

# RAMAYANA

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*Translated by Robert Biggs*

## PART II AYODHYĀ-KĀṆḌA

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*With love, respect and radiators*  
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## KING DAŚARATHA DECIDES TO INSTALL RĀMA AS REGENT

Then the sinless Śatrughna, who always conquered His enemies, went to His maternal uncle's, being lead by Bharata, who was full of affection for Him. There Śatrughna remained with His brother, being entertained by His maternal uncle who owned many horses and who was full of affection for his nephew. Although They were entertained with every kind of pleasure while residing there, the two brothers remembered their elderly father, the valiant King Daśaratha. The highly glorious king also remembered his two absent sons, Bharata and Śatrughna, who were equal to Indra and Varuṇa. Moreover, King Daśaratha loved all four of his exceptional sons as if they were four limbs sprung from his own body. Among Them, Rāma was the joy of His father, possessing the most excellent qualities, as does Lord Brahmā among the created living beings. Indeed, He was the eternal Lord Viṣṇu who had appeared in this world by the request of the demigods to slay the demon Rāvaṇa. Kausalyā shone with her son whose splendor was unlimited, just like Aditi with Indra, the best of the demigods, who wields a thunderbolt in his hand.

Indeed, He possessed physical beauty and valor and was free from enviousness. As a son, there was no comparison to Him on the earth; He was equal to King Daśaratha in good qualities. He was always peaceful and spoke sweetly. Whenever reproached, He never returned a harsh reply. One could satisfy Him anytime by doing any favor. He did not begrudge even one hundred offenses because of His self-mastery. Even when busy learning the use of weapons, He would converse with the pious souls who were advanced in character, knowledge and age. He was intelligent, sweet-spoken, the first to speak, a pleasant speaker and valorous, yet not deluded by His own greatness. He never spoke a lie, and was learned and respectful to His elders. He was loved by the citizens, and He also loved the citizens. He was kind, had conquered anger, and was respectful to the brāhmaṇas. He was

compassionate on the wretched, familiar with righteousness, always self-controlled, and pure. His mind was intent on what was worthy of His dynasty and held in high regard His duties as a warrior. Among those, He considered the attainment of heaven as the highest good. He never engaged Himself in any inauspicious deed, nor did He relish profane talk. In debate, He could give arguments and counterarguments just like the celestial sage Bṛhaspati.

He was free from disease, youthful, eloquent, handsome, and knew how to act according to time and place. He was celebrated as the only saintly person who could discern the essence of all people in this world. Moreover, because of His possessing super-excellent qualities, the prince had become so dear to the citizens as if He were their own life air externalized. Lord Rāma, the older brother of Bharata, had concluded all His studies under vow, had duly studied the four Vedas and their corollaries, and had surpassed His father in archery and deployment of missiles. He was the source of auspiciousness, holy, free from depression, truthful and straightforward.

He was fully instructed by elderly brāhmaṇas who could directly see the purpose of religious principles. He was familiar with the principles of religiosity, economic development and sense enjoyment, had a keen memory and was shrewd. He was conversant and expert in the customary rites prevalent in the world. He was modest and kept His feelings concealed and His deliberations secret. He had many followers. His anger and joy were never obstructed. He knew when to disburse His funds and when to retain them. He had unflinching devotion and steady intelligence. He did not gather impious men around Himself nor did He use foul language. He was never lazy or careless, and was aware of the faults of His own people as well as of others. He was well-versed in the scriptures, and grateful.

He could read people's minds and was expert at meting out punishment and rewards according to justice. He knew how to gather pious men around Himself and how to be kind to them. He knew where to wage war. He was conversant with the means of raising funds and knew how to expend money as recommended in the scriptures. He achieved proficiency in all the scriptures and also in those texts interspersed with vernacular language. He engaged in both economic development and religiosity. He

enjoyed the subtle pleasures of life and was not lazy. He was learned in the arts of entertainment and knew how to divide His wealth. He was expert at training and riding horses and elephants. He was the foremost of those conversant with the art of war. He was esteemed even by the atirathas. He was expert at encircling the enemy, attacking them and leading the army into battle. He could not be harmed in battle, not even by the angry gods or demons. He was free from envy, had conquered anger, and did not become excited or jealous. He was irreproachable by any living being and was never under the influence of time. Being endowed with such outstanding qualities, Prince Rāma was esteemed by the citizens and in all the three worlds. He was equal to the earth in forgiveness. He was equal to Br̥haspati in intelligence and to Indra in prowess. Like the resplendent sun with its rays, Rāma shone brightly by His qualities, which made Him the darling of the common people and endeared Him greatly to His father. The earth desired Him as her Lord, possessing as He did such qualities, having unassailable prowess and being equal to the protectors of the directions.

Seeing his son endowed with so many unparalleled good qualities, the elderly and long-lived King Daśaratha began to think: “How can the wonderful event of Rāma’s becoming king take place in my life time? Oh, when shall I see my beloved son installed as king? This is the topmost desire throbbing in my heart. He truly desires the improvement of the world and is compassionate upon all living beings. He is dearer to the world than I, like Parjanya, the sender of rains. In valor He is equal to Yama, the lord of death, and Indra, the lord of heaven. In intelligence He is equal to Br̥haspati. He is equal to a mountain in firmness, and surpasses me in good qualities. Seeing my son Rāma ruling over this whole earth in my old age, let me ascend to heaven.”

Thinking in this way and seeing that Rāma was endowed with abundant good qualities rarely found in other monarchs, as well as innumerable other excellent qualities not in anyone else in this world, King Daśaratha, in consultation with his ministers, decided to coronate Him as prince regent. The king told the ministers about the danger presaged by fearful signs appearing in the sky, air and earth, as also about the signs of old age on his own body. Furthermore, the king learned of the popularity among the people of the great-souled Rāma, whose face was like a full moon. This

news of Rāma's popularity removed the king's anxiety. For his own good, as well as that of the citizens, and because of his love for them, the righteous king ordered the ministers to hasten the arrangements for when the proper time would arrive. The king summoned to Ayodhyā the prominent citizens of different cities, as well as the rulers of the different countries of the world. The king, being himself decorated with jewels, saw that they were all hospitably lodged and adorned with jewels according to rank, as does Lord Brahmā with his descendants. Because of the hurriedness with which everything was arranged, the king forgot to invite the king of the Kekayas or King Janaka of Mithilā, but consoled himself with the thought that they would hear about the delightful event later.

Now that the king, who was capable of destroying the enemy's stronghold, had taken his seat, the other kings, who were esteemed by the world, entered the arena. The kings then sat down on the seats allotted them by the emperor, facing the king in an organized manner. Surrounded by humble kings who had received due respects from the emperor, and by men who resided in the city of Ayodhyā or from other parts of the country, the king resembled the thousand-eyed Indra surrounded by the immortal demigods.



## KING DAŚARATHA INFORMS THE ASSEMBLY OF HIS DESIRE

Thereafter, addressing the whole assembly, King Daśaratha spoke words that were beneficial, gladdening and unambiguous. His deep voice resonated like the beating of a kettledrum or the rumbling of a thunder cloud. With a voice that had the characteristics of a king's and which was charming, inimitable and full of wisdom, King Daśaratha addressed the kings: "It is well known to you all that my excellent kingdom has been protected by the kings previous to me like a child by its parents. As such, I wish to endow the whole world, which is so deserving of happiness due to having been ruled by all the kings of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, with the highest good fortune. Following the path trodden by my ancestors, I fully protected the people as well as I was able, even foregoing sleep. This body has become worn out under the shade of the royal white umbrella while being used for the good of the whole world. Having exceed many lifetimes by living for thousands of years, I wish to rest this old body. After carrying the heavy burden of administering the world with justice, which can only be done with the ability of a king and not by one who has not conquered the senses, I am completely exhausted. As such, securing the agreement of all the best of brāhmaṇas gathered near me, after placing my eldest son Rāma in charge of the welfare of the people, I wish to retire. For my eldest son Rāma has taken after me in all qualities, is equal in valor to Indra and a conqueror of the enemy's strongholds. Tomorrow morning I shall install as prince regent that superexcellent person who is the best of those who uphold righteousness and who resembles the moon united with the constellation puṣya.

"The fortunate Rāma, the elder brother of Lakṣmaṇa, is worthy of being your ruler. By Him the three worlds will be better ruled. I shall immediately bestow this good fortune upon the world. Having entrusted my son Rāma with this task, I shall be free from anxiety. If this proposal of mine is suitable and advisable, give me your approval, otherwise tell me how I

should proceed. Although this is my preference, let any other salutary course be contemplated. The opinion of the neutral is different and greater since it is derived from two conflicting views.”

The kings jubilantly applauded King Daśaratha as he spoke, as peacocks applaud a great rain cloud. Thereafter, prompted by joy, from the multitude of men arose a fond applause that caused the earth to tremble. Fully perceiving the mood of King Daśaratha, who knew the principles of righteousness and the interests of the people, the leading brāhmaṇas consulted with the representatives of the empire and, having reached a decision, addressed the aged king Daśaratha: “O monarch, you have ruled for many thousands of years and have now grown old. Please install Rāma as prince regent to rule over the earth. Indeed, we wish to see the strong-armed and mighty hero of the Raghu Dynasty riding on a great elephant with the royal umbrella over His head.”

Hearing their decision, the king replied to them to ascertain what would please their minds, as if he did not already know: “Having heard my proposal, you now desire Rāma as your ruler. O kings, this is my doubt. Please answer it truthfully. How is it that while I am ruling the earth righteously, you wish to see mighty Rāma installed as prince regent?”

Those great souls along with the citizens of Ayodhyā and other nations said to him: “O king, your son possesses numerous auspicious qualities. O lord, we shall describe in full the dear and pleasing attributes of the intelligent and godlike Rāma who is a storehouse of excellent qualities. Now listen to them. Rāma, whose prowess is unfailing, is equal to Indra in divine qualities. He has in fact surpassed all the descendants of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, O ruler of men. Rāma is the most righteous person in the world. He is truthful and dedicated to truthfulness. Righteousness and prosperity have sprung directly from Lord Rāma. He is equal to the moon in pleasing the people and His forgiveness matches that of the earth. In intelligence He is equal to Br̥haspati and in valor He is equal to Indra, the husband of Śaci. He is conversant with the principles of righteousness, is true to His vow, is well-mannered and nonenvious. He is peaceful, comforting, mild, grateful and in control of His senses. He is gentle, steady-minded, always gracious and ungrudging. He speaks kindly to all living beings and always tells the

truth. He is devoted to the learned, the elderly and the brāhmaṇas. By this, His unequaled glory, fame and influence have been enhanced.

“He is expert in the use of the weapons of the gods, demons and men. He has concluded His vow of studying all the sciences, as also the branches of the Vedas. Rāma, the elder brother of Bharata, has proven to be the most expert in the art of music in the world. He is of auspicious lineage, saintly, noble-minded, and highly intelligent. He has been fully instructed by the foremost of brāhmaṇas who were skilled in ascertaining the principles of righteousness.

“Whenever He sets out in expedition with Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, for the benefit of a village or town, He never comes back without being victorious. While returning from a campaign on the back of an elephant or in a chariot, He inquires about the well-being of the citizens, as well as their children, wives, sacrifices, servants and students, as if they were His own relatives, as a father would about the sons born from his own loins. Rāma, the lion among men, always asks the brāhmaṇas, ‘Are you being served by your disciples?’ and the kṣatriyas, ‘Are you protected by guards in armor?’

“When people are in difficulty, He becomes sorely distressed and He revels in all their celebrations as if He were their father. He speaks truthfully, can wield the mighty bow of Śiva, serves His elders and Has conquered His mind and senses. He always smiles before talking and has embraced righteousness with his whole being. He perfectly accomplishes beneficial deeds and does not take pleasure in wrangling. In argumentation he is on a par with Bṛhaspati. With well-formed eyebrows and large, reddish eyes, He looks as if He is directly Lord Viṣṇu Himself. This Rāma delights the world with His heroism, valor and prowess. He is engaged in protecting the citizens and his mind is never overcome with passion. He is capable of ruling the three worlds, what to speak of this earth. His anger and favor are never fruitless. He slays those who deserve to be killed according to ordinance and is never angry with those who do not deserve to be killed. He jubilantly bestows wealth upon one with whom He is pleased. Rāma shines like the brilliant sun with its rays by dint of His qualities, such as self-control, dearness to all people and bestowal of delight on everyone.

“Endowed as He is with such qualities, the earth desires to have Rāma, whose prowess is unfailing and who is the unmatched protector of the world, as her Lord. Fortunately enough, this son of yours is quite capable of beneficial acts. He is also luckily endowed with all the good qualities of a son, just like Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci. Everyone among the gods, asuras, mortals, gandharvas and celestial serpents, as well as all the people of the nation of Kośala and its capital Ayodhyā, the residents of the palace and those outside, the urban and rural populations of the state, all pray for the strength, health and long life of the illustrious Rāma. The elder and younger women day and night devotedly bow to all the gods on behalf of the wise Rāma. O lord, let their entreaty be fulfilled by your mercy. Let us see installed as prince regent your eldest son Rāma, whose is the color of a dark lotus and the destroyer of all enemies. For our benefit, O bestower of boons, you should joyfully install without delay your son, who is equal to Viṣṇu, the God of gods, intent as He is on procuring the welfare of all people.”

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE INSTALLATION

In reply to the assembly, who held their palms joined as a sign of respect, King Janaka spoke the following pleasing and beneficial words: “Ah! I am highly elated and my fortune unequalled, for you all wish that my eldest and favorite son be installed as prince regent.” Thus did the king return the honor offered by the assembly. Then he replied to the brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva so that all could hear: “This is the auspicious and pious month of Caitra, during which the forests are adorned with flowers. Let everything be prepared for the installation of Rāma as prince regent.”

After the emperor finished speaking, there arose from the multitude a loud sound of jubilation. When the assembly gradually quieted down, the emperor said to Vasiṣṭha, the tiger among sages: “O lord, you should immediately arrange all the rituals and paraphernalia for the installation of Rāma.”

Having heard the king’s request, Vasiṣṭha, the best of sages, along with Vāmadeva, commanded the chief counselors, who stood with joined palms before the king: “Please get ready gold and other precious metals, jewels, oblations for the gods, medicinal herbs, garlands of white flowers, parched grains, honey, clarified butter, new clothes, a chariot, all kinds of weapons, a fourfold army (consisting of horses, elephants, chariots and calvary), an elephant with auspicious marks, one pair each of yak tail whisks and peacock fans, flags, a white umbrella, one hundred gold water pots as brilliant as fire, a bull with gold-plated horns, the complete skin of a tiger, and whatever else that would be desirable. Place all these things within the royal sacrificial arena. Let the doors of the inner chambers of the palace, as well as those of the whole city, be decorated with flower garlands and sandalwood paste and perfumed with captivating incense. Let one hundred thousand brāhmaṇas be served as much as they like of wholesome, top-quality rice cooked in either milk or yogurt. Tomorrow morning, after duly

honoring the foremost of those among the twice-born, let them be given clarified butter, yogurt, whole grains and remuneration in abundance.

“As soon as the sun rises tomorrow there will be a recital of prayers for auspiciousness. Let the brāhmaṇas be invited for this and seating arranged for them. Let the city be decorated with flags and the main road sprinkled with scented water. Having reached the second chamber of the royal palace, let the beautifully decorated male and female dancers wait there. Let cooked rice, flower garlands and monetary grants be offered to the Deities in the different temples and road shrines. Let garlands of flowers be hung everywhere. And let warriors clad in clean clothes with long swords and armor enter the emperor’s courtyard with jubilation.”

Having thus given their instructions, the two brāhmaṇas remained seated as they finished up what had to be done, after informing the monarch. When all these things were completed, the two outstanding brāhmaṇas approached the king and joyfully informed him that everything had been done as they had instructed. Thereafter, the effulgent King Daśaratha said to his minister Sumantra: “Please immediately bring the self-perfected Rāma.” Acknowledging the king’s request by saying “So be it,” Sumantra brought Rāma, the best of charioteers in a chariot.

All the rulers of the world, who came from the north, south, east and west, and from the āryas and mlecchas, as well as those from the mountains and forests, attended on King Daśaratha, as the gods wait on Indra. Seated in the midst of the royal sages, he resembled Indra in the assembly of the maruts. While seated in his palace, King Daśaratha saw the approach of his son Rāma, who was like a replica of the king of the gandharvas, whose prowess was widely known in the world, whose arms were long, who possessed true greatness, who walked like an elephant in rut, whose face was as lovely as the moon and whose appearance was exceedingly pleasant, who attracted the sight and mind of people by His personal beauty and liberality, and who delighted the people, even as a rain cloud delights those scorched by heat. Daśaratha, a ruler of men, did not feel satiated seeing his son’s approaching. Helping Rāma disembark from His excellent chariot, Sumantra followed behind Him with folded hands as Rāma approached His father. Rāma, the best of men, accompanied by Sumantra,

went up into the palace which resembled the gleaming peak of Mount Kailāsa, in order to see the king. Drawing near with His hands folded, He bowed before His father. Introducing Himself as Rāma, He prostrated Himself at His father's feet.

Seeing Rāma prostrated at his side with folded hands, King Daśaratha grasped his beloved son by the hands, drew Him near and embraced Him. The king offered to Rāma a magnificent and sparkling throne encrusted with gold and jewels that was waiting for Him. Sitting down on it, Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, illuminated it with His effulgence as the spotless sun illuminates Mount Meru. The assembly also shone brightly on that occasion, being illuminated by Rāma, like the autumnal sky with its stars and planets illuminated by the moon. Seeing his dear son, the king was as pleased as one would be upon seeing oneself nicely decorated in the reflection of a mirror. King Daśaratha, the luckiest father in the world, addressed his comfortably seated son, speaking to Him the following words, as Kaśyapa would have addressed his son Indra: "You were born from Kausalyā, my seniormost wife, who is most worthy of that position, as are You to be my son. Because of the outstanding qualities which You have acquired, You are my dearest son, O Rāma. Since all these citizens have been delighted by Your qualities and character, accept the position of prince regent when the moon is in the asterism of Puṣya. You have been found to possess all the qualifications by Your very nature.

"Out of affection I shall advise You, who possess so many good qualities. Being humbler than You have been, maintain Your mind and senses always under control. Avoid the vices born of lust and anger. Rule by the direct and indirect methods and please Your ministers and other officials and all the citizens, increasing the wealth in the treasury and the supplies in the armory. When a monarch who loves the citizens and is loved by them protects the earth, his friends exult as did the gods when they attained the nectar of immortality. Therefore, son, conduct Yourself accordingly while controlling Your mind."

Hearing this, Rāma's friends, as a favor to Him, hurried to Kausalyā to inform her. With extreme delight, Kausalyā gave gold, jewels and cows to those who bore the gladdening news.

Rāma then bowed to the emperor and mounted the chariot, departing for His own splendid palace, being cheered along the way by the multitudes. Hearing the emperor's proclamation, the citizens were as jubilant as one just promised a cherished boon. Taking leave of the emperor, they returned to their homes and duly worshiped the gods.



## RĀMA VISITS HIS MOTHER KAUSALYĀ

After the citizens had left, King Daśaratha, who knew how to determine the certainty of a thing, again conferred with his counselors and resolved to carry through with his plan. He said: "Tomorrow the constellation puṣya will be in the ascendant. As such, tomorrow my son Rāma, whose eyes are like petals of the red lotus flower, should be installed. Then King Daśaratha entered the inner chambers of the palace and commanded his charioteer Sumantra: "Go bring Rāma here again." Obeying the king's request, Sumantra hurriedly approached Rāma's quarters to bring Rāma back. The doormen informed Rāma of the request for His return. Hearing that Sumantra had arrived, Rāma became anxious. Rāma hastily summoned in Sumantra and spoke the following: "Please state for what reason you have returned a second time." Sumantra the charioteer then informed Him: "The king wishes to see You. Hearing my submission, it is up to You to go or to do otherwise." Hearing the charioteer's message, Rāma hurriedly set out for the royal palace to see the emperor again.

When King Daśaratha heard that Rāma had arrived, he had Him enter the palace, desiring to tell Him something pleasant and splendid. As soon as Rāma entered the palace and saw His father from a distance, He fell prostrate on the ground with His palms joined. Lifting Rāma up as He lay prostrate and embracing Him, the king offered Him a seat and once more spoke to Him: "O Rāma, having enjoyed as desired the pleasures of life through the execution of hundreds of sacrifices accompanied with remunerations, I have lived a long life and become old. You were born in the world as the unequaled son which I desired. I have given gifts and studied the Vedas, O best of men. I have also enjoyed the delights sought by me. I have paid my debt to the gods, sages, forefathers and brāhmaṇas, as well as to myself.

"There is nothing else for me to do now except install You as prince regent. Therefore, You should do for my sake what I tell you to do. All the

people want You as their ruler now. Therefore I shall install You as prince regent, my son. Besides, O Rāma, I have been having inauspicious dreams these days. There are thunderstorms and meteors falling from the sky with great noise. Astrologers declare that I am afflicted by an inauspicious configuration of three planets, the Sun, Mars and Rāhu. Usually when such a configuration arises, a king meets with certain death or some terrible disaster. As long as my mind is not bewildered, O Rāma, be installed, for people's judgements are fickle. The astrologers say that today the moon is in Punarvasu, the asterism prior to Puṣya. Tomorrow they say it will be in conjunction with the asterism Puṣya. As such, while Puṣya is in the ascendant, be installed. My mind is hastening me. Tomorrow I shall install You as prince regent, O destroyer of enemies.

“Therefore, from this very moment, throughout the night You should observe a fast with Your wife, controlling Your mind and body and sleeping on a mat of kuśa grass with a stone as a pillow. Let Your friends vigilantly guard You on all sides tonight, for occasions of this kind are hindered by many kinds of obstacles. In my opinion, You should be installed at the time when Your brother Bharata is away from the city. Although Your brother certainly abides by the conduct of the pious, is obedient to You, is righteous and has control over His mind and senses, the mind of men is inconstant; this is my opinion. The mind of the pious, who are always engaged in righteousness, rejoice in action, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty.” Having been thus instructed in regard to His installation the next day and receiving permission to leave, Rāma said good-bye to His father and returned to His quarters. When He entered His own quarters to inform His wife Sītā of the impending installation, He could not find Her. Coming out, He proceeded to His mother's quarters. There He saw His devoted mother dressed in silken robes in the temple silently praying for their prosperity.

Hearing about Rāma's fortunate installation, Sumitrā had already arrived there with her son Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā had been summoned. At that time, Kausalyā was seated with her eyes closed, being served by Sumitrā and Lakṣmaṇa. Having heard that her son Rāma would be installed as prince regent when the asterism Puṣya was in the ascendant, she was meditating on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, known by the name Janārdana, by controlling her breathing process. Approaching her even as she was thus

absorbed in meditation, Rāma addressed the following words to her, which gave her great joy: “O mother, I have been entrusted by father with the task of protecting the citizens. My installation will take place tomorrow as per the instructions of My father. I, along with Sītā, must observe a fast tonight. This is the instruction of My teachers, and father has also told Me the same. Therefore, please perform today whatever auspicious rites are necessary for Me and for Sītā regarding My installation tomorrow.”

Hearing this news, which she had been desiring for a long time, she said the following to Rāma with tears of joy in her eyes: “Rāma, my child, may You live long! May those who block Your path be destroyed! Invested with the royal glory, give pleasure to my family and to that of Sumitrā. How wonderful that You were born to me under an auspicious star, my son, and that Your father King Daśaratha has been honored by Your good qualities. I am also glad that my austerities to propitiate the Supreme Personality of Godhead Viṣṇu, whose eyes are as beautiful as lotus petals, in order to obtain a son like You, were not in vain. It is by this that the royal fortune of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty is going to embrace You.” Having been addressed in this way by His mother, He looked at His brother Lakṣmaṇa, who was bowed with palms joined, and said to Him as if smiling: “O Lakṣmaṇa, You are My other half. Rule this earth with Me. This good fortune has come to You who are My second self. Enjoy the pleasures desired by You, O son of Sumitrā. I desire to live and even to rule for Your sake.” Having spoken to Lakṣmaṇa in this way, Rāma bid good-bye to His two mothers, Kausalyā and Sumitrā, and, with their permission, departed for His own palace in search of Sītā.

## VAŚIṢṬHA VISITS RĀMA TO INSTRUCT HIM ABOUT FASTING

Having instructed Rāma regarding the installation on the following day, King Daśaratha summoned his family priest Vasiṣṭha and said to him: “O you who possess the wealth of austerities and are engaged in the observance of vows, go at once to Rāma and have Him begin a fast with His wife for His own good and for the attainment of sovereignty.” Having said “So be it” to the king, the mighty Vasiṣṭha, the best of those who know the Vedas, personally proceeded toward Rāma’s palace. The brāhmaṇa, who was firm in his vows and expert in chanting mantras, mounted an exquisite chariot that awaited him in order to instruct Rāma to observe a fast. Rāma then hastily came out of His palace in order to offer respects to the honorable sage who had just arrived. He then quickly approached the sage’s chariot, took the sage by the hand, and personally helped him get down from the chariot. Seeing Rāma bowed down in humility, the sage Vasiṣṭha, inquiring about His well-being, spoke to Him the following, deserving as He was of kind words:

“Your father is pleased with You, O Rāma, in as much as You will attain sovereignty tomorrow. Today You should observe a fast with Sītā. Out of love for You, Your father King Daśaratha is going to install You as prince regent tomorrow morning, as Nahuṣa installed his son Yayāti.”

Speaking in this way, the holy sage of firm vows then had Rāma along with Sītā undergo a fast according to scriptural rules. After being duly worshiped by Prince Rāma, the descendant of Kakutstha, Vasiṣṭha took leave of Him and left the palace. Sitting there with His friends, who were talking pleasantly with Him, and being praised by them, Rāma then took their leave and entered His own palace. Being crowded with jubilant men and women, Rāma’s palace resembled a lake full of frolicsome birds and full-blown lotus flowers. When Vasiṣṭha came out of Rāma’s palace, he saw that the road was crowded with people. The royal highways of Ayodhyā were

blocked up everywhere with crowds of curious people. On that day, the city of Ayodhyā had its streets thoroughly swept and sprinkled with scented water, garlands of wild flowers were hung all about, and flags were hoisted over the homes.

There was a flurry of people in Ayodhyā, including the women and children, who longed for the sunrise, anxious as they were to see the installation of Lord Rāma. The people were anxious to witness this great festival in Ayodhyā, which was an adornment for the people themselves and which gave them great joy. In this way, Vasiṣṭha slowly returned to the emperor's palace, traversing the royal highway blocked with people, parting through the throngs of people. He climbed the staircase of the royal palace whose spires resemble the peaks of the cloud-covered Himalaya mountains, he met with the emperor, as Bṛhaspati would meet with Indra. The emperor immediately got up off his royal throne the moment he saw that the sage had arrived. The emperor inquired from the sage what was on his mind and was informed that everything had been arranged. At that time the assembled ministers who were seated around the king rose from their seats out of respect for the family priest. As soon as he was permitted by his preceptor, the king dispersed the assembly of men and entered his private quarters, as a lion enters its mountain den. Entering the lovely quarters crowded with young ladies dressed in the finest clothes and which resembled the abode of Indra, the king shone like the moon in a star-spangled sky.

## THE CITIZENS OF AYODHYĀ REJOICE

When Vasiṣṭha had left, Rāma bathed and with a controlled mind, worshiped the Supreme Personality of Godhead Nārāyaṇa with the help of his broad-eyed wife. Taking the vessel of clarified butter and then raising it respectfully to His forehead, He then proceeded to offer oblations into the flames of the sacrificial fire for the purpose of propitiating God. Tasting the remnants of those oblations, and expecting what He dearly desired, Rāma personally spread a mat of kuśa grass on the floor of the temple of Lord Viṣṇu. Restraining His speech, Rāma, in the company of Sītā, lay down on the mat and meditated with a controlled mind on the Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa. Rising several hours before dawn, He had the temple room decorated. Hearing there the felicitous words of the bards, panegyrists and psalmists, He chanted with a concentrated mind the Gāyatrī mantra. He propitiated the Supreme Lord Madhusūdana with His head bowed. Dressed in immaculate silk, He requested the twice-born brāhmaṇas to recite the prayers for auspiciousness called svasti-vacana. They then heard them recite the prayers for an auspicious day with deep and sweet voices. Indeed, the city of Ayodhyā was filled with the sound of auspicious prayers and the echoing sound of musical instruments. When all the people of Ayodhyā heard that Rāma accompanied by Sītā had observed a fast, they were overjoyed.

Hearing of Rāma's impending coronation and seeing that night was almost over, all of the citizens began decorating the city. Flags and banners were hoisted high over the spires of temples, which gleamed like mountain peaks covered in white clouds, at crossroads, in the streets, at roadside shrines and on the rooftops, as well as over the shops of merchants that were full of different commodities, over the beautiful homes of the householders, over the assembly halls and in all the outstanding trees. The minds and ears of the people were gratified by listening to singers, actors and dancers. As the time for the coronation of Rāma drew near, the people gathered in homes and enclosures to discuss about the coronation. Children playing in

the doorways of houses also talked about the coming installation ceremony of Rāma. On the occasion of the installation of Rāma, the citizens had beautified the royal highway with decorations of flowers, and had scented it with incense and perfumes. In anticipation of the nightfall, the people had placed lamps in the trees along the streets in order to illuminate the streets.

Having decorated the city and, longing for Rāma's installation, the people gathered in courtyards and meeting halls praised the emperor while talking among themselves: "O how great a soul is King Daśaratha, the delight of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. Perceiving himself to be old, he is going to install Rāma as king. We are all grateful that Rāma, who has seen the good and bad of the world, will be the ruler of the world and our protector for a long time. Rāma, the descendant of Raghu, has a humble disposition, is wise, righteous, fond of His brothers and as affectionate to us as He is to His brothers. Long live King Daśaratha, who is righteous and sinless. By His grace we shall see Rāma installed as king."

Others, who had heard of the upcoming installation and had come from the surrounding countryside, heard the citizens making such remarks. Having come to the capital from all directions in order to see the installation of Rāma, they had filled the city of Ayodhyā. While moving here and there, the multitudes produced a sound like the roar of the ocean agitated by the full moon. The city resembled the capital of Indra and was completely crowded with people from the countryside that had gathered there in eagerness to witness the coronation ceremony of Rāma. The city was noisy and resembled the waters of the ocean stirred up by monstrous sea creatures.

## MANTHARĀ'S RAGE

A certain maidservant of Kaikeyī's family who lived with the queen and was of unknown origin by chance ascended the palace roof which shone like the full moon. From the palace roof, Mantharā, the maidservant, looked around the city of Ayodhyā whose principal roads were sprinkled with scented water and strewn with petals of lotus flowers. The city was adorned with costly flags and festoons, the roads were sprinkled with water scented with sandalwood, and were crowded with people who were fully bathed. The city resounded with the playing of all types of musical instruments and the intonations of brāhmaṇas bearing garlands of flowers and round sweetmeats, and who stood at the doors of its gleaming-white temples. Ayodhyā was crowded with jubilant people and resounded with the chanting of the Vedic hymns. The elephants and horses were overjoyed, and the cows and bulls were bellowing.

Mantharā was amazed to see the city of Ayodhyā packed with rejoicing citizens and decorated with flags and flower garlands. Seeing Rāma's childhood nurse who was standing nearby dressed in white silk with eyes blooming with joy, Mantharā asked her: "Why is the chaste woman Kausalyā, the mother of Rāma, giving charity to the people with the greatest joy, being herself devoted to acquiring wealth? Please also tell me why people are so ecstatic. Also, what is the overjoyed emperor having done?"

Bursting with joy, the nurse happily told the hunchback of Rāma's good fortune to be installed prince regent: "Tomorrow, under the auspices of the asterism Puṣya, King Daśaratha will install as prince regent Rāma, who is sinless and who has conquered anger." Hearing the nurse's words, the hunchbacked Mantharā quickly descended from the palace roof which resembled the peak of Mount Kailāsa.

Burning with anger, the faultfinding Mantharā spoke the following words to Kaikeyī, who was reclining on a bed: "Get up, you fool! How can



you lie down when danger confronts you? You do not see yourself submerged in a flood of danger. Although unfavored by the king, you boast yourself most fortunate because of your good looks. Your good fortune is fleeting, however, like the flow of a stream during the dry season.”

Being addressed with such harsh words by the angry, censorious hunchback, Kaikeyī was extremely disturbed. Kaikeyī then said to the hunchback: “Is anything wrong, O Mantharā? I see your face is sullen and afflicted with grief.”

Hearing Kaikeyī’s sweet words, the angry Mantharā, who was an expert speaker, became more pained. Then, posing as the queen’s well-wisher, in order to put her in distress and to estrange her from Rāma, she spoke to Kaikeyī the following words: “The irreversible and mighty deed that will destroy you is this: King Daśaratha is about to install Rāma as prince regent. Plunged into unfathomable fear, I am afflicted with grief and anxiety. Being burnt by this fire, I have come here for your benefit. By your suffering, O Kaikeyī, I shall also suffer greatly. My prosperity depends on your prosperity. Of this there is no doubt. You were born in a royal dynasty and are the wife of a king. How is it that you do not know the cruelty of royal duties, O madam? Although your husband speaks virtuously, he is a rascal. Although he speaks sweetly, he is cruel. Even so, you consider him pure-hearted, deceived as you are by him. Standing beside you and speaking sweet words devoid of meaning to pacify you, your husband will invest Kausalyā with fortune this very day. Having sent away Bharata to your relatives—thus timely removing all thorns—the wicked-minded king will install Rāma on the throne. You have embraced an enemy, conversing with him and desiring his welfare, like a person who holds a venomous serpent on his body as if it were a child.

“You and your son have been dealt with today by King Daśaratha just like by an enemy or a serpent when unwatched. Ever looking for pleasure, you and your friends and relatives have foolishly been destroyed by the evil, untruthful reassurances of the king, who is about to install Rāma on the throne. Now is the time, O Kaikeyī. Quickly do what is good for you. Protect your son, yourself and me, O lady of amazing appearance!”

Hearing Mantharā's words, the lovely lady arose from her bed, bursting with pleasure like the orb of the moon in autumn. Extremely pleased and surprised, Kaikeyī gifted the hunchback with a wonderful shining jewel. Having given the jewel to the hunchbacked Mantharā out of excessive joy, she again said the following to Mantharā: "This is indeed very good news for me. What more can I do for you for bringing me this good news? I see no difference between Rāma and Bharata. I am therefore glad to hear that the emperor is going to install Rāma on the throne. No other more agreeable, nectar-like news could have been so easily given to me, O you who are deserving of affection. Because you have spoken to me such news, I offer to you another dearmost boon; please choose it."

## MANTHARĀ TURNS KAIKEYĪ AGAINST RĀMA

Scolding Kaikeyī and throwing away the jewel, Mantharā spoke the following words to her, being overwhelmed with anger and grief: “Why have you expressed pleasure, O foolish woman? Apparently you do not see yourself in the midst of an ocean of grief. In my mind I laugh at you, my lady, despite my grief and loyalty to you. I lament your poor intelligence, for what wise woman would rejoice over the promotion of her stepson, who is thus her enemy and like the arrival of death? Rāma has reason to fear Bharata who has a claim to sovereignty. Pondering this, I am sad, for danger is born from fear. The mighty-armed Lakṣmaṇa of course follows Rāma with all of His being, and as Lakṣmaṇa is to Rāma, so also is Śatrughna to Bharata. As far as seniority is concerned, Bharata also has a claim to the throne, O lady. Śatrughna and Lakṣmaṇa have no claim because They are both junior. I am trembling with fear at the thought of the danger posed to your son Bharata by Rāma, who is well-versed in the conduct of a warrior, is learned and does what is necessary.

“Fortunate indeed is Kausalyā, whose son is being coronated prince regent tomorrow under the asterism of Puṣya by the best of the brāhmaṇas. You will wait upon Kausalyā with folded hands like a servant when she has gained sovereignty over the earth, the love and trust of King Daśaratha, and the disposal of her enemies. In this way, you, along with us, will become her maid servant. Your son Bharata will surely become Rāma’s servant. The fortunate women of Rāma’s household will be pleased; your daughter-in-law and her companions will be saddened by the demotion of Bharata.”

Seeing Mantharā so distraught, Kaikeyī spoke to her, extolling the virtues of Rāma, it is said. “Rāma is well-versed in the principles of religion, possessed of good virtues, self-controlled, truthful and pure. He is the eldest of the King’s sons. Therefore it is fit that He be crowned prince regent. The long-lived Rāma will look after his brothers and their servants as if He were

their father. Why, O hunchback, are you so distressed on hearing of Rāma's coronation? After a hundred years of Rāma's reign, Bharata, the best of men, will also inherit his ancestral kingdom. O Mantharā, why are you burning with anxiety when we are on the verge of an auspicious happening? As much as my own son Bharata is worthy of esteem, Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, is even more so. Rāma renders more service to me than He does to Kausalyā. If Rāma possesses the throne, then Bharata does also. Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, considers His brothers as equal to Himself."

Hearing Kaikeyī's words, the greatly saddened Mantharā heaved a deep sigh and replied as follows to Kaikeyī: "Out of foolishness you are unable to see the truth! You do not recognize your own situation. You are sinking in an ocean of sorrow which is full of misery and adversity. Rāma will become king, and after Him, he who is His son, wherein Bharata will be deprived of the royal throne, O Kaikeyī. All the sons of a king do not occupy the throne, O piqued lady. If all the princes were installed king, it would be a cause of great misfortune. Therefore, Kaikeyī, kings entrust the eldest son with the rule of the kingdom, even though, O woman of faultless limbs, there may be other qualified sons.

"Your son will be completely deprived of comforts and the kingdom as if he were an orphan, O you who are affectionate to your son. It is for your own good that I have come here, but you do not understand me. Rather, you bestow upon me a gift on the occasion of your co-wife's promotion. Once Rāma has freed the kingdom of enemies, He will dispatch Bharata to another country or even to the other world. Immobile entities like trees and creepers develop affection by mere proximity, whereas, when Bharata was a child, you sent him off to his uncle's house. Śatrughna is devoted to Bharata and therefore accompanied him at that time. He is as dedicated to Bharata as Lakṣmaṇa is to Rāma. It is said that a certain tree that was to be cut down by foresters was saved from that great danger by the proximity of thorn bushes. Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, will protect Rāma, and Rāma will protect him. Their brotherly affection is as famous in these worlds as that of the two Aśvins. As such, Rāma will commit no sin against Lakṣmaṇa, whereas He must doubtlessly do so against Bharata.

“Therefore, let Rāma be exiled from the royal palace to the forest. That alone would make me happy and would also be extremely beneficial to you. If Bharata rightly inherits the paternal throne, your family members will certainly be fortunate. Your son, the born enemy of Rāma, deserves a life of ease. How will he be able to live in subjection to the prosperous Rāma, himself being destitute? You should protect Bharata when he is being overcome by Rāma like the leader of a herd of elephants being chased in the forest by a lion. When your co-wife, the mother of Rāma, has been slighted by you in the past out of pride in your good fortune, why would she not strike up enmity with you? When Rāma gains the earth with its many oceans and mountains, you will, O proud lady, suffer with Bharata from misfortune, humiliation and depravity. When Rāma indeed gains the earth, Bharata will certainly meet with doom. Therefore, devise some plan to secure the kingdom for your son and to banish his rival Rāma.”

## KAIKEYĪ ENTERS THE SULKING CHAMBER

Having been addressed in that way, Kaikeyī, burning with anger, heaved a deep sigh and spoke the following to Mantharā: “I shall now quickly banish Rāma to the forest and thereafter coronate Bharata as prince regent. Now please consider how I may immediately accomplish this, that Bharata should gain the throne and not Rāma under any circumstance.”

After Mantharā had been addressed in this way by her mistress, the evil wretch replied to Kaikeyī, harming the interests of Rāma: “Hah! now look here, Kaikeyī, and listen how your son Bharata alone will be able to attain the throne. Do you wish to hear from me that plan for your welfare which has often been mentioned to you? Do you remember it, Kaikeyī, or remembering it, do you hide it? If, O coquettish woman, your desire is to hear it as told by me, listen. I shall explain it, then you should execute it.”

After hearing what Mantharā said, Kaikeyī raised herself a little from her bed, which she herself had spread, and asked: “Please tell me the means by which Bharata can get the throne and not Rāma under any circumstance.” Then the dreadful-looking Mantharā, in order to harm the best interests of Rāma, spoke the following to Kaikeyī: “In the past your husband went with royal sages to assist Lord Indra in the battle between the gods and the demons, bringing you along. Proceeding south towards the Daṇḍakā forest, O Kaikeyī, you reached the city known as Vaijayanta, ruled by a demon whose banner was the gigantic timi fish. He was known as Śambara and was a formidable demon possessing tremendous magical powers. Being unconquered by the host of demigods, he gave battle to Indra. In that great battle, those who were badly injured were at night killed as they slept by the rākṣasas who swiftly attacked them. At that time, the strong-armed King Daśaratha fought a fierce battle with the demons in which he was badly lacerated by their weapons. When he lost consciousness, he was carried by you from the battlefield. There also your husband was

wounded by the demons' weapons, so you saved him by carrying him still farther away. Pleased by this, he offered you two boons, O woman of charming appearance. You then told your husband, 'I shall choose my boons when I wish.' Then your great-souled husband said, 'So be it.' I was indeed ignorant of this, my lady, but was once told about it by you. But, out of affection for you, I have borne it in mind. Use these boons now to bring the king under your control and to stop Rāma's coronation.

"Ask from your husband two boons—the coronation of Bharata and the banishment of Rāma for fourteen years. When Rāma has passed fourteen years in exile in the forest, the citizens will have developed great affection in their hearts for Bharata and his position will be secure. O daughter of Aśvapati, enter the sulking chamber today as if you were angry and lie on the floor wearing soiled clothes. Start crying as soon as you see that the king has come. Lying on the ground and weeping piteously, do not even look at him or speak to him. You are always very loved by your husband. I have no doubt about it. The emperor is ready to enter fire on your behalf. He is unable to become angry with you, nor can he see you angry. He is willing to give up his life in order to please you.

"The emperor cannot refuse your request. Recognize the power of your own good fortune, O lady of sluggish nature. King Daśaratha may offer you gold jewelry with pearls and gems. Do not let your mind be attracted to them. Remind King Daśaratha of the two boons offered to you by him during the battle of the gods and demons. Do not lose sight of your goal, O highly fortunate one. When the king personally lifts you up and grants you the boons, bind him with an oath and then make known your choice: 'Let Rāma be banished abroad for fourteen years and Bharata installed as king over the earth, O best of kings.' When Rāma is banished to the forest, Bharata will be established as king. When the term of banishment has ended, your son will remain king for the rest of his life. And, my lady, do not fail to ask for the boon of Rāma's exile. Thus all your son's goals will be accomplished. By His banishment, Rāma will thus fall into disfavor, and Bharata, without any enemies, will become king. By the time Rāma returns from the forest, your son will have consolidated his position both internally and externally. The common people will rally to him and he will be surrounded by friends because of his self-control. I think the present

moment is the time to fearlessly restrain the king from his intention of coronating Rāma.”

