

Ramayan week (25th March - 2nd April 2020)



The Ramayana week begins nine days before Raam Navami, the appearance day of Lord Raam. Fasting during this period is considered highly auspicious. Staunch Lord Raam devotees fast for nine days. There are also several devotees who only fast only on the Raam Navami day. Those devotees who undertake fast during this period usually remain on a fruit and milk diet for the entire period. Many devotees read the entire Ramayana during these nine days. During this period several temples and Hindu spiritual associations organize Akhand Path – nonstop recital – of the Valmiki Ramayana and the Shree Raamcharitamanas by Goswami Tulsidas. Another important event during this period is the staging of Raam Lila – stage artists narrate the thrilling and exciting episodes from the epic Ramayana.

So the 9 days the devotee observes a vegetarian fast and read the Ramayana and praise Shree Raam.

Below are free copies of the Ramayana. Please follow these links...

www.swargarohan.org (Sanskrit)

www.valmikiramayan.net (Sanskrit to English)

www.astrojyoti.com/ramacharitamanasindex.htm (Shree Ramacharitamanasa by Tulsidas)

The Ramayana: Summary

The Ramayana is one of the two great Vedic Epics the other being the Mahabharata. The Ramayana tells about life in India thousands of years ago offers models in Dharma. Our Supreme Hero, Shree Raam, lived His whole life by the rules of dharma. When Prince Raam was a young boy, He was the perfect son. Later He was an ideal

husband to His faithful wife, Sitadevi, and a responsible ruler of Ayodhyadham. The original Ramayana was a 24,000 couples long epic poem attributed to Valmiki Rishi. From childhood most of us Hindus learn the characters and incidents of the Ramayan and furnish the ideals and wisdom of common life. The epics help to bind us Hindus, transcending caste, distance and language. Two important Hindu days are celebrated events in the Ramayana. Dussehra, a fourteenday festival in October, commemorates the siege of Lanka and Lord Raam's victory over Ravana and Diwali, the October-November festival of Lights, celebrates Shree Raam and Mother Sita's return home to Their kingdom of Ayodhya.

Many lessons in the Ramayana focus on how us Hindus are to perform out dharma. Encourage students to pick out examples of characters in the epic who were faithful to their dharma and those who violated their dharma.

Dasaratha King of Ayodhya (capital of Kosala), whose eldest son was Lord Raam. Dasaratha had three wives and four sons – Lord Raam, Lord Bharata, and the twins Shree Lakshman and Shree Satrughna.

Shree Raam Dasaratha's firstborn son, and the upholder of Dharma (correct conduct and duty). Shree Raam, along with Sitadevi, have served as role models for thousands of generations in India and elsewhere.



Sita – Lord Raam's wife, the adopted daughter of King Janaka. Sita was found in the furrows of a sacred field, and was regarded by the people of Janaka's kingdom as a blessed child.

Bharata – Lord Raam's brother by Queen Kaikeyi. When Bharata learned of His mother's scheme to banish Lord Raam and place Him on the throne, He put Lord Raam's sandals on the throne and ruled Ayodhya in His name.

Hanuman A leader of the Vanara (monkey) tribe allied with Lord Raam against Ravana. Shree Hanumanji's devotion to Lord Raam, and his supernatural feats in the battle to recapture Sita, has made him one of the most popular characters in the Ramayana.

Ravana The 10headed demon king of Lanka who abducted Sita-devi.

Kaushlaya Dasaratha's first wife, and the mother of Lord Raam.

Lakshman – Lord Raam's younger brother by Dasaratha's third wife, Sumitra. When Shree Raam and Sitadevi were exiled to the forest, Lakshman followed in order to serve them.

The pastimes of Lord Raam are divided into four parts:

1. Early life of Lord Raam
2. Shree Raam's exile
3. Abduction of Sitadevi and
4. Slaying of Ravana, the abductor of Sitadevi, and Lord Raam's coronation.

Dasharatha was the king of Kosala, an ancient kingdom that was located in present day Uttar Pradesh. Ayodhya was its capital. Dasharatha was loved by one and all. His subjects were happy and his kingdom was prosperous. Even though Dasharatha had everything that he desired, he was very sad at heart; he had no children. During the same time, there lived a powerful Rakshasa king in the island of Lanka, located just south of India. He was called Ravana. His tyranny knew no bounds, his subjects disturbed the prayers of holy men.

