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Rāmāyaṇa

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Rāmāyaṇa

By Parth Sharma

Dedicated to my late Grandmother, Kamla Sharma

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Rāmāyaṇa

Introduction

Vālmīki provides a foundation for Indian society through *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Vālmīki* is known as the poet harbinger for Sanskrit literature. He defines the form of Sanskrit poetry because he discovers the first *Sholka*, first verse, and that's why he is also referred as *Adi Kavi*. *Vālmīki* composed the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* in 24,000 *Sholkas* during the time period of 500 BCE-100 BCE. Like many other epics such as *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* also went through the process of editing for publishing, but it is still impossible to provide the correct dates of its compositionⁱ

Rāmāyaṇa is the tale of the Lord and His consort born as mortal, experiencing human sorrow and following their *Dhárma* on earth. The epic lays down the basis of *karma* and *Dhárma* for human beings through a battle between good (the *Dhárma* king *Rāma*) and evil (his protagonist, *Rāvaṇa*). The text provides guidelines to people to differentiate between right and wrong. Lord *Brahma* pointed out "as long as mountain stands and river flow, the *Rāmāyaṇa* will be cherished among men and save them from sinⁱⁱ."

The notion of *Dhárma* can be seen early in the story. *Rāma* is, as are the majority of the other characters, bound to follow his *dhárma*. Following one's *Dhárma* is important and necessary to achieve good *karma*. *Karma* in Hinduism refers to the actions and deeds of the body and mind that result in the cause and effect in the cycle of *Saṃsāra*, *Mokṣa* being the point in the cycle where one reaches salvation and is no longer a part of the cycle. The best way to achieve good *karma* for the characters in The *Rāmāyaṇa* is to follow their *dhárma*, even if doing so leads them to do something that at times conflicts with their

personal desires. Such events create many dharmic conflicts for the characters that can be seen throughout the story, beginning with the following conflict.

Up to the exile

The evil king is *Rāvaṇa* whose wicked ambition is to conquer to the whole world. This ambition of *Rāvaṇa* has a goal of causing pain and misery to everyone in the world. On the good side is the *Daśaratha* who is a benevolent ruler and under whom a kingdom in North India *Ayodhyā* prospers. The king keeps the true meaning of the word *Ayodhyā* alive that is “not to be subdued”. Very wise people such as Sage *Vasiṣṭha*, who facilitate *Daśaratha* in running his kingdom. However, the biggest concern for *Daśaratha* and the kingdom is that he does not have a son. He calls all the *Ṛṣi*'s to perform rituals so that his wives can bear him a son. On the advice of sage *Vasiṣṭha*, king performs a *Yajña* in order to beget a son. As a result, king is blessed with four sons from his three queens. His eldest son is *Rāma* who is the son of *Kaushalyā*.

When *Rāma* is fifteen, *Rāvaṇa* is at the peak of his powers. His evil relation *Marich* and his mother *Tadaka* together were a big problem for the *Ṛṣi*s. They never let the sages pray or perform *Yajña*. Sages getting really frustrated with this act everyday ask Lord *Viṣṇu* to help them so that they can peacefully perform their daily prayers.ⁱⁱⁱ Lord *Viṣṇu* hears the prayers of the Sages and informs them that his reincarnation *Rāma* is the solution to their problem. It is believed that whenever there is a crisis on the earth, Lord *Viṣṇu* arrives from heaven for its salvation. Lord *Viṣṇu* has ten reincarnations and *Rāma* is believed to be his seventh reincarnation.

Dharmic conflict #1: Daśaratha

Dharmic duties of a King as a Kṣatriya-

- To protect, punish and preserve *Dhárma* in his kingdom
- To protect his subjects against external threats and wage war with rival kingdoms
- Never to back down from a battle
- To rely on his own powers of deduction in the administration of justice
- To properly inflict (punishment) so he will prosper with respect to (these) three (means of happiness); if he is voluptuous, partial, and deceitful he will be destroyed, even through the (unjust) punishment (which he inflicts)^{iv}.

Dharmic duties as a father- to protect his son from any harm and provide him with all his assets after he is gone^v.

After speaking with Lord *Viṣṇu*, Sage *Vishwamitra* goes to *Ayodhyā* where he asks King *Daśaratha* to send his eldest son, *Rāma*, along with his brother, *Lakṣmaṇa*, to kill the demons. *Daśaratha* has special love for *Rāma* because he was his first-born son. He tries to convince the Sage that his sons are just boys and, instead, offers himself to go and kill the demons. The Sage rejects his offer and tells him that the command from the God is that *Rāma* and his brother go in the forest, and forbids *Daśaratha* to say no to such a divine command. This is the first incident in which *Daśaratha* faces a conflict between his *Dhárma* as being a king and a father. He has special affection for *Rāma* and thinks that *Rāma* is still too young to fight with demons, but at the same time he cannot neglect his duties as a king,

which is to give Sage what he wants. He asks *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* to go with Sage and do what ever he asks them to do, because this is *their dhárma*. Even though the king wants to protect his sons by keeping them in the palace, he still sends them to fight demons because he is a dharmic king and not making the correct decision would disrespect the gods and his people.

Dashratha grew pale hearing these words,

His heart with filial love was stirred.

He said: "For sons born in old age,

You know not what you say good sage

All sons are dear to me alike,

But Rāma is dearer than my life

As Daśaratha spoke these love filled words,

The sage was with emotion stirred

Vashist advised: "O King think well,

Of call of Dhárma and double dispel!"^{vi}

Rāma and *Lakṣmaṇa*, under the training of Sage *Vishwamitra*, successfully kill the demon *Tadaka* and fulfill their *dhárma*. During his quest to kill the demons, *Rāma* finds his "love at first sight", *Sītā*, and marries her after winning a *swayamvar*, a marriage competition. *Sītā* is the daughter of the king of Mithila. The story behind *Sītā*'s birth further separated her from other women.

Sītā is believed to be the daughter of the earth because King *Janaka* finds her in the fields. It is believed that *Sītā* is sown into the soil through a bead of sweat that falls from King *Janaka* into a furrow as he is tilling his fields. From this bead of sweat, *Sītā* grows into an infant and, eventually, the woman who becomes *Rāma's* wife.

Though *Daśaratha* is initially sad about *Rāma* leaving and going to kill the demons, as soon as he hears about *Rāma's* wedding he quickly goes to Mithila to join the celebrations. *Ayodhyā* prospers under *Daśaratha* and the four brothers live in harmony with each other.

*Around the fire the couple walked
With deep devotion people watched.
The charming prince and lovely bride,
Glorious, blissful, dazzling bright!^{vii}*

A day arrives when King *Daśaratha* warns his family and courtiers about the impending doom that he predicts will befall his kingdom. He also points out that he is getting old and no longer has the power to resist the evil forces. Therefore, he decides to make *Rāma* his successor so that during the troubled times to come, the kingdom of *Ayodhyā* can be safe. According to the king, no one is as worthy as *Rāma* to be the next king because everyone respects *Rāma's* strength, his courage and his purity above all others.

This news brings great happiness to everyone in the kingdom because everyone expects the beloved *Rāma* to be the next king and their wishes were coming true. But this

happiness did not last long. *Manthara*, the servant of *Kaikeyī*, with her evil intentions, successfully convinces *Kaikeyī* that this is a time of great misfortune and King *Daśaratha* has betrayed her trust. She is believed to be the main reason for *Rāma's* exile. *Manthara* does not want *Rāma* to be the next king and in order to prevent this from happening, she approaches *Kaikeyī* because, as the beloved queen of *Daśaratha*, she will be able to change the decision to make *Rāma* king. *Manthara* is also aware of the promise *Daśaratha* makes to *Kaikeyī*.^{viii} *Kaikeyī* tries to stop *Manthara* from further accusing the king of betrayal because *Kaikeyī* herself believes that his decision is right and that he is just following his *Dhárma*, but *Manthara* tells *Kaikeyī* that if *Rāma* becomes the king he will not spare *Bhārata's* life. She continues by saying this is because no king would like having a threat to his crown and, as a result, *Rāma* will have *Bhārata* killed to secure his position. *Kaikeyī* tries her best to resist, but this thought creates a fear in her heart. *Manthara* successfully convinces *Kaikeyī* that *Daśaratha* is deceiving her and is planning a conspiracy against her son, *Bhārata*. Influenced by *Manthara's* words, *Kaikeyī* forces King *Daśaratha* to follow his promise that he makes to her in the battlefield when she saves his life. She uses one of her wishes to send *Rāma* to the jungle for fourteen years and the other to assign the crown to her own son. *Daśaratha* has no choice but to obey and the family is stricken with sorrow.

