



श्री सनातन धर्म सभा – दक्षिण आफ्रिका

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Shri Rama in the Ramcharitmanas



Introduction

Jay Shri Ram. The Ramcharitmanas of Goswami Tulsidas was written in Awadhi and many of us commonly refer to it as the Ramayana. Although, strictly speaking, The Sanskrit version of the Sage Valmiki is referred to as Ramayana. Nevertheless, we too will refer to the Ramcharitmanas of Goswami Tulsidas as Ramayana. Ramcharitmanas means the “the lake of the past times of Shri Ram”. The Tulsi Ramayana is a lake into which we continuously dive to retrieve gems. Therefore, it is going to be our aim to dive into the Ramayana to extract a gem from which we can all benefit.

The Ramayana is not only a great work of literature. It is not only a great epic. Nor is it only a scripture. It is a guide to life. It is a book of practical religion. The epithet practical is not necessary to qualify religion because religion is for practice. For a person to be accepted as religious, he or she needs to live religion. Sanathan Dharma or Hindu Dharma is for living. The Ramayana is a book portraying characters. We can actually locate ourselves in the Ramayana. If I appear like Kumbhakaran, or Meghnath or Manthra, then I have to change my life style and model it after Sabari, Hanuman, Sita or Bharata. Lord Ramachandra taught the world by example and by practice. If he had to preach, his preaching had the implication of practice. His preaching was always translated into practice.

In this article we want to share with episodes of the Ramcharitmanas which are pregnant with values and morals of the highest nature.

Values and morals in the Ramcharitmanas

Dharma and Satya were the two basic principles of the life of Lord Ramachandra. Rama was the embodiment of righteousness and truth. When Lakshmana was in battle with Meghnath, the son of Ravana, Lakshmana said, “If Dashratha’s son, Rama, is righteous and truthful, and if in powers he has no rival, then, O arrow, slay this son of Ravana”. Meghnath was killed. It was not the arrow that killed him, but the power of Rama’s righteousness and truth.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Mother Sita says to Shri Rama that the three great sins are speaking falsehood, going after other’s wives and causing injury to others without even an enmity to them. However, in this regard, Shri Ram is clean. Mother Sita says to Ansuyah in the forest that Rama is a man of controlled senses and permanent affection and righteous – one who reveres other women as mother. The Maha Bhagavad Purana states that Rama taught the world how to live the life of a pure householder by remaining devoted to a single wife, sage-like in character and taintless. Again, we see that the preaching of Shri Ramachandraji had the implication of practice – his preaching was always translated into practice.

Who then, is the Maryada Purusha (observer of etiquette) who taught the world by example? Who lived his religion?

Shri Rama – the Maryada Purusha

Let us consider the beautiful chanda composed by Tulsidas.

भये प्रगट कृपाला दीनदयाला कौसल्या हितकारी ॥

हरषित महतारी मुनि मन हारी अद्भुत रूप बिचारी ॥

प्रगट: means appearance or to appear. It was not a birth. It is an appearance. The Lord is आदि

मध्यान्त हीनाय – the Lord has no beginning, no middle and no end. He merely appears. He appears in embodied form for the welfare of Brahmanas, cows, devas and saints.

विप्र धेनु सुर संत हित लीन्ह मनुज अवतार

Let us consider another incident from the Ramayana, which depicts Shri Rama's Dharmic nature. That incident is his treatment of Mother Sabari. This incident is a perfect example of the Lord's attitude to his devotees. When mother Sabari meets Rama, she says:

केहि बिधि अस्तुति करौं तुम्हारी अधम जाति मैं जडमति भारि

अधम ते अधम अति नारी तिन्ह महं मैं मतिमंद अधारी

“How can I extol you: lowest in descent and dullest of wit as I am? A woman is the lowest of those who rank as the lowest of the low. Of women again, I am the dullest headed”. The Lord's response is,



कह रघुमि सुनु भामिनि बाता मानउं एक भगति कर नाता

जाति पांति कुल धर्म बडाइ धन बल परिजन गुन चतुराइ

भगति हीन नर सोहइ कैसा बिनु जल बारिद देखिअ जैसा

“I recognise no other kinship except that of devotion. Despite caste, kinship, lineage, piety, reputation, wealth, accomplishments and ability, a person lacking in devotion is of no more worth than a cloud without water”. Therefore, to Shri Rama, devotion is all that matters. Shri Rama then continues to explain various devotional practices to Sabari.

