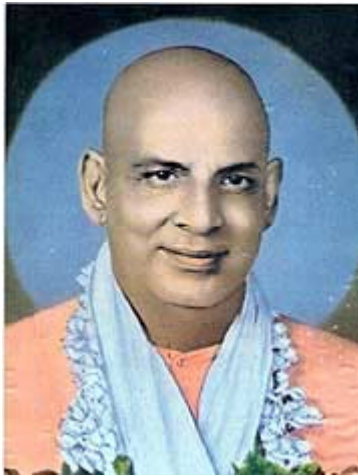


SPOTLIGHTS ON THE RAMAYANA

By

Sri Swami Premananda

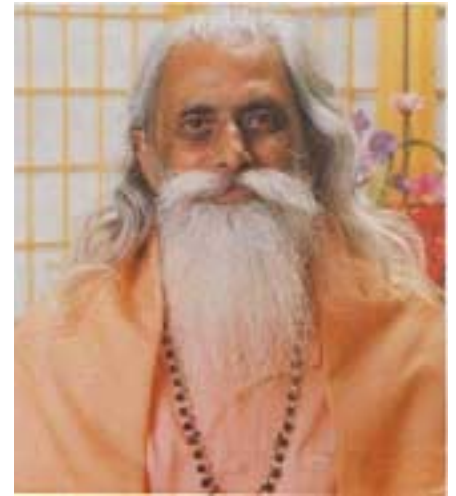


**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE**

**So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Premananda

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Dedicated
TO
MY HOLY MASTER
SATGURU SRI SWAMI SIVANANDAJI MAHARAJ

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

Instruction by way of narration through heroic poems written in stimulating language has been in all countries an effective medium of awakening the drooping spirits in man to a vision of the forces that operate in the universe. The Ramayana of sage Valmiki, which had its immortal successor as the great work of Sant Tulsidas and several others in the languages of India, is regarded as the first Sanskrit poem ever, which recounts the deeds of Rama, his exploits, forming the various scenes of his life.

The work is a reservoir from which flowed countless streams of powerful poetic works touching upon some one or the other of the incidents and episodes of the epic. The importance of the Ramayana is in its perennial appeal to the spirits of humanity in general, whose different sides are ably touched by the deft imagery of Valmiki, and the line of poets who followed in its wake.

The present publication throws some light on certain aspects of the Ramayana, which presents an interesting reading to students and the public who are devotees of the valuable scripture. The approach departs markedly from the usual devotional and religious reading common among the Ramayana circles, not because the holy epic is not a superb masterpiece of religious literature, which it really is beyond doubt, but because the supernatural features of the epic seem to call for a novel study these days in the light especially of western thinking for which a natural interpretation might provide a diversion well expected. The work also includes a few pages on questions and answers on different themes.

Shivanandanagar,
27th August, 1980

The Divine Life Society.

FOREWORD

OM

Salutations to Holy Master Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj.

Worshipful homage unto Lord Rama, divine incarnation of the Supreme Deity, Bhagavan Narayana. May His perfect personality representing the perfect ideal human individual, inspire all beings to strive to improve their own character and conduct and to emulate the noble behaviour of Maryada Purushottama, Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra.

When I was approached with a request to give a brief foreword to this present work, I was somewhat nonplussed and a bit puzzled as to what I could write about a scripture that is being read by millions of people all over India and many other parts of the world and which has been translated into numerous languages and upon which very many writers have written numerous books over the past centuries. I felt as one would feel if he was asked to give a foreword to a book like the "Old Testament" or the "Illiad" or the "Odyssey".

However, after reading the Publisher's Preface and the author's own statements in the first ten or twelve opening pages, I became aware of the very special approach and the analytical nature of this present work. This made me aware that it has a unique value as a manual of human conduct and a guide to righteous living to every individual in general and to aspiring spiritual seekers who are striving for a higher inner unfoldment, in particular.

The narrative has also been interpreted as an allegorical work, somewhat similar to Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Vedantic Wisdom is also to be found within its pages in such versions that contain most illuminating and instructive dialogues as in the conversation between Lord Sri Rama and his brother Sri Lakshmana in the "Rama Gita". Revered Sri Swami Premanandaji has done a valuable service in culling together, within the covers of this present work, all these precious aspects of the great divine drama of the "Ramayana" for the benefit of the English-knowing public who may not have access to the original versions either in Sanskrit "Valmiki", or in the other Indian vernaculars like Hindi "Tulsidas", Tamil "Kamban", etc.

Readers will find a rich treasure in this work, "Spotlights On The Ramayana", by Sri Swami Premanandaji who has himself delved deep into the well-known "Sri Ramcharitmanas" and who is himself a great *Ramayana-Premi*. I wish the book wide circulation and careful study.

May the abundant Divine Grace of adorable Lord Sri Rama ever be upon Sri Swami Premanandaji and may the Lord's blessings make him shine as an ideal person adorned with all sublime virtues and Divine spiritual qualities. May the Lord's Grace grant unto all the readers joy, peace and spiritual illumination. Salutations, again, to Gurudev Sri Swami Sivananda. Victory to worshipful Lord Rama.

Sivanandashram (Rishikesh)
Dated: 11th September, 1980

Swami Chidananda.

INVOCATION

Salutations to Lord Ganesha who removes all impediments and ensures blessedness and success.

Reverence to Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge and learning, and Parvati, consort of Lord Siva, bestower of strength and energy.

Prostrations to my Satguru Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, an ocean of benevolence and compassion, who removes defects of vision and purifies the eyes of understanding and guides on the path of spirituality, wisdom and devotion and protects his humble disciples from all sides.

Adorations to Lord Mahadeva, over whose divine body the holy ashes are auspicious and ecstatic and who narrated the sacred Sri Ramacharitmanas (Ramayana) to his holy consort Uma.

Veneration to Lord Rama and Janaki Sita, incarnations of Lord Hari and Goddess Lakshmi respectively, who remove illusion and illumine the heart & mind with devotion and truth.

Obeisance to Hanuman, an ideal and faithful servant-cum-devotee of Sita Rama, by whose blessings truth is made manifest and the Yugal-sarkar grant their darshan to a devotee.

Benedictions be from great sage Valmiki, the first author of Ramayana, and Sant Goswami Tulsidas, an incarnation of Valmiki, who composed Sri Ramcharitmanas in Hindi for the redemption of mankind, in this perverse Kali Yuga.

MY SUBMISSION

The holy Ramayana, a masterpiece in Sanskrit classics of the great sage Valmiki, the Adi-kavi, is the first and foremost specimen of exquisite poetry. There are other Ramayanas viz. Adhyatma Ramayana, Anand Ramayana, Maha-Ramayana, Adbhuta Ramayana, Ramcharitmanas and several others in different languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, South Indian languages like Tamil and others.

The Valmiki Ramayana and Sri Ramcharitmanas of Goswami Sant Tulsidas, enjoy a unique place among the classics of the world's literature. Valmiki Ramayana has since been translated, both in prose and poetry, in English, French, Italian, Latin and some other languages. Almost similar is the case with Sri Ramcharitmanas of Sant Tulsidas.

Someone told me that Ramayana has also been translated into Russian language and they are now staging and screening some of the important scenes of the same—of course in their own way and style. In fact, in India and the Far East, the great epic of Lord Rama, *Jagatjanani Sita* and celibate Hanuman is not just an ancient classic; its mystique and mythology based on some facts as well as history have inspired and influenced the entire cultural framework of South-East Asia for four millennia.

As ancient Greece had two famous epics Odyssey and Iliad, ancient India had the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana, which describes the wanderings of Prince Rama banished from his kingdom, has something in common with the famous Odyssey. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata together comprise the whole of the epic literature of ancient India, and they present a most graphic and life-like picture of the civilisation and culture, customs and traditions, the social and political life, the religious and spiritual thoughts of ancient India, which cannot be ignored in any way.

The races which flourished in the Northern region of India, approximately one thousand years before Christ, amongst them the Kosalas of Oudh, now in the province of Uttar Pradesh and the Videhas of Bihar (now it is a province), were considered the most cultured races and their kings, monarchs and priests were famous for their administration, bravery, learning and prowess. They were glorious, righteous and truly Dharma abiding.

The great sages and distinguished priests in those times founded schools of arts and learning which were well-known all over India and several students joined from surrounding countries for study and research.

Our ancestors those days did a lot of research on several subjects including the mysteries of the soul and into the nature of the One Universal Soul which pervades the entire creation, which are still preserved in the holy and marvellous Upanishads. Besides the Vedas, the Upanishads, Ramayana and Mahabharata and some other wonderful legacies are a most valuable heritage left by the ancients to us.

Historical Facts

Time lent higher and greater lustre to the achievements of these gifted races and the age in which they flourished appeared to their descendants as the Golden Age of Bharatavarsha. Dasaratha, the king of the Kosalas, is considered as an ideal king, who laboured for the good of his subjects. His capital was Ayodhya on the bank of the river Saryu. The ruins of his fort and palaces and Hanuman Garhi are still there, approximately six miles from Faizabad, in Uttar Pradesh.

The king of Videhas, Raja Janaka is accepted as a monarch and a saint of high order. Lord Rama, the eldest son of Dasaratha is the hero of epic Ramayana, whereas Sita, the daughter of Raja Janaka is the heroine.

Three brothers of Lord Rama are Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna and they were married with the daughters of the Videhas, namely Mandavi, Urmila and Srutakirti respectively. Their sons were founders of great cities and kingdoms as stated under, which flourished in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries before the Christian era.

i. Lava and Kusa, the two sons of Rama, ruled in Sravasti an old and famous historical town which was the capital of Oudh for sometime during the days of Lord Buddha and the latter founded Kusavati at the foot of the Vindhya mountains. I have personally visited this place, which is now in the Behraich district of Uttar Pradesh.

ii. Bharata's two sons—Taksha and Pushkala—founded famous and flourishing kingdoms on either side of the river Indus, now in Punjab. Its Western part is now in Pakistan. On the East of the Indus river Taksha-sila (known to Alexander the Great and the Greeks as Taxila) was founded by Taksha. Pushkala founded his kingdom known as Pushkalavati to the West of the Indus. (Alexander and the Greeks called the same as Peukelaotis.)

iii. Lakshmana's two sons, Angada and Chandraketu, founded the kingdoms of Karupada and Chandrakanti respectively in the Malwa region.

iv. Shatrughna's first son, Subahu, ruled Mathura and the second son named Shatrughati became the king of Vidisha.

