

Sri Rama's holy deeds of gratitude

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Various deeds of Sri Rama who is none other than Lord Narayana ...प्रजापतिसमः along with worthy and supreme three brothers, ...पुत्राश्चास्य भविष्यन्ति चत्वारोऽमितविक्रमाः as portrayed in the eternally famous Srimad Valmiki Ramayana have always been reverently discussed incessantly since long. Sri Rama himself informs his brothers that Ramayana contains excellent words affording versatile, profound meaning. विचित्रार्थपदं .

The inquisitive query of Valmiki to Narada Muni is about a person, who presently living during his life time possesses about sixteen auspicious characteristics. The main essence of those attributes is harmonious existence of the extremes of human qualities in a person. To say the least, that person should be kind but gentle, calm but stern when occasion demands, dignified but easily accessible, helpful, keen to reciprocate etc. Only a superhuman who can blend opposing qualities seamlessly could ever possess all those sixteen qualities.

Narada Muni, then, instructed Sage Valmiki about Sri Rama, son of Maharaja Dasaratha of Ayodhya, endowed with all the characteristics. He also indicated that he is none other than Lord Narayana who has Sri Lakshmi as his consort, who gets all desires accomplished at all times by himself and is veritably an abode of all the auspicious qualities, श्रियः पतिवताप्तसमस्तकामः समस्तकल्याणगुणात्मकः सर्वस्वरः. He also informed him that Sri Rama is living his life like a normal human being bound by Dharma at all times.

Out of the sixteen qualities, ..” कृतज्ञश्च “. Sri Rama's act of gratitude, gratefulness, being conscious of help or aid or services done to him, being keen to acknowledge the service, his benevolent deeds etc. would be discussed in this article.

Sri Rama always remembers lifelong even small entreaties done to him. He never takes note of disservice, displeasure, disrespect or unbecoming demeanour exhibited towards him by anybody. Not only does he just remember the good deeds, however small they may be, but also abundantly reciprocates. Sri Rama, even from his childhood, is very much interested in the welfare of the people. He is helpful to the people of all walks of life in their time of need, illness or grief, whether or not they come to him for redressal. He renders necessary assistance and feels more elated than them on alleviation of their distress. When anyone is in distress, he feels more sorrowful and sincerely empathises with them in spite of being vested with the onerous duties' incumbent upon a member of royal family.

Dhasaratha Maharaja, in his plea to Kaikeyi to desist from insisting exile of Sri Rama, mentioned that “the entire world of human beings extols Sri Rama's virtue...जीवलोको यदा सर्वो रामस्याह गुणस्तवम् .”, “he has made a special place for himself in the hearts of everyone through his excellent acts of gratitude .श्रीमान् धर्मज्येष्ठ ”. He reminded her that Sri Rama not only did service to her but also did it with impeccable respect and appropriate words as the occasion demanded. तवशुश्रूषमाणस्य, शुश्रूषाम् गौरवम् चैव प्रमाणम् वचनक्रियाम् | (Ayodhya Kanda Sarga 12). In introducing himself to Hanuman, Lakshmana said that Sri Rama is always conscious of even small service done to him. Therefore, bound by the adorable qualities of Sri Rama, he wants to be known as his humble servant rather than as his younger brother अहम् अस्य अवरः भ्राता गुणैः दास्यम् उपागतः | कृतज्ञस्य बहुज्ञस्य लक्ष्मणो नाम नामतः || (Kishkinda Kanda - Sarga 4) Sita Devi in her conversations with Hanuman mentioned that “being kind and helpful to all” was Sri Rama's main motto. आनृशंस्यम् परो धर्मः त्वत्त एव मया श्रुतः | (Sundara Kanda - Sarga 38). Hanuman had also given importance to Sri Rama's quality of being helpful to the virtuous people with clear understanding. साधूनाम् उपकारज्ञः प्रचारज्ञः च कर्मणाम् || (Sundara Kanda - Sarga 35) This aspect of his character is exhaustively discussed here with respect to his action towards the Vanaras.

These monkey-like Vanaras are procreated by the gods and numerous celestials with their potential ability infused in them as per the directions of Brahma only to assist Sri Rama. विष्णोः सहायान् बलिनः

सृजध्वं कामरूपिणः (Balakanda sarga 17) and देव गन्धर्व पुत्राः च वानराः काम रूपिणः (Kishkindha Kanda sarga 38). All of them - forest rangers, courageous, expert warriors wielding rocks, mountains, etc, possess supreme bodily strength, gigantic form, capacity to take any form at will and are capable of traversing tirelessly through the length and breadth of the globe. Their prowess can only be comparable with Vishnu .मायाविदश्च शूरांश्च वायुवेगसमान् जवे | नयज्ञान् बुद्धिसंपन्नान् विष्णुतुल्यपराक्रमान्...(Balakanda sarga 17).

