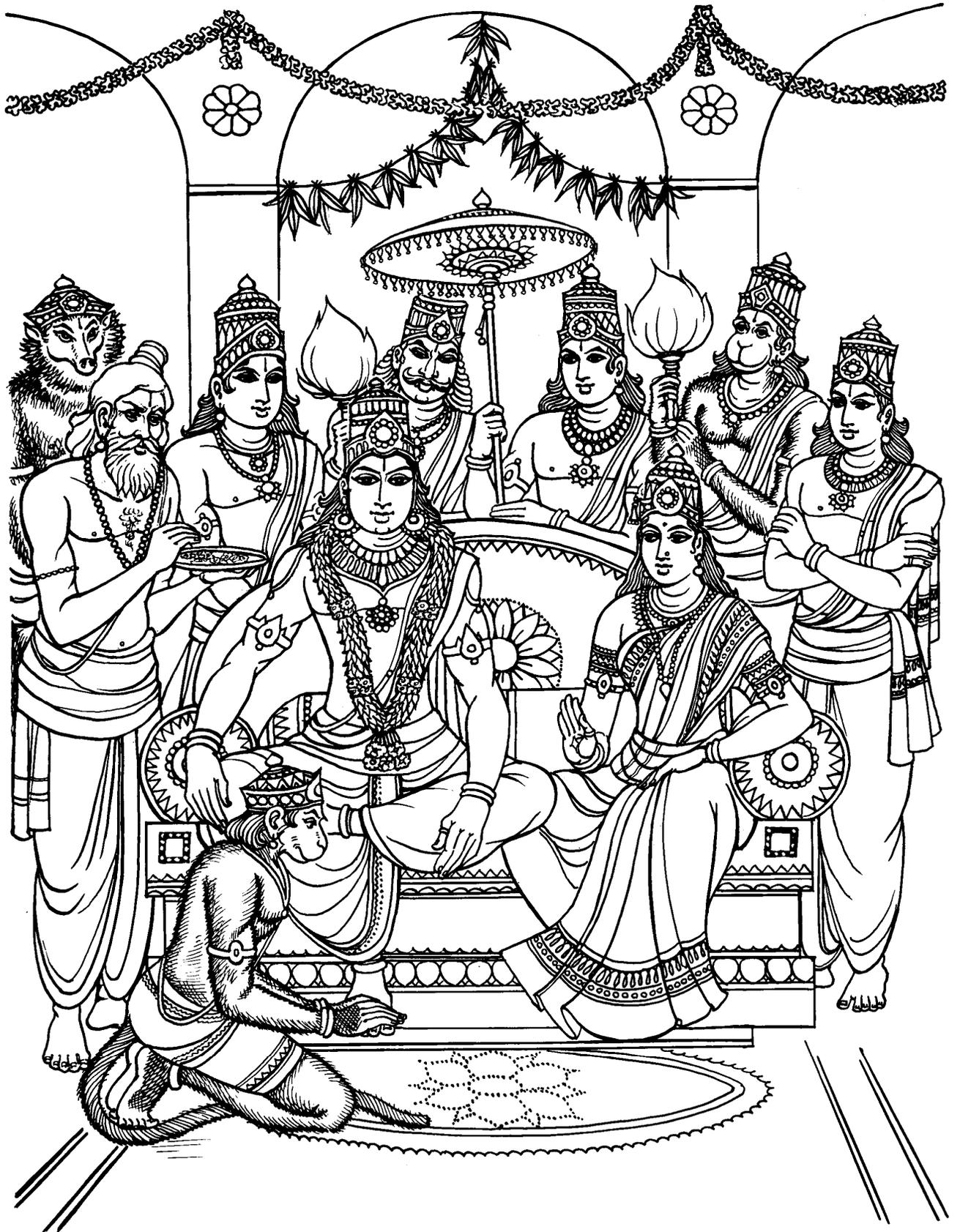


Ramayan – Part 14



Hearing of his beloved son Indrajit's death, Ravana felt distressed. He decided now was the time to kill Rama and put an end to this bloodshed. The entire kingdom of Lanka was resounding with the lamentations of the *rakshasi* women.

With his head throbbing with fury, Ravana thundered into battle and created havoc in Rama's ranks. The army scattered at his sight. Only Hanuman, Sugriva, Vibhishana, Lakshmana, and Rama stood their ground.

Ravana's eyes were a fiery red as they glared at his brother Vibhishana. A swift spear soon followed his fierce glance. However, Lakshmana deflected the spear with an arrow and saved Vibhishana's life. Ravana grabbed another spear, puts a spell on it, and hurtled it towards Lakshmana. When it hit Lakshmana, it knocked him down. Rama then shot hails of arrows on Ravana from his flaming bow. Ravana then runs away out of fear. Rama returned to where Lakshmana was lying, and started crying on the state of His beloved brother. He is disconsolate. Without his brother, Rama feels as though he has lost everything.