Sri Ramcharitmanas is considered to be the best work on Devotion by the Father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest men of the modern world. This immortal poem has an universal appeal and is accepted by all classes of people from Bihar to Punjab and from the Himalayas to the Narmada. The characters shown in it are the characters of flesh and blood, virtues and vices, ideals of devotion and truth, bravery and duty, sacrifice and greatness, struggle and success, womanly faithfulness, love for domestic life based on Dharma, respect for the values of

higher life and the goal of human life in the end. The exemplary government is known as 'Ram-Rajya' in the historic world.

There is something indescribably touching and tender in the description of these characters. Deeper than all the other characteristics is the sense of Rama's duty towards his father, his consort and brothers, his mother and step-mothers, towards his subjects, his foes and friends and others, including even birds and beasts. For the pious Hindus, Rama is Lord Rama, whose life in the form of a man and king is the ideal life in all respects. His life exemplifies triumph of good over evil forces. It is a life of submission and service to sages and saints.

It is the truthfulness, power of endurance and sincerity of Rama under suffering and privations which impart the deepest lessons to man's character. This holy book is also a treasure of higher philosophy of wisdom, devotion and Karma-yoga. The ancient ideal may seem to modern man far-fetched in these days, but one can never fully comprehend this great moral epic of the ancient Hindus unless one develops the requisite sincerity to know the Reality behind things.

According to an old and respected Christian missionary "no one could hope to understand the people of Upper India till he had mastered every line that Tulsidas had written." This Ramayana is deep like an ocean, vast like the infinite space, full of moral and ethical teachings and soul-illuminating treasures. In order to reap the benefit, one has to dive deep to bring out the pearls and to rise higher and higher in the realm of spirit with devotion and faith.

Difference Due To Ages

It is not just a facetious novel but contains within itself the novelty of human life, lofty ideals and a record of the meritorious deeds of Raghuvansmani Rama, based on facts—as the popular saying goes, "there is no smoke without fire." The variance in the different Ramayanas seems due to Kalpa-bheda (difference of age-cycles) according to mystagogues and mythologists and religious pandits, and the varied approach by various authors at different times.

While concluding Sri Ramcharitmanas, Sant Tulsidas has warned;

This story however should not be repeated to a perverse knave, who does not listen attentively to the story of Hari, nor should it be recited to a greedy, or lustful man who worships not the Lord of all animals and inanimate creation.... They alone are qualified to hear Sri Rama's narrative, who are extremely fond of communion with holy men. They alone are fit to hear it, who are devoted to the feet of their preceptor and are lovers of propriety and votaries of the Brahmins.....

So, generally, whenever I happen to talk on Sri Ramcharitmanas, I mostly touch upon the philosophy and teachings of Ramayana and the beauty and meaning of the words and phraseology rather than a narration of the mere story, events or exploits of Rama or other characters. I never thought of writing a commentary on the Ramayana but this book has come up suddenly on its own. Thus, my purpose of writing this "Spotlights On The Ramayana" is somewhat strange and may be construed as a new approach.

During my recent visit to the US and Canada, I was confronted with several peculiar types of queries and arguments not only by the American and Canadian brothers and sisters but also by the educated Indians who have settled there. It was an astonishing phenomenon. Of course such Hindus are in India also. My mind therefore started thinking, how to place the picture of the epic on a different footing without lessening the faith in Lord Rama, and naturally I prayed to Him and to Satgurudev. Consequently, I first wrote an article titled “Esotericism in the Ramayana” However it was later developed along the lines of a somewhat rational appreciative critique, which is now in the hands of the readers in form of “Spotlights On The Ramayana”. At the end of the book, a chapter on ‘Questions and Answers’ has been added, which are of general interest to seekers and sadhakas.

Here it would not be out of place to add a few words on the role of the epics in the literature of the world. The “Mahabharata”, the “Ramayana”, the “Illiad” , the “Odyssey”, the “Aeneid”, the “Divine Comedia”, the “Paradise Lost and Regained” the “Shahnama” of Firdaus may be mentioned as perhaps the greatest epics of the world. We may add the Iceland “Eddas” & the Silappadikaram in Tamil as masterly specimens in this category. Translations of the “Ramayana” such as that of Kamban stand, again, unparalleled in epic literature, and do they tell us only stories for our leisure hours?

Travel Diary of The Soul

Far from being tales and legends, they rise above the ground of mortal comprehension to the height of a majesty which can only be described as a travel diary of the sojourn of the soul in the cosmos. Written in tumultuously powerful styles and with a virility that can brook no comparison, the epics of the world are the depiction of the soul of man as the chief hero in the drama of creation. Who can read these masterpieces without an electrifying touch of the supernatural, felt within oneself? The epic poets are the messengers of eternity who speak in the language of man, charging it with the force that they receive from the depths they have plunged and the heights they have scaled.

Under such circumstances, it should look idle to cavil and carp at the messages of the epics as a grandmother’s story, a myth, a fable, a fantasy, something ‘unhistorical’. And what is history to the eye that can see all the details of creation with one sweep? How could events which have a cosmic significance be regarded as unhistorical? Is history merely a record of events capable of physical verification confined only to this earth? Are we, all-seeing men and there can be nothing beyond the ken of human perception? Humility should be considered as the insignia of true wisdom and insight.

Parading of modern empirical researches has often become these days a major theme in many recent journals and papers, learned editorials which denounce the super-physical nature of life and shout down anything that is superhuman. Man himself is more than man! He strides the very heavens in an inner reach of his own being. These are the regions explored in the mighty epics. One should wish more caution and patience from these distortions of modern scholarship.

This sevak is not a writer and his intellect is a poor match to the unlimited glory and exploits of Lord Rama. I may even not be qualified to write anything by way of this exceptional approach. I hope that the generous readers will hail this new attempt believing that there may be some divine

purpose, some play of divine Grace, behind this novel urge which has in one way or the other inspired this sevak to undertake this task. I hope too that learned and devout readers will not wholly denounce this new attempt and will forgive my impertinence and errors, if any.

Before concluding, I am eager to express my gratitude with reverence, to His Holiness Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj for favouring me so graciously in writing the foreword to this book. Similarly, my heartfelt thanks naturally go to Revered Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj and Shri Baldeo Sahaiji whose valuable guidance, suggestions and practical assistance encouraged and helped me to place this book in this form before the readers. I am also very much thankful to Shri Kailash Chanderji Sachdev and his entire family who worked hard and helped in bringing out this book. Lt. Col. Birmaniji's suggestions and assistance have their own place and I am grateful to him. May God Almighty and Satgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj bless these families, who were chosen by the Lord to fulfil this task. There are several others who have assisted me in this work in one way or the other, and I thank them all.

Sivananda Ashram,
8th September, 1980

SWAMI PREMANANDA.

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I

THE STORY

The story of Lord Rama has inspired millions over the centuries. It is said that the first Ramayana, as the epic is called, was written by sage Valmiki in Sanskrit, much before the incidents occurred. Valmiki was a contemporary of Rama and when Sita, his consort, was exiled by King Rama. She stayed at the Ashram of sage Valmiki. The latest recension was done by Sant Tulsidas in Avadhi, the language of the masses, in the 15th century.

In the present interpretation of the epic the main actors of the drama are personified by various attributes common to the human race. This interpretation could, therefore, command universal appeal. This is called *Adhyatma* or spiritual Ramayana which explains the esotericism in the great epic.

Till very recently, none in India bothered to verify the veracity of the story. It was not their concern to investigate the actual happenings in history—when Rama lived and ruled or the places he occupied during his fourteen years' period of banishment by his father. To Indians it was the grain that mattered and not the chaff.

The modern period is the age of reason, not of faith—faith in tradition, in the past, in epics, in authority, in parents, even in oneself. For everything the modern generation clamours for proof, authenticity and verification. In the case of past events there can be circumstantial evidence, historical support, archaeological proof and literary or even astronomical occurrences to support dates and incidents. The Ramayana, i.e. the history of Lord Rama, in the light of the temper of times, has also been subjected to detailed scrutiny. Historians have been busy locating various places where certain events of his life took place.

Some are of the view that Lord Rama never went beyond the Vindhyas and the entire episode occurred in northern India. Lanka of the Ramayana is said to be somewhere in Madhya Pradesh. Mandu is pinpointed as the city where Mandodari, the wife of Ravana, lived. The demon king Ravana is also said to have been living nearabout. As evidences are cited a huge brick-mound known even today as Ravana Kursi or the seat of Ravana, a musical instrument played with a bow on strings popular in the region is called Ravana-hattha. Panchavati is supposed to be situated near Nasik and authentically shown round to visitors as the place where Sita lived with her husband and his brother Lakshmana for a part of the banishment period.

The historians contradict these views and quote literary events in the Valmiki Ramayana to prove that Lanka did lie across the seas and Rama offered prayers to Siva before launching the construction of the oversea stone-bridge. At Rameshwaram there is a temple with the idol of Lord Siva who was worshipped by the royal couple before they mounted an attack on Lanka. Since Rama's spouse Sita was in the custody of Ravana and the worship could not be performed without the wife being by his side, it is said that Ravana agreed to send Sita for a short while so that the worship could be performed according to the rites laid down in the scriptures.

There are historians who contradict all this since, obviously, it looks strange and incredible. According to them, there was no Rama, Sita, Ravana, the battle, the banishment and a victory of Rama over his rival Ravana. They say that the entire story is a tale told by elders from generation to generation assuming the shape of history over the years. The story, like any other fiction, has been so much ingrained in the race-unconscious that by constant repetition over a few thousand years, people have started believing that it is a part of history which is far from the truth.

Be that as it may, we will not enter into an argument whether the story of Lord Rama is a historical fact or otherwise. We would prefer to stick to the grain and start with the assumption that the story is basically true. It has inspired millions of Indians all over the country to follow the right path. It continues to inspire millions today, and will continue to do so in future.

Many epics have been written about the life and activities of Lord Rama. There are hundreds of them written in the North, South, East and West of the country. Among these about 36 are considered to be important. One of them, the Adhyatma Ramayana, gives a symbolic interpretation of the various characters and events of Ramayana. Since such an interpretation could be of universal significance, we would concentrate here in giving a brief outline of the symbolism. Before we do that it would be better to be acquainted with the generally accepted story of Lord Rama.

