

Book 1, Chapter 1

From [The Ramayana](#), by [The Ramayana](#), 100BCE

[Editor's note: The Ramayana is an Indian epic poem by the Hindu sage Valmiki, written sometime between 500 BCE and 100 BCE. It tells the story of the divine prince Rama attempting to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. The Ramayana is 1700 pages long with 24,000 verses, so we'll be publishing it chapter by chapter for you to enjoy. Dig in, it's awesome. This translation from Sanskrit to English was completed by Bangladeshi scholar Hari Prasad Shastri and published in 1952.]

Shri Narada relates to Valmiki the story of Rama

The Sage Valmiki (Valmilri. Once a robber, became later a fully illuminated sage author of The Ramayana), chief among the munis (holy sages) and the most eloquent of men, constantly engaged in the practice of self-control and the study of the holy scriptures, enquired of Shri Narada (A great rishi, son of Brahma, the Creator):

“Who is there in the world today, endowed with excellent and heroic qualities, who is versed in all the duties of life, grateful, truthful, firm in his vows, an actor of many parts, benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent, handsome, patient, slow to anger, one who is truly great; who is free from envy and when excited to wrath can strike terror into the hearts of celestial beings? O Sage, I would hear of such a man from thee, who art able to describe him to me.”

Narada, acquainted with the past, the present and the future, pleased with the words of the Sage Valmiki, answered him saying:

“Rare indeed are those, endowed with the qualities thou hast enumerated, yet I can tell thee of such a one. Born in the family of Ikshwaku (Son of Manu, founder of the Solar race of kings, who reigned in Ayodhya), he is named Rama; one renowned, fully self-controlled, valorous and illustrious, the Lord of All. Wise, conversant with the ethical code, eloquent, fortunate, a slayer of his foes, broad-shouldered, long-armed, possessing a conch-shaped neck and prominent chin, eminent in archery, with a muscular body, arms extending to the knees, and a noble head and brow; of mighty prowess; possessing well proportioned limbs and skin of bluish tint, one renowned for his virtue; of prominent eyes, deep-chested, bearing auspicious marks; one who protects those who take refuge in him and is ever-mindful of the good of those dependent on him; true to his promises, benevolent to his subjects, omniscient, renowned for his good deeds, pure, and ever responsive to devotion; meditating on his own essence.

“Equal to Brahma, the Protector of his people, pleasing to look upon; supporting the universe; the destroyer of those who contravene the moral code ; the inspirer of virtue; the giver of special grace to his devotees and to those who duly observe sacrificial rites and are charitable; conversant with the essence of the Vedic philosophy; an adept in the science of warfare; skilled in the scriptural law; of infallible memory; beloved of all; of courteous disposition; incapable of cowardice; acquainted with the laws of this world as also of the other worlds.

“As the rivers hasten to the ocean, so do men of virtue ever approach him.

“Equal to Vishnu in valor; grateful to the sight as the full moon; when stirred to righteous anger, resembling all-consuming death; in patience like the earth, in generosity like Kuvera; in truthfulness the personification of virtue. Such are his great qualities-Rama, the beloved heir of King Dasaratha, possessing every excellent attribute, benevolent to all, devoted to the welfare of every living being.”

His father, King Dasaratha, made preparations to install him as his regent, but the Queen Kaikeyi, claiming the boons formerly promised to her, demanded the exile of Rama and the enthronement of her own son Bharata. The king held by his promise and by the ties of honor, sent his son Rama, whom he loved as his own life, into exile. Obeying the command of his royal sire, and in order to gratify Kaikeyi, Shri Rama went to the forest.

The son of Queen Sumitra, Prince Lakshmana, inspired by affection and humility, followed his brother Rama into exile.

The daughter of King Janab, an incarnation of Lakshmi (The consort of Shri Vishnu), endowed with the highest feminine virtues, seeing Prince Lakshmana accompanying Rama, obedient to her lord, followed him as Venus follows the moon.

Accompanied for some leagues by King Dasaratha and his people, Rama dismissed the chariot on reaching the town of Shringeri on the banks of the Ganges, and commanded the minister Sumant to return to the capital.

