

Think before you leap

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The maxim “Think before you leap” is well known. Those who strictly adhere to it can only vouchsafe its efficacy. More often than not, all of us are carried away by someone’s request due to proximity to the requester. Hence, we gave promises or do things hastily only to repent later, sometimes. The situations can be a happier or grimmer one with genuine need or suffering to the persons close to us. Or, the people concerned may be very affectionate or very esteemed one placing us in a compelling position to accede to the demands or into giving a word or promise.

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana too has plenty of such incidents where the person on the spot had acted without paying heed to the above age-old saying “think before you leap”. Study of some of them would give us hints to guard against if we are smart enough to remain on our own guard at that time!

Dasaratha, King of Ayodhya, was presented with a bowl of Payasam as a Prasad on the completion of Putrakameshti yagna to be given to his three principal consorts namely Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Normal act by the King would have been an equal distribution of one third each. However, the King, in deference to the seniority of Kausalya amongst the three, distributed a half of the portion to her. With the remaining 50%, he gave a half of it to Sumitra (ie 25% of the originally given Payasam). The next logical action by the King would have been handing over the remaining 25% to the third consort namely Kaikeyi. The King had only given half of the remaining portion to Kaikeyi (12.5% of the original quantity). He gave the balance portion (12.5% of the whole) to the Queen Sumitra, after thoughtful thinking. Thus, Sumitra had consumed two portions of Payasam.

It is important to note that Sage Valmiki here remarked that Dasaratha had paused and taken time to think before distribution of Payasam second time to Queen Sumitra.¹ The result was birth of twin children, Lakshmana and Shatrughna to Sumitra. Not only that, Lakshmana was always attached to and served Sri Rama. On the other hand, Shatrughna was eternally attached to Bharata at all times and did services to him.² It is very significant that companionship of Lakshmana and Shatrughna had immensely helped Sri Rama and Bharata respectively. Thus, a well-reasoned thinking on the part of Dasaratha had beneficial effects in the times to come.

During the period of exile at Dandaka Forest, Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha devi, visited the Sage Agastya’s hermitage. After entreaties, the Sage had himself asked Sri Rama where he would like to stay thereby prompting him to make a choice of his preference. When he was told about his preference, the Sage, due to his penance, could contemplate the possible abduction of Seetha Devi. Therefore, the Sage had pondered a while before recommending Panchavati suitable from all angle for their stay during the remaining period of exile.³ In fact,

¹ अनुचिन्त्य सुमित्रायै पुनः एव महीपतिः | एवम् तासाम् ददौ राजा भार्यणाम् पायसम् पृथक् || (Balakandam Sarga 16)

² शत्रुघ्नश्चापि भरतं काकुत्स्नं लक्ष्मणो यथा || (Ayodhya kandum Sarga 8).

³ ततो अब्रवीत् मुनि श्रेष्ठः श्रुत्वा रामस्य भाषितम् || ध्यात्वा मुहूर्तम् धर्मात्मा धीरो धीरतरम् वचः || (Aranya kandum Sarga 13).

the sage had explained with due respects the merits of selection of that place. The ultimate result was the complete destruction of Ravana and his supporters though with heavy price of separation and untold misery to Lord and His consort.

We can also see in Ramayana, result of hasty action on the spur of the moment undertook by the people which had resulted in embracing moments, grief and repentance later.

Once such an occasion involved King Dasaratha. The King was overwhelmed on hearing the news of visit of Brahma Rishi Vishwamitra to his palace. He was overjoyed due to the notion that the Sage had brought glory to Kshatriyas as he became Brahma Rishi from Raja Rishi. In his enthusiasm, he ignored thoughtful thinking and volunteered in advance to carry out any wishes of the Sage even without hearing from the sage about the purpose of the visit. Mind may truly play a trick when one is under the spell of happiness or sorrow. With misplaced overzeal, the King had entreated him to inform any errand to be carried out by him for which he had arrived at his palace. He, further, promised him that he deemed it as his duty to undertake any work and to see that the expected results happen to the joy of the Sage. In that regard, he went on justifying his overt zeal by saying that it was not apt for him to question either the nature of the request, feasibility etc as the Sage himself was the esteemed God to him. Truly, the king had uttered such words or committed himself without any deep thinking or proper deliberations.⁴

