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Arrival of Rama – Shabari honours Rama –

Rama blesses Shabari – Shabari attains the holy Realm



Taking up the route through the forest to the Pampa lake as shown by Kabandha, both the sons Rama and Lakshmana of Dasaratha (the foremost among men) proceeded towards the west. Gazing on the numerous trees collected in the form of a cluster on the mountain rocks and laden with flowers and fruits and dripping honey, the two princes, Sri Rama and Lakshmana, marched on their mission to see Sugriva. Staying for the night on a plateau, those two scions of Raghu, the delights of Raghu's race, for their part approached the western edge of Pampa. Having reached the western brink of the lotus pond, Pampa, the two princes then sighted the lovely hermitage of Shabari on the aforesaid brink (of Pampa).

Reaching that most delightful hermitage hemmed in with many trees, and looking all-round, the two princes met Shabari. Rising respectfully with joined palms on seeing the two princes, Shabari (who had attained perfection through Yoga or abstraction) for her part presently clasped the feet of Sri Rama and the prudent Lakshmana and offered (to her honoured guests) with due ceremony water to bathe their feet and rinse their mouth with and every (other) form of hospitality, Sri Rama then spoke (as follows) to the aforesaid ascetic woman, who was intent upon virtue :- "Have all impediments (to the practice of your austerities) been thoroughly overcome by you? Is your asceticism (steadily) growing? Has anger been fully controlled by you as well as your diet, O lady with asceticism (alone) as your wealth? Are (all) your religious vows completely observed and has satisfaction come to your mind? Has your attendance on your preceptor borne fruit, O lady of pleasing speech?"

Stationed before Sri Rama when interrogated (as above) by the latter, the aforesaid ascetic woman, the aged Shabari, who had not only attained perfection (through Yoga), but was esteemed by perfect souls, submitted (as follows) to Sri Rama :- "Today has the fruition of my austerities been attained by me through your blessed sight. Today my birth (as a human being) has borne fruit and my elders have been duly adored. My asceticism (too) has become fruitful today and (the highest) heaven too will definitely fall to my lot, now that you, the foremost of Gods, have been worshipped by me, O Rama, the flower of humanity. Hallowed by your gracious look, O gentle one, bestowing honour on other, I shall by your grace ascend to realms knowing no decay, O subduer of foes !

When you reached Chitrakuta, the sages whom I served (viz., the pupils of Sage Matanga) ascended to heaven from this place in aerial cars of incomparable splendour.

Nay, I was reassured (in the following words) by those eminent and highly blessed seers of Vedic Mantras, who knew what is right :- 'Sri Rama will visit this highly sacrosanct hermitage of yours. Alongwith Lakshmana (son of Sumitra) he should be hospitably received by you as a guest. Having seen him (before casting off your body) you will ascend to realms that know no decay.' I was reassured by those highly blessed souls in these words on that occasion, O jewel among men ! Produce of the forest of every description growing on the brink of Pampa has, therefore, been gathered by me for you, O tiger among men, the flower of humanity !" Spoken to as aforesaid by Shabari, the said Sri Rama (a scion of Raghu), whose mind was set on virtue, lovingly spoke as follows to Shabari, who had been eternally admitted into the portals of divine wisdom :- "If you deem fit, I wish to perceive with my own eyes the glory of your high-souled preceptors, heard of (by me) in its true character from the demon (Kabandha)." Hearing these words issued from the lips of Sri Rama, Shabari for her part showed both the brothers round that vast forest, saying :- "Behold the forest dark as a rainy cloud and thronged with beasts and birds and widely known by the name of Matangavana only, O joy of the House of Raghu !"

She said, "Here the aforesaid preceptors of mine, who had purified the soul by meditating on God, sacrificed their body consecrated by repeating the holy text (of Gayatri) while uttering the Mantra which are recited at the time of pouring oblations into the sacred fire, O prince endowed with great splendour ! This is the altar known by the name of Pratyaksthali, where the aforesaid Risis highly adored by me, offered worship with flowers to the deities with their hands shaking due to exhaustion (caused by old age coupled with austerity of life).

See how the altar retains its matchless effulgence even to this day, illumining all the quarters by its splendour through the power of their asceticism, O flower of Raghu's race ! Behold (all) the seven oceans (encircling the earth) drawn in a collective form (to this spot) by the (very) thought of those sages when they had grown feeble due to exhaustion occasioned by fasting and were (consequently) unable to undertake a journey (to the seven oceans). The barks of trees spread by them on the trees in this region after they had finished their ablutions have not dried up till today, O delight of the Raghus ! The garlands which were actually made by them with flowers interspersed with blue water-lilies while going through rites undertaken to propitiate the Gods have not really faded till now. The whole of this forest has been seen and what was worth hearing (about it) has been heard by you. I, therefore wish that duly permitted by you, I, may cast off this body. I long to approach those ascetics of purified mind to whom this hermitage belongs and whose servant I was."

