

RAMAYANA

Translated by Robert Biggs

PART V
SUNDARA-KĀṆḌA

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With love, respect and japanese robots
— *Sourcebits Family*

HANUMĀN LEAPS ACROSS THE OCEAN

In order to find the location of Sītā, who had been kidnapped by Rāvaṇa, Hanumān wanted to follow the path of the cāraṇas across the sky. Stretching his neck, Hanumān, like a bull amongst a herd of cows, prepared to perform without opposition a most difficult task. Hanumān then strode as he liked through the meadows that were the color of vaidurya gems, frightening birds, brushing his chest against trees and subduing multitudes of creatures like an adult lion. Stopping at the foot of Mount Mahendra, Hanumān looked like an elephant standing in a lake. The mountain was adorned with deposits of spotless natural minerals that were blue, red, yellow, pink, black and white. It was frequented by yakṣas, gandharvas and nāgas, all of whom could assume any form at will. They resembled demigods and were accompanied by their associates.

Hanumān joined his palms together to offer respects to the sun god, the wind god, Indra, Lord Brahmā and sprites. Pointing his joined palms toward the east to offer respects to his progenitor the wind god, the dexterous Hanumān then grew in size to proceed toward the south. Before the eyes of those monkeys, Hanumān, who had made up his mind to jump across the ocean in order to complete Rāma's mission, continued growing like the ocean during a full moon. Desiring to jump across the ocean with his immeasurable body, he pressed down on the mountain with his hands and feet. Being squeezed by Hanumān, the mountain trembled, shaking off the flowers from the blossoming branches of trees. The mountain was covered all over with a shower of fragrant flowers dropped from trees, as if it were made of flowers. Being squashed by the tremendous might of Hanumān, the mountain was spurting water, as an elephant in rut exudes ichor from its temples. Because of the pressure, the mountain was releasing streams that were golden, black and silver. The mountain also shed big boulders containing red arsenic, just as a medium flame of fire would release a column of smoke. Due to the pressure which Hanumān was exerting on the mountain, all the creatures living in caves were being squeezed and were

howling awfully. The loud wail of creatures occasioned by the crushing of the mountain filled the earth and all directions in the forests. Snakes with svastikas on their foreheads vomitted fire from their big heads and bit the rocks with their fangs. When the stones were pierced by the venomous fangs of those angry snakes, they burst into flames and exploded into thousands of pieces. Even the herbs capable of neutralizing venom which grew on that mountain could not counteract the effect of the poison of those snakes.

Thinking that the mountain was being smashed by evil spirits, frightened ascetics and vidyādhara with their consorts fled from there. The vidyādhara left their gold jugs in their wine houses, along with their valuable gold plates, bowls and cups. They also left behind succulent eatables and sauces and various kinds of meat, shields made with ox leather and swords with golden hilts. The vidyādhara, whose eyes were as red as lotus flowers, wearing red flower garlands and red sandalwood paste, flew up into the sky. Wearing necklaces, ankle bells, arm bands and bracelets, the astonished women stood smiling with their husbands in the air. Exhibiting their extensive magical expertise by hovering in the air as if they were great sages, the vidyādhara gazed at the mountain. As they did so they heard the following exclamation from sages, cāraṇas and perfected beings standing in the clear sky: “Resembling a mountain, Hanumān, the son of the wind, wishes to speedily cross the ocean which is the abode of Varuṇa. Desiring to accomplish a difficult task for the pleasure of Lord Rāma and the monkeys, he wants to reach the other side of the ocean, which is not easy to achieve.”

After hearing those remarks of the ascetics, the vidyādhara saw on the mountain that monkey whose powers were immeasurable. Shaking the hairs on his body, he looked like a flickering flame. He roared like a huge rain cloud. Preparing himself to jump, he rolled up his hairy tail, as Garuḍa would curl up a snake. Tightly curled up behind him, his tail looked like a snake being carried away by Garuḍa. The monkey clenched the mountain with his arms which were like huge clubs, crouched down and tightened his feet. Drawing in his arms and neck, he gathered up his force, strength and virility. Looking upwards to see the long path he would have to take, he held his vital air in his heart. Placing his feet firmly and flattening his ears as he was about to jump, he spoke the following words to the other monkeys: “As an arrow shot by Rāma would fly with great speed, so shall I cross over to

Laṅkā, which is protected by Rāvaṇa. If I do not find Sītā in Laṅkā, I shall proceed with the same speed to the heavenly planets wherein dwell the gods. If I do not find Sītā there after a thorough search, then I shall bring Rāvaṇa, the king of the rākṣasas, bound up. At any rate, I shall successfully bring back Sītā. Or else, uprooting the whole island of Laṅkā, I will bring it back with Rāvaṇa.”

Having said this, that best of monkeys Hanumān jumped into the air with great speed without noticing it. He considered himself to be like Garuḍa. While he leapt into the air, the trees growing on the mountain drew in their branches and flew in all directions. As he traversed the cloudless sky, his rear draft sucked up the flowering trees with the birds perched on them. Pulled up by the thrust of his legs, the trees followed him for a while, as relatives follow a traveller setting out on a long journey. In this way, sāla and other kinds of trees followed Hanumān as an army follows a king. Followed by trees whose branches were laddened with flowers, Hanumān, who was as big as a mountain, looked amazing. The heavier trees soon fell into the salty ocean, as mountains once fell in the ocean out of fear of Indra. Covered all over with many different flowers, shoots and buds, Hanumān shone brightly like a mountain covered with fireflies. When the trees became free from his flurry, their flowers fell off and the trees themselves fell into the ocean like returning friends. Having been dragged along by the wind created by Hanumān because of their light weight, the flowers of the different trees fell over the ocean so that it looked like the sky spangled with stars.

Covered with a shower of flowers of different colors, the monkey looked like a rising cloud illuminated by streaks of lightning. Covered with flowers dropped on it by Hanumān’s back wind, the ocean looked like the night sky speckled with lovely stars. His outstretched arms reaching into the sky looked like a pair of five-hooded snakes coming out of a mountain. When Hanumān looked down, he seemed to be drinking the wave-tossed ocean. And when Hanumān looked up, he seemed to be sucking in the sky. As Hanumān traversed the path of the wind, his eyes, which were as brilliant as lightning, shone like two fires burning on a mountain. His reddish eyes, which are large and round, glowed like the sun and moon. His whole face became reddened by the reflection of his red nose, just like when the sun sets on the horizon. Moreover, as he passed through the sky, his coiled tail

looked like a flag raised in honor of Indra. With his coiled tail and white teeth, Hanumān looked like the sun encircled by a halo.

That huge monkey shone brightly with his deep red buttocks, like a mountain with red metallic ore split open. The wind passing through his arm pits rumbled over the ocean like a thunder cloud. That best of monkeys looked like a long-tailed comet falling from the northern part of the sky. Hanumān, who was as effulgent as the sun, resembled an adult elephant with a girth around its waist. With his body moving above and his shadow sunken below, he looked like a boat on the ocean being blown by the wind. Whichever part of the ocean he passed over became turbulent because of his body's propulsion. Hanumān precipitously lurched forward, smashing the mountain-like waves of the ocean with his chest. The wind caused by the monkey and the wind caused by the clouds made the ocean quiver and roar. Dragging a mass of giant waves with him as he sped along, He seemed to be agitating both heaven and earth. As Hanumān dashed ahead with great speed, he seemed to be counting the waves on the great ocean that resembled the peaks of Mount Meru and Mount Mandara. The water sucked up into the air by his tail wind looked very beautiful like a mass of autumn clouds stretched across the sky. The hidden whales, crocodiles, alligators and tortoises became visible, like the limbs of a body when the cloth is drawn back. Carefully observing him passing through the sky, the ocean snakes concluded that he was Garuḍa.

Hanumān's shadow, which was ten yojanas wide and thirty yojanas long, looked most lovely because of its speedy movement. The shadow cast on the sea appeared splendid like a row of white clouds in the sky as it followed the son of the wind god. Rushing along the path of the wind without any support, that gigantic monkey resembled a winged mountain. As Hanumān passed by, the ocean below the path he followed was forcibly spread apart like a trough. Travelling along the course of the birds like the king of birds, Garuḍa, Hanumān dragged a mass of clouds behind him, just like the wind. The white, red, blue or yellow clouds being dragged behind him were very brilliant. Entering into and coming out of the clouds, he looked like the hidden and shining moon respectively. Seeing that monkey jumping so rapidly, the gods, gandharvas and dānavas showered flowers down on him. As he was jumping to fulfill the mission of Lord Rāma, the sun did

not scorch him and the wind god fanned him with breezes. Sages praised him as he flew through the air and the gods and gandharvas sang his glories. When the nāgas, yakṣas and different kinds of rākṣasas saw him unwearied, they glorified him.

As Hanumān was flying overhead, the presiding deity of the ocean wanted to do something to honor the dynasty of Ikṣvāku and thought as follows: “If I do not help Hanumān, I will be criticized by those who wish to talk. I was greatly extended by King Sagara, the protector of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. He is a friend of Lord Rāma, a descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, and therefore he should not suffer unnecessarily. I should make some arrangement for him to rest. After resting on me, he will easily cross the rest of the ocean.”

Having made this pious decision, the lord of the ocean said to Maināka Mountain, whose core is gold: “You were placed here by the great soul Indra as a barrier against the demons from the nether world. You stand here blocking the exit from the immeasurable nether world so that the demons whose strength is well-known and who wish to come up, cannot do so. You are capable of growing sideways, downwards, as well as upwards, O mountain. Therefore, I command you to rise upwards, O best of peaks. Here is the mighty Hanumān, a tiger among monkeys, flying in the sky to perform a strenuous deed for the service of Lord Rāma. I must help Hanumān, a servant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. I am bound to honor the descendants of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, and they are your highest objects of worship. Please maintain our friendship. Our duty should not be neglected. Rise up from the waters and allow the monkey to rest on you. Hanumān is our guest and worthy of our respect. After resting on your lofty peak of gold frequented by gods and gandharvas, Hanumān will then cross the remaining distance. Considering the mercifulness of Rāma, the abduction of Sītā and the effort of Hanumān, you should rise up.”

When Mount Maināka, whose core was gold, heard this request made by the lord of the ocean, he quickly rose up from out of the water, covered with tall trees with vines. It split the sea water when it rose up, as the shining sun splits a rain cloud. That great mountain, which had been covered and restrained by the ocean’s water, at once revealed its peaks. The

mountain seemed to be scraping the sky with its golden peaks as brilliant as the newly risen sun and that were inhabited by kinnaras and giant serpents. Because of the rising gold peaks of the mountain, the sky became golden and shone like a sword. With its golden peaks shining brightly, that best of mountains was as effulgent as one hundred suns. Hanumān actually considered that mountain which had suddenly risen up in the midst of the salty ocean to be an obstacle. The exceedingly sturdy Hanumān knocked over the lofty mountain with a puff of breath, as the wind pushes away a cloud. When that excellent mountain was overcome by Hanumān and recognized his might, he rejoiced and roared loudly. Assuming a human form and standing on his own summit, the jubilant mountain addressed the monkey, who was standing in the sky:

“You have undertaken this difficult task, O best of monkeys. After landing on my peaks and resting for some time, continue on your way. The ocean was extended by those born in the Raghu Dynasty. The lord of the ocean wishes to honor you who are engaged in the service of Rāma. And one must return a favor, this is an eternal law. Seeking to repay his obligation, he wishes to render you some service. He has therefore respectfully commanded me to assist you in some way. He said: ‘This monkey has jumped into the sky in order to cover a distance of at least one hundred yojanas. After resting on your peaks, he can cover the remaining distance.’ O best of monkeys, stay and rest on me for some time, then you may go. Here are many fragrant and tasty roots, tubers and fruits. After enjoying them and resting, you may continue. Actually, we have some connection with you. You are renowned in the three worlds and are a store of immense qualities. I consider you the chief of those monkeys who can jump, O son of the wind god. A discerning man who is keen to know what is duty should offer respect to even an ordinary guest, what to speak of someone like you. Indeed, you are the best of the gods and the son of the glorious wind god, being equal to him in vigor. By offering you hospitality I will have honored the wind god. Listen to another reason why I must offer you respect.

“Previously, in the Golden Age, mountains had wings. With great speed they used to fly in all directions like eagles. Therefore, when they flew, the hosts of gods, sages and living beings became afraid that they would fall off the mountains. This angered Lord Indra, who then cut off with his thunderbolt the wings of the mountains by the hundreds of thousands.

Lifting up his thunderbolt, Lord Indra approached me. Then I was suddenly thrown into the air by the wind god and tossed down into this salty ocean. Thus my wings and all my paraphernalia were saved by your father. I therefore respect you and consider you worthy of my homage, O son of the wind. My relationship with you is very efficacious. Since this opportunity has arisen, you ought to oblige the ocean and myself, O highly intelligent one. Relieve your fatigue and accept my hospitality, O best of monkeys. I am very pleased by our meeting, worthy as you are of my affection.”

Having been addressed in this way by Mount Maināka, Hanumān replied as follows: “I am fully satisfied with the hospitality you have offered me. Do not think that I have not accepted it. The time for accomplishing my task is hastening me and the day is also slipping by. Moreover, I have promised that I would not stop here midway.” Saying this, Hanumān touched the mountain with his hand and then flew off into the sky while seemingly laughing. Meanwhile, both the ocean and the mountain esteemed, adored and heartened Hanumān with suitable blessings. Then, rising upward, leaving the mountain and ocean far below, he reached the path of the wind and traveled across the immaculate sky. Going still higher and looking down at the mountain, the son of the wind god continued on his way. Seeing this second difficult accomplishment of Hanumān, the reaching of Mount Maināka and the refusal of its hospitality, all the gods, perfected beings and topmost sages glorified him. The gods who happened to be present there, including Lord Indra, were pleased with the intentions of that golden mountain.

Because of his satisfaction with the mountain’s behavior, the wise Lord Indra himself addressed the mountain with a faltering voice: “I am extremely pleased with you, O golden mountain. I grant you protection. Go in peace, O gentle one. You have offered assistance to Hanumān, who, being untired, is attempting to jump a distance of one hundred yojanas, even though it is very dangerous. The monkey is trying to do something beneficial for Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha. I am delighted that you have offered assistance according to your capability.” Seeing that Indra, the lord of the gods, was pleased with him, that foremost of mountains felt most delighted. Having received the boon of protection from Indra, the mountain again took his position below the ocean as Hanumān continued flying over the ocean.

After this, the gods, gandharvas, siddhas and topmost sages said the following to Surasā, the mother of the nāgas, who was as effulgent as the sun: “This glorious son of the wind god named Hanumān is leaping across the ocean. Assuming the form of a frightening rākṣasī as big as a mountain with a head touching the sky, bloodshot eyes and fearsome fangs, obstruct him for a while. We want to ascertain his strength, and furthermore his prowess. Either he will defeat you by some means or he will give way to despondency.” When instructed in this way by the gods, Surasā assumed the form of a rākṣasī in the midst of the ocean. Her appearance was deformed, hideous and terrifying for everyone. Blocking Hanumān’s path, she spoke to him the following words, so it is said: “You have been designated as my food by the controlling deities, O best of monkeys! I shall devour you. Enter into my mouth! In the past I received this boon from Lord Brahmā that I would be able to devour anyone who came before me.” Opening her huge mouth, She stood in front of Hanumān.

When spoken to in this way by Surasā, Hanumān’s face light up with joy and replied: “Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, entered the Daṇḍakā Forest with His brother Lakṣmaṇa and His consort Sītā. The glorious Sītā was kidnapped by Rāvaṇa, who harbored enmity toward Rāma, while Rāma was engaged in some other affair. On the order of Rāma I am going to Sītā as a messenger. You ought to do something to assist Lord Rāma, for you are one of his subjects. Or else, after I have seen Sītā and then Rāma, I shall enter your mouth. I promise you.” Hearing this, Surasā replied: “No one can get past me. That is my boon.”

Seeing Surasā’s open mouth with a long tongue and how it resembled hell, Hanumān contracted his body like a cloud and in a moment became the size of a thumb. After entering her mouth and coming out, the mighty Hanumān said the following as he stood in the air: “I have in fact entered your mouth and thus your boon as been upheld, O descendent of Dakṣa. I offer my respects to you. I shall now proceed to where Sītā is.” Seeing him escaped from her mouth as the moon frees itself from an eclipse, the goddess Surasā assumed her original form and said: “Go as you wish to complete your mission, O best of monkeys, and reunite Sītā with Rāma.”

Seeing this third feat of Hanumān, which was very difficult to accomplish, all living beings praised him by exclaiming: “Well done! Well done!” Drawing near the invincible ocean, he went past it, flying speedily into the sky like Garuḍa. Hanumān traversed the path of the wind, which is drenched by torrents of rain and followed by birds. This path is the same one which is followed by gandharvas expert in singing and dancing, as well as by Indra’s elephant Airāvata. It is adorned with spotless, fast-moving vehicles drawn by lions, elephants, tigers, birds and serpents. It is blessed with the presence of highly fortunate persons who have earned residence in heaven through the performance of pious deeds, who shine like fire and who are as hard to touch as a diamond or a bolt of lightning. It is frequented by the god of fire carrying abundant offerings to the other gods and is beautified by the sun, moon, stars, planets and constellations. It was crowded with great sages, gandharvas, nāgas and yakṣas. The clear, cloudless sky was frequented by Viśvavāsu, chief of the gandharvas. This is the path followed by Lord Indra’s elephants and is the peaceful path of the sun and moon. It is a canopy spread by Lord Brahmā for the world of living beings. It is the path taken by many warriors who die valorously in battle and is guarded by vidyādhara.

Like the wind, Hanumān dragged behind him a mass of clouds that were black, red, yellow and white. Being dragged by Hanumān, the clouds looked wonderful. Entering and exiting those masses of clouds again and again, he shone like the moon coming in and out of clouds during the rainy season. Being watched from all sides, Hanumān, the son of the wind god, sped through the sky without any support, like Mount Meru with wings. Seeing him flying by, a gigantic rākṣasī named Sindhikā, who could assume any form at will, thought to herself: “Now I shall be satisfied for a long time. After quite some time, this huge creature has come into my grasp.” Thinking in this way, she grabbed hold of his shadow. When his shadow was grabbed, Hanumān began thinking: “Being seized all of a sudden, my motion is halted as if I am a lame man, as when a contrary wind stalls a large sail boat on the ocean.” Looking sideways, as well as up and down, he then saw a gigantic creature risen out of the ocean. Seeing her hideous face, Hanumān began thinking: “This is undoubtedly the same bizarre-looking beast described by Sugrīva that is capable of capturing its victims’ shadows.”

Understanding from Sugrīva's description that she was *Simhikā*, Hanumān expanded himself into a gigantic form like a storm cloud during the monsoon. Seeing his body growing, she stretched her mouth as wide as the space of the nether world and rushed toward Hanumān like a thundering mass of clouds. He then noticed her huge and grotesque mouth, the same size as his own body, as well as her vulnerable areas. Instantly contracting his body again, Hanumān, whose body was as hard as a diamond, flew into her grotesque mouth. The *siddhas* and *cāraṇas* saw his vanishing into her mouth, like the full moon being devoured by an eclipse. Then, tearing out her vital organs with his sharp nails, Hanumān came out of there with the speed of the mind. Having defeated her by good fortune, firmness and ingenuity, Hanumān again rapidly increased his size. With her heart torn out by Hanumān, she fell dead into the water. Hanumān had been created for her destruction by Lord Brahmā. Seeing *Simhikā* so quickly killed by Hanumān and fallen into the ocean, the beings who were hovering in the sky said to Hanumān: "Just now you performed a fearful task by killing a gigantic creature. Accomplish your purpose without hindrance, O best of monkeys! He who, like you, possesses the four qualities of firmness, foresight, intelligence and adroitness is successful in all activities."

After being honored by those beings who had now achieved their goal, the venerable Hanumān flew up into the sky like *Garuḍa*. Upon reaching the opposite shore of the ocean after travelling one hundred *yojanas*, he looked all around and saw a row of trees. While hovering in the air, he also saw an island adorned with many kinds of trees, as well as the forest groves on Mount Malaya. He also beheld the ocean, the coastal swamps, the trees growing there and the mouths of rivers. Looking at himself with a form resembling a large cloud and which seemed to block the sky, Hanumān began to contemplate how the *rākṣasī* became curious about him when she saw his huge body and speed. After contracting his form which was as big as a mountain, he later resumed his natural size, just as a self-realized soul conquers infatuation. Hanumān made himself very small to defeat the *rākṣasī*, and then resumed his original size, just as Lord Viṣṇu in His incarnation as *Trivikrama* assumed a gigantic form for crossing the universe in three steps to defeat *Vali Mahārāja's* power. Having reached the opposite shore of the ocean, which could not be reached by anyone else, Hanumān, who was capable of assuming many different amazing forms,

thought about his mission and assumed his original form. Then the great soul Hanumān landed on Lamba Mountain, which had many peaks covered with trees such as ketaka, uddālaka and coconut. From the coast where he had arrived he could see the city of Laṅkā situated on Trikūṭa Mountain and abandoned his huge form which was frightening the forest animals and birds. Having crossed the wave-tossed ocean infested with dānavas and snakes by dint of his strength and landing on the shore of the great ocean, Hanumān saw the city of Laṅkā, which resembled Lord Indra's capital of Amarāvātī.

HANUMĀN ENTERS THE CITY OF LAṆKĀ

Standing calmly on a slope of Trikūṭa Mountain, the mighty Hanumān viewed the city of Laṅkā. Being completely covered with flowers fallen from trees, the courageous Hanumān looked as if he was made of flowers. Even after crossing a distance of one hundred yojanas, the glorious monkey did not breath heavily nor was he tired. He thought: “I am capable of jumping many hundreds of yojanas, what to speak of crossing the ocean, which is calculated as only one hundred yojanas.” After jumping across the ocean, that mightiest of monkeys had reached Laṅkā. He passed through fields of blue-green grass and fragrant forests full of honey and big trees. Hanumān also crossed over mountains covered with trees and forests in bloom.

Standing on the side of the mountain, the son of the wind god saw forests and groves and the city of Laṅkā perched on top of it. Hanumān also saw trees such as sarala, karṇikara, blooming date palm, priyāla, muculinda, kuṭaja, ketaka, priyāngu, nīpa, saptacchada, āsana, kovidāra, and blooming karavīra, as well as trees laden with flowers or buds that were crowded with birds and being shaken by the wind. He also saw ponds abounding in swans and ruddy geese and blanketed with lotus flowers and water lilies. He furthermore saw many different charming pleasure-gardens and pools covered by all kinds of trees brearing fruits and flowers.

Hanumān reached the beautiful city of Laṅkā, which was protected by Rāvaṇa and surrounded with moats full of lotus flowers and water lilies. Because of Sītā’s abduction, the city was thoroughly protected by Rāvaṇa, as well as by rākṣasas armed with formidable bows wandering all about. The metropolis was surrounded by a golden wall and crowded with buildings as large as mountains and they resembled autumn clouds. It was criss-crossed by elevated roads paved with white plaster and had hundreds of mansions adorned with flags and banners. There were golden archways covered with rows of celestial flowering vines. Hanumān observed Laṅkā as a god would

the city of the gods. Hanumān saw the city with its beautiful white mansions situated on the summit of the mountain as if it were floating through the air. He saw that city which was constructed by Viśvakarmā and protected by Rāvaṇa as if it were flying in the sky. In his mind he thought of the city as a woman: the ramparts and walls were hips and loins, the broad ocean and forest surrounding the city were her garments, the missiles and javelins were her locks of hair, and the mansions were her earrings.

Upon reaching the northern gate, which resembled the entrance to Kuvera's capital Alakāpurī on Mountain Kailāsa and which was scraping the sky with its mansions and holding up the firmament, Hanumān began to think. The city was overrun with fearsome rākṣasas, just as Bhogavatī is with nāgas. It was inconceivable, well-constructed, clearly visible and had previously been inhabited by Kuvera. It was guarded by many frightful fanged rākṣasas carrying spikes and sharp spears in their hands, like a cave full of poisonous snakes. Considering the formidable defences and the ocean surrounding it and the sinister enemy Rāvaṇa, Hanumān began thinking in the following way:

“The coming of the monkeys here would be completely useless, for Laṅkā cannot be defeated in battle, not even by the demigods. What would the strong-armed Rāma be able to do when coming to Laṅkā, whose terrain is rugged, difficult to penetrate and protected by Rāvaṇa? I see no possibility of subduing the rākṣasas by persuasion, gifts, sowing dissension among them, or battle. Only four agile monkeys are able to leap this distance—Aṅgada, Nīla, Sugrīva and myself. Meanwhile, I shall verify whether Sītā is alive or not. After finding Sītā I will consider what should be done next.”

Standing on the mountain slope, that greatest of monkeys thought for a while about how to accomplish Rāma's mission. Hanumān thought: “Because Laṅkā is guarded by fierce and powerful rākṣasas, I cannot enter it in my present form. The rākṣasas are extremely energetic, vigorous and strong. I must therefore deceive them in order to search for Sītā. To accomplish this great task, I should enter the city of Laṅkā at night in a form which is unrecognizable except by my exploits.”

Seeing that city which was difficult to assault even for gods and demons, Hanumān sighed repeatedly and thought: “How can I find Sītā, the Princess of Mithilā, without being seen by the evil-minded rākṣasa Rāvaṇa? How will I be able to meet Sītā in private so that Rāma’s mission is not spoiled? Goals which are all but accomplished are ruined by a hesitant messenger who acts contrary to time and place, just as darkness is dispelled by the sun. Even a decision regarding what should be done and what should not be done becomes ruined by an unqualified messenger. Messengers who consider themselves wise ruin all endeavors in such circumstances. How can I prevent the mission from being spoiled? How can I avoid insecurity? And I wonder how I can ensure that my jumping across the ocean was not in vain. If I am discovered by the rākṣasas, then the mission of the wise Rāma, who wishes to checkmate Rāvaṇa, will be fruitless. It is impossible for anyone to remain here unrecognized by the rākṣasas, even if one were to assume the form of a rākṣasa, what to speak of any other form. I think that even the wind cannot blow here without being detected by the rākṣasas whose activities are dreadful. If I remain here clothed with my natural form, I will be killed and my master’s goal will be stopped. Therefore, I shall make myself very small and enter Laṅkā at night in order to carry out Lord Rāma’s mission. Entering at night Rāvaṇa’s city, which is most inaccessible, I shall discover Sītā.”

Making this decision, the valiant Hanumān, desiring to find Sītā, anxiously waited for sunset. When the sun set, Hanumān contracted his body to the size of a cat of unusual appearance. As night fell, Hanumān quickly jumped up and entered the charming city whose roads were nicely aligned in a grid. With its rows of palaces with gold columns and gold lattice screens over the windows, it looked like a city for gandharvas. He saw mansions that were seven and eight stories high. With their floors inlaid with crystal, gold, vaidurya gems and rows of pearls, those mansions of the rākṣasas shone brightly. The city of Laṅkā was adorned on all sides with lovely golden archways erected by the rākṣasas. Seeing the inconceivable and amazing city of Laṅkā, Hanumān was both despondent and joyful, eager as he was to find Sītā. He entered the city which was lined with white mansions and valuable golden archways and which was guarded by fearsome rākṣasas. Even the moon seemed to be assisting Hanumān as it shone in the

midst of a mass of stars. It spread its light over the sky as it rose on the horizon. That stalwart monkey glanced at the moon, which was as white as a conchshell, milk or a white lotus flower and which looked like a swan swimming in a lake.

HANUMĀN STOPPED BY A RĀKṢASĪ

From a peak on Trikūṭa Mountain, which looked like a long cloud, the courageous Hanumān entered the city of Laṅkā at night. The city was fully protected by Rāvaṇa and possessed charming groves. It was adorned with buildings that resembled autumn clouds. From the city rose a din like the roar of the ocean and it was fanned with ocean breezes. It was protected by well-fed soldiers just like Kuvera's capital Alakāpurī. Its charming arches were guarded by elephants in rut and its white gateways were guarded by serpents, as is the splendid city of Bhogavatī, capital of Pātāla. It was overcast with clouds spewing bolts of lightning and illuminated by multitudes of luminaries. It resounded with the booming sound of wind, just like Amarāvātī, the capital of Lord Indra. It was surrounded by immense golden walls and adorned with flags trimmed with small jingling bells. All of a sudden Hanumān jumped up on the wall. Surveying the city on all sides, his heart was filled with wonder.

Hanumān was overjoyed to see Laṅkā. It had gateways of gold with platforms of vaidurya gem. The sides of the gateways were inlaid with diamonds, crystals and pearls. The floors of the gateways were embellished with gems and the sides were adorned with elephants of smelted gold. The vaults of archways were plated with spotless, shining silver. The city's stairways were made of vaidurya gems and their walls were encrusted with crystals and were free from dust. There were charming assembly halls which seemed to be flying in the sky. The city resounded with the cries of herons and was frequented by royal swans. On all sides could be heard the sound of claironets and the tinkling of bells. It was like a duplicate of the city of Alakāpurī. Gazing at that beautiful and opulent city ruled by Rāvaṇa, Hanumān began thinking: "Protected as it is by Rāvaṇa's soldiers bearing weapons in their hands, this city cannot be overwhelmed by anyone. This land can only be penetrated by Kumuda and Aṅgada, or else by the great monkey Suśeṇa, as well as by Mainda and Dvividā. It could also be

penetrated by Sugrīva, Kuśāparṇa, Jāmbavān or by me.” Hanumān also considered the prowess of the strong-armed Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and felt enlivened.

Observing the city, whose darkness was dispelled by burning lamps and shining planets, Hanumān considered it like a well-decorated woman. The inlaid jewels on the walls constituted her garments, the stables and other buildings, her ornaments, and the armories, her breasts.

The city then appeared in her personal form before Hanumān, seeing that he was entering. Upon seeing him, the personality of Laṅkā rose up and exhibited her unsightly form. She stood in front of that heroic monkey. Roaring loudly, she said: “Who are you and why have you come here, O forest dweller? Tell me the truth as long as your life airs are still with you. Guarded as Laṅkā is on all sides by Rāvaṇa’s soldiers, you cannot enter it at all, O monkey! The valiant Hanumān then replied to the rākṣasī standing before him: “I shall tell you whatever you have asked. But first tell me who you are with hideous eyes standing at the city gate? And why are you angrily threatening me, O cruel woman?”

Angered by Hanumān’s reply, the personality of Laṅkā, who could assume any form at will, said the following: “Always at the command of the king of rākṣasas, Rāvaṇa, I guard this city. No one can disregard me and then enter this city. Deprived of your life airs and stricken down by me right now, you will enter the slumber of death. I am in fact the personality of the city of Laṅkā. I guard this city on all sides and therefore I have spoken to you in this way.” Hearing what the personality of Laṅkā said, Hanumān, son of the wind god, stood his ground like a mountain. Seeing her with the form of a female, the wise and courageous monkey spoke as follows:

“I would like to see the city of Laṅkā with its palaces, walls and arches. I have come here for this purpose, for I am very curious to see it. In fact, I have come here just to see the forests, gardens and groves of Laṅkā, as well as its mansions on all sides.” Hearing his words, the personality of Laṅkā spoke the following harsh retort: “You fool! Without defeating me who am protected by Rāvaṇa, you cannot see this city right now, O lowest of

monkeys!” Then Hanumān said to the night-stalker: “After seeing the city, I shall go back the way I came.” Letting out a loud and frightening yell, Laṅkā violently hit Hanumān with the palm of her hand. After being strongly hit by Laṅkā, Hanumān roared very loudly. Being agitated, Hanumān closed the fingers of his left hand and hit her with his fist. Considering her a woman, he did not personally exhibit excessive anger. When her limbs were overpowered by that blow, the horrible-looking night-stalker suddenly fell down on the ground. Seeing her knocked down on the ground, the chivalrous Hanumān felt compassionate upon her, for he considered her a woman.

Seeing what had happened to her, Laṅkā humbly addressed Hanumān with faltering words: “Be pleased, O strong-armed one! Protect me, O best of monkeys! Those who are courageous and strong stand by the codes of chivalry. I am indeed the personification of the city of Laṅkā, O monkey. You have defeated me with your prowess, O warrior of extraordinary power. Therefore listen to this fact as I speak. Lord Brahmā once made the following prophecy regarding me, that when some monkey subdues me by his prowess, I should understand that the destruction of the rākṣasas was about to take place. From this meeting with you I can see that the time has now arrived. This fact has been ordained by Brahmā and cannot be prevented. Because of Sītā, the time has come for the destruction of the evil-minded King Rāvaṇa, as well as all the other rākṣasas. As such, enter this city and accomplish whatever it is you wish to. Entering into this lovely city which is bound by a curse, easily go everywhere and search as you like for Sītā.”

HANUMĀN REACHES THE ROYAL PALACE

After defeating the personification of the city of Laṅkā by means of his prowess, the mighty Hanumān leapt over the wall without going through the gate. Endowed with exceptional strength, he entered the city of Laṅkā at night. By entering the city, Hanumān, who always did what was beneficial for Sugrīva, literally put his left foot on the head of his enemies. Passing through the gate, Hanumān took the main road which was strewn with flowers. Thus he headed for the charming city of Laṅkā, which was still some distance ahead. The city looked very beautiful, like the sky with clouds. Its outstanding houses resounded with laughter and instrumental music and their windows were adorned with screens inlaid with diamonds. At that moment the city of Laṅkā was shining brightly with the homes of the hordes of rākṣasas. These were as attractive as white clouds and were of the style of svastika and vardhamāna, and were finely decorated on all sides.

Wandering about to fulfill Rāma's mission, the glorious Hanumān saw that city adorned with flower garlands and felt overjoyed. Going from house to house, he saw all around buildings of every shape and size. He also heard melodious songs embellished with high, medium and low notes vibrated from the head, throat and heart. He also heard the tinkling of bells on the belts and anklets of women who were love-smitten and who were as beautiful as celestial damsels. He could also hear the sound of the mighty rākṣasas going up and down staircases, as well as the slapping of arms and the roars of wrestlers competing here and there. He could hear the recitation of mantras in the homes of the rākṣasas and he saw sorcerers engaged in the study of their sacred texts. He also saw rākṣasas engaged in glorifying Rāvaṇa and a big mob of rākṣasas gathered on the main boulevard.

In the downtown area of the city he saw many rākṣasa spies who were disguised as initiates in the practice of mystic yoga, ascetics with matted hair, shaven-headed monks, and renunciates wearing deer skins for

clothes. He saw that they were carrying handful of kuśa grass as a weapon for warding off evil spirits, or vessels for holding sacrificial fires, or weapons, such as hammers, clubs, staffs, and so forth. He saw rākṣasas who were one-eyed, many-eared, pot-bellied, flabby-breasted, hideous, twisted-faced, fierce and stubby. He saw them bearing bows, swords, spikes and clubs, and others shining very brightly because of their armour. He saw that some of them were neither too fat nor too thin, neither too tall nor too short, neither too fair nor too dark, and neither hunchbacked nor dwarfish. He also saw that some were very ugly, others able to assume any form at will, others very handsome and effulgent. Some were carrying flags, banners or different kinds of weapons. Some were carrying javelins, tree trunks, sharp-pointed spears, thunderbolts, slings or nooses in their hands. He also saw many wearing flower garlands and anointed with sandalwood paste, adorned with costly jewelry and wearing different kinds of costumes as they wandering about at will. Some were carrying razor-sharp spears and others who were physically very strong carried thunderbolts. He also saw the central garrison of one hundred thousand rākṣasas that was commanded by Rāvaṇa and which was located in front of his residential quarters.

After seeing that garrison which had large gold arches, Hanumān then saw Rāvaṇa's famous palace, constructed on the summit of Trikūṭa Mountain and which was surrounded by a moat full of blossoming white lotus flowers. Hanumān entered Rāvaṇa's palace, which was surrounded by a big wall. That palace was heavenly, like the abode of the immortals, and it resounded with angelic music. There could also be heard the neighing of horses and the tinkling of silver and gold ornaments. The gateways of the palace were adorned with chariots, conveyances and aerial vehicles, as well as beautiful horses and four-tusked elephants that resembled white clouds, and deer and birds in heat. That palace was guarded by thousands of the most formidable practitioners of the black arts. Hanumān entered the palace of the lord of the rākṣasas, which was encircled with a wall of refined gold. Those walls were inlaid with valuable pearls and gems. It was also sprinkled with water scented with aloe and sandalwood.

HANUMĀN SEES MANY RĀKṢASAS IN THE CITY

Thereafter, Hanumān saw the moon risen high in the sky constantly spreading the canopy of its rays over the earth, as does the sun, and resembling a bull in rut wandering about a cowpen. He also saw that the moon was destroying the sins of the people, causing the ocean to swell and illuminating all beings with its cooling rays as it advanced across the sky. The same splendor which shines in this world on Mount Mandara, on the waters of the ocean at night, or on lotus flowers in a pool was emanating from the moon. And that moon was shining in the sky just like a swan in a silver cage, a lion in a cave on Mount Mandara, or a warrior riding a proud horse. The full moon with its spots looked like a bull with horns, a big white mountain with rising peaks, or an elephant with gold-plated tusks. The fortunate moon shone brightly, its stain of cold water and frost having vanished, its stain of darkness having been eliminated by the sun, and its spots being illuminated by its own splendor. The moon looked splendid like a lion standing on top of a rock, an elephant entered deep into a forest, or a monarch who had just reached his own kingdom. The glorious night's defects, such as the increase of the power of the flesh-eating rākṣasas, and the agitation of the minds of lovers, were dispelled by the all-pervading radiance of the moon. The sound of stringed instruments which is so pleasing to the ears had started. Chaste women were sleeping with their husbands. The night-stalkers whose behaviour was strange and menacing had also begun to enjoy themselves.

The wise Hanumān saw the mansions of the arrogant and intoxicated rākṣasas. These buildings were connected together and were crowded with chariots, horses and furniture and wealth fit for valiant warriors. The rākṣasas were constantly assaulting each other, waving their thick arms, uttering incoherent sentences and cursing one another. Sometimes the rākṣasas beat their hands against their chests, and sometimes they put their arms around their loved ones. They were wearing different

kinds of clothes and were pulling the strings of their strong bows. Hanumān saw the rākṣasas' wives applying sandalwood paste on their bodies, while others were sleeping. Some who had lovely faces were laughing, while others who were angry were hissing. With its big elephants trumpeting, its pious souls who were respectable and its warriors who were hissing, the city appeared like a lake full of hissing snakes. Hanumān saw in the city sorcerers who were mostly intelligent, sweet-speaking, fully dedicated, outstanding and dressed in different ways. He was happy to see those who were handsome, endowed with many virtues and who acted according to their own qualities. He saw that some of those who were very effulgent were handsome, while others were ugly.

Hanumān then observed the women, who were worthy of fine clothes. They were extremely pure-hearted and dignified. They were completely attached to their lovers and to beverages, were very good-natured and shone like stars. He saw some women who were very radiant, bashful, and delighted, enjoying the embrace of their lovers at night like female birds in the embrace of their mates. He saw others on the roofs of their mansions seated comfortably in the laps of their lovers. These were devoted to their husbands and their marital duties. They were properly married and completely in love with their husbands. Some of the women were not properly covered and resembled streaks of gold. There were other women who were the color of molten gold. Others who were not accompanied by their husbands looked as pale as the moon, though they had lovely complexions. That most valorous monkey then saw extremely charming women in their homes. These were delighted to meet their dear husbands, who were similarly pleased in mind by them. Those women were overflowing with affection and were very satisfied in heart. He saw rows of faces shining like the moon, rows of slanted eyes with lovely lashes and rows of ornaments resembling flashing thunderbolts.