Hanuman comes quickly to the rescue. Riding on the wings of the wind as per Sushena's request, Hanuman vaults North to the Himalayas, and brings an entire mountain and carries it to Lanka the second time. Healed by the herbs, Lakshmana is soon back on his feet.

Then Rama again turns to face Ravana. For several seconds the two stand staring at each other. The two incensed warriors engage in a pitched battle. The dreadful combat lasts seven days and seven nights. Neither hero rests for a single second. Every *astra* (weapon) one warrior sends is meticulously met by the *astra* sent by the other. Rama is baffled when every time he cuts off one of Ravana's ten heads, another head sprouts in its place. Hundreds of heads are cut off this way, only to reappear again and again. Seeing that Ravana is fighting from a chariot while Rama stands on the ground, the gods watching the spectacle are concerned. Indra, the god of devas sent his charioteer, Matali, along with his chariot for Rama to use.

Rama bows to the gods, circumambulates the divine chariot and ascends it. In the fierce battle that follows, Ravana is injured and becomes temporarily unconscious. Ravana's charioteer carries Ravana away from the battle in the chariot. Vibhishana then tells Rama the secret of Ravana's heads reappearing. Ravana has obtained amrita, the nectar of immortality, from the gods and has stored a vessel of it in his navel and this is causing his heads to regenerate.

Rama is exhausted by the battle. Sage Agastya, and many rishis and gods are all watching the terrific battle from the heavens. Sage Agastya approaches Rama. He advises Rama to worship Lord Aditya, the Sun, to get energy. He teaches Rama the Aditya Hridayam, a collection of verses in praise of the sun-god, with a view to gaining victory. Rama feels rejuvenated immediately.

When Ravana recovers consciousness a little later, he is furious with his charioteer for taking him from the battle. He insists on being taken back to face Rama. The grim battle begins again. Rama is told by Matali to use Brahmastra as the end of Ravana was near. Rama remembers the quiver Agastya had given Him when he first entered the Dandaka forest. He draws from it a sparkling arrow which is infused with the power of the universe.

Rama utters the required mantra and sends the Brahmastra. The Brahmastra, emitting flames, goes towards Ravana and pierced his navel and shatters the stored nectar. The missile then enters the earth and then returns to the quiver of Rama. The bow in Ravana's hand slips. The Rakshasa ruler falls to the ground with the sound of a thousand thunderbolts. His crown rolls in the dust. Ravana falls down dead from his chariot to the earth. Ravana is dead, at last.

Seeing the majestic body of Ravana lying motionless, Vibhishana laments that Ravana never paid heed to good advice from his well wishers and has met his death as a result. Rama consoles him and asks him to move on with the next course of action, but Vibhishana hesitates. Rama says that all enmity ends with death and tells him to perform the obsequies of Ravana with due respect.

In the meanwhile the wives of Ravana came to the battle field and wail and cry. Queen Mandodari cries in anguish that it is impossible that a mere man roaming in the forest to kill the invincible Ravana unless it was the Lord himself, and it is destiny that Ravana chose to ignore her caution. Vibhishana performs the funeral rites for Ravana. Then, Rama instructs Lakshmana to arrange for the installation of Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka. Lakshmana arranges to get sea-water from some monkey-chiefs and sprinkles it on Vibhishana, to install him as the King of Lanka, in the presence of the demons there.

Rama then tells Hanuman, with King Vibhishana's permission to convey the happy tidings of Ravana's downfall. Sita is jubilant, and she expresses her heartfelt gratitude to Hanuman. Hanuman asks Sita if he could punish the rakshasi women who tormented her endlessly. But Sita is filled with compassion for these women and says they only did their duty. Then she tells Hanuman to convey to Rama her eagerness to meet him.

Rama hears Hanuman's account, but for some strange reason, his face becomes pensive and clouded. He then tells Vibhishana to bring Sita, after bathing and decorating her in a befitting way. Accordingly, Sita is seated in a palanquin and brought before Rama.

As Sita's palanquin weaves its way through the multitude of *Vanaras*, there is a brief moment of confusion, with *Vanara* leaders pushing back the surging crowd. Everyone wanted to catch and glimpse of Sita, for whom the war had been fought. "Let no one be kept away," says Rama. "These dear *Vanaras* have risked their lives and helped me." Sita had been waiting for this moment and was very hungry to hear Rama's words of affection. But the words that come from Rama are cold and distant. "I have slain the enemy, I have recovered you. I have done my duty as a Kshatriya. My vow is now fulfilled. We cannot live together. You must live alone, or under the

protection of any of our kinsmen or friends. A Kshatriya cannot take back a wife who has lived so long in a stranger's house.

