

TALKS ON RAMAYANA



Swami Venkatesananda

Given on the occasion of RAM NAWAMI 1973

Published by: The Chiltern Yoga Trust,
Sivananda Yoga Ashram, Rose-Hill
April 1995



First Edition: 1995
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Electronic Edition: 2008
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Talks on the Ramayana by Swami Venkatesananda

TALK I

The tradition of observing these nine days as Vasanta Navaratri is not common in all parts of India. These nine days are usually devoted to Rama because they culminate in Rama Navami, which is the birth anniversary of Rama. However, what exactly is Rama, what exactly is Durga, what exactly is Devi, what exactly is God, we do not know. We do not really know what God or Devi means. Sometimes we call the same thing 'father' and sometimes we call it 'mother', because we associate our life with either mother or father. Who created you? First, we have a feeling that mother gave birth to us, and then we start thinking that mother could not give birth to us unless there was a father. Who is more important? Both are important. We used to play this little joke with children, asking, "whom do you love more, father or mother?" Some child would say mother, another would say father – depending upon who beats more!

In the same way, I suppose, amongst human beings also, in their relationship to God, some regard God as father and some as mother. All the rationalisation that the mother loves the child more than the father comes later. The Devi as Durga is supposed to create, sustain and destroy. We may not like to regard God as woman – some of us have this problem: how can God be a woman? – God must be a man! So make it Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. What exactly is the difference? Does God also have sexual troubles? We have these troubles and we extend them to God; we have family problems and somehow or other, we must stretch them to include God also. "God is in us", and therefore, if I have a headache, God also must have a headache! If I have a heart attack, God also must have a heart attack and so on! So we project our problems on to God.

We know that a human being is either male or female. So we think God also must be either male or female, the female being called Shakti and the male being called Shakta, or Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. If there is a Vishnu, there is a Lakshmi; if there is a Siva, there is a Parvati; if there is a Brahma, there is a Saraswati. This is more our problem than the problem of God. But this much is true: that in the life of all creatures, not only human beings, there are these three distinct stages – birth, existence and what is called death. Whether this is all, whether there was something before and whether there will be something after death, that is a matter for philosophers. But we see this: a plant comes into being – it is born – it grows, it gives it fruits, it disappears – it dies. We see also that in order to bring this into being, in order to give birth to a new plant, somebody needs to sow and protect the seed; during the process of its existence here, somebody has to water it, somebody has to guard it against its own enemies, pests, snails, etc... and then, at the end, somebody has to harvest its fruits. Of these three functions, it is easy to see that we value only two when it comes to human life: I must live happily and I must die without too much pain. Why is Brahma (The Creator) not worshipped? Because by the time we wake up and open our eyes and ask ourselves, "Should I pray or should I not pray?", we are already born – Brahma's job is over! I live now and I want to live comfortably. When the time comes for me to die, I do not want to suffer too much. So we pray to the Protector and the Redeemer: Vishnu and Siva.

In the life of this world, it is said that Vishnu comes again and again, that is, incarnates repeatedly in order to protect us. One of those incarnations is said to be Rama. Vishnu comes on earth again and again to protect Dharma. What is Dharma? It is almost impossible to define. If you say that Dharma means righteousness, then I would ask you

what is righteousness. If I ask children, they will usually tell us what righteousness means “I should not tell lies; I should not harm anybody; I should not kill anybody; I should not be greedy; I should not cheat anybody.” Krishna tells us in Bhagavad Gita: “God incarnates in order to protect the good and destroy the wicked; in order to preserve Dharma, I have to destroy Adharma.” This is another big controversial topic: can Dharma protect Dharma? Can you be righteous, completely non-violent, and yet stop violence? When you stop violence, you are indulging in violence. When God comes in order to protect Dharma, He has to fight against Adharma and this fighting is Adharma!

But when God does it, we do not consider it as Adharma! Whatever God does is good. So this word Dharma is impossible to translate. When you go on inquiring deeply into these things you become more and more puzzled. Rama killed Ravana; Ravana was unrighteous. How do you know Ravana was unrighteous? Because Rama killed him! If Rama had not killed him, he would not have been unrighteous! Vali and Sugriva were brothers; both of them did more or less the same thing – one can argue both ways: some people say Vali was right, others say Sugriva was right – but because Rama killed Vali and protected Sugriva, we are quite certain that Sugriva was a righteous person and that Vali was wicked! It is the same in politics: the part that wins power is the majority party or the party that has the support of the people. When you are to protect something, you are already indulging in violence. Without violence, nothing can be protected, nothing can be destroyed. So Dharma involves and means all that. It is a very difficult question. That is why people do not usually discuss these topics. What is Dharma? It is the essential nature of each object in existence; the greenness of grass is its Dharma; the redness of a rose is its Dharma; there is no question of protection! Water is liquid, that is its Dharma; fire is hot, that is its Dharma. We are told that God incarnates again and again in order to protect Dharma and destroy Adharma. How is Adharma born? How and when does a person become unrighteous?

You may agree with me or you may not agree with me – I hope you do not agree with me – but listen carefully. In Indian theology, there are certain rules governing “Moksha”. Like the Christian “Kingdom of God”, we also have a Kingdom of God called “Vaikuntha”. If throughout your life you have been devoted to God, from morning to night, doing Japa, meditation, devotional practices and if you constantly remember God right up to the last moment of your life, then on leaving this body, you will go to this place called Vaikuntha. (Do not ask me if such a place exists, you will have to go and find out for yourself! Not so soon – later!) There are thousands and thousands of people there – you are not the only one devoted to God! Narayana, Vishnu, is seated at the far end of a huge hall and all these devotees ascend to the Kingdom of God, queue up and have a look at God from a great distance. Since you were devoted even when you were on earth, you are more devoted to Him when you see Him at a distance! They stand in the queue: “Oh God! Oh Bhagwan!” – and constantly meditate on God. Then the queue moves on and on, from *Salokya* to what is called *Sameepya*, closer to God. When you get close to God, you see Him more clearly – you are charmed and your meditation becomes deeper, more intense. When you have this intense meditation on God, they say, you even become like God. Your form looks like Narayana’s form. You look like God and you have almost all the powers of God.

Now, there were two men who had done all this and had graduated to this stage: one more step and they would have attained union with God, they would have become one with God! They were waiting. The last step had been reached – they looked like Vishnu – they had the form of Vishnu and they had been allotted the duty of gate-keepers. They were called Jaya and Vijaya. They were standing at the entrance to the Lord's inner apartments – the Lord's own room, as it were – acting as God's own bodyguards. One day four great sages called the Sanatkumaras came to that place. Without saying anything but meditating upon God all the time (spiritually one with God, why should they need anybody's permission to enter their own home, as it were?), they were about to enter. Jaya and Vijaya stopped them and asked, "Where are you going? Who are you?" When these two fellows asked these questions, the four sages were annoyed ('Annoyed' is a bad word, as sages do not get annoyed – but so runs the story.) They said to Jaya and Vijaya: "You have come here, you look like Vishnu, but look how you behave. God is omnipresent: God is in all, in you, in me. Vishnu is not only sitting here but is in the hearts of all. Don't you know this? You have the form of Vishnu, you stand as bodyguards to Vishnu and you do not know that He is omnipresent? You do not know that there is no difference between us and Vishnu? Do you not know that God is in all? If you still have this perception of diversity, you have no business to be here! This is a temple, a shrine, a holy place and only people who are interested in what goes on here come here. Those who are not qualified to come here, those who want to sleep, those who want to drink or to smoke, should simply go away."

That is what the sages said. Though the story says that the sages cursed these two men, they merely pointed out: "Here is the kingdom of God and only they can remain here who have transcended the vision of diversity. This is a place only for those who see God in all. You who are asking 'Who are you?' have no business to be here. Go down!" When these sages said, so they had to be proved right. These two who were such great devotees while on earth and even afterwards that they had come so very close to God, even they *fell*. They *had* to fall! So what you call 'evil' is not something which somebody else has created. As if we say "We are all created by God, but the people in XYZ have been created by Satan." –no, no, whatever has been created in this world has been created by God. Whether you call them Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Creoles; whether you call them black, white, brown, green, yellow; whether you call them Brahmins, Kshatriyas, untouchables and so on, they are all beings created by God. Whether you call them "bad" or "good" people, that is *your* business! People were created by God, even the most wicked ones! At one stage or another, we lose our head, we become mad, power-intoxicated: "I am God's bodyguard and I am the greatest among His devotees!" – then comes the fall. That person becomes wicked, that person is wicked! So it is good to remember before we enter into a study of the Ramayana that though Rama incarnated in order to kill Ravana, this Ravana was none other than God's own gate-keeper, a great devotee. There is nothing called 'evil' here. Just as dirt is matter out of place, 'evil' is goodness which has lost its way. There are plenty of pebbles, macadam and manure outside. All those things are all right there. They must be there! If you bring a little manure or some macadam and put it here, somebody is bound to say, "It is dirty, filthy – take it away!" There is no dirt in this world. It is not that macadam is dirty. Without macadam you will not be able to build a road; without manure you will not be able to grow vegetables and fruits and flowers. They are all right there, in their place, and they are not right here – that is all!

In the same way, what you and I call 'evil' is merely goodness which has temporarily lost its sense of direction. It is good to remind ourselves of this right in the beginning so that we do not get into fixed ideas or grooves: 'this is right', 'that is wrong'; then you get into endless troubles. Therefore it is not right to say that Vishnu incarnated as Rama in order to kill Ravana. As a matter of fact, to go back to the other story, as soon as Jaya and Vijaya, the bodyguards, were 'cursed' – to use a simple word – they fell on their knees and prayed to the sages: "Please let us not be away from Narayana too long. When will we be rid of this curse?" Then the sages said, "All right, choose: would you like to be God's devotees on earth for a long time or would you like to be God's enemy, but for a short while?" A difficult question, is it not? I do not think it is in Valmiki's Ramayana, but according to some other accounts, they were given a choice: either to take birth ten times as God's devotees or thrice as God's enemies. They said: "Let us come back quickly! Even if we are going to be God's enemies, it is better to come back quickly! Even if we are going to be God's enemies, it is better to incarnate only thrice!" And so it is said that these two great devotees of God incarnated first as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu, then as Ravana and Kumbakarna, and last as Sishupala and Dantavakra – and then returned to the Kingdom of God.

