

The Avanti PRE Curriculum

Resource Sheet 7.6.0

Story: "The Ramayana"

Dasharatha was the king of Koshala, an ancient kingdom that was located in present day Uttar Pradesh. 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 Ceylon, 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 Vashishta 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 (payasa) 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. Of the four brothers, Rama was closest to Lakshmana and Bharata to Shatrughna. One day, the revered sage Viswamitra came to Ayodhya. Dasharatha was overjoyed and immediately got down from his throne and received him with great honour.

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. Dasharatha strictly ordered his sons to obey Rishi Viswamitra and fulfil all his wishes. The parents blessed the two young princes. They then departed with the sage (Rishi).

The party of Viswamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana soon reached Dandaka forest where the Rakshasi Tadaka lived with her son Maricha. Viswamitra asked Rama to challenge her. Rama strung his bow and twanged the string. The wild animals ran helter-skelter in fear. Tadaka heard the sound and she became incensed. Mad with rage, roaring thunderously, she rushed at Rama. A fierce battle ensued between the huge Rakshasi and Rama. Finally, Rama pierced her heart with a deadly arrow and Tadaka crashed down to the earth. Viswamitra was pleased. He taught Rama several Mantras (divine chants), with which Rama could summon many divine weapons (by meditation) 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, Tadaka's ferocious

son, arrived with his followers. Rama silently prayed and discharged the newly acquired divine weapons at Maricha. 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. King Janaka invited Viswamitra to attend the great fire sacrifice ceremony that he had arranged. Viswamitra had something in mind - to get Rama married to the lovely daughter of Janaka.

Janaka was a saintly king. He 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. So he had vowed that he would give Sita in marriage only to the one who could string that great bow of Siva. Many had tried before. None could even move the bow, let alone string it.

When Viswamitra arrived with Rama and Lakshmana at the court, King Janaka received them with great respect. Viswamitra introduced Rama and Lakshmana to Janaka and requested that he show the bow of Siva to Rama so that he could try to string it. Janaka looked at the young prince and assented doubtfully. The bow was stored in an iron box mounted on an eight-wheeled chariot. Janaka ordered his men to bring the bow and place it in the middle of a big hall filled with many dignitaries.

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! Sita was relieved. She had liked Rama right at the first sight.

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 favourite 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."

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 Dasharatha'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 Koshala and for the second boon to banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years."

Kaikeyi 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 Kaikeyi to share his happiness at seeing Rama the crown prince of Koshala. But Kaikeyi 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 Kaikeyi's head on his lap and asked in a caressing voice, "What is wrong?"

But Kaikeyi 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."

Kaikeyi 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. Kaikeyi 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 Kaikeyi 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 Kaikeyi. "Long ago your father had offered me two boons. Now I demand it." Then Kaikeyi 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 pranams to his revered father, Dasharatha, and to his stepmother, Kaikeyi, 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 fulfil 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 on a chariot driven by Sumatra. 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!" Vashishta 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 Chitrakut 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?" Bharat 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.

The next day, Bharata asked Rama to return to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. But Rama firmly replied, "I cannot possibly disobey my father. You rule the kingdom and I shall carry out my pledge. I will come back home only after fourteen years."

When Bharata realized Rama's firmness in fulfilling his promises, he begged Rama to give him his sandals. Bharata told Rama the sandals will represent Rama and he would carry out the duties of the kingdom only as Rama's representative. Rama gracefully agreed. Bharata carried the sandals to Ayodhya with great reverence. After reaching the capital, he placed the sandals on the throne and ruled the kingdom in Rama's name. He left the palace and lived like a hermit, as Rama did, counting the days of Rama's return.

When Bharata left, Rama went to visit Sage Agastha. Agastha asked Rama to move to Panchavati on the bank of Godavari River. It was a beautiful place. Rama planned to stay at Panchavati for some time. So, Lakshmana quickly put up an elegant hut and they all settled down.

Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, lived in Panchavati. Ravana was then the most powerful Asura king who lived in Lanka (today's Ceylon). One day Surpanakha happened to see Rama and instantly fell in love with him. She requested Rama to be her husband.

Rama was amused, and smilingly said, "As you see I am already married. You can request Lakshmana. He is young, handsome and is alone without his wife."

Surpanakha took Rama's word seriously and approached Lakshmana. Lakshmana said, "I am Rama's servant. You should marry my master and not me, the servant."

Surpanakha got furious with the rejection and attacked Sita in order to devour her. Lakshmana swiftly intervened, and cut off her nose with his dagger. Surpanakha ran away with her bleeding nose, crying in pain, to seek help from her Asura brothers, Khara and Dushana. Both the brothers got red with anger and marched their army towards Panchavati. Rama and Lakshmana faced the Rakshasas and finally they were all killed.

Surpanakha was terror stricken. She immediately flew to Lanka to seek her brother Ravana's protection. Ravana was outraged to see her sister mutilated. Surpanakha described all that

happened. Ravana was interested when he heard that Sita is the most beautiful woman in the world, Ravana decided to abduct Sita. Rama loved Sita very much and could not live without her.

Ravana made a plan and went to see Maricha. Maricha had the power of changing himself into any form he wanted along with the appropriate voice imitation. But Maricha was afraid of Rama. He still could not get over the experience he had when Rama shot an arrow that hurled him far into the sea. This happened in Vashishtha's hermitage. Maricha tried to persuade Ravana to stay away from Rama but Ravana was determined.

"Maricha!" shouted Ravana, "You have only two choices, help me to carry out my plan or prepare for death." Maricha preferred to die in Rama's hand than be killed by Ravana. So he agreed to help Ravana in the abduction of Sita.

Maricha took the form of a beautiful golden deer and began to graze near Rama's cottage in Panchavati. Sita was attracted towards the golden deer and requested Rama to get the golden deer for her. Lakshmana warned that the golden deer may be a demon in disguise. By then Rama already started to chase the deer. He hurriedly instructed Lakshmana to look after Sita and ran after the deer. Very soon Rama realized that the deer is not a real one. He shot an arrow which hit the deer and Maricha was exposed.

Before dying, Maricha imitated Ram's voice and shouted, "Oh Lakshmana! Oh Sita,! Help! Help!"

Sita heard the voice and asked Lakshmana to run and rescue Rama. Lakshmana was hesitant. He was confident that Rama is invincible and the voice was only a fake. He tried to convince Sita but she insisted. Finally Lakshmana agreed. Before his departure, he drew a magic circle, with the tip of his arrow, around the cottage and asked her not to cross the line.

"As long as you stay within the circle you will be safe with the grace of God" said Lakshmana and hurriedly left in search of Rama.

From his hiding place Ravana was watching all that was happening. He was glad that his trick worked. As soon as he found Sita alone, he disguised himself as a hermit and came near Sita's cottage. He stood beyond the protection line of Lakshmana, and asked for alms (bhiksha). Sita came out with a bowl full of rice to offer to the holy man, while staying within the protection line drawn by Lakshmana. The hermit asked her to come near and offer. Sita was unwilling to cross the line when Ravana pretended to leave the place without alms. As Sita did not want to annoy the sage, she crossed the line to offer the alms.

Ravana did not lose the opportunity. He quickly pounced on Sita and seized her hands, declaring, "I am Ravana, the king of Lanka. Come with me and be my queen." Very soon Ravana's chariot left the ground and flew over the clouds on way to Lanka.

Rama felt distressed when he saw Lakshmana. "Why did you leave Sita alone? The golden deer was Maricha in disguise. "

Lakshmana tried to explain the situation when both the brothers suspected a foul play and ran towards the cottage. The cottage was empty, as they feared. They searched, and called out her name but all in vain. Finally they were exhausted. Lakshmana tried to console Rama as best as he could. Suddenly they heard a cry. They ran towards the source and found a wounded eagle lying at the floor. It was Jatayu, the king of eagles and a friend of Dasharatha.