Accepting evil as good, Kaikeyī was delighted and convinced by the maid servant. Misled from the path like a young girl, the extremely beautiful Kaikeyī was greatly bewildered by what the hunchback had said and replied to her: “I shall not disparage your wisdom, O bestower of superb knowledge. You are the best of hunchbacks in this world as far as intelligence and discernment. You alone are my well-wisher, ever-busy after my best interest. I cannot comprehend the intention of the king, O hunchback. With the exception of yourself, hunchbacks are ill-disposed, crooked and extremely sinful. You, O fair lady, are like a lotus bowed by the wind. Your breast alone is deformed, rising as far as your shoulders. Below your chest, you are endowed with an abdomen adorned with a beautiful navel which seems embarrassed by your large breasts. Your hips are wide. O Mantharā, Your face shines like a spotless moon. Your buttocks are completely clear and decorated with a girdle. Your thighs are very close together and your feet are exceptionally long. With your long thighs, you look exceedingly lovely when you walk before me, O lady clad in silk garments.

“The thousand magical powers of Śambara, the king of the demons, are present in your heart, along with thousands of others. This hump is exactly like the long frontal part of a chariot. In it reside thoughts, knowledge of diplomacy and artifices. Therefore, O hunchback, when Bharata is crowned king and Rāma has departed for the forest, I, having had my goals fulfilled and being pleased, will drop upon your hump a chain of first-class smelted gold and shall also smear upon it sandalwood paste. I shall place a gold diadem upon your forehead and shall adorn you with shimmering ornaments. Dressing yourself with two fine silken garments, you will walk about like a goddess. Being of unparalleled countenance, by your face which rivals the moon you will achieve a foremost position, behaving proudly among my enemies. Adorned with all kinds of jewels, other hunchbacks will serve your feet, even as you always serve mine.”

Being praised in this way by Kaikeyī, she spoke the following words to Kaikeyī, who was lying on the finest of beds, shining like a flame on an altar. “There is no use in building a dam when the water is already gone. Get up! Do the right thing and show yourself to the king.” Being incited in that



way, the broad-eyed queen went with Mantharā to the sulking chamber. The lovely woman then cast off her necklace with hundreds of thousands of pearls and other ornaments with costly gems. Then, appearing just like gold, Kaikeyī reclined upon the ground in accordance with the hunchback's instructions and said the following to her: "Either Rāma will be exiled to the forest and Bharata will achieve the earth, or you shall report to the king that I have died here on the spot. Of what use to me is gold, or jewels or food? This will be the end of my life if Rāma is coronated."

Then the hunchback once again spoke with great aggressiveness to the queen, Bharata's mother, words that were favorable to her and unfavorable to Rāma: "If Rāma, takes this kingdom, you and your son will surely suffer. Therefore, O fortunate one, do what is necessary so that your son is crowned prince regent." Being gravely pierced by the impact of the arrow-like words of the hunchback, the queen, bewildered as she was and enraged repeatedly by what she heard, placed her hands on her heart and spoke to the hunchback: "Either Bharata will have his desire fulfilled with the exile of Rāma to the forest for a long spell, or, hearing of my departure from this world to the abode of death, you will inform the king. I want neither bedding, nor garlands, nor sandalwood paste, nor eyeliner, drinks nor food, nor anything else, not even this life, if Rāma does not leave here for the forest!"

After speaking such bitter words and tossing off all her ornaments, she lay down on the bare floor without any covering, like a heavenly damsel fallen from the sky. With her face covered by the darkness of her intense anger and her fine garlands and ornaments cast aside, the disconsolate queen appeared just like the sky with all its stars covered by darkness.

## DAŚARATHA CONSOLES KAIKEYĪ IN THE SULKING CHAMBER

Having had her eyes fully opened by the sinful hunchback, Kaikeyī lay down on the floor like a heavenly damsel struck by a poison arrow. Considering in her mind everything that she must do, the proud Kaikeyī, crafty as she was, gradually revealed everything to Mantharā. Having arrived at a conclusion, that wretched woman, bewildered by Mantharā's advice, heaved a heavy sigh like a female serpent and thought for a while about the way to achieve her own happiness. Mantharā, being a friend desirous of the welfare of the queen, on perceiving the resolve of the queen, was highly pleased, as though she had achieved her goals. The infuriated royal lady, having firmly made up her mind, lay scowling on the floor, being of the weaker sex. At that time, her colorful garlands and sparkling ornaments lay abandoned on the floor. The scattered garlands and ornaments of the queen beautified the floor like stars in the sky. Lying on the floor of the sulking chamber, wearing soiled clothes and her hair tightly bound in one braid, she resembled a lifeless heavenly damsel.

Having ordered the installation of Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, King Daśaratha left the assembly and entered his private quarters. Since the news of Rāma's coronation had only just been announced, the king thought, "Let me break the news to my favorite queen," and entered the queen's quarters. The highly illustrious king entered the excellent chamber of Kaikeyī, as the moon enters the sky with the Rāhu planet enveloped in white clouds. The chamber resounded with the cries of parrots, peacocks, cranes and swans, and the playing of musical instruments. Here and there passed female hunchbacks and dwarfs. It was adorned with flower trellises and decorated pavilions and beautified by campaka and aśoka trees. The chamber was provided with gorgeous seats adorned with ivory, silver and gold, and there were many varieties of palatable foods and refreshments. With such costly decorations, the chamber resembled a heavenly planet.

The king entered his opulent royal harem, but did not find Kaikeyī inclined upon her excellent couch. Eager to inform her of his desire to coronate Rāma and desirous of her affection, the king did not see his beloved wife about and called out for her in despair. Never before had she missed an occasion of his visit. Never had the king entered her chamber to find it vacant. Thereafter, standing within the quarters, the king inquired about Kaikeyī, as he had done previously, being unaware of the foolish woman's desire to achieve her own goal. Thereupon, the female doorkeeper, being frightened, addressed the king with folded hands: "O lord, the queen, being angry, ran off to her sulking chamber." Hearing the doorkeeper's words, the king was again saddened and began to despair, his senses being agitated and overwhelmed.

Seeing her sprawled upon the floor of the sulking chamber in an unbecoming manner, the ruler of the earth was pained by sorrow. The sinless, elderly king saw his young wife, who was dearer than his own life, intent as she was on committing sin, lying on the ground like a cut vine, a fallen goddess, a heavenly damsel cast down from the sky, a fallen angel, a fumbled trick or an ensnared doe—even as the leader of an elephant herd in the jungle is deeply pained due to affection when one of his consorts is pierced by the shaft of a hunter. His mind gripped with fear, out of love for her, he stroked the lotus-eyed woman with his hands. Then he spoke the following to the distressed lady: "I know that you are not angry with me. O my lady, who has offended you? Who has insulted you? It is to my great discomfiture that you, O glorious one, are lying in the dust. On whose account other than mine, who am constantly thinking of your welfare, are you lying on the ground? You appear like one possessed by an evil spirit, which is disturbing my mind. I have skilled physicians who are in every way congenial. They can bring you relief. Tell me what your illness is, O proud woman.

"Whom do you seek to oblige or who has displeased you? Who should be rewarded now, or who should be punished? Please do not cry nor torment your body, my lady! What person undeserving of execution should be killed, or what person deserving death should be freed? What pauper should be granted wealth, or what wealthy person should be made destitute? I and all my possessions are under your control. I do not dare to impede any of your goals. Tell me what is on your mind, for I am prepared to risk my life

for it. Knowing well my strength, you should not doubt me. I swear to you on the strength of my good merit that I shall do what is pleasing to you.

“Wherever the sun shines on the earth is my domain, including the prosperous lands of Draviḍa, Sindhu-sauvīra, Saurāṣṭra, Dakṣiṇā-patha, Vāṅga, Aṅga, Magadha, Matsya, Kāśi and Kosala. Those lands have produced many assets, such as riches, food, goats and sheep. Therefore, O Kaikeyī, choose whatever your mind desires. What is the use of this overexertion, O fearful one? Get up! Get up, O my beauty! Tell me, Kaikeyī, the source of your fear. I shall drive it away, as the sun drives away fog.”

Feeling comforted by what the king had said and desiring to tell him her distasteful request, she prepared to torment him even further.

## KAIKEYĪ REQUESTS HER TWO BOONS

To the king who was pierced by the arrows of Cupid and obedient to the impulse of love, Kaikeyī spoke the following deceptive words: “I have not been offended nor insulted by anyone, my lord. But I do have something I wish you to fulfill. If you want to do it, promise to do so. Then I will explain to you what it is that I desire.”

Stroking with his hand her hair as she lay upon the floor, the loving king, smiling softly, addressed Kaikeyī: “My proud woman, do you not know that except for Rāma, the tiger among men, there is no one more dear to me than you? I swear to you by Rāma, the invincible, the chief of men, the great-souled, who is dearer to me than my own life. Tell me what it is your heart desires. I swear by that Rāma without whom seeing for a moment I cannot live that your request will be fulfilled. I swear by that Rāma, the bull among men, whom I prefer above myself and my other sons, that your request will be fulfilled. Fair lady, realizing my heart to be like this, you may accordingly tell me what it is you deem fit. Seeing the strength of my love for you, you should not harbor any doubt about my intentions of fulfilling your desire. I swear to you on my good merit that I shall please you.”

With her mind fixed on her goal, Kaikeyī spoke words difficult to be uttered due to partiality to her son Bharata and due to the joy of having the king under her control. Thrilled by his oath, she proceeded to reveal her desire, which was as frightening as the arrival of death. “As you have sworn to grant my wish, let the thirty-three principal gods headed by Indra, as well as the sun and moon, the sky, the planets, the night, the day and the ten directions, the universe along with this earth, the angels and ogres, the demons that prowl at night, the ghosts that haunt houses, the spirits that protect houses, and whatever other beings there may be, hear what you say. Listen all you gods! This powerful king who is true to his promise, a knower of the principles of conduct, faithful to his word and pure is going to grant me a boon.”

When she had finished speaking, the king, who was holding a huge bow, having been praised by her and being infatuated by love, was disposed to grant her a boon. She then said to him: “Remember, O king, that time in the past during the war between the gods and the demons when you were struck down by the enemy, leaving you with only your life. Because on that occasion you were saved by me as I struggled to protect you without sleep the whole night, you thereafter offered me two boons. I now seek those two boons offered by you, O ruler of the earth. If, after having sworn on the strength of your righteousness, you do not grant me the two boons, I shall give up my life this very day, being insulted by you.”

At that time, being brought under the control of Kaikeyī by her mere words, the king slipped like a deer into a snare set for his own destruction. Then she said to the king who was willing to grant her the boons due to his infatuation: “My lord, ruler of the earth, the two boons offered by you must be given. I shall now tell you what they are. Listen to my request. The preparations that are being made for the coronation of Rāma should instead be used to coronate my Bharata. The time has now arrived for the second boon which was granted by you in my favor during the war between the gods and demons. Let the sober Rāma live for fourteen years in the Daṇḍaka Forest as an ascetic dressed in the bark of trees and deerskin, and let Bharata secure the post of prince regent this very day, free from any enemy. This is my ultimate desire; I only ask a boon already given. Let me see today the departure of Rāma for the forest. Being hailed as the king of kings, be true to your promise. Protect the good name of your dynasty, your virtue and your high birth. Those rich in asceticism say that truthful speech is conducive to one’s supreme benefit in the other world.”

## KING DAŚARATHA TRIES TO DISSUADE KAIKEYĪ

After hearing Kaikeyī's harsh words, King Daśaratha was put into anxiety and suffered for a while. He thought to himself: "Am I having a daydream, or is my mind hallucinating? Is it a flashback of past experiences or some kind of mental derangement?" Reflecting in this way, the king, unaware of what was happening and experiencing intense agony, fainted. Regaining consciousness, he was tormented by Kaikeyī's words. He was as distressed and uneasy as a deer at the sight of a tigress. Seated on the bare floor, he heaved a long sigh like a venomous serpent fixed to one spot by magical spells. Uttering the words "Oh! How awful!" the king, being very agitated, again fell into a swoon, his mind being sorely pained. Regaining consciousness after a long time, and being enraged, the king spoke to Kaikeyī as if incinerating her with his furor: "O cruel woman of wicked character bent on destroying this dynasty! What offence has been committed against you by Rāma or by me? Rāma always offers you service as if you were His mother. Why are you intent on His ruination at this time? Out of ignorance, I have allowed you to enter my home for my own destruction, like a highly poisonous serpent princess.

"When the whole world extols the virtues of Rāma, for what offence shall I forsake my beloved son? I can give up Kausalyā, Sumitrā, my wealth, or even my own life, but not Rāma who is so affectionate to His father! Supreme is my pleasure upon seeing my eldest son Rāma; on not seeing Him for a moment I lose consciousness. The world may survive without the sun, or crops without water, but my life force cannot remain in this body without Rāma. O woman of sinful resolve, enough of this! Abandon your proposal. I even touch my head to your feet. Be pleased with me. How is it you have hatched such a wicked plan? If you wish to determine whether I am pleased or displeased with Bharata, let that which was first uttered by you in relation to Rāma come to pass. I have heard you say that Rāma is my most glorious, virtuous and eldest son. You must have said this

in order to please me or to somehow serve Rāma. Afflicted with grief to hear of Rāma's coronation, you are also greatly tormenting me. While alone in your quarters you were possessed by an evil spirit and it has brought you completely under its control.

“A tremendous calamity has visited the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, my lady, and it has perverted your mind. You have never before done anything unreasonable or unpleasing to me. Therefore, I do not believe what you have done, O broad-eyed one. In fact, Rāma is equal to the high-souled Bharata for you, for many times you told me stories illustrating this, O youthful woman. How is it you desire the banishment of the righteous and glorious Rāma to the forest for fourteen years, O timid one? How is it you desire His residing in a most dreadful forest when His body is so delicate and He has dedicated Himself to righteousness? Why, O bright-eyed lady, do you savor the exile of Rāma, who is pleasing to behold and who is so dedicated to your service? Actually, Rāma always serves you more than Bharata does. In particular, I do not see that Bharata respects you more than Rāma does. Who else other than the superexcellent Rāma could more perfectly serve, respect, honor or carry out instructions?

“I have heard no accusation or defamation of Rāma by any of the many thousands of women or their many dependents in this palace. Reassuring all living beings with his pure mind, Rāma, the tiger among men, captivates the inhabitants of this kingdom by His pleasant dealings. Rāma conquers people with His goodness, the brāhmaṇas by gifts of charity, the elderly with service, and enemies on the battlefield with His bow. Truth, charity, austerity, detachment, friendship, cleanliness, straightforwardness, wisdom, and service to superiors—all these are certainly to be found within the person of Rāma. Why, my lady, do you wish harm upon Rāma, who is possessed of rectitude, is equal to a god and is as powerful as a great sage? I do not remember hearing any unkind word being spoken by Rāma to anyone. As such, how can I for your sake tell dear Rāma such unpleasant news? I have no other goal than Him in whom reside forgiveness, austerity, renunciation, truth, righteousness, gratitude, as well as nonviolence to other beings. O Kaikeyī, be kind to me, an old man on the verge of death who am entreating you piteously again and again. Whatever there is on the earth girded by seas I shall give to you. Do not bring about my untimely death. I



offer you respects with folded hands, Kaikeyī, and touch your feet too. Take shelter of Rāma and spare me from the unrighteousness of breaking my promise to coronate Rāma.”

The grief-stricken king’s mind was reeling with lamentation and he tossed about on the ground unconsciously, overwhelmed with anxiety. Although he wished to somehow cross over that ocean of misery, the irate Kaikeyī answered him with even harsher words: “If after giving two boons, O king, you then repent, how will you be able to speak of your righteousness on this earth, O valiant one? When the many assembled royal sages wish to talk with you about your acts of duty, what will you say to them? Will you say that you have broken your promise to Kaikeyī, by whose mercy you live and who protected you on the battlefield? You alone among kings will commit the sin of saying something else after having promised to grant me two boons today. In a fight between a dove and a hawk, King Śibi gave his own flesh to the hawk to protect the dove. King Alarka gave his eyes to a blind brāhmaṇa and thus attained the highest destination. Having made an agreement with the gods, the ocean never transgresses its borders. Bearing in mind the actions of your ancestors, do not nullify your promise. It seems, O fool, that after forsaking righteousness and installing Rāma on the throne, you wish to enjoy with Kausalyā perpetually. Regardless of whether my request is righteous or unrighteous, or whether it is in truth or in jest, you cannot transgress your promise to me. If Rāma is coronated, I shall drink poison this very day and die before your eyes. I would prefer death to seeing people bow with folded hands to the mother of Rāma for even one day. O ruler of men, I swear to you on Bharata and on my own self that I cannot be satisfied by anything other than the banishment of Rāma.”

Having spoken in this way, Kaikeyī became silent, so it is said. She did not reply to the weeping king. After hearing Kaikeyī’s most unwelcome request for the banishment of Rāma to the forest and the sovereignty of Bharata, the king remained speechless before her for some time. With all his senses overwhelmed, he stared without blinking at his beloved queen who had spoken so viciously. The king was not happy to hear Kaikeyī’s remarks, which were like a thunderbolt, displeasing to the heart, frightful and producing sadness and grief. Considering the resolve of the queen and the formidable oath he had made, he heaved a deep sigh, uttered the name of

Rāma and collapsed on the ground like a felled tree. He, though lord of the earth, became just like a mindless madman, like a debilitated patient or like a hypnotized serpent.

Then, in a wretched tone, the king addressed Kaikeyī: “Who has instructed you to achieve this unworthy goal which seemingly appears worthy? Like one possessed by a ghost, you are not ashamed to speak to me as you have. I did not realize earlier that your good behavior had been despoiled. I find your present behavior opposite to that of when you were young. What circumstance frightened you to the extent that you could request a boon such that Bharata would be installed as ruler of the land and Rāma made to reside in the forest? Away with this hostile attitude and ungrounded fear of Rāma, if you wish to do something amenable to your husband, the world and Bharata! O wicked woman of evil resolve, you are petty-minded and bent on perpetrating dastardly deeds! What disfavor or deception do you see in me and Rāma? Under no circumstance will Bharata reside in this kingdom without Rāma, for I believe Bharata is even more righteous than Rāma.

“After telling Him to go to the forest, how could I bare seeing His face turn pallid like the moon swallowed by an eclipse? After having consulted with my well-wishers to finalize all the details, how can I bare to see the well-planned arrangement to coronate Rāma be destroyed as if by an enemy army? The kings who have gathered from many directions will say of me, ‘How did this foolish descendant of Ikṣvāku manage to rule for so long?’ When the many qualified and learned elders inquire from me about Rāma, how shall I be able to tell them, ‘Being hard-pressed by Kaikeyī, I had to send my son Rāma into exile?’ If I were to say that I did so to uphold truth regarding your promise, the result would be the falsehood of my public announcement of the coronation of Rāma.

“What will Kausalyā say to me after Rāma is banished to the forest? And, having perpetrated such an unkind act, what will I say to her? Whenever Kausalyā, who always sought to please me, who gave me my favorite son and who always speaks sweetly to me, served me as a maidservant, a friend, a wife, a sister and a mother, I could never treat her kindly, though she deserved it, for fear of offending you. Now the kindness which I have shown you stings me as spicy food irritates one who is sick.

Seeing the injustice done to Rāma and His departure for the forest, and being fearful for the situation of her two sons and herself, how will Sumitrā be able to trust me?

“Alas! With misery will Sītā hear of two remorseful incidents—my own death and the forest exile of Rāma. When she is lamenting the exile of Rāma, like a heavenly damsel deprived of her mate on the slope of a snowy peak, I will give up my life. Seeing Rāma entering into the wild forest and Sītā crying for Him, I will not want to live for long. As a widow, indeed, will you manage the affairs of the kingdom with your son, for I cannot bear to live while Rāma is in exile. I considered you a chaste and devoted wife, although you were not so, just as a man might drink wine tainted with poison because its appearance was fine. You have been speaking to me with false flattery to kill me, as a hunter lures a deer with a melodious sound.

“The honorable people of the streets will definitely slander me as ignoble for having sold my son, just as they do to a brāhmaṇa who drinks liquor. Oh how troubling and painful to put up with your words! Such misfortune has overtaken me due to some impious action in a previous life. For a long time, O sinful wretch, you have been maintained by me, a sinner, out of ignorance, like a noose placed around my neck. While enjoying with you in my later years, like a child playing with a black snake in a solitary place, I did not realize you would be the cause of my death. The whole world must surely revile me, saying that the noble son has been deprived of fatherly protection by me, evil-minded as I am. They will say: ‘Alas, out of foolishness, the overly lusty king has sent his beloved son to the forest on account of his wife!’

“After becoming emaciated by the execution of vows, celibacy and service to His preceptors in His youth, at a time when He should be enjoying life, He will again have great difficulties. If I should tell my son Rāma to leave for the forest, He would not say to me anything other than ‘So be it.’ If on being ordered to go to the forest, He did otherwise, that would still please me, but my beloved child will not do so. Being as pure-hearted as He is, He will not understand my emotions. When told to go to the forest, He will say yes. When Rāma has departed for the forest, I will be cursed by everyone and will be fit to be taken to the abode of death.

“After my death and the exile of Rāma, the best of men, what atrocities will you commit against my beloved surviving relatives? If Kausalyā misses me, Rāma and my other two sons, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna, unable to bear the agony, she will follow me to the abode of death. Having thrown Kausalyā, Sumitrā and myself along with our three sons into hell, be you happy, O Kaikeyī! You will have to take care of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, which, though always endowed with virtue and unassailable, will be shaken by the absence of myself and Rāma. If the exile of Rāma is acceptable to Bharata, do not allow him to perform my funeral rites. After my death and the exile of Rāma, as a widow you can rule over the kingdom with your son. By ill luck, O princess, you resided in my palace. Surely unparalleled infamy and perpetual reproach, as well as the scorn of all living beings, will be mine in this world because of the sin committed by me.

“How will my dear Rāma, who has always ridden on chariots or on elephants and horses, tread on foot in the great wilderness? How will my son, at whose meal time cooks wearing gold earrings served him and vied with each other to see who could finish cooking first, be able to survive eating alkaline, bitter and pungent fruit, berries and roots from the forest? How will Rāma, after having worn costly garments, deserving as He is of lasting comfort, be able to wear ochre-colored cloth. By whose instigation have you spoken such harsh words as the demand for the exile of Rāma and the coronation of Bharata? Woe unto womankind, which is cruel and bent upon her own interests. I speak not of all women, but only of the mother of Bharata. O wicked woman intent on achieving your own unworthy goals, you are residing in my home to torment me. What offence do you find with me or with Rāma?

“Having fixed their love on Rāma, fathers may abandon their sons, and wives, their husbands and everything else. Indeed the whole world may become disturbed on seeing Rāma plunged into adversity. I rejoice upon seeing my son coming before me, adorned with jewels and as handsome as a youthful god. Beholding this vision, I am rejuvenated. Life may be possible without the sun, or without the rains given by Lord Indra. But seeing Rāma departing from the capital, no one can live; such is my opinion. Alas! I allowed you, a serpent and my enemy intent on destroying me, to reside in my house, although you are like death personified. For a long time, out of

ignorance, I held you, a highly venomous snake, in my lap, by which I am now killed. Free from me, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, rule over this capital and country with Bharata. Having killed your relatives, give pleasure to my enemies. O evil-doing witch! You have smitten me with adversity.

“I am greatly surprised that your teeth did not fall out and shatter into a thousand pieces on the spot when you spoke so violently. Rāma has never spoken any malicious or unpleasant word. He is incapable of speaking harshly. How, then, can you find fault with Rāma, who speaks sweetly and is endowed with many virtues? You may faint, burst into flames, drop dead or enter the earth opened with thousands of fissures, yet I shall not heed your severe request, as it is prejudicial to me, O disgrace of the Kekaya Dynasty. I do not wish you to live any longer, for you are as cutting as a razor, always speaking falsehood, and possess a mischievous nature. You are the murderer of your own family and are determined to burn my heart and vital organs. I cannot live without my son. What is the question of happiness, even for a self-situated person, when one is deprived of one’s son? As such, you should not act in a way that is detrimental to me. I shall even touch your feet. Be pleased upon me.”

Crying like an orphaned child, the monarch, whose heart was gripped by Kaikeyī, collapsed like a diseased person, not quite reaching her feet that were stretched before him.

## FURTHER LAMENTATION OF KING DAŚARATHA

King Daśaratha, who did not deserve to be treated in that way, lay on the ground in an unbecoming manner, like King Yayāti when he had fallen from heaven after the exhaustion of his pious credits. Undaunted in her determination to achieve her unworthy goals and perceiving some possible danger still, she again demanded her boons: “You claim, O king, to be truthful and faithful in vows. Why then do you wish to neglect granting me my boons?”

Having been spoken to in that way by Kaikeyī, King Daśaratha remained unconscious for a long time. Then he angrily replied: “Oh, when I am dead and Rāma is banished to the forest, you, my dishonorable enemy, be happy with your wishes fulfilled! How shall I bear being addressed with reproach when questioned in heaven by the gods about the welfare of Rāma? If I tell them that to uphold truth, I have banished Rāma to the forest to satisfy the sweet whim of Kaikeyī, that would constitute falsehood, for I have previously promised the coronation of Rāma.

“My son, the glorious and mighty Rāma, was achieved only after tremendous exertion when I was childless. How then could I reject Him? How could I exile the lotus-eyed Rāma, who is valiant, learned, has conquered anger and is dedicated to forgiveness? How can I put the mighty, long-armed and congenial Rāma, who is as beautiful as a dark blue lotus, into the Daṇḍaka Forest? How could I bear seeing the plight of the talented Rāma, who deserves material comforts and is undeserving of suffering? If my demise were possible without inflicting sorrow on Rāma, I would therein derive satisfaction. O evil-plotting wench, why do you put my valorous Rāma into difficulty? You will certainly be disgraced with unequalled ill repute”

While he was thus wailing, his mind overcome with grief, the sun set and the night commenced. On that occasion, the night adorned with the

orb of the moon did not illumine the lamenting king. Constantly sighing, the aged king Daśaratha wailed remorsefully like an infirm man, his eyes fixed on the sky. At one point, he declared: “O star-clad night, I do not want you to become dawn, as it would herald the banishment of Rāma. Be merciful to me, O gentle one. I offer you my respects with folded hands. Otherwise, pass quickly. I no longer wish to see the shameless and debased Kaikeyī, for whose sake I am in this predicament.”

The king said this so that Kaikeyī would hear it. Then, with folded hands, the king who was conversant with righteousness, entreated Kaikeyī: “O good lady, be kind to my wretched self, of saintly conduct, devoted to you and near the end of my life, especially since I am a king. I did not announce the coronation of Rāma in a secluded place. Please confer upon me your sweet mercy, for you are indeed kind-hearted. Please allow my Rāma to receive the perpetual sovereignty which I have offered Him. You will in this way achieve the greatest fame, O dark-eyed one. Your face and eyes are lovely, O buxom girl. Do this good deed for me, Rāma, the world, our preceptors, and for Bharata.”

After hearing the many tender entreaties of the harrowed, yet pure-hearted, king, whose eyes were as red as copper and filled with tears, the malicious woman was still intransigent. When he saw that Kaikeyī as yet remained unpacified and continued to speak in a hostile manner, he again lost consciousness and in desolation fell on the ground. As the distraught king sighed dolefully, the night passed. When dawn was about to break, the court musicians came playing sweet melodies to wake the king. On hearing them, he ordered them to immediately stop.

## KING DAŚARATHA SUMMONS RĀMA

The evil Kaikeyī, seeing the king lying motionless and unconscious on the ground due to grief for his son, said to him: “After making me a promise, you are lying on the ground as if you have committed some sin. You should stick to the bounds of morality set by your forefathers. Those who are conversant with duty say there is no greater duty than truthfulness. On the basis of truthfulness, I have instigated you to do your duty. Śaibya, a king of the world, having promised a hawk his own body and giving him it, achieved the highest destination. So, indeed, the mighty Alarka, remorselessly plucked out his own eyes and gave them to a brāhmaṇa trained in Vedic lore when requested. The lord of waters, the ocean, being dedicated to truth, never surpasses its boundaries one bit, even during the full moon tide, because of its obedience to truth. Truthfulness is identical with the syllable om, representing the Absolute. On truthfulness is duty based. Truthfulness is the immortal Vedas. By truthfulness is the Supreme attained. Adhere to truthfulness if your mind is fixed on duty. O truthful one, since you are a granter of boons, let my request be fulfilled. In order to carry out your duty, as well as to heed my request, exile your son Rāma. This is the third time I am telling you this. If you do not do so this time, O noble sir, being slighted by you, I shall give up my life before your very eyes!”

Being ordered in this way by the unscrupulous Kaikeyī, the king could no more free himself from her noose than Bali could when subdued by Indra. His mind was bewildered and his face lost its color. He was exactly like an ox struggling between the two wheels of a cart. Barely able to see due to impaired vision, the monarch controlled himself by his fortitude, and, with difficulty, said to Kaikeyī: “You wicked creature! I herein reject that hand of yours which I accepted before the consecrated fire, along with the son born from you. On my death, Rāma should offer me libations of water, using the things which were assembled for His coronation. You and your son shall not do my funeral rituals, O woman of ill actions, if you obstruct the



coronation of Rāma. I am unable to see the saddened, joyless and downcast faces of the people after previously seeing them jubilant.”

While the high-souled king was speaking to her in that way, the holy night with its garland of the moon and stars was followed by the dawn. Then Kaikeyī, whose conduct was vicious, being skilled at talking, again spoke to the king bitter and angry words: “Why do you utter words which are as painful as poison and disease? You should have Rāma brought here without becoming disturbed. When you have established my son on the throne, forced Rāma to wander in the forest and freed me of rivals, your duty will be accomplished.”

The king was like a fine horse beaten with a sharp whip. After the constant insistence of Kaikeyī, the king said: “I am bound by the rope of duty and have lost my mind. I wish to see my eldest, favorite and pious son Rāma.”

After night had ended and dawn begun with the stellar alignment called puṣya, the virtuous Vasiṣṭha surrounded by his disciples gathered up the paraphernalia for the coronation and entered the splendid city. The streets of the city had been swept and sprinkled down with scented water. The city was decorated with colorful flags, thronged with joyous crowds and the marketplaces were overflowing with goods. There were grand festivities in the city, for the people were eager for the coronation of Rāma. Everywhere the scent of sandalwood, aloe and other perfumes wafted through the air. The city of Ayodhyā surpassed Amarāvātī, the capital of Lord Indra. The glorious sage beheld the residential quarters of the queens, which were decorated with many different flags. Outside them were crowds of people from the city and countryside, which were graced by the presence of brāhmaṇas. Royal servants carried staffs and guards patrolled on richly adorned horses.

Arriving at the queens’ quarters, the overjoyed Vasiṣṭha, surrounded by great sages, passed through the throng. At the gate he saw the king’s minister and charioteer, the good-looking Sumantra, coming out. The powerful sage Vasiṣṭha said to the experienced son of a charioteer: “Please inform the king that I have come. Here are the gold pots filled with water

from the Ganges River and from the oceans, and a lovely throne made from udumbara wood, which I have brought for the coronation ceremony. All kinds of seeds, perfumes and jewels, honey, yogurt, parched grains, darbhā grass, flowers, milk, eight beautiful virgins, a fine elephant in rut, a chariot drawn by four horses, a glorious sword, a superb bow, a palanquin with bearers, an umbrella resembling the moon, a pair of white yak tail whisks, a large gold pot, a humped, white bull bound with a gold chain, A lion with four protruding fangs, a very strong stallion, a lion throne, a tigerskin, wood for the sacrificial fire, the sacred fire itself, all kinds of musical instruments, courtesans, beautifully attired damsels, professors, brāhmaṇas, sacred cows, deer, birds, the leading citizens of the city and countryside, merchants—these and many other gentle souls who are eloquent—along with the visiting kings, are waiting for Rāma’s coronation. Hurry the king so that after the sun has risen in the asterism Puṣya, Rāma may ascend the throne.”

Hearing Vasiṣṭha’s request, the mighty charioteer entered the palace while glorifying the king as a tiger among men. The doorguards, being devoted to the king and keen on pleasing him, did not impede Sumantra, senior as he was and already permitted by the king to pass. Unaware of the king’s condition, he stationed himself next to the king and decided to begin praising him with very pleasing words. Then, as on previous occasions in the king’s palace, Sumantra stood with folded hands and praised the king: “As the ocean pleases on the rising of the sun, shining in the light, you yourself being joyful, gladden us with your joyful mind. After being praised by his charioteer Mātali at this same time of day, Indra conquered all the demons. Therefore, do I glorify you. As the Vedas along with their different branches of knowledge waken Lord Brahmā, even so do I wake you. As the sun along with the moon wakens the blessed earth which sustains all creatures, so do I wake you. Arise, O great king, shining with your body adorned for the auspicious occasion, as does the sun rise from behind Mount Meru. O descendent of Kākutṣtha, may Soma and Sūrya, Śiva and Kuvera, Varuṇa, Agni and Indra grant you victory! The night is over, O tiger among men. Be informed that your instructions have been carried out. Now complete the remaining duties. Everything for Rāma’s coronation is ready. The citizens are standing with folded hands. The holy Vasiṣṭha himself along with the brāhmaṇas, is waiting. Please command the installation of Rāma at once, O king. Like livestock without its herdsman, an army without its general, the

moon without the night, or cows without a bull, so is a country where no king is to be found.”

Hearing Sumantra’s praise, which began with consoling words as it were, the monarch became more distressed. Thereupon, the righteous king, his eyes reddened with grief, being devoid of happiness, looked up at his well-loved charioteer and said: “Your words do wound my heart still further.” Hearing the king’s remorseful remark and seeing his misery, Sumantra, with tightly folded hands, withdrew to a distance. When the monarch was unable to reply on his own due to his anguish, Kaikeyī, being versed in diplomacy, addressed Sumantra, so it is said: “O Sumantra, the king, due to excitement over the coronation of Rāma, passed the night sleeplessly and has just now fallen asleep. As such, go quickly, O charioteer, and bring the glorious Prince Rāma. Bless you! Think no further of this.”

Sumantra replied: “O impatient woman, how can I go without having received this order from the king?” Hearing the minister’s reply, the king said: “O Sumantra, I wish to see Rāma. Bring the handsome fellow right now.” Considering the king’s request good, he became pleased at heart. On the king’s order, Sumantra immediately left in good spirits. Remembering how Kaikeyī had also commanded him to go quickly, he thought: “Obviously, I am being sent because the pious king is too exhausted to go out personally.” Making this conclusion, the charioteer again departed with great delight. Coming out of the royal chambers, which resembled a pool in the sea, Sumantra saw a multitude gathered before the entranceway. Having emerged suddenly, he noted who was waiting at the king’s gate. He saw many different citizens gathered at the door holding valuable gifts in their hands.

## SUMANTRA'S SUDDEN RETURN TO THE PALACE

Having passed the night, the brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas who had been invited by the king, stood waiting with the king's family priests. With great pleasure, the ministers, army commanders and leading businessmen waited in an orderly fashion for the installation of Rāma. A clear sun having risen, the asterism Puṣya having taken place, and the sun being in Cancer, as it was at Rāma's birth, the twice-born brāhmaṇas had gathered everything for Rāma's coronation. This included gold pots filled with water, a richly adorned throne, a chariot completely upholstered with a shiny tigerskin, water from the holy confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā Rivers. Water was also brought from lakes, wells, ponds and other holy rivers which flow with their milky waters toward the east, toward the south, and toward the west, as well as water from all the oceans. There was also honey, yogurt, clarified butter, whole grains, darbhā grass, flowers, milk, eight beautiful virgins, a fine elephant in rut, water-filled silver pots covered with sappy leaves. They were further beautified by the sparkling water they contained and by lotus flowers and water lilies. There was kept ready to fan Lord Rāma a exquisite, jewel-studded, white yak tail whisk that vied with the rays of the moon. There was also a white parasol resembling the moon kept ready in front of all the other paraphernalia. A white bull was also ready, as was a white horse. There were all kinds of musical instruments, as well as bards.

In obedience to the king's order, they had gathered all the things necessary for the coronation of the king's son, as was customary in a dominion ruled by kings descended from Ikṣvāku. Not seeing King Daśaratha, the people began saying: "Who will announce us to the king? We have not yet seen the king, even though the sun has risen. Everything is ready for the wise Rāma's coronation as prince regent."

As they were talking, Sumantra, who was honored by the king, spoke to the assembled royalty and distinguished guests: "I have been

urgently despatched by the king to fetch Lord Rāma. You are, however, worthy of being respected by the king, and particularly by Lord Rāma. As such, I shall inquire on your request about His Majesty's good health, for, although fully awake, he has not yet come out." Having spoken thus, he returned to the gate of the royal living quarters. Sumantra reentered the palace, it is said, because he had permission to do so at any time. As he entered, he sang the glories of the king's dynasty. Reaching the monarch's bedchamber, he paused. Going right into the room and hiding behind a curtain, he extolled the virtues of King Daśaratha and offered him blessings: "O descendent of Kākutstha, may Soma and Sūrya, Śiva and Kuvera, Varuṇa, Agni and Indra grant you victory! The night is over, O tiger among men. Be informed that your instructions have been carried out. The brāhmaṇas, army commanders and businessmen have come here. They desire your audience. Please wake up, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty!"

Recognizing that it was Sumantra, the king said the following: "O charioteer, when I have ordered you to bring Rāma here, for what reason have you not carried it out? Neither am I fast asleep. Bring Rāma here immediately." Thus did King Daśaratha again instruct the charioteer. Hearing the king's instruction and bowing his head, he departed from the royal residence, considering that order most dear. Reaching the royal thoroughfare decorated with bunting and flags, the charioteer felt delighted, or rather, overjoyed. He proceeded quickly, looking here and there. As he did so, he was elated to hear the discussions of the people concerning the imminent coronation of Lord Rāma.

Sumantra then spotted the charming palace of Rāma, whose splendor was like that of Mount Kailāsa, which shone like Indra's palace and was secured with huge doors and adorned with hundreds of balconies. At the entranceway was a golden statue, and the entranceway itself was studded with gems and coral. Like a mass of autumn clouds, it shone like a cave on Mount Meru. It was trimmed with long bands of gilded flowers interspersed with jewels. It was encrusted with pearls and scented with the fragrance of sandalwood and aloe. It emitted a pleasing fragrance of sandalwood like Mount Dārdura. It was frequented by crying cranes and peacocks. It had skillfully carved panels of wolves, and it attracted the eyes and minds of all living beings by its bright effulgence. It was like the sun and moon, like the

abode of Kuvera, treasurer of the gods. It was equal to the palace of Indra, lord of heaven, and was inhabited by flocks of many kinds of birds. To the charioteer, Rāma's palace resembled the peak of Mount Meru, so it is said. Men were gathered there with folded hands and people from throughout the land were trodding there with gifts, eager to see the coronation of Rāma. It resembled a large mass of clouds, and was very tall and resplendent. It was studded with many jewels and flanked on all sides by dwarf guards.

Sumantra's horse-drawn chariot with its front fender shimmered as he arrived at Rāma's palace, thus pleasing the minds of all the citizens. The charioteer was thrilled to reach Rāma's palace, which was tremendously opulent, crowded with deer and peacocks and as glorious as the palace of Indra. Passing through nicely decorated gates that challenged the beauty of Mount Kailāsa or the abode of heaven, he reached the inner chambers where were standing many men whose minds were fixed on Rāma, and as such were very dear to Him. There he heard all the people joyfully discussing Rāma's coronation and offering blessings upon the prince. Sumantra saw that Rāma's palace, inhabited as it was by deer and birds, appeared like the abode of Indra, lord of the gods, and was as brilliant as the lofty peak of Mount Meru. He saw the doorway crowded with hundreds of thousands of people who, having left there vehicles elsewhere, were standing with joined palms bearing gifts. Next he saw Rāma's elephant-carrier, called Śatruñjaya, Conqueror of Enemies, whose glaring body was formidable, being as large as a mass of clouds or a mountain and uncontrollable by a goad. He also saw the chief ministers, who were loved by the king, fully dressed for the occasion. They had come by either horse, chariot, or elephant. He parted the crowd on both sides as he entered the luxurious palace, it is said. Like a whale diving in the gem-endowed sea, the charioteer, unhindered, entered the palace, which looked like a cloud perched on a mountain top and which had chambers like huge airships.

## RĀMA GOES TO SEE KING DAŚARATHA

Passing through the gateway which was crowded with people, Sumantra, who was knowledgeable of ancient tales, reached the solitary inner chambers, which were guarded by young men wearing golden earrings who carried barbed clubs and bows and who were dedicated to their master. There at the door he saw old men dressed in ochre-colored robes wearing ornaments and holding staffs in their hands as they stood guard over the women. Seeing him arrive, they all suddenly jumped up from their seats out of respect, eager as they were to serve Lord Rāma. The charioteer, having a disciplined mind and being practical, said to them: "Let Lord Rāma know that Sumantra is waiting at the gate." To please their master Rāma, they approached Him, who was with His wife, and immediately informed Him. Hearing this, Lord Rāma ordered His father's charioteer to be brought inside, keen as He was to please His father. The charioteer saw Lord Rāma well-adorned and resembling Kuvera, treasurer of the gods, as He sat upon a gold couch covered with a linen sheet. He was smeared with the finest, pure, fragrant sandalwood paste which was as red as the blood of a boar. With Sītā standing at His side holding a peacock fan in Her hand, He looked exactly like the moon accompanied by the star Citra.

Being a humble bard conversant with etiquette, he began praising Lord Rāma, the bestower of boons, who was invested with His own splendor and who shone like the sun. Seeing the prince with a cheerful countenance reclining upon His pleasure couch, Sumantra, with joined hands, spoke the following: "O Rāma, the worthy son of Kausalyā, Your father wishes to see You, and so also does Queen Kaikeyī. Please go there. Do not delay." Having been addressed thus, the highly effulgent lion among men was pleased. Thereafter He said to His consort Sītā: "My lady, the king and queen have surely gotten together and are having some discussion concerning my coronation. Understanding what the king's intentions were, the well-wishing and expert queen has prompted His Majesty to act on my behalf. The dark-eyed daughter of King Kekaya, being one of My mothers, is delighted about

My upcoming coronation. She is always concerned about the welfare of My father, and is also desirous of My good fortune. Luckily the king, along with his good wife, has sent his messenger Sumantra, who acts as My benefactor. A messenger equal to that assembly has arrived. Surely I shall be installed today as prince regent. Ah! Leaving here, I shall soon see the emperor. Be seated comfortably and enjoy with Your companions.”

The dark-eyed Sītā, who was greatly honored by Her husband, invoked blessings on Him and followed Him to the gate. There, Sītā addressed Lord Rāma: “This being a kingdom inhabited by the twice-born brāhmaṇas, the king ought to consecrate You with a rājasūya sacrifice, as Brahmā, the creator of the universe, did for Indra. Seeing You initiated for this ceremony, observing vows, dressed in a deerskin, leading a pure life and carrying an antelope horn, I worship You. May Indra, the bearer of thunderbolts, protect Your eastern side. May Yama, the lord of death, protect Your southern side. May Varuṇa, the dispenser of justice, protect Your western side. May Kuvera, the gods’ treasurer, protect Your northern side.”