So, when Vishnu incarnated as Rama, what He did in relation to Ravana was to liberate him from his second incarnation so that he would go on quickly to the third one and then return to the Kingdom of God. There is no curse, there is no punishment, there is no killing of the 'wicked'! These are all ways of storytelling.

Dharma is always there – nothing needs to be 'protected'. But in this world-play (this is the fun, the *tamasha*, game) someone plays the role of a 'villain' and someone plays the role of a 'hero'. Someone *has* to! In truth, there is really no distinction between the one and the other. As a matter of fact, Ramayana starts with a question: "Who is the most excellent man in this world?" (Excellent in all respects – strong, powerful, knowledgeable, wise, handsome, loving, dutiful). When Valmiki wrote this story, Rama was still alive and the whole Ramayana is the answer to this question. Who is an excellent person? Who is a righteous man? Immediately our mind creates definitions: "a righteous man should do this – a righteous man should not do that ...". If you create these in your mind and study the Ramayana, you are caught on the horns of a dilemma: why did Rama do this? For instance, Rama went to Lanka, fought with Ravana, nearly lost his life and eventually won a victory and brought Sita back. Obviously he loved her deeply but Rama acted as if he was afraid of a scandal. If you love your wife, why are you afraid of a scandal? Do you want to be a good king or do you want to be a good husband? You tend to take sides. He was right here, but he was not right there! Or, he was right in both places, etc. All this is rubbish – one cannot possibly determine what an excellent person would do. It is impossible to define what an enlightened man would do or would not do. It is up to the enlightened man to do, to live his life. We are not here to judge them. We do not even know what 'enlightened' means! We shall study the Ramayana as a story – as a piece of history or possibly a historical novel where there is part fiction and part fact. Possibly, even Gandhiji's biography may contain much fiction even though he was almost our contemporary. When we study the story of someone who is said to have lived thousands of years ago, it is possible that there is much fiction in it. We shall study this account bearing in mind the question, "Who is the most excellent man?"

TALK II

What do we regard as a Scripture, as a holy and sacred book? If you look carefully at what mankind has done, you will probably be both surprised and shocked that scriptural guidance, thought to be helpful, has become more of an obstruction. I consider the Gita as a Scripture. I keep it on a pedestal higher than my seat – so that I shall be able to read it without straining my neck! Psychologically, I also keep it on a high pedestal: it is a book to be worshipped! The word Bible actually means “book”, nothing more, nothing less, but it has been used as an honorific title – euphemistically: ‘a holy book’! Then I do not regard it as a book anymore – but as a Bible, a ‘holy’ Scripture.

When I read the morning newspaper, I do not contemplate on it. It does not really matter to *me*: what the papers record has not happened to *me*. Someone died in a car accident: I did not die! There is a war in Cambodia: bombs do not fall on *my* head ...! If I read the papers absent-mindedly, it is possible that instead of Cambodia, my mind registers Columbia. But there is not much difference between Cambodia and Columbia as far as we are concerned... The war is not here, where I am! You may even tell someone there is war in Columbia... there is no urgency, no value, in these newspaper articles. But it is said that there is a great loss if you read the Scripture without properly grasping the meaning of the words. While reading a Scripture, your mind must be concentrated, you must read it with all your heart and soul. So it was said: if one invests it with the mantle of divinity, then one will be devoted to it. Love it as you would love God. Approach it as you would approach God. Then it is possible that something you read in the Bible or the Gita will enter your heart.

In Christian churches, they usually insist that you keep standing while the Bible is read. This is to show your reverence to it and to prevent you from being inattentive. (It is more difficult to doze off while you are on your feet). There is however a danger in regarding the Scripture as God.

When the descriptions of the life of Jesus or Rama are taken as describing what God did, then one tends to make a distinction between Him as God and me as a human being, implying: “What God can do does not apply to me. I am not supposed to do what *He* did!” I have even heard this in reference to swamis: “Oh, you are a swami, we are mere mortals.” – as though swamis are special mortals and when they die, something special happens to them! “We are only ordinary mortals and we are not supposed to follow your example,” yet they keep on telling us that a swami should set the example! To whom and what for? Who will follow any example? At each step, you will say, “Oh, you are someone special, you are not like us!” By regarding the Scripture as something special, something that has no relevance to our life, unconcerned with our life, we destroy its value.

Therefore people do not learn anything from holy books. In some Tamil Scriptures, there are some spicy romantic passages. The first half of a Tamil hymn would be a graphic, almost enticing, description of the female body. The second half says that this is only a piece of flesh to be ignored. There are people who only read the first half! They find it beautiful, enticing....that suffices!’ So some people do not regard the holy books as Scriptures but treat them more like newspapers, history or prehistory. This is 1973. Our history goes back 1, 972 years. What happened before is counted backwards! B.C. 100 is before B.C.1. Surely the people who lived then did not count backwards! We have our own set idea: this is history, this is not history. If we regard the Bhagavatham,

Ramayana, etc. as history, it would be more meaningful. You would read it with a lively interest. But again, since the problem does not arise in your case, you will still not derive any inspiration from it. As people read the New Testament, they can note Jesus Christ saying, "Follow me"; there is the Sermon on the Mount, etc., but people read it like a paper, and the value is lost. Loss is possible only after gain. Here there is nothing gained. This is the tragedy of human experience: unless my foot aches, a description of gout is nothing more and nothing less than a description of gout! Absolutely irrelevant to our life – unless we are awake to this in the manner in which Buddha was awake to it. It is not necessary for me to suffer from cancer to appreciate what cancer can mean. If warned about the danger of developing cancer from smoking, it is not essential that I also experience lung cancer in order to give up smoking. It is possible that I can, by the right use of intelligence, really understand the tragic consequences without actually experiencing the disease itself. In a manner of speaking, we can learn through other people's experiences. Buddha did not suffer at all. He was surrounded by luxury. Yet, when one day he saw an old man, he asked himself: "Am I also subject to old age?" Similarly, he enquired about his body being subject to sickness on seeing a sick person; on seeing death, he wondered whether he too was destined to go away the same way. That was enough..... Therefore, even the morning newspaper can be a 'Bible' to me if it is approached in this spirit of realising that what happens to him can happen to me too! Then one can derive a great amount of inspiration from any Scripture, any writing.

Now we come to the Ramayana – we have to come to it, it does not come to us! The original was written in Sanskrit. They say Sanskrit was a living language some time ago. This means it is no longer living now! When it came to be translated into English, or modern languages, the Golden Age of Indian Civilisation had already passed. Some Westerners translated the Ramayana. They were well-meaning but had no idea of what life had been in the days of the story. If an African, who had never had contact with any European, were to be told that in certain places people cover themselves, wearing clothes, all he could conceive of is bulrushes used to cover the body. Similarly, these translators visualised the weapons that their European ancestors used to fight with long ago and translated words like *dhanush* and *baana* into the supposed equivalents *bow* and *arrow*. Their forefathers used bows and arrows for hunting one thousand years ago; so they thought the people of the Ramayana could not have done any better! They did not ask themselves how Rama could have killed 1,000 people with one 'arrow'. This was glossed over as oriental exaggeration! "One part of it I accept as historical, true; the other part I push aside as exaggerated." Who will query this? "I am the expert – so I lay down the law!" – that is where the translating scholar stands.

So the Ramayana came to us through foreign translators. Few of us read it in the original. The Sanskrit language was not difficult but it had been forgotten. There was a lot of speculation as to whether the Ramayana was historically true, whether there ever lived a person called Rama. I have a simple answer whenever this problem is raised: The Ramayana is the story of Rama who is regarded as an incarnation of God; if you think this is a cock and bull story and that Rama did not exist, then the author of the story must be God – it is so wonderful! Choose what you like: either accept that Rama, the hero living on earth, was God, or the author of this account was a divine being who was capable of conceiving this fantastic story. Therefore, whether or not Rama existed as Rama, whether or not Rama was God in human form, the story is still valid. I have been

reading the Ramayana for a long time. Having carefully studied the description of the world as it was in those days, I do not know if anyone can boldly declare that whatever is described in the Ramayana can be affirmed as having taken place in what is known as India today. It seems to be totally different. They often declare that what is called Lanka there is modern Ceylon. This is very improbable. Who was Rama, who was Ravana, we do not know. It is quite possible that the battle between Rama and Ravana is a veiled description of an actual battle that took place thousands of years ago between two nations that may still exist. The whole thing is beautifully veiled. Names, descriptions of places, are such that they cannot be recognised. Therefore hostility between the descendants of the combatants is not continued – unlike the perpetuation of ill-will encouraged by the repeated reading of the accounts of the Jewish insistence on Jesus's crucifixion. This makes the Christian members of the congregation get hot under the collar each Easter at the memory of what the Jews did to their Lord. A few blocks away during the time of the Passover, the Jews in Israel recall the suffering they had to endure from the Egyptians before Moses helped them escape. I cannot visualise harmony coming while we are constantly fed with these accounts reviving hostility, keeping up bad feeling.

It is quite possible that the same kind of events are recounted in the Ramayana, but in completely different terms so that I cannot recognise the conflicting parties. It is quite possible that your ancestor and mine were opposed in bitter warfare in the events referred to in the Ramayana, but it is so cleverly veiled that we do not recognise it. We only take the lessons if we can – and forget the personalities concerned. We do not know when the story took place. We do not know who was involved or where it all happened. All these are totally irrelevant. The Indian scholar is not interested in these factors which can only perpetuate hostility and antagonism without contributing one positive factor to our life. So we study a completely impersonalised, fictionalised version of past history in an attempt to see if we can learn something from it. The question of the authenticity of the text has also preoccupied the scholars. There has been endless argument about the authorship of the first books of the Old Testament ascribed to Moses, as the death of Moses is described in one of them! It is probably that the first four and a half books were dictated by him, but who gave the story of his death and of what happened afterwards?