There Was A King

There is an ancient city of Ayodhya on the banks of broad-bosomed river Saryu in the Utter Pradesh State of India. There lived a king called Raghu, so powerful, that he was invited by even Indra of Swargaloka to help him in his battles against the demons. Swargaloka is heaven, but interpreted these days as a land lying somewhere in the North amidst the hoary heights of the Himalayas and Indra, according to this reading, must have been a powerful king enjoying all the luxuries of life but constantly threatened by some other kings who were equally affluent and brave. The arts and sciences of that age are not well-known now. The elixir of youth, the devas—Indra was their lord—had discovered is treated now as a myth. Their adversaries, the Asuras or demons, were anxious to get hold of the prescription of the elixir.

In war there are descriptions of many weapons which could cause fire like modern Napalm bomb, or whirlwind and a storm which are not known today. There were mnemonic formulae which were recited to invoke supernatural powers to help one party to harm the other. These formulae called mantras are also mostly on way out and have not been preserved in the original form. There are descriptions of aerial cars, horse-driven golden chariots and palaces of gold and silver.

A scion descended from this king was Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya. Dasaratha had everything that nature could bestow, but he had no progeny. Therefore he performed a sacrifice and was given the essence of that sacrifice to be distributed among his queens. This was divided by Dasaratha in three parts for his three queens, Kausalya the eldest, Kaikeyi the second and Sumitra the youngest. It so happened that the last one ate double the share. In course of time Kausalya gave birth to Rama, Kaikeyi to Bharata and Sumitra to Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Among the queens, Kaikeyi who came from the Kingdom of Kekaya (supposed to be the area near the Caucasus mountains by moderns) was the most beautiful and well versed in the art of war. She often

THE STORY

accompanied the king to battle and once when the king's chariot was disabled due to a broken axle, Kaikeyi put her arm in the wheel to support the chariot so that the King could fight undisturbed. When the king discovered the kind of courage and determination displayed by her, he was very pleased and offered to grant her two boons. It is also said in some Ramayanas that the king of Caucasus had agreed to marry his daughter on the condition that the son born of her would be the crown-prince. Years rolled on and one day when Dasaratha discovered that his hair was turning grey, he decided to enthrone his eldest son, Rama, as the king. Rama was very obedient, loyal and handsome, dear to all the three mothers and the public of Ayodhya. The declaration was greeted with joy, but Manthara, the maidservant of Kaikeyi, became a fly in the ointment and she reminded the queen, of the king's promise that her son would be enthroned as king. Kaikeyi became wild with rage and dismissed her insinuations with contempt, but persistent persuasion of the cunning Manthara had the desired effect.

When the king visited her in the evening, she expressed her desire to reclaim the boons to which the king agreed. The first boon Kaikeyi asked for was that Bharata and not Rama, should be made the king. Secondly, she asked for the banishment of Rama from the kingdom for 14 years. The king, after painful reluctance, agreed to grant the first boon but could not bear the separation of Rama for such a long period. The queen, however stuck to her stand and Dasaratha kept his word. When Rama left for the forest, his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana also insisted upon accompanying him. After their separation the king died of a broken heart.

When Bharata who had been sent away to his maternal uncle, returned to Ayodhya and became aware of the developments. He reprimanded his mother. He went to Chitrakuta, where Rama with Sita and Lakshmana was staying, in order to bring back Lord Rama and enthrone him as king. After great persuasion by Rama, taking it as a command of the Lord, he agreed to rule the kingdom only as a representative of Lord Rama, his elder brother.

II

COSMIC DRAMA

Events in this universe do not occur in isolation or individually. Incidents are inter-related and interdependent. There is a flux in the totality of events and the whole drama is played on a cosmic plane. Can a wave in the ocean claim to ride on the crest on its own or a whiff of wind blow independently of the atmosphere?

You must have watched an army of ants going about their way in a disciplined manner as busy-bodies. To be sure, if they had better brains they would feel being engaged in an enormous task, marching in a row, contacting each other while moving, constantly engaged in a great task. What do we humans feel about their work without rest? Perhaps we laugh in our sleeves at their activity. So, are busy innumerable insects, birds and beasts exciting in us no more than a passing attention.

So are millions of men, each engaged in his own task, governing a country, undertaking construction, increasing production, serving the people and their own family. Each one thinks he is engaged in a mighty endeavour. Suppose there was a better race of beings before whom we are no more than mere ants, how would they view our ponderous plans and untiring efforts in implementing them? But most men regard themselves as a class by themselves, superior to the entire creation, plants, insects, animals and beasts.

If there is a cosmic plan and we are all like waves in an ocean, there is hardly anything that we really can do on our own. In the ocean each wave impelled behind propels forward in rhythmic motion. So in the atmosphere winds rise, go to the area of low pressure, rush out again, moving in a continuous motion, urged on by the whiffs behind and whiffs forward.

We all go about our activities under the mistaken notion that we all act individually and independently taking the credit for achievements and blaming the failures on others. Nothing happens in this universe independently of other happenings. There is a continuous motion sometimes rhythmic and at others not so rhythmic. It is all a part of the cosmic plan and we are all mere waves rising and falling without any will of our own in this grand drama.

Rama knew this cosmic plan. He knew that he was merely a cog in the wheel of the great universe. Or, to view him as an incarnation of Vishnu, he was well aware of the meaning behind the play of the cosmos, of which he was the great central pivot. With this wisdom ingrained in him he was not elated when his father proposed his name as a king. Nor did he sink into the abyss of despondency when the next morning he was banished from the kingdom for 14 long years.

He accepted the command of his father gracefully and approached not only Kausalya, his own mother, but also Sumitra and, of course Kaikeyi who was the cause of all this disaster. It was, he felt, the cosmic will and he should accept its verdict cheerfully. Therefore Rama is always referred to as one of the best specimens of the human race who always respected the right cause—*Maryadapurushottama* Rama.

When he discarded his royal robes, put on the mendicant's attire and prepared himself for the forest. His wife Sita, herself the daughter of a great king, bred and brought up in luxury, sought the permission of her in-laws to accompany her husband. There was a lot of argument, but she convinced all that a wife's place is always by their side of her husband—in prosperity or in penury. Her arguments, according to Indian traditions, were incontrovertible. She was allowed to accompany Rama.

But Lakshmana, Rama's brother, who had his young wife Urmila, did not allow the couple to go alone into the inhospitable forest infested with wild beasts and wilder tribals. A fire-brand and rather aggressive, he had his way and formed one of the trio who finally left their luxurious life and loveable surroundings for the hardships of the forest. Whereas Sita had the satisfaction of accompanying her husband and being by his side, Urmila, Lakshmana's wife denied herself even that privilege and pleasure and stayed back to serve her in-laws.

Ideal Human Relationships

Ramayana is an epic which delineates with remarkable clarity and the precision of a surgeon's knife, how to conduct human relationships of all types. To my mind it appears to be an authentic interpretation in sociology, a comprehensive directory of human relations. There is no end to this variety of relations between man and man, man and woman and it may be surprising that the ideal behaviour of almost every human relationship has been depicted in this epic. To name a few: the relationship between father and son as represented by Dasaratha and Rama; son and stepmother—Rama and Kaikeyi; husband and wife—Lakshmana and Urmila; king and his subjects—Rama and inhabitants of Ayodhya; brother and brother—Rama, Bharata and Lakshmana; married man and a wanton—Lakshmana and Surpanakha; God and devotee—Rama and Sugreeva; king and his army—Rama and the Vanaras; master and servant—Rama and Hanuman; sworn enemies—Rama and Ravana; ideal husband and wife relationship—Rama and Sita. For every human situation, for every intricate relationship, there is an answer in the Ramayana and it is an ideal answer worthy of emulation in all countries, by all people, at all times.

To continue the story, Rama had been sent to the forest as an actor as it turned out to be—to fulfil a grand design and the troubles started very soon in Panchavati in Dandakaranya where they stayed. The sister of Ravana named Surpanakha heard of the two princes and a lady living in the forest and had the easy curiosity of having a look at them. She was a treacherous woman and visited Panchavati in her best attire.

Almost at first sight she fell in love with the handsome Rama and dared to woo him. Rama smiled and explained that he was accompanied by his wife and, in a lighter vein, suggested that she should approach his younger brother Lakshmana who was much fairer and equally handsome. Lakshmana lacked the sobriety and sanguinity of his elder brother. He also said that he was a married man and that she should leave him alone. But the woman was equally adamant and when she started making advances, Lakshmana was enraged and chopped off her ears and nose. She ran away bleeding and cursing, to her brothers Khara and Dushana, kings of two small principalities. She presented entirely a different story—that that the princes wanted to molest her and when she took a stand, the younger brother disfigured her. Both the brothers raided Panchavati and after a fierce battle both were slain. Thus, right from the beginning the stage was set for something more ominous to occur which ultimately led to the wholesale slaughter of the demonic elements along with their king of kings, Ravana.

As the story goes, after her brothers were killed, she went to Meghanatha and finally to Ravana, instigating them to avenge her dishonour. Ravana was a clever king and when he heard that the two brothers had been slain by Rama and Lakshmana, he could guess that they were no ordinary warriors. He therefore set a trap and sent a man Maricha, who could take any form, to go near Panchavati in the form of a golden deer, and beguile the brothers away. The plan worked and when Sita saw the golden deer she asked her husband to get it for her, Rama saw the game and told Sita that it was only a ruse and that she should not pay any attention to it, but cosmic plan had its influence and Sita became restless and compelled Rama to bring the golden deer for her.

Rama instructed Lakshmana to look after Sita and started the chase. As planned, when Maricha was dying he shouted for Lakshmana. Sita suspected that Rama was in danger and insisted

upon Lakshmana's going to his help. Lakshmana tried to convince Sita that nothing untoward would happen to Rama and that it was all a trick to take him away from her. But a woman's heart, she was harsh on Lakshmana and went to the extent of imputing motives to him, which compelled Lakshmana to go in search of his brother. Before departure, he drew a line on the ground with his bow and told Sita not to cross the line, come what may. As soon as the two brothers had gone, a mendicant appeared to beg for alms. He noted the line and knew that if he crossed it he could be burnt to ashes. He therefore requested her to come out of the line, and as she did so, the mendicant who was none else but Ravana, took her away forcibly in his aerial car.

III

THE PLOT THICKENS

While being abducted, Sita flapped her limbs like a caged bird, shrieked and shouted but there was none to come to her rescue. On the way she left a trail by dropping her ornaments. When Ravana was intercepted by Jatayu, a devotee of Rama, who put up a fight, the latter eventually lost the battle and fell down. Ravana thereafter reached his capital without any disturbance and confined Sita to a garden in his palace, called Ashoka-Vatika.