Even so, Hanumān did not see anywhere the frail Sītā, who was high-born, situated on the path of virtue, born in a royal family, sprung from the mind of the Supreme, and like a vine in full bloom. After searching for a long time and not seeing Sītā anywhere, Hanumān became morose due to sorrow. That lady was the wife of Rāma, a ruler of men and the best of speakers. She was firmly situated on the path of eternal duty. She had eyes

only for Rāma and was deeply in love with Him. She had penetrated into the mind of Her husband and was considered by Him to be special and superior to all other women. She was tormented with anguish and Her throat was choked up by a constant flow of tears. Her neck had previously been adorned with a most excellent and valuable gold necklace. She had beautiful eyelashes and a delicate neck, and She resembled a peahen dancing avidly in the forest. Due to Her captivity, She looked like the crescent moon blurred by a cloud, a vein of gold covered with dust, the discolored scar of a wound or the streak of a cloud swept away by the wind.

HANUMĀN ENTERS RĀVAṆA'S PALACE

Wandering about those mansions of Laṅkā as he pleased, Hanumān reached Rāvaṇa's palace, which was enclosed with a wall as brilliant as the sun. That palace was guarded by rākṣasas, like a forest protected by lions. Hanumān felt happy while observing the palace, which was adorned with figures wrought in silver, archways covered with gold ornamentation, beautiful chambers, doorways and enclosed areas. It was guarded by mahouts mounted on their elephants, by unwearied soldiers and by horses that could not be killed and which were pulling chariots. These chariots were amazing and were outfitted with shields of lion and tiger skins. They were adorned with decorations carved from ivory, gold and silver. They were making noise by their rumbling and by the tinkling of their decorative bells. The city was filled with many precious gems and furnished with luxurious furniture. It had buildings for parking big chariots and thrones for the great chariot warriors to sit upon. It was crowded with thousands of different kinds of birds and beasts which were worth seeing. It was well-protected by skilled rākṣasa warriors and was full of remarkably beautiful ladies.

Hanumān saw the vast palace of Rāvaṇa. It was adorned with the presence of joyful damsels. The combined sound of the ornaments of all those ladies resembled the roar of the ocean. The palace was equipped with all the paraphernalia of royalty and was perfumed with the finest quality sandalwood. It was thronged with eminent personalities, as a great forest is infested by lions. The palace resounded with the sound of kettledrums and mṛdaṅgas, and was echoing with the trumpeting of conchshells. The palace was always respected by the rākṣasas, who worshiped there and who extracted soma juice there during the appropriate phases of the moon. It was as unfathomable as the ocean and was noisy like the thrashing of ocean waves. The palace was entirely encrusted with valuable gems and it was crowded with elephants, horses and chariots. It looked splendid due to the presence of the great personage Rāvaṇa.

Considering the palace to be the very ornament of the city of Laṅkā, Hanumān wandered about Rāvaṇa's capital. He fearlessly wandered from house to house, seeing the palaces, gardens and everything else that was there. Jumping into Prahasta's mansion, the mighty Hanumān then jumped over to another one belonging to Mahāpārśva. Hanumān then jumped into the palace of Kumbhakarna, which was like a cloud, and then into that of Vibhīṣaṇa. He then jumped one after the other into the palaces of Mahodara, Virūpākṣa, Vidyujjihva, Vidyunmāli, Vajradamstra, Śuka, Sāraṇa, Indrajit, Jambumāli, Sumāli, Raśmiketū, Sūryaśatru, and Vajrakāya.

One after the other, Hanumān, the son of the wind god, entered the mansions of Dhūmrākṣa, Sampāti, Vidyurūpa, Bhīma, Ghana, Vighana, Śukanābha, Cakra, Śaṭha, Kapata, Hrasvakarna, Daṁstra, Lomaśa, Yuddhonmatta, Matta, Dhvajagrīva, Sādī, Vidyujjihva, (different from the previous), Dvijihva, Hastimukha, Karāla, Piśāca and Śoṇitākṣa. Leaping from one luxurious mansion to the other, Hanumān noticed the opulence of those rākṣasas. Passing all these residences that were all around, the glorious Hanumān again reached Rāvaṇa's palace. While wandering about Rāvaṇa's palace, he spied a rākṣasī with hideous eyes guarding Rāvaṇa's bedroom. Hanumān also saw soldiers carrying tridents, clubs, javelins and lances in their hands. He also saw big-bodied rākṣasas holding all kinds of weapons and swift steeds that were red, white and black. He also saw pedigree tusked elephants that could defeat the enemy's elephants. These were trained in warfare and were just like Indra's elephant, Airāvata. The elephants were discharging fluid from the temples of their foreheads, like raining clouds or mountains with streams flowing down. Their trumpeting was like the thundering of clouds and they were difficult for the enemy to assault in battle.

Inside Rāvaṇa's palace Hanumān saw thousands of army barracks decorated with gold ornamentation and windowscreens of shimmering gold that resembled the rising sun. He also saw palanquins of different shapes and sizes, beautiful vine-covered bowers and buildings with frescoes. Inside Rāvaṇa's palace Hanumān saw a playhouse with a mountain made from logs, a house for love-making and a beautiful day-house as well. That excellent palace resembled Mount Mandara. It had numerous pens for peacocks and

was crowded with flag poles. He saw that there were heaps of jewels and treasures all about. Sober and dedicated priests performed rituals to preserve the wealth so that the palace looked like the residence of Kuvera, treasurer of the gods. Because of the beams of light emanating from the jewels and the effulgence of Rāvaṇa's body, the palace shone very beautifully like the sun surrounded by its own rays. Hanumān then noticed the sparkling couches, seats and vessels all made from gold. Hanumān went inside the immense palace which had wide and spacious rooms. Its floors were damp with wine and liquor and it abounded with vessels made from precious gems. It was captivating to behold, just like Kuvera's palace. It resounded with the tinkling of anklebells and belts, and the beating of drums, clapping of hands, chiming of cymbals and other percussion instruments. The palace contained lofty buildings and was crowded with hundreds of women.

DESCRIPTION OF RĀVAṆA'S PALACE

The stalwart Hanumān saw all the buildings comprising Rāvaṇa's palace. Their window gratings of gold were inlaid with vaidurya gems. It resembled a cloud in the rainy season struck by lightning, and was crowded with birds. He also saw the many different rooms in the palace, including those that were used to store excellent conchshells, bows and other weapons and mind-captivating penthouses on the tops of mountain-like mansions. Hanumān also saw mansions endowed with numerous treasures that were honored by both the gods and demons and that were free from all defect. These had been wrested from Kuvera by the might of the rākṣasas. He saw all of Rāvaṇa's mansions, which had been constructed with great effort by Maya dānava and which were the most excellent buildings in the whole world. Then he beheld the fascinating and unique palace of Rāvaṇa which possessed the loveliness of gold. It resembled a risen cloud. It was just suitable to Rāvaṇa's own power as lord of the rākṣasas. It looked like heaven on earth. It was shining with splendor and replete with abundant gems and strewn with the flowers from many different trees so that it looked like a mountain peak covered with pollen. The presence of beautiful women caused the palace to shine like a cloud pierced by bolts of lightning or like a well-made aerial vehicle being pulled through the sky by marvelous swans.

Hanumān also saw an aerial vehicle encrusted with many gems. It was as charming as a beautiful mountain colored with mineral deposits or the sky lit up by the moon and other luminaries or a lovely cloud of different hues. The ground around that aerial vehicle had rows of gems in mounds. These were covered with planted trees with flowers that had filaments and petals. White mansions had been constructed, as well as pools with lotus flowers, forests and charming lakes. Hanumān gazed at the great aerial vehicle known by the name Puṣpaka. It was glowing with gems and was capable of traveling long distances. It was the very best of aerial vehicles. The vehicle was adorned with birds fashioned with vaidurya gems, silver and coral, snakes made of various jewels and swift horses with comely limbs. The

birds had dainty beaks and wings. Those wings were covered with flowerlets of coral and gold which they had playfully folded and were as beautiful as Cupid himself. The vehicle was adorned with elephants with shapely trunks holding lotus flowers while worshipping the goddess of fortune Lakṣmī, whose image was also sculpted with graceful hands holding lotus flowers.

Thus was Hanumān amazed upon finding that aerial vehicle. It was like a mountain with charming caves or like a tree with hollows which was fragrant with flowers in spring. After wandering about that venerable city protected by the arms of Rāvaṇa and not finding Sītā, who was conquered by Her husband's virtues and sorely afflicted, Hanumān felt miserable. Although he had meditated on the self, had conquered the self and followed the right path, when he was unable to find Sītā after conscientiously searching, his mind became deeply saddened.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PUṢPAKA VEHICLE

Standing in the center of that palace, Hanumān saw the huge aerial vehicle decorated with jewels and gems and outfitted with screens of refined gold. It was adorned with engravings of immeasurable beauty and was a masterpiece manufactured by Viśvakarmā himself. When situated in the sky on the path of the wind it could shine as brightly as a beacon-light in the orbit of the sun. There was no part of it which had not been made with the greatest care, nor was there any part which was not inlaid with costly gems. The special features of that vehicle could not even be found in the realm of the gods, nor was there any part of it which was not special.

That best of monkey warriors saw right there in the palace that most excellent aerial vehicle known as Puṣpaka. It was obtained by Rāvaṇa by dint of the prowess he had acquired through the practice of austerities and meditation. That vehicle went wherever the driver thought with mental concentration. It had been constructed according to specific plans with the use of material from various sources. It was as swift as the wind, quickly following the thoughts of its driver, and it was difficult to raid. It could only be occupied by great souls who had performed acts of piety, had accumulated austerity as their wealth and who were illustrious and very blissful. It had a certain peculiarity about it and had been constructed in an unusual manner. It was a mass of curiosities and was adorned with numerous compartments. It was fascinating and impeccable like the autumn moon. It looked like the highest pinnacle of a many-peaked mountain. It was carried by thousands of goblins, whose faces were adorned with earrings. These were voracious eaters who had large rolling and unwinking eyes. They could travel through the sky, roamed about at night and could move with great speed. The vehicle was pleasant to see with bunches of spring flowers. In fact, it was more beautiful to see than spring itself.

HANUMĀN SEARCHES RĀVAṆA'S PALACE

Hanumān beheld in the midst of that palace compound the vast, spotless and superexcellent residence of Rāvaṇa. That foremost of edifices was half a yojana wide and one yojana long and crowded with numerous structures. Hanumān, the defeater of enemies, wandered about the palace looking everywhere for the broad-eyed Sītā. Seeing the unexcelled residence of the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, Hanumān, who possessed all good qualities, thereupon approached it. The palace was surrounded by elephants that had either four, three or two tusks each, and was guarded by rākṣasas bearing weapons. Rāvaṇa's residence was crowded with rākṣasīs who were his wives, as well as princesses whom he had kidnapped by means of his prowess. It looked like the ocean agitated by strong gale winds and crowded with crocodiles, alligators, whales, eels and other aquatic creatures.

The lovely splendor that belongs to Kuvera, Indra and the moon always remained in the palace of Rāvaṇa. In the residences of the rākṣasas could be found the same or even greater opulence than that found in the palaces of Kuvera, Yamarāja and Varuṇa. Hanumān saw in the middle of the palace compound another finely constructed building guarded by many elephants in rut.

The Puṣpaka aerial vehicle had originally been constructed in the heavenly planets by Viśvakarmā for Lord Brahmā. It was entirely inlaid with precious gems. Because of his severe austerities, Kuvera received it from Lord Brahmā. The lord of rākṣasas Rāvaṇa confiscated it after defeating Kuvera by his physical strength. Hanumān jumped onto the aerial vehicle. It was supported by columns fashioned with silver and gold, engraved with images of wolves and blazing with splendor. It resembled Mount Meru and Mount Mandara and seemed to be scraping the sky. It had secret chambers and pleasure houses on all sides. It seemed to be blazing like fire and was perfectly crafted by Viśvakarmā. It had staircases of gold and lovely platforms inlaid with emeralds and sapphires. Its windows were covered with

screen lattices of gold and crystal. The floor was inlaid with coral, unmatched pearls and precious gems. It was smeared with red sandalwood paste that was the color of the newly risen sun and which emitted a sweet fragrance. As he stood there, from all around he could smell the aroma of beverages and cooked foods, including grains. That aroma pressed against him as if it were solid air. As one would beckon a dear friend, the aroma was calling the mighty Hanumān to the place where Rāvaṇa was, saying “Come here!”

Leaving that place, he saw the beautiful, spacious chamber of Rāvaṇa’s beloved consort. It had stairways made with gems and lattice screens of gold over the windows. Its floors were inlaid with crystals and decorated with inlaid figures of ivory, pearls, diamonds, coral, silver and gold. Its pillars were uniform, straight, very tall and embellished with gems and gold. The very high columns supporting the palace resembled wings which the palace used for flying to heaven. The floor was covered with a large carpet embroidered with designs of mountains, trees, rivers and so forth. That carpet was as broad as the earth and had depictions of different countries and dwellings. The chamber was resonating with the sound of birds in heat and was always fragrant with the aroma of celestial perfumes. It was hung with decorative tapestries and was inhabited by Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas. That palace was always smoky with incense and was immaculate and as white as a swan. With its decorations of leaves and flowers, it looked bright and festive. It was mind-captivating and made the colors of things look even brighter. The palace drove away all misery and produced celestial opulence.

The chamber protected by Rāvaṇa gratified the five senses with their sense objects: sight, taste, smell, touch and sound. Hanumān thought that the palace might be heaven, the world of the gods, the city of Lord Indra or the topmost abode of material perfection which corresponds to Lord Brahmā. Hanumān saw flickering golden lamps which seemed to be meditating, like gamblers defeated by greater gamblers. He thought that the chamber was illuminated by the light of the lamps, the splendor of Rāvaṇa and the brilliance of ornaments. Then he saw lying on the carpet thousands of beautiful ladies clad in garments and flower garlands of many different hues. They were fast asleep under the influence of drink, having abandoned their entertainment, and half the night had passed. Sleeping in that way,

their ornaments making no noise, they resembled a great lake full of lotus flowers on which swans and bees sat quietly.

Hanumān saw those ladies' faces, which were as fragrant as lotus flowers; their teeth were concealed by their lips and their eyes were closed. Sometimes their faces resembled fully opened lotus flowers at the end of night, and sometimes they resembled lotus flowers with their petals closed at night time. Hanumān logically concluded that intoxicated honey bees must be constantly petitioning those lotus faces as they do blossoming lotus flowers, for he considered those faces to be the same as lotus flowers. Being illuminated with the brilliance of those women, the chamber was as beautiful as the night sky in autumn lit up by stars. Surrounded by those women, Rāvaṇa shone like the splendid moon encircled with stars. Hanumān thought that all the stars which fell from heaven when their pious merit was exhausted had gathered at that place. The luster, complexion and grace of the women lying there resembled the clarity, eminence and lovely splendor of stars.

With their hair and flower garlands disheveled and their ornaments in disarray from when they were drinking, they were unconscious and lying in deep slumber. Some had the decorative marks on their foreheads smeared, some had their ankle bells slipped off, some had their necklaces fallen off and lying at their side. Some lay covered by their broken necklaces, others' veils and shawls had fallen off. The strings of the girdles of some had broken and some women lay like young mares exhausted from carrying heavy loads. Some of the ladies were missing their earrings, some had their flower garlands broken and squashed like flowering vines crushed by a great elephant wandering in the wilderness. On some of the ladies, the pearl necklaces shone like the sun and the moon and resembled swans sleeping in between their breasts. The necklaces of vaidurya gems on some women's breasts looked like kādamba geese with their grey wings, while the chains of gold on other women resembled ruddy geese. With their thighs as the sandy banks, the women resembled rivers beautified by the presence of swans, ducks and ruddy geese. They resembled rivers with the golden bells of their girdles as lotus buds, the gold ornaments as broad lotus flowers, their amorous expression in sleep as alligators, and their glory as banks. The lovely marks made by their ornaments on their tender limbs and on their breasts

seemed to also be ornaments. The ends of cloth drawn over the faces of some women fluttered constantly from the breath coming out of their mouths. Those cloths covering the lower faces of Rāvaṇa's wives of many different attractive complexions waved like gleaming flags. The earrings of some of the brightly effulgent ladies were trembling gently due to the breath coming out of their mouths.

Smelling like liquor distilled from sugar, their fragrant and enjoyable breath emanating from their mouths was refreshing Rāvaṇa. In fact, some of Rāvaṇa's wives were smelling their cowives mouths again and again while asleep, suspecting them to be the mouth of Rāvaṇa. No longer in control of themselves because of intoxication, those women whose minds were totally attached to Rāvaṇa pleased their companions with the smell of their mouths. Some of the women lay there using their arms adorned with ornaments as pillows, while others used pretty pieces of cloth as pillows. One woman was resting her head on another's chest, another was resting her head on someone's arm. Another was resting her head on someone's lap, and another, on someone's breasts. Fallen under the influence of their cherished intoxication, they rested their heads on the thighs, sides, waists and backs of one another, their limbs resting on top of each other. Feeling pleased by the touch of their intertwined limbs, the ladies were all fast asleep. With their limbs intertangled as if the women were strung on one string, they resembled a garland of flowers with black bumblebees, which was their scattered black hair. The assembly of Rāvaṇa's wives resembled a flowering vine trembling from spring breezes. They were strung together as if a garland of flowers or like the tangled bouquets of a flower vine because of their interlocked shoulders, their hair resembling black bumblebees. It was not possible to distinguish the ornaments, limbs, garments and garlands of the women, even though these were in their usual places. While Rāvaṇa was sleeping comfortably, the shining gold lamps seemed to stare without blinking at those women of different complexions.

Under the spell of lust, the virgen daughters of royal sages, brāhmaṇas, demons, gandharvas and rākṣasas had become his wives. Many women had been won by him because of his fondness for war, while others had come on their own because they were deluded and intoxicated with love. Not one of those women had been forcibly abducted, though he was quite

capable of it, nor did any one of them long for another man, nor had they ever been married to anyone else, except Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka. Not one of his consorts was low-born, uncomely, clumsy, without proper accouterments, feeble or not loved by Rāvaṇa. The pious-minded Hanumān thought that if Rāvaṇa had allowed Sītā to remain with Rāma as happily as those women with Rāvaṇa, then he would have been truly fortunate. Then Hanumān again thought that Sītā was surely superior to all those women because of Her qualities and that the mighty lord of Laṅkā had perpetrated a difficult and ignoble deed against Her.

HANUMĀN SEES RĀVAṆA SLEEPING

Looking around, Hanumān saw an outstanding platform made of crystal and inlaid with gems that was truly divine. On it sat luxurious bedsteads that were fashioned from ivory, gold and vaidurya gems and spread with the most costly sheets and blankets. In a certain part of the platform Hanumān saw decorated with sparkling flower garlands a white parasol which resembled the moon. Then he saw under it a most excellent bed that was covered with gold plating. It was as effulgent as the sun and adorned with garlands of aśoka flowers. It was being fanned on all sides by ladies holding yak-tail wisks. It was scented with various kinds of aromatic oils and perfumed with fine incense. It was spread with the finest sheets and blankets, was upholstered with sheep fleeces and adorned on all sides with superb flowers and flower garlands. Then Hanumān saw Rāvaṇa. He looked like a dark cloud. His earrings were sparkling like flames. His eyes were reddish and his arms long and strong. He was wearing golden robes. The limbs of his body were smeared with fragrant red sandalwood paste. He resembled a reddened rain cloud in the sky at sunset lit up by flashes of lightning. He was adorned with dazzling ornaments. He was handsome. He could assume any form he wished. He looked like Mount Mandara with its covering of trees and bushes fallen asleep. After enjoying himself at night and drinking sufficiently, that dearest of rākṣasīs and rākṣasas was sleeping comfortably. Hanumān saw that lord of the rākṣasas sound asleep on the lustrous bedstead.

Extremely appalled at seeing Rāvaṇa, who was snoring like an elephant, Hanumān stepped back as if he were afraid. Ascending the stairway and pausing at the edge of the dais, Hanumān began looking at the drunken Rāvaṇa, who was a tiger among rākṣasas. As Rāvaṇa slept on that magnificent bed, he looked like the great Mount Prasravaṇa or like a mighty elephant that drives away its rivals by its mere odor.

He also saw the two outstretched arms of the invincible rākṣasa. They were adorned with gold bands and resembled a pair of flags raised in

honor of Lord Indra. They bore scars from wounds inflicted by the sharp tusks of Indra's elephant Airāvata. His muscular arms were fixed on a pair of uniform and well-shaped shoulders, which bore scars from Indra's thunderbolts and from Lord Viṣṇu discus. His arms were large-jointed and strong. His fingernails and thumbs bore auspicious marks, and his fingers and palms were well-formed. His solid arms were shaped like iron clubs and resembled the trunks of elephants. Stretching across the bed, they looked like a pair of five-headed serpents. His arms were nicely decorated with cooling and fragrant sandalwood paste that was the color of a hare's blood. They were accustomed to being massaged by fine ladies and smeared with the finest fragrant essences. Their sight caused yakṣas, nāgas, gandharvas, dānavas and gods to howl in terror. To Hanumān, those two arms stretched across the bed looked like two big angry snakes sleeping in a cave on Mount Mandara. With his two arms, the lord of rākṣasas resembled Mount Mandara with its two peaks.

In that palace, Hanumān saw Rāvaṇa, who was the lover of his wives. His face was adorned with lovely pearl necklaces and a gold chain, and was illuminated by sparkling earrings. His head had withdrawn a bit from his gold crown. His broad and fleshy chest was smeared with sandalwood paste and was illuminated by the shimmering necklaces upon it. His eyes were blood-red. His lower body was covered by a white silk loin cloth, which was falling off. His upper body was properly covered with an expensive yellow shawl. Rāvaṇa looked like a mound of black beans. He was hissing like a snake and resembled an elephant sleeping in one of the large currents of the Ganges River. He was illuminated on all sides by lamps burning on four golden stands. Thus all the limbs of his body were illuminated like a cloud lit by a number of lightning bolts. He also saw Rāvaṇa's wives lying at his feet. He saw that their faces were as bright as the moon. They were wearing exquisite earrings. The garlands they wore had not yet wilted. Those lying women were expert at dancing and playing musical instruments and were fond of cuddling in Rāvaṇa's lap. They wore the finest jewelry. He saw that the women wore on their earlobes gold earrings studded with diamonds and vaidurya gems, as well as bands and bracelets on their arms. That chamber was illuminated by their moon-like faces and lovely, sparkling earrings so that it resembled the night sky spangled with stars.

Exhausted from intoxication and love-making, Rāvaṇa, the lord of rākṣasas, had fallen asleep with those women while taking a break. One lady who was fast asleep, being especially endowed with bodily beauty, appeared to be in a dancing pose due to the delicate placement of her limbs. Another lady was asleep tightly holding her vinā. Another lady looked like a lotus plant which had been thrown into a big river and was clinging to a boat. Another beauty was sleeping with her small hand drum held in her armpit, looking like an affectionate mother with her child. Another shapely lady with beautiful breasts was lying asleep hugging a kettledrum as if she were a desirous woman embracing her lover after a long time. Yet another woman was sleeping while hugging a vinā, like a lusty woman embracing her dearly beloved. Another lovely lady seemed to be dancing, having fallen under the spell of slumber while clutching a seven-stringed vinā as if she were in the embrace of her lover. Another lady with intoxicated eyes was asleep clutching a clay drum with her fascinating, soft, golden arms. Another woman of faultless beauty and slim waist, exhausted by intoxicated, was pressing a drum to her chest with her arms. Another lady was grasping a drum while having a second one slung over her shoulder, as if she were sleeping with her young husband and child. Another woman with eyes like the petals of a lotus flower, being bewildered by intoxication, was sleeping while hugging a trumpet. One sleeping lady had knocked over a pot of water so that she looked like a garland of various spring flowers sprinkled with water. Being overcome by sleep, another lady was pressing her hands on her own two breasts, which resembled two golden urns. Another woman whose face was like a full moon, being overwhelmed by intoxication, was asleep embracing another woman. Those ladies lying there in slumber while hugging different musical instruments and pressing them against their breasts seemed to be embracing their lovers.

Hanumān then saw sleeping on a lovely bed apart from the other women a lady who possessed great beauty. She was wearing pearl necklaces and other jewelry. The well-attired lady seemed to be illuminating that best of chambers with her splendor. Her complexion was fair, and her effulgence, golden. She was Mandodari, the favorite wife of Rāvaṇa and mistress of all the ladies in Rāvaṇa's harem. Seeing her, the strong-armed son of the wind god, Hanumān, concluded that she was Sītā because of her beauty and youthfulness. Becoming filled with great delight, that leader of monkey

hordes began to rejoice. Exhibiting his simian nature, Hanumān rejoiced, kissed the end of his tail, frolicked, sang, pranced about, climbed up a column, and then jumped down to the floor.

HANUMĀN SEARCHES ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE

Rejecting the thought that the woman he saw sleeping at Rāvaṇa's side was Sītā, Hanumān became calm. He reasoned: "Being separated from Rāma, Sītā would not be able to sleep, eat or decorate Herself, much less engage in drinking. Nor would She consort with any other man, even if he were the lord of the immortal gods, for there is no one equal to Lord Rāma, not even in the heavenly regions." Thus concluding that this woman must be someone other than Sītā, Hanumān again began wandering about in the banquet hall in search of Sītā.

There he saw women who were exhausted from grambling, and others from singing. Others were exhausted from dancing, while others were overwhelmed from drinking. Some were lying on top of kettledrums, clay drums and other musical instruments, while others were lying asleep on excellent beds. Hanumān saw the banquet hall full of thousands of ladies wearing jewelry. They were always engaged in discussing each other's beauty and the meaning of songs. They were skilled at determining the proper time and place for doing things, as well as choosing the right words when they spoke, and they were ever engaged in pastimes of love. In their midst, Hanumān saw the strong-armed lord of the rākṣasas who looked as beautiful as a bull in the midst of a herd of fine cows inside a corral. Surrounded by them, Rāvaṇa looked beautiful like a bull elephant surrounded by female elephants in the forest.

Hanumān again searched the banquet hall of Rāvaṇa's palace, which was furnished with all desirable things. He saw the meat of deer, buffaloes and boars placed separately throughout the banquet hall. He saw in big gold vessels the meat of peacocks and chickens that had not yet been eaten. He also saw the meat of boars, rhinoceroses, procupines, deer and peacocks that was stewed in yogurt and salt. He also saw half-eaten buffalo flesh and the meat of kṛkālā birds, different kinds of goats, hares, ekaśālya fish, well-

seasoned mutton, as well as sauces, different kinds of beverages, purees, fruit punch, sour pickles and salty savories. The floor of the banquet hall spread its charm profusely by means of the valuable anklets and armlets cast aside, as well as the drinking vessels, fruits and flowers scattered over it. With the pieces of furniture touching each other here and there, the banquet hall seemed to be illuminated without fire.

Hanumān saw meats expertly prepared in many different ways in different places in the banquet hall, as well as different appealing liquors distilled from sugar, honey, flower nectar and fruit juice, which were sprinkled with different blends of aromatic spices. Due to the scattered flowers that were gathered here and there, as well as urns of gold and vessels of crystal, and utensils made of gold and other materials, the floor of the banquet hall looked splendid. Hanumān also saw on the floor top-quality drinks in pitchers of silver and gold. He also saw many different vessels of gold and of gems that were full of wine. In some places he saw that they were half full, while in other places they were completely drained of their contents, or were full to the brim. Hanumān wandered about seeing here and there different kinds of foods and beverages arranged separately, as well as half-consumed drinks.

Many of the ladies beds were empty, while some of the ladies lay asleep embracing each other. One woman, under the influence of slumber had gone to the bed of another, snatched her shawl and covered herself with it and embraced the other woman while sleeping. Due to the deep breathing, the shawl and their garlands trembled slightly as if shaken by a gentle breeze. Carrying the varied fragrance of cooling sandalwood paste, sweet wine, different flower garlands, flowers, sandalwood powder for bathing and incense, the blowing wind wafted these aromas to where the Pūṣpaka aerial vehicle was outside the banquet hall. Some of the ladies there in Rāvaṇa's palace were of dark complexion, while others had golden complexions. Exhausted due to indulgence in intoxication and love-making, the beauty of the ladies fallen under the spell of slumber was like that of lotus flowers when closed at night. Thus Hanumān searched the personal residential quarters of Rāvaṇa, but did not find Sītā anywhere.

While looking at those women, Hanumān became fearful about the breaking of moral conduct: “To look at another’s wife while she is asleep will certainly counteract my pious merits. I have never looked upon the wives of others. I have also seen this fellow who takes the wives of others.” Another thought then occurred to the pensive Hanumān, a thought that rationalized his actions: “I have indeed looked upon all Rāvaṇa’s wives without their knowledge, yet no foul thought entered my mind. The mind indeed impels all the senses to engaged in auspicious or inauspicious actions, however my mind is firmly fixed on doing good. I surely could not have searched for Sītā anywhere else, for when searching for a women, one should definitely look among women. One looks for a creature among those of its group. One would not look for a woman in a herd of deer. As such, I have searched with a pure mind the entire private residence of Rāvaṇa, without finding Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka.”

Even after examining the daughters of gods, gandharvas and nāgas, the courageous Hanumān did not find Sītā. After not finding Sītā among those ladies, Hanumān withdrew and prepared to go elsewhere. Leaving the banquet hall, the son of the wind god again began looking for Sītā all around.

HANUMĀN BECOMES DESPONDENT ABOUT FINDING SĪTĀ

Staying within the palace confines, Hanumān visited the arbors, picture galleries and bed chambers, but did not find Sītā, who was charming to behold. When Hanumān could not find Sītā anywhere, he began to reflect: “Obviously Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, is no longer alive, since I am unable to locate Her. Surely the chaste Sītā, who always carefully guarded her own character and adhered to the path of noble women, has been killed by this foremost of rākṣasas. Or else She died from freight upon seeing the misshapened, hideous, big-headed, bulging-eyed and lusterless female attendants of Rāvaṇa. Having failed to find Sītā, lost my valor and surpassed the time limit imposed by Sugrīva, I cannot return to Sugrīva, for that mighty monkey’s chastisement is severe. After thoroughly searching the living quarters of Rāvaṇa’s consorts, I have not found the virtuous Sītā, so all my endeavors have been useless.

“I wonder what all the monkeys will say to me when I return to them. They will probably say: ‘Tell us what you accomplished after going there?’ Since I have not found Sītā, what will I tell them? The time limit set by Sugrīva has unfortunately already transpired. And what will the aged Jāmbavān, Prince Aṅgada and the other assembled monkeys say when I return across the ocean? Tirelessness is the root of prosperity; tirelessness produces the highest happiness. I shall therefore begin anew searching in all those places where I have not yet looked. Indeed, tirelessness impels one to pursue all goals; it rewards the activities which the living beings perform. I shall therefore remain tireless and thereby succeed in making the greatest endeavor. Thus I shall explore the unsearched areas protected by Rāvaṇa. I have already searched the banquet halls and gardens, the picture galleries and pleasure houses, the alleys between home gardens and all the many-storied buildings.”

Thinking in this way, Hanumān began searching basements, kiosks and small cottages for guests at a distance from the main houses. Jumping up somewhere and then down, tarrying somewhere and then leaving, opening doors and closing them, going in and then coming out, climbing up and then down, the great monkey Hanumān wandered everywhere about until not even the space of four fingers remain unsearched by him in Rāvaṇa's living quarters. He explored everywhere—the roads along the protective walls, platforms around the bases of trees, shrines at crossroads, chasms and lotus ponds. He saw various kinds of rākṣasas, ugly and deformed, but not the daughter of King Janaka. He also saw vidyādhara women whose beauty was unequalled, but not Sītā, the delight of Rāma. He saw the daughters of nāgas who had lovely hips and faces like the full moon, but not Sītā. He saw the daughters of nāgas who had been manhandled and forcibly abducted by Rāvaṇa, but not Sītā. Even after examining all those beautiful ladies, Hanumān was not able to find Sītā and thus began to despair. Seeing that the efforts of the monkey generals and his own jumping across the ocean was futile, Hanumān, the son of the wind god, again became despondent. Climbing down from the aerial vehicle, he started thinking, though his mind was bewildered by grief.

HANUMĀN NOTICES AN AŚOKA GROVE

Going from the aerial vehicle to the defence wall, Hanumān, the leader of monkey hordes, was as speedy as a bolt of lightning in a cloud. After scouring Rāvaṇa's quarters and not finding Sītā, Hanumān said to himself: "In order to please Lord Rāma, I have searched Laṅkā many times, yet I have found no trace of Sītā, whose every limb is charming. I have explored pools, ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, forest regions abounding in water and mountains that were difficult to ascend, but I have still not found Sītā. The lord of vultures, Sampāti, said that Sītā was here in Rāvaṇa's abode, yet She is nowhere to be seen. I wonder where She could be. Could Sītā, being a woman of noble decent, having been forcibly abducted by Rāvaṇa, be helplessly consorting with him?

"I think She might have fallen down somewhere halfway across the ocean, since Rāvaṇa was hurrying so quickly in fear of Rāma's arrows. Or else, while she was being carried along the path of the perfected beings through the sky, She had a heart attack upon seeing the ocean so far below. Or maybe because of Rāvaṇa's speed and the pressure of his arms, She simply died. While struggling to free Herself from his grip, She might have fallen into the ocean. Oh, or maybe, while trying to guard Her chastity, the friendless Sītā was devoured by the cruel Rāvaṇa! Or maybe, because of their evil nature, Rāvaṇa's wives devoured the dark-eyed damsel. The unfortunate lady met Her death while meditating on Rāma's face, which is just like a full moon, and whose eyes are shaped like the petals of a lotus flower. Sītā, the princess of Mithilā and a descendant of the Videha Dynasty, must have abandoned Her body while crying loudly and exclaiming: 'O Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa! O Ayodhyā!' Or perhaps She is captive inside Rāvaṇa's palace and weeping greatly, like a caged mynah bird. How could Sītā, being born in the family of King Janaka and married to Lord Rāma, submit to Rāvaṇa?

“In case She has vanished, or died, or been killed, the news could not be relayed to Rāma because of His fondness for Her. It would be wrong to report the matter to Rāma, and wrong not to do so. I wonder what I should do. To me both choices seem the same.”

When the course of action became so difficult to decide, Hanumān again began contemplating a solution. He thought: “If I leave here and return to Kiṣkindhā without finding Sītā, what will have been the use of my endeavor? My jumping across the ocean, entry into the city of Laṅkā and inspection of the rākṣasas will have been for nought. What will Sugrīva, the assembled monkeys or the two sons of King Daśaratha tell me when I return? If, after having reached Laṅkā, I inform Rāma of the bad news that I could not find Sītā, He will thereafter give up His life. After hearing the harsh, rough, piercing, cruel and mind-boggling news, He will be unable to continue living. Seeing Rāma in such a plight and determined to die, the highly devoted and wise Lakṣmaṇa will also be unable to survive. When He learns of the death of those two brothers, Bharata will also perish. Seeing that Bharata is dead, Śatrughna will be unable to survive. Then, when the mothers Kausalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī hear of their sons’ deaths, they will undoubtedly perish.

“Seeing Rāma in such a condition, Sugrīva, the ruler of the monkeys who is grateful and true to his word, will thereupon give up his life. Depressed, distressed, miserable, joyless and stricken with grief because of the death of her husband, Rūmā will give up her life. Agonized and pained by the death of Vālī, Queen Tārā will also simply die. Because of the death of his parents and that of Sugrīva, Prince Aṅgada will thereafter give up his life. Overwhelmed by the agony caused by the death of their master, the forest monkeys will beat their heads with their palms and fists. Having received consolation, gifts and honor from their illustrious and cherished lord, the monkeys will give up their lives. When they assemble together, the great monkeys will no longer play in the forests, on the mountain tops and in the caves. Stricken with grief over the demise of their lord, they, along with their wives, children and ministers, will throw themselves down from the peaks of mountains onto flat or rough terrain. Or the monkeys might drink poison, hang themselves, throw themselves into fire, fast until death, or thrust themselves upon their own weapons. I think there will be terrible wailing

when I return to Kiṣkindhā, signalling the destruction of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty and the forest-dwelling monkeys.

“As such, I shall under no circumstances leave here to return to the city of Kiṣkindhā, for I cannot approach Sugrīva without having found Sītā. If I do not return but stay here, the two righteous chariot-warriors and the monkeys will continue to maintain hope. If I cannot find Sītā, then I shall live as a hermit at the foot of trees, practicing self-restraint and eating whatever comes to my hand or mouth. Or, preparing a pyre on an ocean beach abounding in roots, fruits and water, I shall enter a blazing fire. Or else, after fasting until death in order to free my subtle self, crows and beasts of prey will eat my body. If I do not find Sītā, I shall drown myself in water, for this manner of death has been approved by great sages, at least I think so. Because of my failure to find Sītā, my garland of glory, which took birth when I became a minister of Sugrīva, which brought good fortune to Sugrīva and fame to me through the confidence bestowed upon me by Rāma, has now broken. Perhaps I should become an ascetic living under trees and practicing self-control. I shall not return home until I find Sītā. If I were to do so, Aṅgada and all the other monkeys would cease living. There are many faults in committing suicide, whereas one who lives can eventually achieve good fortune. I shall therefore keep myself alive. A living person can certainly meet with success.”

Imaging so many problems, Hanumān could not at that time reach the other side of his misery. Then, remembering his own prowess, the courageous monkey thought: “I shall better slay the highly powerful ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa. It does not matter whether Sītā has been abducted. I shall avenge that. Or, picking him up and carrying him across the ocean, I shall present him to Rāma, like a sacrificial animal for Lord Śiva.” Overwhelmed with anxiety because of not finding Sītā, the anxious monkey continued to reflect: “As long as I do not find Sītā, the glorious wife of Lord Rāma, I shall destroy the city of Laṅkā again and again. Even if I were to bring Lord Rāma here because of what Sampāti had said, not finding Sītā, Rāma would burn all the monkeys into ashes. I shall remain right here living on a restrained diet and controlling my senses. Let not all men and monkeys perish on my account.

“Here is a large grove of tall aśoka trees. I shall explore it, for I did not search it previously. After offering respects to the eight vasus, the eleven rudras, the twelve adityas, the two aśvins and the fourty-nine maruts, I shall enter this grove and increase the anguish of the rākṣasas. After defeating the rākṣasas and returning Sītā to Rāma, I shall be as victorious as a successful ascetic.”

Thinking like this for a while, Hanumān, whose mind was perturbed by anxiety, stood up and said: “I offer my respects to Lord Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka. I offer my respects to Śiva, Indra, Yama and Vāyu. I offer my respects to Candra, Agni and the maruts. Having offered respects to all those personalities, and also to Sugrīva, Hanumān, the son of the wind god, after looking all around, proceeded to the aśoka grove. First reaching the charming grove mentally, Hanumān began thinking about the outcome:

“Surely the aśoka grove must be protected by many rākṣasas. It must also be a holy place and well-cultivated in every way. The guards posted there must also protect the trees so that the all-pervading and powerful wind does not blow too strongly. I have already made myself very small for the service of Rāma and to avoid being seen by Rāvaṇa. May all the gods and great sages grant me success in this endeavor! May the self-born Lord Brahmā, the gods, the ascetics, Agni, Vāyu, and Indra, the wielder of a thunderbolt who is widely invoked, grant me success! Varuṇa, who carries a noose in his hand, the sun and moon, the noble aśvins, all the maruts, all created beings and their Lord, Viṣṇu, as well as any other gods who are seen or unseen on the path, will grant me success! I wonder when I will see that fair lady whose flawless face is as pleasing as an unobstructed full moon, whose eyes are like the petals of a lotus flower, whose nose is aquiline, whose smile is bright and whose teeth are white.”