If I delude you with false things,

May God destroy me for my sins.

If Rāma tomorrow throne ascends,

Your days of glory soon shall end^{ix}.

Dharmic conflict #2: Daśaratha

- ***Dhárma as a Father***- to protect his son from any harms and provides him with all his assets after he is gone.
- ***Dhárma as a Husband***- to fulfill the promises made to his wife and to protect his wife's life and integrity^x.

Kaikeyī asks for the throne for *Bhārata* and banishment for *Rāma* so that her son does not face any problems from *Rāma*. This incident again tests *Daśaratha* for his kingship. He faces a conflict in his *Dhárma* as a father, and a husband. *Daśaratha* offers his entire wealth in place of those two promises, but *Kaikeyī* is determined to do what she thinks is necessary to save her son. These wishes take the life out of *Daśaratha* because of his love for *Rāma*. If he refuses to fulfill his promise, his promise as a husband is questioned as well as his love for *Kaikeyī*. As a father, he feels terrible for punishing *Rāma* for something he has not done, but he is bound by his promise. He regretfully asks *Rāma* to leave the kingdom and live the life of a *Sadhu* in the jungle for fourteen years.

Daśaratha decides to follow his *Dhárma* as a husband instead of a king by banishing his son from the kingdom. *Rāma* follows the order without questioning the king, accepting that this is his fate.

*“Mother blest is the son indeed,
Who parents words with joy does heed;
Who serves them just as they desire,
Such son to God’s Bliss does aspire^{xi}.*

The exile of *Rāma* reminds *Daśaratha* of causing the accidental death of Ṛṣi's son and in turn is cursed by the Ṛṣi and his wife. The curse dictates that he will suffer the same pain of losing his son. Losing *Rāma* weakens his health and he eventually dies of a heart attack.

Dharmic conflict #3: Rāma

- ***Dhárma of Rāma as a son***- to take care of the family on behalf of his father^{xii}.
- ***Dhárma of Rāma as a prince***- to follow the orders of the king.

Not only *Daśaratha*, but *Rāma* also faces the conflicts between his *Dhárma* as a son and as a prince. He faces a dharmic conflict as a son because if he goes to the jungle, he makes everyone in the family unhappy, especially his father, and at the same time, he fails to fulfill his duties as the eldest son. But if he does not go into the jungle, he not only fails as prince who does not obey his king's command, but also disrespects his father's honor. By not following the command, he would insult his father's kingship and cause others to doubt it.

Rāma follows his *Dhárma* as a prince and obeys the order of the king to go to the forest and live in exile for fourteen years. According to the laws of Manu, it is a prime duty of the eldest son to take care of the family on behalf of his father and for *Rāma* to keep his father's honor alive is more important to him than his duties as the oldest son.

Dharmic conflict #4: Sītā

- ***Dhárma of Sītā as a wife***- to look after *Rāma* through thick and thin, and also assist *Rāma* in his spiritual journey^{xiii}.
- **Lessons learned from the parents**- to do everything her husband wish her to do^{xiv}.

This particular incident brings out the conflicts of *Dhárma* not only for the king and the prince but also for *Sītā*. The king's order does not reach everyone in the palace immediately. *Sītā*'s love manifests itself as anger when she finds out about *Rāma*'s exile and that *Rāma* makes all the preparations to go the forest alone. She finds herself stuck in the middle of her duties as a wife and the lessons taught to her by her parents. Before going to the jungle, *Rāma* asks his wife to stay at the palace and take care of his family. This turns into a conflict for *Sītā* as she starts debating whether she should follow her husband's wish or her parent's lessons. According to *Sītā*, the most important thing for a wife is to be with her husband regardless of the situation. She goes to *Rāma* and questions his *Dhárma*. She tells him that this is not what her parents taught her. Her *Dhárma* is to be with her husband in good or bad times. She believes that a husband's duty is his wife's too.^{xv} *Rāma* tries to convince her to stay but, in the end, *Rāma* is persuaded and agrees to bring *Sītā* to the forest with him.

Without husband, all such ties,

Hotter than sun's rays burns wives.

Body, home, e'en life on earth,

Away from husband have no worth^{xvi}.

Dharmic conflict #5: Lakṣmaṇa

- ***Dhárma of as a younger brother***- to respect and protect his elder brother *Rāma* and his wife *Sītā*
- ***Dhárma as a son***- being the eldest son in the family, it is *Rāma's* duty to take care of the family on behalf of his father.

This decision of the king makes *Lakṣmaṇa* very angry as he questions the king's decision. He cannot believe that the king is punishing *Rāma* for something he has not done. He also thinks that this is the wrong *Dhárma* on his father's part because he is making his decision based on what his wife said and not by using his senses. He thinks that the whole world is going to laugh at this senseless decision made by the king that is to send the oldest son to the jungle and give the throne to his younger son. This decision by *Daśaratha* not only upset *Lakṣmaṇa*, but the whole family.

Lakṣmaṇa faces a conflict as a son and as a brother, but he decides to fulfill his *Dhárma* as a brother and follows *Rāma* to the jungle because of his true devotion for *Rāma* and his belief that he and *Rāma* share the same soul as brothers so their fate should also be the same. *Sumitra* tells *Lakṣmaṇa* that to follow *Rāma* to the forest is the *Dhárma* of his race and that she is very proud of her son.

Nurtured in your love since life's dawn,

Can Sumera be lifted by a swan?

I've sought not love of father, mother,

I've only cared for your love, brother!^{xvii}

In the exile

In this section of the paper we notice how *Rāma*, *Sītā*, and *Lakṣmaṇa* face the hardships of the forest and at the same time follow their *Dhárma*. In the forest, *Rāma*, *Sītā*, and *Lakṣmaṇa* face many Dharmic challenges. While some challenges are small and easy to solve, some are not so easy, and in order to make the right choice, they sometimes make a mistake. In the forest they make decisions that are based on *Dhárma* rather than for their own benefit. The decision made by them in these situations show that they are true followers of *dhárma*.

As *Rāma* leaves for the forest, everyone gathers in the street to have one last look at his face. *Rāma* asks the charioteer to go faster and faster but the crowd keeps saying slower and slower. *Sumantra* manages to take them out of the crowded street and away from the mourning crowd into the jungle. Before leaving the kingdom, *Rāma* requests the people of *Ayodhyā* to accept *Bhārata* as their true king and give him full respect.

In the jungle they spend their first night in the region of *Guha*. *Guha* feels delighted to have *Rāma* as his guest and offers him a place to spend his exile in his region. *Rāma*, showing his excellence, greets *Guha* but refuses the offer because he does not want to stray from his dharmic path. He nobly explains to *Guha* that he is bound by his vows and that they have come down to dwell in forest and not to enjoy life as guests. They spend the night in the region and leave the next morning.

They cross the river Ganga and find themselves alone for the first time in the forest. *Rāma* asks *Lakṣmaṇa* to stand guard and walk in front so that he can clear the way for *Sītā* and protect her from any trouble.

In the meanwhile, *Daśaratha* 's condition starts to get worse and he tells *Kaushalyā* about the sin he commits while playing a sport in the past. He sleeps after telling the story but he does not wake up the next morning. This news of his death comes as a shock to the whole kingdom and its subjects are overcome with grief. When *Bhārata* finds out about what has happened in the kingdom during his absence, he rushes back to *Ayodhyā*. He asks his mother why she causes such injustice to befall *Rāma*. *Kaikeyī* tries to convince *Bhārata* that he should not mourn what has happened, but instead should follow his *Dhārma* as the new king of *Ayodhyā*. Instead, *Bhārata* tells *Kaikeyī* that he is no longer her son and she is no longer his mother. *Bhārata* could not handle such injustice to his elder brother and goes to the forest to give *Rāma* the sad news and ask for his forgiveness. As soon as *Rāma* hears about this father he becomes angry with himself and blames himself for his father's death. *Bhārata* asks *Rāma* to take what belongs to him by birth, but *Rāma* refuses the offer and commands *Bhārata* to follow the order of the king, as it is his *Dhārma*. *Bhārata* decides that his *Dhārma* is to follow *Rāma*'s command as well. He agrees to accept the kingdom on one condition: that he will only rule until *Rāma* returns back to *Ayodhyā* after he fulfills his *Dhārma*.