Rama returned to find Panchavati without its soul, its life, its Sita. He suspected foul play and went round asking for the whereabouts of Sita from birds and beasts, plants and trees, wailing and weeping like an ordinary man. Rama is never projected as the Supreme Lord of the universe who knew the past, the present and the future, but as a mere mortal, although as an ideal man. While looking for Sita the trail of ornaments led the two brothers to Jatayu who told them all about the abduction of Sita by Ravana and then he breathed his last on Rama's lap.

Ravana was a strange foe. He was well-read knowing all the Vedas and Sastras, unbeaten in argument and having great knowledge of various arts and sciences. Indian artists therefore show him as a person having the wisdom of ten wise men—with ten heads. In spite of being so learned and wise, he committed the contemptible act of taking away forcibly another man's wife. Therefore the artists add a donkey's head to the personality of Ravana demonstrating his folly. Ravana retained his propriety, however, in dealing with the captive Sita. She was put under the charge of dreadful demonesses who cajoled her, compelled her, threatened her to accept Ravana as her husband. Nothing availed, and Sita stood like a rock in her faithfulness and loyalty to Rama. Credit must be given to the mighty king Ravana who on his frequent visits to Sita in Ashoka Vatika always, awaited her acceptance and never for once touched her person.

At the other camp, once Rama came to know that Ravana had taken away Sita, a search was launched to find the exact spot where she was confined. The job was performed by his great devotee, Hanuman, son of Vayu (wind God) who had acquired several Siddhis (miraculous powers) like assuming several forms ranging from the tiniest and the lightest to the largest and the heaviest. He took the ring of Rama as a token to establish his identity and dropped the ring from a tree under which Sita was sitting. Sita was delighted to receive a message from Rama and gave an ornament in return as a token of her message to her Lord.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Before returning, Hanuman was caught by the henchmen of Ravana who tried to burn him alive but Hanuman assumed a huge form and in turn caused enormous damage to Lanka. When Ravana's brother Vibhishana advised Ravana to return the captive, Ravana disgracefully turned him out of the court. Thus Vibhishana surrendered to Lord Rama and became his devotee for ever.

Rama did not take any precipitate action. An emissary, Angada, son of Bali, was sent to the court of Ravana asking for the return of Sita to avoid bloodshed. Angada was told by Ravana that he would prefer a fight to avenge the dishonour done to his sister than to patch up by returning Sita.

Vibhishana had joined the forces of Rama and with the help of king Sugreeva, a huge army was raised and a bridge laid across the sea to reach Lanka. Feverish preparations followed on both sides but before starting the war Rama sought the blessings of Lord Siva for his success. Hanuman was asked to bring the idol of Lord Siva from a particular holy place but the Brahmins said that the Yajna could not be performed by Lord Rama unless his wife was by his side. A message was sent to Ravana to spare Sita for a short while so that worship could be performed according to the scriptural rites. There lies the greatness of the foe who agreed to send Sita temporarily and equally the magnanimity of Rama who duly returned her after the Lord had been worshipped.

There are instances after instances which point to the ideal character of not only Lord Rama but of many individuals, especially the main actors who participated in this drama. It is difficult to decide who excels whom. Even a tribal woman who wanted to entertain Rama by offering him plums, tasted each to ensure that only the sweet ones were eaten by the Lord, although it is refuted by some scholars giving a different meaning as Lord Rama is considered Maryada Purushottama. Friends, foes, brothers, devotees and others all leave an indelible impression upon the mind of the reader and tender ideal advice about one's duty in a variety of human situations. In fact almost all conceivable situations have been covered and without being didactic, the advice dawns upon the person through a concrete example.

I leave it to scholars to conduct research and find out the veracity of various incidents, persons and places. The grain is to see how a particular individual acted in a given situation, and draw lessons therefrom. As Longfellow sang:

*Lives of great men all remind us.
We can make our lives sublime.*

The day of reckoning arrived and the great battle began between the forces of good and evil. There were many ups and downs in the battle. At one point Lakshmana was mortally wounded and there were less chances for his survival. But he was revived by the Sanjivini herb brought by Hanuman from the Himalayas. Thousands of Vanaras of Rama's Army were killed by Meghnatha, the son of Ravana, who at last was slain in the battle by Lakshmana. Ahiravana, another son of Ravana, who was in the Patal Loka took away Rama and Lakshmana through his Maya to be sacrificed at the altar of Devi. However, they were rescued by Hanuman, and Ahiravana was killed by Hanuman. Kumbhakarna, a great warrior and brother of Ravana, was also killed by Lord Rama on the battlefield.

Ravana was a bitter foe and a man of miracles. It is said that he could assume many forms and bodies. Rama was hard put to finish him off. Eventually, his brother Vibhishana let out the secret that Rama should shoot an arrow at his navel which contained the elixir of his life and unless the elixir was drained off Ravana would not die.

At last the end came and Ravana fell dead on the ground. Sita was rescued and taken to Ayodhya in Pushpaka Vimana, an aerial car. They were received by the people of Ayodhya and brother Bharata who had ruled the country in his absence as a regent. Rama was crowned king amidst great rejoicings.

IV

IN WORLD LITERATURE

Before we go over to explain the esotericism of the Ramayana, let me say a few words about the prevailing criticism about the veracity of various events mentioned in the epic.

First, there is no doubt that early Indians had an approach to history which was rather different from the present day attitude. The word for literature in India is Sahitya, i.e. which will help in the progress and welfare of mankind. While writing history, maybe they kept the objective of human welfare uppermost.

Secondly there may have been some intermingling of history and mythology. Although mythology is said to be based on what C.G. Jung has called the 'race-unconscious' and therefore projects the innate inhibited aspirations of a race; they did not draw any definite line of demarcation between mythology and history. It is, therefore, possible that either some events were exaggerated or new material interpolated which cannot pass the portals of history as is understood today.

Thirdly, some recent trends in Western thought had a great influence on the thinking of the world, particularly on India which was a colony of the British for almost two centuries. In this trend, the most important influence in recent times has been of Herbert Spencer who formulated the theory of evolution much before Charles Darwin and Wallace. Spencer's evolution has a wider sweep and covers all physical and biological phenomena. According to him, the world is evolving from worse to better. Conversely, as we go back in time, the civilisation would have been worse and worse. As such, the state of affairs in India at present should be definitely better than they were a few hundred or a few thousand years ago. Therefore it is just not possible that the people of ancient India—or for that matter, of any country—could be more prosperous, more intelligent and more advanced than at present. This philosophy cuts at the root of all ancient civilisations and treats the facts of ancient world as fiction. India's philosophy, on the other hand has an exactly opposite approach than the evolutionary progressivism of Spencer. According to it, the world is going from bad to worse—not necessarily in the material sense but in moral essence. The cycle of the universe begins with Satyayuga the age of truth, benevolence and moral rectitude, but gradually degenerates into Treta, Dwapara and the age of Kali, during which moral values gradually go down. After the

worst comes to pass and only little morality is left in the world, one cycle of creation is completed and the whole world is dissolved into nothingness, rising again with Satyayuga.

This approach is nothing unusual to India. There are references in the literature of other countries which speak of high civilisation in the past for which scientific explanations have yet to be formulated. There are two courses open to us, either to reject them as fantasies or to undertake research on modern lines to evaluate their truth.

Let me refer to the Babylonian Etana epic deciphered from clay-tablet library of the Assyrian king, Assurbanipal (669-662 BC). The actual origin of the epic is unknown but parts of it are included in the much older epic of Gilgamesh written in the Akkadian language.

The Sumerians began to write down their past in 2300 B.C. Just as Enkidu, the hero of the epic of Gilgamesh was carried up above the Earth by a god, Etana also floats high in the air. Here are the essential passages as quoted by Erich Von Daniken in his "In Search of Ancient Gods". The passages from the Etana epic say:

The Eagle said to him, to Etana:

'My friend, I will carry thee to heaven—Anus,
Lay thy breast on my breast,
Lay thy eyes on the pinion of my wings,
Lay thy sides on my sides.....'

When he had carried aloft for a while,

The Eagle spoke to him, to Etana:

'Look my friend, how the land has changed,
Look at the sea at the side of the world mountain!
The Land there looks like a mountain,
The sea has become like water course'

When he had carried him aloft a little longer,

The eagle said to him, to Etana:

'Look my friend, how the land has changed.
The earth looks like a plantation of trees...'

Daniken comments, "I am firmly convinced that 'gods' in mythology can only be a synonym for space travellers, for lack of a more accurate name for flying phenomena." Daniken gives many photographs from ancient scriptures found in different parts of the world which appear to be not only strange but bizarre as they do not conform to anything the like of which we know today. He quotes from a translation of Enoch published in Thubingjm in 1900.

It is said in chapter 14 of the Book of Enoch:

"They bore me up into the heavens. I entered and walked until I came to a building of crystal stones and surrounded by tongues of fire, and it began to strike terror into me. I went into the tongues of fire and came to a large house built of crystal stones. The walls of that house were like unto a floor paved with crystal stones and its floor was of crystal. Its roof was like the paths of the

stars and lightning, with fiery cherubs in between. A sea of fire was round its walls, and its doors burnt with fire.”

It is said in chapter 15.

“And when I heard the voice of the most high: Fear thou not, Enoch, the righteous man and scribe of righteousness—go thou and speak to the guardians of heaven who have sent thee in order to intercede for them.”

According to Daniken there is little doubt that a ferry ship took Enoch from earth to the command module which was orbiting around the earth. “The gleaming metal hull of the spaceship seemed to him to be built of crystal stones. Through a heat-rejecting fortified roof he could see the stars and meteorites and also observe the flashes from the steering jets of small spaceships.”

There are references of strange happenings in Mayan literature and stone reliefs. One Mayan legend says that there was a civilisation in full boom 10,000 years ago, although archaeologists question this early dating in their meagre ‘revelations’. It has however been proved that Mayan cities were not destroyed by wars or natural catastrophes, they were simply abandoned by their inhabitants. The Maya disappeared without a trace. Why did they leave their magnificent cities which were built to last with massive blocks of stones? Only three Maya manuscripts, the so-called Codices, were spared in the burning of the books.

Maya calendar was of an incredibly high calibre starting in the year 3117 B.C. South American experts claim that the mysterious year has no connection with the actual history of Maya, having only a pure symbolic value like the Jewish phrase ‘since the creation of the world’. The Maya calendar operates with cycles of years that were only supposed to have repeated themselves over 374,000 years—so similar to the four yugas of India.