Having taken leave of Sītā and having performed auspicious rites suitable to the occasion, Rāma left His palace accompanied by Sumantra. Coming out of the palace as a lion comes out of its mountain cave, Rāma saw Lakṣmaṇa at the door standing bowed with folded hands. At the middle gate, He met His friends. Seeing all those who longed for His coronation and meeting with them, He felt great satisfaction. Thereafter He mounted His fine chariot that was as bright as fire and upholstered with tigerskin. Making a sound like thunder, the chariot plated with gold and jewels captivated the eyes with its radiance as does the summit of Mount Meru. Pulled by thoroughbred steeds that were just like baby elephants, it sped quickly like the chariot of the thousand-eyed Indra pulled by green horses. Illuminated with His own glory, Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, departed swiftly, mounted upon the chariot.

Thundering like a cloud in the sky, He sallied forth from the palace like the bright moon from behind a large cloud. Holding a wonderful yak tail whisk in His hand, Lakṣmaṇa, the younger brother of Rāma, was seated behind Him on the chariot to protect Him. After that, a tumultuous uproar



arose from the crowd gathered around Them as They left. Then noteworthy horses and outstanding elephants with bodies like mountains followed behind Rāma by the hundreds and thousands. Before Them marched soldiers outfitted in steel mail with aloe and sandalwood paste smeared upon their bodies and swords and bows in their hands, as well as reciters invoking blessings. Thereafter was heard along the way the playing of musical instruments and the words of praise recited by bards. Then were heard shouts like the roaring of lions issuing forth from the warriors. As Rāma, the crusher of enemies, continued along the road, from all sides, bejeweled ladies stationed in the windows of mansions showered down flowers.

Afterwards, from the tops of mansions and from the ground, women of perfect limbs, intent as they were on pleasing Rāma, began glorifying Him with choice words: “Certainly Your mother Kausalyā will rejoice upon seeing You installed on Your father’s throne today as a result of this visit to Your father, O joy of Your mother.” All the ladies considered Sītā, who was so dear to the heart of Rāma, to be the best of women. They said: “Surely our lady must have carefully performed tremendous austerities in her past lives to have attained the association of Lord Rāma, as the star Rohiṇī has with the moon.” Thus did the exalted Rāma hear on the royal highway the sweet words of praise uttered by the ladies gathered on the roofs of mansions.

Rāma then heard the conversations of the people who had gathered in Ayodhyā from many distant places as well as of the local inhabitants: “Here comes Śrī Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, who is going to achieve abundant wealth today by the grace of the king. We also will attain all our desires when He becomes our ruler. It will be a great gain for us when He achieves sovereignty over this country for a long time. As long as He remains the ruler of the people, there will be nothing unpleasant, nor will people know sorrow.” A din was raised by the horses and elephants, as well as by the benedictors, bards, rhapsodists and musicians who were glorifying Him like Kuvera as He advanced. Lord Rāma saw the clean highway crowded with female elephants and bull elephants in rut, chariots and horses, and great multitudes of people amassed at the intersections as well. He also saw shops selling many kinds of jewels and other abundant merchandise.

## RĀMA ENTERS HIS FATHER'S PALACE

Mounted upon His chariot, the glorious Lord Rāma, who brought immense pleasure to His friends, saw the city of Ayodhyā decorated with bunting and flags, perfumed with the smoke of incense and crowded with many different people. Rāma drove down the middle of the royal highway, which was beautified on both sides by white houses resembling clouds and the wafting trails of incense. The shops were piled high with sandalwood and other superb fragrant substances, linen and silk cloth, and uncut pearls and first-class crystals illuminated the open road. On the sides of the road were stalls piled high with flowers and cooked foods of different varieties. He saw that at the crossroads were provisions of yogurt, whole grains, clarified butter, parched grains, incense, perfumes and sandalwood, and that there were different kinds of garlands hung. Hearing the blessings invoked by well-wishers and duly honoring all the people according to their status, He continued on His way. The people said: "Being coronated today, take up the well-known path trodden by Your father, grandfather and great grandfather, and follow it." Others said: "We shall live more happily when Rāma is installed as king than when His father or forefathers ruled. What need have we of sense enjoyment or elevation to heaven if we catch sight of Rāma coming out from the coronation ceremony? In fact, nothing will be more pleasing to us than the installation on the throne of Rāma invested with immeasurable splendor."

Hearing these and other auspicious discussions uttered by His well-wishers who glorified His position, He proceeded ahead unaffected. As Rāma, the best of men, passed by, no one was able to withdraw their mind or eyes away from Him. Whoever did not see Rāma or whomever Rāma did not see was despised by everyone and by himself. Because the righteous Rāma bestowed His mercy upon everyone according to their social standing and age, including those outside the four castes, they were devoted to Him. The prince respectfully passed on His right many intersections, temple roads and temples and roadside shrines under trees. After some time, Rāma

reached the royal family's palace, which was as radiant as a mass of clouds, its manifold spires resembling the peak of Mount Kailāsa, and its whitish symmetrical habitations bedecked with gems appearing like aircraft in the sky. The palace was unrivaled on the earth and was equal to the abode of Indra, lord of heaven. Prince Rāma, who was shining with glory, then entered His father's residence. Passing through the first three gates guarded by bowmen in His horse-drawn chariot, that best of men passed through the last two on foot. Having gone through all five gates, the son of King Daśaratha sent back those who accompanied Him and entered the inner chambers. After Rāma had entered His father's quarters, all the people, full of joy, awaited His return, as the ocean awaits the rising of the moon.

## KAIKEYĪ INFORMS RĀMA OF HIS EXILE

Rāma saw His father despondent and miserable, with a withered face, seated upon a beautiful couch accompanied by Kaikeyī. He modestly bowed down first at His father's feet, then, with a composed mind, He bowed down at the feet of Kaikeyī. Muttering "Rāma," the pained king, with his eyes full of tears, could neither see nor speak to Rāma. Seeing that unprecedented appearance of the king, Rāma became gripped with fear, as when stepping on a snake with the foot. With his senses deprived of pleasure, the king looked devastated by the pangs of grief. He sighed heavily with his mind totally perturbed, like the calm sea being ruffled by a series of waves, the sun swallowed by an eclipse or a sage who has told a lie. Observing His father's inconceivable sorrow, He became overwhelmed like the ocean during the full moon.

The shrewd Rāma, devoted as He was to His father's welfare, thought to Himself: "Why is it that on this day alone the king does not respond joyfully to My greeting? At other times when he saw Me, even though angry, He would greet Me graciously. Why is it he feels agonized to see Me today?" Like one distressed and stricken with grief, His face paled by despondency, He bowed to Kaikeyī and said the following: "I hope I have not committed some offence against my father. Please tell Me why he is angry with Me. Please try to placate him. I am wondering why his mind is dissatisfied, when he is always affectionate to Me. Having a distraught look on his face, and miserable as he is, he does not speak to Me. I hope he is not afflicted with bodily or mental agony. Lasting happiness is indeed hard to come by. I hope no offence has been committed against the good-looking Prince Bharata or the valorous Śatrughna, or against My mothers. If I were unable to please the emperor or to obey My father's command, I would not wish to live longer than a moment. How can a man, seeing that his father is the source of birth for his material body and therefore like a manifested god, fail to be devoted to him? Could it be that out of conceit you angrily uttered some harsh word to My father, by which his mind is disturbed? My lady,

please tell Me, inquisitive as I am, what is the actual cause of this unprecedented change in the king.”

Being addressed in this way by the great-souled Rāma, Kaikeyī, shameless as she was, boldly spoke as follows: “The king is neither angry, O Rāma, nor is he afflicted by any adversity. There is, however, something on his mind which he is afraid to tell You. He is unable to say something unpleasant to You who are dear to him. That which has been promised to me must be carried out by You. After granting me this boon and honoring me, the king later repents like an ordinary man. Having offered me a boon with the words “So be it,” the king useless wishes to construct a dam for water that has already gone. Truthfulness is the root of all duty, O Rāma, this is known well by the righteous. Let not the king neglect this, angry as he is for Your sake! If you are prepared to execute whatever the king wishes to say, whether auspicious or inauspicious for You, then I shall reiterate it all to You. If it will not devastate You to hear what Your father has said, I will reveal it. In any case, he is not going to speak to You.”

Hearing these words uttered by Kaikeyī, Rāma was distressed and replied to the queen standing beside the king: “Oh! How terrible! There is no need to say such things to Me, My lady. On the king’s order, I am in fact prepared to jump into fire. Commanded by him who is my preceptor, father, king and benefactor, I can drink strong poison or throw Myself into the sea. Tell me, My lady, what the king’s request is. I shall do it. I promise. Rāma does not speak twice.”

To the honorable and just Rāma, who always spoke the truth, Kaikeyī uttered the following bitter words: “Formerly, O descendant of King Raghu, during a the war between the gods and demons, when Your father was struck down on the battlefield with an arrow, I rescued him, for which he offered me two boons. In regards to that, I have solicited the king to coronate Bharata and to exile You to the Daṇḍaka Forest this very day. If You wish to prove that You and Your father are true to Your promise, O best of men, then listen to what I have to say. Stand by the order of Your father. As promised by him, You should reside in the jungle for fourteen years, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Furthermore, let Bharata be coronated with all the paraphernalia that was gathered by the king for Your coronation. Renouncing this coronation, stay in the forest for fourteen years wearing

dreadlocks and cloth made from the bark of trees. Let Bharata rule over this dominion of Kosala which is adorned with many valuable jewels and crowded with horse-drawn chariots and which belongs to King Daśaratha. Overwhelmed with compassion for You, this monarch cannot even look at You, his face being tormented from anguish. O Rāma, fulfill the king's promise. Protecting his great truthfulness, deliver the king!"

Even though Kaikeyī spoke so harshly, Rāma did not become aggrieved. Pained at the thought of his son's calamity, the high-minded king was greatly distressed.

## RĀMA AGREES TO GO TO THE FOREST

Hearing those words which were unpleasant and like death itself, Rāma, the destroyer of enemies, did not become disturbed. Rather, He said the following to Kaikeyī: “So be it. I shall most certainly proceed to the forest and wear dreadlocks and tree bark cloth in pursuance of the king’s promise. I do, however, wish to know why His Majesty, who is capable of assailing his enemies, does not welcome Me as before. You should not become angry because I am saying this before you. Be assured that I shall go to the forest and wear bark cloth and matted hair. Commanded by My father, who is My benefactor, preceptor and king, and who is grateful for service rendered, what act of kindness will I not do without hesitation? There is, however, one mental anxiety that is burning My heart: why His Majesty did not personally tell me about Bharata’s coronation. By your command, I can happily give up Sītā, the kingdom, wealth and my dear life for My brother Bharata. How much more so would I do this if personally ordered by My father, the lord of men, to uphold a promise meant to please you? Therefore, reassure the shy king. For, why should it be that he gently sheds tears with his eyes fixed on the ground? On the order of the king, let messengers go immediately on swift horses to bring Bharata from His maternal uncle’s house. As far as Myself, I am indeed quickly leaving for the Daṇḍaka Forest to reside for fourteen years without questioning My father’s command.”

Elated to hear Rāma’s reply, and confident in His departure, she urged Him to hurry: “So be it. Messengers shall go on swift horses to bring back Bharata from His maternal uncle’s home. I do not think You should delay any longer, eager as You are to leave. O Rāma, get out of here and go to the forest at once! It matters little that the king, out of embarrassment, does not address You directly. Begone with this unease! As long as You do not leave this city for the forest, O Rāma, Your father will neither bathe nor eat.”

Sighing deeply with the words “Oh! How awful!” the grief-stricken king collapsed unconscious on the couch which was as white as snow. Rāma started to lift His father up, but was compelled by Kaikeyī to leave promptly for the forest, like a fast steed lashed by a whip. Hearing those biting words which were unpleasant and ignoble, the anxious Rāma spoke to Kaikeyī: “I have no desire to live in this world for material gain. Know Me to be fixed in immaculate righteousness like a sage. Whatever is agreeable to My father is already accomplished by Me in every way, even at the risk of My life. There is no greater duty than this: to serve one’s father or carry out his request. Although uninstructed in this regards by My father, I shall reside in the desolate jungle for fourteen years by your order. Obviously you do not find any good qualities in Me, O Kaikeyī, since you spoke to My father, even though you have greater authority over Me. After bidding farewell to My mother and getting the permission of Sītā, I shall immediately head for the vast wilderness of Daṇḍaka. You should see to it that Bharata protects the kingdom and serves Our father, for such is the eternal code of duty.”

Hearing Rāma’s words, His father suffered intense agony. Unable to speak due to anguish, he wept loudly. Bowing down at His father’s feet, who was unconscious at the time, as also at the feet of the ignoble Kaikeyī, the highly effulgent Rāma left. Circumabulating His father and Kaikeyī, keeping them on His right as a sign of respect, Rāma came out of the palace and saw His friends. Behind Him, His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, who increased the joy of Sumitrā, was furious with tears in His eyes. Cycling clockwise round the repository holding the paraphernalia for the coronation, Rāma moved slowly without looking at it, intent as He was on leaving that place. Loss of sovereignty did not diminish His majestic splendor, anymore than the waning of the moon, which pleases everyone by its cool rays, reduces the moon’s charm. Despite His being about to renounce the throne and go to the forest, there was no discernible change on His face, like one who has transcended the world.

Forbidding the use of the beautiful parasol, as well as the pair of yak tail whisks with silver handles studded with gems, he sent away His followers, the chariot and the citizens. Restraining His sadness with His mind and controlling His senses, the self-controlled Rāma entered His mother’s residence to inform her of the bad news. Everyone around the



splendorous and truthful Rāma did not notice any change in His appearance. The mighty-armed Rāma did not forsake His usual cheerfulness, any more than the autumn moon with its mass of rays loses its brilliance. Honoring everyone with sweet words, the most glorious Rāma entered the presence of His mother. His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, who had acquired extensive prowess, having attained by His qualities parity with Rāma, followed behind while controlling the sorrow arising in His mind. On entering the palace which was elated with jubilation, despite His own loss of wealth, He did not show any transformation out of fear of causing the loss of life of his well-wishers.

## RĀMA INFORMS KAUSALYĀ OF HIS EXILE

As soon as Rāma, the tiger among men, departed from His father's residence with joined palms, there issued forth a great sound of lamentation from the womenfolk there: "That Rāma who used to look after the affairs of the palace without being asked by His father, and who was our purpose and shelter, is now going into exile! Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, has always been from His very birth as attendant on us as He has been on His mother Kausalyā. He who never became angry even when maligned, who avoided provoking words and appeased the angered, will go into exile today. Alas! This foolish king of ours is driving the whole world to destruction by forsaking Rāma, who is the shelter of all living beings."

In this way, all the royal ladies scolded their lord and wailed loudly. Hearing the frightful and distressing noise in the women's chambers, the king, who was stricken with grief for his son, buried himself in the couch. Greatly pained, Rāma, sighing like an elephant, went with His brother into His mother's residential quarters. He saw the elderly and most respected of porters standing at the entrance of the chamber among many other guards. Upon seeing Rāma, they all approached Him, the foremost of the victorious, with shouts of victory. Having passed the first gate, he saw standing at the second gate senior brāhmaṇas who were learned in the Vedas and who were honored by the king. Rāma bowed before these elders, then reached the third gate. There He saw women, young girls and old men engaged in guarding the gate. Delighted to see Rāma, the women entered the chambers to promptly inform His mother of the good news of His arrival. Having passed the night in a vigil, Queen Kausalyā had at dawn begun worshipping Lord Viṣṇu, the preserver of the world, for the welfare of her son. Dressed in silk, she who was ever-devoted to vows, performed auspicious rites and had the brāhmaṇas offer oblations of clarified butter into the sacred fire with the recitation of sacred hymns from the Vedas.

On entering His mother's beautiful living quarters, He saw her having oblations being offered in the sacred fire. He also saw yogurt, whole grains, clarified butter, round sweetmeats, ghee for oblations, parched grains, garlands of white jasmine flowers, milky rice pudding, porridge of rice and lentils, firewood, and full waterpots gathered there for the worship of God. He saw His fair mother clad in white silk looking emaciated from fasting and offering libations of water to God. Seeing her son after a long time, she became overjoyed and ran to Him, as a mare would run to her foal. Rāma embraced His approaching mother. Embracing Him likewise with her arms, she smelled His head. Then Kausalyā, out of maternal affection for her son, addressed the following sweet and beneficial words to her unassailable son: "May You attain the long life, fame and righteousness worthy of one born in the dynasty of ancient royal sages of righteous conduct and magnanimity! Just see, O Rāma, the descendant of Raghu. Your father, the righteous-souled king, being true to his word, will crown You prince regent this very day."

His mother offered him a seat to take breakfast. He, however, merely touched the seat and, stretching out His hands slightly, spoke to her. About to leave for the Daṇḍaka forest, Rāma, being humble by nature, bent low out of reverence and asked her for permission to leave: "Surely you do not know, My lady, that a great calamity is at hand. It will bring sorrow not only to you, but to Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. I am leaving for the Daṇḍaka Forest. Of what use is the seat to Me? The time has now come for Me to sit upon a mat of kuśa grass. Indeed, for fourteen years I shall reside in the uninhabited jungle and subsist like an ascetic on tubers, roots and fruits. The emperor is granting the post of prince regent to Bharata, whereas I am to dwell in the Daṇḍaka Forest as an ascetic. I shall live in the desolate wilderness for fourteen years, practicing austerities as a hermit and eating fruits and roots, eschewing all meat."

Kausalyā fell down like the branch of a fir tree cut off with an axe, appearing like a fallen goddess. Seeing His mother, who did not deserve to suffer, unconscious and fallen like a banana tree, Rāma lifted her up. He removed with His own hands the dust which clung to the limbs of her body as it does to a mare that wallows in dust after carrying a burden. Then Kausalyā, who was deserving of happiness, being smitten with anguish, said

to Rāma, the tiger among men, who was standing beside her, within ear shot of Lakṣmaṇa: “If a son had not been born to me, that would have been a cause for sorrow, O Rāma. In any case, I would not have experienced any sorrow greater than that of childlessness. For a barren woman there is but one mental anguish, the thought that she is childless, nothing more, my son. Previously, I never had any good fortune or happiness bestowed on me by my husband. Thinking that if my son were coronated prince regent I would then achieve these, I have managed to carry on with my life. Although I am the senior-most queen and exceedingly chaste, I shall now have to hear many thoughtless, heart-rending remarks from my younger co-wives. What could possibly be more painful for a lady than this? My sorrow and lamentation are endless.

“Even while at Your side I have been despised. How much more so when You are sent away, my child. I shall surely have to die. Because my husband did not think much of me, I was always greatly ignored by him. He treated me on the same level as the servants of Kaikeyī, or even lower! Whoever serves me or follows me would not, after seeing the son of Kaikeyī, even talk to me. In such an unfortunate situation, how shall I be able to bear looking at the face of Kaikeyī, who, through constant anger, always speaks harshly? I have passed seventeen years since Your [second] birth, O Rāma, waiting for the end of my difficulties. Despite having aged, I am unable to bear much longer the unending abuse received at the hands of my co-wives. Unable to see Your face, which is as brilliant as the full moon, how will I, as wretched as I am, be able to live such a miserable life? I think my heart must be very hard since it does not slit open any further, like a river flooded with new water during the monsoon.

“Surely there is no death for me, nor is there room for me in the abode of Yama, lord of death. At the present, death does not wish to carry me away, as a lion carries away a crying doe. My heart must certainly be as hard as iron that it does not split apart, or that this body does not break into pieces on the ground due to the suffering heaped upon it. Assuredly death does not come except at the fixed time. This is all the more painful to me when the vows observed, charity given and self-control practiced by me are fruitless and the austerities done for the good of my child, futile like seed sown in saline soil. If one crushed by heavy suffering could by merely willing

it die before the appointed time, I would, in your absence, like a cow without her calf, go this very day to the court of Yama. Even if I cannot die, my life is useless without You who are as splendid as the shining moon. I shall follow You into the forest as a feeble cow follows her calf out of intense longing.”

Unable to bear the great pain and seeing Rāma trapped, she wailed grievously like a kinnarī who finds her child caught in a trap.

## RĀMA DEFENDS HIS DECISION TO LEAVE

While Kausalyā, the mother of Rāma, wept in that way, Lakṣmaṇa, being sorely afflicted, spoke to her in a manner befitting the circumstance: “It does not please me in the least that Rāma should go to the forest renouncing the royal fortune. Being under the control of a woman, perverted, senile and under the assault of his senses, what will the king not say when urged by Kaikeyī, lusty as he is? I do not see in Rāma any such offense or fault for which He should have to leave this country to reside in the wilderness. I do not see in this world anyone who, though inimical to or vanquished by Him, can find fault with Him, even when not in His presence. How could one who is intent on righteousness abandon for no reason his son who is equal to a god and is just, disciplined and dear even to his enemies? What son who is mindful of politics can take to heart the instruction of a king who has become a child again?”

Then Lakṣmaṇa said to Rāma: “Before anyone comes to know of this scheme, take control of the administration with my help and make Yourself the ruler. With me standing at Your side protecting You with a bow and You standing like Death himself, who can do anything against You? I shall depopulate the entire city of Ayodhyā with my sharp arrows, if it stands opposed to You. Those who are on Bharata’s side and those who seek his well-being—all of them I shall kill, for he who is soft is overcome. If our father is agreeable to being incited by Kaikeyī, having become our enemy, he should be killed without any remorse, he should be killed! If the preceptor has become arrogant, not knowing what is to be done and what is not to be done, and has strayed from the path, he should be punished. On what authority or for what reason does he wish to give to Kaikeyī what is rightfully Yours, O most perfect person? What power does he have to confer

the royal fortune on Bharata, establishing enmity with You and me, O chastiser of foes?”

Then he said to Kausalyā: “My lady, I swear to you on my truthfulness, my bow, my charity and my good deeds that I am truly devoted to my brother. If Rāma will enter blazing fire or the forest, know that I have already done it. By my valor I shall remove your suffering as the sun dispels darkness. You and Rāma just see my valor. I shall kill my senile father whose mind is attached to Kaikeyī, is wretched, in his second childhood and contemptible due to his senility.”

On hearing these words spoken by the great-souled Lakṣmaṇa, Kausalyā, bemoaned and weeping, addressed Rāma: “You have heard what Your brother said. Do what must next be done in this connection, if it pleases You. Hearing the unjust request of my co-wife Kaikeyī, You should not go away, leaving Me here in my grief. If You wish to do what is right, O pious one versed in duty, then serve me while remaining here and practice the highest duty. While living at home, Kaśyapa practiced self-control and served his mother. By that supermost austerity he attained the heavenly world. As much as the king is worshipable by You, even more so am I. Therefore, I do not give You permission to proceed to the forest. After my separation from You I would have no need of life or happiness. It would be better to be with You, even if I had to live by eating grass. If You go to the forest, leaving me afflicted as I am, I shall sit down fasting and shall not be able to survive. As a result of that, my son, You will attain some well-known suffering in hell, as the ocean suffered punishment equal to killing a brāhmaṇa for an infraction of duty.”

The just Rāma, fixed in righteousness, said the following to His mother Kausalyā who was crying incessantly: “I am unable to disobey My father’s command. As such, I propitiate you with My head bowed. I shall go to the forest. On the order of his father, the learned forest sage Kaṇḍu slaughtered a cow, knowing it to be a sin. On the order of King Sagara, who belongs to our dynasty, his sons met with a tragic death while digging into the earth. On the order of his father, Paraśurāma killed his own mother Reṇukā in the forest with an axe. These as well as many other god-like men have carried out the order of their father without hesitation. I shall

therefore do what is good for Father. It is not that I am the only one to carry out my father's command, it has already been done by those whom I mentioned, O glorious woman. I am not introducing some new practice that is adverse to you. I am following a path previously traversed by My ancestors. I am only doing what is necessary to be done in this world, not otherwise. One who carries out the instructions of his father is never lost."

After addressing His mother in this way, He, being the best of speakers and the best of archers, said to Lakṣmaṇa: I know Your unsurpassed love for Me, as well as Your valor, strength and glory which are difficult to be matched. Not knowing the purpose of truthfulness and self-control, My mother is experiencing unparalleled suffering, O possessor of good characteristics. Duty is indeed supreme in this world; truth is founded on duty. Father's request is also excellent because it is based on duty. Having promised to fulfill the order of one's father, one's mother or of a brāhmaṇa, O valiant one, one who takes his stand on duty should not falsify it. Being commanded by Kaikeyī on the basis of a pledge given by Father, I dare not disobey in any way. Give up this ignoble plan to seize the kingdom which is based on the ideals of chivalry. Taking shelter of duty, do not resort to severity. Let My resolution be fulfilled."

Having reprimanded His younger brother out of fraternal affection, He again spoke to His mother Kausalyā with folded hands and a bowed head: "Please allow Me, O lady, to go to the wilderness. You are bound by an oath. Recite prayers for My welfare. After fulfilling this promise, I shall come back from the forest to Ayodhyā, as the royal sage Yayāti returned to heaven after having left it once. Let the sorrow in your heart be impeded, O mother. Please do not grieve. After carrying out Father's command, I shall return from the forest. You, I, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Sumitrā must stand by Father's injunction: this is eternal duty. Mother, putting away the paraphernalia for the coronation and restraining the sorrow in your heart, let My rightful resolve to dwell in the wilderness be executed."

Hearing Rāma's words which were very righteous, detached and fearless, she regained consciousness, like a dead woman come back to life, and looked on Him while saying the following: "My son, as Your father is worshipable by You as Your guru out of duty and affection, so also am I. I do



not give You permission to abandon me in misery, my son. What is the use of living in this world without You? What is the use of this world or offerings in funeral rites to me? I would prefer to have Your association than to possess the entire creation.”

Hearing His mother’s piteous lamentation, Rāma became incensed, like a great elephant in darkness being driven by men with blazing torches. Sticking to His duty, Rāma replied in a righteous way that only He was capable of, saying to His mother, who was almost unconscious due to grief, and to Lakṣmaṇa, who was consumed by anxiety: “O Lakṣmaṇa, I know your eternal devotion and valor. However, by not perceiving My purpose, You, along with Mother, are torturing Me most painfully. It has been positively determined that religiousness, economic development and sense enjoyment in this world are by-products of dutifulness, just as an obedient and amenable wife bears a son. There is no doubt about this, as far as I am concerned. One should shun those pursuits in which these three human goals are not present and should undertake those which are conducive to duty, for one who dedicates himself to material acquisition becomes hateful and one who is addicted to sense enjoyment is not praiseworthy. What person, unless he were vicious, would not consider as his duty an action which his father, who is his preceptor, king and elder, might request, even if out of anger, overexcitement or lust?

“As such, I am incapable of not completely fulfilling Father’s order as it is. He is in fact fit to be our instructing preceptor, My boy, and he is Mother’s husband, goal and duty. While the righteous king still lives, especially as he is following his prescribed path, how can the queen go with Me from here as if she were a widow? For this reason, My lady, grant Me permission to leave for the forest. Please recite prayers for My well-being so that when the time is over, I may return, as did King Yayāti return to heaven by dint of truthfulness. I cannot abandon fame, which is more important, just to acquire a kingdom. Life being so fleeting, O lady, I shall not this day choose sovereignty over the earth out of unrighteousness.”

Trying to placate His mother and having instructed His younger brother in philosophy, that bull among men, set as He was to go to the Daṇḍaka Forest, mentally circumambulated around His mother.

## RĀMA ATTRIBUTES HIS MISFORTUNE TO DESTINY

Approaching Lakṣmaṇa, who was smitten with anguish and especially indignant, whose eyes were wide open with rage like a mad elephant, Rāma, possessing self-mastery, spoke with restraint as follows: “Suppressing Your anger and sorrow and resorting to uncommon fortitude, ignoring this insult and taking it as a reason for rejoicing, send back all the wonderful paraphernalia that has been gathered together for My coronation and quickly do without interruption what is necessary for My departure. O son of Sumitrā, let the enthusiasm shown in gathering the paraphernalia for My coronation be shown in gathering the paraphernalia for My exile. Make sure that Your step-mother Kaikeyī, whose mind is disturbed over My coronation, is not apprehensive about whether I will leave. I cannot bear to disregard her mental anxiety for even a moment.

“I do not remember ever committing an offense either knowingly or unknowingly against My mothers or father. My father is always truthful, true to his promise, of true prowess and afraid of misfortune in his next life. Let him be free from fear. As long as this matter is not taken care of, the anguish in his mind that his veracity has not been vindicated will also disturb Me. Therefore, having disposed of this coronation ceremony, O Lakṣmaṇa, I wish to leave this capital and go to the forest at once. After My departure, let Queen Kaikeyī’s aim be accomplished today with the coronation of her son Bharata, free from any cause for alarm. When I leave for the forest dressed in tree bark cloth, deerskin and matted hair, Kaikeyī’s mind will become happy. Destiny has directed her intelligence and fixed her mind, hence I should not torment her. I shall leave very soon.

“Destiny alone is responsible for My exile, as well as My getting the kingdom back. How could Kaikeyī possibly have brought about My exile if the thought had not been instigated by destiny? For, You know I never made any special distinction between any of My mothers in the past, nor did

Kaikeyī distinguish between Myself and her son. I cannot find any reason other than destiny as the cause for which her terribly harsh words could provoke the emperor to stop my coronation and banish Me. How else could she, being a princess of gentle nature and rare qualities, speak like a vulgar woman to torment Me before My father? An inconceivable situation is definitely the result of destiny and cannot be obstructed by any created being. Obviously it is the will of providence that contrariety has befallen her and Me. And who can fight destiny whose only trace is the result of an action, O son of Sumitrā? Happiness and sorrow, anger and fear, gain and loss, birth and death, or whatever else one might undergo, are nothing but the work of destiny. When impelled by destiny, even sages practicing rigorous austerities are made to fall down by lust and anger, abandoning their stringent practices. That unexpected thing that suddenly takes place after duly starting an undertaking is but the work of destiny.

“Although the coronation was canceled, I am not disturbed, having steadied My mind by Myself on the strength of this philosophical attitude. Therefore, without being perturbed, follow My instructions. Immediately stop the preparations for My coronation. Lakṣmaṇa, all of these pots filled with water that were gathered for My coronation shall be used for My bath and vow to austerity. Then again, of what use to Me is all this paraphernalia gathered for the royal coronation? Better to use water that I Myself have drawn for the consecration of the vow. Moreover, do not bemoan the loss of wealth, O Lakṣmaṇa. Sovereignty or exile are the same to Me, though exile will be of greater benefit. O Lakṣmaṇa, do not suspect that our youngest mother is responsible for the voiding of My coronation, nor our father, both of them being impelled by destiny, for You know destiny and its great power.”

## LAKṢMAṆA INSISTS THAT PERSONAL EFFORT IS GREATER THAN DESTINY

With His head bent down, Lakṣmaṇa contemplated the words being spoken by Lord Rāma. Then he began to vacillate between dejection and joy. Knitting His eyebrows, He began to breath heavily like an angry snake in a hole. His frowning face, which was difficult to look at, resembled that of an enraged lion. Shaking His forearm, exactly as an elephant shakes its trunk, throwing His head forward and upward from His body, and glancing sideways from the corner of His eyes, He said to His brother: “This illogical zeal to ally the public’s doubt about Your having committed some fault in Your duty is inappropriate. How could You speak as You are unless You were bewildered? Why do You, a proud and foremost warrior, praise destiny which is prideless, pitiable and impotent? How can You have no suspicions about the evil couple, Daśaratha and Kaikeyī? Do You not know, O righteous one, that there are people who are devoted to false duty? If it had not been their intention from the very beginning to forsake You by fraud for their self-aggrandizement, Your coronation would not have been commenced at all. If the granting of the boon were true, it would have been done prior to the beginning of the preparations for Your coronation.

“What has now taken place is odious to the people. I cannot bear the coronation of any one other than You. Please forgive Me for that. I detest that duty by whose contact Your intelligence has become diverted and by devotion to which You are bewildered, O noble-minded one. Why are You going to carry out the unjust and contemptible command of our father, who is under the control of Kaikeyī, when You are capable of correcting the circumstances by action? Although the fraudulent interruption of the coronation does not effect You, it is saddening Me. Attachment to such duty is despicable. Your attachment to carrying out this particular duty is abhorrent to the general public. How could anyone but You fulfill, even in thought, the desires of these two enemies called parents, who are always after their own enjoyment and are inimical?

“Although it is Your opinion that their course of action was ordained by destiny, You should disregard it. Such a view is not to My liking. The cowardly and weak submit to destiny. The valiant who are strong-willed never surrender to destiny. One who is able to overcome destiny by his personal efforts is not disheartened when his goal is thwarted by destiny. Today people will see the difference between destiny and human effort. Their differences will now be made clear. Those people who through destiny prevented Your coronation today will now see destiny defeated by My personal effort. I shall repulse destiny by My personal effort, charging forward like an unbound, unrestrained mad elephant with ichor flowing from his temples. Neither all the protectors of the planets, nor the inhabitants of all the worlds can prevent Your coronation today, what to speak of Father. Those who advocated exiling You to the forest for fourteen years, O king, shall themselves have to do so. I shall shatter Father’s and Kaikeyi’s desire to install Bharata on the throne at the cost of Your coronation.

“The force of destiny may not be so capable of counteracting my strength, for my frightful vigor shall rebound for inflicting suffering. Later, when You have gone to the forest at the end of one thousand years, Your honorable sons will take up the task of protecting the citizens. Previous royal sages have set a precedence of only going to the forest after first charging their sons to care for the citizens as if they were their children. If, due to Your present state of mind, You do not desire the kingdom for fear of alienating the citizens, do not worry, for the king himself is irresolute about this. I promise You, O valiant warrior, that I shall guard You and Your kingdom. Spare Me from the fate of going to the world of dead heroes. Allow Yourself to be coronated with the auspicious paraphernalia. Apply Yourself to this matter. I alone am able to stop the great rulers of the earth by My own strength. These two arms are not meant for decoration, nor is this bow an ornament, nor is this sword for tying to My belt, nor are these arrows for supporting something. These four all exist for defeating the enemy. Whomever I consider My enemy, I desire that he not live. With My sharp-edged sword flashing like streaks of lightning in hand, I am prepared to attack even Indra, the wielder of thunderbolts. The earth will today become difficult to walk on due to the carcasses and limbs of elephants, horses and warriors severed by the crushing blows of My sword. Killed by

the edge of My sword shining like fire, the enemy will fall to the earth like fire or clouds with lighting. When I stand with My hands protected with iguana skin gloves and an arrow drawn to shoot, how can any boastful man stand before Me? Knocking down one man with many arrows or many men with one arrow, I shall pierce the vital organs of men, horses and elephants. Today the power of My weapons will be manifested to prove the king's weakness and Your greatness, My Lord. These two arms, which are worthy of being smeared with sandalwood pulp, being encircled with armbands, giving away wealth and protecting friends, will engage themselves in stopping those who seek to interrupt Your coronation. Tell Me which enemy should be deprived of life, fame, friends or relatives. Instruct Me so that the earth may be subject to You. I am Your servant."

Wiping the tears from the eyes of Lakṣmaṇa, the promoter of the Raghu Dynasty, Rāma said: "I am bound to obey the command of My father and mother, for that is the path of righteousness."

## RĀMA INSTRUCTS KAUSALYĀ TO STAY

When Kausalyā saw that Lord Rāma was determined to carry out the promise of His father, she spoke to the righteous Rāma with a voice choked up with tears: “Born of me through Daśaratha, how will He, who has never known sorrow, is righteous and speaks kindly to all living beings, be able to live by gleaned the grains left in the fields after harvest? How will this Rāma who was accustomed to eating prepared foods with His servants and attendants be able to eat roots and fruits from the forest? Who will believe that the virtuous, kind descendant of King Kakutstha will be going into exile? Who will not be dismayed upon hearing this? Surely, O charming Rāma, in the world where You will go destiny is powerful and rules all. This condition of my mind is fanned by the wind of not seeing You, fed with the firewood of lamentation, offered oblations with tears of lamentation, and is thick with the smoke of tears born from anxiety over Your return. Without You here, O son, I am completely dried up by heavy breathing, and am being burnt by an unparalleled fire of grief, as a forest fire burns up grass and bushes in the dry season. As a cow will follow her calf wherever it may wander, I shall follow you, my darling, wherever you may go.”

Lord Rāma, the best of men, replied to His mother, who was greatly distressed: “Having already been betrayed by Kaikeyī, if when I have left for the forest you also abandon him, he will not be able to survive. For a woman to abandon her husband is sheer cruelty. You should not do that even in your mind. As long as My father, the descendant of Kakutstha and emperor, lives, let him be served; that is eternal duty.” Having been spoken to in that way by Lord Rāma, Kausalyā, of good looks, said “So be it” to Rāma, who did things without exertion. Hearing His mother’s reply, Rāma, the best of those who uphold righteousness, again spoke to His mother who was still very distressed: “Father’s promise must be carried out by Me and by you, for he is the king, supporter, preceptor, senior, lord of all and master. After enjoying Myself for fourteen years in the wilderness, I shall gladly carry out your instructions.”

Kausalyā, who was very affectionate to her son, with tears in her eyes due to grief, spoke the following to her dear son: “Rāma, it is not possible for me to live among the other co-wives. If You have made up Your mind to go to the forest in deference to Your father, take me with You as if I were a wild deer.” As she cried, Lord Rāma also cried and replied to her as follows: “While alive, a married woman’s husband is her worshipable deity and master. The king has power over you and Me this day. Surely with the wise king ruling over the world We are not masterless. Bharata is also a righteous soul who speaks kindly to everyone. He will serve you because He is ever-devoted to righteousness. Please act in such a way that when I have left, the king does not become at all disturbed by My absence. Be always vigilant to do what is good for the elderly king so that this terrible sorrow does not kill him. Though devoted to the observance of vows and exceedingly noble, that woman who does not serve her husband is sure to attain the destiny of a sinner. That woman who serves her husband, though she never offers respects to anyone or worships the gods, attains the highest heaven. Intent on the welfare of her husband, a woman should serve him. This is that eternal duty mentioned in the Vedas and in the Smṛti literature. While performing fire sacrifices, you should worship the gods and brāhmaṇas of good deeds with flowers on My behalf. Following a regulated regimen and eating with abstinence while engaged in serving your husband, pass your time in that way, waiting for My return. When I have returned, you will attain your cherished goal, provided the pious emperor retains his life.”

After being addressed in that way by Rāma, Kausalyā, with tears in her eyes, being pained with sorrow at the thought of separation from her son, said: “I cannot change Your mind which is set on going, my valiant son. Obviously time is insurmountable. Go with a resolute mind. May good fortune always accompany You, O mighty one. I shall be free from distress only when You have returned. I shall sleep soundly only after You have accomplished Your purpose, fulfilled Your vow and freed Your father from his debt. The course of destiny is always hard to discern in this world, my son, which is impelling You forward while rejecting my pleas. Go now, my strong-armed son. When You have returned safely, You will please me with sweet words of consolation. If only that time when I could see You come



back from the wilderness dressed in the cloth of tree bark with matted hair were now, my son.”

Seeing with her sharp mind that Rāma was determined to accept exile in the wilderness, the lady blessed Him and wished to recite auspicious prayers and perform rites for His well-being.

## KAUSALYĀ BLESSES RĀMA

Overcoming her anguish by self-control, Rāma's intelligent mother, Kausalyā sipped water three times for purification and performed auspicious rites for Rāma's welfare: "You cannot stop this, therefore go now, O best of the Raghus. Follow the foot steps of the good and come back quickly. May that righteousness which You observe with attention and pleasure protect You on all sides. May those whom You salute at crossroad shrines and at temples, as well as the great sages in the forest, protect You on all sides. May the weapons given by the wise Viśvāmitra protect on all sides You who are possessed of good qualities. Protected on all sides by service to Your father and service to Your mother, as well as by truthfulness, O strong-armed son, may You live long. May the wood for the sacrificial fire, the kuśa grass, the ring of kuśa grass, sacrificial altars, pavilions erected for sacrifices, the sites chosen by brāhmaṇas, as well as mountains, trees, bushes, lakes, birds, serpents and lions protect You, O best of men. May the sādhyas and viśvedevas, the maruts and the great sages, Dhātā and Vidhātā, Pūṣā, Bhaga and Aryamā bestow auspiciousness upon You. May the protectors of the planets headed by Indra, the six seasons, the twelve months, the years, the days and the hours bestow auspiciousness upon You. May the Śruti scriptures, the Smṛti scriptures and religiosity protect You from all danger, my son. May Lord Skanda, the moon, Bṛhaspati, the seven sages, and Nārada protect You all around. May the siddhas, the directions and their protectors, being praised by me, constantly protect You in the forest, my son. May all mountains, oceans, as well as Varuṇa, the king of the ocean, heaven, earth and the region between them, the wind and all moving and nonmoving beings, the lunar asterisms, all the planets along with their presiding deities, day and night, and the morning and evening twilights protect You while residing in the forest. Again, may the six seasons, the months, the years, the minute and the second, bestow good fortune upon You. May the gods and demons always bestow happiness upon You as You wander about in the great wilderness clad in the dress of an ascetic, O intelligent one. Let You have no

cause of fear from the any of the cruel rākṣasas, piśācas, raudras and flesh-eating creatures.

“Let there be no monkeys, scorpions, gnats, mosquitoes, reptiles or insects in the impenetrable forest where You stay. Let not wild elephants, lions, tigers, bears other fanged beasts, as well as buffaloes with sharp horns be angry with You, my son. Let not other ferocious man-eaters of all varieties, being propitiated by me now, kill You. Let Your pathways be auspicious, and Your undertakings be successful. May You enjoy all the opulence of the forest. Go with luck, my son. I propitiate again and again those beings who reside in the atmosphere, on the ground, as well as all the demigods and those who are Your adversaries. Being worshiped by me, let Indra, the moon, the sun, Kuvera and Yama protect You while residing in the Daṇḍaka Forest. May fire, wind, smoke and hymns sprung from the mouths of sages protect You while sipping water for purification. May Brahmā, the lord of all worlds and creator of this universe, along with the sages and the demigods yet to be mentioned, protect You while residing in the forest.”

In that way, the glorious Kausalyā, who had large eyes, worshiped all the demigods with flower garlands, perfumes, as well as with befitting hymns. After arranging for a sacrificial fire, she had a brāhmaṇa offer oblations for the good fortune of Rāma in accordance with scriptural rules. The lovely Kausalyā supplied the brāhmaṇa with clarified butter, garlands of white jasmine, firewood and white mustard seeds. After offering various oblations as prescribed for the welfare and health of Rāma, the priest left the sacrificial arena and offered the remains of the sacrifice to the protectors of the directions headed by Indra. She then had brāhmaṇas supplied with honey, yogurt, whole grains and clarified butter recite auspicious prayers for the welfare of Rāma in the forest. Then the mother of Rāma gave the chief priest some monetary remuneration.

Thereafter she said to Rāma: “May You have the same good fortune that befell the thousand-eyed Indra when he slew the demon Vṛtra, gaining thereby the praise of all the demigods. May You have the same good fortune as that asked for by Vinatā, the mother of Garuḍa, when he desired the nectar of immortality. May You have the same good fortune as that bestowed by Aditi on her son Indra, the wielder of the thunderbolt, when he was busy

killing demons at the time of churning nectar from the ocean of milk. May You have the same good fortune as Lord Viṣṇu, whose glory is unequaled, when, in His form as Trivikrama, He traversed the universe with three steps. May the sages, the ocean, the continents, the Vedas, the planets and the directions offer You, O mighty-armed one, the best of all good fortune.”