The childless Dasharatha was advised by his family priest Vasishtha to perform a fire sacrifice ceremony to seek the blessings of God for children. Lord Krishna decided to manifest Himself as the eldest son of Dasharatha in order to kill Ravana. While performing the fire worship ceremony, a majestic figure rose from the sacrificial fire and handed to Dasharatha a bowl of rice pudding, saying, "God is pleased with you and has asked you to distribute this rice pudding (payasa) to your wives they will soon bear your children." The king received the gift joyfully and distributed the payasa to his three queens, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. Kausalya, the eldest queen, gave birth to the eldest son Rama. Bharata, the second son was born to Kaikeyi and Sumitra gave birth to the twins Lakshman and Shatrughna. Lord Rama's birthday is celebrated now as Ramanavami.



The four princes grew up to be tall, strong, handsome, and brave. Of the four brothers, Lord Raam was closest to Lakshman and Bharata to Shatrughna. One day, the revered sage Vishwamitra came to Ayodhya. Dasharatha was overjoyed and immediately got down from his throne and received him with great honour.

Vishwamitra blessed Dasharatha and asked him to send Lord Raam to kill the Rakshasas who were disturbing his fire sacrifice. Lord Raam was then only fifteen years old. Dasharatha was taken aback. Raam was too young for the job. He offered himself, but sage Vishwamitra knew better. The sage insisted upon his request and assured the king that Lord Raam would be safe in his hands. Ultimately, Dasharatha agreed to send Lord Raam, along with Lakshman, to go with Vishwamitra. Dasharatha strictly ordered his sons to obey Rishi Vishwamitra and fulfil all his wishes. The parents blessed the two young princes. They then departed with the sage (Rishi).

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

Vishwamitra then proceeded, with Lord Raam and Lakshman, towards his ashram. When they started the fire sacrifice, Lord Raam and Lakshman were guarding the place. Suddenly Maricha, Tadaka's ferocious son, arrived with his followers. Lord Raam silently prayed and discharged the newly acquired divine weapons at Maricha.

Maricha was thrown many, many miles away into the sea. All other demons were slain by Lord Raam and Lakshman. Vishwamitra completed the sacrifice and the sages rejoiced and blessed the princes.

The next morning, Vishwamitra, Lord Raam, and Lakshman headed towards the city of Mithila, the capital of the kingdom of Janaka. King Janaka invited Vishwamitra to attend the great fire sacrifice ceremony that he had arranged. Vishwamitra had something in mind to get Lord Raam married to the lovely daughter of Janaka. Janaka Maharaja was a saintly king. He received a bow from Lord Shiva. It was strong and heavy. He wanted his beautiful daughter Sita to marry the bravest and strongest prince in the country. So he had vowed that he would give Sita in marriage only to the one who could string that great bow of Lord Shiva. Many had tried before. None could even move the bow, let alone string it.

When Vishwamitra arrived with Lord Raam and Lakshman at the court, King Janaka received them with great respect. Vishwamitra introduced Lord Raam and Lakshman to Janaka and requested that he show the bow of Shiva to Lord Raam so that he could try to string it. Janaka looked at the young prince and assented doubtfully. The bow was stored in an iron box mounted on an eightwheeled chariot. Janaka ordered his men to bring the bow and place it in the middle of a big hall filled with many dignitaries. Lord Raam then stood up in all humility, picked up the bow with ease, and got ready for the stringing. He placed one end of the bow against his toe, put forth His might, and bent the bow to string it when to everyone's surprise the bow snapped in two! Sita was relieved. She had liked Lord Raam right at the first sight.

Dasharatha was immediately informed. He gladly gave his consent to the marriage and came to Mithila with his retinue. Janaka arranged for a grand wedding. Lord Raam and Sitadevi were married. At the same time, the three other brothers were also provided with brides. Lakshman married Sita's sister Urmila. Bharata and Shatrughna married Sita's cousins Mandavi and Shrutakirti. After the wedding, Vishwamitra blessed them all and left for the Himalayas to meditate. Dasharatha returned to Ayodhya with his sons and their new brides. People celebrated the marriage with great pomp and show.

For the next twelve years Lord Raam and Sita lived happily in Ayodhya. Lord Raam was loved by all. He was a joy to his father, Dasharatha, whose heart nearly burst with pride when he beheld his son. As Dasharatha was growing older, he summoned his ministers seeking their opinion about crowning Lord Raam as prince of Ayodhya. They unanimously welcomed the suggestion. Then Dasharatha announced the decision and gave orders for the coronation of Lord Raam. During this time, Bharata and his favourite brother, Shatrughna, had gone to see their maternal grandfather and were absent from Ayodhya.