Such incredible strong and powerful leaders of Vanaras with their huge battalions assembled at Kishkindha in great numbers from far and wide from the then Bharata land on just the receipt of the sudden command of Sugreeva. The Vanaras assemblage being boundless and immeasurable looked like another ocean. अप्रमेयश्च द्वितीय इव सागरः Though they had some idea of the task before them, they did not know the so-called timeline of their operation and the strength of the opponents. But the unique feature of that huge assembly was their unequivocal enthusiasm to take up the challenge as proposed by their king.

They had left their residence, family, possessions and had happily put themselves in the service of Sri Rama at the behest of their king. रामसहायहेतोः Without exception, all of them felt that the wrong had been done to them personally. Hence, their enthusiasm to take up the challenge of fighting with the aggressors of Sita Devi was so profound.

The wrath to avenge the injustice was so severe. They were cheerful that they were doing a noble service to their king and Sri Rama. The spies who have been sent by Ravana to assess the strength; weakness became unnerved by noticing the immense strength displayed by these unconquerable Vanaras. With all humility and respect to their king Ravana, they cautioned him against waging war with such dedicated troops. When Maharaja Sugreeva, with joined palms, humbly placed at the command of Sri Rama all these valiant Vanaras including himself, Sri Rama was overwhelmed by the exceptional friendly service done to him. He embraced Sugreeva and profusely praised him for his helping nature and for his affectionate friendship with him. जानामि अहम् त्वाम् सुग्रीव सततम् प्रिय वादिनम् || (Kishkindha Kanda sarga 39).

In that assembly of massive army of Vanaras, Sri Rama, confidently and happily remarked that with such a benevolent friend by his side, he would easily triumph over all the enemies. Sri Rama, who had already taken a vow to eliminate Ravana along with his entire clan, openly acknowledged his dependence upon and his faith in Sugreeva by requesting him to decide the next course of action.

After the glad news of the whereabouts of Sita Devi at Lanka, Sri Rama expressed his apprehension regarding how they may cross the Ocean. He said that he could find only three persons, namely, Garuda, Vayu and Hanuman are capable of crossing the Ocean. The confident Sugreeva submitted to him that we can find a way out as the latter was capable of devising a suitable way out. His words were meant to remove the grief arising in the mind of Sri Rama. He spoke encouraging words to him not to give in to grief saying that all the accomplishments would be frittered away by one who is depressed, misapprehensive and doubtful on account of grief about further course of action. ,निरुत्साहस्य दीनस्य शोकपर्याकुलात्मनः | सर्वार्था व्यवसीदन्ति व्यसनम् चाधिगच्छति || तदलम् विकलबाम् बुद्धिम् राजन् सर्वार्थनाशनीम् | पुरुषस्य हि लोकेऽस्मिन् शोकः शौर्यापकर्षणः || (yuddha kandha sarga 2) We can, here, recollect the words of Acharyas stating that keeping up tireless efforts is inherent trait of the human beings so also the enthusiastic attitude . प्रयत्नः स्वात्मधर्मः स्यादुत्साहो भावना च सः||.

Having briefly stated the earnest service attitude of the Vanaras, let us look into various graceful actions of gratitude done by Sri Rama.

Overwhelmed and grateful Sri Rama, before the commencement of the long march through tedious path, instructed Nila to choose the route by the side of waterways and through the areas having trees laden with juicy fruits so as to afford food, shelter and shade to the weary ones. फल मूलवता नील शीत कानन वारिणा | पथा मधुमता च आशु सेनाम् सेना पते नय || (yuddha kandha sarga 4) Similarly, after reaching the land before the Ocean, he wanted to ensure the safety of the troops and prevent any misadventure by them since Ocean always fascinates everyone. He also cautioned about possible

chances of food contamination by the demons and directed that security should be tightened. He put all the leaders to take charge and put Lakshmana for overall supervision. After the construction of Sethu bridge and the army of gallant Vanaras having arrived at base, he requested Lakshmana to oversee the arrangement with regard to availability of food, fruits for his noble troops. He entrusted to Vibhishana the task of proper positioning of the monkey battalions at a safer location. He had personally overseen the medical treatments to the injured Vanaras with encouraging words, timely provision of medicines, herbs and ointments. He made no distinction amongst the leading commanders, his younger brother, other Vanaras.