Sita's mind seethed with the fire of anger, helplessness, and shame. Sita's eyes dry up. She directed her gaze firmly on Rama, "The uncultured may speak such words but not one born and brought up in noble families such as yours. I was brought up by the pious Janaka, but actually I came from the earth. My sacred birth was not honored by you. Is it my fault that the wicked Rakshasa seized me by force and imprisoned me? But since you entertain this attitude, there is but one course open to me."

Lakshmana and everyone else was shocked at Rama's conduct. Sita turned to Lakshmana and commanded him to light a fire. Lakshmana turns to Rama looking for him to tell him not to, but receives no such sign. Rama turns away his impassive face. With tearful eyes, Lakshmana starts a fire, lighting the faces of thousands of despondent monkeys and bears, too dazed to move.

Sita circumambulates Rama and proceeds towards the blazing fire. She offers salutation to all the gods and speaks with her palms joined in a fervent prayer. "If my heart never swerved from Rama and if my conduct has been unimpeachable, then let the fire-god, the witness of the world, protect me from all sides." Then she walked around the fire and right into it!

Agni is the god of fire. His very nature is to burn everything, just as the god of water makes everything wet. Even though it is his nature to burn, he would not burn Sita. Agni rose out of the flames and lifted Sita in his arms with all her clothes and jewels untouched. The fire-god came forward, and presents Sita to Rama. Then, the fire-god, the witness of the whole world, said "Here is your Sita. No sin exists in her. This auspicious lady has never been unfaithful to you either by word or by mind or even by intellect. This helpless lady was taken away by the demon Ravana, and was detained in the female apartments and guarded by female-demons. Even though allured and terrorized by these ogresses, Sita's mind was always directed towards you. I request you to take Sita."

Rama's eyes welled up with tears of joy. Rama replied, "Of course I know Sita is sinless. I had to put her through this ordeal to convince the three worlds. Ravana could not violate this wide-eyed woman, protected as she was by her own splendor and chastity." Turning to Sita, Rama said with affection, "Think you that I did not know your irreproachable purity? Without this ordeal people would say that Rama, blinded by love, behaved with a strange weakness and broke the rule of well-brought-up men." So saying he draws her to his side.

Remember that Indra's charioteer drove Rama on the battlefield? Indra himself came to retrieve the chariot. He offered Rama a boon. Rama asked that Indra use some of his "amrit" to revive all the monkeys and bears that had died during the battle. Indra sprinkled amrit on all the dead corpses and all the monkeys and bears sprang back to life, causing great joy among everyone. He granted liberation (spiritual splendor) to all the demons who had fought, showing his generous nature even to his enemies.

Rama then began to prepare to return to Ayodhya. Remember Rama's brother Bharat? Bharat had said that if Rama would not return on the exact fourteenth day of his exile, and become King, Bharat would walk into a fire and kill himself. The fourteen years was ending the next day. So Rama was very anxious to get home. But how to travel all the way across India in only one day? You may remember Ravana had an airplane called the Pushpaka Vimana. He had stolen it from his step brother Kubera, the God of Wealth. It travelled as fast as a modern airplane. Rama, along with Sita

and Lakshmana, as well as his whole entourage of Vibhishana, Hanuman, King Sugriva, Prince Angada, and many others go into the luxurious jewel studded Pushpaka Vimana and set off towards Ayodhya. Rama is taking everyone to his coronation ceremony.

As the airplane soars in the sky, Rama recalls and shares with the group the many thrilling incidents that colored their lives when the three were together. Sita is eager to know the momentous happenings of the last one year that have taken place after her abduction. Rama shows her the bridge they built across the sea, the hill where he met Sugriva the first time, where he killed Vali, and so on.

Before entering Ayodhya, Rama stopped at Bharadwaja Rishi's ashram, so that He could inquire about the welfare of His relatives before meeting them. On Rama's request, Hanuman approaches Guha and Bharata in Nandigram and informs them of Rama's impending return to Ayodhya.

After taking permission from Rishi Bharadwaja, Rama proceeds to Nandigram. Remember, Bharata was King while Rama was gone. But did he live in luxury like a King in Ayodhya? No! Instead, he lived in the small village of Nandigram, right outside of Ayodhya, sleeping on the ground and worshipping Rama's sandals. His love for Rama was that intense. All he wanted was for Rama to return.