Dharmic duties: Kṣatriya

- I. He should protect the people
- II. Always exert himself for the destruction of robbers and wicked people
- III. He should put forth his powers in battle^{xviii}.

Rāma, *Sītā*, and *Lakṣmaṇa* start to live in the forest of *Panchavati* where they build a small hut for themselves. All of the animals in the forest help them by bringing things that will help them build shelter. Ten years pass and, during this time, *Rāma*, *Sītā*, and *Lakṣmaṇa* visit different sages and continue to live in the forest.

These ten years are referred to as *Aranya Kanda*, the “Forest Section”, also known as the time of misfortune for *Sītā*. *Rāma* is chosen to protect all of the Sages and destroy all of the demons. *Sītā* softly questions *Rāma* as to why he is the one who should protect the sages and not the king. She tells *Rāma* that it is the *Dhárma* of a king and not of the one who is engaged in penance. She mentions the three sins to *Rāma* and tells him that she does not worry about the first two because she have complete faith in him, but what worries her is the third sin: violence. *Rāma*, a *Dhárma* follower, respects *Sītā*’s concern and explains to her that even though he is living the life of an ascetic, it is his *Dhárma* to follow his duties as a *Kṣatriya*. He further explains that the duties of a *Kṣatriya* are for everyone who belongs to the cast and not just for the king alone.

In the meanwhile, the chief minister of Lanka tells *Rāvaṇa* that all sages are coming back to the forest with a new confidence in them because a boy name *Rāma* is eradicating all of the demons from the forest. After discovering the heroic work of *Rāma*, and to test his loyalty, *Rāvaṇa*’s sister, *Shurpankha*, visits *Rāma* as a beautiful lady in disguise. *Shurpankha* commands *Rāma* to marry her but *Rāma*, the follower of *dhárma*, gently asks her to leave him and ask his brother to marry her, as he is already married to *Sītā*. *Shurpankha* becomes enraged when *Rāma* rejects her so she tries to kill *Sītā*. *Lakṣmaṇa* in order to save *Sītā* throws a dagger at *Shurpankha* and cuts her nose. *Lakṣmaṇa* attacks *Rāvaṇa*’s sister because it was his *Dhárma* to protect *Sītā* from any danger.

*None have I yet found who is fit for me,
 All over the world I have been to see
 So though I am lovely, I'm single still,
 But seeing you now, wed you I will!"*
*Insulted by Lakshaman to Rāma then she went,
 Assuming her real form, Sita to torment.
 Seeing Sita frightened by her terrible form,
 Rāma motioned to Lakshaman to demoness warn^{xix}*

Dharmic conflict #6: Lakṣmaṇa

- ***Dhárma as a brother-*** to respect and protect his elder brother *Rāma*
- **Going against the actual truth**

Shurpankha goes back to Lanka and tries to stimulate *Rāvaṇa* by telling him about *Sītā's* beauty so that she may have her revenge on *Rāma*.^{xx} They do not face any big dharmic conflicts for ten years in the forest, but when *Rāvaṇa* tries to kidnap *Sītā*, Lakṣmaṇa and *Sītā* must both make decisions based on *Dhárma*.

In order to kidnap *Sītā*, *Rāvaṇa* makes a plan with his uncle *Marich*. *Marich* takes a form of a golden deer and successfully catches *Sītā's* attention. At *Sītā's* request, *Rāma* tries to catch the deer and commands *Lakṣmaṇa* to protect *Sītā*. While attempting to catch the deer, *Rāma* strays far from the hut. As soon as he catches the deer, he realizes that it is a demon purposely luring him away from *Sītā*. In the meanwhile, *Ravava* hides behind a

tree and waits for *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* to leave. The demon imitates *Rāma*'s voice and calls for help. Hearing the voice of *Rāma*, seemingly in pain, *Sītā* asks *Lakṣmaṇa* to leave at once and help his brother. He follows her command and leaves in search for *Rāma*. As soon as *Lakṣmaṇa* leaves, *Rāvaṇa* appears, disguised as a *Sage*, and kidnaps *Sītā*, taking her back to his palace in Lanka.

At first *Lakṣmaṇa* refuses to leave *Sītā* alone, but upon hearing the cruel words from *Sītā* that he does not care about his brother's life, he agrees to go and help *Rāma*. *Lakṣmaṇa* in the story is the one who is always hasty and quick, and *Rāma* is calm and patient in making decisions. On this particular occasion, however, the brothers switch their roles. *Lakṣmaṇa* is suspicious from the start. He also warns *Rāma* and *Sītā* that the animal is not a golden stag but a demon in disguise. But, rather than argue, he follows his brother's command as his *Dhárma* and stays by *Sītā* to protect her. This could be seen as a small dharmic conflict that *Lakṣmaṇa* has to face. Even though he knows he is right, he still decides to obey his brother's order to protect *Sītā*.

Dharmic conflict #7 and #8: Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā

Lakṣmaṇa

- ***Dhárma as a younger brother***- to protect *Rāma* and his wife *Sītā*.
- **Going against the actual truth**

Sītā

- ***Dhárma of a wife***- it is the duty of a wife to control her thoughts, speech and deeds in order to gain highest renown and place near her husband in the next world^{xxi}.
- ***Dhárma as a sister***- to listen to the orders of the elder brother

Lakṣmaṇa soon faces another dharmic conflict when the demon calls for help in *Rāma's* voice. This time the conflict comes from *Sītā's* side as she commands him to go and help his brother. He tries to convince *Sītā* that this is just a trick and brother *Rāma* is all right, but when *Sītā* starts to curse him for being heartless, he decides to go in search of his brother. All this time *Lakṣmaṇa* is aware of what is happening, but he also cannot overlook his duties as a brother. His decision is based on *Dhárma* and not on his own wish. He knows that following *Sītā's* command could result in great misfortune but he still does not argue and does what his *Dhárma* expects from him.

*When Sita spoke some bitter words,
With pain Lakshman's faithful heart stirred.
Leaving alone in god's care,
To seek Rāma in the woods he fared^{xxii}.*

Sītā also faces a dharmic conflict. Before leaving to help *Rāma*, *Lakṣmaṇa* makes a line around the hut to protect *Sītā*. He tells *Sītā* that as long as she is behind the line she is safe. *Sītā* finds herself in the conflict when *Rāvaṇa* comes as a Sage and asks for charity. When *Sītā* refuses to cross the line, he threatens her by saying that misfortune will befall her if she does not feed the hungry sage. Like *Lakṣmaṇa*, she did not know if something bad would happen if she crosses the line. At that time, she just does not want to upset the sage because she is already worrying about her husband. *Rāvaṇa's* plan to kidnap *Sītā* is

perfect because he utilizes dharmic conflicts to his advantage, anticipating what each character will do.

*When Sita was by herself left,
Rāvaṇa in form of saint came dressed.
The demon who kept gods in fear,
Awake, hungry, lest he appear^{xxiii}*

Followers of Dhárma

When *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* return and cannot find *Sītā* anywhere, *Rāma* becomes angry and starts to lose his patience. Once again, *Lakṣmaṇa* must help *Rāma* control his anger and they decided to look for *Sītā* everywhere.

On their mission to find *Sītā*, *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* were still performing their duties as a *Kṣatriya*. They release a heavenly body from his curse by killing his demon form. The heavenly body advises them to find *Sugrīva*, the king of the *Vānara*, or monkeys. Both the brothers start to find *Sugrīva* in the forest and during their search they come in contact with his minister name *Hanumān*.

*Who are you sires, sky blue and fair,
Like warriors in the forest fare?
Treading rough ground with your feet,*

What do you in the forest seek?^{xxiv}

Hanumān is the son of *Añjanā* and *Kesari* and is believed to be an avatar of Lord *Śiva*. *Hanumān* is worshipped as the symbol of strength and devotion. He is considered as one of the dearest devotees of *Rāma*. It is believed in the Hindu tradition that Lord *Śiva* and Lord *Viṣṇu* use thoughts of each other to better concentrate while performing yoga and looking after the world. As a result, when Lord *Viṣṇu* arrives on earth in the form of *Rāma*, Lord *Śiva* also comes to earth as *Hanumān*.