Saying this, she placed with the tip of her ring finger a spot of sandalwood paste mixed with whole grains of rice in the middle of Rāma’s forehead and tied the herb viśalyakaraṇī around the wrist of His right hand, invoking a prayer for its effectiveness. She recited the prayers as if she were happy, though the recitation was mechanical and with a faltering voice due to the sorrow she was experiencing.

Bending over, the illustrious lady smelled Rāma’s head and embraced Him. Then she said to her son: “Go at ease, Rāma, set as You are to accomplish Your goal. I shall be glad to see You come back in good health with Your goals achieved, passing along the royal roads of Ayodhyā. With my thoughts of anguish vanquished and my face illuminated with joy, I shall see You returned from the forest, shining like the risen full moon. I shall see You, O Rāma, after carrying out Your father’s word, returned from exile in the forest and seated upon the throne. When You have returned from exile and are dressed in festive clothes, fulfill the desires of my daughter-in-law, Sītā. Now go, my son. Worshiped by me, let the host of gods headed by Lord Śiva, the great sages, the hosts of ghosts, heavenly serpents and directions wish You well when You have departed for the forest, O descendant of Raghu.”

With tears welming in her eyes, having finished the rites for auspiciousness in accordance with scriptural regulation, she circumambulated clockwise around Rāma and, glancing at Him again and again, embraced Him. Thereafter Rāma touched His hands to her feet repeatedly. Then the glorious and highly effulgent descendant of Raghu left for Sītā’s residence.

## RĀMA INFORMS SĪTĀ OF HIS EXILE

After Kausalyā had performed rituals for the good fortune of Rāma, the righteous Rāma was ready to leave for the forest. Offering respects to His mother, He went out onto the road. The prince, who was surrounded by a crowd, illuminated the royal highway with His effulgence. The people's hearts were agitated by the abundance of good qualities that He possessed. Sītā, who was accustomed to austere vows, had not yet heard about all this and was cherishing in Her heart the thought that Rāma would be crowned prince regent that day. Having worshiped the gods, the princess, who was aware of her own obligations and knowledgeable about royal duties, was waiting.

Just then, Rāma entered His residential quarters which were beautifully decorated and crowded with joyful people, His head slightly lowered due to embarrassment. Sītā jumped up from Her couch and shuttered when She saw Her husband sullen and His mind overwhelmed with anxiety. When the righteous Rāma saw Her, He could not contain the sorrow troubling His mind, and therefore manifested it. Seeing Him pale in the face, covered in sweat and unable to control His emotions, She felt distressed and said: "What is this, my Lord? Today the asterism Puṣya, which is presided over by Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods, is in conjunction with the moon, which is auspicious for being coronated. This was stated by the wise brāhmaṇas, O descendant of King Raghu. Why are You disquieted? Without the one hundred-ribbed royal parasol which is as white as the foam of water, Your beautiful face does not shine so well. Nor is Your lotus-eyed face fanned by an excellent pair of yak tail whisks as white as the moon or a swan. Nor are joyous orators, bards and psalmists seen blessing You, O best of men. Nor have brāhmaṇas studied in the Vedas consecrated You by sprinkling Your head with honey and yogurt according to the scriptural rules. Nor are troops headed by their commanders, nor the ordinary citizens, following behind You in procession. Why does not a gold-plated, flower-decked chariot pulled by four swift horses proceed before You? Nor is a

glorious elephant resembling a mountain crowned with a black cloud and endowed with all good characteristics seen parading before You. Nor do I see walking before You, O handsome hero, a servant carrying a seat adorned with gold filigree. When everything for the coronation is ready, why are You like this? Your face is discolored as never before and You appear dismal.”

Then Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, replied to Sītā, who was weeping: “O Sītā, My honorable father is sending Me in exile to the forest. You were born in a noble family and are conversant with and also practice the principles of righteousness. O daughter of King Janaka, please listen to the sequential explanation for My exile this day. It so happens that My father King Daśaratha, who is true to his word, granted two ominous boons to My mother Kaikeyī in the past. While the king completed the arrangements for My coronation today, he was compelled to grant the boons. Thus, by his dedication to morality, he was overpowered. I must reside in the Daṇḍaka Forest for fourteen years and Bharata will be installed as prince regent by Father. I have come to see You as I was about to leave for the desolate forest.

“Never praise Me in the presence of Bharata, for men who possess wealth and power cannot bear to hear the praise of others. As such, do not extol My virtues before Bharata. In particular, You should not talk about Me before other people of the palace; You can only stay with Bharata by being amenable to Him. The position of prince regent has been permanently conferred on Him by the king. You should please Bharata, especially since He will become king. Besides, I shall depart for the forest this very day to uphold the promise of My father, O intelligent one.

“When I have left for the jungle inhabited by ascetics, O fortunate lady free from sin, You should observe vows and fasts. After rising at dawn and worshiping the gods according to scriptural rule, You should offer respects to My father, King Daśaratha. Keeping duty foremost in Your mind, You should also honor My mother Kausalyā, who is elderly and afflicted with sorrow. You should also respect My other mothers, for by their love, affection and service to Me, I consider them equal. You should consider My half-brothers, Bharata and Śatrughna, like Your own brothers or sons, for They are dearer to Me than My life. O Sītā, never commit an offence against Bharata, for he is now the ruler of this land and of Our dynasty. Kings are in

fact highly pleased when they are propitiated with proper conduct and waited upon with much endeavor, otherwise they become infuriated. Rulers reject the sons born from their own thighs when these act in a prejudicial way and they accept others who are sympathetic to them. Therefore, O blessed lady, acting in a befitting manner towards King Bharata, dwell here devoted to righteousness and engaged in the observance of sacred vows. I shall go to the great wilderness, My dear. But You should stay here. I advise You to act in such a way as not to offend anyone.”

## SĪTĀ REQUESTS RĀMA TO TAKE HER ALONG

Hearing what Rāma said, Sītā, who deserved kindness and who was a pleasant speaker, became angry out of love for Her husband and said to Him: “Why do You speak to Me such demeaning words. Hearing them makes Me laugh, O best of men. What You have said is unworthy of valiant princes and disgraceful for one who knows the use of weapons, O ruler of men, and is not worth listening to. Father, mother, brother, son and daughter-in-law enjoy their particular good fortune according to their pious activities. But the wife alone achieves the same fortune as her husband. Therefore, I also am ordered to reside in the forest. For a married woman, neither her father, her own body, her mother, nor her girlfriends is ever her shelter in this world or in death, only her husband is.

“If You leave for the impenetrable wilderness today, O descendant of Raghu, I shall walk ahead of You crushing the sharp blades of kuśa grass and thorns with My feet. Casting away Your envy at My courage and Your anger at My disobedience to stay in Ayodhyā, take Me with You without any hesitation, as one drinks the remaining water left in a cup. There is no sin in Me for which I should be left behind. In all circumstances, shelter in the shade of the feet of one’s husband is better than residence in a palace, in an aircraft or travel through outer space. I have been instructed in many ways by My mother and father. As such, I do not need any instruction at this time regarding how I should act. Not taking any servants, I shall enter the impenetrable jungle, which is teeming with many different wild beasts and frequented by packs of tigers. Disregarding sovereignty over the three worlds and thinking only of My vow to My husband, I shall reside as happily in the wilderness as I would in My father’s palace. While You are engaged in the execution of sacred vows, O valiant one, I shall practice self-restraint and celibacy and shall enjoy with You in the forest which is scented with sweet fragrances.



“You are quite capable of taking care of other people in the forest, what to speak of Me, O You who give honor to others. I shall no doubt accompany You to the forest today. I cannot be stopped, O most fortunate one, as I am ready to go. I shall undoubtedly eat fruits and roots every day and will not trouble You while living with You. I will walk before You scouting for danger and will only eat the remnants of Your food. Furthermore, I wish to fearlessly see the mountains, ponds and lakes, being protect by You, My wise lord. Let Me see lotus ponds full of flowers and crowded with swans and geese while in the company of You, My hero. I shall gladly bathe in those ponds every day, fixed as I am in devotion to You, and shall enjoy with You in them, O broad-eyed man. I shall happily live thousands of years or hundreds of thousands of years with You in that way, what to speak of fourteen years. I would not even think of heaven. Indeed, if residence in heaven were available without You, I would not like it, O tiger among men. I shall proceed to the impenetrable jungle inhabited by wild beasts, monkeys and elephants. Clinging to Your feet and being loved by You, I shall live in that wilderness as if in My father’s house. O please grant My request and take Me along. I am exclusively devoted to You and My mind is attached to You; without You I would certainly die. I shall not be any burden to You.”

When the woman who was fond of righteousness had finished speaking in that way, Rāma, the best of men, was still not inclined to take Her with Him. In fact, He spoke to Her at length about the difficulties of forest life to dissuade Her.

## LORD RĀMA DESCRIBES THE HARDSHIPS OF FOREST LIFE

Being aware of the difficulties of living in the forest, Rāma, who was fond of righteousness, did not favor the idea of bringing along Sītā. After consoling the teary-eyed lady, the righteous Rāma spoke the following words in order to dissuade Sītā from Her desire to accompany Him to the forest: “O Sītā, You were born in a great dynasty and are always devoted to righteousness. Therefore, follow the principles of righteousness in such a way that My mind will be pleased. O frail Sītā, You should do as I say. One who dwells in the forest has many problems. Listen to them from Me. O Sītā, abandon the notion of living in the forest, for a dense forest is said to be fraught with many difficulties. I am saying this taking into account Your safety. I know that in the forest there is never any happiness and there is always suffering. To hear the roar of mountain streams and the roar of lions living in mountain caves is frightening. Therefore a forest is difficult. O Sītā, when animals in rut sporting fearlessly in a solitary place see a human, they attach him from all sides. Therefore a forest is difficult. Rivers are infested with alligators and their beds full of deep mud to the extent that they are difficult to cross and are also frequented by elephants in rut. Therefore a forest is difficult. The dreary paths are crowded with vines and thorny branches, there is no drinking water and one hears the frightful screeching of wild cocks. Therefore a forest is difficult. Exhausted from passing the day looking for food, one has to sleep on a bed of leaves that have fallen of their own accord. Therefore a forest is difficult. O Sītā, one has to always control the mind and senses and be satisfied with fruits that have fallen from trees. Therefore a forest is difficult. One has to fast according to one’s health, O daughter of the king of Mithilā. One also has to let one’s hair become matted in dreadlocks and wear the bark of trees for clothes. One has to worship the gods and forefathers every day according to scriptural rules and also entertain unexpected guests. Those who follow the scriptural rules have to bathe three times a day. Therefore a forest is exceedingly difficult. O Sītā, one has to offer flowers picked with one’s own hands on an altar in

accordance with rules laid down by the sages. Therefore a forest is difficult. O Sītā, those who dwell in a forest have to eat sparingly and be satisfied with whatever they manage to get. Therefore a forest is difficult. A forest is a very windy, dark and hungry place with tremendous dangers. Therefore a forest is difficult. There are many kinds of slithering snakes that proudly travel the forest paths. Therefore a forest is extremely difficult. There are river snakes that wreath like the currents of a river that block the paths. Therefore a forest is most difficult. O frail girl, moths, scorpions, worms, gnats and mosquitoes always harass everyone. Therefore a forest is extremely difficult. There are thorny trees, razor-sharp kuśa grass, and kāśa bushes whose gnarly branches spread all around them. Therefore a forest is difficult. There are many bodily sufferings and many kinds of danger that one who resides in a forest has to face. Therefore a forest is difficult. One has to become free from anger and lust and fix the mind in austerity. One must furthermore not fear that which is fearful. Therefore a forest is most difficult. Forget about going to the forest. It is not safe for You there. After a lot of thought I can see that the forest is extremely difficult.”

After the great soul Rāma refused to take Her with Him to the forest, Sītā rejected His reasons and spoke as follows.

## SĪTĀ'S REASONING FOR ACCOMPANYING RĀMA TO THE FOREST

Upon hearing Rāma's reply, Sītā become saddened. With Her face wet with tears, She slowly said the following: "You should know that because of Your affection, the difficulties You mentioned regarding exile in the forest are actually merits. Deer, lions, elephants, tigers, śarabhas, yaks, sṛmaras and other creatures that frequent the forest will all flee upon seeing Your form, the likes of which they have never seen before. They will all be afraid of You. Besides, I have to accompany You in pursuance of the order given by Your parents. If I were separated from You I would have to give up living. Not even Indra, the lord of the demigods, can overpower Me with all his might as long as I am at Your side. O Rāma, You have taught Me that a wife cannot possibly live without her husband.

"Furthermore, previously, when I was living in My father's house, I heard a prophecy from brāhmaṇas that I would have to dwell in the forest. Hearing the words of the brāhmaṇas who were skilled in interpreting marks on the body, I have always been eager to reside in the forest, O mighty one. In fulfillment of this prophecy, I shall accompany You, my husband; it cannot be otherwise. You will give me permission and I shall accompany You. The time has now arrived for the fulfillment of the prophecy. Let the brāhmaṇas be proven true. Of course, I know that forest life is fraught with manifold difficulties. But that is so only for one who has not brought his mind and senses under control. When I was a young girl in My father's house, I heard this prediction in the presence of My mother from a woman ascetic given to the practice of quietism. On many occasions in the past I have requested You to take Me to the forest. I cherish the desire of going to live in the forest with You. O descendant of Raghu, at that time You agreed to take Me. I shall be very pleased to serve My hero while residing in the forest.

“O pure soul, by following My husband with love and devotion, I shall be absolved of all sin, for the husband is the supermost worshipable deity. I shall always be united with You, and after death it will bring Us good fortune. In this regards, the following sacred text has been heard from glorious brāhmaṇas:

Even after death a woman continues to be the wife of that man to whom her parents married her in accordance with the principles of righteousness and solemnized with the pouring of water.

As such, for what reason do You not wish to bring Me, Your own wife, who am dedicated to You and to pious deeds? My dear husband, You ought to bring Me, who am so devoted to You, who am so wretched and who am equal in happiness and distress, O descendant of Kakutstha. If You do not wish to take Me who am so distressed, I shall swallow poison, set Myself on fire or drown Myself in water.”

Sītā thus implored Him in many ways to take Her with Him, but the mighty-armed Rāma did not agree to take Her to the desolate wilderness. When Sītā, the princess of Mithilā, had spoken thus, She became overwhelmed with anxiety. Hot tears fell from Her eyes as if to bathe the earth. In order to dissuade the anxious and angry Sītā, Rāma began to console Her in various ways.

## RĀMA AGREES TO TAKE SĪTĀ IN EXILE

Being consoled by Rāma, Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, replied in the following way to Her husband in order to get His permission to stay with Him in the forest. Overwhelmed at the thought of the broad-chested Rāma's exile, Sītā was extremely anxious and began to shake out of love and pride, saying: "Did My father, the king of Mithilā, realize when he accepted You as his son-in-law that You are a woman in the body of a man? What a pity if people falsely declare due to ignorance that Rāma lacks supreme valor although He shines like the sun! Why are You despondent or what are You afraid of that You are prepared to abandon Me who am completely devoted to You? Know that I am as devoted to You as the chaste Sāvitrī was to Satyavān, the son of Dyumatsena. I will not even mentally look at another man, as do woman who disgrace their families, O sinless one. I should therefore go with You, O descendant of King Raghu. Having lived with You as Your wife since tender youth and being chaste, You wish to give Me away to others like a man who engages his wife as a prostitute for money. O ever-pure Rāma, be You under the control of and obedient to he whose welfare You seek, for whose sake You stopped Your coronation, and whom You ask Me to follow.

"It is not right for You to leave for the forest without taking Me. If it means undergoing austerities, living in the forest or going to heaven, I will stay by Your side. It will be no more difficult for Me to follow behind You on the forest path than to stroll in a pleasure garden or to lie sleeping in a bed. The sharp blades of kuśa grass, the prickly kāśa shrubs, and the reeds and rushes on the pathway will feel soft to the touch like cotton or a deerskin when I am with You. The dust raised by stormy winds that will cover My body I will consider the most exquisite sandalwood paste, My darling. While living deep in the forest, I will lie down on the soft turf of meadows. Could lying on a bed covered with colorful quilts be more enjoyable than that? Whenever You bring Me leaves, roots and fruits to eat, whether a lot or a little, it will taste like the nectar of immortality. While enjoying the seasonal

flowers and fruits, I shall forget My mother and father as well as My home. You should not worry about any difficulty arising from My staying in the forest. You will experience no suffering on My account, nor shall I be a burden to You.

“Wherever I am, if I am with You, it is heaven, and if I am without You, it is hell. Thus knowing My supreme love for You, O Rāma, take Me along with You. If despite My being undisturbed by the impending difficulties of forest life, You do not take Me to the forest, I shall drink poison this very day. I shall not remain subjugated to Your enemies. After Your departure I would not survive because of My anguish. Therefore, O Lord, it is better to die now than to be abandoned by You. I cannot bear the pain of one hour’s separation from You. How then could I, pained as I am, bear fourteen years or even one year of separation from You?”

Thus Sītā was overcome with grief and wailed piteously. Embracing Her husband tightly, She wept bitterly. Being pierced by so many sharp words, like a she-elephant pierced with spears, She shed tears which She had long held back, as araṇi wood produces fire. Sītā’s face with its broad eyes shone like the spotless full moon. Her face looked withered due to crying, like a lotus plucked from the water. Rāma closely embraced Sītā, who was almost unconscious due to sadness, and reassured Her by speaking the following words: “My dear lady, I would not care to attain heaven if it meant causing You suffering. Like Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself, I have no reason to fear anything. O lady of beautiful countenance, not knowing Your full intention of accompanying Me, I did not think it good for You to dwell in the forest, even though I am quite fit to protect You. O Princess of Mithilā, since You were born to live with Me in the forest, I cannot abandon You, as a self-realized soul cannot abandon compassion. O lady whose hips resemble the trunk of an elephant, I shall adhere to the duties executed in the past by the ascetic householders, as Saṁjñā follows her husband the sun god. It is in deed impossible for Me to not go to the forest, O daughter of King Janaka. The fateful command of My father is pushing Me on. Duty means to be obedient to one’s mother and father. If I neglected their order I would not be able to live long. If one rejects the order of one’s mother, father or guru who are visibly manifested, how will one be able to worship God who is not visibly manifested? There are no persons more worshipable in this world

than one's mother, father and guru. By worshipping them one can satisfy the three worlds and attain the three goals—occupational engagement, economic development and sense enjoyment. Therefore I am trying to propitiate them.

“It is said, O Sītā, that service to one's father is more powerful than truth, charity, respectfulness, sacrifice or remuneration to sacrificial priests. Heaven, wealth, food grains, knowledge, children and material pleasures—none of these is difficult to obtain when one obeys one's superiors. Those great souls who are devoted to their mothers and fathers can attain the worlds of the gandharvas, of the gods, of Lord Brahmā, or even the abode of Goloka. I wish to do exactly as My father who is situated on the path of truth and righteousness has instructed Me. That is eternal duty. Because of Your determination to accompany Me to the forest, I have changed My mind. Therefore, O charming lady with bewitching eyes, I now allow You to accompany Me in the forest. Come with Me as My partner in the execution of My religious duties.

“My dear Sītā, You have made such a wonderful decision worthy of My dynasty, as well as of Yours. Begin the rituals necessary to take up a life of asceticism in the forest, O lovely woman. Except for You, at this time not even heaven appeals to Me. Give jewels to the brāhmaṇas and food to the mendicants who solicit it. Be quick. Do not delay. After satisfying the brāhmaṇas, give away whatever remains of Our valuable jewelry, fine garments, enjoyable playthings, furniture and conveyances to Your dependents.”

Overjoyed to know that Rāma was agreeable to Her accompanying Him to the forest, Sītā quickly began giving away Their possessions.



## LAKṢMAṆA SEEKS PERMISSION TO ACCOMPANY RĀMA

Lakṣmaṇa, who had come with Rāma, heard everything discussed between Sītā and Rāma. Lakṣmaṇa's face was wet with tears and He was unable to bear the sorrow of separation from Rāma. Holding on firmly to His brother's feet, He spoke to Rāma, the executor of great vows: "If Your mind is set on going to the jungle which is inhabited by wild beasts and elephants, I shall accompany You, walking before You with My bow. In My company You will wander through pleasant forests surrounded on all sides by the noises of flocks of birds and herds of deer. I do not wish to ascend to the world of the gods or to attain immortality. I do not care to achieve sovereignty over all the worlds without You!"

When Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, had finished expressing His resolve to accompany Them to the forest, Rāma consoled Lakṣmaṇa in many ways and forbid Him to accompany Them. Then Lakṣmaṇa said: "Although Your good self previously gave Me permission to accompany You, why is it that I am now being prohibited? What is the reason I am being prohibited from accompanying You? I am confused because previously You gave Me permission to go, O sinless one."

Then the powerful Rāma said to His younger brother, who was standing somberly before Him with folded hands requesting permission to go to the forest: "My dear brother, You are affectionate to Me, devoted to virtue, sober, always situated on the right path, as dear to Me as My own life, obedient to Me and friendly. If You come with Me now to the forest, who will take care of Kausalyā and the glorious Sumitrā? The most mighty emperor, who showers blessings upon the earth like the rain god, is bound by the shackles of love. Acquiring this kingdom, Kaikeyī, the daughter of King Aśvapati, will not treat kindly her afflicted co-wives. Acquiring this kingdom, Bharata will not maintain the forlorn Kausalyā and Sumitrā, dependent as He is on Kaikeyī. Remaining here, by Your own efforts or by the goodwill of

the king, take care of the noble Kausalyā. Please see to this, Lakṣmaṇa. By serving Your superiors, O knower of righteousness, Your devotion to Me will be properly shown and You will receive unequaled merit. Just do this for My sake. Deprived of Us, Our mother cannot be happy.”

Having been spoken sweat words in this way by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa replied to the eloquent Rāma as follows: “Impressed by Your greatness, Bharata will be respectful to Kausalyā and Sumitrā. Of this there is no doubt. If after obtaining the kingdom, Bharata is misled due to malice or pride in particular and does not care for Kausalyā, I shall doubtlessly kill the wicked-minded and cruel wretch along with all of His supporters and even the three worlds. The noble Kausalyā can support thousands of persons like Me, because her dependents have been granted a thousand villages for their maintenance. As such, the intelligent Kausalyā is capable of supporting herself, My mother Sumitrā and many others like Me. Take Me as Your assistant. There will be no wrong in it. Thus I will have achieved My purpose, and so also You. Taking My strung bow, a shovel and a basket, I shall walk before You, showing You the path. I shall supply You and the forest ascetics with fruits and roots to eat, as well as those ingredients from the forest for offering in sacrificial fires. You will enjoy with Sītā on mountain tops. I will look after everything while You are asleep or awake.”

Rāma was highly pleased by what Lakṣmaṇa said and replied: “Go and take leave of all Your relatives and friends. Go get the two fearsome looking bows given by the great Varuṇa to King Janaka in a sacrifice, as well as two sets of impenetrable armor, two quivers with inexhaustible supplies of arrows, and two swords whose brilliance is as spotless as the sun and are gilded with gold. These were respectfully placed in the residence of Our guru, Vasiṣṭha. Please bring them all quickly, O Lakṣmaṇa.”

Bidding farewell to His kith and kin, Lakṣmaṇa, who was set on going to the forest, approached Vasiṣṭha, the preceptor of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, and took the weapons. Upon returning, Lakṣmaṇa, the tiger among men, showed Rāma all the divine weapons, which were respectfully decorated with garlands of flowers. When Lakṣmaṇa had returned, the self-controlled Rāma said to Him: “You have arrived at the time I wanted You to, My dear Lakṣmaṇa. I now wish to give in Your company all My wealth to

austere brāhmaṇas, O conqueror of enemies, as well as to all those brāhmaṇas here in Ayodhyā who are firmly devoted to their preceptors and to all My dependents. Quickly bring Suyajñā, the honorable son of Vasiṣṭha, as well as other learned brāhmaṇas. After offering them respects I shall proceed to the forest.”

## SĪTĀ, RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA GIVE AWAY THEIR WEALTH

Thereafter, in obedience to the pleasing and beneficial instructions of His brother, Lakṣmaṇa quickly entered the residence of Suyajña. Lakṣmaṇa greeted Suyajña, who was seated and offering oblations into the sacrificial fire. Then Lakṣmaṇa said to him: “Please come and see the difficult task which Śrī Rāma is about to execute.”

After finishing his noontime prayers and ritual fire sacrifice, Suyajña went with Lakṣmaṇa to the palace of Śrī Rāma, which abounded with the opulences of the goddess of fortune. Seeing that the learned Suyajña had arrived, Rāma, accompanied by Sītā, stood up with folded hands to offer respects, just as one would respect the sacrificial fire. Rāma conferred upon Suyajña first class golden bracelets, beautiful earrings, jewels strung on gold thread, armlets, waistbands and many other valuable ornaments. Prompted by Sītā, Rāma said to Suyajña: “My dear Suyajña, your wife’s friend Sītā wishes to bestow upon her a pearl necklace, a gold cord and a girdle. Leaving for the forest with Me, She wishes to give to you for Her friend, your wife, Her carved bracelets and lovely armlets. Sītā also wishes to send to your house Her couch bedecked with many gems which is covered with fine quilts and pillows. I Myself give to you, O best of the brāhmaṇas, a thousand gold coins and the elephant named Śatruñjaya which was gifted to Me by My maternal uncle.”

After being spoken to in this way by Rāma, Suyajña accepted the gifts and offered auspicious blessings to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. Thereupon, Rāma spoke to His dear younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, who was an eloquent speaker, as Brahmā would address Indra, the lord of the demigods: “Lakṣmaṇa, summon the two outstanding brāhmaṇas, the son of Agastya and the son of Viśvāmitra and honor them with costly gifts. O strong-armed descendant of Raghu, satisfy them with one thousand cows and with a

fortune in gold, silver and jewels, as a cloud satisfies parched fields of grain. To the brāhmaṇa who serves Kausalyā by offering blessings to her every day, who is devoted to her, who is a teacher of the Taittirīya recension of the Yajur Veda, who is worthy of respect and who is learned in all the Vedas, bestow upon him a conveyance and maidservants, O Lakṣmaṇa, and as many fine silk garments as may please him. The honorable charioteer Citraratha has been a minister a long time. Satisfy him with valuable ornaments, clothes and wealth. Also give him all kinds of livestock and ten hundred cows. Besides, there are many brāhmacārīs carrying staffs who are students of the Kāṭha and Kalāpa recensions of the Vedas. Engaged in the constant study of scripture, they do not do anything else. They are reluctant to beg alms, even though they desire tasty food to eat, and are therefore highly regarded by the great. See that they are given eighty camels loaded with jewelry, as well as one thousand oxen bearing fine rice and two hundred oxen fit for cultivating fields. Gift them one thousand milking cows. To each of those brahmacārīs whose waists are bound with a belt of muñja grass, having approached Queen Kausalyā en masse, give one thousand gold coins. Lakṣmaṇa, honor all those brāhmaṇas on My behalf to such a degree that Mother Kausalyā is completely satisfied by My charity.”

Thereafter Lakṣmaṇa, the tiger among men, personally distributed Lord Rāma’s wealth as commanded, as if He were Kuvera, treasurer of the gods. Having bestowed sufficient wealth upon each of His dependents to last them the entire length of His exile, Lord Rāma spoke to them who stood with tears streaming down their faces. “Until I return you should guard the residences of Lakṣmaṇa and Myself.” Having said this to all His saddened dependents, He then said to His treasurer: “Bring all My wealth here.” Then His servants brought His wealth. That huge pile of valuables was a sight to see. Thereupon, the tiger among men along with Lakṣmaṇa actually had the wealth distributed to the brahmaṇas, regardless of whether they were children or aged, and to those who were destitute.

There was a brāhmaṇa named Trijāta in the dynasty of Garga who had no means of supporting himself and was very thin and pale. As such he always carried an axe, a spade and a plough to dig up roots and tubers to eat. His young wife brought her children and spoke to him, who was old, saying: “Although the husband is certainly a worshipable deity for the wife, please

put down your axe and spade and heed my instructions. Seek audience with Rāma, who knows what is duty, and you will surely get something.” Hearing his wife’s request, he wrapped a worn cloth around his lower body that barely covered him. Then he set out on the path to the palace of Rāma. Shining like Bhṛgu or Aṅgira, Trijāta reached the fifth gate, passing through the crowds without anyone obstructing his passage.

Approaching Śrī Rāma, Trijāta then spoke the following: “I am destitute and have many children, O mighty prince. My means of livelihood has failed and I therefore have to live in the wilderness. Look at me.” Then Rāma said to him jokingly: “I have not even given away one thousand cows yet. I shall give you as many cows as you can cover by throwing your stick.” Tightening his cloth around his waist, he twirled the stick and threw it with all his might, exited as he was. Released from his hand and crossing the Sarayu River, the stick fell near a bull in the midst of a herd of many thousands of cows. The righteous Rāma embraced Trijāta and had all the cows from the bank of the river to the spot where his stick fell sent to Trijāta’s residence. Rāma then said to Trijāta, the descendent of Garga, in order to console him: “You should not be angry. This test was in jest only. I wanted to see your strength, which is hard to imagine, and therefore I provoked you in this way. If you want anything else, ask for it. I tell you the truth; you have no reason to doubt it. Indeed, whatever wealth I have is for the brāhmaṇas. The act of giving charity to brāhmaṇas like you in accordance with scriptural rule will bring Me great fame.”

Taking the herd of cows, the great ascetic Trijāta, who was delighted, along with his wife, pronounced blessings upon the great soul Rāma for the increase of His fame, strength, love and happiness. Thereafter Rāma, although perfect in many virtues, incited by the respectful words of the sage, distributed in no time the vast wealth which He had acquired by dint of His righteousness. There was not a brāhmaṇa, a well-wisher, a servant, a pauper or a beggar whom Śrī Rāma did not satisfy by offering due respect, wealth and honor.

## SĪTĀ, RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA GO TO SEE KING DAŚARATHA

After giving abundant wealth to brāhmaṇas, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went with Sītā to see Their father. Two servants carried Their weapons which were draped with flower garlands and smeared with sandalwood paste by Sītā. At that time, the somber wealthy people of the city had climbed on top of the roofs of the mansions, palaces and seven-storied buildings to get a view. The densely crowded streets could not be easily travelled. The morose people had therefore ascended the roofs of buildings in order to see Lord Rāma. Seeing Rāma walk with His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the people's minds became overwhelmed with grief and said: "That lord who was previously followed by a great four-fold army of infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots is now walking alone, followed by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Out of respect for righteousness, that Lord Rāma who had experienced the pleasures of sovereignty and was the repository of enjoyable things does not wish to falsify the word of His father. Now people can see Sītā travelling on the royal highway, who previously was not visible even for those beings who travel in the sky. Sītā, who deserves to anoint Her body with cosmetics and is accustomed to smear her body with red sandalwood paste, will become pallid due to rain, heat and cold.

"Surely King Daśaratha, under the influence of some evil spirit, will announce the exile of Rāma, otherwise the king could not exile his dearest son. How could banishment be inflicted upon even a virtueless son, much less upon one whose has conquered the whole world by His character? Harmlessness, mercifulness, learning, goodness, self-control, and tranquility—these six qualities adorn the foremost of men, Rāma, the descendant of King Raghu. Therefore, people are feeling sorely afflicted by His mistreatment, as water creatures are afflicted by dry heat when removed from the water. The whole world feels pained by the suffering heaped upon this protector of the earth, as the flowers and fruits of a tree suffer when the root is damaged, for Rāma, who is righteousness personified and most

lustrous, is the root of humanity, and other people are the flowers, fruits, leaves and branches.

“Therefore, like Lakṣmaṇa, we shall with our wives and kinsmen follow after Rāma by the path that He takes. Abandoning our gardens, fields and homes, let us follow the righteous Rāma, sharing in His sorrows and happiness. Let Kaikeyī have the buildings of this city with their treasures dug up, abandoned and dilapidated, their wealth and stock of food removed, their essential commodities entirely taken away, being covered in dust and abandoned by the protective Deities, with mice coming out of their holes scurrying about, devoid of water and fire, unswept, deprived of offerings to all beings, religious rites, fire sacrifices, worship, the recitation of hymns and prayers, crumbling due to the ravages of time and scattered with broken utensils. Let the forest where Rāma is going become a city and let this city abandoned by us become a forest. Out of fear of us the snakes will abandon their holes, the birds and beasts, the mountain peaks, and the elephants and lions, the forest. Let them abandon the place we are about to occupy and take shelter of the place we are going to abandon. Let Kaikeyī and her son and relatives obtain a country where there is grass, meat and wild fruits and which is inhabited by vicious snakes, wild beasts and birds. We will all happily reside in the forest with Rāma.”

Rāma, the descendent of Raghu, heard the remarks made by the people, however, His mind was not disturbed. Śrī Rāma, who moved like a royal elephant in rut, entered again the residence of His mother, Kausalyā, which resemble the peak of Mount Kailāsa. When He had entered the palace which was guarded by disciplined soldiers, He saw Sumantra looking miserable, not far away. Although seeing the people distressed, Rāma Himself showed no sign of perturbation. Apparently smiling, He to His father, eager to see him and to carry out his instructions. While high-souled Rāma was proceeding towards the disconsolate king, He saw Sumantra and waited for him to announce His presence to the king. Having made up His mind to go into exile according to the instruction of His father, Rāma, who was fond of duty, said to Sumantra: “Announce My arrival to the king.”



## RĀMA, LAKṢMAṆA AND SĪTĀ APPROACH KING DAŚARATHA

for Permission to Leave

The lotus-eyed swarthy Rāma, who was distinguished and unparalleled, then said to the charioteer, Sumantra: “Inform My father that I have arrived.” Sent by Rāma, the charioteer Sumantra quickly entered the king’s quarters where he found the king breathing heavily, his mind and senses greatly disturbed. He thought the emperor resembled the moon caught in an eclipse, a fire covered by smoke, or a lake without water. The wise charioteer caught the attention of the king, whose mind was overwhelmed with grief for Rāma, and spoke to him with folded hands. Sumantra first tried to encourage the king with blessings for the king’s victory. Due to fear, he spoke in a low, sweet voice: “Having given away all His wealth to the brāhmaṇas and to His dependents, your illustrious son is waiting at the door. May Rāma, whose prowess is unfailing, see you. Bless you. For, having taken leave of all His kith and kin, He now wishes to see Your Majesty. He is about to leave for the great wilderness. O emperor, look at Him. Endowed as He is with all royal qualities, He resembles the sun surrounded with its rays.”

The righteous king, who was true to his word, as profound as the ocean and as stainless as the sky, spoke as follows: “Sumantra, summon all my wives here. I wish to be in the company of my wives when I see Rāma.” As soon as Sumantra entered the queens’ chambers, he said to them: “His Majesty, the King requests that you go see him without delay.” When Sumantra had thus conveyed the order of the king, the queens all proceeded to the king’s palace. Their eyes red as copper due to grief, three hundred and fifty women, fixed in devotion to their husband, encircled Kausalyā and hurried to the palace. When the emperor saw that his wives had arrived, he said to his charioteer, Sumantra: “Summon my son Rāma.” Taking Śrī Rāma,

Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the princess of Mithilā, Sumantra quickly returned to the king. Seeing his son coming with joined palms, the king stood up from his throne due to anxiety, surrounded by his queens. Seeing Rāma, the king ran towards Him, but due to being overwhelmed with grief, he collapsed on the ground before reaching Him. Śrī Rāma, accompanied by the great warrior Lakṣmaṇa, rushed to the king, who was laying unconscious. Suddenly there arose in the royal palace a tumult from the jangling of ornaments and the wailing of thousands of women as they cried out, “Alas, O Rāma!”

Accompanied by Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cried as They lifted the king in Their arms and laid him on a couch. Then Rāma with folded hands spoke to the king, who was submerged in an ocean of tears, when he shortly regained consciousness: “I take leave of you, O king, since you are the ruler of us all. Please place your kind glance upon Me, for I am about to leave for the Daṇḍaka Forest. Give permission to Lakṣmaṇa to accompany Me to the forest, and also to Sītā. Although I gave Them many good reasons to stay, They do not wish to do so. Giving up your sorrow, O bestower of honor, grant us all permission—Myself, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, as Lord Brahmā did to his four sons.”

The emperor looked upon Rāma, who was waiting to receive permission to leave for the forest, and said: “I was deceived by Kaikeyī on the plea of a boon. Take me captive and make Yourself king of Ayodhyā this very day.” Having been addressed by the monarch in this way, the eloquent Rāma, the best of those who uphold righteousness, joined His palms together and replied to His father as follows: “May you be the ruler of this world for a thousand years, O king! I Myself shall reside in the forest. I have no desire to have the kingdom. After entertaining Myself for fourteen years in the forest, I shall again clasp your feet at the end of My pledge, O ruler of men.”

Being urged in secret by Kaikeyī, King Daśaratha, who was bound by the noose of truthfulness, wept bitterly and said to Rāma: “My son, for the attainment of heaven, success in this world and Your return to this kingdom, go in peace. May Your journey be free from danger. O descendant of King Raghu, truthful as You are and bent on righteousness as is Your mind, Your decision cannot be deterred. In any case, my son, do not go

today but spend the night so that I can enjoy one more day seeing You. Looking at Your mother and me, stay here tonight. After I have satisfied all Your desires, You may continue on Your way tomorrow morning. My dear son, You are undertaking a very difficult task. You are heading for the forest in order to please me. I swear on my truthfulness, however, that this does not please me, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. I was diverted from crowning You king by Kaikeyī, who concealed her intentions like a fire covered by ashes. Compelled by Kaikeyī, who has no concern for the welfare of our dynasty, You wish to fulfill a vow obtained from me through fraudulence. Since You are my eldest son, it is no wonder You seek to prove the veracity of Your father.”

Upon hearing at this time His afflicted father’s request, the saddened Rāma replied along with His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa: “Who would give Me tomorrow the same tasty dishes that I am given today? I therefore choose to depart from here rather than satisfy all My desires to enjoy. Being abandoned by Me, this earth along with the country of Kosala and its citizens, food grains and wealth may be given to Bharata. My mind does not waver from the decision to reside in the forest. I shall dwell for fourteen years in the wilderness in the company of forest ascetics. Do not hesitate in giving the earth to Bharata. Indeed, I do not care for the kingdom, happiness, nor what is pleasing to the mind. Whatever your command is I shall do, Your Majesty. Let your sorrow be gone and your tears cease. As the unassailable lord of the waters, the ocean, is not disturbed, neither should you be, O father. I do not desire this kingdom, nor happiness, nor this earth, nor any physical pleasures, nor heaven, nor even life. I swear by My truthfulness and pious deeds that I only wish to be true to your order and never false, O best of men! Nor is it possible for Me to stay any longer, O dear father. As such, restrain your sorrow, for there is no question of My changing My mind. Since I was commanded by Kaikeyī to go to the forest, and I responded that I would do so, I must redeem that promise. Nor should you be in anxiety for Our sakes, lord. We shall enjoy in the forest abounding with deer and resounding with the songs of many different kinds of birds.

“In fact, a father is compared to a god even among gods. Therefore I shall carry out the request of My father as if it were that of a god. When

fourteen years have passed, O best of kings, you will see Me come back again. Give up this sadness. How is it that you are so grief-stricken when you are supposed to be the support of all these tearful people? Renounced by Me, this city, state and world may be given to Bharata. Carrying out your order, I shall depart for the forest to sojourn there a long time. Let Bharata alone rule over this earth with its mountain ranges and garden-filled cities in a manner which is salutary and within the bounds of duty. Let the boon given by you to Kaikeyī be carried out. My mind does not care as much for the great pleasures of this world, nor for the whims of the mind, as carrying out your command which is approved by the wise. Do not be sad for My sake, O sinless one. I would not accept perpetual sovereignty, all bodily pleasures, the earth nor Sītā, if it falsified your boon to Kaikeyī. Therefore let that boon be proven true. Eating fruits and roots, and seeing the mountains, rivers and lakes, I shall reside happily in the heavily forested wilderness. Do not worry.”

When Rāma had finished speaking, King Daśaratha, who had fallen into adversity and was thus afflicted with burning agony, embraced his son and fainted. Lying on the ground, he did not move at all. All the queens assembled there, except for Kaikeyī, began to wail. When Sumantra also began crying, everyone else did so too.

## SUMANTRA REPROACHES KAIKEYĪ

The charioteer Sumantra suddenly began beating his own head, sighing deeply. He clutched his hands together tightly and ground his teeth. His eyes turned red due to anger and he turned pale. His mind became greatly agitated due to the terrible suffering he was experiencing. Reading the mind of King Daśaratha, the charioteer spoke to Kaikeyī, her heart seemingly trembling on being pierced by his sharp arrow-like words. Sumantra replied with grave words like unparalleled thunderbolts apparently piercing all the organs of Kaikeyī: “Seeing as you have forsaken your own husband, King Daśaratha, the lord of the world of moveable and immoveable things, surely there is no evil you are not capable of, my lady. I consider you the murderess of your husband and ultimately the destroyer of the dynasty too. You torment by your actions he who is like Indra, the lord of heaven, as steadfast as a mountain and as calm as the ocean. Do not belittle King Daśaratha who is your husband, benedictor and protector. For a wife, the will of her husband is more important than that of millions of sons. Indeed, when a king dies, the sons inherit the throne according to their seniority. You wish to abrogate this custom in the presence of the lord of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty.

“Let your son Bharata be king and rule over the earth. We shall go wherever Rāma goes. And no brāhmaṇa should reside in your kingdom. If you now carry out such a despicable deed, we shall certainly all follow the path chosen by Rāma. What enjoyment will you have, my lady, through the attainment of this kingdom when you will be abandoned by all your friends and relatives, the brāhmaṇas, and the pious people? The act you wish to carry out is so heinous. I consider it amazing that the earth is not shattered by your performance of such an action, or that rods of punishment in the form of fearsome, blazing words uttered by the great sages do not kill you who are intent on exiling Rāma. Who would cut down a sweet mango tree with an axe to nurture a bitter neem tree? And even watering a neem tree with milk will not make it sweet. I consider your disposition to be just like

that of your mother. There is a common proverb that honey does not flow from a neem tree.

“We know what was said about your mother’s inclination towards evil. A capable person granted a most excellent boon upon your father. By means of it the king could understand the languages of all created beings. He could understand the sounds uttered by the various kinds of animals. Once while the mighty king was lying in bed, he heard the cry of a jṛmbha bird and, understanding its meaning, began to laugh heartily. Your mother became very angry because of that and was ready to slip the noose of death around your father’s neck. She asked him: “Why are you laughing my dear king? I wish to know.” The king then replied to the queen: “If I tell you why I laugh, I would surely die shortly thereafter.” Your mother then addressed your father, the ruler of the Kekayas: “Live or die, tell me why you are laughing. You will never laugh at me again.” Being spoken to in this way by his beloved queen, the king of the Kekayas accurately related it to the sage who had given him the boon. The holy man thereupon replied to the king: “Let her die or go back to her parents house. Do not reveal the ability to her, O ruler of the earth.” Hearing the reply of the sage who was pleased at heart, he immediately rejected your mother’s request and lived as happily as Kuvera, treasurer of the gods.