He may be right as whatsoever sages would do or say may eventually turn out to be beneficial to the other persons. However, as a king, his normal conduct would have been to await the request from Vishwamitra. Vishwamitra had promptly and gladly requested him to send Rama with him to protect the yagna soon to be undertaken by him. Here, the king had to retract his promise as he had unwittingly committed himself to fulfil any request of the rishi. However, with intervention of Sage Vasisht, the matter got amicably settled. Sri Rama and Lakshmana accompanied the sage to protect his yagna.

Once again, Dasaratha, in his extraordinary desire to appease Kaikeyi in her grief and to spend some happy moments with her, had promised her without thinking to carry out her wishes.⁵ In fact, he, without any second thought, went on to the extent of giving promises in the name of Sri Rama to comply with her demands, whatever it may be. By this unthoughtful action, he only invited his death. Had he shown patience, composure and allowed Kaikeyi to talk about her demands or the reason for her sudden grief, he could have spared heartfelt torments undergone by him.

In fact, later, the king had lamented that due to infatuation with sinful Kaikeyi, he could not deliberate and take proper counsel from elders.⁶ Further, he admitted openly in front of the assembly of people gathered on his request that this act was done by him due to his obsession with Kaikeyi and hastily without proper consultations with the ministers, friends or persons

⁴ ब्रूहि यत् प्रार्थितम् तुभ्यम् कार्यम् आगमनम् प्रति ॥ इच्छाम् अनुगृहीतो अहम् त्वदर्थम् परिवृद्धये । कार्यस्य न विमर्शम् च गंतुम् अर्हसि सुव्रत ॥ कर्ता च अहम् अशेषेण दैवतम् हि भवान् मम ॥ (Balakandam Sarga 18).

⁵ आत्मनो जीवितेनापि ब्रुहि यन्मनसेच्छसि । बलमात्मनि जानन्ती न मां शङ्कितुमर्हसि ॥ करिष्यामि तव प्रीतिं सुकृतेनापि ते शपे॥ (Ayodhya kandam Sarga 10).

⁶ कैकेय्या विनियुक्तेन पाप अभिजन भावया । मया न मन्त्र कुशलैः वृद्धैः सह समर्थितम् ॥ (Ayodhya kandam Sarga 59).

well versed in Dharmic texts.⁷ The king also accepted and blamed himself saying that this great calamity and consternation to all had arisen as a consequence of his not thinking calmly and acting hastily by him.

Though the above incidents look ordinary and may not merit serious attention except passing glance, the act of speaking without thinking on the spur of the occasion happens with every one of us frequently both in our personal life and official career. In official meeting, some people, after hearing some congratulatory or praiseworthy remarks in their favour by the boss, may tend to be carried away and promise timeline which may prove difficult to comply with. Similarly, due to innate affection towards one's child or anybody, people may promise things to the crying or demanding child/ other known friends without understanding the future consequences. The best way always to pause for a while and completely calm the nerves before making any utterance in such situations.

While concluding, it is worth to learn some of important advice written by Valmiki to avoid hasty decisions. Kumbha Karana rightly pointed out to Ravana that due to impulsive thought to avenge Sri Rama, he had committed a great blunder and sin. As an emperor, the king is expected to perform his functions with a composed mind guided by justice so as to avoid later repentance.⁸ He, further pointed out that any actions done without proper strategy or prior profound thinking is as good as spoiled just like any oblation poured without devotion is considered as spoiled or not a fruitful one.

⁷ न सुहृद्भिर् न च अमात्यैः मन्त्रयित्वा न नैगमैः | मया अयम् अर्थः सम्मोहात् स्त्री हेतोर् सहसा कृतः || (Ayodhya kanda Sarga 59).

⁸ न्यायेन राजकार्याणि यः करोति दशानन | न स सम्तप्यते पश्चान्निश्चतार्थमतिर्नृपः || (Yuddha kanda Sarga 12).