When the Vanaras eagerly surrounded the palanquin to have a glance at Sita Devi, it resulted into a stampede. They were, then, badly treated by the guards of Vibhishana. Sri Rama looked at Vibhishana with stern fiery eyes as to consume him by fire. He then ordered him to stop the exertion and see that Vanaras were treated kindly as they are his own people.विभीषणं महाप्राज्ञं सोपालम्भमिदं वचः ॥
....निवर्तयैनमुद्योगं जनोऽयं स्वजनो मम ॥ (yuddha kandha sarga 114).

Sri Rama personally made submission to Indra and got the Vanaras who had lost their lives to come alive happily with no memory of them having lost their life in the battle. Thus, Sri Rama wanted to ensure the mental health as well as physical strength of his troops. He further made Indra to confer benedictions that the places inhabited by them would provide all types of fruits at all times irrespective of season, abundant freshwater supply and trees providing shelter and shades from any type of inclement weather. Here one can recollect that these Vanaras were not supposed to lose their life in the combat with Ravana's army. Having known this fact, Sri Rama could have himself attempted to revive the dead. But he didn't do that so as not to transgress the dharma laid down for human beings.

He advised King Vibhishana to honour the vanaras by distributing abundant gifts like gold, diamonds and precious stones. Still unsatisfied, Sri Rama requested from sage Bharadwaja, a similar boon of favourable enlivening environment to the Vanaras where they choose to live or roam about.

Let us now recollect the special bond that existed between Sugreeva and Sri Rama. In fact, Sri Rama, was in a happy smiling countenance only after his friendship with Sugreeva. When Sugreeva wanted to get rid of Vali, Sri Rama readily agreed and proclaimed that cooperation and help in time of need as mark of friendship. उपकार फलम् मित्रम् विदितम् मे महाकपे ॥ Similarly, Sri Rama was grave with

immense mental agony when Sugreeva could not resist his temptation to wrench the life of Ravana and jumped at him by cruising through the air at the time of first sighting from the top of the hill facing the rampart of Lanka. There ensued a fierce equally balanced wrestling between them before Sugreeva extricated himself from the impending sorcery attempt by Ravana. The words spoken then by Sri Rama was reflective of his close relationship with him. He told him that he had decided to renounce his life after killing Ravana as "life with Sita Devi and my brothers meant nothing in the event of any untoward things happens to you, Sugreeva". करुणम् दीनया वाचा राघवः पुनर् अब्रवीत् | अहम् च लक्ष्मणः च एव सीत च वरवर्णिनी ॥ त्वत् अधीना वयम् सर्वे वने अस्मिन् शरणम् भवान् ॥ (Yuddha kanda sarga 41). Bharata,

in his first interaction with Sugreeva embraced him and called him as the fifth brother due to Sri Rama's affinity. He magnanimously remarked that a friend is born out of affection. त्वमस्माकं चतुर्णां वैभ्राता सुग्रीव पञ्चमः ॥ ...सौहार्दाज्जायते मित्रम् ॥ (Yuddha kanda sarga 127). Sri Rama had specially instructed Bharata to make necessary comfortable arrangement in one of Sri Rama's beautiful palace for the stay of Sugreeva.

At the time of his coronation, Sri Rama kindly remembered with gratitude and honoured all his associates with costly ornaments and with excellent things to their bewilderment and great satisfaction. He advised Sugriva to treat all vanaras with love and affection as every one of them were near to him. Still, the most compassionate Sri Rama was not satisfied with these profound help and reciprocity towards them. Therefore, at the time of his ascendance to his own abode, nearly 11,000 years after the battle, he remembered them. He asked Sugreeva to assemble all the Vanaras at Sarayu river to take them with him since they had taken birth for the specific purpose of rendering kankarayam to him and had endured living such a long period on the earth. Accordingly, he requested Brahma to confer supreme abode of heaven to his followers which was readily agreed to by Brahma. Thus, Sri Rama is remembered as
ओं भक्तलोकैकवरदाय नमः ॥

In conclusion, let us always remember the grateful Sri Rama's holy deeds to Vanaras as and when we utter the namavali such as ॐ ऋक्षवानरसंघातिने नमः ॥ ॐ मृतवानरजीवनाय नमः ॥ We may recollect here that He, as air inside the body of all of us infuses life in every body. तस्मै वातत्मने नमः ॥ Our Acharyas have unequivocally pronounced that the reading, hearing about the life of Sri Rama itself is an effective elixir to revive the dead..... मृतसञ्जीवनं हि रामवृत्तान्तं . May Sri Ramachandra bestow his unfailing grace on all those who mentally recollect these events while reading Srimad Valmiki Ramayana.