“Taking up the path trod by wicked people and seeing evil everywhere, you too urge the king to embrace impropriety due to delusion. The popular saying that sons take after their fathers and daughters, after their mothers, appears to be true. Do not be like your mother. Accept this instead: carry out the request of the emperor. Give shelter to these citizens as per the will of your husband. Incited by wicked persons, do not force the king, who is the maintainer of the world, to execute that which is unrighteous. Pious as he is, His Royal Highness, whose eyes resemble lotus petals, would not renege his promise to you, O queen. Let Rāma, the eldest son, who is magnanimous, diligent, powerful, the protector of His own duties and of all living entities be coronated. You will be greatly slandered by people if Rāma goes to the forest, abandoning his father, the king. Let Rāma, the descendant of King Raghu, protect His own kingdom and you be free from anxiety. No other king ruling over Ayodhyā could be as kindly disposed toward you as Rāma. Bearing in mind the custom of his

forebearers, after installing Rāma as prince regent, King Daśaratha, bearing his mighty bow, will take up residence in the forest.”

Thus Sumantra, standing in the royal court with joined palms, repeatedly tried to provoke Kaikeyī. The queen, however, was not disturbed nor saddened, nor was her face seen to change color.

## KING DAŚARATHA ORDERS HIS ARMY TO ACCOMPANY RĀMA

Sighing deeply with tears in his eyes, King Daśaratha, who was sorely pained by the promise he had made to Kaikeyī, spoke the following words: “O charioteer, immediately send a detachment of all four divisions of the army abundantly adorned with jewels to accompany Śrī Rāma. Let courtezans skilled in speaking sweetly and wealthy merchants expert in setting up shops grace Rāma’s army. Also order into His service with gifts of charity the wrestlers who depend on Him for their livelihood by entertaining Him with their strength. Let all the important weapons, noble men, ox carts and hunters skilled in forest lore accompany Rāma. Hunting deer and elephants, drinking mead and seeing the many different rivers, He would not miss the kingdom. Let the contents of my granary and treasure be sent along with Rāma while He resides in the desolate wilderness. Performing sacrifices in holy places and giving the priests appropriate fees and associating with sages, He will dwell happily in the forest. And the mighty-armed Bharata will rule Ayodhyā. Therefore, let Rāma be sent off with all desirable enjoyments.”

While King Daśaratha was speaking in this way, Kaikeyī became gripped with fear. Her mouth became dry and her voice, choked up. Being morose and frightened and her mouth parched, Kaikeyī stared at the king and spoke as follows: “Bharata will not rule a kingdom divested of its wealth and thereby unenjoyable like flavorless wine, O good king!” When Kaikeyī had finished speaking such harsh words, King Daśaratha spoke as follows to the broad-eyed queen: “O vulgar woman, after forcing me to carry such a heavy burden, now that I am carrying it, why do you whip me? Why did you not stipulate your demands before I made these arrangements?” When the lovely woman Kaikeyī heard these angry words of King Daśaratha, she became doubly incensed and replied to him: “In your own dynasty King Sagara rejected his eldest son known by the name of Asamañja. Rāma should leave in the same way.” Being spoken to in that manner, King Daśaratha



exclaimed: “Shame on you!” All those present also felt ashamed. Kaikeyī, however, did not mind it at all.

At that time, the elderly minister named Siddhārtha, who was pure and greatly regarded by the king, spoke as follows to Kaikeyī: “The ill-disposed Asamañja used to amuse himself grabbing children playing on the street and throwing them into the Sarayu River. Seeing this, the people of the city became angry and said to the king: ‘O promoter of the nation, please keep Asamañja to himself or protect us from him!’ Then the king asked them: “What is the reason for this fear?” Being questioned by the king, the common people replied: ‘When our children’s minds are distracted in games, out of his foolishness, Asamañja takes great pleasure in throwing them into the Sarayu River!’ After hearing the presentation made by the citizens, the king rejected his son in order to please them. Placing him and his wife on a chariot along with paraphernalia for their maintenance, he commanded: ‘Let Asamañja remain in exile for the rest of his life.’ Carrying a basket and a shovel for gathering food in the forest, he wandered in all directions searching for a place to stay in the lofty mountains. Asamañja was so sinful that the righteous King Sagara rejected him. What sin has Rāma committed that He should be barred from sitting on the throne? We certainly do not find any fault in Rāma. It is in fact as difficult to find fault in Him as to see a spot on the new moon. However, if you do see some fault in Rāma, O queen, tell us explicitly. Then Rāma will be banished. The unjust act of exiling an innocent person who is following the path of righteousness can destroy the splendor of even Indra, lord of heaven. What is the use, O queen, of your withholding Rāma’s wealth? Rather, you should protect yourself from criticism by the common people, O woman of lovely countenance.”

Hearing Siddhārtha’s entreaty, the king spoke in anguish with a feeble voice to Kaikeyī: “Do you not care for this request, O embodiment of sin? Following the path of miserliness, you are unaware of what is good for you or me. Your intentions are contrary to the path of piety. I and all the citizens shall today accompany Rāma, abandoning this kingdom with its pleasures and opulence. Enjoy this empty kingdom with Bharata as long as you like.”

## SĪTĀ, RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA DONE BARK CLOTH

Hearing the statement made by Siddhārtha, Rāma, who was adept at courtesy, then politely said to King Daśaratha: “O king, when I have completely renounced all sense enjoyment to live on what the forest produces, of what use is an army? If upon giving away an elephant one remains attached to the tether, it is not good. What is the use of attachment for the tether when the elephant has been given up? Similarly, O best of the pious, of what use is the army to me? I therefore give permission for Bharata to have it all. Let the servants of Kaikeyī bring the clothes of ascetics for Us to wear. Servants, go and bring Me a shovel and a basket. I will need them during My stay in the forest for fourteen years.”

Then Kaikeyī, being so shameless, personally brought the bark cloth to Rāma and said before everyone in the assembly: “Put this on.” Lord Rāma took two pieces of bark cloth from Kaikeyī, removed His fine silken robes and donned the attire of an ascetic, so it is said. Lakṣmaṇa too left His exquisite robes there and covered himself with the clothes of an ascetic in the presence of His father. Then Sītā, who was dressed in silken garments, gazed upon the bark cloth intended for Her like a deer dismayed upon seeing a snare. Sītā, whose body possessed auspicious marks, was disturbed in mind and somewhat embarrassed as She took the two pieces of bark cloth from the hands of Kaikeyī. Her eyes overflowing with tears, Sītā, who was conversant with the principles of righteousness and whose appearance was virtuous, spoke the following to Her husband, who resembled the king of the gandharvas: “I wonder how the forest ascetics put this cloth on?” Thus Sītā, being unfamiliar with the ways of ascetics, failed again and again in Her attempts to put the bark cloth on. With one piece hanging around Her neck and holding the other in Her hand, She stood perplexed, inexperienced as She was in wearing such clothes.

Quickly approaching Sītā, Rāma, the best of those who uphold righteousness, personally tied the bark cloth over Her silken garments. Seeing Rāma fasten the bark cloth on Sītā, the noble ladies of the palace began shedding tears profusely. Greatly pained at seeing this, they exclaimed to Rāma, who was shining with glory: “O lad, this lady was not ordered into exile in the forest as You were. Let us have the benefit of seeing Her while You are in exile in the desolate wilderness according to the order of Your father, O lord. Go to the forest with Lakṣmaṇa at Your side, O son. This blessed girl does not deserve to reside in the wilderness like an ascetic. Please grant our request that the lovely Sītā remain here, although You do not wish to be here any longer, ever-dedicated to duty as You are.” After hearing what the ladies of the palace said, Rāma finished fastening the bark cloth to Sītā, who was of the same mind as Rāma.

When Sītā was first taking the bark cloth from the hands of Kaikeyī, the sage Vasiṣṭha, King Daśaratha’s guru, stopped Her, speaking to Kaikeyī with tears in his eyes: “O evil-minded Kaikeyī, you are the destroyer of this dynasty as you overstep all propriety. After deceiving the king, do you not yet remain within bounds? Princess Sītā will not go to the forest, O woman devoid of good character! She will sit upon the throne on behalf of Rāma. Wives are the very selves of their husbands. As Rāma’s very self, She will rule the earth. If Sītā accompanies Rāma to the forest, all of us here in the palace, as well as all the people of this city, will go with Them. The palace guards will also go wherever Sītā and Rāma go. Indeed, the city and the whole nation will leave, bringing all their wealth and necessities. Dressed in bark cloth like forest ascetics, Bharata and Śatrughna will also live in the wilderness like their elder brother Rāma. You can rule this land devoid of people and overgrown with trees, vile as you are and set on harming its people. Without Rāma as king the nation cannot survive, whereas the forest in which He will reside will become a nation.

“Bharata would not want to rule the kingdom if it were not willingly given by King Daśaratha, nor would he choose to reside with you if he is actually born from King Daśaratha. Even if you were to leap from the ground and fly in the sky, he would not act otherwise, knowing as he does the custom of his ancestors. As such, although you covet the welfare of your son Bharata, you have committed an act displeasing to Him. There is no one

in the world who is not devoted to Rāma. This very day you will see, O Kaikeyī, how beasts, snakes, deer, birds and even trees eagerly accompany Rāma. Putting aside the bark cloth, give your daughter-in-law excellent jewelry, O queen. It is improper to make Her wear bark cloth!” In this way, Vasiṣṭha forbade Sītā’s wearing bark cloth. The sage continued: “O daughter of the king of the Kekayas, you only demanded the forest exile of Rāma, not of Sītā. Therefore, let Sītā be always nicely decorated while She lives with Rāma in the forest. Let the princess depart with proper conveyances and Her principal maidservants, as well as befitting garments and all sorts of necessary paraphernalia. When you requested your boons, you never stipulated the exile of Sītā.”

As the king’s guru, who was the foremost of sages and whose power was unparalleled, spoke, Sītā, who wanted to undergo the same hardships as Her husband, could not be dissuaded from Her intention to wear bark cloth as an ascetic.

## KING DAŚARATHA CHASTISES KAIKEYĪ REGARDING SĪTĀ'S PLIGHT

When Sītā, though in the presence of Her husband, donned the bark cloth like a destitute woman, the people who were present all cried out: “Shame on you, King Daśaratha!” Saddened on hearing that outcry, King Daśaratha lost all interest in life, religious duty and fame. Heaving a hot sigh, King Daśaratha said to his wife: “Kaikeyī, Sītā does not deserve to go dressed in bark cloth. My guru truly says that being young, tender and accustomed to pleasure as She is, She is not capable of living in the wilderness. Has this daughter of King Janaka actually done anything to anyone that She stands dressed in bark cloth in the midst of this assembly like a bewildered ascetic? Let Sītā shed the garments of bark cloth. I never gave permission for anything like this. Let the princess go comfortably to the forest provided with jewelry and other paraphernalia. I have made under oath such a dastardly promise, that I no longer deserve to live. Furthermore, you have initiated this outrage through sheer childishness. As much as the flowering of bamboo signifies the withering of the plant, this act will surely burn me to ashes.

“If Rāma has committed some offence against you, what harm has Sītā done to you, O vulgar woman? What injury could the daughter of King Janaka possibly have done against you, possessing as She does eyes blooming like a deer and being of such sweet disposition? Surely the banishment of Rāma is enough for you, O sinful wretch. What more miserable sins than this do you wish to carry out? I only agreed to as much as the command you gave Rāma when He came here the other day in connection with His coronation. You must want to go to hell because, surpassing that, you wish to see Sītā dressed in bark cloth.” While King Daśaratha said this, his head hung down.

Śrī Rāma, who was about to depart for the forest, said the following to His father: “This illustrious woman, My mother Kausalyā, has grown old,

and is also generously disposed and never speaks offensively to you, O pious king. Without Me, she will be plunged in an ocean of sorrow, although she has never previously known suffering. Therefore you should give her extra attention, O giver of boons. Being honored by you in such a way as to not succumb to sorrow for her son, let My austere mother live while remembering Me. Please take care of My mother, who will miss Me very much, so that while I am in the forest, she may not become overly distressed nor give up her life to enter the abode of death.”

## PREPARATIONS FOR EXILE

Hearing the request made by Rāma and seeing Him dressed as a hermit, the king and his wives fainted. Afflicted with grief, he could not look upon Rāma, and, even after gazing upon Rāma, he was unable to reply, disturbed as he was. After remaining unconscious for a while, the disconsolate king lamented as he continuously remembered his son Rāma: “I think that in my previous life I deprived many cows of their calves or killed many living entities. That is why this is happening to me. Surely life does not depart until the allotted time, that is why I have not died despite being tormented by Kaikeyī and despite seeing my son who is as effulgent as fire standing before me in the dress of an ascetic, having abandoned His fine garments. Certainly everyone will suffer simply because of Kaikeyī, who, having resorted to this wickedness, is struggling hard to achieve her goals.”

Exclaiming “Rāma” once, the king could not say anything further because his senses were obstructed by tears. After some time when the king had regained consciousness, he spoke with tear-filled eyes to Sumantra: “Go hitch fine steeds to a pleasure chariot and bring it here. Then take this glorious prince beyond the borders of this kingdom. When a righteous warrior is exiled to the forest by his mother and father, I consider this the consequence of his virtues.”

Carrying out the king’s command, the efficient Sumantra hitched horses to a decorated chariot. When he had returned, the charioteer announced with joined palms to the prince that the gilded chariot drawn by excellent steeds was ready. Summoning the officer in charge of the treasury, the king who was conversant with what should be done at a particular time and place and was completely pure spoke as follows: “Considering the years which Sītā will have to spend in exile, immediately bring Her costly clothing and valuable ornaments.” Commanded in this way by the king, the officer went to the treasury, brought everything required and delivered it to Sītā.

Since She was about to depart for the forest, the noble-born Sītā decorated Her limbs with beautiful pieces of jewelry. Being so splendidly adorned, Sītā illuminated the palace as the radiance of the sun illumines the morning sky. Kausalyā embraced and smelled the head of Sītā, who had never acted in an improper way. Then she said to Sītā: “Women who abandon their loving husbands when they are in difficulty are considered unchaste by the whole world. Having enjoyed with them in the past, such women malign and even abandon them when they have the least misfortune. Unchaste women are untruthful, perverted, difficult to deal with, heartless, of sinful resolve and become estranged from their husbands in a moment. Neither birth in a good family, acts of kindness done to them, good instructions or even marital union can capture the hearts of such women. On the other hand, for virtuous women who remain within the limits of good behavior, truthfulness, the precepts of the scriptures and propriety, their husbands are the supreme object of worship. Although my son has been exiled to the forest, You should not despise Him. With or without wealth, He is surely like a god for You.”

Realizing Kausalyā’s advice to be based on the principles of righteousness, Sītā joined Her palms and replied to Her mother-in-law standing before Her: “I shall certainly do all that you have instructed Me. I already know how I should regard My husband, as I have already been instructed in this matter by My elders. Your noble self should not equate Me with impious women. I am as incapable of deviating from righteousness as the moonlight is of abandoning the moon. As there can be no *viñā* without strings and no chariot without wheels, there is no question of a woman deprived of her husband being happy, even if she had one hundred sons. A father gives limited happiness, a son gives limited happiness and a brother gives limited happiness. What woman would not adore her husband, the giver of unlimited happiness? I have been instructed by My elders about the special and ordinary duties of a wife to her husband and consider Him as good as God. How then, O noble woman, could I disrespect My husband?”

Hearing Sītā’s reply which touched her heart, the pure-minded Kausalyā suddenly began shedding tears of anguish at the thought of her son’s impending exile and happiness for the faithfulness of Sītā to Rāma. Gazing at Kausalyā, whom He respected more than His other mothers, the



supremely righteous Rāma spoke to her with folded hands: “Mother, do not look upon My father disparagingly. The exile will soon be over. Those fourteen years will pass by while you are asleep. When you wake you will see Me here again surrounded by My friends.”

Having expressed His feelings in this way to His mother, He gazed at His three hundred and fifty stepmothers. He saw that they were just as distressed as His own mother and so spoke the following virtuous words to them with folded hands: “Please forgive Me for any unkind word or deed I may have committed. I take leave of you all.” The royal ladies whose minds were afflicted with grief listened to Rāma’s virtuous submission.

As Rāma spoke in this way, the wives of King Daśaratha began to wail like cranes. The palace of King Daśaratha which used to resound with the lively sound of different drums, was now distressed by cries of lamentation since it had come upon misfortune.

## THE DEPARTURE OF RĀMA

Thereafter, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa touched the feet of King Daśaratha. With joined palms, they circumambulated the king. Duly taking leave of His father, Rāma, being overwhelmed with grief, bowed to Kausalyā. Following the example of His brother, Lakṣmaṇa also took leave of Kausalyā. Then He touched the feet of His own mother, Sumitrā. Smelling the head of the strong-armed Lakṣmaṇa as He bowed to her, Sumitrā, who wished Him well, spoke to Him as follows: “Because You are so attached to Your dear relative Rāma, I give You permission to accompany Him in exile. Do not neglect the service of Your brother Rāma, my dear son. He alone is Your refuge, whether in affluence or adversity. The general precept of duty for the virtuous is that the younger brother should always be obedient to his older brother. The eternal engagement for members of our dynasty consists of giving charity, performing sacrifices and giving up one’s life on the battlefield.” After speaking to Lakṣmaṇa in this way, Sumitrā said again and again to all-perfect Rāma who was dear to everyone: “Go! Go! Good luck to You.” Then she again spoke to Lakṣmaṇa: “Consider Rāma to be Your father Daśaratha, Sītā to be Me, and the forest to be Ayodhyā. Now depart happily, my son.”

Then Sumantra, who was meek and knew how to behave politely, spoke with folded hands to Rāma, as Mātali did to his master Indra: “Mount the chariot, O highly glorious prince. Good luck to You! I shall quickly take You to wherever You say. Those fourteen years that You must spend in exile in the forest as demanded by Kaikeyī start from this day.” Sītā, who had donned the garments and jewels given Her by King Daśaratha, mounted with a joyful mind the chariot which shone like the sun. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa carefully arranged in the back of the chariot the garments and ornaments which King Daśaratha had given Sītā after considering the length of time that She would spend in exile with Her husband, as well as the weapons and armor that he had given the two brothers and a basket covered with leather and a spade. Then the two brothers mounted the chariot which was adorned with gold and which shone like fire.

Seeing that all three exiles had mounted the chariot, Sumantra drove the worthy horses that were as swift as the wind. When news of Rāma's imminent departure to the wilderness for a long time spread, the common people, the soldiers and the visitors from other lands all fainted. Then the city of Ayodhyā was filled with a great noise by the bellowing of its bewildered elephants and the clanging of the bells of its horses. Sorely stricken with grief, the citizens of the city, including the children and elderly, rushed toward Rāma the way one afflicted by heat rushes to water.

Clutching the sides and back of the chariot with their tearful faces fixed on the occupants of the chariot, they addressed Sumantra: "Pull back on the horses' reins and go more slowly! We want to see Rāma's face, which we will soon not be able to see so easily. Kausalyā's heart must be made of steel that it does not break when her son, who is like the offspring of the gods, is going into exile in the forest. Sītā, the princess of Videha, devoted as She is to duty, has done the right thing by following Her husband like a shadow, even as the sun never leaves Mount Meru. O Lakṣmaṇa, You have accomplished Your purpose by following Your brother Rāma, who is like a god and always speaks kindly to everyone. This is Your great intelligence; this is Your good fortune; and this is Your path to heaven, that You are following Rāma." Speaking in this way, they could not restrain their tears and followed after their dear Rāma, the most loved of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty.

Meanwhile, surrounded by his wives who were all dejected, the king came out of the palace saying, "I want to see my beloved son." Before him was heard the loud wailing of women like the bellowing of a herd of she-elephants when their mate is captured. At that time, Rāma's father, King Daśaratha, looked lusterless, like the full moon at the time of an eclipse. On the other hand, the splendor of Śrī Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, was inconceivable. He commanded the charioteer: "Drive quickly." He ordered the charioteer to go, but the people shouted "Stop!" In this way, the charioteer could neither go quickly, nor stop. The dust that was raised by the departure of Rāma's chariot settled on the road which was dampened with tears falling from the eyes of the citizens. Full of lamentation and looking sullen because of the departure of Rāma, the people wailed and lost consciousness. Tears produced by their anguish flowed from the eyes of the

women like drops of water falling from lotus flowers that are agitated by the movement of fish.

Seeing the city reduced to the same state of mind, the king collapsed due to grief, like a tree cut down at its base. Seeing the king suffering such intense agony along with his wives, the people who were behind Rāma cried out loudly: “O Rāma,” while others cried out: “O Rāma’s mother!” Looking back, Rāma saw the king dejected and bewildered and His mother following the chariot on the road. Being bound by the ropes of duty, He did not see His mother any more than a foal caught in a snare could see its mother. Seeing His parents walking behind Him, though they deserved to ride chariots, and suffering, though they deserved to enjoy, He commanded the charioteer: “Go quickly.” As an elephant urged on by a goad cannot look back, Rāma was unable to bear the sight of His mother and father following Him on foot. Rāma’s mother ran after Him like a cow that runs to the stall where her calf is tied.

Rāma repeatedly looked back at His mother, Kausalyā, who was weeping and running after the chariot as though dancing, crying out “Rāma, Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa!” and shedding tears for Their sake. King Daśaratha shouted “Stop!” Then Rāma shouted “Go!” Thus Sumantra felt as if he were caught between two revolving wheels. If the king chastises you for not obeying him, tell him that you did not hear him. Prolongation of this agony of My departure will be disastrous for My parents.” Carrying out Rāma’s request, Sumantra took leave of people and urged the horses on which were starting to go faster. The king’s men circumambulated Rāma with their minds, which are very quick, and then returned, but the common people did not return. On reaching the king, the ministers said: “One should not follow too far the one whom one wishes will return.” Hearing their statement, the king who possessed all good virtues felt miserable and stopped walking. Looking miserable and covered in sweat, he gazed with his wives at his son, Rāma.

## THE PEOPLE OF AYODHYĀ LAMENT RĀMA'S EXILE

As Rāma was leaving Ayodhyā, there arose from the ladies of the palace a loud wailing sound. With folded hands they said: "Where goes that Lord who was the shelter of the helpless, weak and distressed? Where goes He who remained calm when slandered, avoided provoking words, could appease the angry and was equal in happiness and distress? Where goes the great-souled Rāma, who behaved with us just as He did with His own mother, Kausalyā? Tormented by Kaikeyī, the king has forced Him to go to the forest. Where goes that protector not only of this people but of the whole world? How unintelligent the king is that he exiled to the forest the righteous Rāma, who is the shelter of all living beings and is dedicated to truth!" Stricken with grief, all the royal ladies cried at the top of their voices like cows separated from their calves.

Hearing the frightful cries of anguish by the royal ladies in the palace, King Daśaratha, who was already afflicted with grief due to separation from his son, became further aggrieved. That day, no oblations of clarified buttered were offered in the sacrificial fires. No householders bothered to cook food. The citizens did not carry out their normal affairs, and the sun set prematurely. Elephants dropped the fodder from their mouths; cows refused to give milk to their calves; mothers did not rejoice on seeing their first-born sons. The planets Trīṣaṅku, Mars, Jupiter, Mercury and other luminaries formed an alignment with the Moon and assumed a stern aspect. The lunar asterisms lost their effulgence and the planets, their splendor. Following a wrong course, they cast a haze over the sky. Driven by fierce winds, a mass of clouds resembling the turbulent ocean covered the sky. Because of Rāma's departure for the forest, the city of Ayodhyā trembled. All the directions became obscured as if enveloped in darkness. No planet or star emitted any light. Suddenly, all the people of Ayodhyā had been reduced to a miserable condition. No one could think of eating or recreation. Constantly distressed and sighing heavily, the people of Ayodhyā

cursed the emperor. The faces of the people passing on the royal highway were wet with tears. No one could be found that was happy. Everyone was grief-stricken.

No cool breeze blew, nor did the moon show its pleasant face. The sun did not warm the people. The whole world was disturbed. Sons ignored their mothers, and husbands, their wives, and brothers, their brothers. Rejecting everything, everyone was thinking only of Rāma. Those who were Rāma's personal friends were mentally perplexed. Overwhelmed as they were by the weight of sorrow, they were unable to sleep. As the earth with her mountains shakes when bereft of Lord Indra, the city of Ayodhyā, agitated due to fear and sorrow, shook violently due to being bereft of the great soul Rāma, and its elephants, horses and soldiers wailed.

## KAUSALYĀ CONSOLES KING DAŚARATHA

As long as the cloud of dust raised by the departing chariot could be seen, King Daśaratha did not turn his eyes away. As long as the king could see the dust raised by the chariot in which rode his dearest and highly righteous son, he stood there stretching his body taller to see. When the monarch could no longer see the dust of Rāma's chariot, he fell on the ground, afflicted and depressed. His senior wife Kausalyā came to his right side to lift him by the arm, while the lovely Kaikeyī came to his left side. Disturbed on seeing Kaikeyī, the king, who was endowed with piety and culture, spoke to her as follows: "O Kaikeyī of sinful resolve, do not touch my body. I do not even want to see you. You are neither my wife nor my relation. I no longer have anything to do with your dependents, nor do they have any relationship whatsoever with me. I disown you who are dedicated only to your own selfish ends and have forsaken righteousness. I reject in this world and in the next everything related to acceptance of your hand in marriage and the subsequent circumambulation of the sacred fire. If Bharata is pleased to accept this kingdom without any encumbrance, his funeral offerings to me shall not be accepted."

Lifting up the king who was covered in dust, the grief-stricken Kausalyā returned with him to the palace. Thinking of his son, the king began to repent having exiled Him, even as one would regret killing a brāhmaṇa or touching fire with one's hand. Again and again the king looked back at the path the chariot had taken. The king's appearance was not well, it resembled the sun caught in an eclipse. Thinking of his beloved son, he was grievously pained and lamented. When he learned that his son had reached the city limits, he said: "The hoof marks of the excellent horses drawing the chariot of my son can be seen on the road, but not my great-souled son. My dearest son whose body was smeared with sandalwood paste, and who used to lie comfortably on cushions while being fanned by beautiful women adorned with costly jewels, will surely lie down today at the foot of some tree, resting His head on a block of wood or stone! The next morning,

He will rise from the ground in a wretched condition, covered in dust. He will be breathing heavily like the leader of a herd of elephants coming out of a spring. Surely those people who live in the forest will see Rāma, the Lord of the world, rising and going about like one who is destitute. Sītā, the beloved daughter of Janaka, who deserves to always be happy, will certainly go to the forest today and will be injured by stepping on thorns. Unfamiliar as She is with the forest, upon hearing the deep, frightening roar of wild beasts, She will be overwhelmed with fear. Let your desires be fulfilled, Kaikeyī. Enjoy this kingdom as a widow. I am unable to continue living without that tiger among men.”

Lamenting in this way and surrounded on all sides by his ministers, the king entered his excellent palace, which was full of sorrow, like one who has bathed on the death of a relative. Seeing the entire city with its cross roads and gates deserted and the stalls in front of shops closed, its people depressed and feeble and its roads uncrowded, the king entered his palace crying and thinking only of Rāma, as the sun enters a cloud. Without Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, the palace resembled a big pool left still because its snakes had been carried away by Garuḍa. The lamenting emperor then spoke in faltering, pitiful and indistinct words to his porters: “Take me at once to the quarters of Kausalyā, the mother of Rāma, for nowhere else can my heart find solace.” The porters took him there and gently laid him on a couch.

Even though he had been brought to Kausalyā’s quarters and laid on a couch, the king’s mind continued to be agitated. Without his two sons and daughter-in-law, the king found the palace to be devoid of charm like the sky without the moon. Looking at the palace and lifting his arm, the mighty king cried out in a loud voice: “O Rāma, are You really abandoning Your mother and I? Alas, those best of men who survive the term of Rāma’s exile and who live to see Rāma return and embrace him will be truly happy!”

Now when the night had arrived, which was like the night of universal dissolution, King Daśaratha spoke the following words to Kausalyā at midnight: “Kausalyā, I cannot see you. Please touch me with your hand. Since my eyesight followed after Rāma, it has not yet returned.” Seeing the king lying on the couch absorbed in constant thought of Rāma and



breathing with difficulty, Queen Kausalyā, who was sitting at his side and appeared sorely distressed, began to lament.

## KAUSALYĀ LAMENTS HER MISFORTUNE

Seeing the king lying on the couch stricken with sorrow, Kausalyā, who was also feeling distress due to separation from her son Rāma, spoke to the king as follows: “After releasing her poison on Rāma, the tiger among men, Kaikeyī of crooked ways will surely wander about freely like a serpent that has cast off its old skin. Having exiled Rāma and achieved her goals, the fortunate Kaikeyī, whose mind is now relieved of anxiety, will surely cause me difficulty, like an evil snake dwelling in one’s house. I would not mind Rāma’s having to live by begging as long as He could stay at His residence in this city. Indeed, it would be better to make Him Kaikeyī’s slave. By throwing Rāma out of His position, Kaikeyī has acted like one who mistakenly offers oblations to rākṣasas during the fire sacrifice of the full moon and new moon days. Accompanied by His wife and Lakṣmaṇa and walking with His bow in hand like the king of elephants, the mighty warrior must have already entered the forest. What greater hardships can befall Them who have never known suffering when you have sent them into exile in the wilderness at the behest of Kaikeyī?

Exiled at the time when They should be enjoying the fruits of life, how shall those poor ones, deprived of Their valuables, manage to survive by eating wild fruits and roots? Will that happy time marking the end of my grief ever come when I shall be able to see Rāma with His wife and brother returned to Ayodhyā? When will Ayodhyā regain its glory, being adorned with rows of flags and crowded with joyous people upon hearing of the return of the two heroes? When will the city become joyful like the ocean during a full moon upon seeing the two princes returned? When will the might hero Rāma again enter the city of Ayodhyā, placing Sītā at the front of His chariot, as a bull follows a cow? When will my two sons, the conquerors of enemies, pass along the royal road with thousands of people tossing parched grains over Them? When shall I be able to see the two princes wearing brilliant earrings and bearing excellent swords and bows, enter the city of Ayodhyā like two mountains crowned with peaks? When will the

three of Them drive around the city, receiving fruits and flowers from the hands of brāhmaṇas and virgins? When will Rāma, grown wise with age and as lustrous as an immortal god, return to nurture the world like a good rain?

Undoubtedly in a previous life I believe I must have cut off the teats of a cow as her calf stood waiting to suck them. For this reason, I, who love my son as a cow loves her calf, have been forcibly deprived of my son by Kaikeyī, just as a cow is deprived of her calf by a lion. Having only one son, I definitely cannot survive without Him, endowed as He is with all virtues and knowledge of the scriptures. I am completely incapable of maintaining my life without seeing my dear son along with the powerful Lakṣmaṇa. This fire born from the anguish of separation is certainly very harmful to me and is burning me as the heat of the sun scorches the earth during the hot season.”

## SUMITRĀ ASSUAGES KAUSALYĀ'S GRIEF

Sumitrā, who was fixed in righteousness, spoke the following words which were in accordance with righteousness to Kausalyā, the best of women, who had been lamenting: “That son of yours is endowed with good qualities, O noble lady, and is the foremost of men. What is the use of lamenting like this or crying piteously? Your noble son, having renounced the throne, has gone away, upholding the truthfulness of His father’s promise. Rāma is fixed in righteousness, which has been eternally and duly practiced by those who are cultured and which rewards one in the next world. Therefore, there is no need to feel sorry for Him. The sinless Lakṣmaṇa, who is kind to all living beings, always renders the best service to Rāma. Therefore the great soul will certain attain good fortune. The daughter of King Janaka, deserving as She is of comfort, is following your pious son, though aware of the suffering of forest life. What good fortune has not been achieved by Your son, who is righteousness personified, is dedicated to truth and whose banner of glory flies throughout the world?

Fully aware of Rāma’s purity, which is unparalleled, the sun should not scorch His limbs with its rays. A favorable and pleasant breeze both warm and cool, blowing from the forest at all times, will serve Rāma. Dissipating heat during the day, stroking Him while He sleeps at night and embracing Him like a son, the cool moon will gratify the sinless Rāma. The powerful brāhmaṇa Viśvāmitra bestowed celestial weapons upon Rāma and he saw Rāma kill on the battlefield Subāhu, the chief of the demons, who carried a flag marked with the emblem of a fish. Such a warrior as Rāma, a tiger among men, depending on the strength of His arms, will surely dwell in the forest undaunted, as He would in His own home. How can the earth fail to obey Rāma, when His enemies are destroyed on crossing the path of His arrows? Because of the splendor, valor and benevolent strength that He possesses, it is certain that upon His return He will immediately regain His throne.

He is the sun of the sun, the fire of fire, the Lord of lords, the foremost splendor of splendor, the glory of glories, and the forgiveness of forgiveness. He is the worshipable God of the gods and the foremost of all beings. Indeed, what disadvantage can there be for Him in the forest or the city, O queen? Surely Rāma, the best of men, will soon be installed on the throne along with Mother Earth, Sītā and Lakṣmī. Seeing Him leaving Ayodhyā, all the people shed tears of grief, smitten as they were by sorrow. Sītā, who is equal to the goddess of fortune Lakṣmī, followed the invincible hero, who was clad in garments of tree bark and kuśa grass, as He left for the forest. What can be difficult for Him to attain? Indeed, what can be difficult to attain for Him in front of whom walks Lakṣmaṇa Himself, the foremost of bowmen, wielding a sword, arrows and other weapons? O queen, I swear to you, you will see Rāma returned from exile. Give up your sorrow and delusion. O fortunate and irreproachable lady, you will see your son again offering you respect by touching His head to your feet, looking like the newly risen moon. Seeing Him returned and enthroned with great opulence, you will immediately shed tears of joy. Let there be not sorrow or grief, O queen, for there is nothing inauspicious for Rāma. You will soon see your son Rāma accompanied by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa.

Since all these people deserve to be comforted by you, why do you harbor such grief in your heart at this time, O sinless lady? You, O queen, whose son is Rāma, should not grieve, for none is more devoted to the path of righteousness than Him. Seeing your son greeting you with His friends, you will immediately start shedding tears of joy like a mass of rain clouds during the monsoon. On returning to Ayodhyā, your son, who can bestow boons, will clutch your feet with His soft hands. When you see your son greeting you by bowing before you with His friends, you will shower Him with tears of joy, as a mass of clouds would drench a mountain.”

After speaking to Rāma’s mother in this way, the charming and faultless Sumitrā, who was trying to console Kausalyā in various ways, remained silent. Upon hearing what the mother of Lakṣmaṇa had said, the signs of anguish on the body of Kausalyā’s body quickly vanished, like an autumnal cloud holding little water.

## THE CITIZENS OF AYODHYĀ TRY TO PERSUADE RĀMA TO RETURN

People devoted to the magnanimous Rāma of unfailing prowess followed Him as He proceeded toward the forest. The king was made to return by force, by the social customs of only accompanying a departing person a certain distance. The people of Ayodhyā, however, would not turn back, but continued to follow the chariot, for Rāma, who enjoyed great fame, had become as dear to them as the full moon. Although implored by those people to come back, Rāma kept going along to prove truthful His father's promise. Fondly looking at them as though drinking them with His eyes, Rāma affectionately spoke to them as if they were His own children: "The abundant love which you, the residents of Ayodhyā, have bestowed upon Me should especially be directed to Bharata. For Bharata, who increases the pleasure of Kaikeyī and whose conduct is benevolent, will do what is both pleasing and beneficial to you all. Advanced in wisdom though young in age, tender though possessing heroic qualities, He will prove to be a worthy master and will dispel your fears. Endowed as He is with royal attributes, He has been considered qualified to be installed as the heir apparent. For this reason too, you must carry out the emperor's order, as well as because you are requested to do so by Me. Moreover, in order to please Me, you should treat the king in such a way so that he does not suffer too much while I am away in exile."

The more Rāma held fast to the principles of righteousness, the more the people wanted Him to be their ruler. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa attracted by Their good qualities the people of Ayodhyā, who were in a miserable condition and were wet with tears, as if they were bound by ropes. Those brāhmaṇas who were senior in three ways (by wisdom, age and power acquired through asceticism) and whose heads were shaking due to old age, spoke as follows from a distance: "O you swift steeds drawing the chariot of Rāma, come back! Do not go! Do what is beneficial for your master! Of all living beings with ears, you horses have especially heard our request."

Therefore, please come back. Your master is righteous, pure-minded, heroic and of firm resolve. He therefore deserves to be carried back to the city, not further away toward the forest.”

Hearing those elderly brāhmaṇas uttering such words of anguish, Rāma suddenly got down off the chariot, so it is said. Taking short steps so that the brāhmaṇas could catch up with Him, He proceeded toward the forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Rāma, who was by nature affectionate and whose eyes were full of compassion, could not send away the brāhmaṇas who were walking when He Himself rode a chariot. Their mind bewildered to seeing Rāma still heading for the forest, the brāhmaṇas spoke to Him as follows: “The whole brāhmaṇa community is following You, devoted as You are to the brāhmaṇas. Borne on the shoulders of brāhmaṇas, the sacred fires are also following You. Look at these white canopies which we acquired during the performance of a vājapeya sacrifice and which are following You like the white clouds of autumn. With these canopies we shall give You shade, for You have no umbrella and are being scorched by the rays of the sun. Indeed, our minds which used to be engaged in studying the Vedic texts have for Your sake decided to follow You in exile in the forest. The Vedas, which are our supreme treasure, are firmly fixed in our hearts. Our wives shall remain at home protected by their own good character. There is no need for us to think things over, for our minds are fully determined to follow You. If You ignore righteousness by rejecting our request, who will bother honoring the path of righteousness? Requested by us with our heads bowed down, whose hair is as white as swans and are covered with dust from prostrating ourselves on the ground, please come back. Many of the brāhmaṇas here have left sacrifices unfinished at home. Their conclusion therefore depends on Your return, O dear prince. All beings here, both animate and inanimate, are devoted to You. Show Your affection for such devotees who are imploring You to return. The trees, whose ability to move is obstructed by their roots, are unable to follow You and appear to be crying by the creaking sound being produced by the wind. The birds, which sit fixed on the branches of trees and are unable to go out in search of food, are also imploring You who are compassionate to all living beings to stay.”

While the brāhmaṇas were crying in this way to secure the return of Rāma, the Tamasā River came into view, as though blocking the progress of

Rāma. Thereafter Sumantra unhitched the tired horses from the chariot and directed them toward the river. After letting them drink and washing them with river water, he allowed them to graze not far from the Tamasā.



## RĀMA SNEAKS AWAY AT NIGHT

Then, standing on the pleasant bank of the Tamasā River and looking at Sītā, Rāma spoke the following words to Lakṣmaṇa: “Lakṣmaṇa, this is the first night of our exile in the forest. Do not fret about the city of Ayodhyā. Bless You. Look. Resorted to for shelter by birds and beasts returning to their homes, the desolate forest appears to be crying on all sides. The city of Ayodhyā, My father’s capital, with its men and women will undoubtedly lament for Us who have left. The people of Ayodhyā are attached to the king, as well as to You, Me, Bharata and Śatrughna because of Our manifold good qualities. I grieve the plight of My father and My illustrious mother. I fear they may become blind from crying excessively. Certainly the pious Bharata will console My father and mother with words that are conducive to righteousness, wealth and enjoyment. Constantly thinking of the tenderheartedness of Bharata, O mighty-armed prince, I am not worried about My mother and father. By following Me to the forest, You have rendered Me a valuable service. Otherwise, I would have had to look for help to take care of Sītā. Lakṣmaṇa, tonight I shall drink only water. This will be sufficient to please Me, even though there are many things to eat in the forest.”

After speaking to Lakṣmaṇa in this way, Rāma spoke to Sumantra as follows: “Look after the horses, My dear fellow.” Since the sun had completely set, Sumantra tied the horses up, gave them plenty of grass and returned. Having performed his evening worship and seeing that it was now night, the charioteer Sumantra, with the help of Lakṣmaṇa, prepared a bed for Rāma and Sītā. Seeing the bed made from the leaves and twigs of trees, Rāma laid down upon it with His consort Sītā. After Rāma was fast asleep with His consort, Lakṣmaṇa began telling the charioteer about the different glories of Rāma. Lakṣmaṇa and Sumantra passed the night awake until sunrise, discussing the qualities of Rāma on the bank of the Tamasā River. At a good distance from the bank of the Tamasā River, which was crowded with herds of cows, Rāma, accompanied by the citizens of Ayodhyā, passed the night.

Getting up and seeing the citizens laying asleep there, Rāma said to His brother Lakṣmaṇa, whose body was adorned with auspicious marks: “Lakṣmaṇa, look at these people full of longing for Us and uninterested in their own homes. They are lying at the roots of trees at this time of the morning. By the way in which these people are trying to bring Us back to Ayodhyā, they would give up their lives before they would give up their determination. Therefore, while they are still asleep, let Us get on the chariot and take a route that they will not be able to follow so that the citizens of Ayodhyā will not again spend the night sleeping at the roots of trees. We princes should free the citizens from any discomfort brought on by themselves. They should not have to undergo any hardship on Our account.” Lakṣmaṇa replied to Rāma, who was standing like righteousness personified: “What You say appeals to Me. O wise one, get on the chariot immediately.”

Rāma then said to the charioteer: “Get the chariot ready at once. I shall now depart for the forest. Go quickly.” When the chariot was hitched with excellent steeds, Sumantra, with joined palms, spoke to Rāma: “Your chariot is ready, O best of princes. Mount it swiftly with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Good luck to You.” Mounting the chariot with all Their necessities, Rāma quickly crossed the fast-flowing Tamasā River. After crossing, the glorious Rāma reached a smooth road that was safe even for those who are fearful of danger. In order to trick the citizens, Rāma told the charioteer: “Get on the chariot and drive north. After speeding along for some time, bring the chariot back. Be mindful to do so in such a way that the citizens cannot find Me.”

Hearing Rāma’s command, the charioteer did as he was told. Coming back, he informed Rāma about the presence of the chariot. Then the two princes, who were the promoters of the Raghu Dynasty, along with Sītā, took Their seats on the chariot which was waiting ready for Them. The charioteer then urged the horses along a path leading to a forest fit for practicing austerities. Rāma, who was a great chariot fighter, sat in the chariot as it drove towards the wilderness. At first the charioteer steered the vehicle northward, for he saw an auspicious omen for travel in that direction.

## THE CITIZENS RETURN TO AYODHYĀ

When the night ended with dawn and the citizens saw that Rāma was gone, they were stunned with grief and lost consciousness. Although looking everywhere, they could not see Rāma and became morose with tears of sorrow. With their faces wracked by despondency, and feeling miserable, the wise among them spoke pitifully as follows: “Curse that sleep that rendered us unconscious and for which we are now unable to see Rāma with His broad chest and strong arms! How did Rāma, whose actions are never unsuccessful, abandon us, His devotees, to live as an ascetic in a foreign land? How did that best of the descendents of the Raghu Dynasty, who always protected us as a father protects his children, abandon us and go to the forest? Let us either die here this very day, or undertake a death march. What is the use of living for us without Rāma? Besides, there are many huge, dry logs here. Lighting a funeral pyre, let us enter the fire. Shall we say that the strong Rāma who is free from envy and speaks so sweetly was lead by us to the forest? How can we say this? Seeing us return without Rāma, surely the city will assume a wretched and joyless appearance with its women, children and elderly people. After having gone to be with the great-souled Rāma forever, how can we again look upon the city of Ayodhyā without Him?”