HANUMĀN HIDES IN THE AŚOKA GROVE

After thinking for a while about going to the aśoka grove and searching for Sītā, Hanumān jumped from the defence wall of the palace into the enclosure around the aśoka grove. While standing on the wall of the aśoka grove, all of his limbs were thrilled. The great monkey saw different kinds of trees, such as sāla, aśoka, bhavya, campaka, uddālaka, nāgakesara and mango trees with fruits as red as the nose of a monkey. Around the grove were groups of mango trees with fruits as red as the nose of a monkey. The trees were intertwined with hundreds of vines and the ends of their branches were covered with flowers, for it was spring. Like an arrow shot from a bowstring, Hanumān jumped into the grove. Having entered the grove, the mighty Hanumān looked around. The grove was noisy with the sounds of birds. There were golden and silvery trees on all sides and there was a variety of birds and herds of deer. There were lovely thickets of bushes whose flowers looked just like the rising sun. The grove was surrounded by various kinds of trees with fruits and flowers. It was always frequented by love-maddened cuckoos and bumblebees. It resounded with the cries of peacocks in rut and was inhabited by many different species of birds.

While searching for the blameless princess Sītā, the monkey woke up the birds that were sleeping peacefully. Battered by the winds driven by the flapping wings of the birds in flight, the trees showered flowers of different kinds and colors. Covered with those flowers, Hanumān looked elegant, like a mountain of flowers in the middle of the aśoka grove. After running in all directions, the living creatures residing there saw Hanumān and mistook him for the personification of spring. Strewn with the many different flowers fallen from trees, the earth looked beautiful, like a nicely dressed lady. When shaken violently by the monkey, the trees had thereupon dropped their respective flowers. With their tops shorn of leaves and their flowers and fruits fallen, the trees looked like gamblers who were destitute after gambling away their clothes and ornaments. Shaken by the impulsive

monkey, those excellent fruit trees quickly shed their flowers, leaves and fruits. After being pummeled with strong wind, the trees, with only their baren branches remaining, were not worth approaching and had been abandoned by the flocks of birds. Battered by the tail, hands and feet of Hanumān, the āśoka grove looked like a young woman whose hair was disheveled, whose lips with bright teeth were colorless, whose cosmetic mark on the forehead had been rubbed off, and who was wounded all over by teeth and fingernails. In his rush, the monkey snapped bunches of rope-like vines, as the wind scatters clouds during the rainy season.

Wandering through that grove, Hanumān saw that the ground was strewn with fascinating gems, as well as nuggets of silver and gold. He also saw pools of different shapes that were full with prized drinking water. The pools had steps of valuable jewels. For sand they had pearls and coral, and their bottoms were covered with crystals. They were enhanced by exquisite golden trees growing on their banks. The pools contained clusters of blossoming lotus flowers and were further adorned with ruddy geese. They resonated with the sweet singing of cātaka birds and the honking of swans and cranes. The pools were fed from all sides by broad streams whose waters were like the nectar of immortality and which were lined with trees. The pools were obscured by hundreds of vines and covered with the flowers of santāna trees. Around them were clumps of different kinds of bushes. The pools could be seen through the spaces between the branches of karavīra trees, as if these were windows.

Then Hanumān saw a mount like a cloud. It had lovely peaks on all sides and was dotted with caves and covered with all kinds of trees. It was one of the most charming mounts on the earth. The monkey also saw a river falling from that mount, like a woman who had thrown herself into the lap of her lover. The waterfall was fringed with trees whose branches had bent down to the water, looking like a woman angry because of being prohibited to meet her beloved by her dear relatives.

Not far from that mount, Hanumān spotted a lotus pond crowded with different kinds of birds. He also saw an artificial long pond full of cool water. It had steps made of valuable gems and was lined with pearls for sand. It looked charming with herds of deer and groups of trees. Nearby were large mansions constructed by Viśvakarmā. The pond was landscaped with

planted trees and shrubs all around. Whatever trees were there bore flowers and fruits. Their branches formed umbrellas. All the trees had golden platforms built around their bases. Then Hanumān saw a single golden śimśapā tree. It was entangled by numerous vines, covered with many leaves and was surrounded by golden daisies. He also saw stretches of land, mountain springs, and other golden trees that were as bright as fire. Being completely surrounded by the effulgence of those trees, which was like the effulgence of Mount Meru, Hanumān thought that he was golden all over. Hanumān was amazed to see those golden trees whose branch ends were covered with flowers and tender shoots, for they produced a sound like the tinkling of hundreds of small gold bells fastened to a belt.

Climbing up the śimśapā tree which was completely covered with leaves, Hanumān thought: “From here I can watch for Sītā, who is longing to see Rāma, and who, being stricken with sorrow, must be wandering about aimlessly. This aśoka grove of the wicked Rāvaṇa is very delightful and is endowed with sandalwood, campaka and bakula trees. Here is a charming lotus pond frequented by flocks of birds. Queen Sītā will undoubtedly come here. Queen Sītā, the chaste darling of Lord Rāma, being accustomed to walking in forests, will surely come here. Or else, that fawn-eyed lady, being consumed by anxiety for Rāma, will come here today, being familiar with this place. Since She is accustomed to forest life and is stricken with anguish due to separation from Rāma, She will come this way. Previously, the chaste and beloved spouse of Lord Rāma surely used to love the creatures inhabiting this grove. Devoted as She is to devotional prayers at the three junctures of the day, She will definitely come to this river with clean water in order to perform worship at sunrise. Moreover, this aśoka grove is worthy of the lovely Sītā, the esteemed wife of Rāma, the ruler of the earth. If that lady whose face vies with the moon is still alive, She will per force come to this river with cool waters.”

Thinking in this way and expecting the princess, the great soul Hanumān looked all about the grove while remaining concealed by clusters of flowers and leaves.

HANUMĀN FINDS SĪTĀ

While hiding there in the tree, Hanumān thoroughly scoured the ground below in search of Sītā. Sitting there, Hanumān surveyed the aśoka grove, which was beautified by trees entangled with santānaka vines, endowed with celestial aromas and nectars, and decorated all around. It resembled the Nandana Garden of Lord Indra. It was teeming with birds and deer, crowded with mansions and palaces, and resounding with the singing of cuckoos. It was landscaped with long ponds filled with golden waterlilies and lotus flowers. It was supplied with numerous seats and carpets, and had many-storeyed buildings. The grove had trees which bloomed in all seasons and bore fruits. The splendor of its flowering aśoka trees was like the brilliance of the rising sun or blazing fire. The trees were constantly shedding leaves because of the coming and going of birds. The wonderful aśoka trees crowned with flowers seemed to be composed of flowers from top to bottom because of their falling flowers. The blossoming kaṇṭikāra trees bent under the weight of their flower clusters seemed to be touching the ground. Because of these and the blooming kiṁśuka trees, that place seemed to be ablaze with fire on all sides.

Many flowering punnāga, sapta-parṇa, campaka and uddālaka trees with big roots were beautifying that grove. The thousands of aśoka trees that grew there were as brilliant as gold, a flame of fire or black eye-liner. The aśoka grove was as beautiful as the Nandana Garden of Indra or the Citraratha Garden of Kuvera. In fact, it was superior to these. It was inconceivable, divine and endowed with charming splendor. It was like a second sky with its flowers as its mass of shining stars, or like a fifth ocean with its flowers as its innumerable gems. The grove produced flowers in all the seasons and its trees emitted a sweet fragrance. The garden was enjoyable because of the many sounds of birds and animals. It was perfumed with the numerous fragrances which were pleasing and tantalizing. Indeed, it was like a second Gandhamādana Mountain.

In the middle of the aśoka grove Hanumān saw not far away a lofty temple supported by thousands of columns and which was as white as Mount Kailāsa. It had stairways made of coral and platforms of gold. It shone brightly with its splendor and seemed to blind the eyes. It was free from any dust and looked as if it were scraping the sky. Then he saw a dispirited woman who looked frail from fasting. She was surrounded by rākṣasīs and was sighing again and again. She was as immaculate as the moon at the beginning of the bright fortnight. Her form, which was barely discernible, was casting its pleasant brilliance all around. Her soiled garment looked like a flame of fire enveloped in smoke. She wore a single piece of fine yellow silk cloth which was worn out. She was dirty and divested of ornaments, like a muddy pond devoid of lotuses. She looked pained, anguished, devastated and austere, like the star rohiṇī when afflicted by Mars. Her face was covered with tears. She looked wretched and exhausted from not eating. She was always thinking of Her misfortune and was therefore always sorrowful. Unable to see Her beloved and only seeing the crowd of rākṣasīs, She was like a deer separated from the herd and surrounded by a pack of dogs. With her single snake-like braid hanging down to Her waist, She looked like the earth decorated with a row of blue-green trees at the end of the rainy season. Observing the broad-eyed woman who deserved to enjoy, who had never previously known suffering and who was now burning with anguish, Hanumān concluded that She must be Sītā: “This lady looks just like the one which I had previously seen being carried away by a rākṣasa in the sky.”

Seeing Sītā, Hanumān’s mind became bewildered. Her face was just like a full moon. She had well-formed eyebrows. Her breasts were pleasingly rounded. The goddess dispelled the darkness all around with Her effulgence. Her neck had a bluish tint and Her lips were the color of bright red bimba fruits. The limbs of Her body were well-proportioned. Her eyes were like the petals of a lotus flower. She looked like Rati, the consort of Cupid. She was loved by the entire world, like the light of the full moon. She was sitting on the ground like an ascetic practicing austerities. Although fearful, She was hissing like a consort of the king of serpents. She was entangled in a large and extensive web of sorrow. Because of this, She looked like a flame of fire covered by a cloud of smoke. She looked like a scriptural text that could not be understood, a valuable treasure that had been thrown away, shattered

faith, frustrated hope, success blocked by obstacles, clouded intelligence, or fame marred by false scandal. She was tormented by the obstruction of Her reunion with Rāma and was tortured by the rākṣasas. With Her eyes which resembled those of a doe, She was looking around here and there helplessly. Her cheerless face was completely drenched with tears and her black eyelashes were curved. She was sighing again and again. Her body was coated with dirt. Although She deserved to be nicely decorated, She was unadorned. She resembled the light of the moon covered by a black cloud. She looked wane like knowledge not reinforced by continuous study. Hanumān had difficulty recognizing the unadorned Sītā, as an uneducated person would have difficulty recognizing the meaning of the same word in a different context.

Upon seeing that blameless princess, Hanumān concluded that She must be Sītā for the following reasons. He saw the same jewelry adorning Her body as that described by Rāma: “I see the same well-made earrings, as well as hand ornaments inlaid with various valuable gems. Although they are tarnished with age, I think that they are the same ones which Rāma described to me. I do not see Her wearing the particular ornaments which She had dropped while passing over Rṣyamūka Mountain. Obviously those that are missing from Her body now are the same ones which She had dropped then. That bright yellow shawl that looked like a sheet of gold which we monkeys found caught in a tree and the valuable tinkling ornaments which we found on the ground could only have been dropped by Her. Although Her garment is worn from long use, its color and brilliance are not inferior to that other cloth. This golden-complexioned lady is Rāma’s beloved consort. Although absent, the chaste woman never left Rāma’s mind. This is that lady for whom Rāma suffered in four ways: due to compassion, kindness, grief and love. He felt compassion for a woman who had vanished. He felt kindness for Her who was dependent on Him. He felt grief because of His wife’s abduction. And He felt love for one who was dear to Him. The beauty and excellence of Her limbs and body is just like that of Rāma’s, and vice versa. This lady’s mind is fixed on Him, and His is also fixed on Her. For this reason only are She and He able to continue living for more than a moment. Rāma has accomplished a difficult task: He is maintaining His life and does not perish from grief, even though separated from Her.”

Overjoyed to find Sītā, Hanumān's mind began thinking of Lord Rāma and he began praising his lord.

HANUMĀN GRIEVES FOR SĪTĀ

After praising Sītā, who was deserving of praise, as well as Rāma, who possessed pleasing qualities, Hanumān again began contemplating. Thinking about Sītā for a while, the glorious Hanumān began lamenting and his eyes filled with tears: “If even the honorable Sītā, who was properly instructed by Her elders and most dear to Her husband is stricken with sorrow, then it is indeed difficult to understand destiny. Aware of the prowess of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the wise lady does not become agitated, any more than the Ganges River does with the coming of the rainy season. Rāma is worthy of Sītā, for Their qualities, age and behavior are comparable, as are Their ancestry and physical characteristics. Therefore Sītā is also worthy of Rāma.”

Sītā’s complexion was as brilliant as newly refined gold and She looked like the goddess of fortune whom the whole world desires. Seeing Her, Hanumān thought of Rāma and said:

“On behalf of the lady, the mighty Vālī was killed, as was also Kabandha, who was equal in prowess to Rāvaṇa. The fiersome rākṣasa Virādhā was also killed in combat in the forest by Rāma, as Indra killed Śambara. Fourteen thousand rākṣasas of freightful actions were obliterated at Janasthāna by arrows that were just like flames of fire. Khara was slain on the battlefield, as was Trīśirā and Dūṣaṇa, by the energetic and self-realized Rāma. On Her account, Sugrīva attained sovereignty over the monkeys, which was difficult to achieve because it was guarded by Vālī. On account of this lady with broad eyes, I have crossed the magnificent ocean and searched this city. If Rāma were to turn upside down the earth with its oceans, or even the universe, on Her account, I would consider that justified. If lordship over the three worlds and Sītā were put on scales, lordship over the three worlds would not equal a fraction of Sītā. This is Sītā, the daughter of the righteous and great soul King Janaka. She has taken a strick vow of fidelity to Her husband. While the earth was being plowed, it split open and She emerged covered with bright dust which was scattered all about like the

pollen of lotus flowers. She is the famous and seniormost daughter-in-law of the valiant and noble King Janaka(Daśaratha?), who never retreated from a battle. She is the beloved consort of Rāma. She is conversant with righteousness and thankful, and now in the hands of rākṣasīs. Overwhelmed as She was by love for Her husband, She gave up all enjoyment and, not worrying about hardship, entered into the desolate wilderness.

“That same Sītā who was satisfied eating roots and fruits, who was dedicated to the service of Her husband, who enjoyed the same ecstatic pleasure in the forest as in Her palace, whose limbs were the color of gold, who always spoke with a sweet smile, and who did not deserve to suffer, is suffering here. As a thirsty person longs to drink water, Rāma wishes to see this qualified woman who is now being tormented by Rāvaṇa. Lord Rāma will certainly derive great pleasure upon regaining Her, as does a king upon regaining his kingdom which was lost. Deprived of all desirable comforts and separated from Her kinsfolk, She maintains Her body because of Her desire to meet Him again. She does not even notice those rākṣasīs, or those trees full of fruits. With Her heart fixed on one goal, She obviously sees only Rāma. In fact, the husband is the best ornament for a wife. Therefore, although She deserves to be nicely decorated, She does not look well because of Her separation from Her husband. Rāma is performing a difficult task by maintaining His life in separation from Her without fainting due to grief. My mind is disturbed upon seeing this lady with eyes like lotus petals and long black hair suffering, though She deserves to be enjoying. She who is as tolerant as the earth and who was protected by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, is now being guarded at the foot of a tree by rākṣasīs with hideous eyes. Her beauty has vanished, like a lotus flower damaged by frost. Being afflicted by a series of hardships, She is in a pitiable condition, like a ruddy goose bereft of her mate. The boughs of aśoka trees bent down by the weight of flowers causes her sorrow, which, since the end of the cold season, has grown as uncomfortable as the blazing sun.”

Thinking in this way about his mission, the swift monkey concluded that he had found Sītā and remained seated in that tree.

HANUMĀN CONTINUES WAITING IN THE TREE

Then the moon rose in the sky like a swan swimming in water. It looked like a cluster of waterlilies and appeared quite clear. Aiding Hanumān with its light as if it were his servant, the cooling moon shone its shining rays. He then saw Sītā, whose face shone like a full moon. She seemed to be crushed by the weight of sorrow, like a boat sinking in water because of its heavy load. While trying to see Sītā, Hanumān saw horrible-looking rākṣasīs sitting not far from Sītā. One of them was one-eyed, another—single-eared, while another used her ears to cover her body. Another had no ears, another had dart-like ears. One had her nose on her forehead. Another had an over-sized head. Another had a long, thin neck. Another had lost all her hair. Another was completely hairless, while another was entirely covered with hair like a blanket. Another had long ears and protruding eyebrows. Another had a protruding belly and breasts. Another had protruding lips. Another had lips hanging down over her chin. Another had a long face. Another was knob-kneed. Another was stunted. Another was tall, another—hunchbacked. Another had a crooked body. Another was a dwarf. Another looked monstrous. Another had her face all twisted. Another had blood-shot eyes. And another had her face deformed.

Hanumān saw rākṣasīs that were deformed, tawny, swarthy, cantankerous and quarrelsome. They were carrying large lances, mallets and clubs of iron. Some of the rākṣasīs had heads like boars, deer, tigers, buffaloes, goats or foxes. Some of them had feet like an elephant, camel or horse. Some of them were neckless. Some had only one hand, and others, only one foot. Some had ears like horses, some like cows, some like elephants and some like lions. Some had unnaturally long noses, and other had crooked noses, while others had no noses at all. Some had noses like the trunk of an elephant, while others had their noses located on their foreheads. Some had huge feet. Some had hairy feet. Some had unusually large heads and necks, and others, exceptionally large breasts and bellies.

Some had abnormally large mouths and eyes, some had long tongues in their mouths. Some of the fearsome-looking rākṣasīs had the heads of goats, elephants, cows, boars, horses, camels or donkeys. Some were carrying picks and clubs in their hands. The frightful rākṣasīs who were fond of quarrelling had smoke-colored hair and deformed faces. They were constantly drinking liquor and were fond of alcohol and meat. Their very sight would make one's hair stand on end. They were sitting near and all around the beautiful śimśapā tree. At the foot of the tree he could see that blameless and godlike princess.

Hanumān could see that Sītā was bereft of Her effulgence, like a star whose pious credits had expired and had therefore fallen to earth. She was grief-stricken. Her hair was full of dirt. Though rich in fame because of Her good character, She was deprived of the sight of Her husband. Though deprived of Her fine jewelry, She was adorned with the affection of Her husband. Because of being detained by Rāvaṇa and isolated from Her relatives, She resembled an elephant separated from its herd and detained by a lion. She looked like the crescent moon obscured by autumn clouds at the end of the rainy season. Due to separation from Her husband, Her beauty had faded, like an unused instrument, though She did not deserve such a fate. She was devoted to the welfare of Her husband and did not deserve to be under the sway of the rākṣasas. Though living in the midst of the aśoka grove, She was drowning in an ocean of sorrow and was surrounded by rākṣasīs, like the star rohiṇī afflicted by an inauspicious planet. She looked like a vine divested of its flowers.

Endowed with Her body, even though it was dirty, She looked lovely, like a lotus stalk stained with mud. Hanumān beheld Sītā dressed in dirty and tattered clothes. Her dark eyes were like those of a fawn. Although wretched in appearance, She was not miserable, for She was protected by Her husband's glory and Her own good character. Seeing Her, Hanumān felt extreme delight. She was looking all around like a frightened fawn. She seemed to be burning the leafy trees with Her sighs. It was as if She was the personification of grief and looked like a tidal wave of sorrow. Although She was emaciated, Her well-shaped limbs looked charming, even without ornaments. Hanumān eyes filled with tears of joy upon seeing that woman with fascinating eyes, and he thereupon offered respects to Lord Rāma.

After offering respects to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the chivalrous Hanumān, being overjoyed from finding Sītā, again hid himself.

HANUMĀN SEES RĀVAṆA APPROACH SĪTĀ

While Hanumān was watching the grove with its blossoming trees to get a better view of Sītā, the night came close to ending. Just before the end of night, he heard the chanting of the Vedas by rākṣasa brāhmaṇas who were well-versed in the six divisions of the Vedas (grammar, prosody, etymology, phonetics, astronomy and ritualism) and were conducting grand sacrifices. Then Rāvaṇa, the powerful lord of the rākṣasas, was awakened with auspicious instrumental music and by words of praise that captivated the ears and mind. When the magnificent Rāvaṇa woke up, his clothes and flower garland being dissheveled, he thought of Sītā. Excessively attracted to Her out of carnal desire, the intoxicated rākṣasa could not quell the lust in his mind. He dressed himself with all kinds of ornaments and shone with unequalled splendor. He then entered the aśoka grove, which was adorned with all kinds of trees bearing flowers and fruits. It was surrounded with lotus ponds and was beautified by innumerable flowers. It was always picturesque due to the most amazing birds maddened with love. It had numerous fake deer that were fascinating to see. Along the pathways could be seen archways encrusted with gold and jewels. It was filled with herds of all kinds of deer, and the ground was strewn with fruits.

Only one hundred women followed Rāvaṇa, the grandson of Pulastya, as he walked, as goddesses and gandharvīs follow Lord Indra. Some of them carried gold lamps in their hands, some carried yak-tail whisks, and others carried palm-leaf fans. Some carried water in gold urns, while others followed behind carrying cylindrical cushions. One woman skillfully carried in her right hand a bejeweled pitcher filled with liquor. Coming from behind, another carried a white parasol as bright as the moon. It resembled a swan and had a gold handle. With their eyes overwhelmed from sleeping and intoxication, the foremost of Rāvaṇa's consorts followed their valiant lord, as bolts of lightning follow a cloud.

Their necklaces and bracelets were slightly displaced. Their sandalwood paste was smeared off. Their hair was disheveled and their faces were moist with sweat. The lovely women were staggering under the remaining influence of liquor and sleep. The flowers on their bodies were wilted from perspiration and the hair and flower garlands on their heads shook. Out of extreme love, the ladies with intoxicated eyes followed the lord of demons as he went along. Their mighty lord, who was overwhelmed with lust, was mentally attached to Sītā. Thus the powerful demon moved along slowly.

Thereafter Hanumān heard the tinkling of the bells around the waists and on the ankles of those exceptional ladies. Hanumān also saw Rāvaṇa, the accomplisher of unequalled deeds and possessor of inconceivable strength and prowess, arrive near the gate. He was being illuminated on all sides with many lamps filled with fragrant oil. He was passionate, proud and intoxicated. His eyes were coppery-red and slanted. He looked just like Cupid deprived of his bow. He was tugging on his shawl, which was as white as churned milk and was decorated with flowers and costly pearls, trying to free it from his arm band, to which it was stuck.

Hidden behind a leafy branch, Hanumān, whose body was covered with leaves and flowers, tried to understand the identity of Rāvaṇa, who had now drawn near. Looking around, Hanumān also saw Rāvaṇa's consorts, who were endowed with beauty and youth. Surrounded by those beautiful ladies, the glorious king entered that garden made for the pleasure of women. Hanumān beheld the extremely strong Rāvaṇa, the son of Viśravā, who was drunk. He was nicely adorned and had ears shaped like darts. He was surrounded by the best of women, as the moon is by stars. The great monkey Hanumān observed the glorious Rāvaṇa. Hanumān concluded: "This must be the strong-armed Rāvaṇa. This is the same person who was sleeping inside the great palace." Hanumān climbed down from the tree branch he was on. Although Hanumān possessed terrible splendor, he was overshadowed by Rāvaṇa's effulgence. Hanumān stayed hidden behind a branch thick with leaves. Desirous of seeing Sītā, whose limbs were charming, whose breasts were well-formed, whose locks of hair were black and whose eyes were dark at the edges, Rāvaṇa drew near.

RĀVAṆA APPROACHES ŚĪTĀ TO WOE HER

As soon as the irreproachable princess Śītā saw Rāvaṇa, Her body, which was adorned with the best ornaments of beauty and youth, began shaking like a banana tree in the wind. Drawing up her legs to conceal Her stomach and using Her arms to cover Her breasts, the large-eyed lady with a lovely complexion sat down and started crying. Rāvaṇa stared at Śītā who was guarded by rākṣasīs. She was miserable and grief-stricken, like a boat adrift in the ocean. She was sitting on the bare ground, like the bough of a tree that was cut off and fallen on the ground. Her limbs were smeared with dirt as if a decoration, and She was unadorned, though She deserved to be so. Like a lotus stem stained with mud, She looked beautiful and did not look beautiful. She was always approaching Rāma, the lion among kings, with the chariot of Her mind drawn by the horses of thoughts. She was emaciated and crying from constantly thinking of Rāma. Although dedicated to Rāma, She saw no end to Her suffering. She was writhing like the wife of the king of snakes under the spell of an enchantation and was suffering like the star rohiṇī afflicted by a comet. Although born in a noble family and married into a family of right conduct, She looked as if She were born in a wretched family.

Rāvaṇa lusted after Śītā for his own destruction. Śītā looked like fame that had faded, faith that had been treated with contempt, wisdom that had become feeble, hope that was frustrated, an opportunity that had been lost, an order that had been disobeyed, a fire burning somewhere at an ominous time, an act of worship that was disrupted, the orb of the moon eclipsed when it is full, a withered lotus flower, an army whose soldiers have been killed, sunlight obstructed by darkness, a waning stream, a desecrated altar, or an extinguished flame. She looked like a pond whose lotus plants had been uprooted, whose birds had been chased away, and whose water had been muddled by the trunk of an elephant. She was stricken with grief caused by separation from Her husband, and had become thin, like a river whose waters had been diverted. Because of not bathing properly, She

resembled a night during the waning moon. She was young, with delicate limbs, and deserved to live in a palace made of gems. She looked like a recently uprooted lotus plant that was being baked by the sun. She looked like a cow elephant chained to a pillar and breathing heavily due to sorrow occasioned by being separated from her mate. She looked charming with Her single long braid, which resembled the earth covered with a row of blue-green trees after the rainy season. She was emaciated, worn out and miserable from fasting, grief, preoccupation and fear. She was eating meagerly and practicing difficult austerities. She always seemed to be entreating God with folded hands for the defeat of Rāvaṇa by Rāma. Although She was blameless, She was looking around and crying. Her large eyes were white and reddish, and She had lovely eyelashes. She was completely dedicated to Lord Rāma.

RĀVAṆA TRIES TO SEDUCE ŚĪTĀ

Rāvaṇa revealed his mind to Śītā, who was miserable, joyless and surrounded by rākṣasīs, by the following significant and sweet words: “Upon seeing me, You are covering Your stomach and breasts, as if You want to hide Yourself due to fear. I long for You, O broad-eyed lady! Think of me highly, my dear. All your limbs are endowed with excellence and You fascinate the minds of everyone. There are no men or rākṣasas who are capable of changing their forms at will here. Let Your fear of me be gone for good, O Śītā! It has undoubtedly always been a normal custom for rākṣasas to have intercourse with others’ wives or to abduct them. Being this as it may, I shall not touch You as long as You do not desire me. Rather I would allow passion to torment my body as it wishes. You need not be afraid now, my lady. Trust me, my dear. Make love to me in truth. Do not allow Yourself to be swayed by sorrow. To wear a single braid of hair, to lie on the ground, to be preoccupied, to wear dirty clothes, and to observe a fast when unwarranted does not befit You. After accepting me, enjoy colorful flower garlands, paste of sandalwood and aloe, different types of garments, shimmering jewelry, costly drinks, beds and couches, singing, dancing and music.

“You are a jewel among women. Do not remain like this. Decorate Yourself with jewelry. Indeed, after accepting me, how can You remain unadorned, O lovely lady? This charming youth of Yours, now fully manifested, is already passing away. What passes away never returns, like the current of a stream. I think that after making You, the creator of this universe who designed Your form has retired, for there is no other woman equal to You in beauty. Who would not lose control of himself, even if he were Brahmā, upon coming close to You who are endowed with such beauty and youth? O lady with broad hips and a face resembling the cooling moon, my eyes become rivetted to whatever part of Your body they behold. Become my wife, O princess of Mithilā! Stop this nonsense! Become the chief of my many unmatched queens. I offer you all the jewels which I have brought as booty from different worlds, as well as my kingdom, O timid

woman. After subjugating the earth with its garland of numerous cities, I will bestow it upon Your father, King Janaka, for his own use, You frolicksome thing! I do not find anyone else in this world who is equal to me in strength. Just see my extreme virility which has no rival in combat. Unable to stand in ranks arrayed against me, the demigods and demons were defeated in battle more than once, their standards being broken. Desire me. Let Yourself be oppulently dressed today. Yes, let the most splendid ornaments be placed on Your body. Let me see your body bedecked with ornaments. Allow Yourself to be properly attired as a courtesy to me. Enjoy pleasures as You like. Drink and be happy! Give in charity whatever land or wealth you desire. Enjoy with me in complete confidence and order me boldly. When You are enjoying in that way out of kindness to me, may Your relatives also enjoy. Just see my opulence and wealth, O fortunate and illustrious one! What is the use of Rāma, who is dressed in rags? Rāma has no chance of victory. He has lost his wealth and is living in the wilderness. He is practicing vows and sleeps on the ground. It is doubtful whether He is alive or not. Rāma will never be able to see You, no more than herons can see the moonlight when it is blocked by clouds.

“Neither will He be able to retrieve You from me, as Hiranyaśipu was unable to recover his glory when it had passed into the hands of Indra. Your smile is sweet, your teeth—lovely, your eyes—charming, your nature—playful. You captivate my mind, as Garuḍa does a snake. Seeing You emaciated, unadorned and dressed in worn-out clothes, I feel no attraction for my own wives. Rule over all the excellent women dwelling in my harem, O Sītā! My consorts, who are the best in all the three worlds, will wait upon You, as the heavenly damsels serve Lakṣmī. Enjoy all the jewels and wealth of Kuvera as You like, as well as all these worlds controlled by me. Rāma is not equal to me in asceticism, strength, prowess, wealth, splendor or fame. Drink! Play! Indulge Yourself! Enjoy pleasures! I shall give you my accumulated wealth and even the earth! Enjoy me as You like, and then, when Your relatives have gathered around You, let them also enjoy. While wearing gold necklaces, sport with me in forests on the shore of the ocean, whose trees are covered with clusters of flowers swarming with black bumblebees.”

SĪTĀ SPEAKS TO A BLADE OF GRASS

Hearing what the horrible rākṣasa said, Sītā, feeling harrowed, slowly answered with a pitiable voice. Weeping due to grief and thinking of Her husband constantly because of Her complete dedication to Him, Sītā placed a blade of grass between Herself and Rāvaṇa and said: “Withdraw your mind from Me and just be satisfied with your own wives. As a sinful person is unworthy of liberation, you are unfit to woo Me. I could never do anything improper for a devoted wife, for I am born in a noble family and am connected by marriage to a pious family.”

After speaking in this way to Rāvaṇa, Sītā turned Her back on him and again addressed him: “I am the devoted wife of another, therefore I cannot be your wife. Look at the conduct of the virtuous and follow their example. You should protect others’ wives as much as you do your own, O night-stalker! Making yourself an example of righteousness, enjoy only your own wives. Others’ wives lead a fickle man who is not content with his own wives to humiliation. Either there are no virtuous people here, or you are ignoring them because your perverse mind has rejected their pious conduct. Or else your mind addicted to falsehood is ignoring the counsel of the wise for the destruction of the rākṣasa race. Opulent kingdoms and cities are ruined when their rulers do not accept the instructions of the pious and are attached to unrighteousness. In this way, this city of Laṅkā with its accumulated wealth, having achieved you as its ruler, will soon be destroyed because of your offense.”

“O Rāvaṇa, everyone rejoices over the death of a short-sighted sinner who is killed by his own deeds. Similarly, the people whom you tormented will declare you a man of sinful deeds. They will joyfully exclaim: ‘By our good fortune this monster has met with destruction.’ I cannot be tempted with power or wealth; I cannot be separated from Rāma, as sunlight cannot be separated from the sun. After resting My head on the arm of Rāma, the Lord of the universe, how could I do so on the arm of anyone

else? I am the legal wife of that king only, as wisdom belongs to the fully self-realized soul. O good Rāvaṇa, please reunite Me, distressed as I am, with Rāma, as one would unite a forlorn elephant with her mate in the forest. It would be good for you to make friends with Rāma, the best of persons, if you wish to save your city and avoid terrible bondage. He is famous as the knower of all virtues and is very kind to those who take shelter of Him. Make friends with Him, if you wish to survive. Placate Him, for He is affectionate to those who seek His shelter. You should control yourself and return Me to Him. In fact, your well-being is dependent on your returning Me to Rāma. Acting otherwise, you will meet with great adversity. A person like you might escape a hurled thunderbolt or even death itself for a long time, but you will not escape Rāma when He is infuriated. You will hear the twang of Rāma's bowstring, which is as tumultuous as the sound of Lord Indra's thunderbolt. Soon straight arrows marked with the names of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa will rain down upon this city, like snakes with flaming mouths. Falling from the sky, those arrows fitted with vulture feathers will spare no part of this city, killing all the rākṣasas. There is no doubt about that. The great eagle-like Rāma will forcefully exterminate the serpent-like leaders of the rākṣasas, as Garuḍa kills snakes.

My husband will soon retrieve Me from you, as Viṣṇu retrieved the goddess of fortune Lakṣmī from the demons with three steps. Because your stronghold at Janasthāna and your rākṣasa army there were destroyed and you were unable to protect them, you have perpetrated this dispicable deed. While the two valiant princes were absent from the cottage in search of the deer, you entered and abducted Me, O vile wretch! You cannot even bear the smell of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, as a dog cannot stand in the presence of two tigers. Your encounter with Them in combat is precarious, like Vṛtrāsura's one arm fighting in combat against the two arms of Indra. Very soon my husband Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, will take away your life with His arrows, as the sun dries up a small amount of water. Even if you go to Kuvera's abode on Mount Kailāsa, or to the assembly chamber of King Varuṇa, Rāma will slay you like a tree struck down by lightning, for you are already slain by your own destiny."

RĀVAṆA GIVES SĪTĀ TWO MONTHS TO DECIDE

Hearing Sītā's harsh rebuke, the lord of the rākṣasas spoke the following unpleasant words to the pleasant-looking Sītā: "The more kind one is to women, the more dear he becomes to them. But the more sweet words I speak to you, the more contemptuous you become. The love which has arisen in me for you is restraining my anger, as a good charioteer restrains horses when they run down a wrong road. Indeed, treacherous love produces affection for that person to whom it attaches itself. For that reason I do not have you killed, O lovely woman, even though you deserve death and mistreatment, engaged as You are in false austerity! Because of the many harsh words which you spoke to me, O princess of Mithilā, You deserve a horrible punishment!"

After saying all this to Sītā, Rāvaṇa, being thoroughly enraged, spoke the following words to Sītā: "According to the time limit of twelve months which I set, I must wait another two months. Then You will get into my bed, O woman with a lovely countenance. If after two months You do not agree to accept me as Your husband, my cooks will chop You into little pieces for my breakfast!"

Seeing Sītā being threatened by Rāvaṇa, the daughters of gandharvas and demigods became distraught. Some of them reassured Sītā with their lips, and others with their eyes and faces. Encouraged by them, Sītā spoke to Rāvaṇa the following words, which were beneficial and full of pride for Her own fidelity and for the valor of Her husband: "Surely there is no one in this city who cares about your welfare, since no one is stopping you from this reprehensible action. Who other than you in these three worlds would mentally seek Me, the wife of Lord Rāma, like trying to approach Śacī, the consort of Lord Indra. O vile rākṣasa, you will not escape punishment no matter where you go for having proposed such a sinful thing to the wife of Rāma, whose prowess is immeasurable. Rāma can be

compared with an elephant, and you, with a rabbit. Your encounter with Him in the forest would be like that between a rabbit and a mad elephant. Obviously you are not embarrassed to rant against Rāma as long as you do not come within the range of His eyes. I wonder why your cruel, monstrous, dark-yellow eyes do not fall out onto the ground when you stare at me, O ignoble one. How is it that your tongue did not fall out when talking to Me, the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha and wife of the pious soul Rāma? The only reason I do not reduce you to ashes with my power is that I have not been instructed by Rāma to do so and because I wish to preserve the power I have accrued through the practice of austerity. Because I am the wife of the wise Rāma, you cannot actually abduct Me. This is just an arrangement by destiny for your destruction. Of this there is no doubt. Why did you, a powerful warrior, the half-brother of Kuvera, having an army of soldiers, abduct Rāma's wife after luring Rāma away?"

Upon hearing Sītā's remarks, Rāvaṇa rolled his cruel eyes and looked at Sītā. Rāvaṇa resembled a dark-blue cloud. He had big arms and neck. He walked like a lion. His tongue was glowing and his eyes were frightful. He was very tall and his crown was trembling. He was wearing flower garlands and his body was smeared with sandalwood paste. His garland of flowers was red, as were his clothes. He wore arm bands of smelted gold. On his waist he wore a belt adorned with dark-blue sapphires. He resembled Mount Mandara encircled by the celestial serpent Vasuki when it was being used to churn the ocean of milk. He was adorned with a pair of earrings. He looked like a mountain with a pair of aśoka trees covered with red leaves and flowers. Although adorned like a desire tree or like the personification of spring, he was frightful like a burial monument at a crematorium. His eyes red due to anger and hissing like a snake, he looked at Sītā and said: "O woman devoted to a man devoid of wealth and troubled by misfortune! I shall destroy You today, as the sun destroys darkness at dawn!"

After replying to Sītā in this way, Rāvaṇa, who caused his enemies to wail, commanded the dreadful-looking rākṣasīs. One of them had one eye, and one, one ear. Another had ears big enough to cover her body. One had ears like a cow, another, ears like an elephant. One had very long ears, while another had no ears. Some of them had the feet of elephants, or horses, or cows, or had feet with tufts of hair. Some had one eye, or one foot, or huge

feet, or no feet. Some had over-sized heads and necks, over-sized breasts and stomach, over-sized mouths and eyes, or had long tongues and finger nails. Some had no nose, or the face of a lion, cow or boar. Rāvaṇa said: “Immediately do what is necessary so that Sītā soon submits to me. Subdue Her by acting in accord with or contrary to Her will, and after persuasion and gifts have failed, by causing Her disaffection, and then by the use of punishment.”

Speaking in this way, Rāvaṇa, whose mind was overwhelmed with passion and anger, roared at Sītā. Quickly approaching Rāvaṇa and embracing him, Dhānyamālīnī said to him: “Enjoy with me, O king! Of what use is Sītā to you? She is but a pale, miserable human woman, O lord of rākṣasas. Surely the gods have not allotted to her the fine pleasures won by the strength of your arms. A man who loves a woman who does not love him in return suffers, whereas the love of one who desires him is very enjoyable.” After hearing these words and being turned away, the mighty demon departed with his consort while laughing. As he left that place, he caused the earth to shake; he shone like the blazing sun as he entered his palace. Surrounding Rāvaṇa, the daughters of the gods, gandharvas, and nāgas accompanied him as he entered that excellent building. After thoroughly frightening Sītā, who stood trembling, and then leaving Her, Rāvaṇa, who was distracted by lusty desires, entered his own abode.