Here the prince met his beloved Guha, the chief of the Chandalas (Outcasts), accompanied by whom, with Lakshmana and Sita, he crossed the river Ganges and entered the forest, arriving at length at the Chitrakuta mountain described by the Sage Bharadwaja. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita dwelt happily in the forest like devas [Gods or celestial beings, literally "Shining Ones"] or gandharvas [Heavenly musicians].

Overwhelmed with grief at the separation from his sons and lamenting their absence, the king departed this life, while Rama was dwelling on the Chitrakuta mountain.

The holy sages offered the throne, left vacant on the death of King Dasaratha, to Prince Bharata, who declined it, not desiring the kingdom. Setting forth to the forest where Shri Rama dwelt, in order to propitiate him, he approached that hero of truth with humility and directing his attention to the code of justice with which he was conversant, requested Rama to return and govern the kingdom.

The magnanimous, handsome and mighty Rama refused to accept the throne, preferring to carry out the command of his sire and, presenting Prince Bharata with his sandals as a symbol of authority, repeatedly exhorted him to return to the capital.

Shri Bharata, touching the feet of Rama in submission, departed and began to rule the dominion from the town of Nandigram, while eagerly awaiting the return of his brother.

The sages and hermits, who dwelt in the forest, constantly harassed by asuras (A race of demons), approached Shri Ramachandra to ask for his protection-Shri Rama agreed to slay the evil asuras in order to preserve the Sages who had sought his help. The holy men, whose appearance equalled the fire in lustre, heard of Shri Rama's resolve and were assured by him of his protection.

The female asura Shurpanakha, who could assume various forms at will, was overpowered and disfigured by Rama and Lakshmana. All the wicked rakshasas (Evil spirits or fiends, enemies of the gods) came led by Khara, Dushane and Trishira, to engage in combat with Shri Rama, and were slain by him. Shri Rama slew fourteen thousand rakshasas who dwelt in that forest. Hearing of the slaughter of the rakshasas, King Ravana transported with rage, took with him Maricha, a demon like himself. Maricha, knowing the superior strength of Rama, sought to dissuade Ravana from entering into combat with him, but Ravana who was marked down by destiny, disregarded the advice and went with Maricha to Shri Rama's abode. There, Maricha lured Shri Rama and Lakshmana away from the hermitage and Ravana, having slain the vulture Jatayu, carried Sita away.

Learning from the dying Jatayu of the abduction of the daughter of the King of Mithila, Shri Rama was overwhelmed with grief and began to mourn.

Having performed the funeral rites of the vulture, while wandering in search of Sita, he encountered an asura named Kabandha whose form was menacing and terrible. Shri Rama slew him and then performed the funeral rites whereupon his soul ascended to heaven. While passing to the celestial sphere, Kabandha spoke to Rama of Shabari, a female ascetic, and entreated him to visit her. Shri Rama, the ever resplendent Destroyer of his foes, came to where Shabari dwelt and was duly worshipped by her.

On the banks of the Lalre Pampa, Shri Rama met the monkey Hanuman who presented Sugriva to him. The mighty Rama related the whole of his story to him as far as the abduction of Shri Sita. Sugriva having listened to Shri Rama entered into the rite of friendship with him, witnessed by the fire. With full faith in Rama, Sugriva then recounted to him all the sufferings he had endured through his enmity with Bali (a Titan King, son of Virochana, son of Prahlada) and the great daring of the latter. Then Shri Rama vowed to slay Bali, but Sugriva, uncertain of Rama's prowess and desiring to test him, showed him the bones of the body of Dundubhi (a giant), forming a heap as high as a mountain. With his foot, Rama kicked the heap to a distance of ten yojanas and, discharging an arrow, pierced seven palmyra trees, cleaving a mountain and with the shaft penetrating to the center of the earth. Having witnessed this exploit, Sugriva was satisfied, and thereafter trusted Rama implicitly. In his company he passed through deep valleys to the town of Kishkindhya; there, the yellow-eyed Sugriva roared like thunder. At this terrible sound, the powerful and valiant monkey chief, Bali, issued forth, disregarding the warning of his wife Tara, and engaged in combat with Sugriva.