Holding up their arms, they were stricken with grief, like a pedigree cow that lost her calf, and they lamented in various ways. Then they followed the tracks of the chariot for some time, but were then overwhelmed with despondency when the tracks stopped. The intelligent citizens returned by the same path, asking themselves: “How did this happen? What shall we do? We are doomed by Providence!” Mentally depressed, they returned by the same road on which they had come to the city of Ayodhyā, where all good people were feeling distressed. Seeing the city, their hearts were overwhelmed with grief, and they shed tears with their eyes aching from sorrow. Without Rāma, the city did not look well, like a river whose pools have been deprived of its snakes by the eagle Garuḍa. They saw the city

joyless, like the sky without the moon or the ocean without water, and were stunned. They entered their richly decorated homes overcome with depression. They could not distinguish between their own families from others, even after looking all about, because their happiness was completely destroyed.

## THE WOMEN OF AYODHYĀ LAMENT

Depressed and pained as they were and their eyes flooded with tears, they wanted to give up their lives. Having gone with Rāma, they had returned without Him. As such they became as if dead. Reaching their own homes and being surrounded by their children and wives, they all shed profuse tears which covered their faces. People neither enjoyed nor amused themselves. Merchants did not spread their wares, nor did these even look attractive. Householders did not bother cooking. The people did not rejoice on regaining lost possessions, nor on acquiring great wealth. Mothers were not joyful to see their firstborn sons. In every house the women were stricken with sorrow and began wailing.

The women then reprimanded their husbands with harsh words for returning without Rāma, as a driver jabs an elephant with a goad: “For those who cannot see Rāma, what is the use of a house, a wife, wealth, children or even physical comforts? The only good man in this world is Lakṣmaṇa, who, along with Sītā, accompanied Rāma to the forest to render Him service. The rivers, lotus pools and lakes in whose pure waters Rāma is going to bathe must have performed many pious deeds. Forests with pleasant groves of trees, rivers, marshes and mountains with high peaks will increase the beauty of Rāma. The forest or mountain that Rāma approaches will not fail to honor Him as a dear guest. Trees laden with different kinds of flowers and buds and crowded with bumblebees will present themselves before Rāma. When Rāma arrives, the mountains will present Him with the best of flowers and fruits, even out of season, because of their regard for Him. They will also release cascades of pure water, showing Him many different picturesque waterfalls. The trees on top of mountains will please Rāma. Wherever Rāma is, there is no cause of fear nor of humiliation.

“Let us go to that heroic and strong-armed son of King Daśaratha before He goes farther away from us. The shade of the lotus feet of such a master is our joy. He is our Lord, He is our goal, He is our shelter. We shall

serve Sītā, while you will serve Rāma.” In this way the bereaved women of Ayodhyā addressed their husbands.

“Śrī Rāma,” they continued, “will supply you with everything you need while in the forest, and Sītā will do the same for us. Residence here is devoid of love and assurance. The people are all longing for Rāma. No one wants to live here, for by doing so the mind loses consciousness. If Kaikeyī gains control of the kingdom, it will not be in accordance with righteousness and will be as good as unprotected. Surely there would be no use to our lives, nor to our children and wealth. Whom else would Kaikeyī not forsaken when she has disgraced her family and rejected her husband and stepson for the sake of power? We swear by our sons that as long as Kaikeyī is alive, we cannot live in her kingdom, even if our life were to depend on it.

“Who could live happily after getting that impious woman of evil conduct as a ruler, seeing that she has mercilessly sent Rāma into exile? Because of Kaikeyī this kingdom will have no protector or sacrifices and will suffer from all kinds of disturbances; everything here will eventually be destroyed. King Daśaratha will not be able to live with Rāma in exile. When the king dies, this kingdom which has existed since ancient times will be destroyed. Distressed as you are and your pious merits being exhausted, either drink poison mixed with water, follow after Rāma, or go to another country where the name of Kaikeyī is unknown. Rāma along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa has been deceitfully exiled and we have been bound to Bharata like animals bound in a slaughterhouse. The face of Rāma, the elder brother of Lakṣmaṇa, is like a full moon, although His complexion is swarthy. The conqueror of enemies has a fleshy chest, long arms and eyes like lotus petals. He is the first to speak, and does so sweetly. He always tells the truth and is very strong. He is courteous to everyone and, like the moon, is of a pleasing appearance. Surely Rāma, the tiger among men, whose gait is like an elephant in rut and who is a great chariot warrior, will beautify the forests when He roams through them.”

As the womenfolk of the city lamented in this way, they cried as one would when there is danger of death, tormented as they were by sorrow. Passing the whole day in their houses lamenting the exile of Rāma, the sun set and night fell. The city of Ayodhyā, in which the kindling of fires, the

chanting of sacred texts and the narration of ancient legends had stopped, looked as if it was enveloped in darkness. The city of Ayodhyā, in which all business transactions had stopped, which was devoid of all merry-making and was devoid of its shelter (Rāma), resembled a sky deprived of its stars. Then the women, who were suffering because of Rāma as much as if their own sons or brothers had been exiled, lamented and wept, for Rāma was dearer to them than their own sons. The city of Ayodhyā, whose singing, rejoicing, dancing, and music had completely ceased, whose happiness was gone and whose financial development had been obstructed, resembled an ocean whose water had dried up.

## RĀMA CONTINUES TOWARD THE FOREST

Remembering the command of His father, Rāma drove a great distance during the remaining hours of the night. As He continued along, the peaceful night came to an end. Performing the religious worship incumbent at twilight, He crossed over several different territories. Seeing villages whose outskirts were skillfully cultivated and woodlands laden with flowers, He continued His journey, though somewhat slower. Thus He heard the residents of the villages talking: “Fie on King Daśaratha, who has fallen under the control of lust. How malicious and evil is Kaikeyī. She is so hot-tempered that she has gone beyond the bounds of propriety to fulfill her wicked designs. She has exiled to the forest such a righteous prince as Rāma, who is so wise, compassionate and self-controlled. How is it that Sītā, who has always been accustomed to comfort is about to experience such hardship? What a pity that King Daśaratha has become so callous to his son Rāma, who is completely offenseless to the people, that he now wishes to abandon Him!”

Hearing these remarks by the people who lived in the villages, the heroic prince of Kosala passed beyond the border of the kingdom of Kosala. After crossing the Vedaśruti River, which flows with auspicious water, He continued travelling southward. After journeying for a long time, He crossed the Gomatī River, whose banks were adorned with herds of cows and whose cool water flows toward the sea. On reaching the other side of the Gomatī River, Rāma then crossed the Syandikā River with the help of His swift horses. Rāma then showed Sītā the prosperous kingdom of Kosala, which was given in ancient times by Manu, the patriarch, to Ikṣvāku. Lying on the other side of the Syandikā River, it is bounded on all sides by other nations. Repeatedly addressing the charioteer, the glorious Rāma spoke to him with a voice like a swan in rut. He said jokingly: “O charioteer, when, after returning to Ayodhyā, will I be able to hunt wild beasts in the flower-laden forests on the bank of the Sarayu River in the company of My mother and



father?” Then He explained Himself: “Actually I do not care to hunt in the forests along the Sarayu River. In fact, hunting is an unusual pleasure highly prized in this world by royalty. Indeed, hunting in the forest is resorted to in this world for the pleasure of royalty. Sometimes it was even done by the descendants Manu. Bowmen especially desire it.” Conversing with the charioteer with sweet words, Rāma, a descendant of Ikṣvāku, discussed various topics as He continued His journey.

## RĀMA MEETS GUHA, KING OF THE NIṢĀDAS

Having crossed the broad and beautiful land of Kosala and facing toward Ayodhyā with folded hands, the wise Rāma addressed Ayodhyā as follows: “I take leave of you, O best of cities, well protected as you are by King Daśaratha, as well as of the deities that protect you and reside in you. When the term of My forest exile is expired and I have paid My debt to the emperor, I shall again see you in the company of My mother and father.” His eyes reddened from crying and His face covered with tears, the forlorn Rāma raised His right arm and spoke to the people who had gathered from the surrounding area: “All of you have shown Me proper respect and compassion. The prolongation of your present suffering would be most sinful. Therefore carry on with your usual affairs!” Offering respects to the magnanimous prince and circumambulating Him, they then remaining standing here and there, wailing terribly. While they were lamenting in this way, enjoying the sight of Rāma, Rāma went out of their sight, as the sun vanishes at the start of night.

Rāma then crossed by chariot the outer territory of Kosala, a land that was beautiful and blessed, endowed with abundant food grains, whose people were charitable and had no cause of fear. The land of Kosala was covered with temples and sacrificial posts. It had many gardens and mango groves and many pools of water. It was populated with contented and well-fed people and had many large herds of cows. The settlements deserved to be protected by kings and they resounded with the recitation of the spiritual hymns of the Vedas. Leaving behind Kosala, the most determined Rāma drove at a moderate speed to a happy and prosperous region ruled over by a number of kings and which abounded in lovely gardens.

There Rāma saw the Celestial and lovely Ganges River which flows through the three worlds. Her waters were refreshing and her course free from duckweed and was frequented by sages. The holy river was adorned

with splendid hermitages not far from her banks, and her pools were visited at appropriate times by joyful celestial damsels. The river was magnified by the visits of gods and demons, gandharvas and kinnaras and frequented by the consorts of nāgas and gandharvas. The famous river was surrounded by hundreds of pleasure-mountains and celestial gardens. She flowed through the heavens for the benefit of the gods and contained celestial lotuses. The river made a terrible sound like loud laughter as it pounded against rocks. Her spotless white foam resembled smiles. In some places her water resembled braids; in other places it was adorned with eddies. In some places it was still and deep; in other places it was disturbed with rapid motion. Some parts of the Ganges produced a deep rumbling, other parts emitted a frightening noise. Hosts of gods took bath in her waters which were crowded with white lotuses. In some places she was lined with smooth banks; in others she was lined by sandy beaches.

The river, which was free from reproach, was noisy from swans and cranes, and was graced with cakravākas. Other birds that are always in rut were hovering over its waters. In some places she was adorned with trees growing on her banks like a garland of flowers. Somewhere else she was covered with full-blown lotuses and at other places she was covered with clusters of lotus flowers. In some places she was adorned with masses of budding water-lilies, and in other places else she was reddened with the pollen of flowers and resembled a woman excited with passion. She washes away all one's sins when one bathes in her waters. She resembles a spotless gem. The forests bordering her shores resound with the bellowing of elephants who guard the directions, wild elephants and pedigree elephants in rut, as well as the breed of elephants used by Indra for riding. Like a beautiful woman adorned with the finest jewels, she was surrounded by fruits, flowers, tender leaves, bushes and birds. Not only is she free from sin, she dispels all sin because she flows from the feet of Lord Viṣṇu. The river was infested with dolphins, crocodiles and snakes. She had fallen from the matted hair on the head of Śiva by the power of King Bhagīratha's austerities.

Near Śṛṅgaverapura Rāma reached the bank of the Ganges, the main consort of the ocean, which was noisy due to cranes and herons. On seeing the river which was full of eddies and waves, the great chariot fighter

Rāma said to Sumantra: “Charioteer, let Us stop here for today. Not far from the river stands a very large īṅgudī tree full of flowers and leaves. Let us stay under that tree. That way I can easily see the holy Ganges whose outstanding waters deserve to be honored by gods, humans, gandharvas, beasts, snakes and birds.” Saying “very well,” Lakṣmaṇa and Sumantra directed the horse-drawn chariot to the īṅgudī tree. Upon reaching the delightful tree, Rāma, the descendent of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, got down from the chariot with His consort and Lakṣmaṇa. After getting down from the chariot and unhitching the horses, Sumantra stood with joined palms beside Rāma, who was seated at the base of the tree.

The king of that region, known by the name Guha, was a friend of Rāma and was dearer to Him than His own life. He was a niṣāda by birth and was known to be physically strong and the military leader of the niṣādas. On hearing that Rāma had arrived in his territory, he came accompanied by his elderly ministers and relatives to see the prince. When Rāma saw Guha, the chief of the niṣādas, waiting at a distance, He immediately approached him with Lakṣmaṇa. Pained to see Rāma dressed as an ascetic, Guha embraced Him and said: “This land is as much Yours as is Ayodhyā, O Rāma! What can I do for You? Indeed, who is so fortunate to have such a dear guest, O strong-armed one?”

After having first class rice and other varieties of dishes brought, Guha then quickly offered Rāma water to wash His hands and spoke to Him as follows, so it is said: “I welcome You, O strong prince! This entire land is Yours. We are Your servants, You are our master. Please rule this kingdom for us. Here for Your pleasure are foods to be chewed, swallowed, licked and sucked. There are excellent beds for You to rest on and fodder for Your horses.” Rāma then replied as follows to Guha: “We are honored by you for coming here on foot to meet Us, as well as by your display of affection. We are always pleased with you.” Embracing Guha with His thick arms, Rāma said the following: “O Guha, I am glad to see you in good health with your family relations. Is everything fine with your state, allies and forests? All this that you have offered to Me out of love I accept and return to you, for I do not use gifts for Myself. Know that I am under a vow to dwell in the forest practicing austerities as an act of piety, and must wear a belt of kuśa grass, cloth made from tree bark and the pelt of a deer and eat only fruits and

roots. I am only interested in procuring fodder for the horses, nothing more. By being provided with this much by you, I shall be properly entertained at this time. Since these horses are very dear to My father, I shall feel honored by their being fully fed.”

At that very place Guha ordered his tribesmen in the following words: “Immediately bring food and drink for these horses.” After performing His evening worship facing the west and wearing over His torso a shawl made from tree bark, Rāma took only water as His meal, brought by Lakṣmaṇa Himself. When He finished washing the feet of Rāma and Sītā, who were laying on the ground to take rest, Lakṣmaṇa sat at the base of a nearby tree. Holding his bow, Guha, along with Sumantra, talked to Lakṣmaṇa about Rāma, passing the night awake and vigilant. While the great-souled son of King Daśaratha, who was glorious, intelligent, unfamiliar with suffering and deserving of enjoyment was laying there, the night gradually passed.

## LAKṢMAṆA PASSES THE NIGHT TALKING WITH GUHA

Guha was pained to see the royal couple in this condition. To Lakṣmaṇa, who was staying awake to protect His brother, he therefore said: “Here is a nice bed prepared for you, my brother. Please rest comfortably on it. O prince! We are all meant for hardship, whereas You are meant for comfort. We shall stay awake the whole night to guard over Rāma. For no one in this world is more dear to me than Rāma. I am telling You the truth and swear by it. By His grace I hope to achieve great fame in this world, as well as religious merit, wealth and sense enjoyment. Therefore I shall with my kinsmen guard in every way, bow in hand, my dear friend Rāma who is resting with Sītā. There is nothing in this forest I do not know about because I am always wandering in it. We can easily overcome a superior army consisting of four divisions: elephants, chariots, calvary and foot soldiers.”

Then Lakṣmaṇa replied: “Being protected by you, O sinless one, who always keep your duty in view, We are not afraid while in this land. But as long as Rāma is lying on the ground with Sītā, how can I sleep, eat or enjoy Myself? Behold Him whom even all the demigods and demons cannot defeat in battle sleeping comfortably on a bed of straw with Sītā! Rāma was achieved as the eldest son of King Daśaratha with qualities like his own through the chanting of sacred hymns, austerities and various undertakings. With Rāma in exile, King Daśaratha will not survive for long, and the earth will surely become a widow soon. After wailing loudly, the royal ladies must have already stopped crying. I think the palace must be silent by now. I do not think that the king, Kausalyā or My mother can survive longer than this night. Well, maybe My mother might survive because she expects to see My brother Śatrughna. But it will be a pity if Kausalyā, who has given birth to a valiant son, dies. That city which used to be joyful, full of people devoted to Rāma and pleasing to the world will perish when agonized by the king’s death.

“How can the king’s life airs maintain his body when he does not see Rāma, his magnanimous eldest son? When the king is dead, Kausalyā will also perish, and My mother will thereafter also meet with destruction. Without achieving his goal of installing Rāma on the throne, My father will die uttering the words ‘Lost! Lost!’ Accomplished persons will see to My father’s funeral rites when the time actually arrives. If My father survives, people will move about happily in his capital, which is provided with crossroads at suitable locations, well-aligned highways, mansions, temples and palaces, the most excellent courtezans, crowded with chariots, horses and elephants, resounding with the sound of drums, overflowing with good fortune, populated with sated, well-fed people, provided with nice parks and entertained with festivals organized by associations. If King Daśaratha, a great soul of noble vows, survives, We might see him once again when We return from exile. Let Us hope that when this period of exile is over, We can return safely to Ayodhyā with Rāma, who is true to His promise.”

While the maganimous prince sat lamenting in this way, tormented with sorrow as he was, the night came to an end. As Lakṣmaṇa spoke in this way, Guha also became overwhelmed and shed tears like an elephant afflicted with fever.

## RĀMA SENDS SUMANTRA BACK AND CROSSES THE GANGES

When the night ended in dawn, the highly illustrious Rāma, who had a broad chest, spoke as follows to Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā: “It is now time for sunrise and the goodly night has departed. Over there a dark bird, the cuckoo, is cooing. The shrill cries of peacocks can be heard in the forest. Let us therefore, dear brother, cross the swift-flowing Ganges which empties into the sea.”

Understanding His brother’s request, Lakṣmaṇa, the deight of His friends, informed Guha and Sumantra and then stood before His brother. On hearing Rāma’s instructions and acceding to them, Guha immediately summoned his ministers and said to one of them: “Quickly bring to this ford a fine and sturdy boat with oars and helmsman for crossing this river.” Receiving Guha’s order, his important minister left. Bringing a charming boat, he reported the matter to Guha. With joined palms, Guha then said to Rāma: “Here is Your boat, O Lord. What more can I do for You? You are as effulgent as the son of a god and dedicated to noble vows! Here is the boat for crossing the river. O tiger among men, please get in it at once.” The most glorious Rāma then said to Guha: “You have fulfilled My desire. Please have everything put in the boat right now.”

Putting on their armour and fastening Their quivers and bows, the two archers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, accompanied by Sītā, went to the ford of the Ganges. As Rāma, who knew what was right, was about to leave, Sumantra approached Him with folded hands and humbly asked: “What should I do?” Touching Sumantra with His right hand, Rāma said to him: “Immediately go back to the king and be at ease. Go back. What you have already done is sufficient for Me. We will abandon this chariot and proceed on foot to the great wilderness.” Finding himself ordered to return to Ayodhyā, the charioteer was sorely perplexed and said to Lord Rāma, foremost of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty: “That destiny which can force You,



Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā to reside in the forest like ordinary persons has never been overcome by anyone in this world. I think it is a waste of time to lead the life of a religious student, to study scriptures, or to practice mercifulness and simplicity when You are in adversity! By living in the forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, You will surely achieve the same result as one who has conquered all worlds. We are surely finished, O Rāma, in that, being abandoned by You, we will come under the control of the wicked Kaikeyī and be brought to suffering.” Speaking in that way to Rāma, who was as dear to him as his own life, and thinking of Rāma gone off to a distance, the charioteer Sumantra wept for a long time.

When his tears had dried up and he had washed himself with some water, Rāma spoke to him for a while with sweet words: “I do not find any one who is a greater friend of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty than you. Please act in such a way that My father may not grieve for Me. The emperor is not only perturbed by sorrow, but is old and has just seen all his desires thwarted. Therefore I request you. No matter what the emperor enjoins you to do for the pleasure of Kaikeyī should be done without hesitation. Kings rule their states for this purpose alone, that their will may not be obstructed in any undertaking. O Sumantra, do everything in such a way that the emperor neither becomes displeased nor suffers distress. After greeting the aged and honorable king who has never known sorrow, convey to him the following message from Me: “Neither I, Lakṣmaṇa nor Sītā are sad that We have been exiled from Ayodhyā or that we shall reside in the wilderness. When fourteen years have passed, you will see Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā and Myself promptly returned.”

“After delivering this message to the king and My mother, the other queens, and even Kaikeyī, tell Kausalyā that I am in good health. Then offer respects at her feet on behalf of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Myself. Then give the emperor this message: ‘Immediately bring Bharata and install Him on the throne. When you embrace Bharata and install Him as prince regent, the remorse that you feel on Our account will not assail you.’ Bharata should be given the following message: ‘You should especially treat all Our mothers equally, even as You do Our father. As much as Kaikeyī and Sumitrā are particularly dear to You, so also should be My mother, Queen Kausalyā. If

You accept the post of prince regent to please Our father, You will be able to thrive happily in this world and the next.”

After listening to all these messages which were spoken with the intention of sending him back to Ayodhyā, Sumantra affectionately replied: “If I do speak to You irreverently or with a voice faltering due to affection, forgive me and consider it all as a manifestation of my devotion to You. How can I return to Ayodhyā without You? Separated from You Ayodhyā is like a mother pained by the loss of her son. On seeing this chariot departing with You in it, the city was reduced to such a plight. If it sees the chariot without You, the city may be torn apart. The city will be devastated to see this chariot without You, like an army that sees a chariot return from battle with its charioteer alive but its warrior dead. Although You are far away, the people of Ayodhyā see You standing before them in their minds. Thinking of You, they surely must not have eaten today. You Yourself saw the confusion of the people of Ayodhyā when their minds became tormented with grief, O Rāma! Indeed, seeing me returned with the chariot, they will raise a cry of distress one hundred times louder than that which they raised when You left in exile.

“Or should I tell Queen Kausalyā, ‘Your son Rāma was taken to His maternal uncle’s. Do not grieve.’ I dare not make such a false statement. How can I tell them the truth when it is so unpleasant? If You insist that I return to Ayodhyā, how will the fine steeds, who are accustomed to carrying You and Your relations, draw this chariot without You? As such, O sinless prince, I shall not be able to return without You, and so, You should let me accompany You into exile in the forest. If after requesting You to take me along, You abandon me, I shall enter fire with this chariot at this very moment. O Rāma, with this chariot I shall repel all those creatures that would interfere with Your performance of austerities in the forest. By Your kindness I secured the service of driving Your chariot. By Your grace I now hope to enjoy residing in the forest with You. Be kind to me. I wish to have Your association in the forest. I wish to hear Your loving assent: ‘Be My intimate companion.’ Moreover, if these horses get the opportunity to serve You while residing in the forest, they will attain the highest destination. Serving You with my head bent low, I shall dwell in the forest and shall completely abandon Ayodhyā and even the world of the gods. I am unable to enter Ayodhyā without You, just as those who commit a sinful deed cannot

enter the capital of Indra. Indeed, my desire is that when Your exile expires I will bring You back to Ayodhyā in this same chariot. Fourteen years in the forest with You will pass like an equal number of moments, but without You they will increase a hundredfold. You are so affectionate to Your servants. Ready to follow the path of the son of my master, You should not reject me, for I am Your devoted servant who always stays within the bounds of my station.”

Compassionate as Rāma was to His servants, He said to Sumantra, who was piteously suplicating Him again and again in various ways: “I know your supreme devotion to Me, O you who are so fond of your master. Nevertheless, listen to the reason for which I send you back to Ayodhyā. When Kaikeyī sees that you have returned to the capital, she will understand that I have definitely gone to the forest. Kaikeyī cannot be satisfied with anything other than My exile in the forest. Otherwise, let her not suspect that the pious king is a liar. This is the main reason, that Kaikeyī should have her son rule over the kingdom and that Bharata should protect the prosperity of the land. For My pleasure and the pleasure of the king, go back to Ayodhyā and deliver each of these messages exactly as you have been instructed.”

After talking to the charioteer in this way and consoling him, Rāma, who was not timorous, said the following to Guha: “It is not proper for Me to stay in a forest inhabited by My own people. I must stay in an isolated hermitage to fully observe all the procedures of My exile. Having adopted a lifestyle of austerity which is the adornment of ascetics with the agreement of Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa, and desiring as I do the welfare of My father, I shall proceed from here with My hair matted in dreadlocks. Bring Me the milky sap of a banyan tree.” Guha at once brought some banyan tree sap to the prince. With that sap, the long-armed Rāma matted His and Lakṣmaṇa’s hair into dreadlocks, like typical ascetics. Wearing the tree bark cloth and having their matted dreadlocks wound up in a bun on top of Their heads, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa looked as brilliant as two sages.

After taking up the way of life of a forest ascetic along with Lakṣmaṇa, and making a vow to practice austerity, Rāma said to His assistant Guha: “Be vigilant with respect to your army, treasury, fortress and

nation, O Guha, for a kingdom is considered hard to protect.” Rāma then said goodbye to the illustrious Guha and, with an undisturbed mind, promptly left with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Seeing a boat on the shore of the Ganges and desiring to cross the swift-flowing river, Rāma said: “Lakṣmaṇa, grab the boat and stand there to hold it steady. Slowly help Sītā get in, then You get in.” Hearing the instructions of His brother, Lakṣmaṇa acted accordingly, helping Sītā get in first, and Himself getting in afterwards. Then the mighty Rāma Himself got in. After that Guha, the chief of the niṣādas, ordered his men to row the boat across the river. When Rāma was seated in the boat, He recited for His own welfare a Vedic hymn worthy of brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas. Sipping water from the river in accordance with scriptural injunctions and feeling highly gratified, Rāma bowed His head out of respect with Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa did likewise. Bidding farewell to Sumantra and to Guha and his army, Rāma ordered the boatmen to begin rowing. Propelled by the oarsmen and steered by the helmsman, the boat speedily crossed the water.

When They reached the middle of the river, the irreproachable Sītā addressed the Ganges with joined palms: “Surrounded by you on all sides, O Ganges, may this son of the wise King Daśaratha fulfill His father’s order. After passing fourteen years in the wilderness, He will return with His brother and Myself. Having returned safely with all My desires fulfilled, I will then joyfully perform your worship, O fortunate goddess. You travel through the three worlds and are seen in the abode of Lord Brahmā. In this world you are seen as the consort of the ocean. I bow to you, O lovely goddess, and sing your praises. When Rāma has returned safely and regained His kingdom, I shall give in charity to the brāhmaṇas one hundred thousand cows, fine cloth and sumptuous food in order to please you. When I have returned to Ayodhyā I will worship you with a thousand things scarce in the world of the gods and with lands free from taxes, silken cloth and cooked rice. In fact, I shall worship all the divinities that have temples on your banks, as well as all the sacred places there. May the mighty-armed Rāma return from exile to Ayodhyā with Me and Lakṣmaṇa, O sinless goddess!”

While the faultless Sītā addressed the Ganges in that way, the boat safely reached the southern shore of the river. When the boat landed on the

shore, Rāma left the boat and continued onward with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. Then the mighty-armed Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Be prepared to protect Sītā in the inhabited as well as uninhabited regions. Certainly protection must be given in the uninhabited regions by persons like Me. Lakṣmaṇa, You lead the way, and let Sītā follow You. I will follow, protecting Sītā and You from behind, for We must both protect each other, O best of men. So far We have not had to undergo any great hardship. From today Sītā will know the rigor of forest life. She will enter a forest where there are no signs of the passage of humans, where there are no cultivated fields or gardens, where the land is rough and where there are dangerous pits.”

Heading Rāma’s advice, Lakṣmaṇa led the way with Sītā following, and after Sītā came Rāma, the best of the Raghu Dynasty. Sumantra constantly watching Rāma, who soon reached the other side of the Ganges. When he could no longer see Rāma because of the great distance, he began to cry remorsefully. After crossing the great river, Rāma, who was as effulgent as one of the guardians of the world, soon reached the prosperous and happy land of Vatsa, which had rows of different crops. There They killed four kinds of stags: varāha, ṛśya, pṛṣata and mahāruru. Soon, when They became hungry, They gathered foods fit to eat and sought out a tree under which They could pass the night.

## RĀMA TRIES TO PERSUADE LAKṢMAṆA TO RETURN

Upon reaching the base of a suitable tree, Rāma, the best of those who give delight, performed His evening worship. Then He spoke to Lakṣmaṇa as follows, so it is said: “This is the first night which we will pass outside the area inhabited by Our own people and without Sumantra. Do not worry. We must both remain awake, free from drowsiness, during the coming nights, for it is Our duty to care for and protect Sītā. Somehow or other let Us pass this night, O Lakṣmaṇa. Let Us lie down on the ground on beds of straw spread with Our own hands.”

Sitting on the bare ground, Rāma, who deserved to recline on a soft bed, spoke enlightening words to Lakṣmaṇa: “Surely the king must be sleeping uncomfortably, O Lakṣmaṇa. But Kaikeyī, whose desires are fulfilled, must be contented. When she sees Bharata returned from His uncle’s home, Kaikeyī may not yet rob father of his life. What will My father, who is helpless, old, separated from Me, under the clutches of Kaikeyī and passionate do? Considering My own plight and the bewilderment of the king’s intelligence, sense gratification is heavier than economic development and religiosity. What man, even though ignorant, would abandon his own obedient son for the sake of a pretty woman, as father has abandoned Me? Oh, but Kaikeyī’s son Bharata must be happy in that He is going to rule over the prosperous kingdom of Kosala like an overlord! Indeed, He alone will enjoy all the pleasure of the kingdom, since father is advanced in years and I am sheltered in the wilderness.

“One who pursues pleasure while ignoring virtue and wealth soon comes to grief in the same way as King Daśaratha. I think, O brother, that Kaikeyī entered our family to kill King Daśaratha, exile Me and secure the kingdom for Bharata. Deluded by her pride and good fortune, Kaikeyī may even now persecute Kausalyā and Sumitrā on account of Me. Your mother Sumitrā may suffer because of Us. Therefore, Lakṣmaṇa, You should go to

Ayodhyā tomorrow. I alone shall go with Sītā to the Daṇḍaka Forest, while You will be the protector of Kausalyā who will soon be a widow. Accustomed to base practices as she is, Kaikeyī might even out of malice administer poison to Our mothers. Surely in a previous life My mother must have deprived other women of their sons, and now it has come back to her.

“At a time when I should be repaying Kausalyā for her labor of nurturing Me for a long time and raising Me with difficulty, I have been separated from her. Woe unto Me. Let no woman bear a son like Me, who have inflicted endless suffering on My mother! I think that mother’s pet Mynah bird is more affectionate to her than I because it says ‘O parrot, bite the foot of the enemy of my mistress.’ What can I, the so-called son of My mother, do for her, when she is as good as issueless? My mother is certainly not very fortunate. Bereft of Me, she is lying stricken with intense sorrow in an ocean of grief. When angry, I can single-handedly subdue Ayodhyā and even the earth with My arrows. But such valor is not always beneficial. I am afraid of sin and of losing ascendance to heaven, O Lakṣmaṇa. For that reason I do not seek to install Myself on the throne today.”

After lamenting piteously in that and many other ways in the desolate forest, Rāma sat quietly for the rest of the night, His face covered with tears. When Rāma stopped lamenting and looked like a fire that had gone out or the ocean devoid of turbulence, Lakṣmaṇa consoled Him: “O best of warriors, now that You have left the city of Ayodhyā, it has lost its brilliance, like a night without the moon. O best of men, it is not proper for You to grieve in this way. By doing so, You are causing Sītā and Me to become despondent. Without You neither Sītā nor I can survive for even a short time, any more than fish can survive out of water. Now I do not wish to see father, Śatrughna, Sumitrā or even heaven without You, O conqueror of enemies!”

Then Rāma noticed a nice bed of leaves under a banyan tree, not far from where They sat. Upon it, Sītā and Rāma took rest. After hearing the excellent and comprehensive statement made by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma agreed to keep Lakṣmaṇa with Him for all the years of Their long stay in the forest practicing Their vow of austerity. From then onwards the two mighty princes

never experienced fear or agitation as They wandered through the desolate wilderness, anymore than a pair of lions living on a mountain top.



## AT THE HERMITAGE OF BHARADVĀJA

After passing the beautiful night under that huge tree, when the spotless sun rose, They continued on Their way. Crossing an extensive tract of forest, They proceeded toward that land where the Yamunā River meets the Ganges. Along the way They saw many different charming regions that had never been seen before. They gazed at the different flower-laden trees as They travelled along safely. When the day had ended, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Look, there is smoke, the emblem of the fire god, near the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā. I think the hermitage of the sage Bharadvāja must be nearby. We certainly must have reached the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā, for I can hear the noise of their waters clashing. Timbers hewn by foresters and trees chopped up in pieces can be seen in the hermitage.”

As the day came to an end, the two archers walked along comfortably and reached the sage’s dwelling at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā. Approaching the precincts of the hermitage and frightening the birds and animals, Rāma crossed the distance in a short time and arrived at the sage Bharadvāja’s hermitage. Reaching the sage’s dwelling and desiring to see him, the two warriors waited at some distance with Sītā. When invited in by one of the sage’s disciples, They entered the sage’s dwelling and saw him there surrounded by his disciples. He was devoted to vows of penance and was single-minded. He had acquired foresightedness through the practice of austerities. Seeing him engaged in offering oblations into the sacred fire, the greatly fortunate Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, greeted him with joined palms. Rāma then introduced Himself to the sage: “We are Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the sons of King Daśaratha, O sage. Here is My blessed and irreproachable wife, a princess from the kingdom of Videha and the daughter of King Janaka. She has followed Me here to the desolate forest which is suitable for practicing austerities. When My father exiled Me, My dear brother Lakṣmaṇa, being of firm vows, followed Me to the forest. On the order of Our father, O sage, We shall go to a forest suitable

for practicing austerities and fulfill our religious duties there, living only on roots and fruits.”

Hearing the statement made by the intelligent prince, the sage Bharadvāja offered Him a cow and water for washing His hands. The accomplished ascetic offered Them foodstuffs of many different kinds prepared from wild roots and fruits and also arranged accommodations for Them. Having welcomed Rāma with an honorable reception, the sage Bharadvāja sat surrounded on all sides by birds and beasts and other ascetics. When Rāma finished accepting the sage’s hospitality and was seated, the sage Bharadvāja spoke to Him the following pious words: “I have actually been expecting Your arrival for a long time now, O descendant of Kakutstha! And I have heard about Your unwarranted exile. This solitary tract of land at the confluence of these two holy rivers is not only beautiful, but pious too. You can stay here without worry.”

After Bharadvāja addressed Him in that way, Rāma, who was dedicated to the welfare of everyone, spoke the following sound words: “O noble sage, the people of the city of Ayodhyā and the state of Kosala are nearby. I think that those who want to see Me and Sītā will come to this hermitage, finding it easy to see Me here. For this reason, as well as for others, I do not care to stay here. Look for some good site for a solitary hermitage where Sītā, who deserves to enjoy, can live comfortably.”

Hearing His pious request, the great sage Bharadvāja told Them about a place suitable for Their purpose: “Thirty krośas from here, my son, is a holy mountain where You may reside. It is inhabited by ascetics. That pious mountain has various peaks and is pleasing to behold. It is inhabited by black Langur monkeys with long tails, as well as by apes and bears. It is known as Citrakūṭa, and resembles the Gandhamādana mountain in beauty. As long as a person sees the peaks of Citrakūṭa, he devotes himself to acts of piety and never sets his mind on sin. Entertaining themselves with austerity for one hundred autumns, many gray-haired sages ascended to heaven. I think that that is an isolated and comfortable place for You to stay. Otherwise, stay here with me for the rest of Your exile.”

Bharadvāja entertained his beloved guest Rāma, accompanied by Sītā, delighting Them with all kinds of desirable things. While Rāma

discussed various topics with the great sage, the harmless night fell. Thoroughly exhausted, Rāma gladly spent the night at Bharadvāja's enjoyable hermitage, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. When the night ended with the dawn, Rāma, the tiger among men, approached the great sage Bharadvāja, who was resplendant with glory, and said to him: "O venerable one, We have spent the night at your hermitage. Please give Us permission to proceed to the place where We shall reside, O sage of truthful nature." Since the night had ended, Bharadvāja spoke as follows: "Go on to Citrakūṭa, which is abundant with honey, roots and fruits. I think it is a suitable place to live, O mighty Rāma. It is adorned with many different clusters of trees and frequented by kinnaras and nāgas. The cries of peacocks are heard all around and there are numerous herds of elephants. You should go to the famed Citrakūṭa, which is a holy and agreeable place with abundant roots and fruits. There You will certainly see herds of elephants and deer wandering on the edge of the forests. You will also see rivers, waterfalls, crags, fissures in rocks, caves and streams. You will relish these in Your mind in the company of Sītā. Upon reaching that calm and peaceful mountain, which entertains visitors with the songs of happy quail and cuckoos, and is most enjoyable because of the deer in rut and herds of elephants, settle down there."

## CROSSING THE YAMUNĀ

After having spent the night at Bharadvāja's hermitage, the two princes offered respects to the sage and then headed toward the mountain of Citrakūṭa. Seeing that They were about to leave, the great sage, it is said, recited Vedic hymns for Their safe journey, as a father would for his children. Then the great sage who was invested with tremendous power began instructing Rāma, whose valor was unfailing: "Upon reaching the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā, You should follow the Yamunā to the right. Reaching a place where the river changes course, You will find a ford where many people cross. Make Yourselves a raft and cross the Yamunā, who is the daughter of the sun. You will reach a huge banyan tree covered with dark green leaves and therefore called "śyāma." It is surrounded by many other trees and visited by siddhas. There Sītā should offer prayers with folded hands for Your safe return to Ayodhyā. If She wishes, She can rest there, otherwise continue on. After going a distance of one krośa, You will see Nīlavana (the Blue Forest), which is interspersed with sallakī and badarī trees and which is enhanced by clumps of bamboos growing along the Yamunā. There You will find the charming path to Citrakūṭa, which I have often visited. It is a path of soft soil and devoid of forest fires."

When the sage had finished explaining how to go to Citrakūṭa, Rāma replied to him: "I shall follow your instructions." After Rāma urged the sage to return to his hermitage, he did so. Then Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Bless You, Lakṣmaṇa! We must have done some pious deeds for which the sage bestowed his mercy upon Us." Talking in this way and placing Sītā before Them, the two intelligent archers headed toward the Yamunā River. Upon reaching the shore of the Yamunā, They began thinking of how to cross the swift current. The two brothers then made a fairly large raft from a number of logs. On this They fashioned a platform of dry bamboo, over which They spread fragrant uśīra roots. With the stems of rushes and the branches of a rose apple tree, the valliant Lakṣmaṇa made a comfortable seat

for Sītā. Rāma then helped His beloved Sītā, whose unimaginable beauty was equal to that of the goddess of fortune, aboard the raft, for She was a little timid. Rāma also placed Her clothes and ornaments on the raft beside Her, as well as the shovel and basket. Then the two darling sons of King Daśaratha began cautiously rowing the raft.

When They reached the middle of the Yamunā, Sītā offered respects and prayed: “Grant Me safe passage to the other shore, O goddess, and that My husband may complete His vow. When Rāma, the protector of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, safely returns to Ayodhyā, I shall offer You one thousand cows and one hundred gifts which even the gods cannot obtain.” Even as Sītā prayed to the Yamunā with folded hands, the raft approached the southern bank of the Yamunā. Thus They crossed on a raft the swift-flowing Yamunā River, which was turbulent with waves and whose banks had many trees growing on them. Abandoning the raft among the trees, They left the forest on the bank of the Yamunā and came upon the cool, dark banyan tree that was covered with green leaves. Sītā approached the banyan tree and requested it for a blessing: “I prostrate Myself before you, O massive tree. Please allow My husband to complete His vow and Us to see Kausalyā and Sumitrā again.” Then the wise Sītā circumabulated the tree clockwise with joined palms. Seeing His beloved and obedient wife, the faultless Sītā, offering prayers to the tree, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Take Sītā and walk in front, O Lakṣmaṇa. Carrying My weapons, I shall follow behind. Give Sītā whatever flower or fruit She requests and which may please Her.” Beholding every flower-bearing tree, shrub or creeper that She had never seen before, She asked Rāma about them. Excited by Sītā’s inquiries, Lakṣmaṇa fetched beautiful clusters of flowers from many different trees. At that time, Sītā was pleased by seeing the charming sands and water of the river, upon which swans and cranes were making a commotion. After walking one krośa in that forest, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had killed a number of deer fit for consecration in sacrifice. After amusing Themselves in the lovely forest, which resounded with the cries of peacocks and was infested with monkeys and elephants, They arrived at a level stretch of land along the shore. There the travellers, who did not appear tired, looked for a tree under which to spend the night.

## ARRIVAL AT CITRAKŪṬA

When the night was over, Rāma gently woke the sleeping Lakṣmaṇa: “O Lakṣmaṇa, listen to the sweet songs of wild birds. Let us begin Our journey, for the hour for travelling has arrived. After being woken by His brother in a timely fashion, Lakṣmaṇa gave up His sleep, drowsiness and fatigue. Getting up and bathing in the cool waters of the river, They all began following the path trodden by sages leading to Citrakūṭa. As Rāma was walking along with Lakṣmaṇa, He said to the lotus-eyed Sītā: “See, O Sītā, the kimśuka trees which seem to shine due to the flowers which adorn and garland them all over with flowers in this spring season. See the bhalātaka and vilva trees, whose fruits are out of reach of men, bent low due to their abundance of fruits and flowers. Surely We will be able to live here!”

Then Rāma addressed Lakṣmaṇa: “See the honecombs hanging in every tree and weighing at least one droṇa which the bees have stocked. Here is a cātaka bird calling out and a peacock answering it in a charming part of the forest strewn with profuse flowers. Behold the mountain of Citrakūṭa with its elevated peaks, where herds of elephants roam and flocks of noisy birds roost. We shall enjoy Ourselves in the holy and beautiful forest of Citrakūṭa, whose ground is smooth for walking and thickly forested.”

Advancing on foot with Sītā, They reached the captivating mountain of Citrakūṭa. It abounded in flocks of many kinds of birds, edible roots and fruits and sweet drinking water. When They arrived there, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “My dear brother, this mountain is enchanting with its groves of trees and creepers supplying roots and fruits. It seems to Me that We can easily live here. Great-souled ascetics also dwell on this mountain. It may actually be habitable. Let us reside here.”

Speaking in this way, They reached the hermitage of the sage Vālmīki and greeted him with joined palms. Extremely delighted, the great

sage who knew what is right welcomed his guests and treated Them with honor, saying: “Be seated!” Lord Rāma then introduced Himself to the sage, afterwhich He told Lakṣmaṇa: “Bring strong logs and erect a hut. My mind is set on residing here.” Upon hearing His brother’s command, Lakṣmaṇa brought a number of trees and constructed a hut with boughs and leaves. Seeing how the thatched hut was fortified with stakes and charming to see, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Bring the pulp of the Gajakanda root so that We can propitiate the deity Vāstupuruṣa, who presides over dwellings, and thereby live here undisturbed for a long time. Digging up a Gajakanda tuber, bring it here at once, O fair-eyed Lakṣmaṇa, for the rituals recommended in the scriptures must be performed.”

Understanding His brother’s request, Lakṣmaṇa did exactly as He was told. Then Rāma instructed Him once more: “Cook this root. We shall offer it to the protecting deities of this hut. Hurry! This is the auspicious hour and day for performing this rite. Having unearthed the tuber whose skin was the color of a black deer and was suitable for sacrifice, Lakṣmaṇa tossed it into a blazing fire. When He saw that it was well-cooked and had lost its ruddy color, He said to Rāma: “I have prepared the tuber by removing all the rootlets and stem. Sacrifice it to the deity of the hut, for You are expert in this and are equal to the gods.”