THE RĀKṢASĪS THREATEN SĪTĀ

After threatening Sītā and instructing all the rākṣasīs, Rāvaṇa left that place. Then the frightful rākṣasīs ran up together to Sītā. Approaching Sītā, the infuriated rākṣasīs spoke to Her the following harsh words: “Sītā, do you not desire to be a wife of the great Rāvaṇa, the best of the descendants of the sage Pulastya?” Then one rākṣasī named Ekajaṭā, whose eyes were red with anger, began to speak to Sītā, whose waist could be spanned by a hand: “Of the six mind-born sons of Brahmā who were prajāpatis, or progenitors of creatures in this universe, the fourth was the well-known Pulastya. He produced from his mind a glorious son named Viśravā, who was equal to a prajāpati in splendor. His son is Rāvaṇa, who makes his enemies wail in terror. You deserve to be the wife of that lord of rākṣasas, O broad-eyed one! Why do you not accept my proposal, O lady of charming limbs?”

Then a rākṣasī named Harijaṭā, due to anger, squinted her eyes that resembled those of a cat, and said: “You deserve to be the wife of that ruler of rākṣasas who defeated all the thirty-three principal gods, as well as Indra, ruler of the demigods. Why do you not desire to be the wife of Rāvaṇa, who is valorous, heroic, chivalrous, and who never retreats from a battle? Rejecting his beloved and highly fortunate wife Mandodarī, whom he esteemes the most among all his consorts, he would only approach you. Abandoning his harem adorned with countless gems and populated with thousands of women, Rāvaṇa would only come to you.”

Another rākṣasī named Vikatā spoke the following words to Sītā: “He who has defeated the nāgas, gandharvas, and asuras more than once on the battlefield by his terrible prowess has come to your side. Why do you not want to be the wife of Rāvaṇa, who possesses all opulences, O vile woman?”

Then another rākṣasī named Durmukhī spoke as follows: “Why do you not yield to Rāvaṇa, O woman with smiling eyes? The sun does not burn, nor does the wind blow in fear of him. Why do you not decide to become the wife of Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, the king of kings in fear of whom the trees shower down flowers and the mountains and clouds pour forth water when he desires? Accept the good and factual advice which has been given to you, O lady of sweet smiles, otherwise you will not live much longer.”

SĪTĀ PROCLAIMS HER FIDELITY TO RĀMA

Thereafter, all the hideous rākṣasīs spoke the following unkind words to Sītā, who did not deserve to be spoken to harshly: “Why do You not agree to live in Rāvaṇa’s harem which fascinates the minds of everyone and which is furnished with costly couches? Being a human, You value being the wife of a human. Withdraw Your mind from Rāma or You will not live much longer. Unite Yourself with Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas and enjoyer of the wealth of all the three worlds, and enjoy with him as You please. Just because You are a human being, You desire that human Rāma, who lost His kingdom, has not accomplished His goals and who is bewildered, O blameless lady!”

Hearing what the rākṣasīs said, the lotus-eyed Sītā replied with tears in Her eyes: “This sinful advice repugnant to the world which you have collectively offered Me cannot stay in My mind. A human woman should never become the wife of a rākṣasa. You may all devour Me, if you wish. I will never follow your advice. Even if He is destitute and deprived of His kingdom, My husband is My lord. I am always devoted to Him, as is Suvarcalā to the sun god. I am devoted to Rāma, the best of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, as fortunate Śacī is to Indra, as Arundhatī is to Vasiṣṭha, as Rohiṇī is to the moon god, as Lopāmudrā is to the sage Agastya, as Sukanyā is to the sage Cyavana, as Sāvitrī is to Satyavān, as Devāhutī is to Kapila, as Madayantī is to King Sudāsa, as Keśinī is to King Sagara, and as Damayantī is to King Nala.”

Upon hearing what Sītā said, the rākṣasīs became furious and began intimidating Her with harsh words, as instructed by Rāvaṇa. Remaining hidden in the śimśapā tree without saying a word, Hanumān listened as the rākṣasīs threatened Sītā. Harrying the trembling Sītā from all sides, the infuriated rākṣasīs continuously licked their glowing and protruding lips. Suddenly raising the axes which they held, they angrily said: “She does not

deserve to have Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, as Her husband!” As Sītā was being threatened by those monstrous creatures, She wiped away Her tears and retreated to the aśoka tree. By the time She reached the foot of the śimśapā tree, She was overwhelmed with grief and surrounded by rākṣasīs. Standing around Sītā, who was emaciated, downcast and dressed in soiled garments, the grim rākṣasīs menaced Her.

Then a horrible-looking rākṣasī named Vinatā, who had an angry appearance and a sunken belly, said: “O Sītā, the amount of affection You have shown for Your husband is enough. Anything done in excess leads to adversity in all circumstances. I am very pleased with You, O princess of Mithilā. I wish You good fortune. You have followed the rules for human beings. Now please follow my advice which is good for You. Accept Rāvaṇa as Your husband, for he is the lord of all the rākṣasas, is most valiant and as handsome as Indra. Give up Rāma and accept Rāvaṇa, who is expert, munificent and sweet when speaking with everyone. O princess, adorning Yourself with celestial cosmetics and ornaments, become this very day the sovereign mistress of all these worlds, like Svāhā, the consort of Agni, or Śacī, the consort of Indra. Of what use is that miserable Rāma whose life is already expired? If, however, You do not accept my advice, we shall all devour You within the next hour!”

Then another rākṣasī named Vikaṭā with long, hanging breasts raised her clenched fist and angrily spoke: “We have tolerated Your many repulsive statements out of compassion and tenderness, O foolish woman! It is therefore a pity that You do not abide by our beneficial and timely advice. You have been brought here to the other side of the ocean, which is difficult for others to reach. Moreover, You are now inside the private palace of Rāvaṇa. You are trapped inside this palace and are being carefully guarded by us. Not even Indra can rescue You. Accept the advice which I am giving You. Stop crying and give up Your useless grief. Give up Your constant misery and enjoy ecstatic love. Frolic with Rāvaṇa as You please, O Sītā, for we all know how fleeting is a woman’s youthfulness. Enjoy Yourself while You are still young. Wander about the charming gardens and mountain forests with Rāvaṇa, O lady with reddish eyes. Thousands of women will remain at Your command, O beautiful one. Accept Rāvaṇa, the lord of all rākṣasas, as Your

husband. However, if You do not follow my advice, I shall tear out Your heart and devour it!”

A cruel-looking rākṣasī named Caṇḍodarī who was brandishing a big trident then spoke as follows: “Upon seeing this doe-eyed woman abducted by Rāvaṇa, this great desire sprang up in my heart to devour Her liver, spleen, large breasts, heart, limbs and head. That is what I think!”

Then a rākṣasī named Praghasā spoke as follows: “Let us squeeze the neck of this heartless creature! What are we waiting for? Then let the king be informed that this human woman expired. After that he will undoubtedly tell us to eat Her.”

Then a rākṣasī named Ajāmukhī spoke as follows: “After hacking Her to death with our axes, let us cut Her into equal-sized pieces. Then we can divide the pieces up among ourselves. I do not much care for bickering. Let someone bring drinks and flower garlands of different colors too!”

Then the rākṣasī named Śūrpanakhā said: “I really like what Ajāmukhī said. Someone quickly go bring wine. It dispells all grief. After eating human flesh, we shall dance before the statue of the goddess Bhadrākālī at her temple in the western part of Laṅkā known as Nikumbhilā.”

While being threatened in this way by the frightful rākṣasīs, Sītā, who resembled the daughter of a god, lost Her patience and began crying.

SĪTĀ CRIES PITEOUSLY

In the midst of those rākṣasīs who were threatening Her with hostile language, Sītā began weeping. Terribly frightened by the threats of the rākṣasīs, Sītā spoke with a voice choked up with tears: “It is not proper for a human woman to marry a rākṣasa. You can all eat Me if you wish. I shall not follow your instructions.” Surrounded by rākṣasīs and threatened by Rāvaṇa, the grief-stricken Sītā, who resembled the daughter of a god, could find no relief. Shaking terribly, Sītā seemed to withdrawn Her limbs into Herself, like a doe separated from the herd and beleaguered by wolves in the forest. Catching hold of a large, flowering branch of the śimśapā tree, Sītā began thinking of Her husband due to grief. Bathing Her large breasts with the tears flowing from Her eyes and thinking about Her situation, She could find no end to Her sorrow. Frightened as She was by the rākṣasīs, She was pale-faced and shook like a banana tree being pummeled by a strong wind. As She was shaking, Her long, thick braid swayed back and forth, resembling a slithering snake.

Breathing deeply, Her mind being overwhelmed by anger, She began shedding tears and cried out: “O Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa! O My mother-in-law Kausalyā! O Sumitrā! There is a popular saying uttered by the learned that a man or woman cannot die before their allotted time. Although I am being tormented by these fierce rākṣasīs and am separated from Rāma, I am still alive. With little pious merit and miserable as I am, I shall perish helplessly, like a fully loaded boat in the midst of the sea being buffeted by strong winds. Unable to see My husband and fallen into the clutches of rākṣasīs, I am being worn down by sorrow, like a river bank being eat away by the current. Those who are fortunate are able to see My lord whose eyes are like the petals of a lotus flower, who walks like a lion, who is grateful and who speaks pleasingly. Being separated from Rāma, the knower of the self, it is very difficult for Me to stay alive, like someone who has swallowed strong poison. What great sin did I commit in My previous life for which I have

been given such extremely terrible suffering? Stricken with this great suffering, I want to give up My life, for Rāma could never rescue Me from these rākṣasīs guarding Me. Shame on the human race! Shame on dependence upon others! Because of that I am unable to give up My life as I wish.”

SĪTĀ CONTINUES DEFYING THE RĀKṢASĪS

While speaking in that way, She held Her head down and shed tears as She wept. She seemed to be crazy, upset or bewildered as She lamented, and rolled on the ground as does a colt when exhausted. She said: “When Rāma was distracted, I was overpowered and carried away screaming by the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, who can assume any form he wishes. Fallen into the clutches of rākṣasīs, I am being threatened in terrible ways, and am always lamenting and stricken with anguish. I have no desire to live. What is the use of My living? I have no need of wealth or jewelry, as long as I am living among rākṣasas without the great chariot warrior Rāma. This heart of Mine must be made of stone or immune to old age and death in that it is not broken by sorrow. How unfortunate I am! How ignoble and unchaste I must be that I continue to live for some time even though I am separated from Him. How sinful My life is!

“I would not even touch the night-prowler Rāvaṇa with My left foot, what to speak of make love with that despicable wretch. He does not recognize My refusal, nor does he know himself or his own family. Due to his cruel nature, he wants to woo Me. I would not consort with Rāvaṇa even on pain of being cut into pieces, pierced, drawn and quartered, roasted in fire or burnt at the stake. What is the use of your ranting for so long? I fear that Rāma, who is well-known as wise, thankful, merciful and well-behaved, has become pitiless due to My misfortune. Otherwise, why does He not come to rescue Me when He was able to kill fourteen thousand rākṣasas at Janasthāna? How unfortunate that I am being detained by Rāvaṇa, whom My husband could easily kill in combat. Why does not Rāma, who slew the mighty rākṣasa Virādha in the Daṇḍakā Forest, not come to Me?

Even though Laṅkā is situated in the middle of the ocean and therefore difficult to assault, this would constitute no obstacle for Rāma’s

arrows. What could be the reason that Rāma whose prowess is firm does not come running to rescue His beloved wife who has been abducted by a rākṣasa? I am afraid that Rāma does not know that I am here. If He knew I was here, would He tolerate the outrage, powerful as He is? The vulture Jaṭāyu who knew about My abduction and could have reported it to Rāma, was killed by Rāvaṇa in combat. A great feat was performed by Jaṭāyu when he tried to kill Rāvaṇa in order to rescue Me. If Rāma knew that I was here, He would rid the world of rākṣasas with His arrows this very day. He would burn down the city of Laṅkā and burn even the ocean. He would also terminate the vile Rāvaṇa's fame and name.

“Then, even as I am crying, there would be wailing in the houses of rākṣasīs whose husbands have been killed. There is no doubt about this. After searching Laṅkā, Rāma along with Lakṣmaṇa will exterminate the rākṣasas. An enemy seen by Them cannot survive for very long. With its streets clouded with smoke from funeral pyres and crowded with flocks of vultures, Laṅkā will in a short time resemble a crematorium. I shall soon achieve My cherished desire, for your wicked conduct implies that you will all be destroyed. The kinds of ill omens which are seen in Laṅkā indicate that it will soon be deprived of its splendor. Surely when Rāvaṇa, the sinful lord of rākṣasas, is slain, Laṅkā, which is difficult to assail, will wither up like a young widow. Although always festive, when the city of Laṅkā's ruler is dead, along with the rākṣasas, it will look like a woman whose husband has died.

“I shall certainly hear before long the crying of rākṣasīs stricken with grief in every house. If only the heroic Rāma were to know that I am present here in the abode of Rāvaṇa, burnt by Rāma's arrows, Laṅkā with its outstanding rākṣasas dead would look dark and dreary. The time limit set by the heartless Rāvaṇa has practically expired. Moreover, my death has been ordained by that wicked fellow in the presence of sinful demons who have no idea what should not be done. As such a great calamity will ensue from this unrighteous act. These flesh-eating rākṣasas are entirely unfamiliar with righteousness. Rāvaṇa will surely have Me cut into pieces for his breakfast. What then shall I do in the absence of the handsome Rāma?

“Unable to see Rāma, the corners of whose eyes are reddish, and therefore being extremely distraught, I shall soon see the lord of death in the absence of My husband. Rāma and His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa do not know that I am alive. If They had known, how could They not have searched all over the world for Me? Giving up His body on account of grief for Me, Rāma has surely left this earth for the world of the gods. Fortunate indeed are the gods, gandharvas, siddhas, and great sages who are able to see My heroic husband Rāma, whose eyes are like the petals of a red lotus. Or else the royal sage Rāma, who always seeks virtue and who is the Supersoul, no longer has any need for Me as His wife. Love for one who is seen lingers, but affection for one who is not seen vanishes. The ungrateful spurn love, but Rāma would never do so. Or, do I have some defect, or is it that My good fortune is finished that I, a young woman, am separated from Rāma, who deserves excellent possessions such as Myself?

“Death is better for Me than living without the great soul Rāma, who is unwearied in maintaining His character and who is capable of annihilating His enemies. Or perhaps the two brothers have renounced Their weapons and are wandering in the forest eating only roots and fruits. Or else the evil-minded Rāvaṇa killed Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by some trick. In such a situation, I wish to die by all means. But it is not ordained for Me to die even in My present extreme agony. Fortunate indeed are the highly blessed great sages who have conquered the self and for whom there is nothing pleasant or unpleasant. For them there is no sorrow when the pleasant is taken away, nor when the unpleasant is excessive, for they reject both happiness and distress. I offer My respects to those great souls! Having been abandoned by My beloved Rāma, the knower of the self and being in the clutches of the wicked Rāvaṇa, I shall give up My life.”

TRIJAṬĀ TELLS OF SĪTĀ'S IMPENDING TRIUMPH

Enraged by hearing Sītā's drastic plan, some of the rākṣasīs went to inform the evil-minded Rāvaṇa. Then the hideous rākṣasīs approached Sītā and again spoke to Her about that repugnant objective which would bring about a terrible disaster for them: "O ignoble Sītā of wicked resolve, we rākṣasīs will feast on Your flesh this very moment!" Seeing Sītā intimidated by the rākṣasīs, an aged rākṣasī named Trijaṭā, who had just woken up, spoke as follows: "Eat your own flesh! You will not be able to eat Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka and the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha! Today I had a frightening and hair-raising dream for the annihilation of the rākṣasas and the welfare of Her husband." When spoken to in this way by Trijaṭā, the rākṣasīs who were previously infuriated became frightened and said to Trijaṭā: "Tell us what kind of dream you saw last night."

Upon hearing their request sprung from the mouths of the rākṣasīs, Trijaṭā related the dream which she saw just before daybreak: "Sitting on a celestial palanquin made of ivory and riding through the air as He was pulled by one thousand horses, Rāma dressed in white clothes and wearing a white garland came with Lakṣmaṇa. In this dream today I saw Sītā also dressed in white robes standing on top of a white mountain surrounded by the ocean. I saw Sītā united with Rāma, as light is with the sun. I also saw Rāma shining brightly and accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa as He rode upon a huge elephant that resembled a mountain and which had four tusks. Wearing white garlands and white robes and shining with Their own effulgence like the sun itself, the two brothers stood by the side of Sītā. Then Sītā actually mounted the shoulders of that elephant led by Her husband which was standing in the air in front of the white mountain. I then saw the lotus-eyed lady jump up from the lap of Her husband and touch the moon and sun with Her hands. Then that super-excellent elephant, upon which were seated Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, went and stood on Laṅkā. In another vision I saw

Rāma wearing a white garland and a white robe as He came here along with His consort Sītā in a chariot drawn by eight white oxen and accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa. Then in another dream I saw the valiant Rāma of unfailing prowess accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā travelling toward the north, having mounted the celestial aerial vehicle Puṣpaka, which was shining as brightly as the sun. In this way I saw in a dream Rāma, who is equal to Lord Viṣṇu in prowess, along with His brother Lakṣmaṇa and His wife Sītā. The mighty Rāma cannot be defeated by the demons and demigods, nor by the rākṣasas, nor by anyone else, as heaven cannot be achieved by sinful men.”

“I also saw Rāvaṇa in a dream today. He had a shaven head, was bathed in oil and dressed in red clothes. He was drunk and still drinking and wearing a garland of oleander flowers. He had fallen on the earth from his aerial vehicle Puṣpaka. Then I saw him another time dressed in black and wearing a garland of red flowers. His body was smeared with red sandalwood paste and he was being carried on a chariot driven by a woman and drawn by asses. Drinking oil, laughing and dancing, with his mind confused and his senses obscured, he jumped on the back of an ass and rode off toward the south. Then I saw Rāvaṇa fallen head first from the back of an ass; he was confused due to fear. I saw him jump up from the ground, completely bewildered, terror-stricken, intoxicated, looking like a madman and totally naked as he uttered foul words. Rāvaṇa entered a fearful darkness that resembled hell and vanished from sight. It was foul-smelling, unbearable and full of filth and mud. Then I saw him head toward the south, enter a dry lake which did not even have mud. A dark young woman then tied the ten-headed Rāvaṇa around her neck. With her limbs smeared with mud, she dragged him toward the south.

“I also saw Rāvaṇa’s mighty younger brother Kumbhakarṇa in that dream. I also saw all of Rāvaṇa’s sons with shaven heads and bathed in oil. Then I saw Rāvaṇa leave in a southerly direction mounted on the back of a boar, Meghanāda on the back of a dolphin, and Kumbhakarṇa on the back of a camel. Only Rāvaṇa’s brother Vibhiṣaṇa did I see shaded by a white parasol. He was dressed in white robes and wore a white flower garland. His body was smeared with white sandalwood paste. He was being honored with blasts of conchshells, beating of drums, dancing and singing. Surrounded by

four ministers, Vibhiṣaṇa was mounted on a four-tusked celestial elephant that resembled a mountain and which was trumpeting like thunder. A large crowd of rākṣasas had gathered. They were dressed in red garments, were wearing red flower garlands and were drinking oil, singing songs and playing musical instruments. I saw this lovely city of Laṅkā with its horses, chariots, elephants and everything else fallen into the ocean, its gateways and arches smashed. Although thoroughly protected by Rāvaṇa, in another dream I saw it burned by an agile monkey envoy of Rāma. Then I saw that in Laṅkā, which was now full of dry ashes, the rākṣasīs were intoxicated from drinking oil and were laughing and making a lot of noise. Kumbhakarṇa and other stalwart rākṣasas put on red garments and then entered into a pool of cowdung.

“Flee from here and see how Rāma rescues Sītā! Supremely intollerant, He will surely kill you along with the rākṣasas. Rāma would never tolerate that His wife who followed Him into exile would be tormented and abused by you. There, enough of these cruel words! Let us conciliate Her with kind words. Let us beg Her forgiveness, for this alone appeals to me. This forlorn woman about whom I saw such dreams will be rid of Her sorrow and achieve Her most desired object. Beg Her for forgiveness, O rākṣasīs, even though you have been threatening Her. What is the use of discussing this any further? For a terrible danger on account of Rāma is approaching the rākṣasas. Sītā will only be satisfied with prostrated obeisances. She is capable of protecting you from this terrible danger, O rākṣasīs!

“Besides, I do not find even the slightest inauspicious mark on the body of this lady. I suspect that this goddess has befallen misfortune at the present time in the same way as when one’s splendor is diminished while bathing. I see the achievement of Sītā’s goal, as well as the destruction of Rāvaṇa and the victory of Rāma. I see that Her left eye, which is shaped like a lotus petal, is trembling. This surely indicates that She has heard something very pleasing. Furthermore, slightly excited, Her left arm is trembling for no reason. Her very shapely left thigh, which resembles the trunk of an elephant, is trembling, as if to announce that Rāma is standing before Her. Continuously uttering sweet notes after sitting in its nest on the

branch of a tree, a bird seems to be repeatedly urging Her to rejoice, vibrating a note to announce the arrival of an auspicious moment. Overjoyed at the prospect of Her husband's victory, this shy, youthful woman then said: 'If this turns out to be true, I shall certainly protect you.'"

SĪTĀ ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

Remembering Rāvaṇa's threats, Sītā, who was afflicted with separation from Her beloved husband, became as frightened as a female elephant calf fallen into the clutches of a lion on the edge of the forest. Surrounded by rākṣasīs and frightened by Rāvaṇa's threats, the timid lady began to wail like a young girl abandoned in the midst of a desolate forest: "Truly do the wise say that death does not come in this world before its due time, for I, though devoid of merit and being constantly threatened, continue living even for a moment. My heart must surely be hard that although devoid of happiness and pained with great sorrow, it does not break into a thousand pieces at this time, like the peak of a mountain struck by lightning. Surely there is nothing wrong in My giving up My life, for I am already condemned to death by this horrible-looking rākṣasa. In any case, I am unable to bestow any affection upon him, as a brāhmaṇa is unable to instruct a non-brāhmaṇa in the Vedas. The ignoble Rāvaṇa will soon cut My body into pieces with sharp instruments, as does a physician to a foetus during an abortion, even before the arrival of Rāma, the Lord of the world.

"Alas, it is painful indeed that the two months will soon have passed, like the end of a night set by a king for the execution of a captive thief. O Rāma, O Lakṣmaṇa, O Sumitrā, O Kausalyā, O My own mothers, I, a woman of meagre luck, am about to perish, like a boat caught in a cyclone at sea. Like two lions struck by a bolt of lightning, those two skillful princes were probably killed on My account by that being in the guise of a deer. Surely destiny in the form of that deer deluded Me, a woman of little good fortune, so that I in My foolishness sent the two sons of My father-in-law to him. O Rāma, You are true to Your vows! Your arms are long and Your face resembles a full moon. You are the well-wisher of the world and dear to all, yet You do not know that I have been killed by the rākṣasas. My worship of one Supreme Deity, My forbearance, My sleeping on the ground, My obedience to the principles of righteousness and My dedication to My

husband—all this has proven useless, like the service rendered by people to ungrateful persons.

“I have practiced this virtue in vain, and My exclusive devotion to my husband has also proven useless because I am unable to see You. Separated from You, I have grown pale and emaciated and have no hope of being reunited with You. Having fulfilled the request of Your father according to the rules, returned from the forest, freed Yourself from fear and accomplished Your purpose, You will, I think, enjoy with broad-eyed women. Having practiced austerities and observed vows in vain, I in whom a desire for You arose and who have been attached to You for a long time for My own destruction, shall soon give up My life. Oh how unfortunate I am! I ought to give up My life very soon with poison or with some sharp weapon. But in Rāvaṇa’s abode there is no one to give Me poison or a weapon.”

Completely anguished, Sītā began thinking about what to do. Then She grabbed the string which bound Her braid. Holding it, She thought: “Using this string from My braid I shall strangle Myself and at once go to the abode of the lord of death.” Grasping a branch of the śīmśapā tree, that woman of tender limbs stood near the tree. As She was absorbed in thoughts of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, many omens which are well-known for dispelling grief and restoring confidence, appeared on Her body, as they had done previously, presaging success.

THE OMENS WHICH SĪTĀ EXPERIENCED

As attendants serve a man favored by the goddess of fortune, auspicious omens appeared on Sītā's body. Although beyond reproach, She was nevertheless deprived of happiness and mentally distressed as She stood near the śimśapā tree. Her beautiful left eye, which was large, lined with lashes, dark in the middle, white all around and tinged with red along the edges, began to throb like a lotus flower struck by a fish. Her gracefully shaped left arm, which deserved to be smeared with black aloewood and sandalwood and which had served as a pillow for Lord Rāma, also began to tremble. Then Her well-shaped left hip, which was fleshy and which resembled the trunk of an elephant, began to visibly tremble, seemingly announcing the presence of Lord Rāma standing before Her.

Moreover, Her veil which was golden-colored, though slightly soiled with dust, slipped a bit in a way that indicated good fortune. Reassured by these and other omens which had proven true previously, Sītā rejoiced, just like when a seed withered by the wind is brought to life by rain. Once again Her face with its lips which were as red as bimba fruits, its beautiful eyes, shapely brows, lovely locks of hair, curved eyelashes and sparkling white teeth, shone like the moon released from an eclipse. She was completely free from sorrow. Her exhaustion was fully relieved. Her fever vanished and Her mind was illuminated with happiness. The noble Sītā's face looked charming, like a night with the risen moon during the waxing fortnight.

HANUMĀN CONSIDERS HOW TO APPROACH SĪTĀ

The valiant Hanumān correctly heard everything, including Sītā's lamentation, Trijaṭā's dreams, and the threats by the rākṣasīs. Staring at Sītā, who resembled a goddess in the Nandana Garden of Lord Indra, Hanumānbegan thinking in various ways: "This lady whom I have found here is the same one which the many thousands of monkeys have been searching for in all directions. Being carefully appointed as a spy and moving about incognito to ascertain the enemies' strength, I have gathered this information. I have scrutinized the specific strength of the rākṣasas, the layout of the city of Laṅkā and the power of their lord, Rāvaṇa. I must however console this lady who is longing for Her husband, whose greatness is immeasurable and who is compassionate upon all living beings. I shall console this lady whose face is as effulgent as the full moon, who had never previously known sorrow and who now cannot find the end of Her suffering.

"If I actually go back without consoling this woman whose mind is bewildered by sorrow, my return will be faulty. After I have left, She might give up Her life due to not finding any means of deliverance. As much as the mighty-armed Rāma who desires to see Sītā deserves to be comforted, so also does Sītā. However, it is not advisable to speak while the rākṣasīs are present. I wonder how I can do this? I am really in a quandry. If I do not reassure Her by the end of the night, She will surely give up Her life. There is no doubt about this. If Lord Rāma asks me what message Sītā gave, what would I reply to Him since I will not have spoken with Her? Rāma might burn me to ashes with His angry glance, if I quickly return without a message from Sītā. If I cause my master Sugrīva to sally forth on behalf of Lord Rāma, his arrival with an army would be useless.

"Catching an opportunity, I shall gradually console the greatly distressed Sītā, despite Her being in the clutches of the rākṣasas. Although I am very short and only a monkey, I shall speak the Sanskrit language spoken

by human beings. But if I speak Sanskrit like a brāhmaṇa, Sītā might become frightened, thinking that I am Rāvaṇa. Therefore I should present my message to Her in the Sanskrit spoken by the people of the kingdom of Kosala. This blameless lady cannot be consoled by any other means.

“Seeing my form as a monkey and hearing my speech, Sītā, who is already terrorized by the rākṣasas, may become further frightened. Terrified by the thought that I am Rāvaṇa, who is able to assume any form he wishes, the broad-eyed lady might scream. Upon hearing Sītā scream, all of the rākṣasīs armed with different weapons as terrible as death would quickly gather. Surrounding me, the hideous and powerful rākṣasīs would attempt to capture me or kill me. Moreover, they would become alarmed to see me jumping from branch to branch. They would become frightened upon seeing my huge form moving about in the forest and would make a terrible noise. The rākṣasīs would then summon the rākṣasas posted by Rāvaṇa at his palace.

“Due to excitement, they would precipitously rush upon me with tridents, arrows, swords and other kinds of weapons in their hands. Being blocked on all sides by them, I could no doubt destroy that rākṣasa army, but then I would not be able to cross back over the ocean. Or, perhaps after surrounding me, the many skillful rākṣasas might capture me. In such a case Sītā will not know about my mission and I will fall into captivity. Or else, the rākṣasas who enjoy violence might kill Sītā. In that case, Rāma’s and Sugrīva’s mission would be foiled. Sītā is living in this obscure region surrounded by the ocean and is difficult to locate and guarded by rākṣasas. If I am killed in a fight, there is no one else who can help Lord Rāma accomplish His task. After due consideration, I do not find any other monkey who is able to jumping one hundred yojana across the ocean after my death. Although I could kill thousands of rākṣasas, I would then be too tired to jump back across to the other side of the ocean. The outcome of a fight is never certain, and I do not like uncertainty. And what wise man would take up a doubtful action without due consideration?

“In fact, if I openly talk with Sītā, that would be a great error on my part, and if I do not talk to Her, I would cause Her death through suicide.

As darkness disappears at sunrise, A timid messenger misses his goals when these are obstructed by time and place, even as darkness is dispelled by the sunrise. Even a decision arrived at in consultation regarding what should be done and what should not be done becomes ruined by a foolish messenger. Indeed, messengers who think themselves wise ruin all undertakings. How can I ensure that this mission is not thwarted? How can I avoid being heedless? And I wonder how I can manage that my jumping across the ocean was not in vain. How can I get Sītā to listen to what I say without becoming disturbed?”

Thinking in the following way, Hanumān came to the following conclusion: “Singing the glories of Her husband Rāma, who is never wearied by action, I shall not frighten Sītā, who is always thinking of Her spouse. Delivering the beautiful message which is in conformity with righteousness regarding Lord Rāma, the knower of the self, I will make everything so understandable that She will believe everything.” While sitting in the branches of the tree, Hanumān spoke the following sweet and truthful words to Rāma’s young wife.

SĪTĀ HEARS HANUMĀN

After fretting for quite some time, Hanumān made the following sweet speech within the hearing range of Sītā: “In the Ikṣvāku Dynasty there was a greatly famous king named Daśaratha, who was pious and who possessed excellent chariots, elephants and horses. Born in a royal family, he was equal in strength to Indra. He was the best of royal sages and equalled the sages in the practice of austerities. He was fond of nonviolence and was not petty. He was merciful and his prowess was unfailing. He was the most prominent member of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. He possessed opulence and could increase his own opulence. He possessed the characteristics of a monarch. He had immense wealth and was the foremost of kings. He was known to the four ends of the earth. He was not only happy himself, but conferred happiness on others.

“His favorite eldest son, who resembled the full moon and was the most expert archer, was known by the name Rāma. He was the protector of His own character, the protector of his people, the protector of all living beings and of righteousness, and the defeater of His enemies. To uphold the veracity of the word given by His elderly father, He departed for the forest in exile with His wife and brother. While running after deer in the vast wilderness, He slew many intrepid demons capable of assuming any guise. After hearing about the destruction of Janasthāna and the death of his brothers Khara and Dūṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa sidetracked Rāma into the forest with a rākṣasa magician disguised as a deer, afterwhich he kidnapped Sītā, to Her indignation.

“While searching in the forest for the blameless Sītā, He found a friend in a monkey named Sugrīva. After slaying Vālī, Rāma bestowed sovereignty over the monkeys to the great soul Sugrīva. Under Sugrīva’s command, thousands of monkeys capable of changing their forms at will set out in all directions in search of the lady Sītā. On the advice of Sampātī, I leapt one hundred yojanas across the ocean with great speed in order to find

that broad-eyed lady. I have found Her here, possessing the same beauty, complexion, and bodily characteristics that were described to me by Lord Rāma.” After speaking in this way, the monkey remain silent.

Sītā was highly surprised to hear that speech. Raising Her face covered with dishevelled hair, that timid woman looked up into the śimśapā tree. Having heard the monkey’s speech and looking in all directions, Sītā experienced the highest pleasure thinking of Rāma with all her heart and soul. Looking from side to side and up and down, She spotted the monkey of inconceivable intelligence who was a minister of Sugrīva and who resembled the sun on the eastern horizon.

SĪTĀ IS BEWILDERED BY HANUMĀN

When Sītā saw Hanumān wearing silvery cloth and himself tawny like a series of lightning bolts hiding in the tree branches, Her mind became disturbed. She saw that he was a monkey, meek and sweet-talking, shining like a bunch of aśoka flowers and with eyes as bright as molten gold. Amazed to see Hanumān sitting so humbly, Sītā began thinking in the following way: “Oh, how horrible is this simian creature!” Considering it hideous to see and difficult to approach, She again became bewildered. Stricken with fear, She piteously cried out: “O Rāma! O Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa!” Then the chaste lady suddenly began weeping softly. Seeing Hanumān coming near Her in a humble way, She thought that She was dreaming.

Looking around to make sure no rākṣasīs were present, She beheld Hanumān. His jaw was swollen due to having previously been broken. He was obedient to the instructions of King Sugrīva. He was an outstanding monkey, most worshipable, the son of the wind god and the best of the wise. She fainted when She saw Hanumān, like a person who has lost his life. When She regained consciousness after a long time, the broad-eyed lady began to think as follows: “I just now had such a terrible dream. The scriptures have forbidden the seeing of a monkey. I wish good fortune for Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and my father, King Janaka. Surely this is not a dream, for I cannot sleep, stricken as I am with suffering and sorrow. Nor do I have any happiness, separated as I am from My husband, whose face resembles a full moon.

“Constantly thinking of Rāma with My mind and talking of Him with my speech, I hear an utterance corresponding to those thoughts and see a form in conformity with that subject. Always thinking of Him only, I am tormented by affection for Him and all My affection is directed to Him. Similarly, I only see Him and hear Him. I think that this is just an hallucination. Yet I am considering with my intelligence what might be the cause of this vision, for an apparition has no distinct form, and this one is

talking to Me. I offer My respectful obeisances to the sage Br̥haspati, along with Indra, to Lord Brahmā as well as to Agni, the god of fire. Let what the monkey said before Me prove true, and not otherwise.”

HANUMĀN ASKS SĪTĀ WHO SHE IS

Coming down from the śiṃśapā tree and approaching Sītā, Hanumān bowed down and placed his joined palms over his head. Hanumān's face was the color of coral. He was dressed in a humble manner and was endowed with extraordinary strength. He was distressed to see Sītā's difficulty and said: "Who are you, O faultless lady? Your eyes are like the petals of a lotus flower and You are wearing a worn-out silk garment, holding on to a branch of this tree. Why do tears born of grief trickle down Your cheeks like drops of water falling from a pair of lotus leaves? Who are You among the gods, demons, nāgas, gandharvas, rākṣasas, yakṣas, and kinnaras? Who are You among the rudras, maruts, vasus, of lovely woman? You look just like a goddess!

"Might You be Rohiṇī, the best of stars and superior in all excellent qualities, fallen from the realm of the gods? Or are You, O dark-eyed lady, the blessed Arundhatī, fallen down after angering your husband, Vasiṣṭha, by annoyance or error? Who could it be, Your son, Your father, Your husband, or Your brother, who has left this world for the next and for whom You are mourning? Because of Your crying, sighing, deep breathing, touching the ground and invoking the name of a king, I do not think that You are a goddess. In fact, by the strength of Your limbs and the marks which I see on Your body I believe You are a princess and the consort of a king. Please let me know if You are Sītā who was kidnapped from Janasthāna by Rāvaṇa. God bless You! Indeed, by Your misery, superhuman beauty, and clothes marred by asceticism, You must surely be Rāma's consort."

Delighted by hearing the monkey glorify Rāma, Sītā spoke to Hanumān, who was standing underneath the tree: "I am the daughter-in-law of Daśaratha, the foremost of lion-like kings on the earth, who was a knower of the self and destroyer of enemy armies. I am the daughter of the great soul Janaka, the king of the land of Videha, and am the consort of the wise Rāma. I am called Sītā. Enjoying human pleasures and possessing whatever

wealth one could desire, I dwelt in Rāma's palace for twelve years. Then, in the thirteenth year, King Daśaratha and his preceptor Vasiṣṭha proceeded to install Rāma as prince regent. While preparations for the ceremony were being made, Kaikeyī, they say, spoke as follows to her husband, King Daśaratha: 'I shall no longer eat or drink anything. If Rāma is coronated it will be the end of my life! If your promise to grant me a boon is to be upheld, O ruler of men, then banish Rāma to the forest.' Remembering his promise to grant her a pair of boons, the king who was true to his word fainted when he heard Kaikeyī's cruel and unpalatable demand. Then the aged king who was fixed in truthfulness begged her to grant Rāma sovereignty.

"First bowing with His mind to His father's command, which was dearer to Him than His own coronation, He verbally accepted that command. Rāma would give gifts and never accept them. He would speak only truth and never falsehood, not even for His own life. Tossing aside His costly upper garments and mentally renouncing the kingdom, that Rāma entrusted Me to His mother. I, however, was determined to accompany Him and walked ahead of Him into the forest, for I would not even care to live in heaven without Him. Even before Me, His illustrious younger brother Lakṣmaṇa donned clothes made from kuśa grass and tree bark in order to follow Him. With high regard and complete dedication to Our lord King Daśaratha's command, We entered an impenetrable forest which We had never seen before. While that prince of immeasurable strength was residing in the Daṇḍakā Forest, I, His wife, was kidnapped by the evil-minded Rāvaṇa. That demon has given Me two months to decide to live with him. After that time has passed I shall give up My life."

SĪTĀ DOUBTS HANUMĀN'S BONA FIDES

Upon hearing the saddened Sītā's reply, Hanumān tried to console Her with the following words: "I have come to You, O lady, as an emissary, bringing You a message from Rāma. O princess, Lord Rāma is fine and He conveys His welfare to You. Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, the foremost of Vedic scholars and the knower of the weapon of Lord Brahmā, inquires about Your welfare. The mighty Lakṣmaṇa, a dear follower of Lord Rāma, bows His head to You, tormented as He is by grief."

Thrilled all over Her body to hear about the well-being of those two outstanding princes, Sītā replied to Hanumān: "The popular saying that happiness comes to a living person even after one hundred years appears to be true." Because of their meeting, they both experienced a wonderful thrill. Trusting each other, they began conversing. Hearing the grief-stricken Sītā's reply, Hanumān attempted to draw nearer to Her. The closer Hanumān came, the more Sītā suspected him to be Rāvaṇa. She said to herself: "O My! What a pity I talked with him! He is actually just Rāvaṇa come in another disguise." Letting go of the branch of the aśoka tree, the morose Sītā sank down to the ground, stricken as She was with anguish. Then Hanumān offered respects to Sītā. Due to fear, however, Sītā did not even look at Hanumān again.