Kaikeyi, Bharata's mother, was in the palace rejoicing with the other queens, sharing the happy news of Lord Raam's coronation. She loved Lord Raam as her own son; but her wicked maid, Manthara, was unhappy. Manthara wanted Bharata to be the king so she devised a heinous plan to thwart Lord Raam's coronation. As soon as the plan was set firmly in her mind, she rushed to Kaikeyi to tell her. "What a fool you are!" Manthara said to Kaikeyi, "The king has always loved you more than the other queens. But the moment Lord Raam is crowned, Kausalya will become all powerful and she will make you her slave." Manthara repeatedly gave her poisoned suggestions, clouding Kaikeyi's mind and heart with suspicion and doubt. Kaikeyi, confused and distraught, finally agreed to Manthara's plan. "But what can I do to change it?" asked Kaikeyi with a puzzled mind. Manthara was clever enough to chalk out her plan all the way. She had been waiting for Kaikeyi to ask her advice.

"You may recall that long ago when Dasharatha was badly wounded in the battle field, while fighting with the Asuras, you saved Dasharatha's life by swiftly driving his chariot to safety? At that time Dasharatha offered you two boons. You said you would ask for the boons some other time." Kaikeyi readily remembered. Manthara continued, "Now the time has come to demand those boons. Ask Dasharatha for your first boon to make Bharata the king of Kosal and for the second boon to banish Lord Raam to the forest for fourteen years." Kaikeyi was a noblehearted queen, now trapped by Manthara. She agreed to do what Manthara said. Both of them knew that Dasharatha would never fall back on his words.

The night before the coronation, Dasharatha came to Kaikeyi to share his happiness at seeing Lord Raam the crown prince of Kosala. But Kaikeyi was missing from her apartment. She was in her "anger room". When Dasharatha came to her anger room to inquire, he found his beloved queen lying on the floor with her hair loose and her ornaments cast away. Dasharatha gently took Kaikeyi's head on his lap and asked in a caressing voice, "What is wrong?" But Kaikeyi angrily shook herself free and firmly said; "You have promised me two boons. Now please grant me these two boons. Let Bharata be crowned as king and not Raam. Raam should be banished from the kingdom for fourteen years." Dasharatha could hardly believe his ears. Unable to bear what he had heard, he fell down unconscious. When he returned to his senses, he cried out in helpless anger, "What has come over you? What harm has Raam done to you? Please ask for anything else but these." Kaikeyi stood firm and refused to yield. Dasharatha fainted and lay on the floor the rest of the night. The next morning, Sumantra, the minister, came to inform Dasharatha that all the preparations for the coronation were ready. But Dasharatha was not in a position to speak to anyone. Kaikeyi asked Sumantra to call Raam immediately. When Lord Raam arrived, Dasharatha was sobbing uncontrollably and could only utter "Raam! Raam!"

Lord Raam was alarmed and looked at Kaikeyi with surprise, "Did I do anything wrong, mother? I have never seen my father like this before." "He has something unpleasant to tell you, Raam," replied Kaikeyi. "Long ago your father had offered

me two boons. Now I demand it." Then Kaikeyi told Raam about the boons. "Is that all mother?" asked Raam with a smile. "Please take it that your boons are granted. Call for Bharata. I shall start for the forest today." Lord Raam did his pranams to His revered father, Dasharatha, and to his stepmother, Kaikeyi, and then left the room. Dasharatha was in shock. He painfully asked his attendants to move him to Kaushalya's apartment. He was waiting for death to ease his pain. The news of Lord Raam's exile spread like a fire. Lakshman was furious with His father's decision. Lord Raam simply replied, "Is it worthwhile to sacrifice Your principle for the sake of this small kingdom?"

Tears sprang from Lakshman's eyes and he said in a low voice, "If you must go to the forest, take me along with You." Lord Raam agreed. Then Lord Raam proceeded to Sita and asked Her to stay behind. "Look after My mother, Kausalya, in My absence." Sita begged, "Have pity on Me. A wife's position is always beside her husband. Don't leave Me behind. I'll die without You." At last Lord Raam permitted Sita to follow Him. Urmila, Lakshman's wife, also wanted to go with Lakshman to the forest. But Lakshman explained to her the life that he plans to lead for the protection of Lord Raam and Sita. "If you accompany me, Urmila," Lakshman said, "I may not be able to fulfil My duties. Please take care of our grieved family members." So Urmila stayed behind on Lakshman's request. By that evening Lord Raam, Sita and Lakshman left Ayodhya on a chariot driven by Sumatra. They were dressed like mendicants (Rishis). The people of Ayodhya ran behind the chariot crying loudly for Lord Raam. By nightfall they all reached the bank of the river, Tamasa. Early the next morning Lord Raam awoke and told Sumantra, "The people of Ayodhya love Us very much but We have to be on Our own. We must lead the life of a hermit, as I promised. Let Us continue Our journey before they wake up."