Rāma and *Lakṣmaṇa* explain their misfortune to the king of the *Vānara*. *Sugrīva* also tells *Rāma* of his misfortune and together they take an oath to help each other in regaining what they have lost.

Deep love pervaded in their heart,

Rāma's story Lakshman did impart.

With tear filled eyes Sugriva then said:

"Lord! News of Sita we shall get^{xxv}.

Rāma agrees to help *Sugrīva* to regain his kingdom and his wife from his brother *Vaali*. *Sugrīva* explains to *Rāma* why he and *Vaali* are enemies. *Vaali* is *Sugrīva's* elder brother who keeps his wife in the palace and refuses to give her back to *Sugrīva*. A long time ago, *Vaali* fights an intense battle against a demon name *Dundudhi*. The battle lasts for years and as the battle is taking place inside a cave, *Sugrīva* and his men were waiting outside to see the result. After waiting for a long time, *Sugrīva* thinks that his brother is

dead because he could not hear any noise from the cave. When *Vaali* comes out and notices that his brother has left and has taken the kingdom, he gets very upset and wishes to kill his brother for tricking him.

*I waited there for thirty days,
 Then streams of blood gushed from the cave,
 'Now he will kill me next' I thought,
 In fear I closed cace's mouth with rock.
 Bali returned, the demon killed,
 Seeing me he was with fury filled.
 He struck me though I cried for life,
 He took from me my wealth and wife^{xxvi}.*

As *Rāma* pledged, he agrees to kill *Vaali*. The first attempt to kill *Vaali* is unsuccessful because both the brothers look very much alike and *Rāma* did not want to kill the wrong person by mistake. This makes *Sugrīva* very angry because he went to fight his brother trusting *Rāma*. *Rāma* explains to him why he could not keep his promise. On the second attempt, *Rāma* successfully kills *Vaali* and gives *Sugrīva* what he desires. *Sugrīva* then sends out his force in all four directions to look for *Sītā*. While the forces were looking for *Sītā*, *Rāvaṇa* asks *Sītā* to forget about *Rāma* and asks her to marry him. *Sītā* tries to explain to *Rāvaṇa* that he has already committed enough *Adhārma* by kidnapping her and requests him not to violate *Dhārma* any further.

The forces search for many days but they could not find any clues of *Sītā's* whereabouts until *Hanumān* finds a secret way to the ocean through a mountain. At the shore, the brother of *Jatāyū* helps the forces by guiding them in the right direction towards Lanka.

Hanumān, with his magical powers, flies across the ocean to rescue *Sītā*, but *Sītā* refuses to come back with him because she wants freedom for everyone and not just for herself. *Sītā* is initially scared, as she thinks that this is one of the tricks of *Rāvaṇa*, but when *Hanumān* shows *Sītā* the ring *Rāma* gives to her, she believes *Hanumān* and asks him about his Lord *Rāma*. Before leaving the palace, *Hanumān* starts bullying the soldiers of *Rāvaṇa*. He purposely allows himself to be arrested in order to meet *Rāvaṇa* and tells him that what he has done is a big *Adhárma*. *Adhárma*, individual disharmony with nature of things, is opposite of *Dhárma*. He tries to talk some sense into *Rāvaṇa* by telling him that he can still prevent another violation of *Dhárma* if he agrees to return *Sītā* to *Rāma* along with the other slaves and beg forgiveness for his actions.

Truth Act #1- *Hanumān*

Truth act in Sanskrit is known as *Satyakriyā*. Pious person to invoke the power of truth and make miraculous events happen performs *Satyakriyā* in the ancient times.

Hanumān goes through similar act when Ravana captures him and tries to punish him.

Rāvaṇa, instead of listening to the noble suggestion, asks his guards to kill *Hanumān* but his brother stops him on the grounds that it against the rules to kill a messenger.

Rāvaṇa instead lights *Hanumān's* tail on fire. *Hanumān* prays to the fire god and requests

him to protect him if his devotion to *Rāma* is true. This plan backfires because *Hanumān*, with his tail, burns most of Lanka before he takes the message back to lord *Rāma*.

Hanumān returns to *Rāma* and tells him that the only way he can get *Sītā* back is by defeating *Rāvaṇa*. *Rāma* decides that war should be fought in order to free this world from the suffering *Rāvaṇa* is causing and restore peace to the world. In the meanwhile, *Rāvaṇa*'s brother, *Vibhīshaṇa*, begs *Rāvaṇa* to return *Sītā* back and make peace with *Rāma*. He suggests that he should not underestimate *Rāma*'s power and that there is a reason why he has been able to defeat all his demons around the world. This makes *Rāvaṇa* very angry and he asks his brother to leave the palace. *Vibhīshaṇa* decides to leave Lanka and make peace with *Rāma*

The army comes to a stand when they reach the shore because the army is too big and they don't have enough boats to carry the whole army across the ocean. After listening to the problem *Vibhīshaṇa* suggests that *Rāma* pray to the sea God and ask for his help in order to cross the ocean. *Rāma* heeds *Vibhīshaṇa*'s advice and prays to the sea God for seven day and nights. On the dawn of the eighth morning the sea God appears. *Rāma* asks the God to allow him to cross the ocean so that he and his army can go to Lanka and defeat the evil king *Rāvaṇa*. The sea God tries to explain to *Rāma* that he is bound by the rules of nature. If he gives the way, then he will break the law and that can result in much harm to the life under water. Instead of saying no, the sea God suggests that *Rāma* inscribe his name on the rocks and make a bridge from those rocks.

Vibhīshaṇa bowed to the Lord's Feet,

By His devotion *Rāma* was pleased.

*He hearkened to his humble prayer,
And clasped him in His loving care^{xxvii}.*

The War between *Dhárma* and *Adhárma*

After getting such advice from the sea God, *Rāma* and his army start to build a bridge that will take them to Lanka. They successfully complete the bridge and, as promised by the sea God, all the stones and rocks float on the heart of the ocean. The stones not only stay on the water but also give the sea creatures an opportunity to take blessings, because all of the stones and rocks have *Rāma's* name written on them.

Soon the news of *Rāma* reaching the shore of Lanka reaches *Rāvaṇa*. He immediately calls his ministers to discuss the strategies of war. *Rāvaṇa's* Commander in chief, *Prahasta*, advises him not to worry about such petty things. He tells *Rāvaṇa* of his accomplishments and that there is no need to call this meeting just because a handful of men and monkeys are at the border of Lanka. However, *Rāvaṇa's* father, *Vishrava*, warns him to return *Sītā* back to *Rāma* because *Rāma* and his army is no ordinary army. He implies that many will die if they go to war, and not just on *Rāma's* side.

Rāma gathers his army and tells them that he has been waiting for this opportunity to destroy *Rāvaṇa*. Even now, when his dreams are about to come true, he still wants to give *Rāvaṇa* one last chance to return *Sītā* and the other prisoners and seek peace under his rule. This surprises the whole army because they could not believe that even after all the *Adhárma* *Rāvaṇa* has committed, *Rāma* still wants to forgive *Rāvaṇa*.

Rāma calls *Vaali's* son, *Angad*, and asks him to be his messenger and convey this message to *Rāvaṇa*. *Rāvaṇa* tries to kill *Angad*, showing that he does not care for the offer

and that all he wants his war. *Rāvaṇa's* message disappoints *Rāma*. *Rāma* tells his army that with the first ray of sun the war will begin and thanks his army for supporting him in the fight of good versus evil.

The next morning the battle starts between *Dhárma* king *Rāma* and evil king *Rāvaṇa*. *Sugrīva's* army equally matches *Rāvaṇa's* army, which is known for destroying its enemies easily and in a short time. This equal match-up creates some tension in *Rāvaṇa's* court. *Vishrava* tries once again to put sense into his son's mind, but gets shut down by *Prahstha* who suggests to send *Kumbhakarṇa's* sons, *Kumbha* and *Nikumbha*, to maintain pressure on the enemy while the tired soldiers get some rest. The first day of battle favors *Rāvaṇa* due to the courageous fight put up by *Kumbhakarṇa's* sons.