Seeing the monkey bowing down before Her, She took a deep breath and spoke to him with a sweet voice: "If you are that wizard Rāvaṇa and have assumed a deceptive form to torment Me again, that is not good. You are surely that same Rāvaṇa who rejected his own form and assumed the guise of a wandering ascetic, whom I saw in Janasthāna. O night-stalker capable of changing form at will, it is not good that you again torment Me, when I am exhausted from fasting and miserable. Or else, what I fear may not be true at all, for joy arises in My heart when I see you. If you have actually come as a messenger of Rāma, then bless you! I inquire from you about Rāma, for discussions about Him are very pleasing to Me, O best of

monkeys. Tell Me about My dear Rāma's qualities. You are carrying away My mind as a current carries away the bank of a river. O how sweet this dream in which I, long since kidnapped, see this monkey sent by Rāma! Even if I could see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in a dream, I would not feel disenhearted. But this dream is turning out bad for Me. I do not believe this is a dream, for happiness does not result from seeing a monkey in a dream, and I have achieved happiness. Could this be an halucination, a gostly apparition, delirium caused by illness or a mirage? Or else, this may not be insanity or delusion with symptoms of insanity, for I am fully aware of Myself, as well as of this monkey."

After thoroughly considering the strengths and weakness of monkeys and rākṣasas who can assume any guise they wish, Sītā concluded that Hanumān was Rāvaṇa. When She reached this conclusion, She would no long speak with the monkey. Understanding Her decision, Hanumān, the son of the wind god, spoke the following delightful words which brought Sītā excessive joy: "As glorious as the sun and as loved as the moon, Lord Rāma delights the whole world, as does Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods. He is endowed with prowess just like the highly illustrious Lord Viṣṇu, and He speaks truthfully like the heavenly sage Br̥haspati. He is handsome, graceful, splendid and the personification of Cupid. He punishes those who invoke His anger, and is the best chariot warrior in this world. The whole earth is dependent on the arms of that great soul. You will see the result of Rāvaṇa's sinful deed when He kidnapped You in solitude after diverting Rāma with a rākṣasa disguised as a deer.

"I have come to You as a messenger sent by that mighty prince who will soon kill Rāvaṇa in battle with His blazing arrows released in anger. Anguished by separation from You, He inquires about Your welfare. The mighty Lakṣmaṇa, who is the delight of Sumitrā, greets You and inquires about Your welfare. Rāma's friend named Sugrīva, who is the king of the monkeys, also inquires about Your welfare, My lady. Lord Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva, always remembers You. Luckily You are still alive, even though You have fallen into the clutches of rākṣasas. Soon You will see Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa and Sugriva in the midst of millions of monkeys. I am a monkey named Hanumān, a minister of Sugrīva. After jumping across

the great ocean, I entered the city of Laṅkā and placed my foot on the wicked Rāvaṇa's head. Depending on my own prowess, I have come to see You. I am not what You think I am, my lady! Give up Your disbelief and trust what I say.”

HANUMĀN NARRATES HIS LIFE TO SĪTĀ

After hearing news about Lord Rāma from that fine monkey, Sītā spoke the following reassuring words to Hanumān with a sweet voice: “Where did you meet Rāma and how do you know Lakṣmaṇa? And how is it that monkeys and human beings met each other? O monkey, describe once more the physical characteristics of Rāma as well as of Lakṣmaṇa so that I do not feel depressed. Describe to Me His physical constitution and beauty, how His thighs are and how His arms are, as well as those of Lakṣmaṇa.”

When questioned in this way by Sītā, Hanumān began accurately describing Lord Rāma: “It is my good fortune that You have asked me about the physical constitution of Your Husband, as well as of Lakṣmaṇa, even though You are familiar with Them, O lady with eyes like the petals of a lotus flower. Listen as I speak about the distinguishing marks of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

“Rāma has eyes shaped just like the petals of a lotus flower and His face resembles a full moon. O daughter of King Janaka, since birth He has possessed great beauty and dexterity. His effulgence rivals that of the sun, and He is as forgiving as the earth. His intelligence is equal to that of Br̥haspati and He is as famous as Lord Indra. He is the protector of every living being in this world and is the protector of His own people as well. O lovely lady, Rāma is the protector of the world-wide four-fold social system. He has established the bounds of morality in this world and has inspired others to follow them. He is as splendid as fire and is greatly adored. He is fixed in the practice of celibacy. He knows how to serve the holy people, and knows how to propagate right actions. He is fully conversant with the science of politics and is a worshiper of the brāhmaṇas. He is wise and endowed with all good qualities. He is self-controlled and is the conqueror of His enemies. He is well-versed in the Yajur-Veda, and is fully respected by the knowers of the Vedas. He is proficient in the Dhanur-Veda or martial science, as well as the Vedas and their corollaries.

“He has broad shoulders, big arms, a neck shaped like a conchshell, a handsome face, a clavicle covered with muscle and eyes tinged with the color of copper. He is known by the people as Rāma. His voice resounds like a kettledrum and His skin is glossy. He is vigorous. His body is balanced, with well-proportioned limbs. He has a swarthy complexion. He is rigid in three places: the chest, wrists and fists, He is long in three places: the eyebrows, arms and scrotum. He is uniform in three places: the locks of hair, testicles and knees. He is elevated in three places: the breast, the rim of the navel and the abdomen. He is pinkish in three places: the corners of the eyes, the nails and the bottoms of the hands and feet. He is soft in three places: the penis, lines of the feet and hair. He is deep in three things: the voice, walk and navel. He has three folds on His neck and on His stomach. He is sunken in three places: the soles of the feet, the lines on the feet and the nipples. He is small at three places: the neck, penis, back and shanks. The hair on His head curls around three times. He has four lines at the base of the thumb, indicating His familiarity with all four Vedas. He has four lines on the forehead, indicating longevity. He is four cubits tall. His body has four symmetrical pairs: the cheeks, arms, shanks and knees. He has fourteen other symmetrical pairs: the eyebrows, nostrils, eyes, ears, lips, nipples, elbows, wrists, knees, testicles, loins, hands, feet and thighs. He has four strong and sharp wisdom teeth. He moves in four speeds: like a lion, a tiger, an elephant and a bull. He has fine lips, chin and nose. He has five shiny bodily parts: the hair, eyes, teeth, skin and soles of the feet. He is long in eight places: the arms, fingers, toes, eyes, ears, nose, spine and body. Lord Rāma has ten lotus-like parts: the mouth, eyes, tongue, lips, palate, breaths, nails, hand and feet. He has ten broad parts: the chest, head, forehead, neck, arms, shoulders, navel, feet, back and ears. He is permeated by three things: splendor, fame and glory. He has two white parts: the teeth and eyes. He is raised in six limbs: the flanks, abdomen, chest, nose, shoulders and forehead. He is small, thin, sharp and fine in nine places: the hair, moustache, beard, nails, bodily hair, skin, finger-joints, penis, intelligence and perception. He is dedicated to truth and righteousness. He is lustrous and is committed to accumulating wealth and giving charity. He knows how to act according to time and place, and He speaks sweetly to everyone.

“Moreover, His brother Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, treats Rāma’s mother Kausalya just like His own mother. Lakṣmaṇa is undefeatable

by anyone. He is just like Rāma in affection, beauty and qualities. Lakṣmaṇa has a golden complexion, whereas the glorious Rāma is swarthy.

“Searching the whole earth eagerly for You, those two tigers among men met us. Wandering across the earth in search of You, They saw sitting at the foot of the heavily forested Rṣyamūka Mountain, the handsome lord of monkeys, Sugrīva. He had been dethroned by his elder brother Vālī, and was terrified of him. We served Sugrīva, who was honest in combat, and who had been deprived of sovereignty. Then two princes clad in bark cloth arrived at the charming region of Rṣyamūka Mountain, which is rich in deposits of minerals. Frightened by seeing those two tigers among men carrying bows, Sugrīva jumped up to the top of Rṣyamūka Mountain.

“While on that peak, Sugrīva quickly sent me to Them. At Sugrīva’s command, I approached with joined hands those two stalwart princes who possessed beauty and auspicious characteristics. They were overjoyed to hear the story of Sugrīva’s situation, afterwhich I carried Them on my back to the place where Sugrīva was. Then I literally introduced Them to the great soul Sugrīva. As a result of talking with each other, they developed a mutual affection. Those two glorious persons—the ruler of monkeys and the ruler of men—comforted each other by relating their past histories. Rāma consoled Sugrīva, who had been deprived of his kingdom and wife by his brother, the mighty Vālī. Then Lakṣmaṇa told Sugrīva about Rāma’s anguish occasioned by Your abduction.

“Hearing what Lakṣmaṇa said, Sugrīva became completely pale, like the moon caught in an eclipse. The monkey leaders thereafter brought all the jewelry which You had dropped to the ground while You were being carrying away by Rāvaṇa, and joyfully showed it to Rāma. They, however, did not know where You were. The jewelry which I had brought to Rāma made a tinkling sound as they scattered when Rāma dropped it. Hugging those beautiful jewels to His chest, He, who is a manifestation of God, weiled in many ways. As He repeatedly looked at the jewelry and wept, the fire of Rāma’s grief inflamed us.

“Overwhelmed with sorrow, that great soul Rāma lay unconscious on the ground for a long time. With difficulty I was able to revive Him by

various encouraging words. After continuously looking at the jewelry and showing it to us, Rāma deposited it with Sugrīva. Rāma is suffering due to Your absence, like Mount Mālyavān which is always being burned by the fire of universal devastation. On account of You, sleeplessness, sorrow and anxiety are burning Rāma, as the sacrificial fires constantly heat the sacrificial sheds. Rāma has been shaken by Your absence like a mountain hit by a powerful earthquake. Not seeing You, Rāma finds no pleasure, even while roaming through charming forests or beside streams and waterfalls. O daughter of King Janaka, Rāma will soon rescue You, after slaying Rāvaṇa and his friends and relatives.

“Forming a pact, Rāma and Sugrīva agreed to dispose of Vālī and to initiate a search for You. When they reached Kiṣkindhā, Rāma slew Vālī in combat. Having killed Vālī by His strength, Rāma then established Sugrīva as king of all the hordes of monkeys and bears. That is how Rāma and Sugrīva became allies. And You may know that I am Hanumān. I have come here as their messenger. After regaining his sovereignty and summoning the great monkeys in allegiance to him, Sugrīva despatched them in all directions. On Sugrīva’s command, the vigorous monkeys resembling mountains set forth in all directions of the earth. Afraid as we are of Sugrīva’s orders, we monkeys have been roaming the entire earth in search of You.

“The glorious son of Vālī is known by the name Aṅgada. He is endowed with extraordinary might and is a tiger among monkeys. He set out with one third of the monkey forces. Many days and nights passed as we were lost in the Vindhya Mountains, being afflicted with anxiety. Despondent over our failure, afraid of Sugrīva and the time limit having expired, we decided to give up our lives. Having failed to find You, even after searching mountain peaks, river banks and cascades, we were determined to give up our lives. We then sat down to fast until death on the summit of that mountain. Drowning in an ocean of grief to see all the monkeys fasting until death, Aṅgada began lamenting Your disappearance, O Sītā, as well as the death of his father Vālī, our determination to die and the death of Jaṭāyu.

“When we had become hopeless to fulfill the command of Sugrīva and were preparing to die, there arrived a certain huge and powerful vulture.

This king of vultures was named Sampāti, and was the brother of Jaṭāyu. When he heard about his brother's death, he angrily said: 'Please tell me who killed my brother and where.' Aṅgada then informed him how Jaṭāyu had been killed at Janasthāna while trying to rescue You from a rākṣasa with a hideous form. Sampāti was distressed to hear about his brother's slaughter. He said that You were residing in Rāvaṇa's abode, O lovely woman. After hearing Sampāti's enlivening information, we all departed from the Vidhya Mountains with Aṅgada as our leader and arrived at the excellent seashore. Being jubilant, enlivened and eager to find You, the monkeys headed by Aṅgada reached the shore of the ocean.

"Although they were very anxious to find You, the monkeys again became despondent. I dispelled the anxiety of the monkey army, which was disturbed upon seeing the vast ocean, by jumping a distance of one hundred yojanas across the ocean. I also entered at night the city of Laṅkā, which is crowded with rākṣasas. I then saw Rāvaṇa, as well as You, who are grief-stricken. I have narrated all of this factually, O faultless lady. Speak to me, O goddess. I am a messenger of Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha. Indeed, I am Hanumān, son of the wind god and a minister of Sugrīva. I have come here on Your behalf as service to Lord Rāma. Everything is fine with Your Rāma, the best wielder of all weapons. The handsome Lakṣmaṇa, who is engaged in the worship and welfare of His older brother Rāma, is also fine. I have come here alone under the order of Sugrīva. Able to change my form at will, I scoured this southern region alone in my eagerness to find You. Fortunately, I will be able to dispel the anxiety of the monkey army, which is lamenting Your abduction, by telling them about my having found You. Luckily my having leapt across the ocean has not been in vain. I shall, O goddess, become famous for having discovered You. The mighty Rāma will soon rescue You, after killing Rāvaṇa, along with his sons and relatives.

"O Sītā, there is a mountain named Mālyavān, which is the best of peaks. From there, a monkey named Kesarī went to Gokarṇa Mountain. On the request of the celestial sages, my father, the great monkey Kesarī, killed the demon Śambasādana, who had been causing a disturbance at the holy place on the bank of the river there. Engendered by the wind god in the consort of Kesarī, I am Hanumān, famous through out the world for my

exploits. O Sītā, I have extolled the characteristics of Your husband in order to instill confidence in You. In a short time Rāma will take You away from here. Of this there is no doubt.”

Reassured by his proofs, Sītā, who was exhausted from grief, recognized that he was indeed a messenger of Rāma. She experienced unequaled bliss and shed tears of joy from Her eyes with curved eyelashes. The charming face of that broad-eyed lady with white eyes tinged with red was shining like the moon escaped from an eclipse. She realized that Hanumān actually was a monkey, and nothing else. Then Hanumān spoke the following excellent words to the beautiful Sītā: “I have told You everything. Believe me, Sītā! What can I do, or how can I please You? After Kesarī, the best of monkeys, killed the demon Śambasādana on the request of the great sages, I took birth as his son and am equal to Lord Indra in prowess.”

HANUMĀN GIVES RĀMA'S RING TO SĪTĀ

In order to further convince Sītā, Hanumān spoke the following polite words to Sītā: “I am a monkey messenger of the wise Rāma, O highly fortunate one. And look, my lady, here is a ring engraved with the name of Rāma. It was given to me by that great soul in order to gain Your confidence. Be assured that Your fruits of sorrow are certainly destroyed. God bless You!” Taking the ring which had adorned Her husband’s hand and looking at it, Sītā felt as happy as if Her husband had arrived. Her face with bright white eyes tinged with coppery red beamed with joy, like the moon released from an eclipse. Then that youthful lady, who was delighted to receive a message from Her husband and embarrassed to see His ring, praised the great monkey:

“You are valiant, capable and learned in that you were able to infiltrate single-handed this rākṣasa stronghold. You have crossed this ocean which is one hundred yojanas across and infested with crocodiles as one would step over a calf’s hoofprint, desiring as you are of praise for your valor. I certainly do not consider you an ordinary monkey, for you have no fear or awe of Rāvaṇa. It is proper for Me to talk with you, if you have been sent by Rāma, the knower of the self. Rāma would not send someone to Me without examining him to determine his prowess. Fortunately, the righteous Rāma, who is true to His word, is fine, and also the glorious Lakṣmaṇa, who increases the joy of His mother Sumitrā. If Rāma is alright, then why does He not burn the earth encircled by oceans with His anger, like the fire of destruction at the end of the world? Indeed, those two princes are able to defeat even the gods in battle. Yet I think that My suffering is not yet ending.

“I hope Rāma is not ill or harrowed. Is that best of persons doing the needful to rescue Me? I hope He is not forelorn or bewildered, or confused about the execution of His duties. I hope the prince is performing His human duties. I hope He is acting as a friend to His allies by the two-

fold method of conciliation and gifts, and, desiring victory over His enemies, is practicing the three-fold method of gifts, chastisement and sowing dissension. I hope He is making new friends and that His enemies are approaching Him for help. Are His friends kind to Him and do they respect Him? Does the prince desire the mercy of the gods? Does He depend on His personal effort as well as destiny in the execution of His activities? I hope Rāma has not ceased loving Me due to My absence abroad. I wonder if He is going to rescue Me from this calamity. I hope Rāma, who deserves happiness and never deserves unhappiness, is not distressed by enduring the misfortune of My abduction. I hope He is able to hear news about the welfare of His mother Kausalyā, as well as Sumitrā and Bharata.

“Is the honorable Rāma stricken with grief on My account? I hope He does not see Me differently now. Will He rescue Me? Will Bharata send out a formidable army consisting of one akṣauhiṇī led by ministers to rescue Me? I wonder if the glorious Sugrīva, king of the monkeys, followed by warrior monkeys using their teeth and claws as weapons, will come to rescue Me. Will the valiant Lakṣmaṇa expert in the use of arms exterminate the rākṣasas with a volley of arrows? I hope that in a short time I will see Rāma slay Rāvaṇa in combat with a horrible weapon, along with all of his friends and well-wishers. I hope His golden face, sullen with sorrow and fragrant like a lotus flower, has not withered like a lotus in a dried lake on account of My absence. Neither fear nor sorrow could dissuade Him from carrying out His duty when He renounced the kingdom and led Me into the forest on foot. Neither His mother, His father, nor anyone else receives the same or more affection that I do from Him. O messenger, I can desire to live only as long as I can hear news about My beloved.”

After speaking these sweet and meaningful words to Hanumān, Sītā became quiet in order to hear more talk about Rāma. When Hanumān heard what Sītā said, he placed his folded hands over his head and made the following excellent statement: “The lotus-eyed Rāma does not know that You are here. That is why He has not rescued You as quickly as Indra did Śacī. As soon as He hears my report, Lord Rāma will come here leading a great army of monkeys and bears. Obstructing the unshakable ocean with volleys of arrows, Rāma will rid the city of Lankā of rākṣasas. At that time, if death, the gods or great demons were to stand in Rāma’s way, He would slay

them. O noble lady, filled with grief occasioned by Your absence, Rāma finds no peace, like an elephant wounded by a lion. I swear by Mandara, Malaya, Vindhya, Sumeru and Dardura mountains upon which we monkeys dwell, as well as by the fruits and roots which we eat that You will soon see Lord Rāma's beautiful face, which resembles a full moon and which has beautiful eyes, lips as red as ripe bimba fruits and charming earrings.

“O princess of the land of Videha, You will soon see Rāma standing on the top of Mount Prasravaṇa, like Indra mounted on his elephant Airāvata. He does not eat meat or honey. He always eats the permitted forest fruits and roots, as well as cooked rice, in the evening. Rāma is unable to repel gnats, mosquitos, bugs or even reptiles from His body because of His mind being absorbed in thoughts of You. Rāma is always thinking of You and always stricken with sorrow. He does not think of anything else, fallen as He has under the sway of love. Rāma is always sleepless, and when He does manage to sleep, He wakes up uttering the sweet name ‘Sītā.’ Whenever He sees a fruit or flower or anything else that would attract the mind of a woman, He heaves a deep sigh and generally exclaims: “O My darling!” Always burning with anxiety and invoking Your name, the great-souled prince has taken stringent vows and is endeavoring to retrieve You.”

Sītā's grief was now completely vanished due to hearing the glorification of Rāma, yet She felt equally sad to hear of Rāma's sorrow. Thus She looked like a night at the beginning of autumn when the moon is hidden by the clouds remaining from the rainy season.

SĪTĀ REQUESTS HANUMĀN TO BRING RĀMA

Hearing what Hanumān said, Sītā, whose face resembled the full moon, spoke the following words which were productive of piety and material gain: “O monkey, what you told Me, that Rāma does not think of anything but Me and that He is tormented by sorrow, is like nectar mixed with poison. Death drags away a man as if bound with a rope, regardless of whether he is enjoying extensive power or terrible adversity. Destiny can certainly not be obstructed. Just see how Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Myself are bewildered by tragedies. How can Rāma reach the other side of this suffering, like a strong man swimming in the ocean after his boat has sunk? When will Rāma see Me, after killing Rāvaṇa and the rākṣasas, and destroying the city of Laṅkā? You should tell Him to act quickly, for I shall live only until the expiry of the one year time limit. This is the tenth month, and two months are left of the time limit set by the merciless Rāvaṇa for My survival.

“Rāvaṇa’s brother Vibhiṣaṇa has often pleaded with Rāvaṇa to return Me to Rāma, but Rāvaṇa would not agree. Rāvaṇa does not like the idea of returning Me, for according to his destiny, death in combat awaits him. The eldest daughter of Vibhiṣaṇa is named Kalā. When she was sent by her mother to Me, she personally related the following information. There is one outstanding rākṣasa named Avindhya, who is wise, learned, determined, amiable, aged and highly respected by Rāvaṇa. He warned Rāvaṇa about the destruction of the rākṣasas at the hands of Rāma, but the wicked Rāvaṇa did not care to hear his good advice.

“No doubt My husband will rescue Me soon, for My heart is pure and He possesses many good qualities. Enthusiasm, manliness, courage, mercifulness, gratitude, prowess and energy are found in Rāma. What enemy would not tremble before Him who killed fourteen thousand rākṣasas at Janasthāna without the assistance of His brother Lakṣmaṇa? That best of

men cannot be harrowed by difficulties. I know His might, even as Śacī knows that of Indra. Rāma is like a sun with arrows as its rays; as the sun's rays dry up water, He will destroy the rākṣasas with His arrows. “

Hanumān then replied to Sītā, who was talking in this way as Her eyes brimmed with tears: “As soon as Rāma hears my report, He will immediately come with a huge army of monkeys and bears. Or else I myself shall free You right now from this misfortune caused by Rāvaṇa. Climb up on my back, O blameless woman! I shall jump across the ocean after placing You on my back, for I can carry all of Laṅkā, along with Rāvaṇa. Today I shall carry You to Rāma on Mount Prasavaṇa, as the sacred fire carries the oblations offered in it to Indra. Today You will see Rāma, who has the same determination to slay demons as does Lord Viṣṇu, along with His brother Lakṣmaṇa. He is very strong and is eager to see You, waiting in His hermitage, as Indra resides on the peak of Mount Meru. Climb on my back, my lady. Do not delay. Desire to be reunited with Rāma, as the star rohiṇī does with the moon. Just by saying so, You will be united with Rāma. Climb on my back and cross the great ocean through the sky. Surely all these inhabitants of Laṅkā will not be able to follow me when I depart from here carrying You on my back. Just see how I shall doubtlessly return, carrying You the same way that I came.”

When Sītā heard Hanumān's wonderful proposal, Her entire body was thrilled and She replied as follows: “O Hanumān, how do you intend to carry Me such a distance? Indeed, I consider your proposal to be quite monkey-like. How do you expect to carry Me from here to where My royal husband is when your body is so small?” Hearing Sītā's remarks, the glorious Hanumān considered it the first time that someone had slighted him. He thought: “The dark-eyed lady does not know my courage or power. Therefore let Sītā see the form that I can assume at will.” Thus Hanumān, the foremost of monkeys and crusher of his enemies, thereupon revealed his form to Sītā. Hanumān then jumped down from the tree and began growing in size in order to convince Sītā. Hanumān looked like Mount Meru or Mount Mandara, and he shone like fire as he stood in front of Sītā. The formidable monkey was like a mountain. His mouth was coppery-red and his teeth and claws were as hard as diamonds. He addressed Sītā as follows: “I have the ability to carry this city of Laṅkā, along with its mountains, forests,

markets, walls, archways and ruler. As such, settle Your mind. Do not hesitate. Rid Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa of sorrow!”

Seeing that Hanumān was as big as a mountain, the broad-eyed Sītā said: “O great monkey, I do know your courage and strength. Your speed is like the wind and your wonderful brilliance is like fire. How could any other ordinary monkey reach this land on the other side of the ocean? I know your power of motion and also your ability to carry Me. Surely you should consider the fastest way to accomplish this task, as if it were for yourself. However, it is not proper for Me to go with you. The force of your speed which is like the wind might render Me unconscious. Besides, even as you speed through the air high above the ocean, I might fall off your back. And falling unconscious into the ocean which abounds with sharks, crocodiles and whales, I might become a fine meal for such aquatic creatures.

“There are also other reasons why I cannot go with you. The rākṣasas will become suspicious when they see you leaving with a woman. Being ordered by the evil Rāvaṇa, frightfully powerful rākṣasas will pursue you when they see you carrying me away. Surrounded by rākṣasa warriors bearing tridents and clubs in their hands and accompanied by Me, a woman, you would fall into danger. There would be many armed rākṣasas in the air, and you are unarmed. How would you be able to confront them and protect Me? While you are fighting with the fierce rākṣasas, I might become frightened and fall off your back. The vicious, huge and mighty rākṣasas might overcome you in combat. Or I could fall off you while you are looking elsewhere. Then the sinful rākṣasas could grab Me up and carrying Me away. Or they might wrench Me from Your hands or kill Me on the spot, for victory and defeat in battle are uncertain. Or I might even die from being intimidated by the rākṣasas. Then your endeavor would prove fruitless. Although even you are capable of killing all the rākṣasas, Rāma’s glory might then be diminished by your deed. Or snatching Me away, the rākṣasas could hide me in a secret place where Rāma and the monkeys would be unable to find Me. Your undertaking on My behalf would then be fruitless.

“There is a good reason for Rāma to come back here with you. The life of the mighty Rāma, as well as that of His brothers and of Sugrīva

depends on Me. Tortured and emaciated by grief because of Me, the two princes will give up Their lives along with all the monkeys and bears. Keeping devotion to My husband as foremost, I do not wish to willingly touch the body of any other man than Rāma. That I was forced to come into contact with Rāvaṇa's body was because I was unprotected, helpless and overpowered, What could I do? If after killing Rāvaṇa and the rākṣasas, Rāma recovers Me and leaves this place, that would be worthy of Him. I have heard about and seen the heroic activities of the great soul Rāma, who is capable of crushing His enemies in combat. Not even the gods, gandharvas, nāgas, and rākṣasas can be a match for Rāma in battle. Who would dare confront the mighty Rāma after seeing Him equal in valor to Lord Indra, holding a bow glowing like blazing fire and accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa? Who can withstand Rāma on the battlefield when he is like a directional elephant in rut or like the sun at the end of the world with rays like arrows. As such, quickly bring My beloved along with Lakṣmaṇa and the monkey generals, O best of monkeys. Gladden Me who have been grief-stricken for a long time on account of Rāma."

SĪTĀ GIVES HANUMĀN A TOKEN

Pleased to hear Sītā's reply, Hanumān, who was a skilled speaker, replied to Her as follows: "O lovely woman, what You have said is quite true and is in accord with your femine nature and characteristic of modest ladies. You would not be able to cross the vast ocean, one hundred yojanas wide, mounted on my back. The second reason which you gave, that You should not touch any other man than Rāma, is befitting of You, the wife of a great soul. What other woman but You would give such an excuse? I shall certainly inform Rāma of everything You have said and done, my lady. I made this proposal to You for many reasons and in order to please Lord Rāma, as well as because of my mind's affection for Him. I made this proposal because of Lankā's difficulty to penetrate, the great distance of the ocean and my ability to cross it. I wanted to reunite You with Rāma right away. I therefore made this proposal out of affection and devotion for Rāma, not for any other reason. If You cannot come with me, O faultless lady, then give me some token by which Rāma may know that I have indeed found You."

After being requested in this way by Hanumān, Sītā, who was just like the daughter of a god, replied faintly, Her voice choked up with tears: "Please do give My beloved the following excellent proof: 'Once, while I was living in a hermitage for ascetics, after enjoying Yourself in the waters of the forest that was fragrant with many different flowers and bountiful with edible fruits, roots and water, not very far from the Mandākinī River, on a prominence to the north-east of Citrakūṭa, You reclined in My lap while still wet. Then a crow desirous of flesh began pecking Me. Picking up a stone, I was able to keep the crow at bay. However, scratching Me slightly, the crow hid himself there and would not leave his prey, desirous as he was of eating. Because of My anger toward the bird, as I pulled the string to adjust My skirt, it slipped. Seeing this, You laughed at Me, for which I felt angry and ashamed. When the hungry crow pecked Me again, I took shelter of You. Exhausted, I lay in Your lap as if I were angry, and was very pleased when

You comforted Me. After wiping the eyes of My tear-stained face, You noted that I had been annoyed by the crow.’

“Due to exhaustion, I slept on Rāma’s lap for a long time, and Rāma also slept in My embrace. Meanwhile, the crow returned. The crow swooped down and scratched My breasts, afterwhich I awoke and rose up out of Rāma’s arms. Flying up into the air, it again dove down and cut Me severely. When the drops of My blood touched Rāma, He woke up. Angered to see My breasts lacerated and hissing like a poisonous snake, He said: ‘Madam, who has injured Your breasts? Who is playing with an angry five-headed snake?’ Looking around, He saw the crow sitting and looking toward Me, its sharp claws stained with blood. They say that crow, the best of birds, was none other than the son of Lord Indra. He had quickly descended to the earth with the speed of the wind. With His eyes rolling due to anger, Rāma, the best of deliberators, made a harsh decision regarding the crow. Taking a blade of kuśa grass from His mat, Rāma invested it with Brahmā’s weapon. The blade of grass burst into flames like the fire of universal devastation at the end of the age. Rāma hurled that blazing blade of kuśa grass at the crow. Thereupon the blade of kuśa grass pursued the crow through the air.

“When pursued in that way, the crow sought shelter in different places while fleeing throughout the whole universe. After traversing the three worlds and being rejected by his own father and all the great sages, he took shelter of Rāma. Falling on the ground, he took shelter of the only one who could give it. Out of compassion, Rāma protected the crow, although he deserved death. As he was falling, Rāma said to him who was exhausted and pale: ‘The brahmāstra cannot be withdrawn. It must have some valid target.’ Then Rāma let the weapon destroy the crow’s right eye. Because the crow gave its right eye, Rāma spared its life. After offering respects to Rāma and to King Daśaratha, it was dismissed by Rāma and returned to its own abode.

“Tell Rāma: ‘You fired a brahmāstra at a mere crow on My account. How do You tolerate the one who has taken Me from You, O ruler of the earth? Profusely bestow Your mercy upon Me, O best of men! She who has You as Her lord seems to have no lord at all. I heard from You that compassion is the highest principle of righteousness. I know that You possess abundant prowess, enthusiasm and strength, and that You are unlimited, inexhaustible, equal to the ocean in profundity, the lord of the

earth with its oceans and equal to Lord Indra. Why, then, do You not use Your weapons against the rākṣasas, when You Yourself are foremost in using them, and are strong and courageous?”

Then She said to Hanumān: “Neither the nāgas, nor the gandharvas, nor the gods, nor the maruts can withstand Rāma’s onrush in combat. If that valiant prince maintains any regard for Me, why does He not rescue Me by slaying the rākṣasas with His sharp arrows? Or why does not the mighty Lakṣmaṇa who easily defeats His enemies take leave of His brother and rescue Me? If those two princes are equal in power to Vāyu and Indra and are undefeatable by all the gods, why do They ignore Me? No doubt, some great sin which I have committed is the reason why those two defeaters of enemies do not rescue Me, even though They are able.”

Hearing the piteous message spoken by the tearful Sītā, Hanumān replied: “I swear to You by truth that Rāma is indifferent to everything due to His sorrow for You. And Lakṣmaṇa is also suffering due to Rāma’s sorrow. Somehow or other I managed to find You. Now is not the time for lamenting. Within one hour You will see the end of Your difficulties, O lovely woman. The two mighty princes are eager to see You and They will reduce the rākṣasas to ashes. After slaying the fierce Rāvaṇa and his relatives, Rāma will take You back to His own city. Please tell me what message I shall convey to Rāma, to Lakṣmaṇa, to Sugrīva, or to the monkeys gathered at Kiṣkindhā.”

In reply, Sītā said: “Inquire on My behalf concerning the welfare of the world’s protector born from the wise Kausalyā, and salute Him with your head bowed down. Inquire on My behalf about the welfare of Rāma’s heroic and powerful brother, Lakṣmaṇa. After pacifying His mother and father, Lakṣmaṇa gave up a dominion in this wide world which is indeed difficult to achieve, as well as flower garlands, all His jewels, beautiful women and unsurpassed happiness. He followed His brother Rāma into exile. Because of Lakṣmaṇa, Sumitrā achieved fame as a good mother. The pious Lakṣmaṇa follows His brother Rāma in the forest while protecting Him. He has shoulders like those of a lion and strong arms. He is intelligent and good-looking. He treats Rāma like His father, and Me like His mother. He was unaware at the time that I was being kidnapped. He serves the elderly.

Lakṣmaṇa is glorious, capable and not talkative. He is most dear to Prince Rāma and is a replica of My father-in-law King Daśaratha. Lakṣmaṇa is always dearer to Rāma than I. He carries the responsibilities assigned to Him. When Rāma sees Him, He forgets about His deceased father. This inquiry should be presented to Lakṣmaṇa, the ever-gentle, pure and expert loved one of Rāma, so that He may destroy the cause of My sadness. You are able to do this, O monkey general. By your action Rāma will commence My rescue.

“Please relay again and again the following message to Rāma: ‘O son of King Daśaratha, I shall not live longer than one month. I swear to You by truth. You should rescue Me from the clutches of the wicked and sinful Rāvaṇa, who is detaining Me, as Lord Viṣṇu rescued the earth from the nether regions.’”

Untying Her beautiful, sparkling diadem from Her garment, She handed it to Hanumān, telling him to give it to Rāma. Taking that excellent piece of jewelry, Hanumān attached it to his finger, since his arm was too thick. Offering respects to the diadem, Hanumān circumambulated Sītā, bowed to Her and stood at Her side. Experiencing great joy from having found Sītā, Hanumān thought of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Mentally pleased to receive that valuable diadem from Sītā which She had kept concealed by Her mystic power, Hanumān felt like one hit by a blast of wind coming from a big mountain. He then prepared to depart.

HANUMĀN PROMISES TO BRING RĀMA

After giving Hanumān Her diadem, Sītā said to him: “Rāma will definitely recognize this token. When Rāma sees it, He will remember three persons: my mother, King Daśaratha and Myself. O best of monkeys, impelled by your enthusiasm, carefully consider how to expedite this affair. You are capable of accomplishing this task. Please think of the undertaking necessary to end My suffering. O Hanumān, remaining diligent, end My suffering.”

Agreeing to do so, Hanumān bowed to Her and prepared to leave. Seeing that he was about to leave, Sītā spoke to him in a voice choked up with tears: “O Hanumān, please communicate My welfare to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Also convey My welfare to Sugrīva and all the senior monkeys. You should do what is necessary so that the strong-armed Rāma delivers Me from this ocean of sorrow. You should inform Rāma about Me in such a way so that He can find Me still living. Earn yourself pious merit through the words you speak to help Me. When Rāma, who is ever-eager to retrieve Me, hears My message, His determination will increase further. When He hears My message from your mouth, Rāma will fix His mind on exhibiting His valor.”

Hanumān placed his joined palms above his head when he heard Sītā’s request and then replied as follows: “Surrounded by the foremost of monkeys and bears, Rāma will defeat His enemies and drive away Your grief by coming here soon. I see no one among mortals, demons or gods who can stand before Him when He is firing arrows. In fact, on Your account He could stand in combat with the sun god, the rain god, or Yama, the lord of death. He is able to subdue the earth bound by oceans, hence his victory in Your regards is certain, O Sītā.”

Hearing Hanumān’s reply, which was reasonable, truthful and well-spoken, Sītā held him in great esteem. Looking at Hanumān continuously as

he was about to leave, She respectfully spoke the following words full of affection for Her husband in order to show Her goodwill to Hanumān: “If you think it wise, rest here for one day. After resting in some hidden place, you can leave tomorrow. By your presence I can be rid of My sorrow for a while, unfortunate as I have been. For, if there is any question about your return, My own survival will also be in question. Of this there is no doubt. Grief born from your absence will further burn Me, plagued as I am with sorrow after sorrow.

“One very great doubt stands before Me regarding your associate monkeys and bears, and that is how those hordes of monkeys and bears or the two princes could actually cross the vast ocean which is so difficult to traverse. There are three beings in this world who can cross over the ocean: Garuḍa, the wind god and yourself. What solution do you see for the accomplishment of this difficult task? Although you are definitely capable of accomplishing this task single-handed, you would then reap the glory and not Rāma. But if Rāma defeats Rāvaṇa in combat with the help of His whole army and returns to Ayodhyā, that would befit Him. If Rāma overruns Laṅkā with His army and rescues Me, that would be worthy of Him. As such, act in such a way that Rāma, who is valiant in battle, may exhibit prowess worthy of Himself.”

Hearing Sītā’s polite and sensible words, Hanumān made the following final reply: “O goddess, the truthful Sugrīva, the lord of the hordes of monkeys and bears, is determined to rescue You. That slayer of rākṣasas will come here very soon, surrounded by millions of monkeys. At Sugrīva’s command stand monkeys who are endowed with prowess, valor and great strength. They can jump any distance they set their minds on. Their advance cannot be impeded either upwards or downwards, to the right or left. They never lose heart in great undertakings and possess immeasurable energy. They have circumambulated the earth with its oceans and mountains more than once by following the path of the wind. In that army are monkeys who are equal to or superior to me. In Sugrīva’s associates no one is inferior to me. Since I was able to come here, how much easier will it be for those who are exceedingly powerful! Indeed, the superiors are never sent on errands, only the inferiors.

“As such, stop lamenting! Be rid of Your sorrow! Those monkey generals can reach Laṅkā by a single leap. Followed by a multitude, those two lion-like men, like the risen sun and moon, will arrive riding on my back. Arriving together, those two best of men will burn the city of Laṅkā with Their arrows. After killing Rāvaṇa and his forces, Rāma will take You and return to His capital city. Be brave and wait Your time. Good luck to You! Before long You will see Rāma blazing like fire. When Rāvaṇa is killed along with his sons, ministers and relatives, You will be reunited with Rāma, as the star rohiṇī is with the moon. Soon You will see the end of Your grief, O princess of Mithilā. You will also see Rāvaṇa killed by Rāma’s strength.

“You will soon see self-realized Rāma, the defeater of enemies, as well as Lakṣmaṇa bearing a bow, arrived at the gates of Laṅkā. Before long You will see a gathering of monkeys with prowess like lions and tigers and appearances like elephants. They will use their teeth and nails as weapons. You will see innumerable companies of stalwart monkeys who resemble mountains or clouds. They will be thundering on the peaks of the Malaya Mountain of Laṅkā. Struck in His vulnerable parts by the arrows of love, Rāma finds no peace, any more than an elephant wounded by a lion. Do not cry, my lady. Do not let Your mind be worried by fear! You will be reunited with Your husband as was Śacī with Lord Indra, O beautiful woman. Who is greater than Rāma and who is equal to Lakṣmaṇa? Those two brothers who are just like the gods of fire and wind are Your shelter. You will not be in this most frightful land inhabited by rākṣasas. Your beloved will not take long to come. Be patient until I can meet Rāma.”

SĪTĀ GIVES LEAVE TO HANUMĀN

Upon hearing Hanumān's assurances, Sītā made the following reply for Her own benefit: "I am pleased to see you speaking kind words, as the earth with its half-ripe crops is by a rain. Be merciful to Me by acting in such a way that I, who am emaciated by sorrow, may embrace with My limbs that tiger among men. Moreover, remind Rāma of the incident when He angrily threw a stalk of kuśa grass and blinded one eye of a crow. You can further remind Him: 'You ought to remember the design which You painted on My cheek with red pigment when the previous one had become effaced. I have protected this sparkling crest jewel well. In My adversity, I would look at it and experience the same joy as when looking at You. I have turned over to You this splendid jewel originating from the ocean. Stricken with grief, I shall not be able to survive beyond one month. For You I have endured unbearable difficulty, heart-piercing words and life among the rākṣasas. I shall live but for one more month. Beyond that, in Your absence, I am not going to survive, O prince. This king of rākṣasas is frightful and his attitude toward Me is also not good. If I hear that You become delayed, I might not survive for more than a moment.'"