Jatayu narrated with great pain, "I saw Ravana abducting Sita. I attacked him when Ravana cut my wing and made me helpless. Then he flew towards the south." After saying this, Jatayu died on the lap of Rama. Rama and Lakshmana buried Jatayu and then moved towards the south.

On their way, Rama and Lakshmana met a ferocious demon, called Kabandha. Kabandha attacked Rama and Lakshmana. When he was about to devour them, Rama struck Kabandha with a fatal arrow. Before his death, Kabandha disclosed his identity. He had a beautiful form which was changed by a curse to the form of a monster. Kabandha requested Rama and Lakshmana to burn him into ashes and that will bring him back to the old form. He also advised Rama to go to the monkey king Sugriva, who lived in the Rishyamukha mountain, to get help in regaining Sita.

On his way to meet Sugriva, Rama visited the hermitage of an old pious woman, Shabari. She was waiting for Rama for a long time before she could give up her body. When Rama and Lakshmana made their appearance, Shabari's dream was fulfilled. She washed their feet, offered them the best nuts and fruits that she collected for years. Then she took Rama's blessings and departed for the heaven.

After a long walk, Rama and Lakshmana reached the Rishyamukha Mountain to meet Sugriva. Sugriva had a brother Vali, the king of Kishkindha. They were once good friends. This changed when they went to fight with a giant. The giant ran into a cave and Vali followed him, asking Sugriva to wait outside. Sugriva waited for a long time and then returned to the palace in grief, thinking that Vali was killed. He then became the king upon the request of the minister. After sometime, Vali suddenly appeared. He was mad with Sugriva and blamed him to be a cheater. Vali was strong. He drove Sugriva out of his kingdom and took away his wife. Ever since, Sugriva had been living in the Rishyamukha Mountain, which was out of bound for Vali because of a Rishi's curse.

On seeing Rama and Lakshmana from a distance, and not knowing the purpose of their visit, Sugriva sent his close friend Hanuman to find out their identity. Hanuman, disguised as an ascetic, came to Rama and Lakshmana. The brothers told Hanuman of their intention to meet Sugriva because they wanted his help to find Sita. Hanuman was impressed by their courteous behaviour and removed his garb. Then he carried the princes on his shoulder to Sugriva. There Hanuman introduced the brothers and narrated their story. He then told Sugriva of their intention to come to him.

In return, Sugriva told his story and sought help from Rama to kill Vali, otherwise, he could not help even if he wanted to. Rama agreed. Hanuman then kindled a fire to bear witness to the alliance made.

In due course, Vali was killed and Sugriva became the king of Kishkindha. Soon after Sugriva took over the kingdom of Vali, he ordered his army to proceed in the search of Sita.

Rama specially called Hanuman and gave his ring saying, "If any one finds Sita, it will be you Hanuman. Keep this ring to prove your identity as my messenger. Give it to Sita when you meet her." Hanuman most respectfully tied up the ring to his waist and joined the search party.

As Sita flew, she dropped her ornaments on the ground. These were traced by the monkey army and it was concluded that Sita was carried southwards. When the monkey (Vanara) army reached the Mahendra Hill, located on the south shore of India, they met Sampati, the brother of Jatayu. Sampati confirmed that Ravana took Sita to Lanka. The monkeys were perplexed, how to cross the huge sea that stretched in front of them.

Angada, the son of Sugriva, asked, "Who can cross the ocean?" silence prevailed, until Hanuman came up to give a try.

Hanuman was the son of Pavana, the wind god. He had a secret gift from his father. He could fly. Hanuman enlarged himself to a huge size and took a jump to cross the ocean. After overcoming many obstacles, at last Hanuman reached Lanka. He soon contracted his body and alighted as a tiny insignificant creature. He soon passed through the city unnoticed and managed to enter the palace quietly. He went through every chamber but could not see Sita.