प्रथम भगति संतन्ह कर संग्गा। दूसरि रति मम कथा प्रसंग्गा ॥

गुरु पद पंकज सेवा तीसरि भगति अमान।

चौथी भगति मम गुन गन करइ कपट तजि गान ॥

मंत्र जाप मम दृढ बिस्वासा ।पंचम भजन सो बेद प्रकासा ॥

छठ दम सील बिरति बहु करमा। निरत निरंतर सज्जन धरमा ॥

सातवें सम मोहि मय जग देखा। मोतें संत अधिक करि लेखा ॥

आठवं जथालाभ संतोषा। सपनेहुं नहिं देखइ परदोषा ॥

नवम सरल सब सन छलहीना। मम भरोस हियं हरष न दीना ॥

The first in order is fellowship with saints and the second is marked by a fondness for my stories. Humble service of the lotus feet of one's preceptor is the third form of devotion, while the fourth type of devotion consists in singing my praises with a guileless purpose. Muttering my name with unwavering faith constitute the fifth form of adoration revealed in the Vedas. The sixth variety consists in the practice of self-control and virtue, desisting from manifold activities and ever pursuing the course of conduct prescribed for saints. He who practices the seventh type sees the world full of me without distinction and reckons the saints as even greater than myself. He who cultivates the eighth type of devotion remains contented with whatever she gets and never thinks of detecting others' faults, the ninth form of devotion demands that one should be guileless and straight in one's dealings with everybody and should in her heart cherish implicit faith in God without exultation or depression. In summary, the nine forms of devotion are: shravana (listening), kirtana (singing the praises), smarana (remembering), paadsevan (serving at the feet), archana (ritual worship), vandana (bowing down), daasya (servant), sakhya (friend) and aatmanivedan (offering of the self).

There are many examples in the Ramayana of situations where Shri Rama preaches Dharma without fear. He had no favourite. He preached Dharma to all, irrespective of their relationship to him. After Mother Kaikeyi had extracted from the King Dashratha the promise to crown Bharatha as King of Ayodhya and to send Rama to exile, she calls for Rama through the King's minister Sumantha. On hearing the request, Rama rushed on foot – there was no time to prepare the chariot, because father had summoned him. On arrival when he sees the king in a state of depression, and Kaikeyi in an ugly mood besides him, Rama humbly asks him to know the cause of his father's trouble. She replies that because of two boons promised by the king to her, she had now required the fulfilment of both in the manner of the coronation of Bharatha as king and the exile of Rama to the forest for fourteen years. Rama remains calm and smiles because he is the abode of peace. He retorts that blessed is that son who is able to obey the orders of mother and father. That son who can serve and support his parents is rare on this earth. He then relates to mother Kaikeyi all the advantages of going into exile. He says that he will meet saints, holy people in the forest and that this will be to

his benefit. Rama does not think in terms of sacrifices. His thoughts are positive. For him, in the worship of parents are fulfilled the objects of all religious pursuit. To obey the father is eternal dharma. Shri Rama also says that Bharata is dear as life to him. There can be no greater joy than Bharata getting the kingdom. Shri Rama does not want to be an obstacle to Bharata's coronation.