When Hanumān heard Sītā's pitiable entreaty with a tear-choked voice, he replied as follows: "I swear to you by truth that Rāma has become indifferent to everything because of Your suffering. And Lakṣmaṇa is also suffering due to Rāma's sorrow. Somehow or other I have found You. Now is not the time for grieving. O beautiful woman, from this time on You shall see the end of Your sorrow. Those two irreproachable princes who are eager to find You will reduce Laṅkā to ashes. O broad-eyed lady, after killing Rāvaṇa and his relatives in combat, the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty will take You back to Their capital. You should give me another token which Rāma can recognize and which would bring Him delight, O blameless lady."

Sītā replied: “I have already given you an excellent token, O monkey. Just by seeing that fine jewel, He will believe what you say.” Having taken that excellent diadem and offering respects to that godly lady with his head bowed, the glorious Hanumān prepared to leave. Seeing that he was expanding himself in order to leap, she said the following with a choked up voice and a face bathed in tears: “O Hanumān, tell the two brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, as well as Sugrīva and his ministers about My welfare. Do whatever is necessary so that the mighty-armed Rāma delivers Me from this ocean of sorrow. When you reach Rāma, tell Him about the intensity of My suffering and about the threats from these rākṣasas. May your journey be pleasant.”

Since he had succeeded in finding the princess and had been instructed by Her, he thought that only a portion remained to be done and his mind directing itself toward the north.

HANUMĀN DESTROYS THE AŚOKA GARDEN

Leaving that spot when he had been granted leave by Sītā and preparing to depart, Hanumān thought to himself: “I have found the dark-eyed Sītā. Very little remains for me to do. Excluding the first three means of managing enemies—negotiation, gifts and sowing dissension—it seems that the fourth or punishment is appropriate in this case. Negotiating with rākṣasas is useless, and so also gifts to those with wealth. Persons who are proud of their power cannot be subdued by sowing dissension. Therefore I like the idea of resorting to prowess. Except for prowess, there is no other sure means of accomplishing this task, for rākṣasas can only be humbled if their leaders are now somehow or other killed in battle. One can successfully accomplish his purpose when after achieving his main objective, he can go on to perform other acts without compromising his previous success. Surely there is not just one way to accomplish a task in this world, no matter how insignificant it might be. One who knows many ways of accomplishing a task is truly capable of doing it. If I return to Kiṣkindhā after having ascertained whether we or the enemy will be victorious and the course of action to follow, I will have fulfilled the order of my master. How can my journey here be made worthwhile? How could I suddenly get into a fracas with the rākṣasas? Similarly, how could it be arranged for Rāvaṇa to rally his own mighty troops in combat with me? After meeting Rāvaṇa, and his ministers, troops and charioteers, and having easily understood his mentality and strength, I can return.

“The exquisite garden grove of Rāvaṇa is just like the Nandana garden of Lord Indra. It pleases the eyes and mind and is full of all kinds of trees and vines. I shall destroy it as fire consumes a dry forest. When this grove has been destroyed, Rāvaṇa will become infuriated. He will then bring out a big army armed with tridents and iron spears riding on horses, huge chariots and elephants. Then a big fight will ensue. After coming into

conflict with those formidable rākṣasas and destroying Rāvaṇa's army, I shall happily return to Kiṣkindhā.”

Furious like the wind, Hanumān proceeded to knock over all the trees with the tremendous strength of his thighs. The valiant Hanumān completely destroyed the pleasure garden of the palace. With its trees uprooted and its ponds muddled and its hillocks pulverized, the grove looked very unsightly. With shrieking birds, destroyed ponds, reddish shoots of plants withered and its many trees and vines withered, the grove no longer looked very nice, as if it had been destroyed by a fire. With its canopies of vines rent, it looked like a women with their clothes disheveled. With its vines and trees destroyed, its picturesque buildings demolished, its beasts, deer and birds crying out in distress, its stone structures and other edifices smashed, the extensive forest was reduced to ruins. By Hanumān's violence, the forest garden which was for Rāvaṇa's women, was reduced to a mass of tangled vegetation which was saddening to behold. Having done something completely displeasing to the lord of Laṅkā and eager to fight single-handedly with many powerful warriors, Hanumān stood blazing with glory at the entrance.

RĀVAṆA INFORMED OF HANUMĀN'S INTRUSION

All the residents of Laṅkā were alarmed by the shrieks of birds and the sound of trees falling. Frightened and chased away, all the birds and beasts began crying out. Moreover, the rākṣasas saw ominous signs. Their sleep having vanished, the hideous rākṣasīs saw the aśoka grove destroyed and the huge courageous monkey Hanumān standing there. As soon as Hanumān saw the rākṣasīs approaching, he assumed a huge form to frighten the rākṣasīs. Seeing a gigantic monkey resembling a mountain and possessing extraordinary strength, the rākṣasīs questioned Sītā as follows: “Please tell us, O broad-eyed lady, who this creature is, who sent him, from where and for what he has come and what he talked with You about. Do not be afraid! What did he discuss with You, O lady whose eyes are dark around the edges.”

Sītā, whose every limb was charming, replied as follows: “How can I understand the rākṣasas who change their form at will? You are the ones who should know who he is and what he is doing. Undoubtedly only a serpent understands the movements of another serpent. I am also very frightened and do not know who he really is. I think He must be a rākṣasa capable of changing his form who has come.”

Upon hearing Sītā's reply, some of the rākṣasīs quickly ran away. Some remained standing there, while others went to inform Rāvaṇa of the matter. When they reached Rāvaṇa, the ugly rākṣasīs informed him about the presence of a monstrous and frightening monkey: “O king, a monkey with a formidable body and immeasurable strength is present in the aśoka garden and has been talking with Sītā. Although we questioned Her, She does not wish to disclose the identity of the monkey. He might be an envoy from Indra or of Kuvera, or he might even have been sent by Rāma in order to find Sītā. That monkey with an amazing form has completely destroyed

your captivating pleasure garden which was crowded with herds of all kinds of animals. There is not one part of that garden which he has not completely destroyed. Only the spot where Sītā lives has not been destroyed. It is not clear whether he spared that spot in order to avoid harming Sītā or because he was exhausted. But since he does not know what exhaustion is, he has most certainly spared Sītā. He has also spared the śimśapā tree in whose shade Sītā always rests. You should mete out some severe punish to that frightful monkey who has spoken to Sītā. He is the one who has destroyed the aśoka grove. Who would dare talk to Sītā, whom you have already accepted in your mind as your consort, except someone who wishes to give up his life, O lord of the rākṣasas?”

When Rāvaṇa heard the report given by the rākṣasīs, he became enflamed like a funeral fire, his eyes quickly rolling around in anger. Tears streamed down from his eyes, like burning drops of oil from lit lamps. Rāvaṇa ordered valiant rākṣasas called kiṅkaras, who were almost equal to Rāvaṇa, to capture Hanumān. Of them, eighty thousand left the palace carrying iron mallets and clubs in their hands. They all had big bellies, long fangs and frightful forms. They were extremely strong, inclined to fight and eager to catch Hanumān. Approaching the monkey who was sitting on top of the archway, they madly rushed toward him, ready to fight, like moths dashing toward a fire. They attacked Hanumān with different kinds of maces, iron clubs plated with gold and arrows shining like the sun. Surrounding Hanumān from all sides, the kiṅkaras, who were carrying clubs, razor-sharp spears, iron tridents, lances and javelins, suddenly came before him.

Thrashing his tail on the ground, the glorious Hanumān, who was energetic and the size of a mountain, roared loudly. Having assumed a gigantic form, Hanumān snapped his tail, filling Laṅkā with the sound. When his tail made a loud and resonating sound, birds fell from the sky and he loudly declared: “All glories to Lord Rāma, who possesses immeasurable strength, and to Lakṣmaṇa, who is extremely strong. All glories to King Sugrīva, who is completely protected by Lord Rāma. I am Hanumān, son of the wind god and the destroyer of enemy armies. I am a servant of Lord Rāma, who is never tired by actions and who is the lord of Kosala. Not even one thousand Rāvaṇas can withstand the force of my attack in combat, for I

would pummel them with a mass of boulders and trees. After destroying the city of Lañkā and saying goodbye to Sītā, I shall return fully accomplished, as the rākṣasas stand watching.”

The kiñkaras were terrified by Hanumān’s roar and saw him standing tall like an evening cloud. The kiñkaras were no longer doubtful about who Hanumān was because of his mentioning his master Rāma. They therefore attacked him from all around with sinister weapons. Surrounded by those courageous rākṣasas, Hanumān grabbed a huge iron bar that was lying near the archway. Holding that iron bar, he beat the rākṣasas, as Garuḍa would a struggling serpent. Holding the bar tightly, the valiant Hanumān flew through the air destroying the rākṣasas, as Indra killed the daityas with his thunderbolt. After killing the kiñkaras, Hanumān stood defiantly at the gateway, desirous of combat. A few rākṣasas who had survived went and told Rāvaṇa about how all the kiñkaras had been slaughtered. When Rāvaṇa heard that the large rākṣasa army had been wiped out, his eyes roled quickly due to anger. He then gave a command to Jambumālī, the son of Prahasta, who was unequaled in prowess and difficult to defeat in battle.

HANUMĀN DESTROYS THE RĀKṢASA SHRINE

Having killed the kiṅkaras, Hanumān thought to himself: “I have destroyed the aśoka grove, but the shrine of the guardian deity of the rākṣasas has not been destroyed.” Hanumān therefore decided to exhibit his strength by destroying the structure at that time. Jumping onto the shrine which was as high as a peak of Mount Meru, Hanumān climbed up it. As he did so, he shone just like a second risen sun. Blazing with glory after scaling the building, Hanumān shone like the Pāriyātra Mountain. Assuming a gigantic form, Hanumān proceeded to demolish the shrine, filling Laṅkā with the tumultuous sound. The deafening crash caused the birds and temple guards to fall over unconscious.

Hanumān said: “All glories to Lord Rāma, who is skilled in the use of weapons, as well as the exceptionally mighty Lakṣmaṇa. All glories to King Sugrīva, who is completely protected by Lord Rāma. I am Hanumān, son of the wind god and the destroyer of enemy armies. I am a servant of Lord Rāma, who is never tired by actions and who is the lord of Kosala. Not even one thousand Rāvaṇas can withstand the force of my attack in combat, for I would pummel them with a mass of boulders and trees. After destroying the city of Laṅkā and saying goodbye to Sītā, I shall return fully accomplished, as the rākṣasas watch.”

Saying this while standing on top of the shrine, the gigantic Hanumān emitted a terrifying roar which frightened the rākṣasas. Attracted by the great tumult, one hundred huge guards posted at the shrine came out carrying all kinds of weapons, such as spears, swords and axes. Discharging their weapons, they surrounded Hanumān. Armed with unusual maces, iron clubs with gold bands and arrows shining as brightly as the sun, the rākṣasas approached Hanumān. Surrounding Hanumān, that multitude of rākṣasas looked like a big, wide whirlpool in the Ganges River.

Furious as he was, Hanumān then assumed a terrifying form. Hanumān forcefully pulled up a gold-plated pillar with one hundred edges from that shrine. He began spinning it around, enkindling a fire that engulfed the whole building. Having slain one hundred rākṣasas with the pillar, as Indra killed demons with his thunderbolt, and seeing that the shrine was on fire, Hanumān declared as he stood in the air: “Thousands of big and powerful monkeys like me have been sent by the command of King Sugrīva. We and other monkeys have been wandering over the entire earth. Some of the monkeys are as strong as ten elephants. Some are as strong as one hundred elephants, while others are as strong as one thousand elephants. Some of the monkey generals are as strong as a flood, others are as strong as the wind, while others have immeasurable strength. Surrounded by hundreds, hundreds of thousands, and even millions of monkeys, Sugrīva, who is capable of annihilating you all, will come here. Neither this city of Lankā, nor you, nor Rāvaṇa will survive, for he has stricken up enmity with the great hero of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty.”

HANUMĀN KILLS JAMBUMĀLĪ

Ordered by Rāvaṇa, Jambumālī, the mighty son of Prahasta, sallied forth. He had big fangs, carried a bow, and was difficult to defeat in battle. He was wearing red clothes, a garland of red flowers and beautiful earrings. With great force he was drawing his bow, which resembled a rainbow and which was supplied with shining arrows. It produced a sound like thunder or lightning. All directions and the sky were suddenly filled with the twang of that bow. Seeing that Jambumālī had arrived in a chariot drawn by donkeys, the energetic Hanumān rejoiced and roared. The mighty Jambumālī pierced Hanumān, who was standing on top of the archway, with sharp arrows. He also hit Hanumān in the mouth with an arrow having a crescent-shaped head. When Hanumān was pierced by the arrow, his face looked like a beautiful lotus flower lit by a beam of sunshine during autumn. His blood-stained face looked like a red lotus flower sprinkled with red sandalwood paste.

Wounded by the rākṣasa's arrows, Hanumān became furious. He then spotted next to him an enormous boulder. Hurriedly picking it up, he threw it violently. The irate rākṣasa broke it into pieces with ten arrows. Seeing what the rākṣasa did, Hanumān pulled up a big sāla tree and began whirling it. When Jambumālī saw how the exceptionally powerful monkey was spinning the sāla tree, he fired numerous arrows at him. Jambumālī splintered the sāla tree with four arrows. He then hit Hanumān in the arms with five arrows, in the breast with one arrow, and in the middle of the chest with ten arrows. Grabbing the iron club which he had used earlier, Hanumān, who was smitten all over with arrows and extremely enraged, spun it around with great force. Whirling it very fast, Hanumān smashed it against Jambumālī's broad chest. Because of the force of impact, one could not see Jambumālī's head, arms, knees, bow nor chariot drawn by donkeys. Due to the intense impact, the great chariot warrior Jambumālī dropped dead on the ground like a tree with its branches smashed.

Rāvaṇa became enraged to hear how Jambumālī and the mighty kiṅkaras were so easily killed by a monkey. Rāvaṇa's eyes became red due to anger. After Jambumālī had been killed in battle, the lord of the rākṣasas immediately ordered the sons of his chief minister, who were exceedingly strong and valiant.

HANUMĀN KILLS THE CHIEF MINISTER'S SONS

Under Rāvaṇa's command, the seven sons of his chief minister sallied forth from the palace in big, horse-drawn chariots rumbling like rain clouds. The sons were shining like seven flames. They were followed by a large army. They were armed with bows and were extremely strong. They were most learned in the use of different kinds of weapons. They were eager to excel each other in valor. They were wearing protective armor of gold and were surrounded by flags and banners. They blithely twanged their bows inlaid with smelted gold and which therefore resembled clouds accompanied by flashing lighting. Learning about the slaughter of the kiṅkaras, their relatives and friends became bewildered with grief. Competing with each other, the sons of the chief minister, who were decked in brilliant gold ornaments, rushed at Hanumān, who stood waiting at the archway. The cloud of rākṣasas roved about discharging a shower of arrows, their chariots rumbling like a cloud during the rainy season. Covered by that shower of arrows, Hanumān could not be seen, like a colossal mountain covered by showers of rain.

Wandering about in the cloudless sky, the swift-footed monkey evaded the rākṣasa warriors' arrows and the onrush of their chariots. Gamboling in the sky with those warriors bearing bows, the heroic Hanumān shone like the wind god playing in the sky with clouds and rainbows. Roaring loudly and terrorizing the great army, the courageous Hanumān rushed toward the rākṣasas. Hanumān struck some of the rākṣasas with the palms of his hands, some with his feet, some with his fists, and still others he slashed with his claws. He crushed some against his chest, others against his thighs, while others fell dead on the ground because of his roaring. When the sons of the chief minister were dead and fallen on the ground, the army fled in all directions in fear. Elephants trumpeted noisily, horses fell on the ground and the earth was strewn with chariots having their seats, flags and canopies smashed. Streams of blood were seen flowing across

the throughfare. Indeed, the city of Lankā seemed to howl because of the wailing of its citizens. Having killed those haughty rākṣasas, Hanumān once again took up a position at the archway, eager to fight more rākṣasas.

HANUMĀN BATTLES MORE RĀKṢASAS AT THE AṢOKA GARDEN

Learning that the sons of his chief minister had been killed by the gigantic monkey, Rāvaṇa, who concealed his own feelings, came up with the following plan. Rāvaṇa commanded his five main generals, Virūpākṣa, Yūpākṣa, Durdhara, Pragmaṣa and Bhāsaakarna, who were courageous, expert at logistics, unbewildered and as swift as the wind in combat: “O generals, take a large army of elephants, horses and chariots with you and punish that monkey. When you approach the monkey, be careful to remain alert. You should act in accordance with time and place. Taking into account his actions, I do not believe him to be a monkey. He must surely be some great being endowed with tremendous strength. My mind is not satisfied believing that he is a monkey. I therefore do not believe him to be a monkey, as the news about him indicates.”

“He might be some creature created by Indra by means of his austerity to confront us. Despatched by me, you have completely defeated gods, demons, great sages, nāgas, yakṣas, and gandharvas. They therefore have to attempt something harmful to us. It is such a creature. There is no doubt about it. He should be captured! All of you generals go with a large army with horses, chariots and elephants. That monkey should be chastised! Do not underestimate that monkey of sober prowess. In the past I have seen monkeys of tremendous prowess, such as Vālī, Sugrīva, Jāmbavān, Nīla, and Dvidida. They could not jump like him, nor did they have the same fierceness, vigor, prowess, intelligence, strength, enthusiasm or ability to assume different forms. You should understand that he is some mighty creature present in the form of a monkey. Exert yourselves sufficiently to capture him. In fact, the three worlds with Indra, the gods, the demons and humans are unable to stand before you on the battlefield. Nevertheless, one who is shrewd and desirous of victory endeavors to protect himself, for combat is always fickle.”

Accepting the order of their master, all the mighty generals armed with all kinds of sharp weapons departed in chariots and on elephants in rut and swift horses, with troops following them from behind. They then saw Hanumān shining like the rising sun. He had a gigantic body, encircled by the rays of his own glory. He had tremendous impetuosity, courage, strength, intelligence, enthusiasm, physique and arms. As soon as they saw him standing at the archway, they attacked him with formidable weapons from all directions. Durdhara stuck him in the head with five polished steel arrows, which shone like the petals of a lotus flower.

When pierced in the head by those five arrows, Hanumān jumped roaring into the air, making all directions reverberate. Then the valiant Durdhara came in his chariot. Drawing his bow, he covered Hanumān with many hundreds of arrows. Hanumān repelled that shower of arrows in the sky, even as the wind restrains a cloud at the end of the rainy season. Harassed in this way by Durdhara, Hanumān roared again and increased his size. Suddenly leaping high into the air, Hanumān pounced on top of Durdhara's chariot, like a bolt of lightning falling on a mountain.

The result was that the chariot's axle and mounting pole were broken and the horses mangled. He fell out of his chariot on to the ground and gave up his life. Enraged by seeing Durdhara fallen on the ground, Virūpākṣa and Yūpākṣa, who were difficult to overcome, jumped up. As they jumped up, they struck Hanumān in the chest with clubs while he was standing in the open air. Obstructing the two generals' vehement assault, Hanumān again swooped down to the ground, like Garuḍa. Approaching a sāla tree, he pulled it up out of the ground and crushed to death the two rākṣasa warriors. Seeing how the agile Hanumān had killed the other three generals and was laughing heartily, Praghosa hastily came along with the powerful and furious Bhāsaṛṇa, who was carrying a spear in his hand. One of them stood on each side of the glorious monkey.

Praghosa pierced Hanumān with a sharp pike and the rākṣasa Bhāsaṛṇa pierced him with a spear. With his limbs lacerated and his fur smeared with blood, Hanumān, who was shining like the newly risen sun, became furious. Breaking off the peak of a mountain with its animals, snakes and trees, he killed the two rākṣasa warriors. After killing those five generals,

Hanumān then began killing the army that remained. As Lord Indra slays demons, Hanumān destroyed the horses with horses, the elephants with elephants, the warriors with warriors and the chariots with chariots. The area had its pathways blocked by the dead elephants, horses and rākṣasas, as well as chariots with broken axels. Having annihilated those valiant generals in combat, along with their soldiers and vehicles, Hanumān stood waiting at the archway for a long time, like time waiting for the death of someone.

HANUMĀN KILLS RĀVAṆA'S SON, AKṢA

Upon learning that his five generals and all their followers and chariots had been destroyed by Hanumān, King Rāvaṇa gazed intently at his son Akṣa, who was violent in combat and who was standing face to face before him. Prompted by his father's stare, the gallant prince, carrying an amazing bow guilded with gold, jumped up in the midst of the assembly, like a flame leaping up, like the flames of a sacrificial fire fed oblations of clarified butter by the twice-born brāhmaṇas. Mounting a chariot as effulgent as the morning sun and covered with protective shields of refined gold, that foremost of rākṣasas sallied forth against Hanumān. The chariot had been acquired as the result of a large mass of austerities. It was adorned with flags and was inlaid with jewels. It was drawn by swift horses. It was unassailable by the gods or demons. It could fly through the sky without any support. It was as brilliant as a lightning bolt. It was supplied with quivers and had eight swords attached to it. Spears and javelins were fixed on it at regular intervals. All its equipment was bound together with a golden cord like the effulgence of the sun and moon. Mounting that chariot as brilliant as the sun, Akṣa, who was equal to an immortal demigod in prowess, sallied forth.

Filling the sky and earth with its mountains with the sound of horses, elephants and large chariots, Akṣa along with the gathered forces approached the monkey standing at the archway. Upon reaching that monkey, who was waiting there like the fire of universal destruction that consumes all living beings and looking at them with amazement, the lion-eyed Akṣa gazed at him with great regard. Pondering Hanumān's speed and prowess toward enemy soldiers, as well as his own strength, Rāvaṇa's mighty son waxed in pride, like the sun at the end of the world. Angered at the sight of Hanumān's valor, Akṣa took a firm stand and with concentration provoked Hanumān to combat with three sharp arrows. Seeing that monkey who had conquered fatigue, who had grown proud due to conquering his enemies and who was mentally exhilarated, Akṣa grabbed his bow and,

holding an arrow in his hand, stared at Hanumān. Wearing a gold breastplate, armbands and charming earrings, Akṣa, who was quick to act, met Hanumān face to face in an encounter which bewildered even the gods and demons.

Seeing that conflict between the monkey and the prince, the earth rumbled, the sun ceased scorching, the wind stopped blowing, Trikūṭa Mountain shook, the sky thundered and the ocean tossed. The warrior, who knew how to fix an arrow, aim and shoot, struck the monkey's head with three well-sharpened golden-feathered arrows that were like venomous snakes. His body was bathed with blood gushing from the wounds caused by the arrows which struck him at the same time. Hanumān shone like the newly risen sun, the arrows looking like his encircling rays, and his eyes rolled due to anger. Looking at Rāvaṇa's son on the battlefield aiming wonderful weapons and bow upward, Hanumān felt delighted and grew in size, eager as he was for battle. Resembling the sun on Mount Mandara and being infuriated, Hanumān began to burn Akṣa along with his soldiers and vehicles with the rays of fire emanating from his eyes. The rākṣasa Akṣa, who resembled a cloud, used his rainbow-like bow to unleash a shower of arrows on the battlefield. He rapidly fired arrows at the mountain-like Hanumān, as a cloud pours rain on a high mountain.

Seeing on the battlefield Prince Akṣa, whose prowess was formidable in combat, and whose energy, strength, prowess and weapons had increased, the monkey roared out of delight, like a thundering cloud. Childishly proud of his valor on the battlefield, Akṣa, who was further enraged and whose eyes were bloodshot, directly approached Hanumān, like an elephant approaching a large well covered by grass. Struck with arrows violently fired by Akṣa, Hanumān roared like a thundering cloud. Suddenly he sprang into the sky, exhibiting a ghastly form with his arms and legs stretched out. Expertly driving his chariot, that mighty and most valiant of rākṣasas chased after Hanumān as he leapt into the air, shooting arrows as a cloud pelts a mountain with hailstones. Hanumān, who was as fast as thought, escaped the arrows by dashing between them, coursing the path of the wind. After Akṣa had grabbed a bow and was filling the sky with fine arrows in eagerness for battle, Hanumān watched him with a mindful eye

and became thoughtful. Angered when hit in the chest with arrows shot by Akṣa, Hanumān roared and pondered Akṣa's prowess on the battlefield.

Hanumān thought: "Possessing extraordinary strength and brilliance like the morning sun, this youth is performing deeds unlike a youth. I do not even feel inclined to kill this youth who has distinguished himself in warfare. This prince is a great soul and exceedingly valorous. He is conscientious and forbearing in combat. He is no doubt honored by sages, nāgas and yakṣas because of the greatness of his deeds and qualities. Standing in the fore as the leader, convinced of his valor and vigor, he looks me in the eye. Surely this prince's valor would shake the mind of even the gods and demons, swift-acting as he is. I should not underestimate him, for his prowess increases in combat. Therefore I think it best to kill him now. A spreading fire should not be neglected."

Taking into account the great speed of his enemy and considering the course of action, Hanumān decided to kill Akṣa right away, and therefore he increased his speed. Following the path of the wind, Hanumān killed Akṣa's eight trained horses, who were able to bear heavy weight, by striking them with the palm of his hand. Overpowered when struck by the palm of Hanumān's hand, Akṣa's chariot fell out of the sky to the earth, its interior smashed, its pole broken off and its horses dead. Abandoning that chariot and leaping into the air with his bow and sword, that great fighter looked like a great sage abandoning his body through the practice of yoga and ascending to heaven.

Hanumān flew through the sky, which is frequented by Garuḍa, Vāyu and siddhas, met the prince and caught hold of his feet, one by one. Holding him tightly as Garuḍa does snakes, Hanumān spun him around thousands of times and threw him down onto the battleground with great force. Killed by Hanumān, the rākṣasa lay fallen on the ground, bleeding. He had broken arms, thighs, waist, chest and other bones, dislocated joints and torn tendons. Hanumān's dashing Akṣa against the ground terrified Rāvaṇa. After killing the prince, great sages who course the heavens, as well as ghosts, yakṣas, nāgas and the gods headed by Lord Indra gathered there and gazed at the monkey in astonishment. Having killed Prince Akṣa, who was

just like Lord Indra's son Jayanta, the heroic Hanumān returned to the archway and waited, like time awaiting the death of someone.

RĀVAṆA'S SON, INDRAJIT, SUBDUES HANUMĀN

Although enraged by Hanumān's slaughter of Akṣa, Rāvaṇa controlled his mind and ordered his son Indrajit, who was just like a god, as follows: "You are the foremost of those learned in the use of weapons. You cause grief to even the demigods and demons. We have witnessed your exploits against the demigods headed by Indra. And you have obtained special weapons by propitiating Lord Brahmā. Coming into contact with the force of your weapons, no one can stand on the battlefield, not even the demigods and maruts who are dependent on Lord Indra. No one in the three worlds is free from fatigue in combat. You are protected by the strength of your arms as well as by your own austerities. You are careful to act according to time and place, and you are truly the most intelligent. There is nothing which you cannot achieve by your exploits in combat, nor is there anything which you cannot accomplish after full deliberation. Nor is there anyone in the three worlds who does not know the force of your weapons or your physical strength. The power of your austerities, your prowess and the force of your weapons in combat is equal to mine. Seeing you in the thick of battle, my mind does not despair, but is assured of victory.

"All the kīṅkaras have been butchered, as well as Jambumālī. Even the seven heroic sons of my chief minister and five of my generals have been killed. The armed soldiers with their horses, elephants and chariots have been destroyed. Your dear brother Prince Akṣa has also been slain. My essence did not rest in them, but it does in you, O crusher of enemies. Seeing how that monkey destroyed this great army, and considering his strength and prowess, show your own valor according to your strength. Fully considering your strength and his, act in such a way so that as soon as you reach him, you can stop any further destruction of our military forces. Do not lead an army against him, as they would flee and not protect you. It is also useless to grab any sharp and hard thunderbolt. There is no measuring the exploits of Hanumān, son of the wind god. Just like fire, he cannot be

killed with any weapon. You should recognize that what I say is true. With a composed mind realize that you can achieve success by your own actions. Remember the potency of this divine bow and sally forth to execute your duty. It is not, in fact, a good idea for me to send you, but it is the duty of a king and approved by warriors. One should be proficient in the different branches of learning, as well as in the science of war, O conqueror of enemies. And one should desire victory in battle.”

Hearing his father’s request, Indrajit made up his mind to quickly attack and circumambulated his father clockwise. Honored by some of his dear followers, Indrajit, who was vicious in combat and eager to fight, headed off for battle. Rāvaṇa’s glorious son with eyes as broad as the petal of a lotus flower rushed off in a hurry, like the swelling ocean on a full moon day. Indrajit, whose energy was unbearable, mounted his chariot drawn by four sharp-toothed tigers and which was equal in swiftness to Garuḍa, the king of birds. That chariot warrior, the best of bowmen and greatest of those skilled in the use of weapons, drove his chariot to where Hanumān was. The valiant monkey Hanumān felt enlivened to hear the rumbling of the chariot and the twang of Indrajit’s bow. Taking his bow and sharp-pointed arrows, Indrajit proceeded toward Hanumān.

As Indrajit left for combat, with arrows in hand and enlivened for fighting, the directions became hazy and horrible beasts howled boisterously. Covering the sky, nāgas, yakṣas, great sages, and siddhas gathered there, and flocks of birds shrieked out of extreme pleasure. When the impetuous Hanumān saw the chariot bearing Indra’s flag speeding toward him, he roared loudly and grew in size. Seated on his celestial chariot, Indrajit drew the string of his wonderful bow, which produced a sound like a clap of thunder. Then the two warriors, who were fierce, most powerful, intrepid in combat and confirmed enemies like Indra and Bali Mahārāja, met. That valiant warrior Hanumān, who had immeasurable strength, moved about on the path of the wind, avoiding the impact of Indrajit’s arrows. Indrajit then began continuously shooting long and sharp-pointed arrows that were as swift as lightning. They had golden shafts and nice feathers.

Hearing the rumbling of Indrajit’s chariot, as well as the beating of clay drums and kettledrums and the twang of the bow, Hanumān again lept

into the air. Dashing in between the arrows, Hanumān baffled Indrajit's marksmanship, although he was famous for hitting the mark. Facing the arrows once more, Hanumān stretched his arms up and jumped. Both warriors, who were swift and skilled in the activities of warfare, captivated everyone's minds by engaging in a noteworthy battle. The rākṣasa was unable to hit Hanumān, and Hanumān was unable to grab the rākṣasa. Drawing close, the two, being equal to gods in prowess, found each other unbearable. Although the arrows were aimed at and hitting him, Hanumān was unharmed. Seeing this, Indrajit, who was concentrating on hitting his target, became very anxious. Realizing that the monkey could not be killed, the Prince Indrajit began thinking about how to catch him.

Then Indrajit, the best of those conversant with the use of weapons, fixed on his bow an arrow charged with the weapon of Lord Brahmā. Seeing that Hanumān could not be killed, Indrajit struck the strong-armed Hanumān with that weapon. The monkey Hanumān was thereafter bound by the rākṣasa's weapon and fell unconscious on the ground. Realizing that he had been paralyzed by Brahmā's weapon but was experiencing little pain, that valiant monkey considered it to be due to Lord Brahmā's mercy upon him. Understanding that this weapon had been activated with hymns to Lord Brahmā, Hanumān remembered a boon he had received from Lord Brahmā. Hanumān said to himself: "I am incapable of freeing myself from the effect of this weapon presided over by Lord Brahmā. Therefore I have to endure the bondage of this weapon of Brahmā."

Considering the potency of the weapon, Lord Brahmā's kindness to him and his own ability to free himself from it after some time, Hanumān submitted to the command of Brahmā. Hanumān thought: "Although bound by this weapon, I am unafraid, for I am protected by Lord Brahmā, Lord Indra and by the wind god. I see a great benefit from being captured by the rākṣasas—the chance to talk with Rāvaṇa. Therefore let the enemy capture me."

Hanumān, who had decided his course of action, lay motionless. Being threatened all around by rākṣasas who had arrived and forcibly restrained him, he moaned. Seeing their enemy motionless, the rākṣasas bound him with plaited ropes of hemp and tree bark. He allowed himself to

be forcefully bound and abused by the enemy warriors, thinking that Rāvaṇa might be curious enough to want to see him. When Hanumān was bound with the rope, he was released from the bondage of the weapon, for the weapon is nullified by any other type of bondage.

Noticing that the monkey bound with rope was freed from the effect of the weapon, Indrajit became anxious. He said: “Oh! My great deed has been foiled by these rākṣasas who are unfamiliar with the deployment of such weapons! Once the weapon has been inhibited, it cannot be utilized again. Thus we are all in a precarious situation.” Although Hanumān was free from the effect of the weapon, he pretended as if he was unaware of this as the rākṣasas dragged him by the tight ropes which bound him. The cruel rākṣasas beat Hanumān with their hard fists as they dragged him into the presence of Rāvaṇa. Seeing that Hanumān was free from the power of the weapon and bound only by ropes of tree bark and twine, Indrajit presented him before the king and his courtiers. The rākṣasas presented to Rāvaṇa that best of monkeys, Hanumān, who was like a bound mad elephant. When the rākṣasa warriors saw him, they began questioning: “Who is he? Whose servant is he? Where has he come from? What is his mission? Who is his master?” Meanwhile, other rākṣasas said to each other: “Kill him! Burn him! Eat him up!”

Having come that far, Hanumān suddenly saw the elderly royal attendants seated at the feet of Rāvaṇa, as well as his great chamber inlaid with precious gems. The splendorous Rāvaṇa saw Hanumān being dragged here and there by the hideous rākṣasas. Hanumān also saw Rāvaṇa, who possessed energy and power, shining like the sun. As Rāvaṇa stared at Hanumān, his coppery-red eyes rolled due to anger. Then he commanded his elderly ministers of good lineage who were present there to interrogate the monkey. When questioned by them successively about his actions and his reason for coming, he replied: “I am a messenger of Sugriva, king of the monkeys.”

HANUMĀN AMAZED BY RĀVAṆA'S SPLENDOR

Amazed by Rāvaṇa's deeds, Hanumān's eyes became as red as copper due to anger as he gazed at that lord of rākṣasas. Rāvaṇa was shimmering with costly golden ornaments. He wore a dazzling crown covered with a network of pearls. He also wore fascinating gold jewelry studded with diamonds and other precious gems which appeared as if they were a creation of the mind. He was dressed in expensive fabrics and his body was smeared with red sandalwood paste with many different instruments. His appearance was striking with his reddish eyes, fearsome gaze, sharp teeth and protruding lips. To Hanumān that ten-headed demon shining with splendor resembled Mount Mandara with its peaks infested with many snakes. He looked like a mound of blue cosmetic, and a strand of pearls sparkled on his chest. With his face as bright as a full moon, he resembled a rain cloud lit up by the rising sun. His arms were girded by gold bands, smeared with the finest sandalwood paste and adorned with gleaming gold armlets. His arms looked like formidable five-headed snakes. He was seated upon a large throne of stunning crystal, which was further enhanced with jewels and spread with exquisite coverlets. He was being attended on all sides by beautiful women dressed opulently who fanned him with yak-tail whisks. He was proud of his four rākṣasa ministers—Durdhara, Prahasta, Mahāpārśva and Nikumbha—who were skilled in giving counsel and were seated near him. They surrounded him like the four oceans surrounding the earth. Ministers wise in statecraft and others who wished him good were reassuring him, as the gods do to Lord Indra. Hanumān saw Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, who looked very effulgent and resembled a rain cloud perched on Mount Meru.

Hanumān felt extremely amazed to see Rāvaṇa, even though he was being mistreated by the wicked rākṣasas. Upon seeing Rāvaṇa's splendor, Hanumān was dazzled and thought to himself: "Oh, what beauty! What fortitude! What courage! What splendor! What an assemblage of all

auspicious marks on the body of this rākṣasa king! If this mighty ruler of rākṣasas were not irreligious, he could even be a protector of the heavenly realm of Lord Indra. Because of his cruel and merciless deeds censured by the world, everyone, even the gods and demons, fears him. When angered he could turn the earth into an ocean.”

Seeing Rāvaṇa’s glory and immeasurable power, Hanumān contemplated many such thoughts.

HANUMĀN IDENTIFIES HIMSELF TO RĀVAṆA

Rāvaṇa, whose sight caused people to scream, was fully enraged to see the monkey present before him. While staring at that splendid monkey, Rāvaṇa became overwhelmed with anxiety and thought: “Is this Nandi, the holy bull of Lord Śiva, who has personally come here, and who had cursed me when I had previously ridiculed him on Mount Kailāsa? Or might he be Bāṇāsura, the son of Bali Mahārāja, disguised as a monkey.” With eyes red due to anger, Rāvaṇa spoke to his principal minister Prahasta in words that were most salutary: “Ask this depraved soul from whence he has come, why he destroyed the aśoka garden, and why he has threatened the rākṣasas! Ask that fool why he has come to my unassailable city and why he has attacked!”

Hearing Rāvaṇa’s instructions, Prahasta said to Hanumān: “O monkey, do not worry! I hope everything is well with you. You have no need to fear. If you have been sent to Rāvaṇa’s kingdom by Lord Indra, tell the truth. Do not be afraid. You will be set free. Tell us if you are a messenger of Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods, or of Yama, the lord of death, or of Varuna, the lord of the ocean, and have entered this city in the guise of a spy. Or have you been sent as a messenger by Lord Viṣṇu, who is eager for conquest. Obviously your strength is not that of a monkey, only your appearance is so. Tell us the truth right now and you will be set free. However, if you lie, it will be very difficult for you to survive. Or just tell us the purpose of your entry into Rāvaṇa’s abode.”

When interrogated in this way, Hanumān replied to Rāvaṇa as follows: “I am not an ally of Lord Indra, Yama, Varuṇa or Kuvera, nor have I been sent by Lord Viṣṇu. I am just a monkey by birth. I have come here to see Rāvaṇa, the ruler of the rākṣasas. I destroyed this rare garden in order to meet Rāvaṇa. Then those powerful rākṣasas came looking for a fight. In self-defence I confronted them on the battlefield. I cannot be bound by any

weapons, not even by the gods and demons. In fact, I received a boon from Lord Brahmā granting me protection from his weapon. I only feigned defeat because I wanted to meet you. Although I am completely free from the effect of the weapon, I have been presented before you as if I am subdued. I have come to you on a mission on behalf of Lord Rāma. Recognizing me to be a messenger of the immeasurably power Lord Rāma, listen to my good advice, O lord!”

HANUMĀN ADVISES RĀVAṆA TO RETURN SĪTĀ

Staring at that most powerful ten-headed demon, the courageous Hanumān calmly spoke the following cogent words: “I have come here in your presence bearing a message from Sugrīva, king of the monkeys. O lord of rākṣasas, being like your brother, he inquires about your well-being. Now hear the message of your brother, the great soul Sugrīva. His words are conducive to piety, material gain and prosperity in this world and the next. There was a king named Daśaratha who owned many chariots, elephants and horses. He was a friend of the people, like their father, and equal in splendor to Lord Indra. His eldest son named Rāma entered the forest in exile at the request of his father. He was accompanied by His brother, Lakṣmaṇa and by His wife, Sītā. That physically powerful and splendid prince was dedicated to the path of righteousness. His wife Sītā, the daughter of Janaka, king of Videha, was lost in Janasthāna. Searching for that goddess, the prince and his younger brother came to Rśyamūka Mountain where they met Sugrīva. That same Sugrīva promised to search for Sītā, and Rāma promised to obtain for him sovereignty over the monkeys.