Finally, Hanuman located Sita in one of the gardens of Ravana, called Ashoka grove (Vana). She was surrounded by the Rakshashis who were guarding her. Hanuman hid on a tree and watched Sita from a distance. She was in deep distress, crying and praying to God for her relief. Hanuman's heart melted in pity. He took Sita as his mother.

Just then Ravana entered the garden and approached Sita. "I have waited enough. Be sensible and become my queen. Rama cannot cross the ocean and come through this impregnable city. You better forget about him."

Sita sternly replied, "I have repeatedly told you to return me to Lord Rama before his wrath falls upon you."

Ravana got furious, "You have gone beyond the limits of my patience. You give me no choice than to kill you unless you change your mind. Within a few days I shall be back."

As soon as Ravana left, other Rakshashis, who were attending Sita, came back and suggested her to marry Ravana and enjoy the enviable wealth of Lanka." Sita kept quiet.

Slowly the Rakshashis wandered away, Hanuman came down from his hiding place and gave Rama's ring to Sita. Sita was thrilled. She wanted to hear about Rama and Lakshmana. After conversing for a while Hanuman asked Sita to take a ride on her back to return to Rama. Sita did not agree.

"I do not want to return home secretly" said Sita, "I want Rama to defeat Ravana and take me back with honour."

Hanuman agreed. Then Sita gave her necklace to Hanuman as an evidence confirming their meeting.

Before departing from the Ashoka grove (Vana), Hanuman wanted Ravana to have a lesson for his misconduct. So he began to destroy the Ashoka grove by uprooting the trees. Soon the Rakshasa warriors came running to catch the monkey but were beaten up. The message reached Ravana. He was enraged. He asked Indrajit, his able son, to capture Hanuman. A fierce battle ensued and Hanuman was finally captured when Indrajit used the most powerful weapon, the Brahmastra missile. Hanuman was taken to Ravana's court and the captive stood in front of the king.

Hanuman introduced himself as the messenger of Rama. "You have abducted the wife of my all powerful master, Lord Rama. If you want peace, return her with honour to my master or else, you and your kingdom will be destroyed."

Ravana was wild with rage. He ordered to kill Hanuman instantly when his younger brother Vibhishana objected. "You cannot kill a king's envoy" said Vibhishana. Then Ravana ordered Hanuman's tail to be set on fire.

The Rakshasa army took Hanuman outside the hall, while Hanuman increased his size and lengthened his tail. It was wrapped with rags and ropes and soaked in oil. He was then paraded through the streets of Lanka and a big mob followed to have fun. The tail was set on fire but because

of his divine blessing Hanuman did not feel the heat. He soon shrank his size and shook off the ropes that bound him and escaped. Then, with the torch of his burning tail, he jumped from roof to roof to set the city of Lanka on fire. People began to run, creating chaos and hideous cries. Finally, Hanuman went to the sea shore and put off the fire in the sea water. Then he began his homeward flight.

When Hanuman joined the monkey army and narrated his experience, they all laughed. Soon the army returned to Kishkindha.

Then Hanuman quickly went to Rama to give his first-hand account. He took out the jewel that Sita gave and placed it in Rama's hands. Rama burst into tears when he saw the jewel.

He addressed Hanuman and said, "Hanuman! You have achieved what none else could. What can I do for you?" Hanuman prostrated before Rama and sought his divine blessing.

Sugriva then discussed in detail with Rama their next course of action. On an auspicious hour the entire monkey army set out from Kishkindha towards Mahendra Hill, located on the opposite side of Lanka. Upon reaching Mahendra Hill, Rama faced the same problem, how to cross the ocean with the army. He called for a meeting of all the monkey chiefs, and sought their suggestions for a solution.

When Ravana heard from his messengers that Rama had already arrived at Mahendra Hill, and was preparing to cross the ocean to Lanka, he summoned his ministers for advice. They unanimously decided to fight Rama to his death. To them, Ravana was indestructible and they, undefeatable. Only Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana, was cautious and opposed to this.