So, Lord Raam, Lakshman and Sita, driven by Sumantra, continued their journey alone. After travelling the entire day they reached the bank of the Ganges and decided to spend the night under a tree near a village of hunters. The chieftain, Guha, came and offered them all the comforts of his house. But Lord Raam replied, "Thank you Guha, I appreciate your offer as a good friend but by accepting your hospitality I will break my promise. Please allow us to sleep here as the hermits do." Next morning the three, Lord Raam, Lakshman and Sita, said goodbye to Sumantra and Guha and got into a boat to cross the river, Ganges. Lord Raam addressed Sumantra, "Return to Ayodhya and console My father." By the time Sumantra reached Ayodhya Dasharatha was dead, crying until his last breath, "Raam, Raam, Raam!" Vasishtha sent a messenger to Bharata asking him to return to Ayodhya without disclosing the details. Bharata immediately returned with Shatrughna. As he entered the city of Ayodhya, he realized that something was terribly wrong. The city was strangely silent. He went straight to his mother, Kaikeyi. She looked pale. Bharat impatiently asked, "Where is father?" He was stunned by the news. Slowly he learned about Raam's exile for fourteen years and Dasharatha's demise with the departure of Lord Raam.

Bharata could not believe that his mother was the cause of the disaster. Kaikeyi tried to make Bharata understand that she did it all for him. But Bharata turned away from her with disgust and said, "Don't you know how much I love Raam? This kingdom is worth nothing in His absence. I am ashamed to call you My mother. You are heartless. You killed My father and banished My beloved brother. I will not have anything to do with you for as long as I live." Then Bharata left for Kaushalya's apartment. Kaikeyi realized the mistake she made. Kaushalya received Bharata with love and affection. Addressing Bharata she said, "Bharata, the kingdom is waiting for you. No one will oppose you for ascending the throne. Now that your father is gone, I would also like to go to the forest and live with my Raam." Bharata could not contain himself any further. He burst into tears and promised Kaushalya to bring Raam back to Ayodhya as quickly as possible. He understood the throne rightfully belonged to Lord Raam. After completing the funeral rites for Dasharatha, Bharata started for Chitrakut where Lord Raam was staying. Bharata halted the army at a respectful distance and walked alone to meet Lord Raam. Seeing Lord Raam, Bharata fell at His feet begging forgiveness for all the wrong doings.

When Lord Raam asked, "How is father?" Bharata began to cry and broke the sad news; "Our father has left for the spiritual world. At the time of his death, he constantly took Your name and never recovered from the shock of Your departure." Lord Raam collapsed. When He came to senses He went to river, Mandakini, to offer prayers for His departed father. The next day, Bharata asked Lord Raam to return to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. But Lord Raam firmly replied, "I cannot possibly disobey My father. You rule the kingdom and I shall carry out My pledge. I will come back home only after fourteen years." When Bharata realized Lord Raam's firmness in fulfilling His promises, He begged Raam to give Him His sandals. Bharata told Lord Raam the sandals will represent Lord Raam and He would carry out the duties of the kingdom only as Lord Raam's representative. Lord Raam gracefully agreed. Bharata carried the sandals to Ayodhya with great reverence. After reaching the capital, He placed the sandals on the throne and ruled the kingdom in Lord Raam's name. He left the palace and lived like a hermit, as Raam did, counting the days of Lord Raam's return.

When Bharata left, Lord Rama went to visit Sage Agastya. Agastya asked Lord Rama to move to Panchavati on the bank of Godavari River. It was a beautiful place. Lord Rama planned to stay at Panchavati for some time. So, Lakshman quickly put up an elegant hut and they all settled down. Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, lived in Panchavati. Ravana was then the most powerful Asura king who lived in Lanka. One day Surpanakha happened to see Lord Rama and instantly fell in love with him. She requested Lord Rama to be her husband. Lord Rama was amused, and smilingly said, "As you see I am already married. You can request Lakshman. He is young, handsome and is alone without his wife." Surpanakha took Lord Rama's word seriously and approached Lakshman. Lakshman said, "I am Rama's servant. You should marry My master and not Me, the servant." Surpanakha got furious with the