If we follow the Aztec calendar, the present age is ripe for the destruction of the earth by an earthquake. During construction work in Mexico in 1700, a round stone disc 3 feet thick and 12 feet in diameter was found. A bass relief of faces, arrows and circles were carved on the stone. It was discovered that these motifs were data for the secret Aztec calendar. But Aztecs, it is said, took over the essential parts of the calendar from their forefathers, the Mayas.

We should, therefore, not be surprised when we hear of Vimanas or the aerial cars, in the epic of Ramayana. These should have been the flying machines, navigated at great heights with the aid of quicksilver with a great propulsive wind. These Vimanas could cover vast distances and travel forward, upward and downwards—a maneuverability which may be envied even today. Here is a quotation from the translation of Ramayana by M.N. Dutt done in 1801:

‘At Rama’s behest the magnificent chariot rose upto a mountain of cloud with a tremendous din...’

We cannot help noticing that not only a flying machine is mentioned, but the chronicler talks of a tremendous din. Here is another passage from the Mahabharata:

“Bhima flew with his Vimana on an enormous ray which was as brilliant as the sun, and made a noise like the thunder of a storm.”

If it is all imaginary and mythological, then even imagination needs something to start it off, says Daniken. “How can the chronicler give description that presupposes at least some idea of rockets and the knowledge that such a vehicle could ride on a ray and cause a terrifying thunder?” he asks. In another ancient treatise, a clear distinction is drawn between chariots that fly and those that cannot.

The first book of the Mahabharata reveals the intimate story of the unmarried Kunti, who not only received a visit from the Sun-god but also had a son by him who is supposed to have been as radiant as the Sun himself. As Kunti was afraid of falling into disgrace she laid her child in a basket and put it in a river. Adhiratha, a worthy man of the Suta caste, found the basket and the child and he brought up the infant. It is indeed a story so remarkably like the story of Moses.

Like Gilgamesh, Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata, undertakes a long journey in order to see the gods and ask for weapons. There are numerical data in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which are so precise that one gets the impression that they were written from first-hand knowledge.

Be that as it may, at this point of time it is difficult for us to state with certainty how far the events described in the Ramayana are factually correct and to what extent there is a mixture of mythology. We thought it appropriate to invite the attention of the readers to the literature and art-work in other parts of the world which speak of events on similar lines. These at least do indicate that in the ancient world things might have not always been worse.

V

ESOTERICISM OF RAMAYANA

There is a spiritual interpretation of the story of Rama which would be found beneficial to the entire mankind. According to the esoteric explanation of the Ramayana, man himself is the battlefield where a constant war is going on between the good and evil propensities. Information about the external world is collected through the five sense organs. These perceptions are turned into impressions with the help of mental background, different in different individuals. On the basis of these impressions the individual acts through the five organs of action. It is by controlling the sense organs and disciplining the mind with the help of the intellect that man can take proper action and lead a happy life. After continuous disciplining of the mind and the senses, ignorance is dispelled and one is able to discriminate between good and evil.

A person who is able to command his ten senses is called Dasaratha. Among his wives, Kausalya can be said to be an embodiment of Devotion, Kaikeyi of Attachment and Sumitra of Detachment. Similarly, Rama represents Wisdom, Bharata Discrimination, Lakshmana Renunciation and Shatrughna Thought. The knowledge contained in the Vedas is personified in sage Vashishtha who first teaches and trains the four princes—Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and

Shatrughna. It is only when wisdom, discrimination, renunciation and asceticism are combined that universal brotherhood or Vishwamitra emerges who imparts further training and help to Rama and Lakshmana to conquer evil forces like Tataka (Anger-lust combined), Maricha and Subahu (Temptation). After that sage Vishwamitra takes them to Mithila, the kingdom of Raja Janaka, to participate in Swayamvara, the marriage function of his daughter Sita. On their way to Mithila, Rama revives Ahalya who had turned into stone i.e. without feeling and sensation, due to a curse which fell on her, and is again brought back to her full sensibilities.

There the contest was that whosoever lifts the bow of Siva, Sita will be married to him. Many princes and kings competed for the hand of Sita but they were not able even to move the great bow and were therefore disappointed. This bow, according to our allegory stands for pride and Sita is an embodiment of Devotion. Now unless a man is able to rise above pride, he cannot attain devotion. Parasurama is a devotee of the Lord and stands for Ego. He was enraged not only as the great bow was lifted but broken into two. Whereas Rama tried to assuage the feelings of Parasurama with sweet words, Lakshmana, his brother almost challenged the great sage for unnecessarily interfering in the internal affairs of king Janaka.

As an embodiment of wisdom and being the eldest amongst the princes, Rama is rightly chosen by his father to be crowned as king, but on account of the intervention of Kaikeyi, he is compelled to banish Rama from the kingdom for 14 years. Thus Rama, Sita and Lakshmana left for the forest and minister Sumanta (i.e. Sukarma—good actions) accompanied them but wisdom (Rama) compelled him to go back to Ayodhya.

The trio (Wisdom—devotion—renunciation) proceeded further. The meeting of wisdom (Rama) with skillful Nishada helped the trio to cross the Tamsa river (river of Brahma-Vidya) on the boat of pure sankalpa and then accompanied with Nishad, the trio reached ‘Triveni’ the conjunction of three rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati) which symbolically represent Ida, Pingla and Sushumana. On the bank of Triveni they had the darshan of Pranav (i.e. Bharadwaja) and afterwards of Valmiki Rishi (Discipline) who advised them (wisdom-devotion—renunciation) to stay at Chitrakut, the place of reasoning and understanding, for sometime.

When Bharata returned to Ayodhya from his maternal uncle’s place, he is able to discriminate and see the injustice of the whole episode. But he fails to dissuade Rama from following the orders of his father as well as of Kaikeyi. Rama does not leave the kingdom alone and is accompanied by Renunciation (Lakshmana) and Devotion (Sita). Then the trio left Chitrakut also. On the way they met the great sages Atri (Truth), and Anasuya, wife of Atri, an embodiment of loyalty and faithfulness.

The trio of Wisdom, Devotion and Renunciation occupy Panchavati—literally an abode standing for an embodiment of the five sense organs. There Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana and an embodiment of Desire, approaches Rama and Lakshmana for the satisfaction of her lust. But neither Wisdom nor Renunciation are attracted or lured by Desire who is not only turned away but also disfigured by Lakshmana. Surpanakha approached her brothers Khara and Dushana, who stand for Pride and Evil. But in a battle royal they are not able to measure swords with Wisdom and Renunciation. Whosoever makes use of wisdom before taking any action—and if that wisdom is

tempered with renunciation—pride and evil cannot stand before the combination, and automatically disappears.

Then we reach the climax of the story where Ravana or Dasanana, literally a person with ten heads, decides to avenge the dishonour done to his sister. Having analysed that the ascetic princes are no ordinary individuals and have withstood not only Pride and Evil but also Desire, Dasanana decides to organise an attack with the help of Deceit, in the form of Maricha. Maricha or Deceit could assume a variety of forms and hence he was used by Ravana as a ploy to appear before Sita as a golden deer so that she might be attracted towards him.

It is said that at this juncture, in order to save Sita—a Princess who had been brought up in luxury—She was concealed by Rama with the help of Fire and in her place an illusion of Sita was created by him. It was this illusory Sita who fell for the golden deer and asked her husband to bring it for her. Rama, through his wisdom saw the game but on account of Sita's persistence and to play his part in the cosmic drama gave the deer a chase.

The deer enticed him away from Panchavati and as he was dying, he cried Lakshmana as if it was Rama himself crying for his help. The illusory Sita heard the cry and asked Lakshmana to rush to Rama's help. Lakshmana tried to assure Sita that no calamity could befall the wise and brave Rama but she insisted and even insinuated motives to Lakshmana who had to leave to find out facts. When Sita was alone, Ravana approached Panchavati as a hermit, begging for alms and took her away forcibly. He was intercepted by Jatayu, an embodiment of peace, who lives for others, but who was fatally wounded.

Since Rama is depicted in the Ramayana as an ordinary but an ideal man, finding Sita missing, he begins to lament and cry for help as any husband would do. Finally he runs into Jatayu who tells him the truth. Several efforts are made to dissuade Ravana from evil path and to make him return Sita, but nothing avails of. Finally, Rama strikes friendship with Sugreeva, who is personified action, which has lost power and strength on account of the defeat inflicted upon him by his brother Bali, literally a very brave man. Sugreeva introduces Rama to Hanuman who stands for absolute renunciation, who is sent to find out the exact whereabouts of Sita. On the way, the water-spirits—Surasa, Simhika and Lankini—standing for three attributes of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, which pervade the universe—try to hinder the progress of Hanuman. He rises above all the three attributes and it is only after he masters all of them that he reaches Lanka and finds out Sita in the forest of Ashoka trees. After delivering the message of Rama to her, he creates havoc in the city and lets himself be caught by Meghanatha so that he is produced in the court of Ravana.

There he speaks of the valour and virtues of Rama and tries to dissuade Ravana from evil ways. Ravana's brother Vibhishana also tries to give good advice to the king and asks him to return Sita so that bloodshed may be avoided. But the king strikes at Vibhishana and turns him out of the court, who then joins the forces of Rama. Even the entreaties of Mandodari, his queen, do not prevail upon the king. Wisdom (Rama) also sends another emissary, Angada, to persuade Ravana to give up his evil ways. But Attachment and Desire, as personified in Ravana are determined to have their way and finally a battle royal ensues.

Ravana had all the evil forces like Greed, Deceit and others on his side but they were all destroyed by Rama, causing consternation in Ravana. But his Desire in the form of his son Meghanatha, consoled him and succeeded in striking at Renunciation (Lakshmana) sending him to sleep for a short while, but Good Actions in the form of the medicine-man Sukhena came to the help of Renunciation and revived him with the help of the Sanjivini herb, i.e. determined good action. Even Kumbhakarna standing for pride, could not stand before wisdom and was killed. Finally Desire and Attachment (Ravana) were completely annihilated by Wisdom and when illusory Sita came to Rama, Wisdom declared that he had no place for Maya and sent her back to fire.

Bharata had been ruling Ayodhya with great discrimination and once the period of 14 years was over, Wisdom, Renunciation along with Devotion, Absolute Renunciation, Bravery and other attributes returned to Ayodhya, to establish the reign of righteousness—Ramaraj.