Bharata's heart melted with joy on seeing the divine Rama. His fourteen years of exile now over, Rama touches the feet of all his three mothers, who warmly embrace him. Rama commands Pushpaka Vimana and its driver to return to Kubera, the lord of riches to whom it belonged. During his fourteen years of absence, the whole of Ayodhya had been as if in a great sorrow. Now that he returned, it erupted in joy. Flowers were in all the windows. Flags waved. Citizens sprinkled the roads with rose water, so the whole city took on a sweet air. Grasping his brother's feet, Bharata humbly requested that Rama become Emperor. Rama accepts the offer.

Soon Lord Rama's coronation ceremony started. Rishi Vasishta places Rama along with Sita upon a gold royal throne. Then, with the assistance of many priests, Vasishta consecrates Rama with water from several holy rivers. After that Vasishta placed the royal crown on Lord Rama's head and decorated His body with gold ornaments, making him Emperor of Ayodhya and the surrounding areas.

At the completion of the ceremony, Rama gave away cows, gold coins, and all varieties of precious jewels to brahmanas in charity. Rama gave a celestial necklace of gold and jewels to Sugriva, and He gave Angada a pair of bracelets that were adorned with diamonds and vaidurya stones. Rama presents a pearl-necklace to Sita and Sita presents that necklace in turn to Hanuman. Also, all the monkey chiefs were given valuable clothing and ornaments, and in this way the coronation of Lord Rama came to a successful conclusion. Being greatly satisfied at heart, all the monkeys returned to their respective kingdoms and Vibhishana also departed for Lanka.

Rama ruled the earth from His capital, Ayodhya, for 11,000 years. (This was a time when people lived much, much longer than they do today.) During the reign of Lord Rama, there were no diseases, no robberies, and no droughts. In fact, even wild animals gave up their natural enmity and did not kill one another. All the citizens were fully righteous, and they considered Rama their Lord and master, and beyond that, their very life and soul. Rama stands as one of the great examples for all men and Sita for all women. Rama taught the lesson of dharma (right action) and happily obeying his parents, whatever their wishes. Sita taught the example of chastity, total love for her husband.

Questions:

- Where did Hanuman fly to get the healing herbs for Lakshmana? Was this the first time?
- How long did the battle between Ravana and Rama last?
- Whose chariot did Rama use? Who was the charioteer?
- What would happen when Rama cut off one of Ravana's heads? Why?
- Whose hymn did Rama sing to get rejuvenated? What is it called?
- What did Rama use to kill Ravana?
- Who became King of Lanka?
- What happened when they tried to bring Sita to Rama on a palanquin? What did Rama say?
- What is a Kshatriya?
- Why, after going to so much trouble to recover Sita, did Rama say he would not take her back?
- What did Sita do when Rama said hard words to her in front of everyone? What happened?
- Where did Rama stop before going to Ayodhya? Why?
- Who was King while Rama was gone? How did he spend his days?
- Who performed Rama's coronation ceremony?

Achyutashtakam

Achyutam Keshavam Rama Narayanam; Krishna Damodaram Vasudevam Hari
Shri Dharam Madhavam Gopika Vallabham; Janaki Nayakam Ramachandram Bhaje (1)
Achyutam Keshavam Satyabha Madhavam; Madhavam Shri Dharam Radhika Radhitam
Indira Mandiram Chetasa Sundaram; Devakinandanam Nandajam Sandadhe (2)
Vishnave Jishnave Sankhine Chakrine; Rukmini raagine Janaki janaye
Vallavi vallabha yarchita yatmane; Kamsavi dhvansine Vansine Te Namah (3)
Krishna Govinda He Rama Narayana; Shripate Vasudev aachyuta Shrinidhe
Achyutananda He Madhavaa dhokshajam; Dvarakanayaka Draupadi rakshaka (4)
Rakshasa sobhitah Siitaya Sobhito; Dandakaa ranyabhu Punyata Kaaranah
Lakshmane naanvito Vaanarai Sevito; Agastya Sam pujito radhava Paatu Maam (5)
Dhenuka ristaka nista kri ddveshiha; Keshiha Kansahru dvansikavadakah
Putanakopakah Surajakhelano; Balagopalaka Paatu Maam Sarvada (6)
Vidyudu dyotavat Prasphurad vaasasam; Pravidam bhodavat Prollasad vighram
Vanyayaa Malaya Sobhito rahsthalam; Lohitan ghrivayam Varijaksham Bhaje (7)
Kunchitaih Kuntalairbh raajamaanaanam; Ratnamau lim Lasat kundalam Gandayoh
Harakey urakam Kankanaaproyalam; Kinkini manjulam Shyamalam Tam Bhaje (8)

Acyutasyaashtakam Yah Patthed-Isstta-Dam
Prematah Pratyaham Puurussah Sasprham |
Vrttatah Sundaram Kartr-Vvishvambharas-Tasya
Vashyo Harirjaayate Satvaram (9)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFpVxy6jNPM>

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

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