The New Testament was written years after the event. Some consider it completely reliable while others find it doubtful. Here, in the Ramayana, they seem to have taken extraordinary care to ensure that the authenticity was not questioned. Valmiki had asked Narada the question that inspired the whole account: "Who is the most excellent man?" Narada told him the life the Rama – the most excellent man. Rama was still alive at that time. Narada added that this was only a glimpse of Rama's story, that Valmiki should meditate, and God would reveal the entire story to him. Here comes an element of doubt: in meditation the rest of the story will be revealed: how to be sure that there is nothing added to it by imagination? It is said that Valmiki saw everything as it took place – even what people thought. But, there is yet another help to confirm authenticity. At the time, the two sons of Rama were actually living with Valmiki. As soon as he had composed the whole of the Ramayana, as seen in his meditation, he taught the two boys to recite the epic. The boys had not seen their father as they were born while Sita was in exile. After teaching them their father's story, Sage Valmiki sent them to go around

singing it wherever they found an assembly of people. He hoped thereby that one day they would sing it in Rama's presence. This is what happened. One day Rama saw the two boys who had come from Valmiki's ashram and he let them sing the epic their Guru had taught them. Here was the story of the Ramayana recounted in the presence of the hero himself! It has now the seal of his own approval. This makes it impossible to question the authenticity of the Ramayana. Thus the epic of the Ramayana is immortalised, ensuring that it is taken out of the pale of doubt and scholarly vacillation.

TALK III

We saw that Ravana, the villain, was a reincarnated divinity. Our Gurudev, Swami Sivananda, used to say that in the course of time, the good man becomes a bad man and the bad man becomes a good man. How this happens, we do not know. In the same way, what we consider to be a 'misfortune' becomes a 'good' fortune and what we consider to be a 'good fortune' becomes a 'misfortune'. There is a saying, "Often good cometh out of evil" and this has been quoted again and again. But what is hidden in this and which is not quoted as often is that "often evil cometh out of good". Not only 'out of evil good cometh' but out of what appears to be good, evil cometh. These two seem to alternate, totally regardless of our wishes, hopes and fears.

There may be people in the world who are afraid of the dark, but darkness does not take any notice of their fear. There is no mercy at all – "Poor thing, you know, she is afraid of darkness, so let me make the sun shine all the time...!" No notice is taken of what you are afraid of, of what you hope, of what you desire. There are people who are afraid of daylight. Prostitutes and thieves do not like daylight. Nor does the sun have supreme compassion for them and say, "All right, enjoy yourself a little more, I shall hide myself for some more time!" Totally regardless of our aspirations and fears, of our hopes and expectations, time seems to flow on, and in this river are found things which you call 'good' and things which you call 'not so good'.

Good and evil seem to follow one another – out of good, evil comes, and out of evil, good comes. I hope it does not make much sense to you – it does not to me! It has been said by a very great man (God) – and we are not here to dispute this "out of evil good comes"..... "Out of good evil comes", I am adding as the inevitable corollary. Saying "this lady's mother was a human being" means 'out of' a human being a human being came, and out of this human being, another human being came." But when you say, "out of evil good cometh" and "out of good evil cometh", it is almost like announcing that a dog gave birth to a girl and the girl gave birth to a cat! Is that possible? Ridiculous!

What is the fun here? What is the mystery? It is quite simple: 'good – evil', 'misfortune – good fortune', are all labels stuck on by us! Nature is not responsible for this. What happens, happens – regardless of our hopes and aspirations. Time brings all these: time brings Ravana, time brings Rama, time brings somebody else. Things keep changing. Change is the only unchanging Truth in this world! To a change which seems to suit us at that time, we give a title, a tag, a label: "it is very good", "good fortune". And when this change goes on and something else happens, one labels that "misfortune". Time is not responsible for all this; time keeps moving, changing, bringing about change.

Ravana was the grandson or great grandson of Brahma, the Creator, God. So Ravana had a supreme qualification – marvellous! On the one hand, he was the great grandson of Brahma, the Creator; on the other hand he was the reincarnated gate-keeper of Vishnu's own Kingdom, the kingdom of God. Because of some mistake, he was born as a demon. Having been born as a demon, he did his job of oppressing good people. Because the good people complained or felt afraid, Vishnu Himself came to their rescue and had to kill this demon. That is the story, in brief. Extremely simple. All this had to happen. In Vedanta, there is a beautiful explanation for this. After hearing the 'explanation', I hope you will still remain in the same state of ignorance in which you are, because explanation does not remove ignorance, does it? You put a little sugar in

your mouth. It tastes sweet. The doctor will 'explain' to you how much sucrose is there, how sucrose is made. You listen to all that explanation for one hour and then put the same sugar in your mouth: how does it taste now? Exactly as it tasted before! The explanation did not change the taste of the sugar! You can take something else: quinine, which is bitter. You go to the doctor and say, "Doctor, it is terribly bitter," and the doctor says, "No, you know it is... etc...etc. ." After listening to his 'explanation' for half an hour, you put one drop of quinine into your mouth – it is still bitter! Exactly as it was before!

Vedanta had brought as explanation that the whole universe, the entire creation, is made of three gunas: Satwa, Rajas and Tamas. Satwa is the quality of divinity, light, enlightenment; Satwa means that quality which clings to Truth. In every experience, it looks for truth, not an assumed truth, but truth as seen. I do not assume that this is Maya. This is 'carpet', why call it Maya? After calling it carpet, after seeing that it is carpet, I begin to enquire because I am not satisfied with calling it carpet. 'Carpet' is a word, a label. I want to enquire into the truth again: "What is it made of? ... What is it? ... And in this way, I arrive at some truth, progressively. But all the time the mind, the heart, or the consciousness is devoted, is clinging to truth. That is called Satwa. Satwa is free from assumptions, from what you call emotions, free from prejudices. Satwa is free from ignorance.

Ignorance is not a real entity. Ignorance is our own unwillingness to face the truth. I am not ignorant of myself: every moment everything that happens in my life mirrors my nature. But I do not want to look at my nature, I do not want to look at myself. That is called ignorance. Ignorance is not something which I have not been taught. When you ask a young boy or a young girl, "Why do you not sit and pray?" – they often say, "You know, Swami, in our society, there are no good people to teach us how to pray; our father and our mother do not teach us either, and therefore I do not pray." Who taught you to eat? Without anybody teaching, you can do this. Boys and girls run after each other; who teaches them how? Without teaching, we find out. If you want to learn, you will learn – you will find out for yourself. Ignorance is not "I have not been taught", but ignorance is deliberately turning oneself, one's face, one's attention, away from what is obvious, terribly obvious.

Life teaches us from moment to moment. Life is like a mirror. It is not as though the world is going to go to the dogs if you and I were not there. In all our activities, in all our encounters with people, our nature is revealed. In our reaction to others, there is an opportunity for us. There is a revelation – not the other funny revelation – "I dreamt" ... "I had a vision" ... "I dreamt of God and I had a vision of angels" means you had too much to eat last night! You were probably drunk, after one extra bottle of beer one has all sorts of funny visions! Life teaches us – and that intellect or intelligence which refuses to see this is ignorance. Note: it is *ignorance*, not ignorant. That is called *tamas*. It may be necessary – *tamas* also may be necessary. If *tamas* were not there, you would never sleep. *Tamas* is considered darkness, sleep, inertia. During this state of inertia, you gain some energy to continue to live.

Then there is *Rajas*, which is energy, dynamism, passion. The whole universe is pervaded by these; nothing in the universe is totally devoid of one or the other or all of these three. Even the greatest saint has got some *tamas* in him. If that *tamas* were not there, he would not be able to sleep. And even the most stupid man has got a moment of

clarity –sometimes he is sensible, even if only once in a lifetime. The most stupid man has some Satwa in him.

Ramayana teaches us a remarkable lesson, and that is: during the course of time, during one epoch, one period of time, Satwa may predominate, holiness may predominate, goodness may predominate; and at another period of time, evil – what you call ‘evil (labels are yours!) – may predominate. There is no absolute goodness and there is no absolute evil. Goodness itself, when it comes into power, when it realises that it is powerful, becomes evil. I have seen this happen everywhere, even in what are called “ashrams” and spiritual institutions. He may be a very good man, a wonderful boy, but put him as president or secretary of an institution, and that is likely to be the last day he will be good! When you have this power, you invent your own theory why you should be vicious. Of course you do not think it is vicious! “I am in charge!” “I am in charge” means the others are cows chased by a bull – charging! That is the danger! If I am dead, what is going to happen? Will Mauritius disappear? Probably it will be better off! – four cups of coffee more ... other people can take them, somebody who may be more thirsty or hungry! Time seems to churn and put somebody on top. That fellow loses his head and then it turns again.

In one of the Upanishads, called the Kathopanishad, this phenomenon is described most graphically: the human being here is cooked exactly like rice. I do not know if you have ever watched a pot of rice cooking: a few grains of rice come up and go down again; other grains come up, they dance and they go down again, the others come up ... that’s all. The thing that comes up is temporarily styled or labelled ‘good’. You know why? This is another crazy thing: someone invented a remarkable slogan: “Survival of the fittest” and it has its counterpart in Indian thought: “Satyam eva jayate – Truth alone triumphs”. Righteousness triumphs. The fittest survive! How do I know this fellow is fit? Because he survives. And therefore, survival becomes important. By hook or by crook, that is the only way I can prove I am fit. If I cannot hit him face to face, I pump a couple of bullets through a hole and he is dead! So long as he is dead, I am fit. I survived – so I am the fittest person. So long as I can destroy somebody else, I am righteousness. If you look at it this way, it is a terrible thought to sustain even for a few seconds. How do I know that I am righteous? Is there a criterion of righteousness apart from surviving, winning, or is victory alone the criterion to prove my righteousness? The moment I assert “survival of the fittest” or “righteousness triumphs”, I am doomed completely. I am going to fight, to trample upon everybody in this world just to get to the top, to prove this is righteousness. All the other fellows were crooks – and I succeeded because I was the worst of them! I was the greatest among crooks! It is a terrible thing. Yet, the one that comes on top, whatever it is, considers himself righteous, considers himself fittest.

