

Application of Ramayana's Teachings

Shivam Dave

Rama Charit Manthan 2011

Varnanam...

*Sita Rama Gunagrama, Punyaranya Viharinau, Vande Vishuda Vigyano, Kavishvara
Kapishvara*

Yo Antaha...

We all know that primarily, the Ramcharitmanas is a spiritual text which cultivates devotion or Bhakti. In fact this is the case with most scriptures. However along with Bhakti, there is Gyan or spiritual knowledge that also needs to be developed. Many see the Bhagawat Gita as the perfect combination of Gyan and Bhakti. However, if we look deep enough, the Ramcharitmanas and the Ramayan of Sage Valmiki also have Bhakti and Gyan. In this presentation I will focus on some of the teachings from Ramayan which can help us in everyday life and other teachings which give it an aspect of being a manual for life.

The point of this discussion is mainly to explain what all the Ramayan has to offer. In addition to being the story of the Lord, it has many practical applications and thus I hope you all enjoy and benefit from this presentation.

Before we start, we must examine on what basis we can take the messages from the Ramayana to be true and beneficial. Lord Rama is known as *maridada purushottama*. He who embodies all positive qualities and he who is the greatest among men. Thus, Lord Rama's birth took place not only to defeat demons. Instead, it took place to live a human life perfectly with a myriad of good qualities and lead by example. Thus the example set forth by Lord Rama is one that should be followed by all humans and thus the messages and teachings he displayed are taken as self-evident.

Application of Ramayana's Teachings

Shivam Dave

Rama Charit Manthan 2011

Starting in Balakanda, we see a teaching that is a recurring theme in the Ramayana. This theme is humility. We see that Lord Shiva is anxious to meet Lord Rama and when he does he says, "*Jaya Saccidanamda Jaga Pavana*". In other words, Lord Shiva, who himself is Maheshwara or the great Lord, bows to Lord Rama. Now it is apparent that no God is greater than any other. Indeed Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, and thus Lord Rama are all on an equal plane. So one may question, as Sati did after seeing this, why Lord Shiva would bow to anyone. The answer lies in the fact that this is a teaching moment. Lord Shiva shows humility here and later on, in Lanka Kand when Lord Rama establishes the Shiva Linga, Lord Rama will pay his obeisances to Lord Shiva. Basically, both the Gods see each other as equals and treat one another with admiration and humility. The message for us is to treat each and every other person with the same humility and respect. A basic tenet of Sanatan Dharma is that we each have a spark of divinity within us. Thus no one is higher or lower than someone else. And being on an equal plane, we must treat them as Lord Shiva treats Lord Rama and vice versa. The same mutual respect is what Ramayana is trying to cultivate in the population.

This is also a spiritual teaching. It is important to keep in mind that throughout the Ramayan, both Sage Valmiki and Tulasidasji have made sure not to distinguish between Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. Thus, we must understand that these two are one and the same.

Much later in the Balakanda, we see another episode which shows the importance of staying calm and avoiding anger. In everyday life, we encounter many situations which are aggravating or irritating. In most of these situations, it is easy to respond with anger but this does not solve anything. Such was also the case for Lord Rama when he was confronted by Parashurama after breaking the bow of Lord Shiva. Parashurama repeatedly challenged the Lord angrily but Lord Rama chose instead to speak softly and as Tulasidasji puts it, "*barhata*

Application of Ramayana's Teachings

Shivam Dave

Rama Charit Manthan 2011

dekhi jala sama bacana, bole raghukulabhanu". Seeing the anger of Parashurama increasing like a raging fire, Lord Rama spoke sweet words like water to appease his rage. Today we have the phrase, fighting fire with fire, which basically says two people conflicting with anger will only create a larger problem. This teaching is contained in Ramayana, which was written thousands of years ago though. This means that the problems of today had been foreseen and solutions for them had been prescribed. As the story goes, Lord Rama continues to appease Parashurama and in the end Parashurama sees the divinity in Lord Rama and bows to him. In a modern day scenario, the person who keeps his cool ends up as the bigger person with more recognition and the respect of others, just as Lord Rama did in this scene.

Moving on to Ayodhya Kanda, there is one of the most misunderstood episodes of the Ramayana. Here Kaikeyi asks for Bharat's kingdom and for Lord Rama to have 14 years of exile. Some say this was purely a misdeed on Kaikeyi's part or purely a part of the Lord's leela. However, if we look to extract a message from it, then the truth is that this episode is a combination of these two theories as well as a teaching moment. After the coronation of Lord Rama was announced, Kaikeyi was initially overjoyed. In fact, when Manthara, at first advised her to stop the coronation, Kaikeyi told her not to repeat those words since they were false and detrimental. However, shortly after as everyone knows, Kaikeyi's will was turned. Sant Tulasidasa says, *bipati biju barasa ritu ceri, bhui bhai kumati kaikai keru*. The company of Manthara was a seed which was planted in the mind of Kaikeyi and eventually blossomed into the fruit of adversity. Indeed, we have been told many times that it is important that our company and the people we are surrounded by are pure of heart as well. There is a gujrati saying that goes: *sang tevu rang*. One's attitude can be determined by who they interact with. In Kaikeyi's case, her attitude was completely transformed simply due to the association with the

Application of Ramayana's Teachings

Shivam Dave

Rama Charit Manthan 2011

wicked and low thinking Manthara. And due to this, many of the characters in the Ramayana including King Dasaratha and Kaikeyi herself had to suffer.