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

Surpanakha was terror stricken. She immediately flew to Lanka to seek her brother Ravana's protection. Ravana was outraged to see her sister mutilated. Surpanakha described all that happened. Ravana was interested when he heard that Sita is the most beautiful woman in the world, Ravana decided to abduct Sita. Lord Rama loved Sita very much and could not live without Her. Ravana made a plan and went to see Maricha. Maricha had the power of changing himself into any form he wanted along with the appropriate voice imitation. But Maricha was afraid of Lord Rama. He still could not get over the experience he had when Lord Rama shot an arrow that hurled him far into the sea. This happened in Vashishtha's hermitage. Maricha tried to persuade Ravana to stay away from Lord Rama but Ravana was determined. "Maricha!" shouted Ravana, "You have only two choices, help me to carry out my plan or prepare for death." Maricha preferred to die in Lord Rama's hand than be killed by Ravana. So he agreed to help Ravana in the abduction of Sita. Maricha took the form of a beautiful golden deer and began to graze near Lord Rama's cottage in Panchavati. Sita was attracted towards the golden deer and requested Lord Rama to get the golden deer for Her. Lakshman warned that the golden deer may be a demon in disguise. By then Lord Rama already started to chase the deer. He hurriedly instructed Lakshman to look after Sita and ran after the deer. Very soon Lord Rama realized that the deer is not a real one. He shot an arrow which hit the deer and Maricha was exposed.

Before dying, Maricha imitated Lord Raam's voice and shouted, "Oh Lakshman! Oh Sita,! Help! Help!" Sita heard the voice and asked Lakshman to run and rescue Lord Rama. Lakshman was hesitant. He was confident that Lord Rama is invincible and the voice was only a fake. He tried to convince Sita but she insisted. Finally Lakshman agreed. Before His departure, He drew a magic circle, with the tip of His arrow (called the Lakshman Rekha), around the cottage and asked her not to cross the line. "As long as you stay within the circle you will be safe with the grace of God" said Lakshman and hurriedly left in search of Lord Rama. From his hiding place Ravana was watching all that was happening. He was glad that his trick worked. As soon as he found Sita alone, he disguised himself as a hermit and came near Sita's cottage. He stood beyond the protection line of Lakshman, and asked for alms (bhiksha). Sita came out with a bowl full of rice to offer to the holy man, while staying within the protection line drawn by Lakshman. The hermit asked her to come near and offer. Sita was unwilling to cross the line when Ravana pretended to leave the place without alms. As Sita did not want to annoy the sage, she crossed the line to offer the alms. Ravana did not lose the opportunity. He quickly pounced on Sita and seized her

hands, declaring, "I am Ravana, the king of Lanka. Come with me and be my queen." Very soon Ravana's chariot left the ground and flew over the clouds on way to Lanka. Lord Rama felt distressed when he saw Lakshman. "Why did you leave Sita alone? The golden deer was Maricha in disguise. "

Lakshman tried to explain the situation when both the brothers suspected a foul play and ran towards the cottage. The cottage was empty, as they feared. They searched, and called out Her name but all in vain. Finally They were exhausted. Lakshman tried to console Lord Rama as best as He could. Suddenly They heard a cry. They ran towards the source and found a wounded eagle lying at the floor. It was Jatayu, the king of eagles and a friend of Dasharatha. Jatayu narrated with great pain, "I saw Ravana abducting Sita. When I attacked him when he (Ravana) cut my wing and made me helpless. Then he flew towards the south." After saying this, Jatayu died on the lap of Lord Rama. Lord Rama and Lakshman then performed the final rites for Jatayu and thereafter moved towards the south. On their way, Lord Rama and Lakshman met a ferocious demon, called Kabandha. Kabandha attacked Lord Rama and Lakshman. When he was about to devour Them, Lord Rama struck Kabandha with a fatal arrow. Before his death, Kabandha disclosed his identity. He had a beautiful form which was changed by a curse to the form of a monster. Kabandha requested Lord Rama and Lakshman to burn him into ashes and that will bring him back to the old form. He also advised Lord Rama to go to the monkey king Sugriva, who lived in the Rishyamukha mountain, to get help in regaining Sita. On His way to meet Sugriva, Lord Rama visited the hermitage of an old pious woman, Shabari. She was waiting for Lord Rama for a long time before she could give up her body. When Lord Rama and Lakshman made Their appearance, Shabari's dream was fulfilled. She washed Their feet, offered Them the best nuts and fruits that she collected for years. Then she took Lord Rama's blessings and departed for the spiritual world. After a long walk, Lord Rama and Lakshman reached the Rishyamukha mountain to meet Sugriva. Sugriva had a brother Vali, the king of Kishkindha. They were once good friends. This changed when they went to fight with a giant. The giant ran into a cave and Vali followed him, asking Sugriva to wait outside. Sugriva waited for a long time and then returned to the palace in grief, thinking that Vali was killed. He then became the king upon the request of the minister. After sometime, Vali suddenly appeared. He was mad with Sugriva and blamed him to be a cheater. Vali was strong. He drove Sugriva out of his kingdom and took away his wife. Ever since, Sugriva had been living in the Rishyamukha mountain, which was out of bound for Vali because of a Rishi's curse.