Then you bring in God, karma, a lot of other things: “My karma was good – God placed me here!” The moment you say, “God has placed me here,” someone comes up, throws you down and says, “God has placed you down there! Come on, down there!” This very concept promotes violence, viciousness, evil. That is why Jesus said, “He who comes last shall be first; he that is humble shall be exalted.” But that is the danger, the trouble! He must continue to be humble, not to be exalted in his own eyes. If, while being cooked in that pot, I realise that I am still a particle, a grain of rice – whether I am at the bottom or at the top – I am safe. That is what happens in life. That is what Ramayana tells us most beautifully. Sometimes – no, all the time – there is evil at the top. That which is at the

top is evil! I do not want you to agree with me, but I want you to think about it! That which is at the top becomes evil. The goodness may survive being at the top for a few years. Once I am elected a spiritual head or whatever it is, for a few days there will be receptions. At every reception, someone will say, "You know, Swami Venkatesananda, he is goodness personified; he is humility personified!" All right. Just to justify his praising me, I may remain good and humble for a few days. Otherwise he would not say it again next time! For a few months, so long as these congratulatory parties continue, I am likely to be good. Once those parties are over, and I am well established on my throne, I become vicious. I may bring in a million excuses why I should do what I do. But nothing is going to alter the fact that I have become vicious. The one on top always becomes vicious. Always! (I do not like using the word 'always' because I have a slogan: "always is always wrong, never is never right".) Here it would be justified to say that that which becomes powerful is always corrupt. But then, this thing which is on top has its own day. Every dog has its own day, and until the time brings about a change, nobody can meddle with it.

This is another lesson that Ramayana teaches us. I am sure most of us have had some kind of experience of this: we go on fooling people until suddenly we fool somebody who fools us! For example, Hitler: he could invade Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, Belgium, etc. till he invaded Russia – that was the end! This was bound to happen. You bully a good man – he keeps quiet. That gives you the feeling that you are the fittest. 'Survival of the fittest' means to some: "I hit him and he kept quiet – he could not answer me." He might have been a good man who did not want to answer you, who did not want to challenge you or to fight with you! Right then, what are you going to do? The habit that you have cultivated of bullying people is going to grow. Like this, you go to a stronger man and you bully him: he may say something or he may also keep quiet, because by that time, your tone has become harder – you have become a hardened criminal. You go on and on till one day you meet your match. That must come. In the Bhagavatham, this is even more clearly pronounced. In the Ramayana, it is declared that when the gods went to Vishnu to complain about Ravana, Vishnu said, "The time is not yet, wait. It is his time now." Evil has its own time, and during that period you can do nothing.

What is the thought that passes your mind as you hear this? "Ah, so I suppose if I am vicious, that cannot be helped! I can also be vicious sometimes – you know, that is the time, that is Kali Yuga, so everybody must be vicious, everyone must tell lies." It is true – but in the current of time that flows on, you and I have the freedom to float either here or there, either in Satwa or in Rajas or in Tamas. Each one of us has got the free will to manoeuvre within the time-stream. I cannot be completely out of the time-stream – but within that time-stream, I can be very vigilant. That is important! Things will happen: sometimes Satwa will be up, sometimes Rajas will be up, sometimes Tamas will be up, but do I have the wisdom to distinguish what is what, to know what is what? Do I realise that whatever it is – whether I am on top or at the bottom or in the middle – I am only a particle of rice, a grain of rice, totally unaffected by all this change that takes place, the change being only relative? What is 'top'? That which is above what is below. What is 'below'? That which is below what is top. The wisdom that enables us to distinguish the unchanging from the change, that is Satwa. Satwa is not an extraordinary imported commodity but that which enables us to see. Changes will take place: out of evil, good will come; out of good, evil will come.

I remember a funny story: someone had been invited to a party and he was narrating to his friend the next morning – “You know, I won a lottery and therefore, I was invited to a gala party.” “Oh, congratulations!” “Not quite; when I returned home the house had burnt down.” “Oh, sorry!” “Nothing to worry about,” he says. “Why so?” “My mother-in-law was there too. She also got burnt in the house!” ... “I won a lottery” – that is a very good thing, which resulted in my being invited to a party. But because I got invited to the party, the house burnt down. That is a bad thing. Because the house got burnt down, my mother-in-law also died. That is a good thing! We do not know at what stage to evaluate a good fortune or a misfortune. At one stage, it is good fortune; at another stage, the same thing appears to be a bad fortune.

Ravana was born: a terrible thing, but because Ravana was born, Rama was born. Rama had to incarnate. If this Ravana was not there, Rama would not have been born at all. All right then: it was most wonderful that Rama was born. but it does not seem to be all that good, because since Rama came into the world, there has been a cult which adores Rama and which is therefore opposed to those who worship Krishna. This fight was not there before! Ravana came, it was bad. Rama came, it was good. Out of that, this sectarianism started – that is bad again. Maybe out of this sectarianism, wisdom comes. We do not know! We do not know what is good, what is evil; except that in the course of time, there is constant change – and to some change, we give the label ‘good fortune’, ‘good’, and to another bit of this change we give the label ‘this is evil’, ‘this is misfortune’.

There is no ‘and therefore ...’ here! One who is aware of this *is* the stream, *is* the river. The river of time flows along. You know expressions like ‘flowing with the current’, ‘flowing against the current’, ‘flowing across the current’? Even these may be inadequate expressions. The river of time flows along: one who realises this is the current, is the stream itself!

TALK IV

It is usual to refer to Rama by a title meaning one who exemplifies the highest excellence in conduct, i.e., Maryada Purushottama. He is also described as one who is an exemplar: aadarsha purusha – someone who sets an example. We are supposed to imitate Him. In the Gita, Krishna Himself says that He has nothing to gain or lose in this world, being desireless: yet, people will follow His example, and therefore he busies Himself here doing His work. Usually, when we quote these verses from Scriptures, we limit ourselves to the part of the quotation which suits our argument. We do not go beyond that! A verse later, Krishna says: “If I appear to be lazy, people will copy this.” It is usually only the bad examples that we are ready to follow.

Rama is supposed to have set an example. Rama was said to have been very fond of his wife. You must accept these statements for what they are worth. Having got Sita back after Ravana had abducted her, Rama banished her. Even so, we must accept that he was a devoted husband. When she had been abducted, he went raving mad and asked rock, tree, pillar: “Do you know where Sita has gone?” Shall we follow His example? Most of us will not! If we lose a wife, we feel we will get another one! Apart from that, if you and I do as Rama did, we will be locked up in a mental home and not allowed out! What is the example I can follow? *Can* one follow the example of someone else?

In the Bhagavatham, it is said that Krishna had officially eight wives. In addition to that, He had about 16,000 others. Those of you who have merely one or two know how difficult it is! Narada, the eternal celibate, was intrigued: people say that they cannot live with one woman and here is someone apparently living with thousands! Before considering the possibility of following Krishna’s example, he wanted to investigate the truth. When he went to Swaraka, he discovered that in every house there was one Krishna and a wife! The Scripture endeavours to prove that, in spite of having so many wives, Krishna was still a monogamist.

A story with a similar lesson is told of Shankaracharya. It is not authentic. It is said that his disciples copied him gladly when he went to quench his thirst in a toddy shop with local liquor after a long pilgrimage, but they were not as keen to follow his example when later on, he drank molten lead in a blacksmith’s workshop! Following does not quite suit here. What does it mean, following an example? I can merely copy! It is silly copying. Because you have no personality, you do not know what you are, what you want, what the matter is with you, this superficial imitation wears out. Imitation can be of superficial behaviour. It is an absolutely ridiculous, superficial affair. It solves no problems, but creates some more! Just because Rama did something, can I also do that? In the Bhagavatham, there is a warning: you must do what Krishna taught you – not what He did! Do not say Krishna did this and I will do the same. Do not say, for example: “Krishna was a thief and stole butter and so I can also steal butter. It is righteous – even God did it!” We are given this warning: you cannot do this. It has been said that in the lives of these great beings who were divinities, one often notes transgression of Dharma. What they forbid in their teachings, they do at times. But whatever they do, they get away with it. If you do it, you get into trouble! There is danger in blind copying. You can also do what Krishna did and marry eight wives (ignoring the 16,000!). He could manage it – he did not get grey hairs. You may also try it, but in fifty days, you will have a heart attack!

If I blindly follow someone else's example without knowing exactly why he does what he does, I am likely to run into trouble. If I inject myself with insulin, as my Gurudev did, after a few days I shall be no more. So the lesson is not to blindly copy the external behaviour of Rama, Krishna, Jesus, etc., but to follow their teachings. Is that possible? Again: what are the teachings I pick up? What do I do with them? How do I apply them in my own life? In one version of Ramayana, there is an incident reported about Ravana mortally wounded and lying on the battlefield, waiting for death. Ravana had been king for a long time and was a past master in administration. Rama explained to Lakshmana that their father was dead and that they, who would eventually go back to rule the kingdom, were totally ignorant of administration. Then Rama sent Lakshmana to ask the dying Ravana – his mortal enemy – for some advice. Lakshmana knelt down by the side of Ravana, asking to be told what to do and not to do when they go back to rule the kingdom. Despite the agony of death, it is said that Ravana was amused. He knew Rama to be God and he thought that He was teasing him with a request. But as that was Rama's command, he obeyed him, saying: "In the short period left to me, I will give you one thing to do: when a good thought enters your mind, do it immediately." He supported this advice with the tragedy of his present circumstances. On the few occasions when he had been advised to return Sita to Rama, he had wondered whether this was not the best thing to do, thinking: "Why kidnap someone else's wife and keep her with me and have all this quarrel?" But, unfortunately for him, he would not be dying as he did at Rama's hand. Then he offered one 'do not': "When a woman gives you advice, do not act on it at once. Think well about it!" To illustrate this, he told about how his sister, enamoured of Rama, had her nose chopped off by Rama and Lakshmana as she was about to molest Rama. She wanted revenge, but she made it appear as though she was keen to get Sita for her brother by twisting the whole story just a little – by hiding half of the facts! One half of the story was truthful; the unpleasant aspect was hidden away and the tempting side was presented. Most of us do this. In listening to her advice, her tempting words without considering the consequences, Ravana had jumped into unthinking action and therefore was here dying!