Vibhishana said, "Brother Ravana, you must return the chaste woman, Sita, to her husband, Rama, seek his forgiveness and restore peace."

Ravana became upset with Vibhishana and told him to leave the kingdom of Lanka.

Vibhishana, through his magical power, reached Mahendra Hill and sought permission to meet Rama. The monkeys were suspicious but took him to Rama as a captive. Vibhishana explained to Rama all that happened in Ravana's court and sought his asylum. Rama gave him sanctuary and Vibhishana became the closest adviser to Rama in the war against Ravana. Rama promised Vibhishana to make him the future king of Lanka.

To reach Lanka, Rama decided to build a bridge with the help of the monkey engineer Nala. He also summoned Varuna, the God of the Ocean, to cooperate by staying calm while the bridge was in the making. Immediately thousands of monkeys set about the task of gathering the materials to build the bridge. When the materials were piled up in heaps, Nala, the great architect, started to build the bridge. It was a stupendous undertaking. But the entire monkey army worked hard and completed the bridge in just five days. The army crossed over to Lanka.

After crossing the ocean, Rama sent Angada, the son of Sugriva, to Ravana as a messenger. Angada went to Ravana's court and delivered Rama's message, "Return Sita with honor or face destruction." Ravana became enraged and ordered him out of the court immediately.

Angada returned with Ravana's message and preparation for the war began. The next morning Rama ordered the monkey army to attack. The monkeys rushed forward and hurled huge boulders against the city walls and gates. The battle continued for a long time. Thousands were dead on each side and the ground soaked in blood.

When Ravana's army was losing, Indrajit, Ravana's son, took the command. He had the ability to fight while staying invisible. His arrows tied up Rama and Lakshmana with serpents. The monkeys began to run with the fall of their leaders. Suddenly, Garuda, the king of the birds, and the sworn enemy of the serpents, came to their rescue. All of the snakes slithered away leaving the two brave brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, free.

Hearing this, Ravana himself came forward. He hurled the powerful missile, Shakti, at Lakshmana. It descended like a fierce thunderbolt and hit hard at Lakshmana's chest. Lakshmana fell down senseless.

Rama wasted no time to come forward and challenged Ravana himself. Following a fierce fight Ravana's chariot was smashed and Ravana was sorely wounded. Ravana stood helpless before Rama whereupon Rama took pity on him and said, "Go and rest now. Return tomorrow to resume our fight." In the mean time Lakshmana recovered.

Ravana was shamed and called upon his brother, Kumbhakarna for assistance. Kumbhakarna had the habit of sleeping for six months at a time. Ravana ordered him to be awakened. Kumbhakarna was in a deep sleep and it took the beating of drums, piercing of sharp instruments and elephants walking on him to awaken him. He was informed of Rama's invasion and Ravana's orders. After eating a mountain of food, Kumbhakarna appeared in the battlefield. He was huge and strong. When he approached the monkey army, like a walking tower, the monkeys took to their heels in terror. Hanuman called them back and challenged Kumbhakarna. A great fight ensued until Hanuman was wounded. Kumbhakarna headed towards Rama, ignoring the attack of Lakshmana and others. Even Rama found Kumbhakarna difficult to kill. Rama finally discharged the powerful weapon that he obtained from the wind God, Pavana. Kumbhakarna fell dead.

Hearing the news of his brother's death, Ravana swooned away. After he recovered, he lamented for a long time and then called Indrajit. Indrajit consoled him and promised to defeat the enemy quickly.