Dharmic conflict #9: Rāma

- ***Dhárma as a Kṣatriya***
 - I. He should protect the people
 - II. Always exert himself for the destruction of robbers and wicked people
 - III. He should put forth his powers in battle^{xxviii}.
- **Qualities of a good human being-** a good human being does not differentiate between himself and others. He treats them equal at every stage of life^{xxix}.

Rāma is truly a *Dhárma* follower as he strictly follows the rules of the battle and fights only until sunset^{xxx}. After the sun sets, *Rāma* visits the wounded soldiers and cremates the bodies of the dead soldiers. *Rāma* not only cremates his soldiers, but

Rāvaṇa's as well. *Lakṣmaṇa* questions *Rāma* about this decision, but *Rāma* explains to his brother that even though they are the men who fight against them, once dead they belong to death. *Lakṣmaṇa* tries to convince *Rāma* that getting carried away with his emotions is not a *Kṣatriya's dhárma*. *Rāma* agrees with his brother but also tries to explain to him that during his journey to Lanka and after the first day of battle, he learns that it is more important to be a good human being than just to be a good *Kṣatriya*. *Rāma* chooses his duties as a good human and honors the dead but at the same time follows the *Dhárma* of a *Kṣatriya* on the battlefield.

The second day of battle is even fiercer. This time it is not only the armies of both sides but also the generals of both armies engage in the battle. *Prahastha* himself starts the day by killing many soldiers of *Rāma's* army, but the general of the *Vānara's* army, *Neel*, stops his run. They fight an intense battle, but in the end *Neel* comes out as the winner and defeats the commander in chief of *Rāvaṇa's* army.^{xxxii}

On the other side, there is another fierce battle going on between the king of *Vānara*, *Sugrīva*, and *Kumbhakarṇa's* son *Kumbha*. At first, it seems as if *Kumbha* will defeat *Sugrīva* and will give an upper hand to his army in the battle, but *Sugrīva*, with his smart tactics, tricks *Kumbha* and kills him. *Hanumān* fights a duel with *Nikumbha* and then the mighty *Kumbhakarṇa*.^{xxxiii} *Kumbhakarṇa* is *Rāvaṇa's* brother and one of the best and bravest warriors of *Rāvaṇa's* troops. *Kumbhakarṇa* normally alternates between sleeping and eating for six months apiece, but after watching all of his brave warriors getting killed by the *Vānara's* army, *Rāvaṇa* orders his men to wake *Kumbhakarṇa* up from his sleep. If *Kumbhakarṇa* had slept for the entirety of these last six months he would have become

immortal, but *Rāvaṇa*'s fear of losing is so strong that he wakes *Kumbhakarṇa* before the six-month marker. *Rāvaṇa* asks him to go in the battle and bring good news for Lanka.

Dhárma* follower in Lanka: *Kumbhakarṇa

After listening to *Rāvaṇa*'s worries, *Kumbhakarṇa* becomes furious and decides to kill *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* and drink their blood, but soon he remembers why this misfortune is happening to Lanka and his brother. He tells *Rāvaṇa* that even after being given so many warning he did not listen to them, and, as a result, now he is suffering. He also tells *Rāvaṇa* that he need not worry because it is his *Dhárma* to protect his brother from any threat and that *Rāma* would have to kill *Kumbhakarṇa* in order to kill *Rāvaṇa*.

"You've sinned against the Mother fool! Now do you your own victory seek?"^{xxxiii}

As *Kumbhakarṇa* comes to the battlefield, all of the *Vānara* army tremble with fear, as they have never seen anyone as mighty as *Kumbhakarṇa*. *Vibhīshaṇa* advises *Rāma* that now is the time for him to go to the battlefield. *Kumbhakarṇa*'s first challenge comes from *Hanumān*, but before *Kumbhakarṇa* can do any harm to *Hanumān*, *Rāma* steps in and challenges *Kumbhakarṇa*. Intense battle starts between *Kumbhakarṇa* and *Rāma* but in the end *Rāma* kills *Kumbhakarṇa* with the weapons that Sage *Vishwamitra* give to *Rāma* during his training. As *Kumbhakarṇa* dies, he concentrates his heart with Lord *Rāma*'s devotion and his spirit enters *Rāma*'s body.

Touching his feet Vibhīshaṇaa went,

To Rāma of three worlds adornment.

He said: "Lord! mighty as mountain,

Comes Kumbhakarṇa, valour's fountain!"^{xxxiv}

As *Rāvaṇa* starts to lose hope, *Indrajīt*, his son, assures his father that he could still turn the result of this battle in *Rāvaṇa*'s favor. Seeing his son's confidence, *Rāvaṇa* feels better, but his worry does not completely dissipate, as *Indrajīt* is the only fine warrior left in his army and if anything happens to him, there will be no one left in the army to face *Rāma*. *Indrajīt* comes to the battlefield with great fury. The war between him and *Rāma*'s army goes on for three days. On the first day of the battle, he swiftly wipes out the army of *Sugreeva*. He calls *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* to come out of their hiding and battle with him so that he can avenge the death of his brothers and uncle *Kumbhakarṇa*. Accepting the challenge from *Indrajīt*, *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa*, jump into the battle to stop destructive *Indrajīt*. *Indrajīt* fights fiercely against the sons of *Ayodhyā* and successfully injures both of the brothers using his most wicked weapon, *Nagapash*, also known as a trap made of one million snakes^{xxxv}. The *Garuda*, who is the enemy of the serpents and the flying vehicle of *Narayana*, rescues *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* from any further harm.

Soon the news of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* being alive and rescued by *Garuda*, reaches *Indrajīt*. He becomes furious and vows to kill one of the brothers that day. He again starts to wipe out the army of *Sugrīva*. This time *Lakṣmaṇa* appears before him and fights an intense battle against him. When *Indrajīt* realizes that *Lakṣmaṇa* cannot be won over, he starts to use his supreme magical powers. He combines his skill of sorcery and deceptive warfare. He uses his trick of vanishing and reappearing to catch *Lakṣmaṇa* off-guard and

make his weapons deadlier. Using his tricks, he successfully injures *Lakṣmaṇa* with his weapons and, once again, *Lakṣmaṇa* falls unconscious on the ground.

Garuda, without wasting any time, commands *Hanumān* to go and get *Sanjivani*, a life-restoring herb, from the *Dronagiri* Mountain. *Rāvaṇa*, in order to increase the problems for *Rāma* and his army, orders *Kalnemi*, a magician, to intercept *Hanumān*'s path. At first, *Kalnemi* tries to discourage *Rāvaṇa* from doing any more *Adhárma*, but when *Rāvaṇa* threatens him with destruction from his own hands, he chooses to die by the hands of the messenger of the Lord and thus attain salvation.

Kalnemi, using his magical powers, creates a beautiful garden with pool of water containing lovely flowers. On his way to the mountain, *Hanumān* decides to stop by the garden and get some rest. Before drinking the water, he approaches *Kalnemi*, disguised as a Sage, and respectfully seeks his permission to drink water to satisfy this thirst. As he drinks water from the pond, a crocodile attacks him and bites his leg. *Hanumān* immediately kills the crocodile. The crocodile happens to be a heavenly body whose spirit is cursed to be trapped within the body of a crocodile. The heavenly body warns *Hanumān* of the Sage by telling him that the Sage is actually a demon. *Hanumān* kills the demon, *Kalnemi*, and continues his journey to the mountain.

Hanumān faces another problem as he reaches the mountain. The mountain is full of herbs and he cannot distinguish among all the herbs which one is *Sanjivani*. Time is running out and in order to avoid any confusion, *Hanumān* lifts up the whole mountain and carries it back to Lanka. The herb brings *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* back to life along with other severely injured *Vaaranas*.

When *Indrajīt* finds out that *Lakṣmaṇa* has survived again, he decides to go and offer sacrifices to his native deity and invoke blessings for invincibility so that he can end this war forever. *Vibhīshaṇa* knows that *Indrajīt* will be without weapons because he is aware that during this ritual *Indrajīt* will not touch his weapons in order to successfully complete the ritual. Knowing his brother's plan, *Vibhīshaṇa* alerts Lord *Rāma* and tells him that something should be done to stop *Indrajīt* from making those sacrifices otherwise it will be very difficult to defeat him. *Rāma* immediately asks *Lakṣmaṇa* to gather a small troop and go spoil the ritual.

Rāma's blessings Lakshman humbly took,

With bow and arrow as he stood.