Hearing the most pious submission (of Shabari), Sri Rama (a scion of Raghu) for his part together with Lakshmana experienced incomparable exultation and said, "Wonderful !" Sri Rama then replied to the said Shabari of austere vows, "I have been (duly) honoured by you, O blessed lady ! (Now) depart happily at will." Casting herself into the fire when spoken to as aforesaid and granted leave by Sri Rama, Shabari, who wore matted locks on her head and was clad in the bark of trees and black deerskin (before she leapt into the fire), rose to (the highest) heaven alone, looking as she did like a blazing fire : so the tradition goes. Adorned with celestial jewels and celestial garlands daubed with a heavenly sandal-paste and clad in heavenly raiment, she wore a pleasing aspect in that (ethereal) form, illumining that region like a streak of lightning flashing from a cloud. Through deep concentration of mind Shabari attained that holy realm where those eminent Risis, whose mind was set on virtue, enjoyed life.

Bayjabai's Austere Devotion & Sai Baba's life-long Remembrance



In the beginning, Sai Baba was well-known amongst the people as the mad *fakir*. The One Who filled His stomach by begging for food, how could He have any grandeur ?

But the *Fakir* was generous by nature. Never expecting anything in return and loving, outwardly He looked wavering but was inwardly steadfast. His behaviour was impossible to understand.

In such an ordinary (mean) village, there were some fortunate people who were kind by nature and who regarded Him as a Saint.

Tatya Kote's mother, whose name was Bayjabai, would put some *bhakris* in a basket and carry it on her head and go into the woods in the afternoon.

She would walk for miles, searching in the woods for the mad *fakir*, trampling upon the thick foliage and bow down to His feet on finding Him.

How can one describe the strength of her devotion ! Dry or curried vegetables and *bhakri* she fed Baba with her hands, in the woods, in the noon or late afternoon.

This austere devotion of hers was also not forgotten by Baba during His lifetime. Keeping the past in mind He blessed her son with good fortune. Both the husband and wife had great faith in the *Fakir* indeed. The *Fakir* only was their God; God lives in the faith of the devotee, doesn't He ?

The *Fakir* would be in meditation. Then Bayjabai would lay out the leaf (which served as a plate), serve the food from the basket, and make efforts to feed Him.

"*Fakiri* is true kingship. *Fakiri* alone will last forever. Look how evanescent is wealth." Baba said this always !

Later on Baba abandoned the woods. He began to stay in the village and accepted food in the *Masjid*. Thus He put an end to the mother's troubles.

Miraculous Effect of Ramanama

Due to the majesty of *Ramanama* stone-rocks started floating on the waters; on the strength of *Ramanama* the monkey army succeeded in subduing the mighty Ravana; depending on *Ramanama*, Hanuman lifted the mountain and Sita could protect and maintain her famine chastity even after living for several months in the palace of Ravana only due to the majesty of *Ramanama*. Bharata could hold his life for the long fourteen years because from his throat no sound other than *Ramanama* came out. This is why Tulasidasa has rightly asserted and prescribed to mutter *Ramanama* in order to wash away the fifth of Kaliyuga.

It is my conviction that the pronunciation of *Ramanama* is of uncommon import. If somebody really feels that the God is ever present in his heart in that case I feel that muttering *Ramanama* is not necessary for Him. But I am not sure if there is any such person on the earth. On the contrary my experiences indicate that there is something very special, very uncommon in muttering *Ramanama* audibly. Why is it so or how is it so – it is quite unnecessary to know.

ourtesy - Kalyan





Hanuman holds a unique position among the deities worshipped by the Hindu devotees and the most important character in the Ramayana. Scholars meditate on him and attain great scholarship. Hanuman is a *Chiranjivi* who will continue to the end of this *Kalpa* and afterwards become the next Brahma, the creator among the Trinities.

Hanuman is a *Brahmachari* (a celibate) all through his life. He is worshipped as an *Ista Devata* by all those who aspire for a life of perfect purity, continence and self-control. According to Swami Chidananda "Personalities of Hanuman and Divine Sita give unto us the secret key to success in this life of purity. Ceaseless service and total dedication sum up this spiritual secret."