Indrajit began to engage in the battle safely hidden behind the clouds and invisible to Rama. Rama and Lakshmana seemed to be helpless to kill him, as he could not be located. Arrows came from all directions and finally one of the powerful arrows hit Lakshmana. Everyone thought this time Lakshmana was dead and Sushena, the physician of the Vanara army, was called. He declared that Lakshmana was only in a deep coma and instructed Hanuman to leave immediately for Gandhamadhana Hill, located near the Himalayas. Gandhamadhana Hill grew the special medicine, called Sanjibani, that was needed to revive Lakshmana. Hanuman lifted himself in the air and travelled the entire distance from Lanka to Himalaya and reached the Gandhamadhana Hill. As he was unable to locate the herb, he lifted the entire mountain and carried it to Lanka. Sushena immediately applied the herb and Lakshmana regained consciousness. Rama was relieved and the battle resumed.

This time Indrajeet played a trick on Rama and his army. He rushed forward in his chariot and created an image of Sita through his magic. Catching the image of Sita by the hair, Indrajit beheaded Sita in front of the entire army of the Vanaras. Rama collapsed. Vibhishana came to his rescue. When Rama came to senses Vibhishana explained that it was only a trick played by Indrajit and that Ravana would never allow Sita to be killed.

Vibhishana further explained to Rama that Indrajit was realizing his limitations to kill Rama. Hence he would soon perform a special sacrificial ceremony in order to acquire that power. If successful, he would become invincible. Vibhishana suggested Lakshmana should go immediately to obstruct that ceremony and slay Indrajit before he became invisible again.

Rama accordingly sent Lakshmana, accompanied by Vibhishana and Hanuman. They soon reached the spot where Indrajit was engaged in performing the sacrifice. But before the Rakshasa prince could complete it, Lakshmana attacked him. The battle was fierce and finally Lakshmana severed Indrajit's head from his body. Indrajit fell dead.

With the fall of Indrajit, Ravana's spirit was in complete despair. He wailed most piteously but sorrow soon gave way to anger. He furiously rushed to the battlefield to conclude the long drawn fight against Rama and his army. Forcing his way, past Lakshmana, Ravana came face to face with Rama. The fight was intense. Finally Rama used his Brahmastra, repeated the mantras as taught by Vashishta, and hurled it with all his might towards Ravana. The Brahmastra whizzed through the air emitting scorching flames and then pierced the heart of Ravana. Ravana fell dead from his chariot. The Rakshasas stood silent in amazement. They could scarcely believe their eyes. The end was so sudden and final.

After Ravana's death, Vibhishana was duly crowned as king of Lanka. The message of Rama's victory was sent to Sita. Happily she bathed and came to Rama in a palanquin. Hanuman and all other monkeys came to pay their respect. Meeting Rama, Sita was overcome by her joyous emotion. Rama, however, seemed to be far away in thought.

At length Rama spoke, "I am happy to rescue you from the hands of Ravana but you have lived a year in enemy's abode. It is not proper that I should take you back now."

Sita could not believe what Rama said. Bursting in tears Sita asked, "Was that my fault? The monster carried me away against my wishes. While in his residence, my mind and my heart were fixed on my Lord, Rama, alone."

Sita felt deeply grieved and decided to end her life in the fire.

She turned to Lakshmana and with tearful eyes she implored him to prepare the fire. Lakshmana looked at his elder brother, hoping for some type of reprieve, but there was no sign of emotion on Rama's face and no words came from his mouth. As instructed, Lakshmana built a large fire. Sita reverently walked around her husband and approached the blazing fire. Joining her palms in salutation, she addressed Agni, the God of fire, "If I am pure, O fire, protect me." With these words Sita stepped into the flames, to the horror of the spectators.

Then Agni, whom Sita invoked, arose from the flames and gently lifted Sita unharmed, and presented her to Rama.

"Rama!" addressed Agni, "Sita is spotless and pure at heart. Take her to Ayodhya. People are waiting there for you." Rama delightfully received her. "Don't I know she is pure? I had to test her for the sake of the world so that the truth may be known to all."

Rama and Sita were now reunited and ascended on a flower air chariot, along with Lakshmana to return to Ayodhya. Hanuman went ahead to apprise Bharata of their arrival.

When the party reached Ayodhya, the entire city was waiting to receive them. Rama was crowned and he took up the reins of government much to the great joy of his subjects.