Swami Sivananda was also fond of recommending acting on the good thoughts as they come. He once mentioned it in a speech in Bombay: Swamiji hammered again and again: "D.I.N" – i.e., *Do It Now*. We were terribly impressed by this, and next morning there was a satirical article in the newspapers. An accountant had planned to rob the bank at some later stage. As soon as he heard Swamiji's message, he – who had been brooding over the robbery – felt he had been given the answer – "do it now". He instantly obeyed and robbed the bank! What is forgotten here is that it is only if a good idea comes to you that you should immediately translate it into action. But *who* decides what a good idea is? In the same way, if we take it literally that whatever a woman advises must be ignored, and my wife tells me the house is on fire and I do not listen to her, I may run into serious trouble! Again the ball is thrown back into my own court. I cannot take anyone else's example however good and glorious it may be. I cannot follow anyone else's advice because I still do not know how to apply all this.

There is the story of the innocent villager, engaged as a domestic servant, who had been warned not to disturb his master at work when the milk boiled over. Applying this order, he refrained from running to report when the whole house was on fire. He let it burn down in compliance with the orders given him by his master in a different situation

where they were applicable! Blind following of a teaching is foolishness! On another occasion in the Ramayana, Rama, the ideal exemplar of conduct, hides himself behind a tree and shoots an enemy. This is considered totally unrighteous conduct in a warrior. When Vali asks him “What did I do to you to make you kill me?”, Rama’s reason was simple: “Sugriva is my friend and you are his enemy – therefore you are my enemy too.” So, even in the lives of very good men, there are one or two incidents which seem to be exceptions. People have argued endlessly whether Rama’s action was one of those exceptions. Was it righteous or unrighteous action? Here Rama does not mince word – he is not interested in his reputation, fame or honour. He is prepared to argue pragmatically. Later, some silly man was beating his wife who had run away to live with another man and had returned home again. He shouted at her to get out of his house, saying, “Do you think I am also Rama?” His wife lived in the house of Ravana for many months and then he accepted her back. “I will not do the same!” This was reported to Rama who decided to banish Sita for fear of public scandal.

In the Gita, there is a sloka which says: For a respectable man, a scandal is death. In another place, the same Krishna in the same Gita tells us to ignore praise or censure! Which advice do I follow? When I am scandalised, which of these two courses of action do I resort to? Which is my guide, my authority? Rama’s story is not only an example, but a mirror. Look at it, and as you look at it, you will see your own face reflected in the mirror. When you study the Ramayana or the Bhagavatham, or any other Scripture or biography, it is foolish to imitate those actions. It is foolish to think, “I have understood the message or the teaching.” Only one course of action is possible: to use it as a mirror.

Read the whole story with its ups and downs described graphically. Something happens in you! A certain maturity takes place. You no longer blindly imitate. That is probably the importance of studying the scriptures.

TALK V

From the beginning of time there has been God. Since the world began, there has been God and what we call 'evil'. It is said that even before Brahma had created the universe, when Vishnu was still sleeping, two demons were formed from the wax that dropped from Vishnu's ears. Symbolically, this suggests that what we call 'evil' is part of creation. You cannot have one side of a paper only – however much you try! If you cut it into half, each half still has two sides! The side *you* are on is always *good*; the other side is *evil*! If you take a test and fail, the fault is the teacher's. You feel you have prepared well but the teacher did not know how to set the test paper! It is always the other side that is at fault. I am good – the others are evil! Good and evil, the distinction between good and evil, is born of "I" and the "other". As soon as "I" is there, the "other" is also there. Somebody else! There is "I" and ... a dog, a mosquito, a husband, a wife. As soon as "I" wake up, the "other" is formed and with this, the differentiation between "good" and "evil".

In the story of Rama, we are told that right at the beginning of his life, before he was sixteen, a sage called Vishwamitra visited his father, King Dasaratha. The sage told the king that he was about to perform a great Vedic ritual and that there were demons who would disturb him in this. He said that he could reduce them to ashes with his yogic powers, but, being a religious man, he did not want to kill them. Instead he was asking for the two sons of Dasaratha – Rama and Lakshmana – to go and destroy these demons. In his habitual hospitality to sages, the king had offered to do anything that was desired by the holy visitor. Now in his attachment to his sons, he forced himself to refuse this request, saying he was willing to do anything else – even to go himself! But after a prolonged argument, it was agreed that the two princes should do as Vishwamitra wanted. The sacred rite was about to begin and Vishwamitra told them: "Now is the time for the demons to appear." The first one to come was a woman. (Symbolically, it looks to me as if it was a cyclone. These, too, have female names!) Tataka, the demoness, appeared and Rama said, "It is a sin for a hero to kill a woman." The first time Rama handled a lethal weapon, it had to be directed against a woman! This is considered unrighteous, unethical, immoral, unbecoming, unchivalrous – all these together. Yet, this is what he had to do. He looked to the Guru, Vishwamitra – "It is a woman!" Then he was told: "Woman or man, it is a wicked thing. Kill it." Rama replied, "All right, you tell me to kill it. I will do so." So, with a certain rationalisation, I can conclude: "I can kill whom I like, or rather, dislike!" "My Guru said so, so it is all right for me to destroy!"

Rama then got married and the story continues. The next evil that manifested in Rama's life was Kaikeyi, his stepmother, who instigated his father to banish Rama against all codes of righteous conduct. The Ramayana paints this lady Kaikeyi as unabashed evil, as evil incarnate. Her husband, the sages, her own son – everyone cursed her. She had somehow wrung out from her royal husband, Rama's father, the boon that Rama should be banished to the forest for fourteen years. It was pointed out that the order of exile was made by the old king under the influence of lust. Misguided by a woman, he had lost his senses. It was objected that his mind was clouded by excessive affection for his wife and that such a decision must be null and void. Rama's own mother begged him not to listen – not to go away. Here is evil. What does Rama do? Does he fight? Does he refuse to obey his father? No. It does not matter whether it is immortal, unethical, illegal: "My father has said that I should go to the forest, so I will go!" The father himself said, "You

do not have to obey me.” – but, Rama insisted on going. Here, evil is made to triumph! So Rama went to the forest. He packed some of his guns. (What were called bow and arrow were probably powerful guns.) Sita was surprised that he should think of taking guns when they were going to live in a forest amongst yogis and hermits. On arrival in the forest, Rama was welcomed by sages living there. They told him that they were ascetics who have taken the vow of non-violence. Even if someone hit them, they were bound by their promise not to retaliate. They submitted to him that many demons harassed them, and they sought his protection. A ‘demon’ is anyone who hurts me, anyone who makes my life difficult. Demons are not a special kind of people. If I live in a quiet hermitage, anybody who worries me, who throws stones on my roof or is opposed to me is a demon! As the sages were committed to non-violence, they appealed to Rama to protect them against the mischief-makers. (If I do not want to kill anyone who harasses me, I engage someone else to do this for me!) Sita reminded Rama that they, too, had come to live the life of peaceful ascetics. Why should they bother the demons in the forest who had not done anything to them? Why should they pick a quarrel with innocent people that had left them in peace and had not even come their way? But Rama assured her that he must keep his promise to the sages of the forest to protect them. He reminded Sita that although he had renounced the kingdom for the duration of the exile, he was still a prince. As one belonging to the royal family, he considered it his duty to protect these people. He fought with anyone offending the hermits. There were thousands of these so-called demons whom he thus destroyed.

One of the most controversial parts of the Ramayana is the Vali episode. Having heard the story of Sugriva, the younger brother of Vali, Rama concluded a treaty of friendship with Sugriva. Everyone tells only *his* own side of a conflict and finds himself totally innocent. It is the *other* who is a fool or a thief or a scoundrel! That I provoked him is forgotten. When we narrate a complaint, there is no mention of what we did. We emphasise that he rolled up his sleeves to hit me; – that I called him a fool before this is not considered important and is glossed over!

The story of Sugriva was as follows: one day a demon had a fight with Vali. Both of them entered a cave. At a certain stage, Sugriva, standing at the entrance to the cave, saw blood coming out of the cave where his brother was fighting with a demon. He concluded that Vali had been killed, and so he crowned himself as ruler and took Vali’s widow as his wife, according to the laws of those days. After some time, Vali appeared. He had in fact killed the demon and was angry at seeing his brother on his throne, with his wife by his side. Fighting started. Sugriva claimed it was a misunderstanding, but Vali did not see it like that. Sugriva decided that Vali, being against him, was a demon. He sought Rama’s help. Rama and Sugriva seemed to recognise that they were in the same boat. Both had lost kingdom and wife and agreed to aid one another. Rama shot Vali while hiding behind a tree, as Vali could only be overcome by someone who was not facing him. He had a boon that meant that he always got half the strength of anyone fighting him. No one could ever beat him, as he was always the stronger in any straight battle. Rama was asked by Vali as he lay dying, “What did I do to you?” Rama replied, “Being the enemy of my friend, you are also my enemy!” Vali told him, “You are searching for your wife Sita who has been abducted by Ravana. Ravana is terrified of me. Hearing my name, he begins to tremble. If you had merely asked me, I would have got your wife back in no time!” But Rama answered, “No, you had to be killed!”

This is the simplified account, but we are on one wavelength: the question of violence and evil. What *is* evil? What *is* violence? What does violence involve? How do we deal with violence, with evil? Now comes the story of Ravana. Ravana was killed because he kidnapped Sita. That was the main crime. Others, such as harassing the sages, were merely added on later. The fact that the main cause for his destruction was his taking away the wife of Rama suggests that Rama was terribly fond of Sita. But as soon as Sita was returned to Rama, he explained that he regretted he was unable to take her back! Rama endured terrible adventures, came all the way to Lanka to recover her, destroyed Ravana for her sake. Yet, suddenly he seemed to doubt about whether she had been chaste away from him. She had to jump into fire as a test. On the surface, it looks as if it was a nebulous argument that Ravana had to be killed because he took away Rama's beloved wife. Therefore, he had to be called evil and eliminated.

Here again, just because Ravana was considered evil, wicked, he had to be killed. The reason that was immediately available was that he had kidnapped Sita. Certain people had to be considered evil. Then that evil had to be destroyed by violence. Then comes the final stroke of the man whose wife had run away with another man and then returned to her husband. He gossiped about Sita – as we tend to do. Must one yield to other people's gossip? Obviously, if I am bowing down to gossip, the gossip-monger is going to be encouraged. If a couple of you report that the Swami has been smoking or drinking wine, and if, as you say it, I wipe my mouth, it means you are right! If I test my own breath, or clean my mouth as you talk about my smoking, it indicates a bad conscience. If you throw doubt on my wife's innocence and I banish her, it suggests that I consider her guilty.