Drawing strength of Rāma's power in his heart,

He spoke grave words in deep regard:

"If victory I bring not today

Myself devotee I'll not say

To save him e'en if Shankar came,

I'll kill the demon, on Rāma's name!^{lxxxvi}

Seeking blessings from *Rāma*, *Lakṣmaṇa* attacks *Indrajīt* inside the cave and spoils the ritual for becoming invincible. *Indrajīt*, fighting with the utensils used in the ritual, somehow manages to get away from the cave. Frustrated with this intrusion, he vows to kill *Vibhīshaṇa* and *Lakṣmaṇa*. Again a fierce battle takes place between *Lakṣmaṇa* and *Indrajīt*, and being unable to hurt *Lakṣmaṇa* by fair means, *Indrajīt* then uses the three

supreme weapons (*Brahmastra*, *Pashupatastra*, and *Vaishnavastra*) on *Lakṣmaṇa*. But to his dismay, none of the weapons cause any harm to *Lakṣmaṇa*. He soon realizes that *Lakṣmaṇa* is not a normal human being and he disappears, retreating to his palace. Upon his return, he tells *Rāvaṇa* about the strength of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa*, and proposes to make peace with *Rāma* and protect demon race from vanishing.

Rāvaṇa, filled with pride, calls *Indrajīt* a coward for fleeing from the battlefield. This accusation makes *Indrajīt* very upset and he decides to go back on the battlefield, even though he knows that this time he will indeed face death at the hands of *Lakṣmaṇa*. He fights again with *Lakṣmaṇa*, but this time *Lakṣmaṇa* ends his life by using *Aindrastra*.

Rāvaṇa sitting alone on his throne looks around and sees that he is the only warrior left in the palace and that all of the other warriors have died at the hands of Lord *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa*. He goes up to the tower and surveys the scene on the battlefield. He notices that the warriors of the demon army are disheartened due to the heavy loss inflicted upon them. He thus decides that the time has come for him to act on his own and do something to bring back the spirit of his army that is known for destroying its enemy quickly.

Next day as sun on Lanka dawned,

Its forts the gallant Vanars stormed.

Calling his demons Rāvaṇa warned:

“Those in battle feel alarmed,

Had better now abstain from strife,

Cowards retreat when come to fight!

*On my strength this war I seeked,
Foe's challenge I shall myself meet^{xxxvii}*

Rāvaṇa returns to his chamber to prepare himself for the battle. He takes a ritual bath and performs special prayers to get blessings from Lord *Śiva*. He summons his chariot. The chariot used by *Rāvaṇa* is unique and special. His chariot can move with horses or without them. As he is leaving the palace, he says that after this battle, his wife, *Mandodarī*, or *Rāma's* wife, *Sītā*, will be a widow.

Devas in the heaven notice the determination of *Rāvaṇa* and decide to support *Rāma* with whatever they can. They request *Indra*, the god of war, to send down his chariot for *Rāma's* use. When *Rāma* sees the chariot he gets very impress but at the same time he also reflects that this might be a trick from the demons. To clear this doubt, *Mithali*, the charioteer, informs *Rāma* that the gods have send him to protect him against *Rāvaṇa*, who is blessed by the power of *Brahma* and *Śiva*.

Rāvaṇa, filled with anger and rage, starts to attack the *Vānara*. *Rāvaṇa* is blessed with ten heads and arms, so he takes a bow in each of his ten hands, picks up deadly arrows, and asks his charioteer to drive towards the *Vānara* army. A fierce battle takes place between the *Vānara* and *Rāvaṇa*. At first, the *Vānara* face *Rāvaṇa* with great courage, but upon seeing the strength of *Rāvaṇa*, they begin to retreat and ask Lord *Rāma* to help them defeat this powerful warrior.

*Then at Vanars bold Rāvaṇa rushed,
His chariot helpless warriors crushed.*

*The vanars flew back full of fright,
To seek from Rāvaṇa's wrath respite.*

*"Save us O Lord!" they cried and wept,
"Like Death Rāvaṇa has Vanars swept."
When Rāvaṇa saw the vanars run,
In all then bows he arrows strung^{xxxviii}*

Lakṣmaṇa cannot restrain himself after hearing the plea of the *Vānara*. He challenges *Rāvaṇa* to fight with him instead of bullying the *Vānara*. *Lakṣmaṇa* fights an intense battle against *Rāvaṇa*. *Lakṣmaṇa* destroys *Rāvaṇa's* chariot and kills his charioteer, but in the end receives a blow from *Rāvaṇa's* *Brahma* missile. *Rāvaṇa* believes that *Rāma's* strength is his brother and that by capturing *Lakṣmaṇa*, he can make *Rāma* weak. This plan fails for *Rāvaṇa* because before he can capture *Lakṣmaṇa*, *Hanumān* comes and rescues *Lakṣmaṇa*.

The next day, *Vibhīṣaṇa* sends some men to Lanka to get more information about *Rāvaṇa's* plan. *Vibhīṣaṇa's* men tell him that *Rāvaṇa* is performing ritual sacrifices to invoke gods to bless him with victory over *Rāma*. *Vibhīṣaṇa* quickly informs *Rāma* about the ritual and requests him to take action immediately in order to ruin the ritual. *Rāma* sends a small troop with *Angad* and successfully ruins *Rāvaṇa's* prayer.

Rāvaṇa returns to the battle in fury. He again starts to slay the monkeys with rage. *Mahodara*, one of the members of *Rāvaṇa's* council, requests that *Rāvaṇa* give him the honor of fighting *Rāma*. *Rāvaṇa* explains to *Mahodara* that *Rāma* is his sole concern and, if

he wants to engage himself in battle, he can fight with *Lakṣmaṇa*. Anticipating *Rāvaṇa*'s plan, *Rāma* asks his charioteer to stand in *Mahodara*'s path so that he can save *Lakṣmaṇa* from any further harm. *Mahodara*, disregarding *Rāvaṇa*'s suggestion, decides to fight against *Rāma*. It is a moment of work for *Rāma* to destroy *Mahodara*'s pride and life.

Before going on the battlefield, there are many ominous signs, such as neighing horses and owls hooting in a mournful way, but *Rāvaṇa*, blinded by his pride, ignores these omens and decides to go and fight. *Rāvaṇa* notices them only for a brief moment and decides that they mean nothing and that *Rāma* is nothing but a mortal.

While deciding on his next move, *Rama* looks at the army of *Rāvaṇa*. He decides that destroying *Rāvaṇa*'s army and *Rāvaṇa* watching his men die might change his heart, but the effect was opposite. *Rāvaṇa* becomes more furious and starts to march towards *Rāma* and his doom.

Finally the battle between *Rāma* and *Rāvaṇa* begins. *Rāvaṇa* starts the rain of arrows on *Rāma* and his army and *Rāma* does the same to *Rāvaṇa* and his army. While *Rāma* and *Rāvaṇa* were fighting, *Rāvaṇa* looks at the chariot of *Rāma* and realizes that the chariot belongs to *Indra* and that the gods are trying to help *Rāma* to win this battle. *Rāvaṇa* decides to teach the gods a lesson and multiplies his attack by tenfold. But these attacks seem to have no affect on *Rāma*. *Rāvaṇa* decides to change his tactics and orders his charioteer to fly in the air. This tactic does not work for long because *Rāma* stops his attack by flying next to him. They chase each other around the earth and finally return to Lanka and continue fighting.

Rāvaṇa soon realizes that multiplying his attacks by tenfold is not going help him, so he switches to the use of magic and sorcery. The first weapon he uses is called *Māya*, a

weapon, which creates illusions and confuses the enemy. This weapon proves some success for *Rāvaṇa*. *Rāma* gets confused seeing all of the enemies that he kills in the war come back to life. *Mithali* saves *Rāma* from this confusion by telling him that this is just an illusion that *Rāvaṇa* is creating to confuse him and he should just focus on the battle. To overcome the confusion, *Rāma* uses a weapon for wisdom: *Gñāna*. *Rāvaṇa* uses various supreme weapons to trouble *Rāma*, but *Rāma* is always ready with a response.

Soon, *Rāvaṇa* realizes that he is running out of resources. Realizing that there nothing much *Rāvaṇa* can do, *Rāma* decides to kill the demon by cutting his head off. He launches a sharp arrow and cuts off one of his heads. *Rāma* thinks that the battle is over but what he does not know is that *Rāvaṇa* has the blessing to have his head replaced if one of his heads is cut off. *Rāvaṇa* comes back to life and starts to battle against *Rāma* yet again.