As desired by Sugriva, Shri Rama slew Bali with a single arrow; then he entrusted the government of Kishkindhya to Sugriva who now, as king of the monkey tribe, gathered his forces together and dispatched them to every quarter in search of Sita.

The vulture chief, the courageous Sampati, informed Hanuman where Sita was, whereupon the monkey leapt over the sea that lies between Bharatvarsha (India) and Lanka (Ceylon), a distance of five hundred miles.

Entering the city of Lanka that was protected by Ravana, Hanuman beheld Sita, meditating on Rama in the ashoka garden. He there delivered Rama's ring to her and acquainted her with the welfare of her lord. Having revived the courage of Sita, he shattered the gate of the garden and slew seven sons of the counsellors of Ravana, five great captains and leveled Akshyakumara, the son of Ravana, to the dust. Then he suffered himself to be taken captive.

Knowing he could not be subdued by the weapon granted by Brahma to Ravana (a weapon which entangled everyone on whom it was used to that they could not escape), yet acknowledging the power of its blessing, Hanuman allowed himself to be imprisoned, suffering many indignities. Subsequently he burnt the whole of Lanka, only sparing the place where Sita dwelt.

Returning to deliver his welcome tidings, he respectfully circumambulated the mighty Rama and recounted in detail how he had found Sita.

Setting out in the company of Sugriva and others, Rama reached the sea. There he created a tempest by his shining arrows and the Lord of the waters, Sumudra, appeared before him. Under his direction, Naga threw a bridge over the sea. Crossing the sea by means of this bridge, Shri Rama entered Lanka, slew Ravana in battle and recovered Sita, but she being the subject of slander, was addressed by him with harsh words in the midst of the assembly. After hearing the words of Rama

with forbearance, Sita entered a great fire. On the testimony of the fire god, Sita was proved to be innocent and Rama, adored by all the gods, was content.

The animate and inanimate beings of the three worlds (Bhur, Bhuvah, Swah. the lower, middle and upper worlds), the gods and the sages, gave thanks that Ravana had been slain by Shri Rama. Shri Rama enthroned Vibishana (Younger brother of Ravana, but a devotee of Rama) as the king of the asuras and, being wholly satisfied, revived all the monkeys and asuras who had fallen in battle.

In the aerial chariot, Pushpaka, accompanied by Sugriva, Shri Rama, a devotee of truth, reached the hermitage of Bharadwaja. From there, he sent Hanuman to Prince Bharata, as his messenger and conversing with Sugriva again mounted the aerial chariot and arrived at Nandigrama.

Ever obedient to his father, Shri Rama then cut off his matted locks and with Sita occupied the throne of Ayodhya.

Seeing Shri Rama occupying the throne, the people were happy and satisfied, virtuous and free from sickness, sorrow, famine or danger. None witnessed the death of his son; no woman became a widow and all were devoted to their husbands; there was no danger from tempests; none perished by water; nor was there any cause of fear from fire; fever and plague were unknown; there was no want, and no danger from thieves. Cities and villages were rich and prosperous; all lived happily as in the Satya Yuga (The golden age).

Shri Rama and Sita observed countless Vedic sacrifices and gave much gold, and hundreds of thousands of cows in charity, thus preparing for themselves a place in the divine regions. Shri Rama added incalculably to the prosperity of the dynasty, and bestowed immense wealth on the brahmins. He employed his subjects in the duties of their respective castes and ruled for eleven thousand years, after which he returned to his celestial abode, Vaikuntha.

He who reads the story of Rama, which imports merit and purity, is freed from all sin. He who reads it with faith and devotion is ultimately worshipped together with his sons, grandsons and servants at his death.

A brahmin reading this becomes proficient in the Vedas, and philosophy; a kshatriya becomes a king; a vaishya grows prosperous in trade; a shudra, on reading this will become great in his caste (The four traditional castes: the priests, the warriors, the merchants, and those who serve the other three).