VI

FACT OR FICTION

Throughout the great epic of the Ramayana, the Adi-kavi, Sage Valmiki, the foremost poet and the first author of the Ramayana represents Lord Rama as an avatara of God. But at several places in the same work, the great sage alludes to Rama, merely his human character, with human limitations. Yet he has unfolded the manifold excellences of Sri Rama's wonderful character, the various aspect of his life that one should dwell upon. Rama, from his very boyhood prepared himself and his companions for the unique part they had to play in the Divine Drama. Sometimes the sage heightened his character, and often glorified him in this cosmic play.

In all the Ramayanas, so far I have gone through, the life of Rama has been painted as of a great heroic personality, a virtuous person a man of ideals and principles, possessing exemplary character and fine conduct, righteousness, serene, brave, bold yet gentle and a king who took great care of his subjects and their views; and in some places as a Superman with Divine Attributes. The story of Lord Rama is even now prevalent in several South East countries especially in the islands of Java, Sumatra and Bali of Indonesia—of course in different versions and with variations.

In India, the term 'pre-historical age' was invented by modern historians during the British rule, declaring the Ramayana at best as a myth. Whereas the reality is something else, and the facts differ. Even the myth which floats in a country, forms the real backbone of theology. Saint Goswami Tulsidas is a man of history and his views and ways cannot so easily be discarded by saying that he talks of 'pre-history'. He never attempted to write or compose Shri Ramcharitmanas till the age of 78 or 87. Tulsidas, after having the darshan of Hanuman at Chitrakut and inspired by him, starts composing the Hindi Mahakavya, famous as Shri Ramcharitmanas from Tuesday, the 30th March, 1574 A.D. in Ayodhya, the holy abode and capital of Lord Rama during his incarnation. He held Lord Rama to be one with Lord Vishnu and at a place as an incarnation of Parabrahma.

Humanity, especially Indians, should be grateful to Sant Tulsidas, who raised the historical Rama to the highest Divine status in order to share his realisation with one and all, for the benefit of millions in India in particular, and of humanity in general. It is not merely an imaginative fiction but something divine based on facts and his own experience. If one takes care to study the holy Ramcharitmanas with devotion and faith, he is sure to reap the same fruit.

The advent of an Avatara, the incarnation of God upon the earth planet, is a law of nature. In fact, it is the descent of God for the ascent of the Divine Ray of the Cosmic Mind or the Cosmic Prana, the Life Force, and the One Ruler of the Universe, Iswara. There is a very firm and faithful declaration that whenever righteousness decays and unrighteousness prevails wildly, God incarnates Himself to vindicate the superiority of righteousness. For Sant Tulsidas 'Rama' was his "Lord" of the heart, the deity—an incarnation of the Supreme Being. Hence his Manas has influenced the hearts and the thoughts of a whole people, not those alone who have been able to read his work but those unlettered millions of our countrymen who have always been there, even during the earlier days of our culture.

Apart from the Ramayana of Sant Tulsidas there are several other works of the saints of Bengal, South India and Maharashtra. The holy book of Samarth Guru Ramdassji Maharaj has its own place who has retold the story of Lord Rama after having his darshan.

On the completion of the Navratri Puja, Hindus celebrate Sri Vijaya Dasami, which is mostly called Dussehra in Uttar Pradesh, and is preceded by "Ramalila" for ten days and even in villages of Uttar Pradesh. And it ends with the burning of the gigantic effigies of Ravana, Kumbhakarana, and Meghanatha. You will wonder to observe that the entire countryside bursts into life and activity with Ramalila fairs and plays held and performed at thousands of places, even after Dussehra, for many days. These Ramalilas continue with joy and glory.

This is an occasion for the people to express their regard, respect, love and reverence for Lord Rama by presenting dramas and pantomime shows depicting scenes from the great Ramayana. I at least, do not feel happy to see in these days that the holy and inspiring Ramayana is often misrepresented, misinterpreted and the occasion is misused by some people for insinuating non-religious or even irreligious motives behind the nobler intention of the celebrations.

VII

RAMA GITA

The inspiring and illuminating story of Lord Rama in several recensions is known the world over and is a part of life in every Hindu home in India. It is a vast ocean, very deep, and it is not possible for this humble sevak to discuss the sacred story in a little book like this. I have, therefore, touched upon some of the points and spots of the huge volume. My heart flows out to the modern man, whose scepticism about Ramayana is understandable due to the impact of science and distance of centuries between Lord Rama and us. No wonder, Einstein the greatest scientist of our

times had recorded the life of Gandhiji in these words: “Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one in flesh and blood ever walked on the earth.”

Before wisdom is able to achieve its goal of self-realisation it has to pass through tedious tests posed by Satanic forces. Remember the evil dose of Mara when the Buddha was bent upon achieving self-realisation under the Bodhi tree. So was the case with Jesus on the mount. Hence it is necessary to look into the Ramayana as to what it teaches. Apart from the lessons which we can derive from the instances and characters of the persons, there is much more in the Ramayana which we can call as direct teaching, constituting the most impressive portion of the Ramayana, well-known as the Rama Gita—the upadesa given at different places to different people, at different times. Revered Gurudev Shri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj has referred specifically about this illuminating portion of Rama Gita in his book titled Essence of Ramayana. The following extracts are reproduced from the same book like a few dew drops from the sky for the benefit of the readers:

“Thereupon Rama imparted to Lakshmana that knowledge which is declared by the Vedas for the eradication of ignorance. The aspirant should first perform in a disinterested manner without caring for fruits all those duties which are enjoined upon by one’s own caste and order, and purify his mind. He should acquire the necessary qualifications or the four means of Salvation viz. Viveka (discrimination between the real and the unreal), Vairagya (dispassion), Shad sampat or the sixfold virtues viz., Shama (control of the mind) Dama (control of the senses), Uparati (cessation from worldly work), Titiksha (power of endurance), Sraddha (faith), Samadhana (one-pointedness of mind) and Mumukshutwa (burning desire for liberation).

All actions lead to rebirths. Man does good and bad actions (dharma and adharma) and reaps the fruits of his actions viz., pleasure and pain. Karma produces body and from body arises work. In this way the course of worldly life (samsara) revolves like a wheel without an end.

The root-cause of it is ignorance (avidya or ajnana). Removal of ignorance is the only means for destroying this course of worldly life. Knowledge alone is capable of annihilating this ignorance. Action (Karma) cannot destroy it, because it is born of ignorance and is not its contrary or opposite.

Let the wise man, therefore abandon all work. There can be no combination of Knowledge and Work because knowledge is opposed to work.

As long as there is the notion of ‘I’, in the body and the like, due to the influence of Maya, so long one is bound by the injunction of the Vedas for work. Let the wise man sublimate or eliminate the whole of it through the doctrine of ‘neti, neti’ (nor this, nor this) and abandon all works, knowing the Highest Brahman or the Eternal.

When ignorance is destroyed by knowledge it cannot produce actions which lead to further births. When ignorance has been annihilated by knowledge which is pure and non-dual, how shall it again arise?

It is only the intellect of one who superimposes the Self (Atman) upon the non-self (Anatma) that entertains the idea of sin in the non-performance of action. The intellect of the sage

has no such idea. Therefore, the wise should renounce action which is enjoined as obligatory. It is meant only for those, whose minds are attached to the fruit of action.

When the limiting adjuncts, viz., the pot and walls of the room are broken, the ether in the pot and in the room becomes identical with the universal ether. When the body-pot is broken by the dawn of knowledge, the individual soul becomes one with Supreme Self.

The crystal appears to be red when it is placed near a red flower. Even so this Atman appears to be of the form of the five sheaths because of its proximity to them. When one meditates on the saying of the Upanishads, “Asangoyam Purusha—this Purusha is unattached”—then he realises that the Atman is unattached, unborn and without a second.

This Atman is neither an actor nor a thinker. All these are due to the action of the mind and the Prana. Verily He is unattached. Dhyativa Lodayativa—He appears as if meditating, as if moving.

The conditions of the intellect (Buddhi) are threefold viz., waking, dream and deep sleep. They are due to its associations with the Gunas of satva (goodness), rajas (activity) and tamas (inertia). They are not the true conditions of the Supreme Self, because one of them is absent when the other is present. Therefore, they are all unreal. They cannot certainly be of the nature of the Supreme Self which is unity and bliss itself.

The Atman never dies nor is born. It is not subject to increase or decrease. It is never new, never old. It is beyond all additions to its greatness. It is of the nature of bliss, self-luminous, all-pervading and one without a second. It is illimitable and undecaying.

To the Yogi who has practised samadhi, who has completely withdrawn all his senses from their objects, who has conquered all enemies such as desire, anger, greed, delusion, fear and inertia, who has vanquished the lower self, who has subdued by his Bhakti, the Lord of six attributes says to such a yogi I reveal Myself.

Thus contemplating on his own Self day and night, let the sage abide free from all bonds till his Prarabdha Karma which gave him this present body is exhausted. He is absorbed in Me on the dissolution of his body.

Even though the sage lives in the world for the exhaustion of his karma he fully realises that the world is false like the appearance of snake in the rope, of silver in the mother-of-pearl, of water in the mirage or the appearance of two moons in the sky or the turning of the quarters through the defect of sight.

So long as one does not behold all as My own Self, let him practise devotion, let him be ever devoted to My worship. I do abide forever in the heart of him who has intense faith and devotion to me.

My dear Lakshmana! This essence of all the Vedas, this great mystery has been declared by me unto thee. The sage who contemplates upon it, is freed from his load of impurities that very moment.

My beloved brother, all this visible world is nothing but Maya. Withdraw the mind from it. Purify it through meditation on Me alone. Do thou be happy, free from all sorrow and full of bliss.

He who meditates on Me with pure mind, thinking of Me as above all attributes or thinks of Me as possessed of the attributes of Omniscience, becomes my own Self. He purifies all the three worlds by the dust of my feet, just as the Sun purifies the world by his light.

This wisdom which is the essence of all the Vedas, has been thus sung by Me whose glory all the Vedantins proclaim. He who reads it with devotion and faith in his preceptor and practises it attains the final emancipation. He attains to my own form if he has faith in My teachings.”

The above Immortal Teachings of Lord Rama, itself show that he was an incarnation of the Supreme Being, and not an ordinary man or a king alone. His holy Epic, the Gospel Divine, is narrated by so many sacred souls. This is the story of a struggle between right and wrong, good and evil, sura and asura hidden within us. The Epic struggle consists of controlling the senses and rising above tendencies like desires, indulgence, and evils like anger, jealousy, hatred etc., so that with the help of discrimination, knowledge may be converted into wisdom and human life may become worth living.