Disciplined and good-natured as He was, Rāma first took a bath. He then summarily recited all the sacred hymns required for completing the sacrifice. After satisfying all the deities, the purified Rāma entered the hut. Rāma experienced great satisfaction in His mind and He shone with splendor. He had bathed in the river in accordance with scriptural rules and had recited the prayers in the proper way. To ward off evil from the hut, Rāma performed the vaiśvadeva sacrifice, as well as a sacrifice to Śiva and Viṣṇu. Rāma also erected in proportion to the hut appropriate altars for worshipping the protecting deities of the area, shrines for the worship of Gaṇeśa and Śiva, and a temple for the worship of Viṣṇu. As the gods enter their assembly hall called Sudharmā in the heavenly world, They all entered together that charming thatched hut built in a windless place. Having reached the enjoyable mountain of Citrakūṭa, where beasts and birds abound, and the Mandākinī River with its holy bathing places, Rāma

rejoiced exceedingly and was relieved of His saddeness over His exile from Ayodhyā.



## SUMANTRA REACHES AYODHYĀ

Guha talked for a long time with Sumantra, saddened as he was by Rāma's departure. When Rāma reached the southern shore of the Ganges, Guha returned home. Rāma's arrival at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā, His stay with the sage Bharadvāja and His journey to Citrakūṭa was seen by Guha's spies, who reported it to Guha and Sumantra. Sumantra hitched the fine horses to the chariot and, when given permission by Guha, proceeded straight for Ayodhyā, his mind being deeply perturbed. Seeing the fragrant forests, streams, lakes, towns and villages along the way, he drove quickly. Reaching Ayodhyā at sundown on the second day of his return journey, the charioteer found it joyless, so it is said. Seeing it as quiet as if it were abandoned, he became greatly disturbed. Overwhelmed with extreme grief, Sumantra began to reflect: "I hope the city with its elephants, horses, citizens and ruler is not burning with agony because of the exile of Rāma."

While pondering in this way, he reached the gate of the city in the chariot being drawn by swift horses and quickly entered it. Hundreds and thousands of people rushed towards Sumantra as he drove to the palace and asked him "Where is Rāma?" He replied to them: "When requested by the virtuous Rāma to return, I took leave of Him on the bank of the Ganges and have thus returned." Learning that the exiles had crossed the Ganges, the teary-eyed people sighed and exclaimed: "Oh, my! Alas! Oh, Rāma!" He heard the people who were huddled in groups declare: "Doomed indeed are we who do not even see Rāma here. We shall never again see the righteous Rāma on the occasions of giving charity, performing sacrifices, holding weddings or in public assemblies. Rāma took care of this city like a father in regards to what was necessary, what was pleasing to the people and what brought us happiness."

Passing through the marketplaces, Sumantra heard the wailing of women who were standing at the windows of their homes, feeling dismayed by Rāma's exile. Covering his face, Sumantra drove down the middle of the

royal highway toward the palace where King Daśaratha was. Disembarking from the chariot and quickly entering the royal palace, he passed through the seven gateways crowded with throngs of people. When the ladies in the mansions, seven-storied apartment buildings and palaces saw that Sumantra had returned alone, already emaciated due to separation from Rāma, they burst into a loud wail. The tears flowing from their eyes washed away their cosmetics as they looked at each other with large eyes. Then he heard in the palaces the wives of King Daśaratha talking in low voices due to the pangs of separation from Rāma: “Sumantra left with Rāma and has returned without Him. Now what will he reply to the wailing Kausalyā when asked about Rāma? Since Kausalyā continues to live even though her son has been exiled, I think that as much as life is hard to live, so also is dying difficult.”

After hearing these truthful remarks of the king's consorts, Sumantra quickly entered the palace as if being burned by grief. Upon passing through the eighth gate, he saw in the white chamber the king who was afflicted with misery on account of his son. Sumantra approached the seated king and, greeting him, delivered Rāma's message as he had been instructed to do. After hearing the message in utter silence, the monarch became so disturbed by the pain which he felt in separation from Rāma that he fainted and fell on the floor. When the ladies of the palace saw that the emperor had fainted on the floor, they raised their arms and began to cry. With the help of Sumitrā, Kausalyā lifted up her husband and said the following to him: “O blessed king, why do you not respond to the messenger who has carried out the difficult task of returning from his journey to the wilderness? Having perpetrated such an unthinkable deed as the banishment of your son, do you now regret it? May your good merit remain. If you continue to grieve like this, your assistants will not be able to survive. Kaikeyī, for fear of whom you do not reply to Sumantra, is not here. Therefore you can speak to him in confidence.”

While Kausalyā spoke to the king, her voice faltered with tears. When she finished speaking she became so overwhelmed with anguish that she fell upon the ground. Seeing her lying on the ground lamenting, and looking at their lord, the other ladies began crying. Hearing that noise coming from the inner quarters of the palace, men both young and old and women too gathered around crying. Thus the city was again agitated.

## SUMANTRA DELIVERS RĀMA'S MESSAGE

When the king regained consciousness and his mind was stable, he summoned the charioteer to hear the news about Rāma. Then, with folded hands, the charioteer drew near the king, who was lamenting for Rāma and smitten with anguish. He resembled a newly captured aged elephant that was sighing while remembering its herd. Like one who is agonized, the king said to the charioteer, whose body was covered with dust and who, standing nearby, was looking miserable with his face covered in tears: “Where will the pious Rāma, who has taken shelter under a tree, live? What will He eat after living comfortably all these years? O Sumantra, how will He, who is underserving of suffering and worthy of reclining on a soft bed, lie down on the barren ground as if He were a destitute? How will Rāma, who used to be followed by foot soldiers, chariots and elephants wherever He went, live in the desolate wilderness? How is it that the two princes and Sītā have taken up residence in a forest infested with ferocious beasts and black snakes? How did the two princes, under a vow of austerity, get down from the chariot and proceed on foot? Fortunate indeed are you, O charioteer, for you saw my two sons enter the wilderness, as the two Aśvinī-kumāras entered the Mandara Mountain. When They reached the forest, what did Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā each say? Tell me how Rāma was sitting, lying down and eating. I shall survive on this information, as King Yayāti survived amongst the goodly souls.”

Urged by the monarch, the charioteer spoke with a faltering voice choked up with tears: “Joining His palms, O king, and observing the rules of conduct, Rāma bowed His head and told me the following:

O charioteer, You should offer respects on My behalf at the feet of My great-souled father, who is self-realized and deserves to be bowed to. All the ladies of the palace should be asked on My behalf of their welfare in particular, offering them respects according to their station. And My mother Kausalyā should be told of My well-being and attention to the execution of My duties.

The following message should be given to her: “Always remain dedicated to righteousness and always be on time at the sacrificial fire shed. And always serve the feet of your husband as if he were a god. Abandoning self-esteem and pride, treat all My mothers equally. Moreover, mother, treat Kaikeyī, who is so loved by the King, as most honorable. Prince Bharata should be treated as if he were King Daśaratha himself. Even though younger in age, a king should be respected. Remember your duty toward a king.”

Bharata should also be informed of My well-being and given the following message: “Behave justly toward all Your mothers. When father installs You as the heir apparent, continue serving him, for he still occupies the throne of the kingdom. Although father has exceeded the age limit for ruling, do not overthrow him. On the power of his authority alone, remain as the prince regent.”

“Crying profusely, He further told me to say to Bharata: ‘You should look after My mother, who is extremely fond of Me, as if she were Your own mother.’ Even as He gave me these instructions, the mighty and glorious Rāma, whose eyes resemble the petals of a red lotus, continued to shed profuse tears.

“Highly enraged and hissing as He spoke, Lakṣmaṇa said: ‘Why has this innocent prince been exiled? Upon hearing Kaikeyī’s demand, the king immediately carried it out without caring whether it should have been done or not, for which We are now suffering. If Rāma’s exile was brought about by an act of greed or because of the offering of a boon, an entirely evil deed has been committed. Whether this was done by the king’s desire or by the will of Providence, I do not find any reason to forsake Rāma. His exile, carried out due to lack of intelligence, imprudence and which contradicts good reason, will bring about remorse. I therefore do not consider the king My father. But Rāma is My brother and master, My friend and also My father. How can people be pleased by this act of the king, when he has forsaken Rāma, who is dear to everyone and always engaged in their benefit? After exiling the righteous Rāma, who delights all people, even against their will, how can he continue to be the king?’

“Sītā, on the other hand, stood motionless as She sighed deeply, as if She was possessed by some ghost. It appeared that She had lost Her

memory. The illustrious princess had previous never know ill fortune. She was simply crying due to distress and did not say anything to me. Seeing that I was about to leave, She suddenly burst into tears as She stared at Her husband with Her withered face. This is exactly what Rāma, with folded hands and tears in His eyes and protected by the arms of Lakṣmaṇa, said to Me. And so also did Sītā, engaged in austerities, weep as She looked at the royal chariot and at me.”

## SUMANTRA DESCRIBES THE PLIGHT OF KOSALA

Sumantra continued: “I bid farewell to the two princes with joined palms as they departed for the wilderness. Then I mounted the chariot to depart, controlling my sadness. On attempting to return, however, my horses refused to follow the path and stood there shedding hot tears. I stayed with Guha for many days, hoping that Rāma might send me some message. Devastated by this great calamity in your kingdom, even the trees with all their leaves, flowers, shoots and buds have withered. The water of the rivers, ponds and lakes has dried up. The leaves of the forests and groves have withered. Snakes do not slither about, nor do ferocious beasts prowl. The whole forest has become devoid of sound due to anxiety over Rāma. The water of the rivers has become dirty and the lotuses in them have dropped their leaves. The lotus flowers in ponds have dried up and the fish and water fowl have died. Water flowers and those growing on land are no longer as fragrant as they were before, nor are their fruits as luscious. The gardens of this city are desolate; the birds have all vanished. Nor do I find the gardens very pleasing.

“No one greeted me when I entered Ayodhyā. Not seeing Rāma, people sighed again and again. Seeing that the royal chariot had returned without Rāma, Your Majesty, all the people on the royal highway had faces covered with tears. When the ladies in the mansions, apartment buildings and palaces saw that the chariot had come back, the ladies, pained at not seeing Rāma, began crying out in despair. The ladies who were very disturbed stared at each other silently with tears washing off their eye cosmetics. I can not perceive any difference between the distress shown by Rāma’s friend’s, by His enemies, or by neutral persons. With its cheerless people and miserable elephants and horses, the city is withering with cries of anguish, sigh and moans. O great king, the whole city of Ayodhyā is devoid of happiness and tormented by the banishment of Rāma, just as Kausalyā is.”

After hearing Sumantra's statements, King Daśaratha replied to the charioteer in a most pitiful manner, his voice choking up with tears: "I did not consult with those worthy of giving advice, dictated as I was by the sinful-minded Kaikeyī. I took this action suddenly, without conferring with my well-wishers, ministers and learned scholars, because of My infatuation with my wife. This great calamity has surely overtaken us by the will of Providence for the destruction of this dynasty, O charioteer! If I have ever at any time done some good deed for you, then take me at once to Rāma, for my senses urge me to see Him. If my order still has any force, let Rāma be brought back. I cannot survive with Rāma for more than an hour or so. Perhaps the strong-armed prince might have gone farther away by now. Helping me mount a chariot, show me the way to Rāma! Where is Rāma, whose teeth resemble jasmine buds and who carries a mighty bow? I can survive only if I see Him in the company of Sītā. If I cannot see the strong-armed Rāma, whose eyes are reddish and who wears earrings adorned with pearls and gems, I will go to the world of the dead. What could be more painful than this when I am unable to see Rāma while in this condition? O Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa! O Sītā! You do not know that I am about to die from sorrow like a destitute wretch!"

His mind being overwhelmed by anxiety, the king was drowning in an ocean of sorrow difficult to cross. In that condition he said: "Without Rāma, this ocean of suffering into which I have sunk, O Kausalyā, is difficult to cross while I am alive. Rāma's anguish in being separated from us is the strong force of this ocean. Separation from Sītā is its distant shore. The in-going and out-going breaths are its waves and eddies. Our tears are the murky streams which sullen its waters. Our flapping arms are the fish. The cries of grief are its roar. Our disheveled hair is its seaweed. Kaikeyī is an underwater fire; it is the cause of my profuse tears. The words of the hunchback Mantharā are big crocodiles. The boons which I gave are the coast and Rāma's exile is its extent. It is unfortunate that I was not able to see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa here today, even though I desired so."

Speaking in this way, the illustrious king lamented and soon collapsed on the couch. As the fallen monarch mourned piteously on account of Rāma, Queen Kausalyā became twice as frightened.

## SUMANTRA CONSOLES KAUSALYĀ

Kausalyā, who was constatly shaking as if possessed by a ghost, had fallen on the floor as if she were dead. Thereafter she said to Sumantra: “Take me to where Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa are. Without Them I am unable to live another moment. Please bring the chariot immediately and take me to the Daṇḍaka Forest. If I do not follow Them, I shall go to the abode of Death!”

In order to console the queen, the charioteer spoke falteringly to her due to tears: “Give up your sorrow, infatuation and delusion born from sadness, for, having left aside His anxiety, Rāma will reside in the forest. Serving the lotus feet of Rāma while in the forest, the self-controlled and dutiful Lakṣmaṇa is securing His passage to the heavenly world. Although Sītā has been reduced to living in a solitary forest, She is unafraid and tranquil, her mind being fixed on Rāma. One cannot detect the least dejection in Her. It appears to me that She must be accustomed to being away from home. Sītā finds as much pleasure in the lonely forests as She used to enjoy in the gardens of Ayodhyā. The chaste Sītā, whose face shone like a full moon, must have enjoyed girlish pleasures accompanied by Rāma in the solitary forest. Without Rāma, there would be no difference between Ayodhyā and the wilderness, for Her heart is dedicated to Him and Her life depends on Him. Seeing villages, towns, the courses of rivers and trees of all kinds, She inquires about them from Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. When She sees Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa at Her side, She thinks that She is in a pleasure garden only one krośa from Ayodhyā. I only remember this much about Sītā. When talking about Kaikeyī, She inadvertently said something which I do not now deem proper.

To amend what he had just carelessly uttered, the charioteer spoke the following sweet words that were pleasing to the queen: “Sītā’s effulgence, which is like moonlight, is not diminished by travel, the force of the wind, fear or the heat of the sun. The face of the munificent Sītā is like a thousand-petalled lotus. Its effulgence, which is equal to the full moon,



never fades. Even though the soles of Her feet are no longer tinted with the reddish cosmetics, they still appear so and resemble lotus blossoms. The lovely Sītā, who still wears jewelery out of love for Rāma, makes a sound like the cackling of a swan as She strolls with Her ankle bells. Although living in the wilderness, She does not give in to fear when She sees elephants, lions and tigers, depending as She does on the arms of Rāma. Neither They, nor you, nor the king should be pitied. This story will always be preserved in this world. Abandoning Their sorrow, with a delighted mind They have taken up the path trodden by great sages. Residing in the forest eating only roots and fruits, They are carrying out the order of Their father.”

Although the charioteer requested her not to lament with wise words, because of her grief for her son, She repeatedly moaned: “O my darling! O son! O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty!”

## KAUSALYĀ CHASTISES DAŚARATHA

Because of the departure to the forest of Rāma, who was very dear to everyone, Kausalyā wept and addressed the king: “Although your glory extends throughout the three worlds and you are compassionate, munificent and speak sweetly, you never took into consideration how your two sons accompanied by Sītā would bear the difficulty of forest life, having been raised in comfort. How will that young and tender woman who is accustomed to comfort bear the heat and cold? How will the broad-eyed Sītā, who has always eaten rich food with sauces live on wild rice in the forest? After listening to the sweet sound of vocal and instrumental music, how will She hear the frightening roars of carnivorous lions?

“Where will the powerful Rāma, who is as reassuring to see as the flag of Indra, sleep, using His arms as strong as an iron club as a pillow? When shall I see Rāma’s face, whose complexion resembles the color of a lotus leaf, whose hair is fine, whose breath is as sweet as a lotus and whose eyes are like lotus petals? Surely my heart is as hard as a diamond because it does not break into a thousand pieces on not seeing Rāma! By your cruel deed my relatives are expelled from the city and are wandering about in the miserable wilderness, although They deserve to live in comfort. Even if Rāma returns after fourteen years, it is yet to be seen whether Bharata will relinquish the throne and treasury to Him.

“It is known that some people feed their own relatives on funeral anniversaries and then, having achieved their purpose, serve the brāhmaṇas. However, the qualified and learned brāhmaṇas, who are like demigods would not even accept food as tasty as nectar after that. Even if other brāhmaṇas were fed before them, brāhmaṇas who are sufficiently wise will not partake of their remnants, any more than a bull would agree to having its horns shorn. Why would not Rāma, who is senior and most worthy, despise a kingdom which has been enjoyed by Bharata, who is junior? A tiger does not care to eat food brought by somebody else. In the same way, that tiger

among men would not desire that which has already been enjoyed by another. Grains, clarified butter, rice cakes, kuśa grass, and sacrificial poles are not reused in sacrifice because they are defiled. Even so, being already enjoyed, this kingdom would be like tasteless wine. Rāma would not consider accepting it any more than He would the soma benegerage left over from sacrifice. Rāma will not endure such an insult, any more than a strong tiger would the touching of its tail.

“If the whole world were to oppose Him in battle, He would not be afraid. The pious soul instills righteousness in those who are unrighteous. Indeed, the valiant warrior can dry up the ocean with His guided arrows, exactly as all things are burnt up at the end of the age. He is as strong as a lion and has eyes like a bull, yet His own father has killed Him, as a fish eats its own offspring. Since you have exiled your son who was dedicated to protecting religious principles, it is doubtful whether you can see the truth taught in the scriptures by the ancient sages and practiced by the twice-born. For a noble woman, her husband is her first shelter, her children are her second, her relatives are her third; she does not have a fourth. In this regards, you are no shelter for me and Rāma has been sent to the forest. I do not wish to go to the forest. Alas! I have been utterly doomed by you! This kingdom and its inhabitants have been devastated by you. We have all been doomed, including your ministers. I and my son are ruined, and so also the citizens. Your son Bharata and your wife Kaikeyī will be pleased.”

Distressed to hear these strong condemnations, the king fell into a swoon exclaiming: “O Rāma!” He thereafter began to grieve and thus remembered a misdeed which he had committed.

## DAŚARATHA BEGS KAUSALYA FOR FORGIVENESS

Having been spoken to with harsh words by the angry Kausalyā, the grief-stricken king began to brood. After thinking for a while, he lost consciousness. It was a long time before the king regained consciousness. When he returned to consciousness, he heaved a long, deep sigh. Seeing Kausalyā at his side, he began to brood again. In this way he remembered the misdeed he had committed one day when he was out hunting. The king was disconcerted by that memory, as well as by remorse for Rāma, thus his suffering was twofold. With joined palms and his face lowered, he spoke with a trembling voice to the disconsolate Kausalyā: “Be pleased with me. This is my supplication. You are always affectionate and merciful to others. Whether a husband possesses good qualities or not, he is a manifested deity for a wife who is conversant with righteousness. You are ever-dedicated to religious principles and understand the good and evil of this world. Therefore, although you are distressed, you should not have spoken such depressing things to me who am in anguish.”

Hearing the king’s stern reprimand, Kausalyā began shedding tears like rain water gushing down a drain. Joining her hands together in the shape of a lotus bud and placing them to her forehead, the weeping queen out of confusion, spoke the following hurried syllables: “Forgive me. I bow my head to you and throw myself on the floor. I beg of you. I am doomed, O lord, and do not deserve to be forgiven. She is certainly not a chaste woman who has to be placated by her husband, who himself deserves to be praised by her in this world and the next. I know the principles of duty and that you are truthful. I said something improper out of sorrow for my son. Grief destroys patience; grief destroys learning, grief destroys everything. There is no enemy like grief. A blow inflicted by the hand of an enemy can be endured. However, an assault of grief even though slight cannot be endured. The five nights that have elapsed since Rāma went into exile I, whose joy has been marred by anguish, consider equal to five years. As I think of Him the

sorrow in my heart increases as the great ocean swells with the inflow of rivers.”

While Kausalyā was thus speaking choice words, the rays of the sun diminished and night ensued. Heartened by her words, the sorrowful king fell into the grip of sleep.

## DAŚARATHA RECOUNTS HIS MISDEED

On awakening after an hour, the remorseful King Daśaratha began to fret. Because of the banishment of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, sorrow gripped the king, as the demon Rāhu eclipses the sun. Remembering the sinful deed for which Rāma and Sītā had been exiled to the forest, the king of Kosala felt inclined to tell Kausalyā, whose eyes were dark around the edges. On the sixth night after the banishment of Rāma to the forest, at midnight, King Daśaratha remembered his misdeed. Remembering his wrong action, the afflicted king spoke to the mournful Kausalyā: “A doer reaps the fruits of his own actions, whether good or bad, according to how he performs them, O blessed lady. One who does not take into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of an action and does not see its fault is said to be a fool. One might cut down a mango grove because of its small flowers and plant a grove of palāśa trees. If upon seeing its large flowers, he became anxious for their fruits, he would be disappointed when they fructified. If one undertakes an action without taking into consideration its result, one will certainly regret its fruition, like one who cultivates a kiṁśuka tree. I myself have cut down a mango grove and cultivated palāśa trees. I have sent Rāma away at the time when I should have been enjoying the fruit of His association. Therefore, foolish as I am, I am lamenting.

“The sin which I am going to describe to you, Kausalyā, I committed when I was a young archer skilled at hitting a target by hearing the sound it made. I am suffering a misfortune brought about by my own self, as a child out of foolishness might swallow poison. As a person might be deceived by the large red flowers of the palāśa tree, I never realized the possible result of my ability to hit a target by its sound. At that time we were not married and I was the prince regent. With the onset of the monsoon season, I became extremely passionate. Sucking the moisture from the earth and scorching it with its rays, the sun had begun its dreadful southern course. Rainclouds appeared in the sky and the heat quickly dissipated. Then all the frogs, cātaka birds and peacocks became joyful. With the tops

of their wings wet with rain, the birds looked as if they had taken baths. With difficulty they reached the trees whose extremities were shaking from the wind and rain. Covered with water by the rain that had fallen and which continued falling, the mountain with its elephants in rut looked like the ocean. The streams filled with crystal-clear water flowed from the mountain like snakes. From contact with the mountain's minerals they became whitish, ruddy and ashen.

“At that most enjoyable time, I decided to get some exercise. Taking my bow and arrows, I drove my chariot to the Sarayu River. Desiring to hunt at night a buffalo, elephant, deer or any other beast of prey, I approached a ford in the river where animals would seek water. Then, in the predawn darkness, I heard the sound of a pitcher being filled with water in an out of sight place, sounding like the trumpeting of an elephant. Taking out a shining arrow that resembled a poisonous snake, I fired it toward the direction of the sound, because of my desire to bag an elephant. From the direction in which I had fired the snake-like arrow, was heard the clear voice of a forest dweller. Crying out “Oh! Ugh!” he fell in the water, the arrow having pierced his vital organs. From there he fell on the ground and a human voice said: ‘How could an ascetic like me be struck by a weapon? I came at night to this lonely river to get water. Who has shot me with an arrow? Or who have I offended, being a sage who has renounced violence and is living on what the forest provides? How could the scriptures condone the killing of a sage like me, who wear my hair in a matted mass and am clad in tree bark cloth and a deer skin? Who could have been interested in killing me? Who could I have offended? For executing such a futile deed that person will only come to adversity. No one will respect him, any more than they would one who desires to enjoy illicitly with his preceptor’s wife. I do not feel that sorrowed by my own death. I am more concerned about the fate of my mother and father. That elderly couple has been maintained by me for a long time. When I am dead, how will they get their sustenance? My elderly mother and father and I have been killed by a single arrow. By what fool with an uncontrolled mind have we been put to death?’

“Hearing those plaintive words and desiring to do the right thing, I dropped the bow and arrows. Hearing his agonizing cries throughout that night, I was bewildered with remorse and fainted repeatedly. With my mind disturbed, I approached the place. There I saw the ascetic, struck with an

arrow and lying on the bank of the Sarayu River. His matted locks of hair were disheveled. All the water had spilled out of his pitcher. The limbs of his body were smeared with dust and blood. He was lying down, pierced by the sharp point of the arrow. Staring at me with his eyes as if he were going to burn me up with his power, he spoke the following bitter words: 'What offense was committed against you by me while I was living in the forest, that you shot me as I was trying to draw water for my parents? Piercing my vital organs with a single arrow, you have likewise killed my blind and aged mother and father. My feeble and thirsty parents must surely be waiting for me. They will have to endure that thirst for a long time, for they are depending on me. Obviously our austerities and studies have not borne fruit because father does not know that I lie fallen on the ground. Even if he knew, what could he do? Weak and incapable of moving, he can do as little to help me as one tree can for another that is being cut down. Quickly go to my father and tell him what has happened. He will not burn you to ashes with his anger, as a wild fire consumes a forest. Here is the path leading to my father's hermitage. Approach him and appease him so that he does not curse you. Free me from pain by extracting the arrow, O king. Its sharp point is tormenting my organs as a river eats away at a soft sandy bank.'

"As I was about to pull the arrow out, the following thought occurred to me: 'As long as the arrow is lodged in his flesh, he will continue to live, although suffering. As soon as it is removed he will die.' Understanding my anxiety and seeing how I was distressed, the ascetic who knew the meaning of the scriptures said: 'My eyes are rolling back and my limbs are flailing. I am unable to do anything. I am about to die. I am trying to restrain my grief with forbearance and to steady my mind. Let the remorse for having slain a brāhmaṇa be driven from your heart, O king. I am not a brāhmaṇa, therefore, do not be disturbed. I am the son of a śūdra woman with a vaiśya man.' As he was speaking in that way with the arrow piercing his body, he tossed about, rolled, fainted and trembled on the ground. I pulled the arrow out of his body. The boy, who was greatly distressed, looked at me and died. I was very dismayed at seeing him lying on the bank of the Sarayu River, sighing and lamenting, pierced by the arrow, and drenched all over with water.



## DAŚARATHA IS CURSED

Remembering the unmerited death of the ascetic, King Daśaratha spoke mournfully to Kausalyā: “Having committed that grievous sin out of ignorance, I tried to think, despite my bewilderment, that some good might come from this. Filling the pitcher with clean water, I proceeded toward the hermitage, following the path indicated by the ascetic. There I saw the aged parents, who were feeble and blind and needed to be lead around, sitting like birds with clipped wings. They were tirelessly talking about their son, expecting his return, though they were deprived of it and rendered destitute by me. My mind reeling with anguish, I became gripped with fear. As I entered the hermitage, I fell into greater dismay. Hearing my footsteps, the ascetic said: ‘Why are you taking so long, my son? Bring the water immediately. Your mother was anxious because you were playing in the water for so long. Come inside the hermitage at once. Whatever offense which your mother or I may have committed should not be harbored by you, my son, being an ascetic as you are. You are the shelter for us who are helpless; you are the eyes for us who have none. Our senses are centered on you. Why do you not talk to us?’

“Terrified by the sight of the sage, I spoke hesitatingly, not pronouncing certain sounds. Controlling my fear, I got the strength to talk and informed him of the calamity that had befallen their son: ‘I am not your son. I am a kṣatriya of the name Daśaratha. By my own actions I have attained this misfortune which is despicable to the wise. O holy one, with bow in hand, I went to the bank of the Sarayu River, desiring to kill any beast of prey or elephant that might come there to drink water. Thereafter I heard the sound of a pitcher being filled with water. Thinking that it was an elephant, I shot an arrow at it. On reaching the shore, I forthwith saw an ascetic lying on the ground about to die, his heart pierced by my arrow. At the request of the ascetic, who was suffering grievously, I drew near. I immediately extracted the arrow from his body. When the arrow was removed, he suddenly ascended to heaven, grieving for your holy selves and

lamenting that you were both blind. Out of ignorance, I have inadvertently killed your son. O sage, kindly instruct me as to whatever else needs to be done.'

"After hearing the cruel tale related by me, the holy sage did not curse me, though he was able. Stupified with grief, he sighed and bathed his face with tears. The sage replied to me who was standing there with joined palms: 'If you yourself had not told me of this unfortunate deed, your head would have exploded into hundreds of thousands of pieces! The murder of a recluse knowingly perpetrated by a kṣatriya in partiuclar can cause even Lord Indra to fall from his position. The head of one who purposely fires a weapon against an ascetic engaged in austerities and spiritual pursuits must certainly split into seven. Because you did this unwittingly, you are still alive. Otherwise, the whole Raghu Dynasty would have been brought to misfortune, what to speak of you.' The sage further said to me: 'Take us to the place, O king. We now wish to see our son for the last time.'

I lead the bereaved couple to that place. The ascetic was lying lifeless on the ground, having left for the abode of Death. His body was smeared with blood and his deerskin, disheveled. I immediately made the sage and his wife touch the body. Upon touching their son, the two of them collapsed over the body. Then the father said: 'You do not greet me now, nor do you speak to me. Why are you lying on the ground, my dear? Are you actually angry with me? If you are in fact displeased with me, my son, then look at your pious mother. And why do you not embrace her, my good boy? Tell me! Whose heart-captivating voice shall I listen to, sweetly reading any particular scripture in the later part of the night? Who will, after bathing and performing the evening worship and sacrifice, sit at my side and console me over the death of my son? Who will bring me tubers, roots and fruits to entertain me like a welcomed guest, for I am unable to work, indigent and helpless? How shall I support this blind mother of yours, who is aged and longing for you?'

'Stay, my son. Do not go yet to the abode of Yama, the lord of death. Tomorrow you will go with your mother and I. Distressed, helpless and living miserably in the forest, we shall soon, without you, enter the abode of Yama. Seing the lord of death, I shall say to him:

O king of justice, forgive me and allow our son to continued serving us, his parents. O pious one, O illustrious protector of the world, you ought to grant this one imperishable assurance to me who am in such a plight.

“Although sinless in this life, you have been killed for some offense committed in a previous existence. Endowed with truth, ascend to that world attained by glorious warriors. Go to that supreme destination, my son, attained by those valiant warriors who never retreat from the battlefield and who are killed while facing their enemies. Go, my son, to that same destination as King Sagara, Śaibya, Dilīpa, Janamejaya, Nahuṣa and Dhundhumāra. Go, my son, to that destination to be attained by those who study the sacred scriptures, practice austerities and penance, give away land in charity, maintain the sacrificial fire, take a vow of monogomy, give in charity thousands of cows, serve their preceptor or give up their lives voluntariy. Indeed, no one born in this family will attain an unfortunate destination after death, but he who has killed you will.’

“Saying this, the ascetic wailed pitifully. He offered libations of water with his wife to their son. Then the ascetic’s son who was conversant with righteousness rose to heaven by dint of his own good deeds in a celestial form accompanied by Lord Indra himself. The son spoke to the two elderly parents, consoling them: ‘By service to you I have attained an exalted position. Both of you will soon reach my station.’ Saying this, the son of the ascetic, in a calm state, quickly ascended to heaven in a celestial vehicle. After offering the final oblations of water with his wife, the mighty ascetic said to me, who was standing nearby with folded hands: ‘Since you have made me, who had but one son, sonless by one arrow, kill me right now. O king, that will not cause me any pain. Moreover, because you killed my son out of ignorance, I shall pronounce a frightful and most distressing curse upon you. As I am experiencing this sorrow caused by the death of my son, so also will you in the future mourn for your son. Because the ascetic was killed by you, a kṣatriya, unintentionally, you will not be held responsible for brahminicide, O ruler of men. A similarly dreadful and fatal situation will soon confront you, as merit accrues to one who gives charity to a priest.’

“After cursing me in that way and wailing miserably, the couple flung themselves into the flames of their son’s funeral pyre and thereupon rose to

heaven. Because of my present predicament, I have automatically remembered that sin foolishly committed by me because of my infatuation with shooting targets by hearing their sound. The fruition of that deed has arrived, as sickness results from eating unwholesome things with food. Therefore, O good lady, that curse has now taken effect!”

Saying this, the anxious monarch wept and said to his wife: “Because I am about to give up my life due to sorrow for my son, I cannot see you, Kausalyā, with my eyes. Therefore, touch me. Indeed, those who have departed to the abode of death cannot see. If Rāma were to touch me once, or acquire my wealth or become prince regent, I would be able to live. This is my opinion. The way in which I treated Rāma was improper, but the way in which He treated me was entirely proper. What wise man in this world would abandon his son, even if mischievous? And what son, on being exiled by his father, would not disdain him? I cannot see you with my eyes. My memory is failing. The messengers of Death are hurrying me, O Kausalyā! Oh, what could be more distressing than not being able to see the righteous Rāma of unfailing valor at the end of my life!

“The grief caused by not seeing my son of unequalled deeds is drying up my senses, as the sun dries up small quantities of water. They are not men but gods who after fourteen years will again see Rāma, whose charming face is flanked by shimmering earrings. Such fortunate ones will be able to behold His eyes shaped like lotus petals, His fine brow, His sparkling teeth, His shapely nose and His face which is equal to the moon. Fortunate are those who will see my Rāma’s fragrant face, which resembles the autumn moon or a full blown lotus flower. O Kausalyā, my mind is bewildered and my heart is sinking. I am unable to experience sensations, even when stimulated by sound, touch or taste. All my senses are disabled by the disruption of my mind, as the bright rays of a lamp cease when the oil is exhausted. This grief which I have brought upon my own self is leaving me helpless and unconscious, as a river eats away its own bank. O Rāma, descendent of the Raghu Dynasty! Your arms are very strong. O You who can arrest my suffering! O beloved of your father! O my protector! Are You gone, my son? O Kausalyā, I cannot see! O Sumitrā, you are so ascetic! O Kaikeyī, you are my enemy and the destroyer of my dynasty!”

Lamenting in the presence of Rāma's mother Kausalyā and Sumitrā, King Daśaratha reached the end of his life. After speaking in that way, the king, who was miserable due to the pangs of separation from his son, passed away at midnight.

## KING DAŚARATHA FOUND DEAD

Then night ended in the early morning light and entertainers came to the king's palace. There were bards, highly skilled musicians, learned genealogists and singers who were very expert at performing in different styles. The whole palace was pervaded by the loud sound of the praises and benedictions which they directed toward the king. While the bards were engaged in praising the king, certain eulogists clapped their hands as they recounted his glorious accomplishments. Woken by that sound, the birds in the palace that were engaged or perched on the branches of trees burst into song. The sound of holy verses, stringed instruments, benedictions and songs filled the palace.

At that time attendants, who were mostly women and eunuchs and who were of spotless conduct and expert in service, waited to serve the king as usual. Being trained in the procedure for bathing, they brought at the proper time and as required, golden pitchers filled with water scented with yellow sandalwood paste. Women, among whom were many pious virgins, brought before the king auspicious things to touch and sip, as well as other articles. Whatever was auspicious and fit for being offered to the king was kept ready. The king's retinue anxiously waited until sunrise, wondering why the king had not yet come out of his chamber.

Inside, the other wives of the king approached their husband's bed to wake him. After carefully touching his bed with reverence, they did not see any sign of life. The ladies, who were familiar with the symptoms of sleep, were mortified at not finding any pulse in his organs. On seeing the king like that, they began shaking like the tops of reeds standing in a stream. Uncertainty arose in their minds as to the veracity of that disaster. Exhausted by their sorrow for their sons, Kausalyā and Sumitrā were also fast asleep and could not be wakened, as if they had been overtaken by death. Drowned in grief, Kausalyā looked faint and pale and did not shine any more than a star engulfed in darkness. Sumitrā, who lay at the side of

Kausalyā nearby the king, also did not shine, her face being bathed in tears of sorrow.

Seeing both the queens asleep at that time, they concluded that the king had passed away while sleeping. Then those gracious ladies wept loudly like a wild elephant that had strayed from its herd. Roused suddenly by their cries, Kausalyā and Sumitrā shook off their drowsiness. Upon seeing and touching the emperor, they exclaimed: “O my lord!” and fell on the floor. Tossing about on the ground and covered with dust, Kausalyā did not look any better than a falling star.

Because of the death of the king, the ladies thought that Kausalyā, who was fallen on the ground, looked like the slain wife of a nāga. Then all the king’s other consorts, headed by Kaikeyī, began to cry due to grief, fainting and falling on the floor. The wailing of the ladies became even louder, resounding throughout the building. The palace of the king, who had come to his appointed end, was crowded with people who were greatly alarmed. Everywhere there was a tumultuous wail. Family relations were wholly bereaved. All happiness had suddenly vanished from the palace, which looked wretched and perplexed. Understanding that the emperor had expired, his glorious wives gathered around him. Crying pathetically, the afflicted women clutched his arms in helplessness.

## MOURNING THE DEATH OF KING DAŚARATHA

The king looked like a fire that had been extinguished, an ocean without water or the sun deprived of its light. With her eyes filled with tears, Kausalyā lamented in many ways. Holding the king's head, she said to Kaikeyī: "Be content, O cruel and evil-doing Kaikeyī! Having disposed of the king, enjoy the state without distraction. Rāma has gone to the forest and my husband has gone to heaven, leaving me behind. I cannot bear living any more than would a woman bereft of her companions on a deserted road. Who else but Kaikeyī, who has abandoned all virtue, would want to remain living in this world after forsaking her husband who is her worshipable deity? As one who eats forbidden food does not recognize his own fault, instigated by the hunchback, Kaikeyī has destroyed the Raghu Dynasty!

"When King Janaka learns of the banishment of Rāma with His wife Sītā, He will feel as sullen as I do. Although still living, Rāma, whose eyes are like the petals of a lotus flower, has vanished from this place. He does not know that I am now an unprotected widow. The daughter of King Janaka, who is engaged in agreeable austerities and who does not deserve to suffer, will undergo hardship in the wilderness. When Sītā hears the beasts and birds suddenly making frightful sounds in the night, she will cling to Rāma in distress. Being old, with few children and worried about Sītā, King Janaka, pained in misery, will surely give up his life. Devoted as I am to my husband, I shall this very day meet my end. Embracing my husband, I shall enter the flames of the funeral pyre."

The ministers who had come to remove the king's body, took away Kausalyā, who was weeping and embracing her husband. Putting the king's body in a tub filled with oil, they then did everything they had been instructed to do by Vasiṣṭha and others. Knowing everything about funeral procedures, they would not do anything more without the presence of one of the king's sons. Therefore counsellors preserved the emperor's body.



When the royal ladies learned that the ministers had laid the king's body in a tub of oil, they were upset and exclaimed: "Alas! He is dead!" With upraised arms and faces dripping with tears, the wretched ladies wept in grief, saying: "O king, why do you abandon us, who are already bereft of truthful Rāma, who always spoke sweetly to us? Abandoned by Rāma and widowed, how will we be able to live at the side of our co-wife Kaikeyī, whose intentions are so wicked? That self-controlled Rāma was certainly our master, and yours too. Giving up His royal fortune, the glorious Rāma has entered the forest. Bewildered by this adversity and mistreated by Kaikeyī, how will we survive without you and the valorous Prince Rāma? Having forsaken the king, Rāma, the mighty Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, who else will Kaikeyī not desert?"

Drenched with tears and gripped with sorrow as they were, the wives of King Daśaratha tossed about on the ground. Like the night sky without stars or a woman without her husband, the city of Ayodhyā did not shine without the great-souled king. With its people wet with tears crying out in distress and its crossroads and buildings empty, it did not look as nicely as it did before. While the king had gone to heaven out of grief and his wives were lying on the floor, the sun suddenly set, ceasing to shine, and the night set in, spreading darkness everywhere. All the assembled relations and well-wishers did not consider it proper to cremate the king without a son present. Thus they laid him in a tub of oil, considering that he had now assumed a form beyond imagination. As the sky is devoid of light without the sun, or the night sky is dark without its host of stars, the city of Ayodhyā was devoid of splendor without the king, its people in the streets and crossroads being choked up with tears. Gathering together in crowds, the men and women rebuked Kaikeyī. Due to the death of the king, there was anguish in the city, and no peace.

## DELIBERATION ON THE FUTURE OF AYODHYĀ

That night, which was rent with wails, devoid of joy, thronged with tearful people and unnaturally long, came to an end. Then, when the sun had risen, brāhmaṇas who managed the affairs of the king assembled in the royal court. These included the illustrious Mārkaṇḍeya, Maudgalya, Vāmadeva, Kaśyapa, Kātyāyana, Gautama and Jābāli. Facing Vasiṣṭha, these foremost of the twice-born royal priests spoke with the minisiters: “With yonder king having died out of grief for his sons, the night which seemed like one hundred years has ended with difficulty. The king as gone to heaven and Rāma is staying in the forest. The powerful Lakṣmaṇa has gone with Rāma. The two brothers, Bharata and Śatrughna, are enjoying Themselves in the palace of Their maternal grandfather in Rājagṛha, capital of Kekaya. One of King Daśaratha’s sons should be made king this very day, for without a king the state may come to ruin.

“In a rulerless country a rumbling cloud interspersed with lightning does not drench the earth with rain. In a rulerless country seeds are not planted. In a rulerless country a son is not submissive to his father, nor a wife to her husband. In a rulerless country there is no wealth. In a rulerless country there is no wife. This is great danger that prevails in a country without a ruler. In a rulerless country people do not construct assembly halls, nor do joyful people plant lovely gardens, nor do they establish places of charity. In a rulerless country the twice-born castes and self-controlled brāhmaṇas who are given to strick vows do not undertake sacrifices in which everyone is a priest and everyone, a sacrificer. In a rulerless country wealthy brāhmaṇas do not remunerate the priests in grand sacrifices. In a rulerless country there are no festivals or social gatherings with actors and dancers to enhance the status of the state. In a rulerless country litigants are unable to settle their disputes, nor are those who like to listen to stories pleased by the recitation of those to whom such stories are pleasing. In a rulerless country

young girls decked in gold do not go in the evening to pleasure gardens to amuse themselves. In a rulerless country wealth and well-protected famers who live by tilling the land and protecting the cow do not sleep with their doors open. In a rulerless country men do not drive in swift vehicles to peasurable forests with their wives. In a rulerless country sixty-year-old elephants adorned with bells do not walk on the open highway for fear of being robbed of their tusks. In a rulerless country there is not heard the constant sound of kṣatriyas plucking the strings of their bows as they shot arrows. In a rulerless country merchants from distant lands do not travel about with their valuable merchandise. In a rulerless country ascetic hermits who meditate on the self and pass the night wherever they arrive do not travel about. In a rulerless country there is no maintenance nor acquisition of wealth, and the army is unable to defeat the enemy in battle. In a rulerless country nicely dressed people do not drive about in swift chariots drawn by excellent steeds. In a rulerless country men learned in the scriptures do not gather in forests and groves for debates. In a rulerless country self-controlled people do not gather flower garlands, sweetmeats and monetary donations for the worship of the gods. In a rulerless country there are no princes strutting about with their bodies smeared with the pulp of sandalwood and aloewood, looking like flowering trees.

