

## **Incarnation Seven**

### **Rama – The Monarch**

Millions of years ago in the land of India there lived a king called Dasharath. His capital was Ayodhya and from there he ruled his kingdom with his three queens.

At around the same time, all of these queens became pregnant. Two of them each delivered a male child, and the third gave birth to twin boys. Thus King Dasharath had four sons, headed by the eldest, called Rama.

The four princes grew into valiant and chivalrous warriors. They learned the military arts of fighting with bow and arrow and with sword and shield. They became expert in the science of government, treating the citizens as their very own family. In due course of time, Rama married a beautiful princess called Sita and they lived happily in the Ayodhya.

One day, as King Dasharath looked into the mirror, he noticed a grey hair on his head. “I am getting old,” he considered. After consulting his ministers, he announced to the citizens his intention to hand over the kingdom to Rama and to retire to the forest.

The citizens were overjoyed and jubilantly prepared for the coronation. They swept the roads till they were spotless and sprinkled them with scented water. They hung garlands on the gates and doorways and decorated every building with flags and festoons.

Not everyone, however, was celebrating. Within the palace, a wicked and hunch-backed maid-servant was consulting with Kaikeyi, one of Dasharath’s wives. She convinced the queen that Rama’s coronation was actually a plot to do away with her own son, Bharat. Smouldering with anger, Kaikeyi hurried to the king’s chamber.

Seeing her anguished face, Dasharath enquired, “My dear wife, what is the matter? Have I done something to upset you? How may I pacify you?”

“My husband, do you remember when you fell from your chariot on the battlefield?” Kaikeyi asked him.

“Yes and you saved my life.”

“At that time,” Kaikeyi continued, “you granted me two boons, to ask of you at any time. I want you now to fulfil my wishes. Firstly, I want my own son Bharat and not Rama to be crowned as king. And secondly, I want you to banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years.”

Dasharath fainted in shock. Coming to his senses he cried out, “Kaikeyi! Your evil words are sharper than any sword. As king, I must keep my word, through fulfilling it is worse than death.”

Bound by his promise, Dasharath had no choice but to comply with Kaikeyi’s wishes. He called for Rama and broke the news. Rama was not disturbed in the least and tried to console His grieving father. Both Sita and Rama’s younger brother Lakshman, refused to live without Rama. They decided to join Him during His exile. All three gave up their royal garments of silks, jewellery and crowns, donning coarse cloth made of tree bark. Amidst wails of grief from their family and citizens, they passed through the city gates. Without looking back, they entered the forest.

Life there was simple. Rama and Lakshman build a cottage. Sita collected fruits, vegetables and herbs for their meals. They enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere and the company of saints and sages. They lived happily – until the fourteenth and final year.

One day a hideous, grey-skinned, man-eating Rakshasa named Shurpanakha chanced upon the hermitage. Ram's elegant and divine features captivated her heart and she longed to marry him. Rama, however, refused her repeated requests saying, "I am content with one wife."

The ugly ogress flew into a jealous rage and rushed at the beautiful Sita. Lakshman stepped forward and with his sword deftly sliced off her nose and ears. Howling she fled into the jungle, screaming of revenge.

A few days later, Rama and Sita were enjoying the splendour of their garden. The princess suddenly sighted a beautifully golden deer with silver spots. "Oh Rama," she cried out, "what an extraordinary creature. I'd love to have it as my pet. Please get it for me."

Rama, however, was suspicious. "It is certainly no ordinary deer," he agreed. "But it may be an illusion created by a magician. Lakshman, stay here and guard Sita. Under no circumstances must you leave her alone!" Thus ordering his brother, he set out to follow the delicate creature. Finally convinced that it was indeed a fake, he released his arrow. The creature fell and resumed its original form as a frightful demon. Just before breathing its last, it cried out in a voice like Rama's, "Lakshman! Help Me! Help Me!"

Lakshman was unmoved when he heard these cries. He knew that no one could defeat his brother. Sita, however, could not contain her grief. "Lakshman! Did you not hear? Rama is in trouble. Why do you stand there? Please go and help him?" Sita could not convince him. "Now I understand," she declared, "you want Rama out of the way so you can marry me!"

Sita's cruel words pierced the pure heart of Lakshman. Determined to prove her wrong, he strode out of the hermitage, leaving Sita alone.

Ravana, King of the Rakshasas, was waiting. Now was the time to avenge his mutilated sister and see for himself the beauty of Rama's wife! Springing forward, he grasped Sita by the wrist and bundled her, screaming for help, into his chariot. Drawn by donkeys, the magical vehicle soared through the skies towards Ravana's capital of Lanka.

Lakshman could not console Rama over the loss of His beloved wife. The two brothers wandered the forests, plains, valleys and mountains searching for any clue of Sita's whereabouts. After several months they enlisted the help of an army of monkey warriors. Their commander Sugriva sent search parties throughout the land in all the four directions of the north, south, east and west. They were almost ready to give up when a vulture brought news that Sita was captive on the isle of Lanka.

From their ranks, the monkey generals chose Hanuman for a dangerous mission: to go to Lanka, find Sita and determine the enemy's military strength. With a single bound, Hanuman crossed the ocean and after many adventures found Sita sitting in a wooded grove. She had grown thin, and was constantly shedding tears for her husband. She told Hanuman how she had refused to be Ravana's queen and how the demon king threatened her that, "If by the end of the year you do

not agree, my cooks will serve you for my supper!" Hanuman pacified Sita and assured her that he would return with Rama. Bidding farewell, he again leapt into the skies and returned to the army, poised on the shores of the ocean.

Lord Rama ordered the monkey soldiers to pick up rocks and boulders and hurl them into the sea. By the Lord's inconceivable power, they floated on the water and very soon formed a bridge stretching all the way to Lanka. With loud cheers, the army marched on Ravana's capital and the battalions of demons waiting for battle.

As the two armies met, the ground appeared to tilt and tremble and the clash of weapons was deafening. The Rakshasas released volleys of spears, arrows and tridents. Against them the monkey warrior hurled trees, rocks and mountain peaks. Gradually Rama's army began to push back the enemy. Vultures circled in the sky, waiting to feed on the carcasses of the dead.

Ravana's army was highly organised and almost invincible. When he heard of the defeat of his best generals and the death of his two sons, he became enraged. Mounting his personal aeroplane, he showered missiles on the monkey troops.

Rama confronted him and challenged, "Oh, worst of the man-eaters, you resemble a dog! A hound steals food from the kitchen when the owner is out. Similarly, you stole My wife Sita when I was away. Therefore, on this day I will send you to the kingdom of death!"

Rama invoked a celestial weapon. Fixing the arrow to His bow, He released it towards the demon's chest. It hissed through the air like a serpent spitting poison and pierced the demon's heart. Vomiting blood, Ravana fell from his plane and his lifeless body thudded to the ground. The monkeys cheered and waved their tails in jubilation.

When Sita saw her husband once again, her lotus-like face blossomed with joy. Together they mounted a flower aeroplane and with Lakshman and Hanuman, returned to Ayodhya.

It was the night of the new moon and pitch black. Millions of oil lamps lit up the capital and the roads along the way. Seeing their king returning after so long, the citizens of Ayodhya offered flower garlands, waved their shawls and danced in great jubilation. Bharat, his eyes full of tears, embraced his elder brother and welcomed him home.

Whilst Lord Rama was King, all mental and bodily miseries disappeared. Disease, old age bereavement, fear and fatigue were completely absent. Death itself did not come for those who did not want it to. Today, people recall it Rama-Rajya, the reign of Lord Rama, and remember His example as an ideal king.