Another practical teaching comes shortly after this. Most people will react to unfavorable news in a negative or pessimistic manner. Such is human nature. But Lord Rama does not act in this way. Instead when told his fate as per the boons of Kaikeyi, Lord Rama is overjoyed at heart. He tells Lakshmana not that we have been exiled but, *pita dinha mohi kanana rajju, jaha saba bhati mora bara kaju*. He says that our father has given me the kingdom of the forests which can only be beneficial to me. Thus, Lord Rama acts in a manner resembling what we would call, an eternal optimist. Logically, the situation will not change no matter the reaction. Thus it is best to react positively or not at all instead of getting worked up or confrontational when faced with an unfavorable decision.

Later on, in the Kiskindha Kand, there is a lesson to be learnt from Sugriva, the king of the monkeys. After the Lord kills Vaali and fulfills his part of his promise, a problem arises when Sugriva forgets his part of the pact, after being coronated king. Tulasidasji says, *Sugrivahu sudhi mori bisari, pava raja kosa pura nari*" After having his desires fulfilled, Sugriva has forgotten about the very Lord who gave him those rewards. This is the case of most humans. They are given many rewards, amenities, and luxuries by the Lord. However they fail to thank the Lord for these. After a while, when they happen to fall on hard times, they wonder why. In the Ramayana, Lord Rama sends Lakshmana to frighten Sugriva and guide him back to the right path, similar to the sorrows that some may encounter in their life. In other words, having been given all our desires, it is important not to be lost in the material world and forget our gratitude to the Lord. By all means, just as the Lord gave Sugriva a whole season to enjoy his

Application of Ramayana's Teachings

Shivam Dave

Rama Charit Manthan 2011

kingdom, the Lord expects people to enjoy what he has given them. But we must remember him and thank him for these.

As we move into the Sundarkand, we focus on some of the qualities of Hanumana which are worthy of being emulated in our lives. He has taken all the teachings of the Lord to heart and has displayed them repeatedly. For example, on his trip to Lanka, he does not waste time with distractions, represented by the golden mountain Mainaka. Instead, he stays on his path and completes his mission of meeting with Mother Sita. Only after this does he say, *sunahu mata mohi atisaya bhuka, lagi dekhi sundara phala rukha*". Having fulfilled his duty, he enjoys the fruits of the Ashoka Vana which represent the rewards of a job well done.

The application of this is apparent. When we have a task to take care of, we should face it with determination and single mindedness. Our minds should be set on the goal. Additionally, Hanuman never works for the hope of a reward. This echoes Lord Krishna in the Bhagwat Gita when the Lord says "Karmanye vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana, ma karma phala heturbhoo, ma te sangostvu karmani". Along with his determination, Hanuman accomplishes his task because of the fact that he is worried only about his duty and not the reward. Here we see interconnectedness of all scriptures.

This is not only the methodology Hanuman uses in his mission, but can also be seen in almost all aspects of human life. Corporate or academic lives assign many tasks which can be easily accomplished through these methods. It is necessary, only, to heed the example of Hanuman, invoke the blessings of the Lord, and go about our work.

The most important aspect of this particular episode is in the end. Notice that Hanuman takes no credit for his amazing achievements. When he says, "*Ta kahu prabhu kachu agama*

Application of Ramayana's Teachings
Shivam Dave
Rama Charit Manthan 2011

nahi, ja para tuma anukula", he attributes all his accomplishments to the Lord. Here he avoids the trap of arrogance which has been cited by many scriptures as a cause for mental downfall. In fact Lord Rama says, "*Mai aru mora tora tai maya, jehi basa kinhe jiva nikhaya*". The feeling of "I" or "mine" is an illusion which has trapped all beings. In Gita, Lord Krishna expounds on this by saying

brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi
saṅgaṁ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ,
lipyate na sa pāpena
padma-patram ivāmbhasa.

By giving up this belief in "I" or "mine" and attributing his actions to the Lord, one remains pure and his tasks are successful. In other words, Lord Hanuman is revered because of his ability to perform miraculous tasks yet remain without arrogance. Thus, having performed our duty, we must attribute the credit to the Lord.

In conclusion, *nana bhanti rama avatara, Ramayana shata koti apara*" Just as the Lord incarnates in countless forms, his story and Leela's are similarly boundless and thus the messages and teachings we attribute with him and his Leelas are endless. The episodes and teachings I have highlighted in this talk are obviously not all that can be found in the Ramayana. But I would like to believe that through this talk I have conveyed the fact that the Ramcharitmanas is a goldmine of information which can help us in our day to day lives. In fact, most of these teachings transcend time and place. For example, the current king of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej will be celebrating his 84th birthday this year by hosting an International Ramayana Festival in Thailand, where countries such as India, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines will be participating. This just goes to show the widespread impact and

Application of Ramayana's Teachings
Shivam Dave
Rama Charit Manthan 2011

recognition of this great text. The teachings from this text are what make it great. We can extract these teachings and implement them in our lives. By applying these teachings, each and every one of us can live a better and more efficient life and thus I urge you to implement these teachings in your lives as you see fit. Thank you.