Other Values

- ***Rāma* duties as a *Kṣatriya***- is to give equal chance to the enemy and never attack when the enemy is incapable of fighting^{xxxix}

Taking constant blows from *Rāma* makes *Rāvaṇa* a little weak and, after some time, he faints. At this time, *Mithali*, *Rāma*'s charioteer, whispers to *Rāma* that this is the right moment to kill the demon. *Rāma* being a true *Kṣatriya* refuses to battle against *Rāvaṇa*, who is unconscious, and decides to battle again when he is back in his consciousness. When *Rāvaṇa* regains consciousness, he gets angry at his charioteer for bringing him back,

but after listening to the explanation, *Rāvaṇa* appreciates *Rāma*'s decision and rejoins the battle.

"It is not fair warfare to attack a man who is in a faint. I will wait. Let him recover^{xl}."

After fighting for a long time, *Rāma* decides to end this struggle by using The *Brahmāstra*, a weapon that is used when all other weapons fail. *Rāma*, with his prayers and worship, invokes the weapon to its full strength and sends it in *Rāvaṇa*'s direction, aiming at his heart. While *Rāvaṇa* prays for indestructibility of his several heads and arms, he forgets to pray for his weak heart. The *Brahmāstra* hits him in his heart and ends his life^{xli}.

After the battle is over, *Rāma* requests that *Mithali* return back to *Indra* and give thanks to him for his help. *Rāma* thanks everyone in his army for helping him win this battle and restore peace in the world. As *Rāma* approaches the dead body of *Rāvaṇa*, he notices a scratch on his back. This makes *Rāma* feel that this is not a moment of pride for him because he probably attacked *Rāvaṇa* while he was retreating. To dispel this confusion, *Vibhīshaṇa*, *Rāvaṇa*'s brother, explains to *Rāma* that the scar is from one of the battles *Rāvaṇa* fights against the divine elephants. This explanation satisfies *Rāma* and *Rāma* decides to make *Vibhīshaṇa* the new king of Lanka.

After the War-

Dharmic conflict #10- Rāma

- ***Rāma as a king-*** to maintain the integrity of his wife^{xlii}.

- **Rāma as a husband**- to accept his wife at any stage of life^{xliii}

Truth Act #2- *Sītā*

Rāma sends *Hanumān* to free *Sītā* from prison and bring her to him. *Sītā*, overjoyed, runs to *Rāma* without caring about her appearance, but *Hanumān* tells *Sītā* that the Lord requests to see her dressed and decorated. When *Sītā* arrives and sees *Rāma*, she feels some kind of barrier between her and *Rāma*. *Rāma* tells *Sītā* that his job of freeing her is done and that he has fulfilled his mission. He also tells *Sītā* that it is against the law for a king to accept a wife who stays alone at a stranger's house. He tells her that she is free to go wherever she wants and he will not impose any restriction on her.

"I leave you free to go where you please and to choose any place to live in. I do not restrict you in any manner^{xliv}."

Rāma faces a conflict as husband and as a king. *Rāma* starts to fight this battle because of *Sītā* and after winning the war he still cannot accept her because his duties as a king prevent him from accepting her as his wife because she stays at stranger's house. *Rāma*, surrounded by his army, decides to follow his duties as a king and tells *Sītā* to go wherever she pleases.

These words take the life out of *Sītā*, who is waiting to see her husband for such a long time. She tells *Rāma* that him winning this war will not bring an end to their misery and her trials are not done yet. She asks *Lakṣmaṇa* to light a fire at once so that she can

justify her purity. As *Rāma* watches, she starts to walk on fire. She requests the god of fire to be her witness and prove her purity to her Lord.

*“If in action, speech and thought,
My heart has only Rāma sought;
Then fire god as you know my mind,
Make flames like sandal cool and kind^{xlv}.”*

After *Sītā* walks through the flames, the god of fire emerges out and presents *Sītā* to *Rāma* with blessings. Satisfied with establishing his wife’s purity in presence of the whole world, *Rama* welcomes *Sītā* back to his arms. *Rāma* later explains to the people around him that as a husband he believes in *Sītā*’s purity, but as a king it is his duty to maintain the integrity of his wife and that’s why he asks *Sītā* to prove herself.

The fourteen years of exile are coming to an end. Gods tell *Rāma* that on the fifth day of the full moon he will be completing his fourteenth year and that will be the best time for him to go back to *Ayodhyā*. *Vibhīshaṇa* offers *Pushpak Vimana*, *Rāvaṇa*’s chariot, and asks *Rāma* to take this chariot so that he can reach home in time. Over in *Ayodhyā*, *Bhārata* starts to lose his patience. He decides to sacrifice himself in a fire. Before he can do that, however, *Hanumān* arrives in *Ayodhyā* and stops him. Soon after this occurs, *Rāma*’s *Vimana* arrives. *Rāma*’s mothers, including *Kaikeyī*, are waiting to receive him. It is a happy reunion for the family and all the rituals and customs that were stopped because *Rāma* leaves start again.

Truth act #3- *Sītā*

Many texts provide two endings to the story. Some of the texts do not talk about the one more truth act that *Sītā* faces after their return to *Ayodhyā*. In the original version of *Rāmāyaṇa*, the rumors about *Sītā*'s adultery continue to happen under *Rāma*'s kingship. As a result, *Rāma* as the new king decides to banish *Sītā* from the kingdom. *Sītā* goes back to the forest where she meets *Ṛṣi Vālmiki*. In *Vālmiki*'s ashram, she gives birth to her two sons *Lav* and *Kush*. *Vālmiki*, who later wrote the *Ramayana*, teaches *Lav* and *Kush* to sing *Ramayana* in a poem form. Soon *Rāma* hears about the two young boys who are singing *Ramayana* to everyone. When *Rāma* sees them, he quickly recognizes that these two boys are his sons and asks them about their mother. After knowing the whereabouts of *Sītā*, he decides to bring *Sītā* back. *Sītā* again goes through a truth act where she asks mother earth to be her witness and swallow her if she is loyal to *Rāma*^{xlvi}. Mother Earth to testify her purity swallows *Sītā* and *Sītā* disappears forever^{xlvii}.

Commentary-

Rāmāyaṇa is an epic that describes the foundation of Indian society and customs. From the start one can see the rules and regulations that men and women have to follow in order to maintain the reputation of their family and their relationship with others. It is often seen in Indian tradition that men give more importance to their occupation while women give more importance to their relationship with their husbands.

The paths for the all characters in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are not easy ones, but especially not for *Daśaratha*, *Rāma*, *Sītā*, and *Lakṣmaṇa*. These characters face challenges due to their dharmic duties. Each of the characters decide to follow their duties according to their role

in the situation. *Daśaratha* in his first dharmic conflict, for example, decides to fulfill his duties as a king and not as a father by sending his young sons into the jungle to fight demons. Being a king is an occupation for *Daśaratha* and by making this decision, he decides to give more importance to the duties related to his occupation.

One of the laws in Hindu society is that the eldest son receives what his father has left for him. According to this presupposition, *Rāma* should be the next king of *Ayodhyā*, but in his second dharmic conflict, *Daśaratha* orders him to go into exile and makes his younger son, *Bhārata*, the next king of *Ayodhyā*. On this particular occasion, *Daśaratha* decides to complete the promise he makes to his wife *Kaikeyī* and neglects his duties as a king by not giving the kingdom to *Rāma*. One thing to notice is that in the second dharmic conflict, when *Daśaratha* orders *Rāma* to go in the exile, he decides to fulfill his promise and give more importance to his family than to his occupation.

Daśaratha is the only one who gives importance to his occupational *dhárma*. *Rāma* also faces dharmic conflict when he decides to fulfill his duties related to his occupation and family. After the order from the king, *Rāma* decides to fulfill his duties as a prince: to follow the king's order, and neglects his duties as the eldest son: to take care of the family. *Rāma*, like his father, also gives more importance to his occupation than to his relationship with his family.