He is one of the foremost of the devotees of Rama "born to save *Dharma*". He has utilized all the three paths, viz. *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Yoga* – These three 'cultures of *Sadhana*' the instrumental trio (*Karanatrayam*) as his own to the fullest possibility and shone brightly. He is a *Karma Yogi* too. We hence call *Jnana-Bhakti-Karma* as '*Hanuman Yoga*'.

Even at first sight, Rama and Lakshmana attracted him as though by a spiritual gravitation, as it were. He finds an aura of radiation around them. He asks :

"Are You the prime cause of this world and the Lord of all the spheres, manifested in human form to bridge the ocean of mundane existence and to relieve the burden of the Earth." Kamban puts it in a pictorial manner :

"How even tigers and pards, he thought within himself, look on them with tenderness, even as they would on their own cubs ! Peacocks and other birds fly in groups and shade the delicate bodies of these strangers from the hot rays of the sun with their great wings; clouds cool them with their little rain drops, marching over them as they walk on. The burning stones on their way became soft and cool as honey-dripping flowers to their feet at every step. Even trees and plants worship them, bending down their heads when they came near. Are they *Dharma's* self ? Are those beings Gods indeed who wipe off the sorrows of living kind and give them salvation, burning away the inevitable fruits of their deeds ? My very bones melt, the flood-gates of love are opened within my heart, and I see no limit or end to the affection that surges me towards them". (*Kamba Ramayana* by V. V. Aiyar, page 179)

Rama and Lakshmana then disclosed their identity to him and they in turn requested him to give details about him.

Now Hanuman recognised his Lord and falling to the ground clasped Rama's feet and prayed that he may be excused for not recognising his soul's master who is no other than the Lord Himself. He says : "Although my Lord I have many faults, let not the servant be cast into oblivion by the master.

The *Jiva* (ego), O Lord, is deluded by Your *May* and can be redeemed only by Your Grace. On top of it, I swear by the Hero of Raghu's line, I know neither adoration nor any other means (of pleasing You). A servant depends on the master and a child its mother and both remain free from anxiety; for a master needs must take care of his servant." So saying he clutched at Rama's feet, overwhelmed with love. The Lord of Raghus soothed him and said : "You are twice dear to Me as Lakshmana. Everyone says that I look upon all with the same eye; but a devotee is particularly dear to Me because he too depends on none but Me." (*Ramacharitamansa*, Gorakhpur Edn.)

This statement of Sri Rama, is interpreted by scholars, as to imply that Rama and Lakshmana were one in each other. Rama was Lakshmana and Lakshmana was Rama. Hanuman, therefore, was dear to Rama than Himself. Lakshmana served only Rama, whereas Hanuman served them both and hence 'twice dear'. Hanuman would not allow the noble brothers to climb the mountain as he thought the hard mountain may hurt their delicate feet and, therefore, he carried them on his shoulders. This episode shows the nature of *Ananya Bhakti*. Such a *Bhakta* is the true *Bhakta* - a devotee servant - who took the Lord alone his master.

The Importance of Ramanama - Dr. M. Narasimhachary



The name '*Rama*' is quite unique. Its potency and sanctity are matters of personal experience. Great sages of our land enjoyed its sweetness and sang eloquently about it. Valmiki, the *Adikavi* of Sanskrit literature, who wrote the *Ramayana*, according to ancient accounts, was a highway robber to start with. The seven great sages headed by Narada were once waylaid by him and they took pity on him, saw his future emanation as a great saint-poet and gave him the name '*Rama*' in the reverse fashion, i.e., '*Ma-na*'. Valmiki (whose earlier name was Ratnakara) chanted the *Mantra* that way, and became a great saint. Later on, he was destined to compose the immortal Epic, the *Ramayana*, at the behest of Brahma

the Creator God. Now let us have a peep into the efficacy and potency of this wonderful name '*Rama*' which keeps even now, large concourses of people *spellbound* when it is just chanted. Let us also at the outset keep in mind the fact that the name '*Rama*' refers to the son of Dasaratha but not either to Parashurama or to Balarama.

The name '*Rama*' is sweet and is composed of sweet-sounding letters, '*Ra*' and '*Ma*'. The semi-vowel '*Ra*' and the labial '*ma*' make a sweet combination. Whenever Valmiki uses the name '*Rama*', he uses the epithets '*abhirama*' (beautiful) and/or '*Madhura*' (sweet). How can his experience be otherwise ? In fact one of the verses of the *Rama-raksa Stotra* reads as follows :

(I bow down to Valmiki the cuckoo-bird, which, perched on the branch of the tree of poesy, sings sweetly the sweet-lettered name '*Rama*'.)