On the face of it, it looks almost as though Rama bowed down to this evil and encouraged it. That is the problem. What does one do about evil? Can evil be destroyed by evil means? By violence? All religions command: "Thou shalt not kill", but we have not obeyed this. Take the Bible, the Qu'ran, any of the India Scriptures: the Ramayana is devoted to descriptions of fighting. The entire story is about battles. The Bhagavatham is dotted with stories of demons – any person I do not like being a demon! Yet, they are Scriptures. I am not criticising them. I am not trying to run them down or suggesting that they are valueless. The Ramayana, the Bhagavatham and the Bible are all Scriptures. They tell us, "Thou shalt not kill" – and apart from that one line, the rest is all killing! They give us the whole story of conflict and killing. Because the killing is inevitable, the thing we destroy is called evil!

I used to wonder, in the early days of psychoanalysis, why the film stars were analysed year after year. This treatment lasted at least three months. When you have analysed me, and I have rationalised all my problems, if I have been properly equipped with insight – which psychoanalysis is supposed to bestow upon me – then I should be free. There ought to be no more need to back for treatment next year!

Once freed, one is free! In the same way, if during a certain epoch, evil had been completely eradicated (as when Rama had overcome Ravana, there followed Rama Raja, a period of complete virtue – no one telling lies, nobody committing crimes, etc.) how did evil come up again? What starts the evil off once more? God had to incarnate all over again to destroy the evil. That is the story of man. If you have studied history closely, you will see that it is also a story of battle. There have been so many wonderful things

done in the world, but history records mostly battles. The English and the French were always fighting, especially on other people's soil! What is the message? Probably to make us realise that this is part of nature, part of the universe, part of creation. Nobody has been able to stop it. I am not using the word 'inevitable', and I am not suggesting that we should accept it (I refrain from the wretched word 'accept'), I just see that it is there. Violence has been there, killing has been there, since the dawn of creation – somebody has always killed somebody else! Some violence has been in the world since the beginning of time. That is what the Ramayana and the Bhagavatham teach us. Similarly, the Bible and the Qu'ran tell us that there has been violence, there has been killing throughout creation. Yet, what does it do to me?

There is a lovely saying in Sanskrit, and elsewhere too, that it is natural that a frog eats a fly, a mongoose eats the frog, and something else eats the mongoose – and so on. It is difficult to transmit this message: there is darkness outside because it is night. That darkness does not upset or annoy or irritate us. It does not make us run wild, it does not produce anxiety. But if the lights here go off, then we panic, we worry: why did the lights go out? ... who put them out? We do not panic when there is darkness on account of night. If I am able to see that this violence and that this evil have been there all the time, I do not worry when someone abuses me, scolds, me, hurts, me, harms me. I take it as peacefully as I take the darkness of the night outside, because it is natural. It is only when somewhere within us, there is the feeling that this should not happen to me that I become violent. We feel the lights here should not go out, and when they do, we become irritated, violent. But if we see that this is the nature of the world, then when somebody comes up and hits me, it no longer seems unnatural. I know that somebody else could also have done it. What is so extraordinary? Why should I rebel that it happened to me?

I do not accept evil or violence. This is a difficult thing to communicate. I do not see it as "inevitable". I do not see it as "Karma" or call it "God's will". No. I just see that it is part of the nature of this world. When I see it in that manner, I do not get worked up to such an extent as to be provoked to hit back. If I enter into the spirit of what we have been discussing, violence does not arise in me at all. That is the beauty. It is when you work it out intellectually that you say, "Well, he hit me and since it is part of nature, I might as well return the blow!" But this does not happen. The moment I see that darkness belongs to night and is not something that happens specially to me, then it does not worry me any more. It seems to me that it is the only way to overcome evil – not to retaliate. That is what Jesus Christ meant when he said, "Resist not evil". You do not run around with a broom trying to wipe out darkness from the face of the earth! Resist not – that is all! If not he, then somebody else might suddenly collapse and fall upon me. What is wrong with that? Why should I be upset because someone threw a stone at me? It is part of nature. The moment I see this, violence does not manifest in my heart. And there the problem is solved. That is the only message of the Ramayana.

TALK VI

The Ramayana contains numerous lessons which are put in the mouth of the various characters, sometimes the heroes, sometimes the demons. For those who like quotations, the Ramayana is full of quotable sayings.

If you want to discuss Dharma, for instance, you pull out a couple of hundred verses from the Ramayana and you have a ready-made exposition of what Dharma means. The official name of Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, occurs quite often in the Ramayana. Whenever anyone wants to clinch an issue, he would say, "This is what is to be done, this is the eternal religion: to return good for evil; to attend to the comforts of guests; for a woman to be utterly devoted to her husband – this is eternal religion, Sanatana Dharma."

I will give you a few lovely morals which come readily to my mind. First, there is this king Dasaratha who had no children. What does this matter? There are already so many children in the world. Why should I not treat these as my own? But the king performed a religious ceremony in order to have children. All the future misery of his life, including his death, was the direct result of having had children. It is said that he lived for about 60,000 years or some such astronomical figure. He had been all right for 59,975 years or so. Come children, comes death! The mother of Rama actually lamented at one stage when Rama was condemned to exile: "I wish I had not had this son. Then I would have only had the misery of being childless. But now, I suffer the agony of losing my own son – seeing him banished to the forest."

How many of us remember that all our troubles are the direct result of desire? If I am a poor man, I have only the wish to be rich. Once I have acquired wealth, the illusion of having something, of possessing goods, keeps me awake, sleepless, worried, anxious. In reality, I do not own anything at all! Whether I have an Ashram or a car or am the author of twenty books, if I take these clothes off, I am as naked as when I was born; even the clothes were given to me by somebody else! I am still exactly as I have always been. It is the mind that suggests that this tape-recorder belongs to me, and now I would be upset if somebody threw a stone at it. Previously, I would have cried only if someone hit my head with a stone!

A desire is an extraordinary thing. A desire fulfilled is even more dangerous than a desire frustrated. Frustration of desire may lead you to an Ashram to become a swami. But a desire fulfilled is a threat. We all talk philosophy, but when it comes to ourselves, the philosophy is usually forgotten! In the same way that the spirit in the bottle evaporates, the spiritual Truth that we think we have evaporates.

King Dasaratha had done something terrible years before Rama was born. As a young emperor, he had gone hunting in the forest. He was so skilful that he did not have to look at an animal but could shoot by mere sound. In the dark, he aimed at what he took to be an elephant drinking water. When he went to pick it up, he was horrified to see a young man fatally wounded. He had mistaken the gurgling sound made by the young man's immersing a pot in water for an elephant drinking. Assumption! The boy was a hermit living with his parents in a small heritage. Both parents were blind and depended upon their son. He had gone to fetch water to quench his father's thirst. The king said he was sorry, but the mischief was done – what good was there in apologising? We kill

someone, then offer our excuses! The youth asked the king to ensure that his father got the water pot in the hermitage. On hearing that they were ascetics, the king got frightened. There is a saying in Hindi: “Keep at a distance from these four: Raja (king), yogi, fire and water”. If you play with them too much, you might get hurt. The king was filled with fear as he approached the hut. The old man called out to what he thought was his son returning. The king explained what had happened. He introduced himself as the king, called himself the greatest sinner. Whether the sage was angry or not is not our concern. But as the king had killed their only son, the only support they had, the sage asked to bring the body for cremation saying that he and his wife would also jump into the fire as they now had no one to look after them. Appropriate action! He added, “As my death ensues from the death of my son which was caused by you, your death will also come as the result of losing your own son!”

The king had forgotten this, as we all do. We all think, “If God only showed us before what sin we are suffering now, if we knew the cause and the effect that Karma is bringing us, we would be wise in the future. Forewarned is forearmed!” It is absurd. However much we learn – even if we are told that smoking will bring cancer – we still take no notice. One might think that the king would decide never to have a son in order to avoid the death predicted. Something happens, one forgets. One thinks one’s knowledge stands one in good stand in time of crisis, but it does not. It is a terrible thing. We may know a great deal, but when we face a crisis, we tremble. All our knowledge is gone! We do not know which theory to apply, though we have a dozen theories: “God is in heaven and all is well on earth” ... “Let go – let God”. Nothing seems to help. Then another theory comes: “God helps those who help themselves: – self-effort! The very man who was told that the loss of his son will one day kill him, prayed and performed a big ceremony to get a son! The story shows how attachment causes all sorts of trouble, many complications.

Dasaratha had been a very righteous king for all these 59,975 years or so. He had four sons of whom Rama was the eldest. In those days, the Guru was considered God on earth. Sage Viswamitra came to the palace one day. The king would always run to greet a sage coming near the palace. For all his life, the king had practised the virtue of offering to holy men whatever they demanded. The king asked the Maharishi to let him know what he could do for him, without knowing what boon he would be asked to grant. When he found that it was a demand for his two eldest sons, Rama and Lakshmana, to go to the forest with Viswamitra to deal with some demons, the king refused. He offered his own life instead, but he was not willing to let his sons go. He had probably never refused a sage’s request! This happens to all of us: we are prepared to share our services, our possessions – then comes an attachment somewhere and that relationship, that attachment, completely changes our attitude to life and towards others. The previous gentleness, goodwill, etc., is gone. It happens, for instance, in the case of mothers. I do not say it is a bad thing. Even if a lady has great respect for me and is my great well-wisher, if she finds that what I want runs counter to her own family’s needs, there will be a conflict. Attachment to something or somebody immediately creates conflict of interest. The mind naturally bends towards your object of attachment and not to what you would normally consider righteousness of Dharma.