On seeing Rama and Lakshman from a distance, and not knowing the purpose of their visit, Sugriva sent his close friend Shree Hanuman to find out their identity. Shree Hanuman, disguised as an ascetic, came to Lord Rama and Lakshman. The brothers told Shree Hanuman of their intention to meet Sugriva because they wanted his help to find Sita. Shree Hanuman was impressed by their courteous

behaviour and removed his garb. Then he carried the princes on his shoulder to Sugriva. There Shree Hanuman introduced the brothers and narrated their story. He then told Sugriva of their intention to come to him. In return, Sugriva told his story and sought help from Lord Rama to kill Vali, otherwise, he could not help even if he wanted to. Lord Rama agreed. Shree Hanuman then kindled a fire to bear witness to the alliance made. In due course, Vali was killed and Sugriva became the king of Kishkindha. Soon after Sugriva took over the kingdom of Vali, he ordered his army to proceed in the search of Sita. Lord Rama specially called Shree Hanuman and gave his ring saying, "If any one finds Sita, it will be you Hanuman. Keep this ring to prove your identity as my messenger. Give it to Sita when you meet her." Shree Hanuman most respectfully tied up the ring to his waist and joined the search party.

As Sita flew, She dropped Her ornaments on the ground. These were traced by the monkey army and it was concluded that Sita was carried southwards. When the monkey (Vanara) army reached the Mahendra Hill, located on the south shore of India, they met Sampati, the brother of Jatayu. Sampati confirmed that Ravana took Sita to Lanka. The monkeys were perplexed, how to cross the huge sea that stretched in front of them. Angada, the son of Sugriva, asked, "Who can cross the ocean?" silence prevailed, until Shree Hanuman came up to give a try. Shree Hanuman was the son of Pavana, the wind god. He had a secret gift from his father. He could fly. Shree Hanuman enlarged himself to a huge size and took a jump to cross the ocean. After overcoming many obstacles, at last Shree Hanuman reached Lanka. He soon contracted his body and alighted as a tiny insignificant creature. He soon passed through the city unnoticed and managed to enter the palace quietly. He went through every chamber but could not see Sita. Finally, Shree Hanuman located Sita in one of the gardens of Ravana, called Ashoka grove (Vana). She was surrounded by the Rakshashis (female demons) who were guarding her. Shree Hanuman hid on a tree and watched Sita from a distance. She was in deep distress, crying and praying to God for Her relief. Shree Hanuman's heart melted in pity. He took Sita as his mother.

Just then Ravana entered the garden and approached Sita. "I have waited enough. Be sensible and become my queen. Rama cannot cross the ocean and come through this impregnable city. You better forget about Him." Sita sternly replied, "I have repeatedly told you to return me to Lord Rama before His wrath falls upon you." Ravana got furious, "You have gone beyond the limits of my patience. You give me no choice than to kill you unless you change your mind. Within a few days I shall be back." As soon as Ravana left, other Rakshashis, who were attending Sita, came back and suggested her to marry Ravana and enjoy the enviable wealth of Lanka." Sita kept quiet. Slowly the Rakshashis wandered away, Shree Hanuman came down from his hiding place and gave Lord Rama's ring to Sita. Sita was thrilled. She wanted to hear about Lord Rama and Lakshman. After conversing for

a while Shree Hanuman asked Sita to take a ride on her back to return to Rama. Sita did not agree.

