

RAMAYANA: THE *ETERNAL* SCRIPTURE

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Sri Rama! The *eternal* incarnation of God has been a household name from time immemorial around the world. Sages and saints have clearly emphasized that the very devotional repetition of HIS name on a daily or regular basis brings immense peace, happiness, pleasure and Bliss. Millions of people of all ages in each and every age of the human existence have experienced special magical moments in their lives when they devotionally and spiritually surrendered to Lord Sri Rama.

Historical and Theological Events

There has been a lot of discussion covering the date or period of Ramayana. Various archeologists, historians, Vedic-theologians and other scholars have attempted centuries after centuries to define the specific period around which Sri Rama ruled the Empire of Ayodhya, which encompassed a large and extensive areas of territories pivoted around Ayodhya in India. They have indicated the period of Ramayana to be not less than 5000 B.C.

A single word can become a power of positive influence or effect on growing minds. The most powerful word that can positively and powerfully impact and influence any individual is ***Rama***. The story of Sri Rama is the story of humanity from the eternal time. It is the story where even a most powerful person can pay a heavy price when letting one's guard for a precious moment. Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyi ultimately created a situation where he found that his only choice was between getting engulfed by a volcanic fire of immense heat or consumed by an earthquake of uncontrolled vibration or motion. In fact, the choice for Dasaratha was between death and dishonor. But, in reality there was no real choice for Dasaratha. Death was the only solution to the astronomical problem created in an instant by none other than his favorite queen, Kaikeyi. The once vibrant and dazzling Kaikeyi had turned into an uncontrolled destructive force. A tragic world history was developing when a man of immense honor was pitted against a woman of uncontrolled anger and greed. The resulting reaction emerging from the contact of the two diametrically opposite forces set of an infinite reaction that ultimately paralyzed the Empire of Ayodhya for a long time. The tragedy in this situation was that a very noble idea - promise made by a person with lofty ideals to repay gratitude - was turned into an evil desire to hurt all the loved ones. Here again, "boon" (sacred promise), a single word was manipulated for evil purposes. Yet in the midst of all the emotional volcanoes and earthquakes, there indeed were many shining stars. At this historical moment, it was our beloved hero Sri Rama, who matched the despicable level of behavior and performance of Kaikeyi with matchless divine behavior to salvage the dignity of the Empire at Ayodhya. The precious moment of royal coronation turned into a precarious moment for the citizens of Ayodhya. The scene at Ayodhya shifted instantaneously from the heights of joy and happiness to the gory depths of sorrow and misery. Kaikeyi was the catalyst for igniting the turmoil and the resulting misery in

Ayodhya and beyond. *The divine plan to bring Sri Rama face to face with Ravana was manifested through the acts and actions of Kaikeyi.*

Nature versus Nurture

Kaikeyi's action is a classic example of how an individual's nature was trampled by hostile nurturing. **Nature** is the quality that one inherits through his or her Karma. **Nurture** is the molding of the individual that starts from the very beginning of the birth, through the various stages of life, and concludes at the very end of the life. There is a continuous and regular interaction between the individual's nature and the nurture. The type of the interaction between nature and nurture can be friendly, neutral or hostile. Sri Rama and Lakshmana experienced virtually identical nurturing as they grew up from childhood to youth and then to adulthood. Their individual natures were not identical but neither opposite of each other. One was calm, cool and patient. The other was somewhat restless, little impulsive and occasionally impatient. The natures or inherent qualities bonded one brother to the other. The remarkable thing is that they also nurtured each other. The relationship between nature and nurture in the case of Sri Rama and Lakshmana is a classic example of perfect affection and friendship. Talking about nature, Kaikeyi was a wonderful personality prior to the day she was manipulated and brain washed by her royal aide Manthara. Her affection towards Rama was as much as her very own Bharatha.

Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra were all mothers to each of the four royal brothers. Nature had endowed Kaikeyi with limitless maternal love and affection for Sri Rama, Bharatha, Lakshman, and Shatrugna. Yet, one ordinary but wicked maid single handedly altered the destiny of the royal household and the world. Over a period of time, day-by-day, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute Manthara manipulated and brainwashed a gentle and kind soul into a human snake. This shows that the company one keeps can significantly and positively or adversely affect even a strong personality. Kaikeyi was not a push over but Manthara was the giant killer. She killed the positive emotions contained within Kaikeyi and then embedded evil thoughts and information into a weakened personality. The fact of the matter is that negative nurture, through the medium of Manthara, had trampled upon an in-built lifelong nature. In the case of Kaikeyi, evil nurture had achieved a victory of sorts. All this simply means that those whom we choose as our advisors, friends, and guides are more important than even the strongest of the known adversaries. In this regard, Kaikeyi failed miserably and paid a life-long price for the giant blunder she committed by listening to Manthara.

At the other end of the spectrum related to the effect of nurture on nature or the other way around, the example of Vibhishana stands as a shining example of how a strong in-built nature can overcome the most adverse nurturing. Ravana, Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna, the three royal brothers at Lanka were three different personalities. However, one thing that is certain is that they all went through the education and military training required for warriors. Ever since Ravana ascended the throne at Lanka, his prime objective seemed to be expansion of the empire at any and all costs. Brute forces symbolized his personality and Dharma was mostly ignored, when it was not trampled upon. Although Ravana and Kumbhakarna had similar wicked personalities, it was a miracle that Vibhishana never accepted their arrogant and aggressive method of ruling the people of Lanka or the

territories that they had captured over the years. In a nutshell, Vibhishana was like an isolated island surrounded by death and destruction. Vibhishana had provided over the years some “checks and balances” in an empire that had completely lost its vision and values. Vibhishana’s nature acted like a well-seasoned rock to withstand the evil and destructive nurturing occurring under the direction of Ravana. Now, one can compare and contrast the extraordinary performance of Vibhishana to the disgusting performance of Kaikeyi.

The word *nature* and *nurture* used in the above discussion are layman’s terms. In fact, a significant portion of what is commonly referred to as nature is embedded in an individual’s birth-horoscope. A skilled and experienced Vedic astrologer can extract this information. Nurture is a component of what is commonly known as free will. Kaikeyi’s association with Manthara was through free will. It was again the free will of Kaikeyi that encouraged Manthara to keep on talking until her evil objective was achieved. In any case, Kaikeyi’s free will was vacillating and weak and ultimately it was no match to the power of Manthara’s loose talk. While the world may have Mantharas, the individuals still have the inbuilt free will not to listen to them. Similarly, Vibhishana had the free will not to follow the evil ways of his brother Ravana. Unlike Kaikeyi, Vibhishana was able to assert his free will, regardless of the consequences and abuses that he had to face as result of his assertive decision. Ramayana gives us the magical courage and conviction, that if an individual feels that he or she does not possess adequate free will, the best possible course of action is to completely avoid at all costs all Mantharas. Ramayana tells us that this may not be an easy decision but it is the only decision for the wise. One must never lose track of the penalty that Kaikeyi paid for the rest of her life. It is an important and never to be forgotten lesson for the entire world.

Eternal Sacrament of Hindus

Any discussion covering the various characters and the historical events enshrined in the universal text of Ramayana is just the end of the beginning of sharing views and issues covered in it. The infinite knowledge contained in Ramayana is extensive and exhaustive. Anyone can see that there is no sight to the possible end to any discussion on it, at least within one’s mere lifetime on this earth. The various levels and the varieties of discussion will have meaningful impact and positive influence only when they are carried on with complete humility, decency, dignity and devotion. ***Ramayana is not a mere story but it is the primary theological sacrament of Hindus.*** We have inherited through Ramayana and other sacred texts or documents, immense amount of spiritual, theological, historical and material knowledge and information from the sages and seers who lived exemplary disciplined lives during the Vedic period of humanity. As we come to the ***end of the beginning*** discussion, let us continue to share among our families and friends, the noble ideas and ideals enshrined in the story of Sri Rama and Sita Devi as contained in the spiritual and theological text of the universe. These noble ideas and ideals will nurture us to take one step at a time towards including and integrating spiritualism into the material world that surround our lives. Lord Sri Rama And Sri Sita Devi Bless All.