Valmiki refers to the sweetness of the *Rama-nama* at several places in the *Ramayana*, thus –

(Visvamitra uttered the sweet word 'Rama'.)

(The sages uttered the sweet name *Rama* repeatedly.)

Now let us come to the definition of the term 'Rama'. It is derived from the verbal root 'Ramu' (Ist conjugation, *Atmanepadi* verb), meaning, one who delights oneself (...*Ramate iti Ramah*). In other words, Rama is one who is always cheerful and blissful. Only the Supreme Being can be blissful and cheerful. (Cf. the *Upanisad* "Raso vai sah")

The second derivation is "one who makes others also happy" (*Ramayati iti Ramah*). This again is in conformity with the *sruti*-text quoted above, which says (He indeed makes all happy).

The third derivation is, "He in whom all the sages delight" (*Ramante yoginah asmin*).

Valmiki himself gives the etymology of this word in the following verse –

(Rama, who is the foremost among those who delight others, spoke to Lakshmana in the following manner.)

Saint Tyagaraja, who was a great *Ramabhakta*, explains the secret power of this name in one of his immortal songs thus –

"shivamantramunaku ma-jivamu; Madhava-mantramunaku Ra-jivamu"

('Ma' is the very life of the *Panchaksari Mantra*, dear to the heart of Lord Shiva. 'Ra' is the very life of the *Astaksari Mantra*, dear to Lord Madhava (i.e., Vishnu).

In other words, if we remove the letter 'Ma' from the *Panchaksari*, it becomes lifeless : it then reads thus – *Na Shivaya* (meaning, there is no welfare). If we take away the letter 'Ra' from the *Astaksari*, it also becomes lifeless, reading thus – *Om Namō Na-Yanayo* (meaning, there is no way to go !). Seeing the potency of these two *Bijaksaras* (seed-letters), the great sage Vasishtha joined them thus 'Ra'+ 'Ma', and gave it as the name to the first son of Dasaratha. So, according to Saint Tyagaraja, Rama contains within himself, the powers of both Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva.

Kalidasa, the Prince of Indian poets, explains in the *Raghuvamsa* (X. 67) that the name Rama was given by Vasishtha to the first boy of Dasaratha, being attracted by his wonderful charm and the name became the first and foremost auspicious symbol for the welfare of the entire universe !

Now we come thus to another dimension of the import of the word 'Rama'. It not only means one who is himself cheerful, and makes others also cheerful (by his wonderful sweet name) but also one who is extremely handsome.

Again, we have to go to Valmiki, for first hand accounts of Rama's personal charm. He says in the *Sundarakanda*, thus –

(Rama the lotus-eyed one, charms all the living beings by his handsome form.) Sage Satananda, the chief priest of King Janaka, was struck with wonder and admiration when he saw Rama for the first time :

Whenever the word Rama is used by Valmiki, he invariably adds the epithet 'kamalapatrasah' or 'rajivalochanah', or a synonym of it.

See some of the phrases used by Valmiki in relation to Rama :

"*Ramo lokabhiramo'yam*" (Ayodhya, 2.44) (This one, Rama, is bewitching the world by his personal charisma).

(Rama with a beautiful face like the Moon, is extremely handsome to look at. He steals the eyes and hearts of the onlookers through his wonderful form and qualities like magnanimity.)

(He who does not see Rama, and he, whom Rama does not see, become ridiculed in the eyes of the people. Even his own self taunts him.)

In the famous verse wherein Lord Shiva informs Parvati that repeating the name thrice is equal to repeating it a thousand times, we have a clue to this calculation. This is the verse in question :

According to the numerology called 'katapayadi', each letter of the Sanskrit alphabet has a specific numerical value. 'Ra' has the value of 2 and 'Ma', the value of 5. So, saying once 'Rama' means saying it $2 \times 5 = 10$ times. So when we say the name thrice, it becomes $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1000$ fold in potency. Such is the mystery about the name 'Rama'.

That is why, the sage Valmiki says towards the end of the Epic –

(When Rama ruled over the kingdom, people spoke about the exploits of Rama, saying, Rama, Rama, Rama.)