"I do not want to return home secretly" said Sita, "I want My Rama to defeat Ravana and take Me back with honour." Shree Hanuman agreed. Then Sita gave Her necklace to Hanuman as an evidence confirming their meeting. Before departing from the Ashoka grove (Vana), Shree Hanuman wanted Ravana to have a lesson for his misconduct. So he began to destroy the Ashoka grove by uprooting the trees. Soon the Rakshasa warriors came running to catch the monkey but were beaten up. The message reached Ravana. He was enraged. He asked Indrajeet, his able son, to capture Hanuman. A fierce battle ensued and Shree Hanuman was finally captured when Indrajeet used the most powerful weapon, the Brahmastra missile. Shree Hanuman was taken to Ravana's court and the captive stood in front of the king. Hanuman introduced himself as the messenger of Lord Rama. "You have abducted the wife of my all powerful master, Lord Rama. If you want peace, return Her with honour to my master or else, you and your kingdom will be destroyed."

Ravana was wild with rage. He ordered to kill Shree Hanuman instantly when his younger brother Vibhishana objected. "You cannot kill a king's envoy" said Vibhishana. Then Ravana ordered Shree Hanuman's tail to be set on fire. The Rakshasa army took Hanuman outside the hall, while Shree Hanuman increased his size and lengthened his tail. It was wrapped with rags and ropes and soaked in oil. He was then paraded through the streets of Lanka and a big mob followed to have fun. The tail was set on fire but because of Agni deva's blessings Shree Hanuman did not feel the heat. He soon shrank his size and shook off the ropes that bound him and escaped. Then, with the torch of his burning tail, he jumped from roof to roof to set the city of Lanka on fire. People began to run, creating chaos and hideous cries. Finally, Shree Hanuman went to the sea shore and put off the fire in the sea water. Then he began his homeward flight. When Shree Hanuman joined the monkey army and narrated his experience, they all laughed. Soon the army returned to Kishkindha. Then Shree Hanuman quickly went to Lord Rama to give his firsthand account. He took out the jewel that Sita gave and placed it in Lord Rama's hands. Lord Rama burst into tears when He saw the jewel. He addressed Shree Hanuman and said, "Hanuman! You have achieved what none else could. What can I do for you?" Shree Hanuman prostrated before Lord Rama and sought His divine blessing. Sugriva then discussed in detail with Lord Rama their next course of action. On an auspicious hour the entire monkey army set out from Kishkindha towards Mahendra Hill, located on the opposite side of Lanka. Upon reaching Mahendra Hill, Lord Rama faced the same problem, how to cross the ocean with the army. He called for a meeting of all the monkey chiefs, and sought their suggestions for a solution.

When Ravana heard from his messengers that Lord Rama had already arrived at Mahendra Hill, and was preparing to cross the ocean to Lanka, he summoned his ministers for advice. They unanimously decided to fight Lord Rama to His death. To them, Ravana was indestructible and they, undefeatable. Only Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana, was cautious and opposed to this. Vibhishana said, "Brother Ravana, you must return the chaste woman, Sita, to Her husband, Lord Rama, seek His forgiveness and restore peace." Ravana became upset with Vibhishana and told him to leave the kingdom of Lanka. Vibhishana, through his magical power, reached Mahendra Hill and sought permission to meet Lord Rama. The monkeys were suspicious but took him to Lord Rama as a captive. Vibhishana explained to Lord Rama all that happened in Ravana's court and sought His asylum. Lord Rama gave him sanctuary and Vibhishana became the closest adviser to Lord Rama in the war against Ravana. Lord Rama promised Vibhishana to make him the future king of Lanka. To reach Lanka, Lord Rama decided to build a bridge with the help of the monkey engineer Nala. He also summoned Varuna, the Deity of the Ocean, to cooperate by staying calm while the bridge was in the making. Immediately thousands of monkeys set about the task of gathering the materials to build the bridge. When the materials were piled up in heaps, Nala, the great architect, started to build the bridge. It was a stupendous undertaking. But the entire monkey army worked hard and completed the bridge in just five days. The army crossed over to Lanka.

After crossing the ocean, Lord Rama sent Angada, the son of Sugriva, to Ravana as a messenger. Angada went to Ravana's court and delivered Lord Rama's message, "Return Sita with honour or face destruction." Ravana became enraged and ordered him out of the court immediately. Angada returned with Ravana's message and preparation for the war began. The next morning Lord Rama ordered the monkey army to attack. The monkeys rushed forward and hurled huge boulders against the city walls and gates. The battle continued for a long time. Thousands were dead on each side and the ground soaked in blood. When Ravana's army was losing, Indrajeet, Ravana's son, took the command. He had the ability to fight while staying invisible. His arrows tied up Lord Rama and Lakshman with serpents. The monkeys began to run with the fall of their leaders. Suddenly, Garuda, the king of the birds, and the sworn enemy of the serpents, came to their rescue. All of the snakes slithered away leaving the two brave brothers, Lord Rama and Lakshman, free. Hearing this, Ravana himself came forward. He hurled the powerful missile, Shakti, at Lakshman. It descended like a fierce thunderbolt and hit hard at Lakshman's chest. Lakshman fell down senseless.