However, there are instances in the story where we can see that the importance is being given to the relationship and not the occupation. *Sītā*, *Rāma's* wife, in her first dharmic conflict faces a conflict between her role as a wife and as a queen. *Rāma* at first asks her to stay back and take care of the family, but she refuses to stay back and decides to go with *Rāma*. According to her, duties of a wife are important than her occupational

duties as a queen. Throughout the story, *Sītā* always gives more importance to her relationship with her husband than her occupational duties.

Challenges for these characters do not only come in terms of their duties as a prince or duties in their relationship. In the story, sometimes they face challenges between their dharmic duties and other moral values.

According to the laws of Manu, for a woman to achieve a place next to her husband after death and in the next life, she should always perform good deeds. This law creates a conflict for *Sītā*. When *Rāvaṇa* plans to kidnap *Sītā* and successfully drives *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* away, comes to the hut in the disguise as a sage and asks for charity. *Lakṣmaṇa* draws a line around the hut, also known as *Lakṣmaṇa Rekha*, to protect *Sītā* from any harm. When *Rāvaṇa*, disguised as a sage, realizes that he cannot cross the line asks *Sītā* to step out of the line and creates a conflict for *Sītā*. *Sītā* faces a conflict between the promise she made to *Lakṣmaṇa* of not crossing the line and other moral values. Charity is considered as a good deed in Hinduism and by not giving charity to the Sage she risks her spot next to her husband in next life.

At that time *Sītā* decides to break the promise and gives more importance to the other moral values. Even though she means well, the whole situation turns into a great misfortune because by making that innocent decision she helps *Rāvaṇa* to achieve success in his plan. We see from this instance that sometimes fulfilling our duties can result in bad things.

During the war between *Dhárma* and *Adhárma*, *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* continue to fulfill their duties as a *Kṣatriya*. However, at one stage *Lakṣmaṇa* question *Rāma's* duties as a *Kṣatriya* because, *Rāma*, while cremating the dead bodies of his soldiers *Rāma* also

decides to cremate the dead bodies of the enemies. To his defense *Rāma* tells *Lakṣmaṇa* that he remembers his duties as a *Kṣatriya*, but at the same time he cannot ignore his duties as a good human being and that's why he decides to cremate the dead bodies of the enemy.

Many scholars in their book mention *Rāvaṇa* as the follower of *Adhārma*. *Rāvaṇa* did perform some *ADhārma* by kidnapping *Sītā*, but many scholars also believe that this is *Rāvaṇa's* way of getting *Rāma's* attention and reach salvation by dying at his hands. Many believe that he is a greater scholar than *Rāma*. The reason *Rāvaṇa* is believed to have ten head is because he is thorough with the four *Vedas* and is fully aware of the contents of the six *Shastra*. In *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* he is portrait as a fool because even after being so knowledgeable, he cannot keep his senses in control, which results in his death^{xlviii}. According to Devdutt Pattanaik, *Rāvaṇa* is a great Brahman scholar in Indian mythology. The only mistake he did in his life is that he went after a married woman^{xlix}. Different scholars view *Rāvaṇa* differently and portrait him in what they is correct.

The last dharmic conflict for *Rāma* brings back the same problem of which role should receive more importance. After defeating *Rāvaṇa*, *Rāma* refuses to take *Sītā* back as his wife because she stayed at another man's house for a long time. *Rāma* faces a conflict as a lover and as a husband. As a lover he should accept *Sītā* regardless of the condition, but instead he decides to follow his duties as a husband that is to set her free and accept her back only if she proves her honor.

Hanumān is true devotee of Lord *Rāma*. Since his childhood he has been taught to make him totally devoted to Lord *Viṣṇu* and as a result he devotes himself in the service of Lord *Rāma* because Lord *Rāma* is believed to be an avatar of Lord *Viṣṇu*. When the time

came for *Rāma* and his companions to go heaven, *Hanumān* requests to stay on earth as long as people honor *Rāma*'s name.

Even after having different version to it, *Rāmāyaṇa* continues to be seen as the foundation of Indian society. However, there are many instances where dharmic duties are challenged but it still continues to teach people to be truthful and be loyal to their *dhārma*.

End Notes

- i *Vālmīki, Robert P. Goldman 1990: Page. 14-15*
- ii *C. Rajagopalachari*
- iii *Some texts believe that it was the monkeys who ask the Lord for help*
- iv *The Laws of Manu edited by Max Muller: pages 216-252, 1886*
- v <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu07.htm>
- vi *Goswami Tulsidas, 1972:Page- 37*
- vii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 66*
- viii *Rajagopalachari version of Rāmāyaṇa mentions that the promise was made at the time of the wedding and not on the battlefield*
- ix *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 79*
- x *The Laws of Manu edited by Max Muller: Pages 327-344, 1886*
- xi *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 87*
- xii <http://www.indiadinivine.org/audarya/hinduism-forum/448520-putra-dhārma-duties-son.html>
- xiii *To respect and protect his elder brother Rāma*
- xiv *Rāmāyaṇa: The Legend of Prince Rāma, Rāma Mohan*
- xv *According to laws of Manu, the Dhārma of a wife is to never leave her husband alone in good or bad times*
- xvi *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 93*
- xvii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 97*
- xviii <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu07.htm>
- xix *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 175*
- xx *According to the text, Rāvaṇa's sister goes back to the forest with the finest soldiers of Lanka to seek revenge*
- xxi *The Laws of Manu edited by Max Muller: Pages 327-344, 1886*
- xxii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 184*
- xxiii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 184*
- xxiv *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 199*
- xxv *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 201*
- xxvi *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 202*
- xxvii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 240*
- xxviii <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu07.htm>
- xxix <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/list-of-human-qualities.html>
- xxx *According to Rajagopalachari, Rāvaṇa's army continued to fight even after the sunset*
- xxxi *According to Rajagopalachari, Neela fought an battle with Prastha*
- xxxii *According to Rajagopalachari, Hanumān also fought with Jaambumaali*
- xxxiii *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 279*
- xxxiv *Goswami Tulsidas 1972: Page- 281*
- xxxv *According to the movie, Indrajīt only harms Lakṣmaṇa with his darts, but he also breaks the confidence of Rāma by his magic, where he shows that he killed Sītā*
- xxxvi *Goswami Tulsidas, 1972: Page- 285*
- xxxvii *Goswami Tulsidas, 1972: Page- 288.*

xxxviii *Goswami Tulsidas, 1972:Page- 290*

xxxix <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu07.htm>

xl *R.K. Narayan, 1972: Page- 158*

xlii *The Laws of Manu edited by Max Muller: pages 216-252, 1886*

xliii *The Laws of Manu edited by Max Muller: Pages 327-344, 1886*

xliv *R.K. Narayan, 1972: Page- 162*

xlv *R.K. Narayan, 1972: Page- 162*

xlvi <http://adaniel.tripod.com/ramayana.htm>

xlvii *William Buck, 1976: Page- 413-417*

xlviii <http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/nevada/1061/Ravana.htm>

xliv http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/salon_where-ravana-is-a-hero-scholar-warrior-lover_1093390

Glossary

Vālmiki- Author of Ramayana

Sholka- Rhymed poetic verse or phrase

Mahābhārata- one of the two major epics of India, other than Ramayana

Dhārma- Duties that each individual must follow

Karma- the total effect of person's actions

Brahma- creator of the world in Hinduism

Samsāra- cycle of life, death, rebirth, in Hinduism

Mokṣa- freedom from the cycle of Samsara

Ṛṣi- a divine sage or poet in Hinduism

Yajña- a ritual performed to impress the gods

Viṣṇu- one of the prime Hindu gods

Swayamvar- a practice in ancient India to choose a life partner

Panchavati- place where Rama spend his 14 years of exile, very religious in India

Kṣatriya- one of the four castes in the Indian society

Vānara- the Sanskrit name for the monkeys

Śiva- Important Hindu deity, also known as the Destroyer

Adhārma- actions that do not match up with the laws

Jatāyū- a demi-god in the form of vulture

Satyakriyā- the power of Truth

Narayana- another name for Viṣṇu

Brahmastra- deadliest weapon that has no counter attack

Pashupatastra- the most destructible weapon of Śiva

Vaishnavastra – personal weapon of god Viṣṇu

Aindrastra- personal weapon of Indra

Māya- Illusion

Rekha- line

Vedas- large book of Sanskrit texts in ancient India

Shastra- sacred writings in Hinduism

Sadhu- also known as the person who renounces all the worldly desires

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