May the blessings of Sri Rama be upon all.

Hari Om Tat Sat!
OM SANTI, SANTI SANTI!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Some devotees sent questions to Swami Premanandaji Saraswati which he answers here in his inimitable style.

Q. *I have tried several times to get out of this illusory world, but am getting deeper into it and ever new difficulties arise. Why it is so?*

Ans. God’s plans are always for the good. His munificence flows fast. Get into the current and establish identity with His Will. That will save you from drowning. Pleasure and pain are the two sides of the coin of life. Do not be undone in sorrow and do not forget Him in happiness. Those who go against His Will, have to suffer. But unless you destroy the ego, it is difficult to understand His Will. So far as ego persists, He cannot reveal Himself.

Q. *I find it impossible to follow the path of Truth and sadhana in spite of my earnest desire. What is the way out?*

Ans. You would not have raised this question, if it were not possible for you to do sadhana. Analyse your thoughts. Avoid duplicity and deceit. Be simple, be content, and have faith in God. Work without attachment and pray to God with a child's heart. You are sure to succeed. In the path of God-realisation there are three obstacles—wealth, sex and name and fame. Avoid them.

Q. *Many People believe—eat, drink and be merry, Comment.*

Ans. On the other hand I believe that the aim of human life is to renounce desire, serve others, worship God, and consider everybody as equal. The contact of senses with their objects does appear to give happiness, but it is not real happiness as it does not last. It only gives a fleeting sense of pleasure.

Q. *I am very sad; how to get rid of it?*

Ans. It is a serious question, but you have not come out openly. The root of all sorrow in this world is attachment—mamata, expressed in a variety of ways. If a person to whom we are attached, does not listen to us, we are annoyed; or if another person opposes, we consider that man our enemy. Also, if we are attached to a person, place or event, and it is taken away or destroyed, we feel very sad.

To get rid of such sorrows, one should try to understand the real nature of persons, places and events. And that is; everything in this world is subject to change and destruction, which is beyond our control. Our own body is constantly undergoing change, and we have no control over it. If this situation is well understood you will have less attachment with the body and concentrate more on performing your duty. It will strengthen renunciation and faith in God's will. Whenever the presence of God is felt, there is no sorrow.

There are two ways of feeling the presence of God; through one's efforts, and through faith in God's Mercy. The former path is hard to tread. Therefore, have faith in God and be happy in whatever condition. Pray to Him with your entire being. Very soon you will see Light, and wherever is light, darkness is dissolved and man rises above the duality of pleasure and pain.

Q. *I do good to others and they return good with evil. Is this the way of the world?*

Ans. To begin with, root out pride of doing good, rather thank God. He has enabled you to help, and never expect that they should be grateful to you. You should be humble to those whom you serve. Moreover, it may be only suspicion that people return good with evil, therefore banish this idea. Nobody can harm you.

The cause of your present troubles may be the result of your past actions. The present is the fruit of the past. Remember, you will not suffer without sufficient cause. Laws of Nature dictate that effect cannot precede the cause. Whatever misfortune is, this is the result of one's actions. It is only to relieve you of past actions that God in His Mercy has devised the present chain of events. A spiritual person and devotee of God should only think that the person causing pain is only an agent,

and therefore to be pitied, not hated. To be annoyed with him, to wish ill of him is not the right approach—Pray like Jesus Christ for his good.

A person who returns good with evil is despicable, who returns evil with evil belongs to a low category, who returns good with good is of average category, and the one who returns evil with good deserves God-realisation.

Q. What are the impediments in God-realisation?

Ans. The biggest obstacle is ego which involves him in the worldly pains of opposites. View each person, place or event in an unattached way—that will lead to salvation. A devotee always tries to cleanse his consciousness by strengthening living faith in God. It is only non-attachment that can annihilate duality and hate, and manifest love for God. An intense urge for God, removes all impediments. I have no faith in artificial means. Fill your heart with love, worship of God will follow.

Q. How to improve the falling standards of society, of government, of the world?

Ans. The whole plan of the world is being worked out according to God's will. We view certain events as favourable or unfavourable due to our own limited egoistic approach. We do not want to understand the real nature of things, nor do we meditate on this reality. Think deeply, the world does not belong to anybody. As to the shortcomings or the attainments of the society in which we live, that is also due to our own approach because each one of us constitute a unit of that society. It is not material attainments, cars, skyscrapers, aeroplanes, wealth and weapons that count in society.

A society is to be judged on the basis of noble actions of individuals. We are fond of talking of an ideal society but we do not care to become ideal individuals. If all of us behave well, the society will automatically take care of itself; the government will become better. Finding fault in others doesn't help a society or a government. A disease can be uprooted only when we diagnose its cause. A religious person should be a man of character. A society or a government composed of such persons will only do good to the people, the country, and world. It is wrong to think that the progress of one country lies in the fall of another. We should not neglect any part or any person of this world. Our scriptures always speak of the good and welfare of the entire universe.

Q. Which is the greatest illusion of the world?

Ans. The greatest illusion is to believe in what I am not and not to believe in what I am. I am not this body and this body is not mine: to realise this reality is the way to get rid of the illusion. You are wearing a shirt and a watch but you are NOT the shirt or the watch. So also you say my hand, my feet, my body, and so on. The 'I' is different than all these. By change in appearances, the reality does not change. It is so obvious but we are unable to appreciate it. Our entire behaviour centres round the body. To realise the reality requires prolonged sadhana.

Now the strange thing is that you have no control or authority over the body which you call your own. In the case of your shirt, your watch, you can give those to somebody, sell them, throw them, destroy them. Please think, whether you have the same authority on your body? You do not want your head to ache, your body to grow old, or die. But you can't stop it. Even the wealthiest man cannot put off death. The body therefore is not yours. But not only you call your body as your own, you regard other bodies and things as your own. There can be no greater illusion than this.

Q. *How to realise God?*

Ans. You can meet God if just you want to, but you should pine for Him. It does not require hard work; it requires Grace-A God who manifests Himself on account of devotee's sadhana, hard work, may also disappear instantaneously. It may be mere mental perception. God is said to be Omnipresent Omniscience, Omnipotent, Attributeless, Sat-Chidanand.

Q. *If God cannot be realised through sadhana, then why waste time in sadhana? (Why not just wait for his Grace?)*

Ans. Sadhana should concentrate on purification of heart. Its objective should be God-realisation. The Grace of God shall reveal itself according to the devotee's conception. Since God is not a distant goal He is Omnipresent. Therefore He is not to be seen through making efforts. The more desires you have the more distant is He. The moment you are without desire and just pine for Him, He will be there in front of you and the entire world of desire shall run after you. With our back to the Sun we see the shadow cast before us, and the faster we run after it, equally fast it moves away. Face the Sun and the shadow shall tamely follow you. Turn your face towards God, that will lead to chitta-shuddhi. We have to do sadhana to realise what IS, by understanding the reality of what IS NOT.

Q. *There is a lot of hullabaloo in the name of religion. Reason?*

Ans. Wherever there are fights in the name of religion there is no religion, no dharma, there is adharma. Differences are created due to our short-sightedness and lack of understanding. Religion and politics are declared poles apart by selfish people. Secularism does not mean being irreligious, but to have faith and respect for all religions. Being fanatic is not the same as being religious; it is a strange type of blind faith, an illusion. A handful of persons indulge in such behaviour due to their own selfish motives by dragging politics into religion. They couldn't care less for the welfare of the society of the world, and then the honest and simple suffer the most.

The greatest religion is universal brotherhood. By neglecting humanity you make demons of men who serve only themselves in the name of God. Every religion preaches service, love, renunciation and salvation. By being religious, a man's life, his emotions and actions, are purified. That is the way to the progress of mankind.

In the United States every coin and note carries the legend, 'In God We Trust'. But do they practise it in daily life? I am not sure. The motto of our constitution is, 'Satyameva Jayate' or 'Truth Triumphs', but we and our Government do not believe in practising it.

Q. Is democracy good and appropriate for India?

Ans. I am not a politician, and your question has a political ring. In my opinion all rules and regulations are framed for the solution of certain problems. If these are followed firmly and faithfully then these should result in good of the community. The cornerstone of democracy is the principle that it is ‘of the people, for the people, by the people’. In practice, ‘of’ is substituted by ‘off’, ‘for’ by ‘far’ and ‘by’ by ‘buy’. The line therefore reads, ‘off the people, far the people, buy the people.’ The principle is right, but the practice is wrong.

We had been under foreign domination for long; that has brought about a change in our religion, culture and way of life. Actually we were not really fit for freedom; it is due to the patriotism and sacrifice of some great souls that we got freedom. Power went to the head of some people and they went astray. We will have to make more sacrifices to make democracy real and establish Ramrajya. In my view democracy is better suited to this country than other forms of government. But whatever the form, it can only succeed when precept and practice are the same.

Q. I try my best to understand the nature of mind, intellect, consciousness and ego, I philosophically analyse the real nature of my body and the world on the strength of scriptures and the words of great saints. But neither physical attachment nor the futility of the world is really understood; how to get rid of this attachment?

Ans. Most revered Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj laid great emphasis on “Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise.” The quintessence of his teachings are summed up in “Be Good, Do Good”. Most revered Swami Sharnanandaji Maharaj with whom I had long contacts and am greatly influenced by his teachings—also emphasised service, love and renunciation. In my view it is extremely necessary to serve the community, to perform our duty to them. Service and performance of duty are genuine only when done unattached. To expect returns from the family or the community is to get involved in the world.

To be a sadhaka means not to give up action, or to become lazy, or not to perform one’s duties. To be a sadhaka means to serve, to get rid of attachment. The ties of attachment are never snapped with japa and worship alone, nor Asana. Pranayama can remove body-attachment. Service helps in purifying the heart, so does pure love. Affection, attachment, desire, or lust is not love. In love also—love everybody alike—all selfish motives have to be given up.

Give unselfishly unto others with a feeling that whatever you have is not yours. It is given to you to serve others. Selfless Dhaan has a high place in our culture. It is improper to keep more than what you need; it is also called aparigraha. But Dhaan often breeds pride, therefore it should be practised anonymously. So if you practise service, love, charity, honesty, and leave the rest to God, you will automatically rise higher, and higher.

Q. We have always seen you laughing, never angry. Don’t you get angry?

Ans. I also get annoyed but it is being automatically controlled. Sometimes I deign fake anger; but when at times I am really angry, I punish myself later, Passion, whatever its form, is

harmful. Iron discipline is required. Anger only betrays your ignorance. It smacks of your desire for your pound of flesh.