“After killing Vālī on the battlefield, Rāma coronated Sugrīva as lord of the monkeys and bears. You were previously already acquainted with that foremost of monkeys, Vālī. Rāma killed him on the battlefield with a single arrow. Impatient to find Sītā and fulfill his promise, Sugrīva sent monkeys in all directions. Hundreds, thousands and millions of monkeys are searching for Her everywhere, even in the subterranean regions and the heavenly realms. Some of them are equal to Garuḍa, others are like the wind. The mighty monkey warriors are swift; they travel without obstruction. I am named Hanumān, and am the son of the wind god. In search of Sītā, I speedily leapt one hundred yojanas across the ocean and have come here anxious to see you. While wandering about, I found Sītā in your palace.

“So, being familiar with righteousness and having amassed wealth through austerity, O wise one, you should not detain another man’s wife. Intelligent persons like you do not engage in actions which are opposed to righteousness, productive of much evil and completely self-destructive. And who among even the gods and demons is capable of withstanding the arrows shot by Lakṣmaṇa in pursuance of Rāma’s anger? Neither is there anyone in the three worlds, O king, who can achieve happiness after offending Rāma. Therefore, accept my advice, which is beneficial at all times—past, present and future—and which is conducive to virtue and material well-being. Return Sītā to Lord Rāma. I have already managed to see Sītā. I have just achieved a difficult task. Rāma is able to do the work remaining to be done. I have seen Sītā, who is grief-stricken and whom you do not recognize to be as dangerous for you as a five-headed serpent. As one has not the power to digest food laced with poison, Sītā cannot be enjoyed even by the demons and gods.

“It is not logical to lose the accumulated piety and duration of life which you have achieved through the practice of austerity. You presently find yourself unkillable even at the hands of the demons and gods by dint of the virtue resulting from your austerities. Sugrīva is neither a god, a demon, a dānava, a gandharva, a yakṣa, nor a nāga. Lord Rāma is a human being and Sugrīva is the king of monkeys. Therefore, O king, how will you protect your life from Sugrīva? One who has obtained the fruit of unrighteousness cannot achieve righteousness. Rather, the fruit of unrighteousness follows him. And righteousness destroys unrighteousness. You have already achieved the fruit of righteousness, of this there is no doubt. Very soon you will achieve the fruit of this unrighteous act. Taking into account the massacre of rākṣasas at Janasthāna, the slaying of Vālī and Rāma’s alliance with Sugrīva, think about your own welfare.

“Although there is no doubt about my being able to single-handedly destroy Laṅkā with its horses, chariots and elephants, this is not Rāma’s intention. Rāma vowed in the presence of the bears and monkeys to exterminate his enemies who assaulted Sītā. Not even Lord Indra can be happy if he offends Rāma, what to speak of someone like you. Know that Sītā, whom you have in your clutches, is none other than Kālarātrī, the goddess of destruction, who will obliterate all of Laṅkā. Therefore, enough

with this deadly noose in the form of Sītā which you have placed around your own neck. Think about your own welfare. Behold this city scorched by Sītā's magnificence and smitten by Rāma's anger as it burns with its palaces and streets. Do not bring about the destruction of your own allies, counsellors, relatives, brothers, sons, well-wishers, enjoyments, wives and the city of Laṅkā. Please listen to my truthful words, O lord of the rākṣasas, especially since it is coming from Lord Rāma's servant, who is a messenger and a monkey.

“The glorious Rāma can annihilate all the worlds with their moving and nonmoving beings, and then create them again as they were. There is no one among the gods, demons, rulers of men, yakṣas, rākṣasas, vidyādhara, gandharvas, nāgas, siddhas, the rulers of kinnaras, birds, nor among all living beings in all circumstances and at all times who can contend with Rāma, who is equal in prowess to Lord Viṣṇu. Since you have committed a deed so terribly displeasing to Rāma, the Lord of all worlds, it is very difficult for you to survive. Even the gods, daityas, gandharvas, vidyādhara, nāgas and yakṣas cannot stand on the battlefield before Lord Rāma, the ruler of the three worlds. Even the four-headed Lord Brahmā who is self-born, the three-eyed Lord Śiva who destroyed the three cities of the demons, and the great Lord Indra, leader of the gods, cannot protect themselves from Rāma on the battlefield.”

Upon hearing the brave monkey's reply, which was excellent yet unpleasant, Rāvaṇa, his eyes rolling due to anger, ordered that Hanumān be killed.

VIBHIṢAṆA INTERCEDES ON BEHALF OF HANUMĀN

Rāvaṇa was so angered by what Hanumān said that he ordered his execution. Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhiṣaṇa, however, did not approve of Hanumān's execution when Hanumān had identified himself as a messenger. Seeing how angry Rāvaṇa was and the action about to be carried out, Vibhiṣaṇa, who was strict about rules of conduct, thought about his duty. Then Vibhiṣaṇa, who was an expert speaker, spoke the following beneficial words to his honorable elder brother: "Please forgive me, O lord of the rākṣasas. Give up your anger! Be pleased with me and listen to what I say. Virtuous emperors of the earth, knowing what is exalted and low, do not kill messengers. The slaughter of this monkey is opposed to righteousness, censurable by the world and unbecoming a warrior like you, O king. You know what is right, you are grateful for services rendered and you are expert in the duties of a king. You can recognize what is exalted and what is low-class. You know what is the ultimate welfare of all beings. If persons who are learned like you can become angry, then to become educated is just so much hard labor. As such, be pleased, O lord of the formidable rākṣasas. A messenger should be punished only after carefully determining what is proper and what is improper."

When he heard Vibhiṣaṇa's entreaty, Rāvaṇa became further enraged and said: "There is no sin in killing sinners, O crusher of foes! I shall therefore kill this sinful-acting monkey!" Hearing Rāvaṇa's reply, which was based on unrighteousness and was manifoldly faulty and unbecoming to the noble, the wise Vibhiṣaṇa made the following plea, which was conducive to the highest truth: "Be pleased with me, O lord of Laṅkā! O lord of the rākṣasas, please hear my entry, which embodies the principles of piety and material amelioration. Messengers should not be killed at any time, at any place, under any circumstance, O king. So say the pious. Undoubtedly this enemy is formidable, and he has perpetrated immeasurable harm. Yet the

pious do not condone killing of messengers, for it is seen that there are many alternative punishments for messengers. Mutilation of the bodily limbs, flogging, shaving of the head and branding with a hot iron—these are the punishments mentioned for a messenger. We have never heard of execution of messengers. And how can you, whose intelligence is acquainted with piety and material acquisition, and who strive after determining the pros and cons, fall under the sway of anger? In fact, the pious do not become angry. No one is equal to you in discussions about virtue, in popular traditions nor in understanding the meaning of the scriptures. Indeed, you are the best among all the gods and demons. You are immeasurable and even difficult to be defeated by the high-minded gods and demons possessing valor and enthusiasm. You have defeated the leaders of hosts of gods and men in combat more than once. In the past, no one has ever dared to offend you even with his mind, nor defeat you, who are so valorous and heroic and inimical to both the gods and demons. Those who did so were killed.

“Neither do I see any good in killing this monkey. Let the punishment be meted out to those who sent him. Whether he is good or bad, he has been sent by our enemies. Because he is dependent on his master, a messenger speaks what is beneficial to that master, therefore a messenger should not be killed. Besides, if you kill this monkey, I do not see any other creature capable of flying through the sky and crossing back over the ocean. Therefore, no attempt should be made to kill this monkey, O conqueror of enemy cities. Rather, you should direct your efforts against the gods headed by Lord Indra. If this monkey is executed, I do not see any other being capable of inciting the two insolent and bellicose princes—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—to wage war against you. It is not proper for you, who are valorous and enthusiastic, to rob these rākṣasas of the opportunity for combat. They are favorable to you, heroic, mentally composed, high-born, qualified, thoughtful, expert in the deployment of weapons, outstanding, obedient and combative. Therefore send some of them this very day, along with part of the army, to apprehend those two foolish princes and to establish your jurisdiction over your enemies.”

Rāvaṇa, the enemy of the gods, accepted the excellent and agreeable advice tendered by Vibhiṣaṇa.

THE BURNING OF HANUMĀN'S TAIL

When Rāvaṇa heard his brother's advice, he gave the following reply, which was in accordance with time and place: "You have clearly stated that the killing of a messenger is condemnable. Anyways, he must be given some sort of punishment other than death. As far as monkeys are concerned, the tail is their most cherished ornament. Therefore, set fire to his tail right away and let him leave in that condition. Then let his friends, relatives and well-wishers see him all wretched and distressed from his bodily mutilation."

Rāvaṇa gave the following command: "Let the rākṣasas parade the monkey with his tail burning throughout the entire city with its cross roads!"

Hearing Rāvaṇa's instructions, the rabid rākṣasas began wrapping Hanumān's tail with old cotton rags. While his tail was being wrapped, he grew in size, like a forest fire when reaching dry wood. After soaking his tail with oil, they set fire to it. Enraged and insulted, his face shining like the rising sun, Hanumān swatted the rākṣasas with his burning tail. The assembled rākṣasas again bound Hanumān more securely. All the night-stalkers, along with their wives, children and aged, felt delighted.

The bound monkey came to the following conclusion which was in accordance with the situation: "Even though I am bound, surely the rākṣasas cannot restrain me. Breaking my bonds and jumping up, I will be able to kill rākṣasas again. If these wicked fellows have bound me under the order of their master because I was wandering around in the service of my master, then they have no justification for retaliating against me now. I am strong enough to take on all of these rākṣasas in combat. Yet, for the pleasure of Lord Rāma I shall suffer such humiliation. I shall thus survey Laṅkā once again, for at night I was not able to clearly see how it is fortified. I therefore have to see Laṅkā when the night ends. As such, let the rākṣasas bind me again and torture me by setting my tail on fire. It will not disturb my mind."

Grabbing hold of that monkey, who was huge, powerful and concealing his emotions, the rākṣasas happily dragged him away. The rākṣasas of cruel deeds attracted public attention by blowing conchshells and beating kettledrums as they parading Hanumān through the city. Followed by rākṣasas, Hanumān happily marched, passing through that great metropolis of the rākṣasas. In that way, Hanumān saw marvelous, many-storied mansions, enclosed tracts of land, well-divided rectangular parcels of land, streets tightly crowded with houses, crossroads, avenues, alleys and spaces between houses. At all the intersections, plazas and avenues, the rākṣasas announced that Hanumān was a spy. Out of curiosity, women, children and the aged came from everywhere to see Hanumān with his tail on fire.

When the rākṣasas were first setting Hanumān's tail on fire, the hideous rākṣasīs conveyed the unpleasant news to Sītā: "That coppery-faced monkey with whom you had a conversation is being led through the streets with his tail on fire." Hearing about that deed which was as cruel as Her own abduction, Sītā felt stricken with sorrow and addressed the god of fire. At that time She wanted to do something to help Hanumān. The broad-eyed Sītā directed the following prayer to the fire god: "O god of fire, if I have served My husband, if I have performed austerities, if I have been exclusively devoted to My husband, be cool to Hanumān! If Rāma is compassionate to Me, or if I have any good luck left, be cool to Hanumān! If the righteous Rāma knows that I am moral and long to be reunited with Him, be cool to Hanumān! If the noble Sugrīva who is true to his promise will bring Me across this ocean of sorrow, be cool to Hanumān!"

After that, the fire which had blazed up fiercely then decreased, its flames flickering on Hanumān's right side as if to signal his safety to the fawn-eyed Sītā. When Hanumān's father, the wind god, came into contact with Hanumān's burning tail, he blew cold air on it, bringing delight to Sītā. While his tail was burning, Hanumān thought: "How is it that this fire blazing all over my tail does not burn me? Although it looks like a big fire, it does not cause me any more pain than a piece of cooling ice placed on my tail. Or perhaps this by the power of Lord Rāma, just as when I saw a mountain in the ocean while I was jumping across it. If the ocean and Mount Maināka were so excited to serve Lord Rāma's mission, then why would not

the fire also make itself cool? Indeed the fire does not burn me because of Sītā's mercy, Rāma's potency, and the friendship of my father the wind god with the fire god."

Hanumān continued thinking for a while: "Why should someone like me be bound by these low-class rākṣasas? As long as I have the necessary prowess, I should revenge this outrage." The impetuous monkey then broke the ropes. Swiftly jumping into the air, the gigantic monkey roared. Then the glorious Hanumān went to the city gate, which was as high as a mountain peak. There were no rākṣasas present there. Although Hanumān was as big as a mountain, in a moment he again became his original small size, casting off his bonds. When he was completely free, he again assumed a form as big as a mountain. Looking around, he saw an iron bar lying near the gate. Grabbing that bar, Hanumān once again killed the rākṣasas who were guarding the gate. After slaying them and again viewing Laṅkā, Hanumān, whose prowess on the battlefield was violent, shone brightly like the sun surrounded by its rays because of the circle of fire created around him by his blazing tail.

HANUMĀN BURNS LAṅKĀ

While scrutinizing Laṅkā, Hanumān, who had accomplished his mission and felt increasing enthusiasm, thought about what remained to be done. He thought: “What more should I do here in Laṅkā in order to further harrow the rākṣasas? I have already destroy the aśoka garden, killed eminent rākṣasas and a part of the army. The only thing left to do is to destroy the citadel. When their fortress is destroyed, my labor will have been a happy one. With just a little bit more effort my mission will be accomplished. It is appropriate for me to present these grand edifices as an offering to the holy fire which is blazing on my tail.” With his tail blazing, Hanumān began jumping over the buildings, resembling a cloud stuck by lightning. Without any fear, Hanumān went from house to house, surveying the palaces and gardens of the rākṣasas.

Jumping up with great force to Prahasta’s mansion and spreading fire all about there, the mighty Hanumān leapt to the mansion of the valorous Mahāpārśva. There he spread that fire which was just like the conflagration at the end of the world. The gigantic monkey then jumped to the homes of Vajradamṣṭra, Śuka and Sāraṇa. Hanumān similarly set fire to the homes of Indrajit, Jambumāli and Sumāli. Thereafter he successively ignited in order of importance the homes of Raśmiketū, Sūryaśatru, Hrasvakarṇa, Damṣṭra, Romaśa, Yuddhonmatta, Matta, Dhvajagrīva, Vidjujjihva, Ghora Hastimukha, Karāla, Viśāla, Soṇitākṣa, Kumbhakarṇa, Makarākṣa, Narāntaka, Kumbha, Nikumbha, Yajñaśatru, and Brahmaśatru. He spared the mansion of Vibhiṣaṇa. The glorious Hanumān thus set fire to the vast wealth inside all those mansions of the rich rākṣasas.

After passing over all those mansions, Hanumān reached Rāvaṇa’s palace. Scattering the fire on his tail all around that foremost of palaces inlaid with valuable gems and stocked with auspicious items, the valiant Hanumān roared like the clouds that appear at the end of the world.

From contact with the wind, the rampagous conflagration spread like the fire of universal destruction. The wind spread that fire through all the buildings. Consequently those grand buildings encrusted with latices of gold, pearls and gems crumbled and their multi-stories collapsed down to the ground, as the abodes of the siddhas crash to earth when their pious credits are exhausted. There was a tumultuous din raised by the rākṣasas running to save their homes, their spirit being broken and their opulence taken away. They exclaimed: “This fellow is surely the fire god come in the guise of a monkey!” Some of the women with their suckling children fell down unexpectedly. Some women with disheveled hair fell from their mansions, their limbs enveloped in flames, shining like lightning bolts falling from clouds in the sky.

Hanumān saw wonderful metals mixed with diamonds, coral, vaidurya, pearls and silver flowing from every building. Hanumān felt no satiety in killing the rākṣasas, just as fire finds no satiety in burning dry grass and wood, nor did the earth become satiated from accepting their corpses. The impetuous Hanumān burnt the city of Laṅkā, just as Śiva burn the cities of Tripura.

Lit by Hanumān, the fire spread all over Mount Trikūṭa, upon which the city of Laṅkā was situated, sending flames leaping up. Fanned by the wind and fed by the fat of the rākṣasas’ bodies, smokeless flames shot up touching the sky like the fire of universal devastation. As that fire at the end of the world fractures the egg-like universe while crackling like lightning, the conflagration enveloped all of Laṅkā so that it shone like millions of suns. The fire rose all the way up into the sky, producing a fierce glow, its flames resembling Kimśuka flowers. The columns of rising smoke resembled clouds the color of blue lotus flowers.

The rākṣasas surmised: “He must be the great Indra, lord of the gods, or Yama in person, or Varuṇa, or the wind god, or the fire emanating from Śiva’s third eye, or the sun god, or Kuvera, or the moon god. He is not a monkey but the personification of all-destructive time. Could it be the anger of the four-head Lord Brahmā, the grandsire of all living beings, who has come here in the guise of a monkey to slay all of the rākṣasas? Or could

he be a manifestation of the inconceivable, unmanifested, infinite, internal potency of Lord Viṣṇu which has come here to annihilate the rākṣasas?” Seeing the city with its mass of people, houses and trees burn so suddenly, the prominent rākṣasas gathered together in Rāvaṇa’s presence spoke in that way.

Being unexpectedly consumed by fire along with all her rākṣasas, horses, chariots, elephants, flocks of birds, beasts and trees, Laṅkā wailed loudly in distress. The rākṣasas raised a hew and a cry, exclaiming: “O my father, O my dear son, O my beloved husband, O my friend, O lord of my life, O my dear one, our abundant pious credit is exhausted.” With its buildings enveloped by flames, its prominent heroes killed and its warriors bewildered, humbled as it was by Hanumān’s wrath, the city of Laṅkā looked as if cursed. Seeing Laṅkā in this condition, Hanumān thought that it resembled the earth being destroyed by Lord Śiva.

Having destroyed the aśoka garden which was crowded with fine trees, killed prominent rākṣasas in battle, and burnt the city with rows of magnificent mansions, Hanumān stood resting. After Hanumān had exterminated many stalwart rākṣasas, destroyed the luxuriant forest grove and ignited the rākṣasas’ dwellings, Hanumān began to think of Rāma. Then all the hosts of gods, glorified Hanumān, the foremost of monkey warriors who is equal in speed to the wind god. All the gods, sages, gandharvas, vidyādharas, nāgas and all the other great beings gathered there experienced the highest unparalleled satisfaction. After performing such a difficult task, Hanumān was glowing brightly. Sitting on the top of an amazing building, Hanumān shone like the sun encircled by brilliant rays due to the circle of fire from his blazing tail. After afflicting all of Laṅkā, Hanumān extinguished the fire on his tail by dipping it in the ocean. Seeing that Laṅkā had been burnt, the gods, gandharvas, siddhas and great sages were dumbfounded. Seeing Hanumān, all living beings thought that he was the fire of universal devastation.

SĪTĀ UNHARMED BY THE FIRE

Seeing the city of Laṅkā burning and its hordes of rākṣasas panic-stricken, Hanumān became pensive. A great fear then entered his mind: “What a terrible thing I have done by burning Laṅkā! Blessed indeed are those great persons who control their anger with their intelligence, just as one would extinguish a blazing fire with water. What angry person would not commit a sinful deed. An angry person can even kill his own superiors. An angry person can insult the pious with harsh words. An angered person does not know what to say and what not to say. There is no activity that an angry person will not do and no statement that he will not make. He who is able to restrain his anger with forbearance, as a snake abandons its slough, is truly a man.

“Alas! What a great fool I am! How shameless! How sinful! Without thinking I have burnt Sītā alive, thus causing the death of my master, Rāma. Since Laṅkā is completely burnt, then the noble Sītā must also have been burnt. This fire which I set has thoughtlessly foiled my master’s mission. My whole purpose in coming here has been ruined by not protecting Sītā while burning Laṅkā. I have undoubtedly achieved this great task as if it were something insignificant. But because of my anger I have cut the very root of this achievement. Sītā must have perished, for there is no part of that city which does not seem to be burnt. The whole city has been reduced to ashes. If my mission has been frustrated by my perverse intelligence, then I shall give up my life here this very day. Either I shall throw myself into this fire, or into hell fire, or I shall feed this body to the creatures living in the ocean. How can I face Sugrīva or Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa alive, when I have completely foiled this mission? By my anger I have exhibited my unsteady simian nature which is well known throughout the three worlds. Cursed be my passionate nature, which yields undesirable and unexpected results, for due to anger I did not protect Sītā, even though I was able to do so! Because Sītā has perished, those two princes will also perish. When they perish, Sugriva and all his kinsmen will perish. When the great soul Bharata, who is

very fond of his brother, hears this news, how will he be able to survive with his brother Śatrughna? When the righteous Ikṣvāku Dynasty ceases to exist, all living creatures will be afflicted with sorrow. Being devoid of good fortune and having lost my stock of pious credits and material gain due to my anger, I have brought about the destruction of the world.”

While thinking in this way, certain omens occurred which he had personally experienced previously. Thus he again began thinking: “Could it be possible that the charming lady has been protected by Her own glory? She must not have perished, for fire does not burn fire. How could fire touch Her, the wife of Lord Rāma, when She is protected by Her own character? Surely it was because of Rāma’s power and Sītā’s virtue that this fire, whose nature is to burn, did not so much as singe me. How could She who is a worshipable goddess for Rāma’s three brothers and the object of mental delight for Rāma Himself perish? Or how is it that this fire which normally burns everything, though not burning my tail, has burnt that noble lady?”

Then Hanumān remembered how the golden Mount Maināka appeared from the midst of the ocean. He thought: “Because of Sītā’s austerity, truthfulness and dedication to Her husband, She can burn fire; fire cannot burn Her.” As he was thinking in this way about Sītā’s dedication to righteousness, Hanumān heard the voices of saintly cāraṇas: “Oh, Hanumān has certainly accomplished a difficult feat by igniting a fearsome fire in the homes of the rākṣasas. With its hordes of rākṣasas, women, children and elderly fleeing and resonating with the clamor of people, the city of Lāṅkā seemed to be wailing. This city with its mountain peak, mansions, ramparts and archways has been burned. But Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, has not been burnt. We find this very amazing.”

Because of the auspicious omens which he witnessed, very strong reasons, [such as Rāma’s immeasurable power and Sītā’s devotion to Her husband] and the words spoken by the sages, Hanumān’s mind was delighted. Having accomplished his purpose and learning that Sītā was unharmed, he decided to see Her once more before leaving Lāṅkā.

HANUMĀN SEES SĪTĀ AGAIN AND THEN LEAVES

Greeting Sītā who was standing at the foot of the śimśapā tree, Hanumān said: “Luckily I find you here unharmed!” While gazing at Hanumān, who was about to leave, Sītā said: “Although you are capable of accomplishing single-handed the task of rescuing Me, the resulting glory would be yours. But if Rāma, the crusher of enemy forces, destroys Lankā with a hail of arrows and carries Me away, that would be most befitting of Him. Therefore, act in such a way that the great soul and battle hero may exhibit prowess worthy of Himself.”

Hearing Sītā’s remarks, which were polite, logical and full of meaning, Hanumān replied as follows: “After defeating His enemies in battle, Rāma, accompanied by stewart monkeys and bears, will soon come and dispel Your grief.” After consoling Sītā, Hanumān decided to depart and bid Her farewell. Then that tiger among monkeys, eager as he was to see his master, climbed up Ariṣṭa Mountain. That foremost of mountains was covered with dark groves of padmaka trees. Between its peaks was a mantle of clouds as if it were a shawl. The mountain seemed to be joyfully awake due to the shining rays of the sun, which resembled outstretched arms. Its scattered metals resembled open eyes. The sound of its rainfall was like the recitation of the Vedas. It seemed as if the mountain had just begun singing in a high pitch due to the sound of its many waterfalls. It looked as if it was standing with upraised arms because of its tall pines. It seemed to be wailing on all sides because of the sound of the waterfalls. It seemed to be trembling because of the undulating of its dark clumps of autumn reeds. It seemed to be whistling due to the sound of the wind blowing through its bamboos. It seemed to be hissing because of its terrible and poisonous snakes. It seemed to be meditating because of its caves covered with mist. Its clouds resembled feet walking all about. Its peaks with their clouds made the mountain look as if it was yawning and stretching itself into the sky. The mountain possessed many peaks and caves. It was covered with trees such as

sāla, tāla, āśvakaṛṇa and bamboo. It was also covered decoratively with flowering creepers. It abounded in herds of deer and had streams sparkling with minerals. It had many cascades and masses of boulders. It was frequented by great sages, yakṣas, gandharvas, kinnaras and nāgas. It was impenetrable because of its trees and vines. Its caves were inhabited by lions. It was infested with tigers. It had many sweet-tasting roots and fruit-bearing trees.

Impelled by great joy and the desire to see Rāma soon, Hanumān climbed up the mountain. As he climbed that pleasant mountain peak, the weight of his feet crushed the stones underneath, producing a loud crunching sound. As he climbed the mountain in order to jump from the southern shore of the ocean to its northern shore, Hanumān grew in size. When Hanumān had ascended the mountain peak, he saw the ocean infested with dangerous sea serpents. Hanumān, son of the wind god, jumped from the south toward the north, like the wind blowing through the sky.

As Hanumān jumped, Aṛiṣṭa Mountain was pressed down. It therefore shrieked and sank into the earth, shaking with its peaks, falling trees and living beings. Violently shaken and broken by the force of Hanumān's legs, the flowering trees fell on the ground, as if they had been struck by Lord Indra's thunderbolt. The frightful sound of roaring lions who were being crushed in the caves could be heard as if splitting the sky. Vidyādhara women rose up suddenly from the mountain, their clothes disheveled and their ornaments in disarray out of fear. Due to the pressure on their heads and hoods, huge, powerful and highly poisonous snakes with flaming tongues lay coiled up. Because of the pressure on that mountain, kinnaras, nāgas, gandharvas, yakṣas and vidyādhara left it and hovered in the sky. Due to the pressure exerted by the mighty Hanumān, that glorious mountain along with its forested peaks sank into the bowls of the earth. Ten yojanas wide and thirty yojanas high, that mountain was made level with the earth. Eager to cross the formidable salt ocean whose shores were lashed with waves, Hanumān leapt into the air.

HANUMĀN RETURNS TO THE MAINLAND

Jumping with great force, Hanumān, who never became tired, crossed the ocean of the sky. The moon was like a white water lily. The sun was like a white duck. The constellations Puṣya and Śravaṇa were its swans. The clouds were its sea weed, as well as the grassy meadows along its shores. The twin constellations of Punarvasu was its large fish. Mars was a large crocodile. Lord Indra's elephant, Airāvata, was a large island. The asterism Svati was a swan. The gusts of wind were its waves. The moonbeams were its cool water. The nāgas, yakṣas and gandharvas were its blossoming lotus flowers.

As if swallowing the sky, scratching the moon and stealing the sky with its stars and sun, Hanumān split the mass of clouds apart as he crossed over the ocean. Huge clouds that were white, pink, blue, yellow, green and black appeared. Entering and coming out of the mass of clouds again and again, Hanumān looked like the moon in the sky being covered and uncovered by clouds. As he entered the clouds, his body was sometimes visible and sometimes not visible. Wearing a white garment, he shone like the moon in the sky. Repeatedly entered the clouds and tearing them apart, he looked like Garuḍa flying in the sky.

After killing so many prominent rākṣasas, gaining notariety for himself, causing a disturbance in the city of Laṅkā, agonizing Rāvaṇa, slaying great rākṣasa heroes and greeting Sītā in the aśoka grove, Hanumān again reached the middle of the ocean and roared loudly like a thundering cloud. Hanumān touched the peak of Mount Maināka and sped along like an arrow released from a bowstring. As he came closer and saw Mount Mahendra, which resembled a big cloud, Hanumān roared like a thunder cloud, filling all ten directions with the sound. Reaching that region where his comrades were waiting for him, Hanumān, who was anxious to see his friends, roared

loudly and wagged his tail. The sky and the sun seemed to be cracking because of his roaring as he hastened along the path followed by Garuḍa.

The mighty monkey warriors, who were already standing on the southern shore of Bharata-varṣa eager to see Hanumān, heard the sound of the thrust of Hanumān's legs, which was like the rumbling of a huge cloud driven by strong winds. All the monkeys, who had been in anxiety, heard the thunder-like roar of Hanumān. They then all became eager to see their dear friend again. Feeling great joy, Jāmbavān addressed all the monkeys: "Hanumān has been completely successful. There is no doubt about it. If he had not been successful, he would not be roaring in this way." The monkeys were thrilled to hear the sound of Hanumān's arms and legs and his roaring, and started jumping all about. In ecstasy they jumped from treetop to treetop and from mountain peak to mountain peak in eagerness to see Hanumān. They perched themselves on the tops of trees, holding on to branches, and joyfully waved their bright raiments. Hanumān roared like the wind trapped in a mountain cave.

Seeing Hanumān flying toward them like a huge cloud, the monkeys stood up with joined palms. Having jumped from Ariṣṭa mountain in Laṅkā, the heroic Hanumān descended to Mount Mahendra, which was covered with trees. Filled with joy, he landed by a mountain cascade, like a mountain with clipped wings falling from the sky. Delighted as they were, all the monkeys came and stood around Hanumān. Doing this, they felt overjoyed. They approached Hanumān with beaming faces. Bringing him presents of roots and fruits, they welcomed Hanumān, the foremost of monkeys. Hanumān then offered respects to his superiors and to the elders, foremost of whom was Jāmbavān, as well as Prince Aṅgada. When Hanumān had thus been greeted and made welcome by the monkeys, he informed them briefly that he had found Sītā.

Taking Aṅgada by the hand, he then sat down in a lovely part of the forest on Mount Mahendra. When questioned by the monkeys, Hanumān told them that he had found Sītā staying in the aśoka grove of Rāvaṇa's palace, that She was being guarded by very dreadful rākṣasīs, that Sītā was wearing Her hair plaited in a single braid and was constantly sighing to see Rāma, that She was emaciated from fasting and had matted hair, and that

She was soiled with dirt. All the monkeys were overjoyed to hear Hanumān's important and nectarean report about his having found Sītā. Some of them roared, others bellowed, others howled strenuously, others ululated and others roared in return. Raising their tails up, some joyful monkeys waved thier thick, long curled tails. Others, because of their excessive joy, jumped from the peaks of mountains and embraced Hanumān, the best of monkeys.

In the midst of all those monkeys, Angada then paid the following excellent compliment to Hanumān, who had relayed to them such good news: "O monkey, there is no one equal to you in strength or valor, for, having jumped across the ocean, you have returned. You are the giver of life to us, O best of monkeys! Fortunately you have found Rāma's glorious wife, and therefore too will Rāma shed His grief occasioned by Sītā's absence." Surrounding Aṅgada, Hanumān and Jāmbavān, the joyful monkeys made themselves comfortable on spacious rocks. Eager to hear how Hanumān had jumped across the ocean and found Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa and Sītā, all the monkeys waited, facing Hanumān with joined palms. The glorious Aṅgada waited there surrounded by many monkeys, like Indra being attended by the demigods in heaven. The mountain peak shone with splendor and was overjoyed because of the presence of Hanumān and the illustrious Angada, who was wearing sparkling arm bands.

HANUMĀN RECAPS HIS ADVENTURES

Having met together on the summit of Mount Mahendra, the monkeys headed by Hanumān were experiencing the topmost ecstasy. When the monkeys were seated comfortably, the elated Jāmbavān questioned Hanumān for details about his mission: “How were you able to find Sītā? And how is She doing there? And how does the wicked ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa behave toward Her? Please tell us all these details correctly. How were you able to locate the lady and what did She say to you? After hearing your response, we shall consider what course of action should be taken. Also tell us what we should reveal when we return to Kiṣkindhā and what we should keep secret.”

Being requested in this way, Hanumān bowed his head to Lady Sītā and, with the hairs of his body raised due to exhilaration, replied as follows: “Desiring to cross the southern ocean, with great concentration I jumped from the peak of Mount Mahendra in your presence. As I was proceeding through the sky, an apparently formidable obstacle appeared before me. I saw a fascinating and dazzling mountain of gold. Since it was blocking my path, I considered it an obstacle. I then decided that I should smash it. I whacked my tail against the great mountain, smashing the peak, which was as brilliant as the sun, into thousands of pieces.

“Seeing what I had done, the mountain spoke to me sweetly: ‘O son, know me to be a brother of your father, the wind god. I am known as Maināka and I dwell in the ocean. In the past the best of mountains had wings. They used to fly all over the world causing destruction everywhere. When Indra, the subduer of the demon Pāka, heard about this, he cut off the wings of thousands of mountains with his thunderbolt. I, however, was saved from that calamity by your magnanimous father. At that time the wind god threw me into the great ocean, O my dear lad. I have to do something to assist Lord Rāma, O chastiser of enemies. Lord Rāma is the best of those who support the cause of righteousness and is equal to Indra in prowess.’

“Upon hearing what Mount Maināka said, I informed him about my mission and my mind again became eager to continue. The great-souled mountain then gave me permission to leave. The mountain, who had assumed a human form, also vanished and his rocky form as a mountain sank into the ocean. Picking up good speed, I proceeded on with the last part of my journey. I continued along my course at full speed for a long time. I then came upon in the middle of the ocean the goddess Surasā, the mother of snakes, who spoke to me as follows: ‘The immortal gods have designated you as my food, O best of monkeys! I shall therefore devour you right away!’ After Surasā had spoken to me in this way, I stood before her, bowing down with joined palms. With my face pale, I said to her: ‘The glorious Rāma, son of King Daśaratha, entered the Daṇḍakā Forest with His brother Lakṣmaṇa and His wife Sītā. The wicked Rāvaṇa kidnapped Rāma’s wife Sītā. On the command of Rāma I am searching for Her as His messenger. Since you live in Rāma’s dominion, you should do something to assist His mission. After finding Sītā and restoring Her to Rāma, I shall enter your mouth. I promise you.’ When I had said this to Surasā, who could assume any form at will, she replied: ‘No one can escape me. That is the boon which I received.’ Upon hearing her threat, although I was already ten yojanas tall, I then grew half that size more in a moment. She then expanded her mouth so that it was bigger than me. Seeing her mouth wide open, I assumed a tiny form. In just a moment I became the size of a thumb. I entered her mouth and then came out again in a flash. After assuming her actual original form, she again addressed me: ‘Continue on your way to accomplish your mission as you wish, O best of monkeys. And reunite Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, with the great soul Rāma, a descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Be happy, O strong fellow. I am very pleased with you.’ Then all living beings applauded me, shouting ‘Bravo! Bravo!’

“Then I sprang into the wide sky just like Garuḍa. After some time my shadow was caught, although I could not see who or what was doing it. When my progress had been obstructed, I looked around in all ten directions, yet I could not find what it was that had stopped me. I then thought: ‘I wonder what has obstructed my advance, even though I do not see anything.’ Unable to see anything before me that could be blocking my path, I happened to glance downward. There I saw lying on the water a horrible rākṣasī. Upon seeing me detained in that way, she laughed and

shouted the following awful words at me: ‘Where are you going, you big-bodied creature? Hungry as I am, you are my sought after food. Satisfy my body which has remained without food for a long time.’

“Agreeing to her proposal, I expanded my body to a size greater than her mouth. She then stretched her mouth wider to devour me. She neither recognized me nor saw the transformation which I had undergone. In the twinkling of an eye, I then contracted my huge form into a very small one. I entered into her mouth and tore her heart out, afterwhich I flew up into the sky. Although She was the size of a mountain and formidable, when I had torn out her heart, her limbs became parallized and she fell into the salty ocean. I then heard siddhas who were accompanied by cāraṇas proclaim: ‘Hanumān killed the rākṣasī Śimhikā in an instant.’ After killing her, I remembered my mission and the delay. After proceeding a great distance, I saw the southern shore of the ocean adorned with mountains where stood the city of Laṅkā. When the sun had set, I entered the city without being seen by the rākṣasas who possessed formidable prowess.

“As I was entering the city a certain woman with a complexion the color of the cloud that appears at the end of the world rose up in front of me and guffawed. Because the horrible witch with hair the color of fire wanted to kill me, I defeated her by punching her with my left fist. I then entered the city in the evening, after she fearfully said the following to me: ‘I am the personification of the city of Laṅkā, O hero, whom you have conquered by your prowess. For this reason you will completely defeat all the rākṣasas.’ Even though I spent the whole night looking for Sītā, and even entered Rāvaṇa’s private chambers, I did not find Her. I therefore found myself confronting an ocean of sorrow whose distant shore I could not see. As I was thinking in this way, I noticed a charming grove of trees completely enclosed by a high golden wall. Jumping up on the wall, I saw many trees. In the middle of the grove of aśoka trees was a big śimśapā tree. Climbing it, I saw a grove of golden banana trees. Not far from the śimśapā tree I saw Sītā. She had an wonderful complexion and looked quite youthful. Her eyes were shaped like the petals of a lotus flower. She looked emaciated from fasting. She was wearing a single piece of cloth and hair was soiled with dust. All the limbs of Her body were afflicted with grief. She was determined to do what was good for Her husband. She was surrounded by the most hideous

and wicked rākṣasīs that subsisted on flesh and blood. She looked like a doe surrounded by tigers. Standing in the midst of the rākṣasīs, She was being constantly threatened. She was wearing a single braid of hair and looked miserable. She was absorbed in thinking of Her husband. She was lying on the bare ground and the limbs of Her body had faded like a lotus in winter. Because of Rāvaṇa and the fruitlessness of Her desire to be reunited with Rāma, She wanted to die. While I beheld that lady with eyes like a fawn who was the glorious consort of Lord Rāma, I remained perched in the śimśapā tree. Then I heard coming from Rāvaṇa's palace the very deep sound of garrolous palaver mixed with the tinkle of bells on girdles and anklets. Feeling intense anxiety, I contracted my form and hid myself in the śimśapā tree like a bird.

“Then the mighty Rāvaṇa and his consorts came to where Sītā was. Seeing Rāvaṇa, the most powerful of rākṣasas, Sītā pressed Her thighs together and covered Her large breasts with Her arms. Frightened and extremely anxious, She was glancing here and there. Not seeing anyone to protect Her, She was trembling. Then Rāvaṇa, thowing himself face-down on the ground, said to Her: ‘Please dote on me! If however after two months time You do not favor Me, I shall drink Your blood.’ When She heard what the wicked Rāvaṇa said, She became angry and made the following excellent reply: ‘O lowest of the rākṣasas, how is it that your tongue has not fallen out since you have spoken what should not be said to the daughter of King Janaka and consort of Rāma, whose glory is immeasurable and who is the lord of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty? O ignoble and sinful wretch, what meager valor you have that you abducted Me in My husband's absence so that He did not even see you! You are not even fit to be Rāma's slave. Rāma is worshipable, He always speaks the truth and He is fond of battle.’