The story of Rama teaches us the threefold *Dharma* pertaining to the individual, the family and the society. We have to make every effort to understand the duties of the individual, the family and the society. It is possible to understand Shri Rama's divinity through the path of love. The modern society needs to follow the *Dharma* that is contained in the Ramayana. Today, the son is not paying heed to his father's advice and the parents are not concerned about the future of the son. The students are not showing regard for their teachers and the teachers are not imparting anything good to them. In such a situation, everyone needs to follow the ideals of the Ramayana. The Ramayana speaks of the true identity of the individual, the real significance of the family and the sanctity of the society. The Ramayana teaches the importance of human values. Today corruption is rampant in all fields such as business, education and politics. Under these circumstances, the principles of the Ramayana are very important. It explains in detail the relationship that should exist between brothers, the father and the son, the preceptor and the disciple. The Ramayana centres on the principle of unity in diversity. Since people have lost the ability to see unity in diversity, they are immersed in restlessness. What we need today is to see unity in diversity and the divinity behind this unity. The Ramayana teaches these values in the simplest way. However, people have forgotten the message of the Ramayana and are leading the life of a Ravana. Ravana did not understand this principle of divinity. There was no transformation in him though he had acquired all forms of knowledge and had done severe penance. He ruined himself on account of excessive desires. Before his death, he gave a message to the people: to use their skills and expertise in different forms of knowledge to stay clear of desires. He warns against becoming a victim of desires. More significantly he emphasises that people follow the path of truth and righteousness and to become like Rama. He encourages us to experience divinity"

Conclusion

The Ramayana is a work of great literary merit and profound wisdom of the timeless Vedas and Puranas. It is a practical handbook for bringing to human beings the teachings of the scriptures so that they may cross over the material ocean even while living their daily life.

The spiritual significance of the Ramayana and invocation to Shri Rama is made succinctly by Tulsidas:

मंगल भवन अमंगल हारी द्रवहु सो दशरथ अजिरबिहारी

As the abode of auspiciousness and the destroyer of evils, may he who sports in the courtyard of Dasharatha show compassion.

The directions given in the Ramayana are relevant in the present age of Kaliyuga to counteract the evils of gross materialism, diminishing morality and increasing abuse of human rights and strong attractions toward sensual pleasures. The eternal knowledge of the Vedas likened to the ocean, and the purifying effects of the Gita likened to the holy Ganga, are ingeniously combined in the epic Ramayana. The Ramayana charms the seeking soul with its words of wisdom and love. Its message is for all people and for all time. The divine attributes of Bhagwan Shri Rama are described throughout. As an incarnation of Shri Hari, he is worthy of worship. The poet, Tulsidas advises:

राम नाम मनि दीप धरु जहि देहरी द्वार तुलसी भीतर बाहरेहुं जौ चाहसि उजिआर

Install the luminous gem in the shape of the divine name Rama on the threshold of the tongue at the doorway of the mouth, if you will have light enter inside and outside.

Bhagawan Shri Rama has been described in the Ramcharitmanas as karunanidhi, dayanidhi, kripasagara with regard to his quality of compassion which is depicted in many episodes, big and small. The all-pervading spirit of Shri Rama exists in the entire creation. Prejudice must be eradicated. We need to see God's manifestation in all beings. In the people of the world, we need to see the presence of Sita and Rama. Tulsidas comments:

आकार चारि लाख चौरासी जाति जीव जल थल नभ बासी

सीय राममय सब जग जानी करउं प्रणाम जोरि जुग पाणी

Eight million four hundred thousand species of beings inhabit land, water and the air. Recognising the entire creation as full of Sita and Rama, I make obeisance to them with joined palms.

Devotees do not read the Ramcharitmanas for entertainment, but for the reawakening of their spiritual consciousness. Repetition of the holy names and kathas is a sure way of developing divine knowledge. The katha of Shri Rama has been told and retold for spiritual

enlightenment. It is the same purifying katha which Yajnyavalkya related to Bharadwaja, Bhagwana Shiva to mother Parvati and Garudji to Kakabhushundji. Both the reciter as well as the listener are virtuous beings dear to Shri Hari. Besides these sages, other devotees of Shri Rama recite, hear and understand the katha in diverse ways. We conclude with an invocation to Shri Rama:

नीलाम्बुज श्यामल कोमलांगं सीता समारोपित वामभागं

पाणौ महा सायक चारु चापं नमामि रामं रघुवंस नाथम्

We offer obeisance to Bhagawan Shri Rama, the Lord of the Raghus, whose hue is dark as the blue lotus, on whose left side is serenely seated Sitaji and in whose hand is the mighty beautiful bow and arrow.



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