Q. Is it improper to pull up children when they commit mistakes so as to train them properly?

Ans. In my opinion anger never helps anybody, it only harms you and others. Anger causes tension, aggressiveness and other evils—which adversely affect the body and mind. Instead of getting angry, or punishing the children, divert their attention from something wrong to something right and more attractive. Anger is the sign of Dvesh, of duality, of attachment. It is by unselfish love, above attachment, that children are properly trained. By sacrificing your rights and upholding those of others you can conquer anger.

Q. It is said in Sri Ramcharitmanas that the only real thing is the worship of God, the world is a dream. What is its implication?

Ans. The world is in a state of continuous flux. A discriminating analysis shall reveal it is a long dream. We do not see dreams when in deep sleep or awake, these are seen in a state of half sleep. As far as worship (bhajan) is concerned, it manifests itself with satsang, to keep the consciousness of God alive, and awake in the midst of discharging your worldly duties in real worship. This should be practised regularly, morning, evening, by strengthening association with God and dissociation with the temporary self.

Instead, we are all the time involved in asserting the ego, having no occasion to examine that there is anything beyond. We can only rise above the little self if we give prominence to satsang. The same idea is expressed by emphasising unattached action and surrendering the fruits thereof to God. Then we do not 'do' things as they happen. The feelings of 'I' and ego are eliminated, and the God's presence is always felt. That is the reality, all the rest is unreal, a dream.

Q. Some people oppose idol-worship, what do you say?

Ans. Worship is a means to an end. The body comprises five elements and in worshipping we have to take the help of one element or the other. Some people block other senses and concentrate on hearing sabd which is an attribute of akasa, that is these sadhakas take the help of air-element. Others perform yajna with the help of another element—fire; and again some perform various rituals connected with water element. Similarly, some sadhakas take the help of idols of gods and goddesses where the earth-element dominates.

It is not the idol that is worshipped but the symbol to God that is worshipped after—according to scriptural injunction. Life is infused (prana-pratishtha) in all the eight limbs of that representation. Therefore, the devotee worships the God Himself who removes his difficulties and lifts him up to a higher plane of God-realisation.

If that does not happen then we only worship a piece of stone indeed. The symbol is treated like God Himself and serves as such. In modern times in the life of Swami Ramakrishna

Paramahansa there is a chapter, Ram Lala. Please read it with devotion, it will set your doubts at rest. In the Age of Kali idol worship as explained here yields quicker spiritual results; but then the devotee should have the feel of it.

Q. You had once said that sadhana-bhajan should be done secretly. How will then a devotee achieve progress?

Ans. Sadhana-bhajan should be done secretly until all the shortcomings of a devotee are completely eliminated. I had read somewhere or heard from some great man that worship should be kept as a guarded secret as the love of a noble lady with the Czar. If a devotee proclaims his devotion having all the human faults, then that only strengthens his ego, his pride; and ego is the greatest stumbling block in sadhana.

If the world comes to know of a person as a great devotee—and he has no real devotion within—that should create a lot of problems for him. Conversely, if a person is over-brimming with the love of God, and people know nothing about it, that is wonderful,

Devotees should always examine two things:

- (a) Whether his shortcomings are being reduced;
- (b) If his fame is on the increase.

Name and fame cause the downfall and if it does come, the sadhaka should try to save himself with humility. The sweet poison of fame has brought about the downfall of even great sadhakas. One should always regard his sadhana as incomplete; that is how he progresses—quietly, secretly. It is only after the consciousness is purified that real wisdom dawns and Guru's and God's grace is felt.

Q. Some people speak ill of you and levy charges against you. Why don't you talk it over with them? What is your attitude towards these people?

Ans. The entire world is full of evil and good. It helps me if some people discover bad qualities in me. But I shall be obliged if these gentlemen tell me about them as that would help me to look at myself. If what they think about me is incorrect, I shall have an opportunity to explain the position to them.

By the time their charges reach me through a third party the original version is garbled and I am unable to get at the real opinion. Even then the criticism that reaches me serves as a soap to clean a dirty sheet, and it helps. Whenever wrong motives are imputed, I do feel sorry, which I should not, and try not to have bad feelings for such people.

I am wide awake not to think ill of anybody and I daily pray to God and Gurudeva that I should never become a vehicle of thinking ill of any person, that I should not harbour a feeling of hate, prejudice, jealousy and tit-for-tat.

If by abusing me some people try to tarnish the image of Gurudev or his institution then I am often unable to put up with it. Gurudev Shri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, even served those who abused him. I try to do my humble bit—as an infant tries to trot. Those who talk good of me are generous, others who talk ill are more generous—and I am grateful to them.

Q. How do you feel when people praise you?

Ans. I am a sanyasi sadhaka, not a siddha. A liberated soul would be above abuse and praise, my weakness is that sometimes I am delighted when people shower praise; this is poison to a sadhaka. I try my best not to hear my praise, to adopt an indifferent attitude, but I do not always succeed. Sometimes people flatter hoping I wouldn't see through it—and that makes me laugh.

They may do so to serve selfish ends but by the God's grace I am seldom fooled. My constant effort is that my heart should brim over with the love of God. The river of life is the pilgrimage of Discipline, Truth is its water, Mercy constitutes its waves, sobriety are its banks. I try to take dips in this river by annihilating ego; that is real life.

Q. What are the signs of a liberated soul?

Ans. Liberated souls are those who have drunk at the fount of Godhead. Those who are involved in minor miracles like anima, garima and so on, are not siddhas. Those who have destroyed their self and realised the Universal Self, are great souls. They do not even accept or bother about bhakti and mukti. It is said in Narada Pancharatra; Siddhis, like salvation and Bhakti are always at the service of Mahadevi Hari Bhakti.

Q. The other day you had mentioned three ways of devotion; kindly repeat.

Ans. I do not now remember all that. The first thing is; there is God, have faith in Him. Then the following three beliefs must be strengthened;

Tasya Vahiye—I am His

Tavey Vahiye—I am Thine

Twamey Vahiye—I am Thou

Q. Those sadhakas who adopt a posture of helplessness, do they not suffer from inferiority complex.

Ans. There is a difference between helplessness (deen) and insignificance (heen). A worldly man sacrifices his self-respect and begs of favours that generates inferiority complex. When a person is assured of his helplessness and surrenders himself to All Powerful, then he gains strength.

All persons can do sadhana. If a person conducts his sadhana on wrong lines under the plea he cannot follow the right path, then he is not honest to himself. Most revered Sri Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj used to put it bluntly; A person who does nothing and who does everything will both reach the same goal. Rather, a person who does nothing attains siddhi earlier than the other one. A person who cannot do things rightly is capable. Both attain similar siddhis. But a person who treads the wrong path, only gets sorrow.

Q. *Doing everything and doing nothing—how can both mean the same?*

Ans. When a helpless man knows his incapability, he calls to God. God answers to his entreaties. But when a man thinks himself capable, he becomes unaware of his helplessness. That is the illusion. He becomes proud of his capabilities that brings about his downfall and he drifts farther and farther away from the Almighty God. But if he is convinced of his helplessness he gets everything. When Gajendra and Draupadi realised their utter helplessness. God rushed to their rescue.

Q. *How man can rise above the world?*

Ans. My experience so far is that it is very difficult to rise above the world. But in the light of the assurance given in Gita by the Lord Himself, it should not be considered impossible. Once a person surrenders to God, even the most difficult tasks become easy. Your questions have been answered by the Lord in the 14th verse in the seventh chapter of Gita.

Q. *What is most precious in the world?*

Ans. Time in my view is the most precious commodity because even a second lost cannot be reclaimed at any cost. Someone has said that a person who respects time can win over death.

Q. *Some Hindus are against sleeping with the head towards North. Is it a blind faith?*

Ans. I do not think so, there is a scientific explanation for this. While sleeping with head towards North, that is in the direction of Pole Star, the person loses his vital powers and there is danger of his falling sick. If he persists, his life span is shortened.

Q. *If that is so then why at the time of death his head is kept pointing to North?*

Ans. It is done so that he is attracted toward Oordha Loka and goes to the higher plane.

Q. *Once you talked about five muktis, what are those?*

Ans. Salokya, Sarishti, Sameepya, Sarupya and Sayujya, respectively standing for achieving worldly powers like God, name and fame like God, status like God, image like God and oneness with God.

Q. *A question was put about a quartet of Sri Ramacharitmanas and replied by Swamiji Maharaj purporting to point out that according to Sant Tulsidas, devotion to God is as easy and enjoyable as taking a morsel to the mouth and eating it. Food gives satisfaction and strength and removes hunger. So devotion to God gives contentment and confidence and removes attachment to the world. In the path of jnana, one has to renounce everything. In bhakti, a devotee can progress on the spiritual path without giving up attachment—but the attachment should be to God alone. Once you completely surrender to God, He looks after all your needs.*

Q. *What is the central point of a man's approach to life?*

Ans. Everybody wants his own good which on account of ignorance turns into his ill. The centre of man's objectives should be good of others. A person who does not have good of others at heart and his conduct is not according to the precepts of Dharma, he does not deserve to be called a man. Only a man of good conduct will work for the good of others. It is said in Uttar Kand of Manas: parhit saris dharmanahim bhain.

Q. *How dharma is turned into adharma?*

Ans. Due to attachment and jealousy. On account of ignorance man is all along busy in strengthening his ego, and associates that ego with the body. But self, the soul, is different from the body. Becoming egoistic he is involved in the cycle of mine, thine, giving rise to attachment and jealousy, and he is unable to distinguish between dharma and adharma. (Another question involving the correct interpretation of a quartet from Sri Ramcharitmanas)

Q. *A dream should be considered real or unreal?*

Ans. Dreams do have an interpretation and persons, places and events appear to be real in dream-state. Once a gentleman presented a beautiful watch to me—in dream. On waking up, the watch wasn't there. Now you tell me whether a dream is real or unreal.

Q. *What is purity?*

Ans. Purity is getting away from all that is extraneous to your real nature. And for a devotee which takes him away from God.

Q. *What are the functions of consciousness?*

Ans. Like fire:

It illumines objects at a distance.

BUT

It destroys them on contact.

Q. *How to stimulate higher reason?*

Ans. If the out-going tendency of the intellect is curbed and the inward-going tendency is encouraged, the lower reason itself is transformed into the Higher Reason.

!!!End!!!