“After Rāvaṇa had been spoken to in this harsh way by Sītā, his anger flared up like a crematory fire. Rolling his cruel eyes and raising his right fist, he prepared to strike Sītā. The women accompanying Rāvaṇa then screamed. Hurrying out of their midst came the the chief of Rāvaṇa's consorts named Mandodarī. She restrained Rāvaṇa from hitting Sītā. Mandodarī spoke the following sweet words to the love-sick Rāvaṇa.: ‘What is the use of Sītā to you who are equal to Lord Indra in prowess? Enjoy with

me right now. Sītā is nothing special compared to me. Enjoy yourself at this time with the daughters of the gods, gandharvas and yakṣas, my lord! Why would you do so with Sītā?’ Surrounding him and enticing him, the women forcefully lead him off to his own residence.

“When Rāvaṇa had left, hideous rākṣasīs threatened Sītā with very abusive language. Sītā considered their taunts as no more threatening than a blade of grass. Their bellowing also had no effect on Sītā. When the flesh-eating rākṣasīs saw that Sītā was unfazed by their bellows and howls, they quieted down and informed Rāvaṇa of Her great resolve not to submit to him. When all their hopes for subduing Sītā were vanquished, they surrounded her and gradually fell under the sway of sleep. Then Sītā, who was devoted to the welfare of Her husband, cried piteously due to Her intense distress. One rākṣasī named Trijaṭā rose up out of their midst and said: ‘You had better eat your own flesh. You will not be able to harm Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka and the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha, any time soon. I just had a frightening dream that made my hair stand on end and which indicated the destruction of the rākṣasas and the triumph of Her Lord. She is the only one who is able to protect us rākṣasīs from Rāma. Let us propitiate Sītā. That is the only thing that makes sense to me. When such a dream is seen in relation to a lady who is afflicted with suffering, she will become freed from all her suffering and will achieve the highest happiness. If we throw ourselves at Her feet She will surely be pleased with us.’

“The timid girl became overjoyed to hear of the surety of Her husband’s victory and said: ‘If this proves true, I shall indeed give you all shelter!’ Seeing Sītā’s precarious situation, my courageous mind could not rest. I thought of the way in which I could talk with Sītā. I began extolling the glories of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. Hearing my words which glorified the qualities of the royal sage King Daśaratha, Sītā inquired from me with eyes brimming with tears: ‘Who are you? Who sent you and how did you get here? What kind of love do you have for Lord Rāma? Please tell me about it.’ When I heard Her request, I replied: ‘Madam, Your husband Rāma has a friend whose prowess is formidable. His name is Sugrīva. He is courageous, the lord of the monkeys and extremely powerful. You may know me to be his servant Hanumān who have come here. I have been sent here by Your husband Rāma, who never tires in action. O glorious lady, here is a ring

presented to You as a token by that glorious son of King Daśaratha. I would like you to instruct me what I should do now. I can personally bring You to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. What is Your reply?’

“Understanding that what I had said was true, Sītā replied: ‘Let Rāma bring Me back after killing Rāvaṇa.’ After bowing my head to that irreproachable lady, I asked Her for some token that would please Lord Rāma’s mind. She thereupon said to me: ‘Take this fine jewel. Because of it Rāma will be very appreciative of you.’ She then presented me with a very wonderful piece of jewelry. In great anxiety She related to me a certain occurrence known only to Lord Rāma. After bowing down before Her with great respect, I circumambulated Her clockwise with my mind set on departing. Deliberating a little bit, Sītā again said to me: ‘O Hanumān, please relate My story to Rāma. Do whatever is necessary so that when those two heroes—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—hear My story, They will come here soon with Sugrīva. Otherwise, I shall not survive longer than one month. I would thus die like one without a protector and Rāma would never see Me again.’

“When I heard Her pitiable plea, I became angry and saw what remained for me to do. I thereafter expanded my body to the size of a mountain. Desirous of combat, I began destroying that aśoka grove. The hideous rākṣasīs woke up to find the garden grove destroyed and its deer and birds bewildered and frightened. When they saw me present in the grove, they gathered around me from all sides. Then they hurried to report the matter to Rāvaṇa, saying: ‘O king, your walled garden arbor has been destroyed by a wicked monkey who does not know your strength. Such is the foolishness of this offender. Kill him immediately before he escapes!’

“Rāvaṇa then sent rākṣasas called kiṅkaras who were obedient to the wishes of Rāvaṇa and difficult to conquer. With an iron bar, I annihilated in that area where the grove was eighty thousand of them, who were armed with spears and clubs. Those who were not slain quickly fled to Rāvaṇa and informed him how the great army had been destroyed. Thereafter I decided to destroy the sanctuary of the worshipable deity of the rākṣasas. Having killed one hundred rākṣasas who were stationed there with a column, I then destroyed the temple, which was the ornament of Laṅkā. Rāvaṇa then sent

Jambumāli, son of Prahasta, along with many rākṣasas who were fearsome and terrifying. With my formidable iron club, I killed Jambumāli and his army although they were skilled in warfare. Hearing of this, Rāvaṇa sent the seven sons of his chief minister along with a regiment of battle-ready infantry. However, with just my iron bar I sent them off to the abode of the lord of death, Yamarāja. Hearing of the death of his minister's sons, who were quick in combat, Rāvaṇa dispatched five valiant generals. I, however, destroyed all of them along with their troops. Thereafter Rāvaṇa sent his mighty son Akṣa, along with many rākṣasas. As Prince Akṣa, the son of Mandodarī, being learned in the art of war, suddenly jumped into the air, I caught him by his feet. Whirling him around one hundred times, I dashed him against the ground.

“Hearing how Akṣa had been slain as soon as he had arrived, the enraged Rāvaṇa dispatched his other powerful son, Indrajit, who was rabid for combat, along with an army. After crushing the spirit of that army and stalwart rākṣasa, I felt very elated. With full confidence, Rāvaṇa had sent that strong-bodied prince accompanied by an army intoxicated with liquor. Seeing that I was unrestrainable and that his army was crushed, Indrajit bound me with a weapon presided over by Lord Brahmā. The rākṣasas there further bound me with ropes and dragged me before Rāvaṇa. Thus I was spoken to by Rāvaṇa and questioned by him about my coming to Laṅkā and slaying of rākṣasas.

“I said to him: ‘All of this I have done for the sake of Sītā. I am a monkey named Hanumān, son of the wind god, who have come to your palace in order to see Sītā. Know me to be a messeanger of Lord Rāma and a minister of King Sugrīva. I have come to you as a messenger of Lord Rāma. The glorious Sugrīva inquires about your well-being and offers you this salutary advice which is conducive to virtue, material gain and enjoyment:

While I was residing on the heavily forested Rṣyamūka Mountain, Lord Rāma, who is valiant in combat, made an alliance with me. He made me the following request: “My wife has been abducted by a rākṣasa. You should promise to help Me retrieve Her.” I then told Him how Vālī had deprived me of my wife and was threatening to kill me. I asked Him to promise to

help me. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa solemnized Their alliance with me, who had been robbed of sovereignty by Vālī, before a sacred fire. After killing Vālī with a single arrow, Rāma coronated me king of the monkeys. We have to do everything we can to assist Rāma's mission in this instance. I have therefore sent a messenger to your presence in accordance with the principles of righteousness. Let Sītā be brought and returned to Lord Rāma before the monkey warriors devastate your forces. Who is not already familiar with the power of the monkeys that can approach the gods when requested by them for assistance.

“Thus Sugrīva, king of the monkeys, has sent you this message.’ Enfuriated by what I said, he stared at me with eyes that seemed to be burning. Not knowing my capability, the evil and sinful-acting Rāvaṇa ordered that I be put to death. But his wise brother named Vibhiṣaṇa pleaded on my behalf: ‘Do not do this, O tiger among rākṣasas! This should definitely be stopped. You are considering a course of action which is at variance with the code of conduct for kings. The execution of a messenger is certainly not advised in the code of royal conduct, O rākṣasa. A messenger only delivers the message he has been entrusted with. If an envoy has committed a very grave offense, then the law codes say that he may be disfigured, but not killed.’

“After Vibhiṣaṇa had exhorted Rāvaṇa in this way, Rāvaṇa ordered the rākṣasas as follows: ‘Just set his tail on fire!’ Hearing this command, the rākṣasas wrapped my tail with twine and cotton rags. Setting my tail on fire, those rākṣasas of frightful prowess began striking me with their fists and sticks. Bound with many ropes and enveloped in flames, the rākṣasas paraded me through the main thoroughfares upto the city gate. I then contracted my huge form, assumed my original size. In this way I freed myself from my bonds, afterwhich I again assumed a gigantic form. Grabbing an iron bar which I found nearby, I killed all those rākṣasas. With impetuosity I jumped up on top of the city gate. With my burning tail, I set fire to that city with its penthouses and gardens, as the fire at the end of the world burns all beings.

“Seeing the destruction, I thought: ‘Obviously Sītā has been burnt alive, since I see no part of Laṅkā which is not burned and the whole city has been reduced to ashes. While I burnt Laṅkā, I also burnt Sītā. There is no doubt about this. I have completely spoiled Rāma’s great mission.’ Thinking in this way, I became overwhelmed with remorse. Then I heard the voices of cāraṇas bearing good news—Sītā did not perish in the conflagration. Hearing this amazing pronouncement, I thought: ‘Sītā has definitely not been burnt up because of this heavenly announcement and because of certain auspicious omens. For instance, even though my tail was on fire, I was not burnt. My heart is also very happy and a breeze is carry a pleasant fragrance. Because of omens which I have seen proven true in the past, as well as other very important reasons and the words of the sages, my mind is delighted.’ Then I saw Sītā again, and She gave me permission to leave. Going to Ariṣṭa Mountain, I proceeded to jump back with a strong desire to see all of you again. Following the path of the wind, moon, sun, siddhas, and gandharvas, I have found you here. I did everything by Rāma’s mercy, by your strength and to fulfill the orders of Sugrīva. I have completed my mission in Laṅkā. Now you should finish whatever I did not do and still remains to be accomplished.”

HANUMĀN INCITES THE MONKEYS TO ATTACK LAŊKĀ

Hanumān continued speaking: “Rāma’s endeavor is successful and Sugrīva’s patience is too. And my mind is pleased to have witnessed Sītā’s chastity. Sītā’s chastity befits that noble lady, O best of monkeys. She can maintain the worlds by Her austerities, or burn them to ashes by Her anger. Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, has also performed great penances in that his body was not burnt to ashes when he touched Her while kidnapping Her. A flame of fire cannot harm the hand as much as Sītā when She is angered. Now all of you great monkeys headed by Jāmbavān, knowing what remains to be done, should do what is necessary in order to return Sītā to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. I myself can single-handedly destroy the city of Laṅkā with it hordes of rākṣasas and kill the mighty Rāvaṇa, and even more so if I am accompanied by you courageous and powerful monkeys skilled in the use of weapons and eager for conquest.

“I shall personally slay Rāvaṇa on the battlefield, the soldiers marching ahead of him, his sons and his brothers. Whatever weapons Indrajit employs that are difficult to ascertain in combat, whether they be those obtained from Brahmā, Rudra, Vāyu or Varuṇa, I shall destroy and then annihilate the rākṣasas. If you permit me, my prowess will obstruct him. When I shower boulders on the field of battle, that is sufficient to decimate even gods, what to speak of night-stalkers! The ocean might overflow its boundaries, Mount Meru might move, but Jāmbavān can never be fazed in battle by the enemy. Even Aṅgada by himself is capable of obliterating all of the rākṣasa hordes. Panasa and Nīla can shatter Mount Mandara by the forceful trust of their legs, what to speak of rākṣasas on the battlefield. Tell me who among the gods, demons, yakṣas, gandharvas, serpents and birds is a match for Mainda and Dvividā. I do not see anyone who can contend against those two fortunate sons of the Aśvinī-kumāras on a battlefield. Mainda and Dvividā became puffed up because of a boon they

received from Lord Brahmā. Previously, in order to honor the Aśvinī-kumāras, Lord Brahmā gave Mainda and Dvividā complete immunity from being killed by anyone. Blessed by this boon, the two warriors defeated the army of the gods and drank their elixir of immortality. When these two are angry, they are capable of destroying Laṅkā with its horses, chariots and elephants. Therefore, all of you monkeys get ready!

“I myself destroyed Laṅkā, set it on fire and reduced it to ashes. On all the main thoroughfares I proclaim Rāma’s name as follows: ‘Victory to the mighty Rāma and to the mighty Lakṣmaṇa! Victory to King Sugrīva, who is protected by Lord Rāma! I am named Hanumān, son of the wind god and a servant of the King of Kosala, Lord Rāma.’ Thus I proclaimed Rāma’s name everywhere.

“The pious Sītā is living in the dirt at the foot of a śimśapā tree in the center of the wicked Rāvaṇa’s aśoka grove. She is surrounded by rākṣasīs and emaciated by the grief that consumes Her. She is as pale as the crescent moon covered by a cloud. Caring little for Rāvaṇa, who is proud of his own strength, Sītā, remaining faithful to Rāma, has been put into detention.

“Completed devoted to Rāma with all Her heart, the lovely Sītā does not think of anything but Rāma, as does Śacī with Indra. She wears a single piece of cloth soiled with dust. All the limbs of Her body are afflicted with grief, yet She is dedicated to the welfare of Her husband. I saw Her in the pleasure grove being constantly threatened by horrible rākṣasīs. She had Her hair tied in a single braid. She was lying on the ground, pale like a lotus withered by the arrival of winter. She rejects all of Rāvaṇa’s advances and would rather die.

“Somehow or other I managed to instill confidence in that fawn-eyed lady. I then informed Her about the whole situation. She was overjoyed to hear about the alliance between Rāma and Sugrīva. Her chastity is steadfast and Her devotion to Her husband is topmost. The great Rāvaṇa is fortunate that She has not killed him with a curse, for Rāma will be the instrument for slaying him in combat. Frail by nature, Sītā has become weak due to Her separation from Rāma, like a student studying on the first day of

the lunar month. In this way the glorious Sītā is overwhelmed with sorrow. We should therefore do whatever is necessary to remedy this situation.”

JĀMBAVĀN DISSUADES THE MONKEYS FROM ATTACKING LAŊKĀ

When Aṅgada heard Hanumān's entreaty, he said: "I do not think it is proper for us to approach Rāma and inform Him that we have found Sītā without having rescued Her. No one among the gods and demons of this world is equal to you in jumping and prowess, O best of monkeys. Since the great heroes of the rākṣasas have already been slain by Hanumān, what more is there for us to do? Let us return to Kiṣkindhā, bringing Sītā with us."

Jāmbavān, the best of bears, spoke the following salutary words to Aṅgada, who had decided on a course of action: "The task which you are considering does not look difficult for us. But you should do it in a manner that is in consonance with Rāma's own decision."

THE MONKEYS ENJOY THEMSELVES AT MADHUVANA

The forest monkeys headed by Aṅgada and Hanumān accepted Jāmbavān's advice. With Hanumān in the lead, the overjoyed monkeys left Mahendra Mountain by jumping. They looked as big as Mount Meru or Mount Mandara and were behaving like stately elephants in rut. With their huge and powerful bodies, they seemed to be covering the sky. As they proceeded, Hanumān was being praised by heavenly beings and all the monkeys fixed their eyes on him. They wanted to give the highest glory to Lord Rāma in the conquest of Laṅkā and were elated by their success. They were all eager to bring Rāma and Sugrīva the good news, were looking forward to combat and wanted to assist Rāma in attaining His goal. Leaping through the air, the monkeys reached a forest thick with vine-covered trees that was just like Lord Indra's Nandana Garden. It was called Madhuvana, and was under the jurisdiction of Sugrīva. It was completely unassailable and fascinating to everyone. It was under the permanent care of the monkey Dadhimukha, the maternal uncle of Sugrīva. The monkeys were overjoyed to see that they had reached the extensive forest of Madhuvana. The monkeys, being themselves the color of honey, asked Prince Aṅgada for permission to taste the honey. Receiving the consent of the elders headed by Jāmbavān, Prince Aṅgada gave them permission to eat honey.

They all rejoiced as they ate the honey; the monkeys were ecstatic. Some of them reveled, some danced, some sang, some bowed down, some laughed loudly, some fell over with their feet in the air, some stumbled about, some jumped and some babbled. Some leaned against each other, some fought with each other, some argued with each other, some rested on each other. Some jumped from tree to tree, while others jumped down on the ground from the tops of trees. Some jumped from the ground with increased speed to the tops of tall trees. While one was singing, another approached him laughing. While one was laughing, another came to him

weeping. While one was howling, another came and pushed him away. While one was pushing another monkey, another came up to him roaring. The whole monkey army became delirious from the powerful effect of drinking honey. There were none of them who were not intoxicated; there were none who were not agitated.

Seeing that forest being consumed and its trees stripped of leaves and flowers, Dadhimukha angrily tried to restrain the monkeys. While being threatened by those puffed-up monkeys, Dadhimukha thought about how he could protect the forest from those monkeys. To some he boldly spoke harsh words; others he slapped with his palms. Some he approached at close quarters and argued with them, others he spoke with calmly. As he was trying to restrain them verbally, they surrounded him, and due to their intoxication, began to drag him around. Crowding together, they had no fear and did not see the fault in what they were doing. Scratching him with their claws, biting him with their fangs, slapping him with their hands and kicking him with their feet, in their intoxicated state they shrouded the forest of its edible produce.

DADHIMUKHA REPORTS TO SUGRĪVA

Hanumān said to the monkeys: “Enjoy the honey with a peaceful mind. I will repulse anyone who would try to hinder you.” Pleased by what Hanumān said, Āṅgada added: “Let the monkeys drink honey! I must certainly heed the request of Hanumān, who has accomplished his mission, even if that task is not worth doing, and what to speak of one like this.” When the monkeys heard Āṅgada’s approbation, they were gladdened and shouted “Bravo! Bravo!” Offering their respects to Āṅgada, they all proceeded to where Madhuvana was, as the current of a river rushes upon a tree. After overpowering the guards by dint of their strength, they entered deep into Madhuvana. Because of Āṅgada’s having given permission, Hanumān’s having found Sītā, and their having heard about it, all the monkeys drank honey and gathered the nectarian fruits in that forest. Jumping up, they all beat the forest guards who had gathered to stop them. Then the monkeys engaged themselves by the hundreds in collecting honey and fruits in the forest.

Holding in their arms honey combs that weighed sixty four pounds, the monkeys gathered together to drink the honey, breaking the combs into pieces. After drinking the honey from the combs, some of them tossed the wax away. Others, who were inebriated, pelted each other with the empty wax combs. Others, who were at the bases of trees, stayed there holding on to branches. Feeling torpid because of their intoxication, some of them spread leaves on the ground and lied down. Due to the elation of the inebriety, some of them had become just like madmen. Some of them insulted each other, while others stumbled and fell. Some of them roared like lions and some of them warbled like birds. Drunk with honey, some of the monkeys lied down to sleep on the ground. Some of them laughed, while others did the opposite, they cried. Having done one thing, some said that they had done something else, while others understood them in a different way.

The guards in charge of the honey in that forest were thwarted by the fearsome monkeys, and so they fled in all directions. The monkeys dragged the guards by the legs and threw them into the sky. Perturbed as the guards were, they went to Dadhimukha and said: "The monkeys have forcefully destroyed Madhuvana with the permission of Hanumān. And they dragged us by the legs and tossed us up into the sky." Angered to hear that Madhuvana had been destroyed, Dadhimukha, who was in charge of protecting that forest, consoled the guards: "Come on! Let us go to those monkeys who are so proud of their strength! By our strength we shall stop them from eating the honey." Hearing Dadhimukha's statement, those monkey guards quickly return with him to Madhuvana. Uprooting a tree, Dadhimukha stood in their midst, and all those monkeys ran quickly to Madhuvana. Angrily grabbing boulders, trees and chunks of mountains, they reached the place where the monkeys were raiding the honey. Taking their master's instructions to heart, the guards had quickly come, armed with boulders and trees such as sālas and tālas. The guards approached the vainglorious monkeys who were in the trees and on the ground by the thousands. Seeing that Dadhimukha was angry, the monkeys, headed by Hanumān, ran up to him. Angry as he was, Aṅgada grabbed the arms of Dadhimukha, who was rushing toward him with a tree in his hands. Blinded by intoxication, Aṅgada showed no mercy to Dadhimukha, even though the former was his maternal uncle. Knocking him down, Aṅgada began rubbing him against the ground. Dazed, soaked in blood and suffering from broken arms and legs, Dadhimukha suddenly fainted for a while.

When Dadhimukha regained consciousness, somehow or other he managed to escape. Going to a secluded place, he told his assistants who had gathered there: "All right, get ready! Let us go where our thick-necked master Sugrīva is staying with Rāma. We shall inform the king about all the mischief perpetrated by Aṅgada. Angered by the report we shall give him, he will have those monkeys put to death. For this heavenly forest of Madhuvana, which is difficult for the demigods to approach, is Sugrīva's patrimony. Sugrīva will punish with death all these monkeys so fond of honey, along with their well-wishers. Those rascals deserve to be killed because they have acted against the orders of the king. Only then will my anger born from indignation bear fruit."

After speaking in this way to the forest guards, Dadhimukha suddenly got up and departed, accompanied by the guards. In just a moment's time Dadhimukha reached the place where was the wise Sugrīva, son of the sun god. Seeing Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva, Dadhimukha descended from the sky to the level ground, so it is said. Landing there and being surrounded by all of his assistants, the glorious Dadhimukha placed his joined palms on his head and touched his head to the two beautiful feet of Sugrīva.

SUGRĪVA ASKS DADHIMUKHA TO SUMMON THE MONKEYS

Sugrīva's heart was pained to see Dadhimukha fallen down with his head on the ground and said to him: "Get up! Get up! Why are you lying at my feet? I shall give you full protection. Just tell me everything. Out of fear of whom have you come? You should tell us everything for our benefit. I hope everything is all right in Madhuvana. I want to hear what you have to say, O best of monkeys." Comforted by Sugrīva, the highly sagacious Dadhimukha got up and said: "O king, the monkeys have done what your father, you or even Vālī have never done, consuming Madhuvana, they have left it devastated. With the help of these assistants I tried to stop them, but they ignored me and continued eating the fruits and drinking the honey. Some of the monkeys were throwing around pieces of honey comb after eating it. When I tried to stop them, they frowned at me. When my assistants became aggravated, they were assaulted and actually driven out of the forest by those angry monkeys with blood-red eyes. Some of my assistants were punched, others were kicked and others were dragged around and thrown into the air. Thus these warriors have been assaulted while you are king. In fact, the whole Madhuvana has been consumed by those monkeys as they liked."

The wise Lakṣmaṇa questioned Sugrīva as he was being informed of these events: "O king, why has this forest guardian monkey come here? Why has this downtrodden monkey addressed an appeal to you?" Sugrīva, who was expert at speaking, replied to Lakṣmaṇa as follows: "O noble Lakṣmaṇa, the monkey warrior Dadhimukha was complaining that the monkeys headed by Aṅgada have raided the honey in Madhuvana Forest. After searching the southern region, the monkeys have returned. They would not have done such a thing if they had not been successful in their mission. As soon as they returned from the south, they completely wrecked Madhuvana, which was unassailable. Since they have destroyed the forest, my task has surely been accomplished. Sītā has undoubtedly been found, and by none other than

Hanumān. Surely only Hanumān was capable of accomplishing this task. Hanumān has the ability to accomplish anything, as well as intelligence, resolution, strength and learning. There is no question of failure for an army where Jāmbavān and the extremely mighty Aṅgada are leaders and Hanumān is a counselor. The monkeys led by Aṅgada have laid waste to the forest of Madhuvana. The monkeys who were guarding the forest were assaulted and dragged by the legs. This monkey named Dadhimukha, who speaks very sweetly, has come here to inform me of the matter. O Lakṣmaṇa, because the monkeys are gorging themselves on honey, they must have discovered Sītā. They would not have destroyed that forest which was given to my family as a gift from the gods unless they had found Sītā.”

The pious Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma were very glad to hear the good news from Sugrīva. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were both overjoyed. Delighted to hear the report from Dadhimukha, Sugrīva further inquired from him: “I am happy to hear that the monkeys have raided the forest after accomplishing their mission. We have to forgive and tolerate the actions of those who have fulfilled their duty. I wish to see right now those haughty monkeys who have achieved their purpose and are led by Hanumān. And with the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty, I want to hear about their endeavor to locate Sītā.”

Seeing the two jubilant princes’s eyes dilated with joy because they were about to achieve their goal, and realizing from the thrill in the limbs of his body that he would also fulfill his promise, Sugrīva experienced immeasurable bliss.

PRINCE AṅGADA AND THE MONKEYS RETURN

Upon receiving this instruction from Sugrīva, Dadhimukha was pleased and bid farewell to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva. After bowing down before Sugrīva and the two mighty descendants of the Raghu Dynasty, Dadhimukha and the other monkeys leapt into the air, so it is said. Dadhimukha traveled as quickly as he had come. Descending from the sky to the ground, he entered the forest. Upon entering the forest, he found all the leaders of monkey hordes in a sober condition, urinating honey transformed into water.

Approaching Aṅgada with joined palms, Dadhimukha spoke to him with great delight: “O gentle one, do not be angry with these guards who tried to restrain you. You should forgive their wrath occasioned by ignorance. O mighty one, as the crown prince you are the rightful owner of this forest. You should forgive the offense which we committed earlier due to foolishness. I have reported your arrival here with all these monkeys to your uncle Sugrīva. He was very glad to hear of your arrival with all the leaders of monkey hordes and was not at all irritated by the destruction of the forest. He then commanded me to summon you there immediately.”

When Aṅgada heard Dadhimukha’s sincere entreaty, he replied as follows: “O monkey leaders, it seems Lord Rāma has heard about our arrival. Therefore we should not tarry here any longer now that our task has been accomplished. You monkeys have drunken honey to your hearts’ content. What more is there to do but go to where my superior Sugrīva is. I shall do whatever you jointly decide, for I am totally dependent on you regarding what I should do. Although I am the crown prince, I am not fit to give you orders. It would be improper for me to dare tell you what to do.”

When the monkeys heard what Aṅgada said, their minds were very pleased and replied as he was still speaking: “O king, who, while being a master, would speak like that? Enfatuated by their power and control, everyone becomes puffed up. These words are worthy of you and no one

else. This humility indicates your fitness for more good fortune in the future. We have all come here in preparation to go where Sugrīva, the perpetual lord of the monkeys, is. O best of monkeys, we cannot take even one step without receiving your permission. We tell you this quite frankly.”

While they were talking in this way, Aṅgada interrupted, saying: “All right! Let’s go!” All of a sudden the powerful monkeys jumped into the sky. As they flew through the air, they covered the sky like boulders shot from catapults. Placing Aṅgada and Hanumān before them, the monkeys sped across the sky, roaring like rain clouds propelled by strong winds. When Aṅgada arrived, King Sugrīva said to the grief-stricken Rāma: Take heart and bless You! Sītā has undoubtedly been found. Otherwise they would not come here like this, for the time limit for their return has expired. If their mission had not been successful, the Crown Prince Aṅgada would not come before me. Even though he could come without having accomplished anything, he would have a dejected look on his face and his mind would be bewildered. They would not have ravaged my forest of Madhuvana, which was given to my father R̥ṣarāja by Lord Brahmā and protected by my predecessors, unless they had found Sītā. O Rāma, fortunate is Kausalyā to have a son as fine as You. Do not worry. Sītā has been found, of this there is no doubt, and by none other than Hanumān. Surely no one but Hanumān could have done it. Hanumān firmly possesses the ability to succeed, as well as intelligence, resolution, potency, courage and learning. In an army where Jāmbavān is a leader, Aṅgada is the commander-in-chief and Hanumān is a counselor, there is no question of failure. Do not worry any longer.”

Then Sugrīva heard a clamor in the sky of monkeys roaring proudly because of Hanumān’s deeds, as if to announce his success as they arrived at Kiṣkindhā. Hearing the roars of the monkeys, Sugrīva, the best of monkeys, felt mental satisfaction and rolled and stretched his tail. Keeping Aṅgada and Hanumān before them, the monkeys arrived, eager as they were to see Rāma. The jubilant monkeys headed by Aṅgada landed nearby Sugrīva and Rāma. The strong-armed Hanumān bowed his head and informed Rāma that Sītā had remained faithful to Him and was unharmed. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were overjoyed to hear the nectar-sweet news that Sītā had been found. Lakṣmaṇa then looked affectionately at Sugrīva, who was confidant that

Hanumān had found Sītā. Rāma, the annihilator of hostile enemies, also looked upon Hanumān with great affection and love.

HANUMĀN RELATES EVERYTHING TO RĀMA

Then they all went to Mount Prasravaṇa, which is covered with beautiful forests. Placing the crown prince Aṅgada before them, they greeted Sugrīva and began telling him all about Sītā. In Lord Rāma's presence, the monkeys related everything about Sītā's being held captive in Rāvaṇa's private chambers, Her being threatened by rākṣasīs, Her complete devotion to Rāma and the time limit set by Rāma for Her to submit to him. When Rāma heard how Sītā was alive, He asked the following question: "Where is Sītā staying and what are Her feelings about Me? Please tell Me everything about Sītā, O monkeys." Hearing Rāma's request, the monkeys urged Hanumān to speak because he knew all the details about Sītā. Being urged in that way, Hanumān bowed his head in the direction toward where Sītā was and explained how he was able to find Her: "Jumping one hundred yojanas across the ocean, I reached the other side and searched all over for Sītā. She is residing there, on the southern shore of the ocean in the wicked Rāvaṇa's city of Laṅkā. There I found the chaste Sītā inside of Rāvaṇa's private residencial compound. Sītā has fixed Her heart's desire on You alone. I found Her in the midst of rākṣasīs who were constantly threatening Her. She is in Rāvaṇa's pleasure garden under the vigilance of rākṣasīs. She is wearing Her hair tied in but a single braid. She is morose and is absorbed in thoughts of You. She sleeps on the bare ground. The limbs of Her body have waned pale like a lotus at the arrival of winter. She has refused Rāvaṇa's advances toward Her and has decided to die rather than submit to his wishes.

"Somehow or other I found that lady who is wholly dedicated to You. By slowing extolling the glories of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, I was able to instill confidence in Her. Then I spoke with Her and informed Her about everything regarding Your alliance with Sugrīva. Hearing about that alliance brought Her great joy. Her good character is constant and so too is Her devotion to You. Thus did I find Sītā, the dear daughter of King Janaka,

engaged in severe austerities and dedicated to You. As a verification of Her identity, She informed me about an incident with a crow that took place while You were residing at Citrakuṭa. Sītā said to me: ‘O son of the wind god, please inform Rāma, the tiger among men, everything about My situation which you have witnessed here. You should give Rāma this piece of jewelry, which I have kept carefully, while delivering the following message within the hearing range of Sugrīva:

Here is the brilliant diadem which I have guarded carefully. Remember the design which You painted on My forehead with red pigment, and which You later rubbed off. I send you this spendid jewel created by the ocean. Looking at it in My difficulty, I feel as happy as if I am looking at You. I shall only be able to survive one more month, O son of King Daśaratha! Fallen into the hands of rākṣasas, I shall not survive past one month.

“Thus did the virtuous Sītā speak to me. While confined in the inner chambers of Rāvaṇa’s residence, She stared at me with fully blossoming eyes like those of a doe. This, then, is the news, which I have now fully delivered to You, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Please find the means by which we can somehow or other cross the ocean.”

Surmising that the two princes had regained confidence and having presented Rāma with the evidence for verification, Hanumān fully recounted everything that Sītā had previous said.

RĀMA ASKS HANUMĀN TO REPEAT SĪTĀ'S MESSAGE

After hearing what Hanumān said, Rāma pressed the diadem to His heart and wept with Lakṣmaṇa. Gazing at that best of gems, Rāma, who was emaciated from grief, spoke to Sugrīva with eyes brimming with tears: “As a cow gives milk from her udder at the sight of her beloved calf, so does my heart shed tears at the sight of this valuable jewel. This diadem was given by My father-in-law to Sītā at Our wedding and it looked so beautiful when fixed in Her head. This jewel produced by the ocean and prized by all men was given to King Janaka by Indra because of his satisfaction over a sacrifice performed by the king. Seeing this jewel is like seeing My father and the powerful King Janaka right here. This gem looked so nice on My darling’s forehead. By seeing this jewel, I consider Her already recovered. Please repeat again and again what Sītā said, thus sprinkling My thirsty soul with water in the form of Her words.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, what could be more painful than seeing this pearl arrived here without Sītā? O Hanumān, if Sītā survives the next month, She will live a long life. I, however, could not survive one moment without that dark-eyed woman. Please take Me to that place where you found My beloved. I cannot wait even a moment longer. How is my virtuous and beautiful wife faring in the midst of frightening and horrible rākṣasas? Surely Her face does not look as beautiful as it did, like the autumn moon concealed by clouds. O Hanumān, tell Me exactly what Sītā said. I can definitely survive on the strength of those words, as a diseased person recovers with the help of medicine. Sītā’s character is sweet, and She speaks sweetly too. Being separated from Me, what did my lovely lady say? How does She survive since She is experiencing hardship greater than previously?”

HANUMĀN RECOUNTS THE INCIDENT OF THE CROW

When requested in this way by Rāma, Hanumān repeated to Him everything that Sītā had said: “Lady Sītā related the following incident which occurred while You were living in Citrakuṭa. Once, while sleeping comfortably at Your side, Sītā woke up before You when a crow swooped down and scratched Her breast. At that time, O Rāma, You were lying asleep on Her lap. The crow began tormenting Sītā. Coming back, the crow attacked Sītā again and again. You woke up only when bathed with the blood flowing from Her wounds. While You were lying asleep, You were awoken by Sītā, who was being relentlessly attacked by the crow. You became as angry as a poisonous snake when You saw Her breast injured, and You asked: ‘Who has torn the flesh of Your breast with the tips of his claws, O timid lady? Who is playing with an angry five-headed snake?’

“Looking around, You suddenly saw a crow with its sharp claws stained with blood perched in front of Sītā. In fact, that bird was Jayanta, the son of Lord Indra and best of birds. He was as fast as the wind and resided in the nether regions. With Your eyes rolling due to anger, You made a very harsh and cruel decision regarding the crow. Pulling a straw out of Your mat of sacred kuśa grass, You charged it with a weapon presided over by Lord Brahmā. That straw of kuśa grass began blazing like the fire of universal devastation and was pointing toward the crow. You then hurled that blazing straw of kuśa grass at the crow, and it began pursuing the crow. Consequently, the crow was forsaken by his forefathers and the demigods, who were terrified. After running all over the three worlds, he was unable to find anyone to protect him. Finally, the crow came back and took shelter of You, the only one worth taking shelter of, throwing himself on the ground before You. Although he deserved to be killed, You gave him the shelter of Your mercy, O descendant of Kakutstha. You were, however, unable to nullify the effect of the weapon, and so destroyed the right eye of the crow

with it. After offering respects to You and to King Daśaratha, the crow, being set free, returned to his own abode.

“You are thus the best of those learned in the use of weapons. You are courageous and of good character. Why, then, do You not direct Your weapons against the rākṣasas? Neither the celestial serpents, the gandharvas, the asuras or the maruts are able to stand up to You in battle. If out of Your virility You have any regard for Me, then quickly slay Rāvaṇa on the battlefield with Your sharp arrows. Moreover, knowing the desire of His brother, why does not Lakṣmaṇa come to rescue Me? Why do those two tigers among men, who are equal to the sun god and the fire god and who cannot be defeated by the gods, ignore Me? Undoubtedly I have committed some great sin that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, though living together, do not protect Me.”

Hanumān said: “When I heard this entreaty, I replied to the noble woman: ‘I swear to You by my truthfulness that Rāma is agonizing on Your account. Because Rāma is overwhelmed with sorrow, Lakṣmaṇa is also suffering. Somehow or other You have been found. Now is not the time for lamenting. Within one hour You will see the end of Your suffering, my lady. Eager to see You, the two brothers will kill Rāvaṇa and his relatives in combat and reduce the city of Laṅkā to ashes. Rāma will then surely take You back to His capital city. You should give me some token as verification which Rāma can easily recognize and which might bring Him joy.’

“Looking around in all directions, She unfastened Her bundled cloth, took out a diadem for wearing in the hair, and gave it to me. I accepted that shiny piece of jewelry in my hands to deliver it to You, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. I offered Her my respects with a bowed head, for I was in a hurry to leave. Seeing that I was eager to go and that I had expanded my form to great proportions, She spoke to me with Her voice choked up with sobs and Her face bathed with tears. Distrubed by the thought of my jumping across the ocean and overwhelmed with grief, She said: ‘O Hanumān, inquire about the well-being of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who are both just like lions, as well as of Sugrīva and all his ministers. You should deliver this message in such a way so that the mighty-armed Rāma rescues Me from this ocean of misery. When you reach Lord Rāma, impress upon

Him the intensity of My sorrow and of My being threatened by the rākṣasas.
May you have a safe journey, O best of monkeys!

“This is the message, O lion among kings, which Sītā entrusted to me in Her despondency. Pondering this message given to me by Sītā, You can understand that She is the most chaste and pious woman.”

HOW SĪTĀ DOUBTED HANUMĀN

Hanumān continued: “Regarding me with respect out of Her kindheartedness and affection for You, and seeing that I was about to leave, She said: ‘You should present the message from different angles so that Rāma quickly slays Rāvaṇa in combat and retrieves Me. Or if you like, O warrior, you can rest here in some hidden place for one day, then you could leave tomorrow. While you are here I am able to free Myself for a while from the fructification of My misfortune. Your departure from this island will undoubtedly also constitute a great danger to My life. And the grief caused by your absence will further torment Me, who am condemned and miserable, stumbling from one misfortune to another. I am also wondering how Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa will cross the vast ocean with an army of monkeys as Their assistants. There are only three living entities who can cross this ocean—Garuḍa, Vāyu and you, O sinless one. Since this task is so difficult to accomplish, tell Me what your plan is, O best of those wise in action. Although you are actually able to carry out this mission single-handed, you would gain all the glory for yourself. If Rāma slays Rāvaṇa in battle with the help of His army and takes Me back to His capital, that would be glorious for Him. Rāma should not rescue Me in the same way that Rāvaṇa kidnapped Me, by deceit. If Rāma were to rescue Me with the assistance of His army, that would befit Him. Therefore, please make an arrangement so that Rāma exhibits valor worthy of a warrior.’

“I then replied to Her with the following words: ‘O madam, Sugrīva, who is most courageous and the lord of an army of monkeys and bears, is determined to rescue You. At his command are monkeys who are capable, brave and most powerful. Their advance cannot be obstructed from above or below, nor on the sides, not even in the completion of the most difficult task, for they possess immeasurable energy. By following the wind, those highly fortunate monkeys have circumabulated the earth more than once. In Kiṣkindhā there are monkeys who are equal and greater than I. In Sugrīva’s realm there is no one less than I. If I could jump here, then what to speak of

those others? The superiors are never sent out on reconnaissance, only the inferiors are.

“As such, what is the use of grieving any longer, my lady? The monkey warriors can reach Laṅkā in one leap. O blessed lady, riding on my back, those two princes will come before You like the sun and moon risen simultaneously. You will soon see Rāma, the slayer of foes, and Lakṣmaṇa bearing a bow standing at the gate of the city. You will soon see a gathering of monkeys with teeth and claws for weapons and as valiant as lions. You will soon hear the roaring of monkeys as big as mountains and clouds on the peaks of Malaya Mountain. You will also soon see Rāma coronated in Ayodhyā with the termination of His exile. Hearing my gladdening words of encouragement, Sītā felt peaceful, even though She was stricken with grief on Your account.”