Then we go on to another interesting feature. Rama’s coronation is announced and preparations are being made. It is said elsewhere (not in Valmiki’s account) that while

they were little children, Rama and Lakshmana teased an old woman called Manthara. Instead of taking it as childish pranks, she bore a grudge against them. When she heard Rama was to become king, she decided to prevent it. She went to see Kaikeyi, Rama's stepmother, who was fond of him as her own son. Manthara told Kaikeyi that her co-wife's son would be crowned king the next day. Kaikeyi was so thrilled that the darling of the family was to be thus honoured that she gave a pearl necklace to the old woman. It did not matter to her if he was her own son or not! Whether he was born of her or of her co-wife did not seem important. He was as dear to her as her own life. The old woman threw the necklace down in anger saying, "You do not know what is in store for you!" Kaikeyi replied that Rama loved her and treated her with as much reverence as his own mother. In a conversation of less than an hour, this same woman was brought to the other extreme: to the determination of having Rama banished. This is what gossip can do. You think you have great love or respect for someone – it can be your husband, your wife, anyone. Then someone comes to pour poison in your ears: you may not want to listen for a few minutes – till your attention is caught: "I have a photograph to prove it."

An opening has been made: you hear a little more and a little more until in a short while, you are ready to go to the divorce court! This is the danger of gossip. The woman called Manthara, which means "to churn", was able to churn the mind of Kaikeyi to such an extent that milk became curd and curd became butter! There was a complete transformation. One has to be very careful!

Rama gives a lesson later, when he had gone to the forest with Sita and Lakshmana. Lakshmana still could not tolerate what he felt to be the injustice of the banishment. On the first night in the forest, as they were getting ready to sleep, he recalled: "This terrible woman, this devilish Kaikeyi, is responsible for your having to lie down on the bare ground here!" Rama tells him that there are many good people to talk about – why discuss one who is wicked? This is a beautiful thought. But do not think that hereafter we will no longer talk about bad people and will only talk of the good! It does not work that way. But Rama's point is that while there are so many good people in this world, why think of the bad ones and waste one's breath talking about them? Just forget them! Is there nothing good to talk about? Must you always go on with this gutter talk?

There is another interesting incident. As the chariot which drove them first to the king and a thousand others followed them on foot, weeping. Rama asked the charioteer to go fast. He says here what he repeats on a second occasion: "Continued suffering is evil. Do not impose more suffering than absolutely necessary in the circumstances. The others are bound to be left behind – so leave them quickly!" Rama turned his face away as if he did not see anybody. He drove off.

They camped in a special part of the forest, and one day they saw a cloud of dust. Rama asked Lakshmana to see what this was. Lakshmana climbed a tree and reported that it was Bharata coming – and behind him, a huge army. He shouted: "That is the end of that. He is coming to kill you so that he can rule for ever!" According to the boon granted to his mother, he would only be allowed to rule for the fourteen years of Rama's exile. Lakshmana made a terrible assumption that Bharata was determined to kill his brother so as to rule after that period too. Rama told Lakshmana to cool down. "It may not be so ... why assume that Bharata is coming with evil intention?" In a million ways, we are guilty of this kind of thing everyday: making assumptions – "He is hostile." ...

“He is waiting to destroy me.” How do you know? Someone looks a little angry at me and I think he is going to destroy me now. I go to bed with this thought. Already I spent a sleepless night, and early in the morning I am preparing myself: “He is coming to attack me! ... He is coming to attack me!” – whereas he is coming merely to greet me! I am already rolling up my sleeves and giving him the impression that I mean to pounce on him. Then possibly he may say a few tactless words, and this confirms my suspicion that he came with a malicious intention. Actually, it was I who created this. Our whole life is based on assumptions: “I think you are going to do this.” ... “I assume you are going to do that.” ... “I think you will help me.” ... “I think you will not help me.” Why can I not look at things as they are? This is a look – no more assumptions.

Then comes the famous story of the demon disguised as a golden deer to entice Sita away. She is keen to get this beautiful object. Lakshmana tries to dissuade her: “You have never seen a golden deer. It is probably not a real animal!” This is a lesson we may learn: when we see something extraordinary, some magic, some miracle, it is better to look at it from a distance. It is probably a trap. Why should someone want to perform a miracle? To show off his powers? What for? There are two words in the English language most appropriate for the occasion: *so what?* If I lose my head and run after the extraordinary, I lose my wife or my life! In anything that looks unnatural – why call it supernatural? It is your credulity that invests the unnatural phenomenon with a supernatural nature. It is unnatural; I am not interested.

We are all capable of impulsive action like Sita here. She desired this special deer impulsively and Rama pursued it to get it for her. Eventually, Rama killed it. When it was shot, it assumed the voice of Rama calling for Sita and Lakshmana. Lakshmana told Sita again that this too is some mischief, refusing to believe that Rama could be in danger, especially from a silly deer. Sita, however, feared for Rama and insisted that Lakshmana go to help him. When he did not want to go, she, who was a marvellous woman, yielded for a moment to impulsiveness. She shouted: “Now I know you have vicious intentions towards me! You want Rama to be killed by these demons so that you can have me!” Once he was accused of immoral intentions towards her, Lakshmana went. Impulsive action often leads to endless suffering!

Then we go on to the story of Hanuman. From there on, the Ramayana contains a lot of incidents which could be interpreted spiritually, esoterically. It need not all be taken literally. Hanuman is considered to have been a monkey. Rama himself says, “Here is someone behaving so politely, so gently, sweetly – well-versed in the Vedas.” Does that fit a monkey? Probably we have to take some things at face value and other things not so literally. Hanuman is supposed also to have been the son of the wind. In English, if you put the first letter of wind upside down, it becomes mind! Mind and wind are the same: mind can also go from one corner of the world to the other in a twinkling of the eyes – like wind. To me, this Hanuman represents mind. It is said that Hanuman was not aware of his own strength until he was reminded of it. Even so, the knowledge that is hidden in you does not manifest until someone else reminds you of it. That is the role of the Guru. You know everything, but it is all submerged, hidden. Only when a Guru reminds you does this knowledge come up again.

Hanuman is supposed to have tremendous strength and power. He had a monkey’s nature, and as such, was destructive. But what was destructive by nature becomes

constructive when directed towards the service of God. This is one of the beautiful lessons we learn from the Hanuman story. Even so, there is the famous Vali episode where Rama is supposed to have been not quite so righteous. Vali had a boon by which fifty percent of his enemy's strength was automatically transferred to him. So he was always stronger. He could not be fought face to face: one had to overcome him from behind. This means, you have a bad thought in your mind, you cannot get rid of it by fighting it. The thought that you are trying to get rid of is this bad thought. The more you think of it, face it, the more impossible it is to eliminate it. So you have to get behind it. Trace it to its source, or take refuge in God and then this evil thought goes away. There are several other interesting lessons. The Ramayana contains a great many homely truths – marvellous incidents for us to remember – if we can!

TALK VII

The Scripture that we study usually stays in the library on the shelf. Rarely is the Scripture or the knowledge that is gained from it assimilated! Assimilated literally means “it becomes similar”. Once assimilated, it is similar to me. It is no longer a foreign substance, but has become like me – it becomes me! So that I do not need to quote the Scripture because every cell of my being shouts the Scripture. This is theoretically possible but in practice extremely rare. Krishna says very beautifully in the Gita: “One in a million might perhaps attempt to assimilate, and one in a million of these might really be able to assimilate Scriptural knowledge.”

The Scripture remains in the library on the shelf, and God remains in the temple. Even if you have your own prayer room, God does not come everywhere with you. God remains in the temple. The only thing that keeps me constant company is myself. Nobody else is constantly with me, even if I have friends and relatives. At times we are together, at times we are not. We all come together and move apart again. It is this me that creates all the problems. The problem is not in the Scripture, and therefore the Scripture cannot solve the problem! I create the problem, and therefore I will have to solve it. If I do not recognise this, I look for somebody outside myself to save me. I look for some Scripture to lay down the rules, to provide a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”, to tell me to be like Rama! But why must I be like Rama and not like Bharata, for instance? Our confusion is this: we ask the big and serious question: “What am I here for? What is my role in life? What is the part that God has allotted to me? – as if God is allotting jobs like a big administrator! Assuming that there is this thing called ‘divine plan’, we wonder about our role in it. And this must be divine – not diabolical! I am a diabolical being and I want to know what my place in the divine plan is – when it might very well be outside!

I make a big assumption: I am a chosen person, I am terribly important – or unimportant! So important that a special job must be given to me by God. God must choose something special for me – make me a Swami. Why not a scavenger? “What am I? What am I here for?” So that I may *become* what God wants me to be.” But if God wants me to *be*, I do not have to *become*. Why must I *become* something which *I am*? God created me as a man, so I do not want to become a man – I am already a man. To become a dog, I would have to grow a tail. But I am a man already, so why must I *become* what God wants me to *be*?

How does one discover this? Not by imagining that I am going to be Rama or Bharata. When I study the Scripture, unless I am very careful, I may be misled. That is probably why none of these Scriptures have really helped me. Watch what happens to you as you read the Ramayana. Your blood begins to boil as you hear how Kaikeyi behaves, how Manthara behaves. You take sides. You think that this is a good person, that is a bad person; this is divine, that is undivine. Rama is God and Ravana is anti-God. You have already created a problem for yourself, even with God, even with the Scripture. How will this Scripture help you? But on the other hand, if one sees the whole story, e.g., the Ramayana as a pattern, each one playing his or her role, that may be much more sensible. (I am not suggesting that this is true!)

I read a Scripture, a lovely inspiring story. But I cannot derive inspiration from this. Inspiration means breathing in. I cannot inhale a Scripture. I look at it. It looks interesting. Rama does all kinds of fantastic things. He is regarded as an incarnation of

God. Then I look at Bharata, who, in some respects, shines even more gloriously. Rama was sent to the forest and went away obediently. Bharata was given the kingdom, which he did not want. He did not feel bound by his mother's or father's promise. He lived the life of an ascetic when he could have had the riches of a king.

Then there is poor Lakshmana who was not involved at all, and he volunteered to go into exile. He seems even greater than Bharata. Then we have Sita. No one knows what Sita did to deserve exile in the forest. She went only in order to be with her husband and then lost even him. There is the remarkable character called Hanuman. He does everything to make the Ramayana possible – and yet, takes no credit for himself. He considers himself only to be a messenger of Rama without preening himself. He could have claimed that he went there to fight Ravana, discovered where Sita was, jumped across the sea and was the cause of finding Sita. But instead, he insisted that whatever was done, was done by Rama.