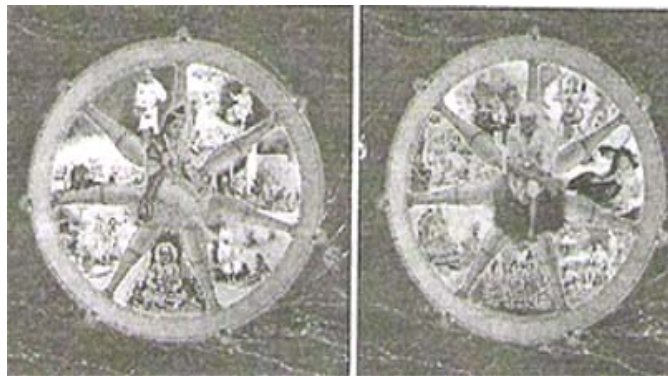
Incidentally it may be noted that in this verse, Valmiki used the word 'Rama' five times, making its power one hundred-thousand-fold :

The *Hanumannataka*, a beautiful drama in Sanskrit, opens with an invocation to the name *Rama* itself.

(The name *Rama* is the abode of all welfare; it can destroy the sins of the *Kaliyuga*. It is the holy of the holiest; it is the food that one can take with him on his onward march to liberation. It is the sole resting place for the words of all great poets. It is the very life of the virtuous. It is the seed for the tree of *Dharma*. May such name bring in all good to you !)

Now, let this also be my humble prayer. May we repeat the sweet and wonderful name *Rama* and derive all happiness here and in the hereafter !

Courtesy - The Kalyan Kalpataru



Karunakara Rama Who protected the Lake at Madurantaka

Ramanavami day is most sacred to the devotees of Sai Baba, as once when devotees pestered Him to tell His birthday He casually said "Let Ramanavami be celebrated as My birthday. Baba showed Himself as Rama to several of His devotees which proves the fact that Baba is Sri Rama.

Once a Doctor who was a Rama Upasaka said that he would not bow to anybody else other than Lord Rama. The Mamlatdar who came along with the doctor went inside the mosque to have Baba's darshan, while the doctor was at a distance from the arati proceedings. Suddenly he changed his mind and fell at the feet of Sai Nath. The mamlatdar was astonished and enquired the doctor why he suddenly changed his mind. The doctor replied that Sai Baba appeared to him as Sri Rama so he ran and bowed to Him. He said that Sai is 'Yoga Sampurna Avatar'.

Baba advised His devotees to do namasmaran. Baba approved any namajapa including 'Sai' namajapa. He instructed Mrs. G. S. Khaparde to repeat the name of Rama. "Always say Raja Ram, Raja Ram. If you do so your life will be fruitful. You will attain peace and infinite good."

Once a Madrasi Bhajan Mela (Party of the Ramadasi Panth) came to Shirdi, on the way to the holy city of Banares, to have darshan of Sai Nath.

The mela did very good bhajan but at the same time all members of the mela except the head of the mela, a lady were avaricious and wanted to get money from Baba. The chief lady of the mela had a great regard and love towards Baba. Hence Baba decided to give darshan to her as her Ishta Daivam Lord Rama. As the noon arati was going on, in the place of Sai Baba she saw her Beloved Deity Lord Rama. She was immensely happy and tears flowed from her eyes. While all the others in the crowd saw only Sai Nath there, the lady alone has sakshatkar of Lord Rama because of her true devotion.

From the above illustrations it is proved that Sai Nath and Sai Rama are one and the same Eternal Supreme. Anybody can pray to this Eternal Brahman in any form or name, He is ever with us to bless us by fulfilling our wishes.

As mentioned above Lord Rama gave darshan to Mr. Colonel Lional Place, the collector of Changlepet. Madurantakam, is a small town about 70 k.m. from Madras city. It is one of the famous Abhimanasthalas of Lord Vishnu. There is a temple here, the Presiding Deity is named as Karunakara Perumal (one full of mercy). He is also called Eari Katha Perumal (one who protected the lake of Madurantakam). There is a separate, shrine for Goddess Sita Devi named as Janakavalli Thayar (Mother Janakavalli). It is a common saying that one who lays his foot on the land of Madurantakam is sure to reach Heaven. This Kshetra is also called 'Vakularanya Kshetram' as it was once full of Vakula trees. About 950 years before Sri Ramanuja, renowned as Ethiraja, the exponent of the doctrine of Visishta Dwaita got his initiation, Vaishnava Diksha or Pancha Samskara Diksha from his Guru Peria Nambi, in this temple under the Vakula tree, the Sthala Vruksha.

An incident which occurred in 1795 at Madurantakam gives ample proof that Lord Rama or Sai Rama's presence is everywhere and His ever watchful eyes are on those who pray to Him and He protects His devotees at critical situations and imminent danger.