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

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

Hearing the news of his brother's death, Ravana swooned away. After he recovered, he lamented for a long time and then called Indrajeet. Indrajeet consoled him and promised to defeat the enemy quickly. Indrajeet began to engage in the battle safely hidden behind the clouds and invisible to Lord Rama. Lord Rama and Lakshman seemed to be helpless to kill him, as he could not be located. Arrows came from all directions and finally one of the powerful arrows hit Lakshman. Everyone thought this time Lakshman was dead and Sushena, the physician of the Vanara army, was called. He declared that Lakshman was only in a deep coma and instructed Shree Hanuman to leave immediately for Gandhamadhana Hill, located near the Himalayas. Gandhamadhana Hill grew the special medicine, called Sanjivani plant, that was needed to revive Lakshman. Shree Hanuman lifted himself in the air and travelled the entire distance from Lanka to Himalayas and reached the Gandhamadhana Hill. As he was unable to locate the herb, he lifted the entire mountain and carried it to Lanka. Sushena immediately applied the herb and Lakshman regained consciousness. Lord Rama was relieved and the battle resumed.

This time Indrajeet played a trick on Lord Rama and His army. He rushed forward in his chariot and created an image of Sita through his magic. Catching the image of Sita by the hair, Indrajeet beheaded Sita in front of the entire army of the Vanaras. Lord Rama collapsed. Vibhishana came to his rescue. When Lord Rama came to senses Vibhishana explained that it was only a trick played by Indrajeet and that Ravana would never allow Sita to be killed. Vibhishana further explained to Lord Rama that Indrajeet was realizing his limitations to kill Lord Rama. Hence he would soon perform a special sacrificial ceremony in order to acquire that power. If successful, he would become invincible. Vibhishana suggested Lakshman should go immediately to obstruct that ceremony and slay Indrajeet before he became invisible again. Lord Rama accordingly sent Lakshman, accompanied by Vibhishana and Hanuman. They soon reached the spot where Indrajeet was engaged in performing the sacrifice. But before

the Rakshasa prince could complete it, Lakshman attacked him. The battle was fierce and finally Lakshman severed Indrajeet's head from his body. Indrajeet fell dead.

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

After Ravana's death, Vibhishana was duly crowned as king of Lanka. The message of Lord Rama's victory was sent to Sita. Happily She bathed and came to Lord Rama in a palanquin. Hanuman and all other monkeys came to pay their respect. Meeting Lord Rama, Sita was overcome by Her joyous emotion. Lord Rama, however, seemed to be far away in thought. At length Lord Rama spoke, "I am happy to rescue you from the hands of Ravana but you have lived a year in enemy's abode. It is not proper that I should take you back now." Sita could not believe what Lord Rama said. Bursting in tears Sita asked, "Was that my fault? The monster carried me away against my wishes. While in his residence, my mind and my heart were fixed on my Lord, Rama, alone." Sita felt deeply grieved and decided to end Her life in the fire.

She turned to Lakshman and with tearful eyes she implored him to prepare the fire. Lakshman looked at his elder brother, hoping for some type of reprieve, but there was no sign of emotion on Lord Rama's face and no words came from His mouth. As instructed, Lakshman built a large fire. Sita reverently walked around her husband and approached the blazing fire. Joining Her palms in salutation, she addressed Agni, the Deity of fire, "If I am pure, O fire, protect Me." With these words Sita stepped into the flames, to the horror of the spectators. Then Agni, whom Sita invoked, arose from the flames and gently lifted Sita unharmed, and presented Her to Lord Rama. "Rama!" addressed Agni, "Sita is spotless and pure at heart. Take her to Ayodhya. People are waiting there for You." Lord Rama delightfully received Her. "Don't I know She is pure? I had to test Her for the sake of the world so that the truth may be known to all." Rama and Sita were now reunited and ascended on an air chariot (Pushpaka Viman), along with Lakshman to return to Ayodhya. Hanuman went ahead to apprise Bharata of their arrival. When the party reached Ayodhya, the entire city was waiting to receive them. Lord Rama was coronated and He took up the reins of government much to the great joy of His subjects.

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