If you study the story of Hanuman alone, it looks as though he is the greatest character in the Ramayana. Yet, there are some whose names are not mentioned a second time – such as Lakshmana's wife, Urmila. Her spirit of renunciation, cooperation, service, remaining completely in the background, totally unknown – is that not glorious?

Then you have conflicting performances. Kumbhakarna gets up from his long sleep asking why he was woken. He is told that his help is wanted to fight Rama, whose wife has been kidnapped by Ravana. He advised Ravana to return the woman, but when the latter refused, he agreed to assist him against Rama. Vibhishana warned, and when his advice was not listened to, he went over to the enemy and abandoned his brother Ravana.

Whom to admire? Why admire anyone at all? Why not simply look at each one? Why import all these battles and quarrels into your own consciousness? Why tell yourself that you approve of Rama while disapproving of someone else? If you do this, you have created the conflict of your own life! They say that if you have darshan of Rama and see him merely once, you go straight to heaven. So all these rascals and demons who saw Rama must have gone to heaven long before you! So why do you wish to repeat to yourself that Ravana was a demon – and then create conflict in your own society? There is, for example, a cult in South India worshipping Ravana. They are anti-this, anti-that, anti-Brahman, anti-Rama – only allowing admiration for Ravana. Who is responsible for this? Me, the worshipper of Rama! I create the problem by defining what the divine is, and arousing opposition to it; somebody else will oppose this with his view of the divine.

Somewhere there is a definition of sura and asura. The usually definition of sura is divine being, devata, God; asura is demon. But there is a different definition somewhere else: sura is one who drank sura or liquor, and asura is one who refused to drink liquor. A beautiful definition! All these divisions are created by our own mind. Having created these divisions, even when reading the Scriptures, a lovely holy story, I am going to carry on in this conflict, trouble, division, feeling quite satisfied that while I may not even follow Christ, Krishna or Buddha, since I have a picture of one of these holy figures on my ring, I am already saved!

These Scriptures are there for you to study. As you study these Scriptures, these stories, watch what goes on in yourself. If nothing happens within you, then nothing happens at all. You are no better off! Sorry! I might pray to Rama to take all my troubles away. If you are a real devotee of Rama, and you are able to see him, he will tell you how much he suffered. Why should he take your little headache away from you? These things cannot save us from the problems that we create. The problem is created by me when I ask, “What am I supposed to become?” – without asking, “What am I?” The desire to *become* something is itself the problem. The desire is the problem! It may be that you are a dynamic, short-tempered, hot-headed person, or you may be a liquid, flowing person. I am not trying to justify all this, but there may not be anything seriously wrong with your fundamental nature. ‘Fundamental’ is the key word here, so do not come to any conclusion. If you are fire, you will not burn yourself. If you are an ice block, you will not shiver. Whatever *is* – as it was created, or whatever follows its own nature, is undisturbed. The sky is undisturbed; wind seems disturbed only in relation to you, not in relation to wind itself. There is no relation; wind is a moving thing. Looking out of a flying jet, far above the clouds, one does not even know if the plane is moving, because there is no comparison. Where there is no landmark, nothing at all to compare, as you look out of the window of a plane flying high above the clouds at the rate of about 600 miles an hour, you feel absolutely still and stationary unless you see some clouds. Wind appears to be moving to you, but not to the wind itself. There is pure being; there is no becoming. The wind does not want to become something else; fire does not want to become something else; water does not want to become something else. It is the desire to become that disturbs us. One should learn what it is to be free – to be oneself!

What is it to be free of the desire to become? How do I recognise when I am caught in this trap of becoming, or the desire to become? I do not even recognise that I am in a trap! “I am a short-tempered man, because God created me like this.” Did you come out of your mother’s body short-tempered? Probably not. What is my fundamental nature? How do I discover my own fundamental nature by which it will be obvious to me why I am here? I will not even have to ask what I am supposed to do in this world in the same way that wind and fire perform their function without asking any questions whatsoever. I may not even know why I am here, but I am what I am supposed to be and I do what I am supposed to do in this world. Without any question, without any doubt.

But how does one *know*? Is there a state where there is no desire? Is there a state where there is no disturbance? Obviously, it is only when you are in a totally undisturbed state that you can see what you are supposed to be. In a state of *being*, there is no disturbance. In a state of becoming, there is commotion. In a stage of being, there is no disturbance, there is peace. How do I know? How do I know this state of peace at all? In trying to achieve the peace, I am disturbing the peace! In trying to run after the peace, to work towards peace, I am disturbing it. In trying to restrain my mind – “I am going to meditate now!” – I am becoming more vicious, more disturbed. It does not seem to work. If my mind is in a turmoil and I want to subdue it, that effort to subdue only adds to the turmoil, it does not eliminate it. So one must know what peace is. I cannot go and ask anyone else to describe peace of mind to me if I have not experienced it! Some will explain: “You know, when your mind is quite steady ...” – this makes no sense at all! Then someone, seeing my mind confused, will suggest that I take drugs to calm it. That is how all the disturbance came into existence: through looking outside for a description

of something that is inside. Peace of mind must be inside me, not outside me. But since I cannot experience this peace inside me, I look outside for it. What shall I do? Is peace of mind such a rare thing? Do we not all enjoy it everyday in sleep? Is that not marvellous?

Why are we asked to practise meditation immediately after coming out of sleep in the early morning? We wonder why the mind does not want to listen when you sit and meditate after a bout of gossiping and all sorts of remarkable activities. The mind is already disturbed by all this. If you wake up and without even remembering where you are, look within yourself, you might perchance experience what that peace means. Anything, any activity that does not disturb the depth of that blissful peace which you experience in sleep is what springs from the fundamental nature or from your being. If you have your mind focussed on this, if you are experiencing this right from the time of waking from sleep, then with a little bit of inner discipline and God's grace, you might be able to discover how this peace gets disturbed and distorted. As a desire, a hope, a despair, irritability, annoyance enter – peace is disturbed. How does this annoyance come into being? Because I say this is good, this is not good; this is pleasure, this is pain; I will do this, I will not do that; I want pleasure, I do not want pain. I have introduced all these conflicts and therefore, as a result, desire and hatred are also coming into my mind, into my consciousness. When desire, anger, hatred are in my heart, I can know no peace of mind at all.

Someone saying, "I am very peaceful" while harbouring these desires and ill-feelings does not even know what he is talking about. We cannot enjoy this peace of mind, we cannot create or bring into being this peace of mind. We need not endeavour to realise what is called our being. All that we need to do is to remove all these obstacles, all these obstructions, remove that which is not part of my being, remove that which is the trap of becoming – the desires, the aversions: "I want this, I do not want that." I will know how to remove all these when I know what the peace that is independent of these can be. When all these are removed, then that fundamental nature, that being, will function in this world. If you are fire, you can be fire; if you are water, you can be water; if you are a stone, you can be a stone; if you are an animal, you can be an animal, and if you are a human being, you can continued to be a human being!

It has been suggested that Rama's army was completely composed of birds, bears, tigers, monkeys, etc., and that the Vanaras were monkeys. I am not sure. In India, there is a tribe called Naga (serpent). Similarly, there may be a group called tiger – just as in English, people are called Wood or Savage! All these names, like Vanaras, may be proper names. But if we must accept that all these were truly animals, Rama chose well! If he wanted animals as his companions, as his lieutenants, his soldiers, he was wise. It is extremely difficult to control human beings, to guide them and make them fight your battle. They will fight their own battles! If you have a small army of fifty people and try to organise them to do something, you might find that they will turn against you sooner or later. Animals do not behave like this. They are closer to nature; they act naturally. Human beings do not seem to know how to behave naturally. So it is possible that Rama had an army of monkeys for this reason!

It is up to each one of us to discover our own inner nature. But while doing so, one has to be extremely cautious and vigilant that one is not inventing a nature: "I want to become like Rama, and I do not want to be like Ravana" – then you have already

invented what you want to be, to become. When you are struggling to become somebody else, then there is trouble. Why do I want to become somebody else? I know the other condition exists because I am comparing myself to someone else. If I am comparing myself with somebody and want to become like him, why on earth do I waste time aspiring to find out what is my role in the 'Divine Plan'? My place, my role, in the Divine Plan is there already. It is only when I try to imitate somebody else that I am attempting to break this Divine Plan! Therefore, we need not even strive to fulfil God's will. One need not even strive to become what 'God wanted me to be'. But with great vigilance, watch out for those factors that disturb the inner peace, the inner tranquillity, the peaceful state of being, regardless of virtue or viciousness, wealth or poverty, health or ill-health.

If you wake up after a nightmare, you do not even remember that you have slept and what it was like. That is the problem. You do not even know how to look at this peace in sleep. This is granted to everybody in this world by God, and if we are able to recapture that peace as soon as we wake up – beautiful! If you calculate the proportion of time spent on the different activities of your life, you might discover that sleep is by far the biggest slice of your life. This makes me feel that God has put sleep there with a specific intention: that there is the hope that you might one day discover this Peace, the peace that all of us enjoy everyday in sleep. Why can we not always be so peaceful? When the mind is at peace, you are in the state of your own being. When that great peace reigns in your heart, know that you are what you are and you are doing what you are meant to do in this world.

To come back to the story, that is what we are told of Rama, of Bharata, of Lakshmana: even in the midst of battle, they were calm, peaceful. This description is given of a great spiritual hero in the Mahabharata: while he was being hit on all sides by bullets, Bhishma could smile and his heart was at peace. Even while fighting fiercely with Arjuna, he could smile – he could cry, of course, and shout! – but inwardly, in his own heart, he had the same peace which one enjoys in meditation. Only then can we stop creating problems. When we try to become something else, we have problems. When the desire to become something is gone, but the opposite – the aversion to being something else – is also present, then there is no peace of mind either. The whole being is in a turmoil. There is problem upon problem.

That is what the Scriptures simply place before us. They do not teach us. We can read them day in and day out, but if the inner eye is closed, then they are like newspapers. But if we study them with the inner eye of wisdom open, then we may see innumerable lessons in these Scriptures. If these lessons are assimilated, then suddenly one day it is possible for us to be awakened to the fact that in that being alone is peace, in that fundamental *being*, you *are* already. Only remove the disturbing elements – and there you are!

