

The Avanti PRE Curriculum

Resource Sheet 7.6.2a

Story: "Manthara and Kaikeyi"

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.

Kaikeyi Requests boons from Dasharatha

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!"