“A state without a ruler is just like a river without water, a forest without grass or a cow without a herdsman. A flag distinguishes a chariot and smoke indicates a fire. The king who was our distinguishing mark has gone to the world of the gods. In a rulerless country no one has any personal possessions; the people are always eating each other like fish. In the absence of the king, even those atheists who were punished by him for disregarding the boundaries of morality, grow strong. As the eyes always work for the good of the body, so does the king strive to establish truth and righteousness for the state. The king is truthfulness; the king is righteousness; the king is the nobility of his dynasty; the king is our mother and father; the king is the benefactor of the people. Yama, Kuvera, Indra and the mighty Varuṇa are surpassed by the great deeds of a king. Alas, if there is no king to indicate what is good and bad in this world, everything will be covered by darkness and will be indistinguishable! O Vasiṣṭha, while the king was alive we never overstepped your instructions, as the ocean never goes beyond the shore. O

best of the twice born, seeing how the nation has been left without a ruler,  
please coronate one of the sons of King Daśaratha or someone else as king.”

## VASIṢṬHA SUMMONS BHARATA

After hearing the statement of the sages, Vasiṣṭha replied to the king's friends, ministers and all the assembled brāhmaṇas: "Since Bharata, to whom rulership was bestowed by the king, is living happily with Śatrughna at His maternal uncle's home, let messengers immediately leave on swift horses to bring back the two valiant brothers. What else can we think of?" Then they all said to Vasiṣṭha: "Let the messengers depart!" Hearing what they said, Vasiṣṭha replied: "Come on Siddharta, Vijaya, Jayanta, Aśoka and Nandana! Listen as I tell you what you will have to do. Reaching the city of Rājagṛha on fast-running horses and giving up your sorrow, convey on my order the following message to Bharata: 'The family priest and all the ministers inform you that all is well. Please come here quickly. There is some important matter for you to do.' Do not tell Him about the banishment of Rāma, the death of His father or the destruction of the Raghu Dynasty because of this. Take silken garments and fine jewels for the king and Bharata. Go!"

When the messengers had been provided with what they needed for the journey and were about to leave, the ministers returned to their own homes. After finishing the preparations for the trip and receiving Vasiṣṭha's permission, they left at once. They followed the Mālinī River that flows between the Aparatāla Mountain on the north and the Pralamba Mountain on the south. Crossing the Ganges at Hāstinapura, they headed west. They reached the territory of Pañcāla through the Kurujāṅgala Forest. Seeing lakes, ponds full of blossoming lotuses and rivers with clear water, the messengers hurried along. They then reached the Śaraṇḍā River, which was full of sparkling-clear water and frequented by many kinds of fowl, and crossed it quickly.

Upon reaching a holy tree called Satyopacana on the western bank of the river, they circumabulated it clockwise and then entered the city of Kuliṅgā. Passing through the village of Tejo'bhibhavana, they reached the

village of Abhikāla. There flows the Ikṣumatī River associated with King Daśaratha's grandfather. In the region of Bāhlika they saw brāhmaṇas who had mastered the Vedas and who lived on only as much water as could fit in the palms of their hands. There they reached the Sudāmā Mountain. They saw the footprints of Lord Viṣṇu on top of the mountain. They also saw the Vipāśā and Śālmālī Rivers, as well as other rivers, wells with staircases, small ponds and lakes. Seeing the different kinds of animals, such as lions, tigers, deer and elephants, they proceeded along a great highway, desirous as they were to carry out their master's command. Although their horses were exhausted, they reached the city of Rājagṛha quickly, after a long yet peaceful journey. For the pleasure of their master Vasiṣṭha, for the protection of the people of Ayodhyā, and for the protection of the king's dynasty, they straightaway entered the city at night.

## BHARATA'S NIGHTMARE

The same night that the messengers entered the city, Bharata had a very unpleasant dream. The night was just ending when Bharata saw the ill dream and became very disturbed. Finding him disconsolate, His sweet-speaking friends began talking with Him to relieve his anxiety. Some of them played musical instruments, others danced to pacify Him, while others read out loud different comical dramas. The great-souled Bharata, however, was not amused by the hilarious jokes of his well-meaning friends. One close friend said to Him: "Why do You not enjoy Yourself, seated as You are among friends?"

Bharata replied to His friend as follows, so it is said: "Listen to the reason why I am so forlorn. I saw My father looking dirty and downcast, falling from the top of a mountain into a filthy pool of cow dung. I also saw him floating in that pool of cow dung, drinking oil out of the palms of his hands and apparently laughing repeatedly. Then he ate rice cooked with sesame seeds, afterwhich he smeared oil all over himself and dove headfirst into the oil again and again. In that dream I also saw the ocean dry and the moon fallen on the ground. The whole earth was consternated and seemingly covered in darkness. I saw a tusk of one of the king's elephants broken in pieces, and burning fires suddenly go out. I saw the earth rent with chasms, all kinds of trees withered up and smashed mountains that were smoldering. I saw the king dressed in black and seated upon a black, wrought-iron chair. He was being beaten by young women with either blackish or yellowish complexions. Then, wearing a garland of red flowers and his body smeared with red sandalwood paste, the pious king hastily drove toward the south in a cart pulled by donkeys. I saw a young and hideous-looking rākṣasī dressed in red who was dragging the king and apparently making fun of him.

"That is the nightmare which I had last night and for which I am so frightened. Either Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, the king or I is going to die. If one dreams of himself riding a cart pulled by donkeys, before long will be seen

the plume of smoke rising from his funeral pyre. That is why I am so forlorn, My voice, stammering, My throat, somewhat dry and My mind, disquieted. Although I see no grounds for fear, I am afraid. My voice is hoarse and My luster, diminished. I almost hate Myself, though I see no reason to do so. I am wondering about the course of that dream with its many events, which I could never have imagined before. Thinking of the king in such an unthinkable situation, I am gripped with a fear that will not leave Me.”



## THE MESSAGE CONVEYED TO BHARATA

While Bharata was relating His dream, the messengers arrived on their tired horses at the lovely city of Rājagṛha, which was surrounded with an impassable moat. Entering the city, they greeted the king and prince Bharata. Touching Bharata's feet, they said: "The family priest Vasiṣṭha and the ministers wish to tell you that everything is all right. They ask that you hurriedly return to some urgent task which you must do. Please take these most valuable garments and ornaments and present them to Your maternal uncle. Of these, two hundred million items are for your maternal grandfather, the king, and one hundred million items are for your maternal uncle, O prince."

After accepting the gifts, Bharata, who was very affectionate to his relatives, entertained the messengers with desirable things and said to them: "Is My father, King Daśaratha all right? Are Rāma and the great-souled Lakṣmaṇa healthy? Is the noble and virtuous Kausalyā, mother of Rāma, in good health? Is the pious Sumitrā, the mother of Lakṣmaṇa and the valiant Śatrughna, in good health? Is My own mother Kaikeyī, who is self-seeking, violent, irascible and thinks herself intelligent also healthy?"

Being questioned in this way by Bharata, the messengers replied most respectfully: "Those for whom You are concerned are all well. Indeed, the goddess of fortune, holding a lotus flower in her hand, has chosen to favor You. Please get Your chariot ready." Bharata replied to them: "I shall ask the king for permission to leave, saying that you are hurrying Me." Prince Bharata then went to His maternal grandfather and, as requested by the messengers, said: "O king, I shall go see My father right now on the insistence of the messengers. I shall come again whenever You remember Me. The king then smelled his grandson's head and spoke the following sweet words: "Go, my child! I give You permission. In You Kaikeyī has a worthy son. You can tell You mother and father about our well-being. You can also convey the same news to the priest Vasiṣṭha and other outstanding

brāhmaṇas, as well as to Your two brothers, the superexcellent archers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.”

The king of Kekaya honored Bharata with gifts of fine elephants, brightly-colored blankets and riches. He also gave Bharata dogs of tremendous size with sharp teeth, like tigers in ferocity and strength, that had been raised in the palace. The king also gave Bharata wealth consisting of two thousand gold coins and six hundred horses. At that time, Bharata’s grandfather, King Aśvapati, provided Him with esteemed and trustworthy ministers as escorts. Bharata’s uncle gave Him Airāvata elephants and good-looking elephants from the region of Indraśira, as well as fast-paced mules.

Bharata did not welcome the gifts of wealth given by the king of Kekaya because He was in a hurry to go. Indeed, because of being hurried by the messengers and the dream which he had, He was in great anxiety. The wealthy Bharata went and returned from His own residence, passing along the royal highway that was crowded with men, elephants and horses. Reaching the excellent palace of the king, the glorious Bharata entered it unchallenged. Taking leave of His grandfather Aśvapati and His uncle Yudhājit, Bharata mounted His chariot with Śatrughna and left. Hitching camels, oxen, horses and mules to their round-wheeled chariots, the escorts followed Bharata. Protected by a detachment of soldiers and unequaled ministers sent by king Aśvapati, Bharata, who had no enemies, left the palace with Śatrughna, as a siddha leaves the realm of Indra.

## BHARATA ALARMED AT THE SIGHT OF AYODHYĀ

Proceeding east from Rājagṛha, Bharata's party came to the resplendant Sudāmā River and crossed it. Crossing the broad Hrādinī River, the glorious Bharata crossed the Śatadru River, which flows westwardly. Crossing another river at the village of Ailadhāna, He reached the region of Aparaparvata. There He crossed the Śilā River. Heading in a southeastern direction, He crossed the Śalyakaṣaṇa River. After purifying Himself by bathing in the Śailāvahā River, He crossed it. Passing through the Mahāśaila Hills, He headed toward the forest of Caitraratha. Reaching the Sarasvatī River and the Ganges at their confluence, He crossed the region of Vīramatsya and entered the Bhāruṇḍa Forest. After crossing the swift and thundering Kuliṅgā River surrounded by mountains and reaching the Yamunā River, He allowed the soldiers to rest. Letting the horses rest their tired legs by cooling off in the river, Bharata bathed and drank, and then stocked up on water for the journey. The blessed prince crossed in His chariot the great forest which is not even inhabited by ascetics, as the wind blows through the sky. Finding the great river Ganges difficult to ford at the village of Amśudhāna, He crossed it at the famous town of Prāgvaṭa.

Crossing the Koṭikoṣṭikā River, Bharata and His soldiers reached the village of Dharmavardhana. He then reached the village of Jambūprastha by passing through the southern half of the village of Torāṇa. Thereafter He reached the lovely village of Varūtha. They spent the night in a lovely grove and then headed in an eastern direction toward the town of Ujjihānā Garden, in which there was a grove of Kadamba trees. After reaching the grove of Kadamba trees, Bharata hitched fresh horses to His chariot and allowed the soldiers to travel slower, for He was now in the territory of Kosala. He Himself hurried along. He passed the night at the village of Sarvatīrtha and crossed the river Uttānikā and other rivers and many different mountains on horseback. At the village of Hastipṛsthaka He

crossed the Kuṭikā River, and at the village of Lohitya He crossed the Kapīvātī. He crossed the Sthānumatī River at the village of Ekasāla. Reaching the Gomatī River, He crossed it at the village of Vinata. Soon Bharata reached the grove of sāla trees at Kaliṅganagara. Although His horses were thoroughly exhausted, He went through the grove during the night. The next morning He saw the city of Ayodhyā, which had been built by Vaivasvata Manu, having passed seven nights on the road, so it is said.

Seeing Ayodhyā before Him, Bharata said to the charioteer: “The city of Ayodhyā with its lovely gardens does not look very cheerful to Me. With its brāhmaṇa priests engaged in sacrifices, competent in the Vedas and possessing many good qualities, its many wealthy men and even standing protected by best of royal sages, Ayodhyā from a distance looks like a pile of clay. Previously there was a great tumult of men and women everywhere in Ayodhyā; I do not hear it now. People used to pass the night enjoying themselves in its parks, and when they were done, they would hurry home from all sides. Now those parks look very different to Me. Abandoned by lovers, it appears to be crying. O charioteer, the city looks as if it has become a forest. Prominent men are no longer seen coming and going on vehicles or elephants as they used to. The gardens previously looked very exciting and were quite suitable for the loving encounters of the people. Now I find them devoid of joy, their trees having shed their leaves on the paths and apparently weeping. Even at this time of the year one does not hear the deer and birds in rut exuberantly and inarticulately making sweet and impassioned utterances. Why does not a pure, refreshing breeze carrying the smoke of incense and the fragrance of sandalwood and aloewood blow here now? Why has the playing of kettledrums, mṛdaṅgas and vīnas, which used to be heard every day, now ceased? I see many different ominous and frightful omens, which are disturbing My mind. I find it hard to believe that My relatives are all right. As such, My mind is sinking into depression.”

Dejected and alarmed, His heart weary and His senses disturbed, Bharata entered the city protected by the descendants of King Ikṣvāku. His horses being exhausted, He entered the western gate called Vijayanta. The guards at the gate stood up to greet Him and raise a cry of victory, accompanying Him as He passed. Bharata greeted the guards and then sent

them back to their posts. His mind being agitated, He said to the weary charioteer of King Áśvapati: “Why was I brought here in such a hurry for no reason, O sinless one? My heart fears some misfortune and I find Myself crestfallen. I see here, O charioteer, all the omens said to indicate the death of a king. I see the houses unswept, dirty, devoid of beauty and their doors wide open. No one is performing sacrifice in them, nor is there any fragrant smoke from incense. The families look unfed and pale. I see the family houses destitute of wealth, The temples are not decorated with flower garlands and their grounds have not been swept for a long time; they are empty and do not look as well as before. The Deity worship in the temples has been abandoned, and so have the halls for sacrificial performances. The flowers for sale in the market do not look as nice as before. Even the merchants do not look as they used to, being seized with fear due to the present standstill in commerce. The birds and beasts in the temples and shines are forlorn. Moreover, I see the men and women in the city looking dirty, downcast, anxious and sorrowful, with their eyes full of tears.”

## KAIKEYĪ INFORMS BHARATA OF THE KING'S DEATH

Bharata did not find His father in his own quarters in the palace. Therefore He went to see His mother in her quarters. Upon seeing her son returned from abroad, Kaikeyī became overjoyed and got up from her gold throne. As soon as He entered the room, the righteous Bharata, seeing that it was devoid of splendor, touched the feet of His mother. Smelling His head, she embraced Him, sat Him on her lap and asked Him: “How many days passed since You left Your grandfather’s palace, and are You not tired from the hurried journey? Are Your grandfather Aśvapati and Your uncle Yudhājit all right? Has everything been well with You while You were away? Tell me everything, my son.”

Questioned so nicely by Kaikeyī, the lotus-eyed prince told her everything: “This is the seventh day since I left My grandfather’s palace. My grandfather Aśvapati and My uncle Yudhājit are both fine. The beasts carrying the gold and jewels which King Aśvapati gave Me became tired in route, so I have arrived first. Urged by the king’s messengers’ to hurry, I have come ahead of the party. O mother, please tell Me what I am about to ask. Your gilded couch, which is enjoyable for sitting, is vacant. The king’s servants do not look very happy to me. The king used to spend most of his time here in your apartments. I came here to see him, though I do not see him now. I will clutch father’s feet. Please tell Me where he might be. Could he be in the apartments of Kausalyā, the senior-most of his wives?”

Infatuated by her greed for the kingdom, Kaikeyī, who knew everything that had happened, told the unsuspecting Bharata about the dreadful calamity as if it were something good: “Your father, the great-souled and valiant king, who was fond of sacrifices and who was the shelter of the pious, has met with the same fate that awaits all living beings.” Hearing that, the pure-hearted Bharata, who was born in a virtuous family, fell on the floor, being overpowered by the pangs of grief for His father. Uttering the

piteous words: “Alas! I am doomed!” the valorous Bharata fell, hitting His arms against the floor. Smitten with anguish over the death of His father, His mind became disoriented and He lamented: “This couch of father’s looked so beautiful before, like a cloudless autumn night illuminated by the moon. Without the wise king, it does not look so well, like a moonless sky or a dry ocean.” Covering His handsome face with a cloth, He was sorely pained, weeping and moaning.

Kaikeyī saw her son, who resembled a god, fallen on the ground. Although He was like an elephant or the sun and moon, He was lying there like the branch of a fir tree cut down in the forest with an axe. His mother lifted Him up and said: “Get up, get up, O king. Why are you lying here, O glorious one? Good souls like You who are honored in assemblies do not lament. Your intelligence, which is dedicated to sacrifices, right conduct, study of scripture and austerity is like the radiance of the sun fixed on the sun.”

Bharata wept for a long time, rolling on the floor. Then Bharata, filled with sadness as He was, said: “I made this trip under the impression that the king was going to install Rāma as prince regent. Indeed, that conjecture has been proven otherwise. My mind is torn apart that I do not see My father who was always looking out for My best interests. O mother, From what disease did the king die before My arrival? Rāma and others were lucky to personally perform all of father’s funeral rites. Obviously the king does not know that I have come, otherwise he would immediately hug Me and smell My head. Where is that hand that accomplished things easily, was so pleasing to Me and which used to brush the dust off of Me when I was dirty? Please inform Rāma that I am here, for He is my brother, father and friend, and whose servant I am. For an honorable man, his elder brother is as good as his father. I shall grab His feet. He is now My only shelter. What did my father, the king, who was conversant with duty, righteous, most fortunate and firm in vows say before dying? I want to know what his last good instructions for Me were.”

Being questioned in this way, Kaikeyī replied: “Crying out ‘O Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa!’ the great soul, foremost of the wise, left this world. Bound by the law of time, like a great elephant bound by ropes, your father uttered these final words: ‘Happy indeed are those who will see Rāma return

to Ayodhyā accompanied by Sītā and the strong-armed Lakṣmaṇa.’ Hearing that, Bharata appeared further saddened by the second bad news and asked His mother: ‘Where is that righteous Rāma, the son of Kausalyā, as well as His brother Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā now?’” His mother then began to relate the unhappy event at the same time as that of His father’s death, as if it were good news: “Clad in tree bark cloth, my son, Prince Rāma has departed for the Daṇḍaka Forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa.” Bharata thereupon became disturbed with misgivings about the character of His brother. Remembering the greatness of His dynasty, Bharata asked His mother: “Rāma never stole the property of any brāhmaṇa. No innocent person, either wealthy or poor, was ever killed by Him. Nor did He ever enjoy the wife of another. Therefore, why was My brother Rāma exiled to the Daṇḍaka Forest?”

Due to her feminine nature, His capricious mother began to relate everything she had done. Kaikeyī, who considered herself wise, replied: “Rāma took no property of any brāhmaṇa. He did not kill an innocent person whether rich or poor. Nor did He even glance upon the wife of another with His eyes. As soon as I heard about the upcoming installation of Rāma as prince regent, my son, I asked Your father for the kingdom and for the banishment of Rāma. Sticking to his dutiful nature, he did as he was asked. Accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, Rāma was exiled to the forest. Missing his beloved son, the illustrious emperor left his body out of grief for his son. Now you should have accepted the throne, O knower of what is right. I did all of this, in fact, for Your sake. Do not grieve nor give in to remorse but be firm, O son. This trouble-free capital and kingdom are now under Your control! As such, my son, quickly perform the funeral rites of the king as directed in the scriptures with the assistance of the learned brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha and then have Yourself installed as king.”



## BHARATA REBUKES KAIKEYĪ

Upon hearing about His father's death and His brother's exile, Bharata was stricken with grief and said: "What good is a kingdom to one like Me who is afflicted by the death of his father and is deprived of his brother? You have heaped injury upon injury, rubbing salt as it were into my wounds by reducing the king to a ghost and Rāma to an ascetic. You took birth to destroy Our dynasty, like the arrival of the night of universal devastation. Unknowingly My father grasped a burning coal. My father was condemned to death by you, O women of evil appearance! You are a disgrace to your family. Due to your infatuation, this dynasty has been robbed of its happiness. After marrying you, My illustrious father, who was true to his word, was afflicted with the most piercing anguish and died. Why was my father, the king, who was so fond of righteousness killed? Why was Rāma exiled and why has He gone to the forest?

"After getting you as their co-wife, Kausalyā and Sumitrā have been tortured by agony over the exile of their sons. They would accomplish a difficult task indeed if they were able to survive. Surely the noble and righteous Rāma served you as excellently as He would His own mother. In the same way, My senior-most mother Kausalyā, whose vision is long-termed, dutifully treated you like a sister. Are you not ashamed at having exiled her great-souled son to the forest dressed in tree bark cloth? What reason do you see for exiling Rāma, the illustrious warrior who does not see other's sins and who has completely mastered the self? I think you, due to greed, are unaware how devoted I am to Rāma. That is why you have perpetrated this great calamity for the sake of sovereignty. Not seeing the two tigers among men, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, how can I find the strength to protect Ayodhyā?

"Even the king always depended on the powerful and mighty Rāma, as Mount Meru depends on the forests around it for protection. How and with what strength shall I bear the burden, like a calf struggling to carry the

heavy burden easily carried by a bull? Or even if I were to have the necessary strength and stamina to do so, I would not fulfill your desire to secure the kingdom for your own son. I will not. Sinful as you are, I would reject without the least hesitation, if it were not for the fact that Rāma always treats you as if you were His own mother. How did you think of such an idea which is abhorrent to our forefathers, O you who have fallen from all good behavior? In this dynasty the eldest of sons is installed as king; the other brothers respectfully obey him. I think, O wicked woman, that you do not respect the customs of royalty, nor do you know the eternal way of the life of kings.

“The eldest of princes is always coronated. All kings follow this, especially those who are descendants of King Ikṣvāku. The esteem which those who are only protected by their righteousness and who enhanced the good name of their dynasty has today been abrogated by contact with you. How has this deluded mentality appeared in you, O highly blessed lady, when you were born in a royal family? I shall not fulfill your desire, O sinful wretch, for you have instigated a calamity that may put an end to my life. This very moment I shall displease you by bringing back from the forest My sinless brother who is very dear to the people. When Rāma who burns with intense glory has returned, I shall become His servant with a contented mind.”

Pained with grief, the great soul Bharata perced Kaikeyī's ears with more sharp words, roaring like a lion on Mount Meru.

## BHARATA RESOLVES TO BRING BACK RĀMA

Insulting His mother in this way, Bharata, who was greatly angered, said: “O hard-hearted and evil-acting Kaikeyī, be deprived of the kingdom! Being abandoned by righteousness, wail for My death. What wrong was committed against you that both Rāma and the highly righteous king had to suffer either exile or death? By destroying this dynasty, you have incurred the sin of slaying a brāhmaṇa engaged in the study of the Vedas. Kaikeyī, go to hell, not to heaven where My father is. Since such a heinous sin has been committed by you through the terrible act of banishing a prince loved by all, you have placed Me in peril. Because of you My father has perished, Rāma has resorted to the forest and I have been subjected to infamy in the world of the living.

“You are My enemy in the guise of a mother. You are a vile wretch who out of the desire for the kingdom has killed her own husband. You should not talk to Me, O malevolent one. After getting you as a relation, Kausalyā, Sumitrā and the others have been filled with great anguish. You are not the daughter of the pious and intelligent King Aśvapati, but a rākṣasī who appeared in father’s dynasty to destroy it. The sin of banishing the truthful Rāma and dispatching father to the other world, though mostly incurred by you, also affects Me in that I am bereft of My father, forsaken by My brothers and despised by the whole world. Having left the virtuous Kausalyā deprived of her husband and son, what place will you go to at death, O hell-bound creature?

“Did you not know that Rāma born from Kausalyā is My eldest brother, is equal to My father and that He is the shelter of His friends and relatives? A son receives the limbs of his body from his father and his heart, from his mother. Therefore, a son is dearer to the mother than to other relations. Once the honorable Surabhi cow saw two of her own sons who had been pulling a plough fallen unconscious on the ground. Seeing how they

had collapsed after working half the day, she began moaning out of grief, her eyes brimming with tears. Her fragrant tears fell upon Lord Indra, who happened to be passing below. Looking up, Indra saw Surabhi weeping in the sky due to her great anguish. Perturbed by seeing Surabhi in such a condition, Indra, who holds a thunderbolt, said to Surabhi: 'I hope no imminent danger is about to befall us. Tell me, O well-wisher of all, what is the cause of your grief.' Surabhi replied: 'God forbid it! You have no cause for fear whatsoever, O ruler of the immortals. I am sorrowed at seeing my two sons sunken in adversity. They are almost dead, being beaten by the cruel farmer and scorched by the rays of the sun. Seeing those two bullocks that were born from my body harrowed by their burden, I feel distressed. There is no one more dear to me than my sons.'

"Seeing how Surabhi, whose thousands of children fill this world, was crying, Indra realized that there is no one dearer to a mother than her son. By the falling of Surabhi's fragrant tears on his body, Indra considered Surabhi to be the greatest mother in the world. Surabhi's activities are equally beneficial to all, actuated as she is to maintain the world; her main characteristic is the fulfillment of others' desires. When she who has thousands of children in this world will grieve like that for her two sons, then how much more will Kausalya suffer without Rāma. Kausalyā, who has only one son and is most chaste, has been deprived of her son by you. Therefore, when you die, you will achieve never-ending suffering. I shall without a doubt make amends to My brother and perform all the final rites for My father, thereby increasing their reputation.

"Aftering bring the mighty and large-armed Rāma back to Ayodhyā, I Myself shall enter the forest inhabited by ascetics. With the citizens looking upon Me with their throats choked with tears, I will certainly not be able to bear the weight of the sin you have committed. You have no other recourse than to enter a blazing fire, go yourself in exile in the Daṇḍaka Forest, or go hang yourself with a rope! I shall have attained My purpose and be freed from the sin of His banishment when Rāma, whose valor is unfailing, has returned to the kingdom."

Falling on the ground like an elephant pierced with a spear, the enraged Bharata sighed, hissing like a snake. His eyes were red, His cloths

disheveled and His jewels scattered. Fallen on the ground, the prince resembled a flag to Indra that had been lowered at the end of a festival.

## BHARATA VISITS KAUSALYĀ

After a long time, Bharata regained consciousness and got up. With tears flowing from His eyes, He addressed His miserable-looking mother and the ministers who were standing around: “I never desired the throne, nor did I consult with My mother about this. Nor did I know about the installation of Rāma as prince regent, for I was in a far-away land with My brother Śatrughna. Nor was I aware of the great-souled Rāma’s banishment to the forest, nor of that of Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā.”

Recognizing from a distance the voice of noble Bharata who was lamenting, Kausalyā said to Sumitrā: “I think that Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī, the doer of cruel deeds, has come. I want to see Bharata, who views things from a long-term perspective.” Speaking in this way to Sumitrā, the pale, distraught and trembling Kausalyā approached the place where Bharata was. Accompanied by Śatrughna, Bharata also proceeded at that time toward Kausalyā’s quarters. Seeing Kausalyā, who had fainted in the hallway, the two aggrieved brothers embraced her. Kausalyā in turn embraced Bharata and Śatrughna, and said: “Here is the kingdom you wanted. Now You have received it free from rivalry by the cruel deed of Kaikeyī! What good did the cruel Kaikeyī see in sending away my son to live in the forest dressed in tree bark cloth. Kaikeyī should also send me away soon to the place where my illustrious son, whose navel is golden-colored, is staying. Or, placing a container with the sacrificial fire on my head and followed by Sumitrā, I shall personally go where Rāma is. Or else You Yourself ought to take me right now to where my son is practicing austerities. This extensive kingdom with its abundant wealth and food grains and its numerous elephants, horses and chariots has been given to You by Your mother.”

Being chastised with many such harsh words, the sinless Bharata was as pained as when a needle is inserted in a wound. Loosing consciousness for some time, He regained consciousness and fell wailing at Kausalyā’s feet. Overwhelmed with grief, He then spoke to Kausalyā with

joined palms: “Why do you rebuke Me, O noble lady. I am innocent. You know the great love I have for Rāma. Let the intelligence of one who assented to Rāma’s exile never be able to follow the instructions given on the scriptures. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile attain the same fate as that of the greatest sinners, of those who urinate toward the sun and of those who kick a sleeping cow. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the same punishment as a master who does not pay a servant after having him work hard. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the same sin as one who bears enmity against a king who protects the citizens as if they were his own children. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the fate of a king who fails to protect the citizens after collecting taxes. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the fate of one who hesitates to remunerate the priest who executes a sacrifice. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the fate of one who fails to observe the code of fighting while on the battlefield. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile forget the subtle meaning of the scriptures taught by the preceptor. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile not live to see My strong-armed brother, who is as effulgent as the moon, seated on the throne. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the sin of one who eats food not offered to God or other superiors. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the fate of one who touches a cow with his foot, who reviles his superiors or who fosters enmity against a friend. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the sin of one who reveals to others what was disclosed to him in confidence. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile never be able to repay someone for service rendered; let him be hated in the world. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the fate of one who, though surrounded by children, servants and dependents, eats a meal by himself. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile not find a suitable wife, die without progeny and be unable to fulfill his religious duties. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the distress of not seeing a son born from his own wife and let him not live his full age. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile suffer the sin of killing a king, woman, child or elderly person or of abandoning his dependents. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile always support his dependents though the sale of liquor, honey, meat and iron, which is prohibited in the scriptures. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile be killed while fleeing the battlefield during the worst of fighting. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile roam around dressed in rags, begging alms with a bowl in hand. Let one who assented to Rāma’s exile be overwhelmed

with lust and anger and addicted to intoxication, women and gambling. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile never feel attracted to piety; let him indulge in impiety and bestow his wealth upon underserving persons. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile have all his vast wealth plundered by thieves. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the sin of one who sleeps during the sunrise and sunset. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the sin of one who commits arson, one who violates the wife of his preceptor or betrays a friend. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile be unable to serve the gods, the forefathers or his parents. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile forfeit his right to attain the world of the pious, the reputation of the pious and the activities of good people. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile be engaged in useless pursuit, abandoning the service of his mother. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer poverty even though having many supporters, and let him always suffer from fever, disease and hardship. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile disappoint the hopes of those who approach him with supplications. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile always delight in deception, being traitorous, unclean and always fearful of the king. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile ignore his chaste wife who approaches him at the time suitable for procreation. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the fate of a brāhmaṇa who becomes deprived of his children. Let that sinful-minded one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the fate of one who interrupts the worship of a brāhmaṇa or who milks a cow who as just calved. Let the fool who assented to Rāma's exile forsake his lawful wife and enjoy another's wife, abandoning all attachment for piety. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the fate of one who pollutes drinking water or who administers poison. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the sin of one who, having water, tells a thirsty person that there is none. Let one who assented to Rāma's exile suffer the sin of one who upon seeing a fight in the road, is partial to one of the contenders."

Even while making these assurances of innocence to Kausalyā, Bharata fainted. Thereafter Kausalyā said to Him: "O son, my present agony is further augmented by choking my breath with your solemn oaths. Luckily Your mind which possesses good traits does not swerve from righteousness. Since You are true to Your promise, my son, You will attain the world of the pious." Saying this, Kausalyā embraced Bharata, who was so fond of Rāma, and, placing Him on her lap, wept excessively. Bharata's mind was also



disturbed with grief. While Bharata was weeping, fallen practically senseless on the ground and heaving deep sighs, the night passed.

## BHARAT CREMATES THE KING

The sage Vasiṣṭha politely spoke to Bharata, who was grief-stricken: “Enough of this sorrow! Bless You, O illustrious prince! Perform the king’s funeral, for it is time.” Hearing Vasiṣṭha’s instruction, Bharata prostrated Himself on the ground before the sage. Then He had the preparations begun for the funeral. Taking the body of the king out of the tub of oil, they first placed it on the ground. The king looked pale and appeared to be asleep. After placing the body on an excellent bier decorated with jewels, Bharata began to lament: “What did you intend to achieve by banishing Rāma while I was away and had not yet returned, O you who know what is right action? Where will you go, having abandoned this miserable soul who is bereft of Rāma, the lion among men, who accomplishes everything easily? Now that you have gone to heaven and Rāma is wandering in the forest, who will effortlessly meet the needs of the city? Deprived of you, its lord, the the earth does not look so well; the city looks to me like the night sky without the moon.”

While Bharata was lamenting in this way, the sage Vasiṣṭha said to him: “All the necessary rituals for the king’s funeral should be carefully carried out, O strong-armed prince.” Bharata bowed to Vasiṣṭha, saying, “So be it.” Then He urged all the priests to make haste. The sacrificial fire maintained by the king was taken out of its sanctuary and oblations were offered into it by the multitude of priests according to scriptural rule. Placing the lifeless king on a funeral bier, the disconsolate and tearful servants bore him to the cremation grounds. Crowds of people walked before the king, tossing silver and gold tinsel and cloth of many colors on the road. Others had made a pyre of sandalwood, aloe wood, frankincense, pine, laurel and cedar. Tossing other fragrant substances onto the funeral pyre, the priests placed the king’s body on top of it.

Having Bharata light the funeral pyre, the priests recited the appropriate funeral prayers while other priests among them recited hymns from the Sāma Veda, as ordained in scripture. Attended by senior guards, the

king's wives also circumambulated the pyre clockwise, riding in palanquins and chariots according to their status. In that way, the priests officiating at the funeral and the morose ladies headed by Kausalyā all went around the pyre of the king, who had performed many sacrifices. At that time was heard the loud wails of mourning women that sounded like the cries of thousands of cranes. Weeping helplessly and lamenting repeatedly, the king's wives got down from the chariots on the bank of the Sarayu River. Offering libations of water to the spirit of the deceased king, Bharata, the king's wives, consorts and family priests returned to the city. They spent the next ten days lying on the floor and crying miserably.

## DISPOSING OF THE KING'S ASHES

After ten days had passed, Prince Bharata performed the rites for purification. When the twelfth day had arrived, He performed the obsequial rite called śrāddha. On that occasion, He gave the brāhmaṇas gold, jewels, abundant food grains, herds of white goats and plentiful cows. For the future good life of the king, the prince also gave to the brāhmaṇas male and female servants, vehicles and big mansions. Then, on the morning of the thirteenth day, the mighty Bharata, saddened as He was, began to lament. Going to the cremation site to gather the ashes, the choked-up Bharata addressed the king: “O father, My brother Rāma, whom you had committed Me to serve, has gone to the forest and I have been completely abandoned by you. Where have you gone, leaving Kausalyā unprotected with her son exiled in the forest?”

The circular spot where the king had been cremated was reddish and strewn with ashes and burnt bones. Seeing that, Bharata wept and fell falt on the ground, like a flag raised in honor of Indra stretched out in the wind. All the king's ministers then rushed to Bharata's side, as when the sages rushed to King Yayāti upon his falling from heaven. Seeing Bharata overwhelmed with grief, Śatrughna, thinking deeply about the king, also fell unconscious on the ground. Remembering the characteristics and gestures of His father, the disturbed Śatrughna lamented like a madman: “The formidable ocean of grief created by Mantharā, which consists of the dreadful boons granted and which is infested with the crocodiles of Kaikeyī's harsh words, has overwhelmed us. Where have you gone, father, leaving Bharata, who is still young and who had always been fondled by you, weeping? You used to see to it that We brothers had the best food, drink, clothes and ornaments. Who will do this now? Without you, the righteous and pious king, the earth should have split open, although it has not. Since My father has gone to heaven and Rāma has gone to the forest, I am unable to bear living. I shall enter a blazing fire. Deprived of My brother and father,

I shall not enter Ayodhyā, which was protected by the descendants of King Ikṣvāku; I shall go to a forest fit for practicing austerities.”

Hearing the two brother’s laments and seeing Their sorrow, all the attendants became greatly disturbed. Dejected and forlorn, Śatrughna and Bharata began rolling on the ground like two bulls whose horns had been broken. The great sage Vasiṣṭha, who was the family priest of the king and the princes, spoke to Bharata as follows: “Today is the thirteenth day since the cremation of Your master, O Lord. Why are you taking so long to gather the remaining bones and ashes to throw in the river? Three pairs of dualities afflict everyone: life and death, happiness and sorrow, gain and loss. Since they are unavoidable, You should not lament like this.” Picking up Śatrughna and consoling Him, the wise Sumantra told Him how birth and death were incumbent on all living beings. When the two glorious princes had gotten up, They looked like two flags to Indra that were abused by the sun and rain. The ministers urged the two princes, whose eyes were red and filled with tears from weeping, to finish the final ritual of throwing the ashes and bones in the river.

## ŚATRUGHNA CHASTISES MANTHARĀ

As Bharata was thinking about taking a trip to see Rāma, Śatrughna, the younger brother of Lakṣmaṇa, said the following: “How strange that Rāma, who is the shelter of all beings in distress and even of Myself, has been banished to the forest by a woman! What a pity that even Lakṣmaṇa, who is strong and valiant, did not save Rāma by restraining Our father. In fact, considering what is just and unjust, the king, who had gone astray by coming under the control of a woman, should have been constrained even before this happened.” While Śatrughna was speaking in this way, the hunchback Mantharā appeared, wearing all kinds of jewelery, at the eastern entrance. Her limbs were smeared with sandalwood paste and she was wearing royal clothes; she was decorated with many different kinds of jewelery. Because of the girdle, belt and other fine ornaments, she looked like a female monkey bound with many ropes.

When the door guard saw the hunchback who was responsible for this great sin, he grabbed her heartlessly and said to Śatrughna: “Here is the sinful wretch responsible for the banishment of Rāma and the death of Your father! Deal with her as You wish!” Thinking about what the guard said, the morose Śatrughna said to those present in the palace chambers: “Let this hardhearted creature reap the fruit of her activity which caused extreme distress to My brothers and father.” All at once He forcefully seized the hunchback who was surrounded by her friends and made the chamber resound with her shrieks. Greatly distressed to see Śatrughna so enraged, the hunchback’s girl friends ran away in all directions. All of Mantharā’s fiends and the palace servants thought: “Śatrughna is so angry, He will put an end to us. We shall go to Kausalyā for protection. Kind, merciful, righteous and glorious as she is, she will surely give us shelter.”

Incensed with rage, Śatrughna, the chastiser of enemies, then dragged the wailing hunchback across the floor. While Mantharā was being dragged about in this way, her beautiful ornaments were smashed to pieces

on the floor. Strewn with those ornaments, the splendid royal palace shone even more, like the bright autumn night filled with stars. Strongly holding on to Mantharā, Śatrughna rebuked Kaikeyī, who had come to help Mantharā, with harsh words. Greatly pained by His harsh and unpleasant words, Kaikeyī, out of fear of Śatrughna, ran to her son Bharata for protection.

Seeing Śatrughna so angry, Bharata said to Him: “Women should not be killed by anyone. Forgive her. I would have killed this sinful and evil-acting Kaikeyī Myself, if it were not for the fact that the righteous Rāma would be angry with Me for killing My mother. If Rāma knows that this hunchback has been killed, He will surely neither speak with You, nor with Me. After hearing Bharata’s advice, Śatrughna desisted from that crime and released the unconscious hunchback. It is said that Mantharā then threw herself at the feet of Kausalyā. Distressed as she was, she breathed heavily and wept miserably. Seeing that the hunchback was practically senseless from being dragged by Śatrughna, Kaikeyī slowly calmed her, who looked like a crane just released from captivity.

## BHARATA DECIDES TO BRING BACK RĀMA

On the morning of the fourteenth day, the ministers came together and said to Bharata: “Having sent into exile his eldest son Rāma along with the powerful Lakṣmaṇa, King Daśaratha, who was our most exalted master has ascended to heaven. Now You, O glorious prince, should be our king. It is appropriate and there is no offense in taking over the kingdom, for it is presently leaderless. Having gathered together all the paraphernalia necessary for the coronation, Your ministers and the citizens are waiting, O prince. Accept the throne which You have indeed inherited from Your father and grandfather. Let Yourself be coronated and protect us, O best of men!”

Bharata circumambulated clockwise around the paraphernalia for the coronation and then said to the ministers: “You are all intelligent people. You should not speak to Me like this. In Our dynasty it has always been the custom to crown the eldest son. Since Rāma is Our eldest brother, He will be the emperor. I, however, shall reside in the forest for fourteen years. Prepare a large and powerful army of four divisions. I shall bring My eldest brother Rāma back from the forest. Carrying all the paraphernalia for the coronation in the front, I shall go to the forest in order to find Rāma. There I shall coronate that tiger among men as king and bring Him back to Ayodhyā, as one would bring fire home from a fire sanctuary. I shall not allow this so-called mother of Mine to have her desire fulfilled. I shall reside in an impenetrable forest and Rāma will be king. Let engineers construct a road to the Ganges, repairing any existing roads, and let guards familiar with the difficult route follow us.”

To the prince who was speaking in this way in favor of Rāma, they all replied with the following auspicious remark: “May the goddess of fortune be with You who speak in this way, for You wish to give the kingdom to the eldest prince!” Bharata was pleased to hear the excellent benediction uttered by the ministers. Tears of joy flowed down the cheeks of His noble



face. The ministers and other people who had gathered in that assembly were very pleased and relieved of anxiety upon hearing Bharata's proposal. They therefore said to Him: "O best of men, in compliance with Your command devoted engineers have been instructed to build the road."

## THE ENGINEERS CONSTRUCT A ROAD

Those who were skilled in surveying land or constructing buildings, hard-working laborers, excavation crews, mechanics, hired workers, architects, skilled machinists, carpenters, road-clearing crews, lumbermen, cooks, plasterers, whitewashers, bamboo craftsmen, leatherworkers and capable guides proceeded in advance. That great multitude of people gladly set off toward the region of the forest where Rāma was, resembling the swell of the ocean during the full moon. Bringing along their fellow workers, those who were skilled in the construction of roads set forth with all the different implements they needed. Cutting down trees and clearing out vines, plants, bushes, stumps and boulders, they made a passageway.

Where there were no trees, they planted trees for shade, while others cut down with axes, hatchets and saws those trees which blocked the way. Others who were physically strong uprooted the fragrant and deep-rooted *vīraṇa* grass and leveled the uneven ground. Others filled in empty wells and wide pits with soil. They also quickly leveled all the sunken land thereabout. The workers also built bridges across the streams which could be bridged, crushed the stones which could be crushed and dug ditches to bring water to that region. By building dams they very soon turned streams into copious reservoirs of many shapes that resembled the ocean. In waterless regions they dug different kinds of wells with platforms around them. The highway built for the army looked as beautiful as a road for the gods. It was paved with plaster and concrete. It was lined with flowering trees in which love-struck birds cried out loudly. It was decorated with flags and festoons, sprinkled with water scented with sandalwood and strewn with different kinds of flowers.

The overseers had the diligent workers set up tents as instructed in pleasant areas where there were many sweet fruits to eat. They also set up the kind of tent which Bharata liked and decorated it so profusely that it also resembled an ornament. The architects commenced the construction of

those camps for Bharata at auspicious moments. Heaps of earth were raised and moats excavated around the camps. They were provided with good streets and resembled the camp of Lord Indra. They had rows of religious shrines and were surrounded with whitewashed walls. Flags could be seen on the well-constructed streets that were everywhere. The birdhouses on the roof of buildings that were erected seemed to be flying in the sky. Thus these camps resembled the capital of Indra. The highway reached the Ganges River, which was flanked with forests of many kinds of trees. Its waters were cool, clear and drinkable with schools of large fish. At that time, the royal highway, which had been gradually constructed by the skillful laborers, looked very beautiful, like a cloudless night sky filled with light by the moon and stars.

## THE ROYAL BARDS EULIGIZE BHARATA

Seeing that the night before the execution of the śrāddha rite was over, the skillful bards and panegyrists began singing songs of praise and benediction to Bharata. Struck with a gold stick, the drum which was beaten to mark the hours resounded. The servants also blew conchshells and played musical instruments at different pitches. Seemingly echoing throughout the sky, that great sound further tormented the distraught Bharata. As soon as He was woken by the music, He stopped it, saying: “I am not the king.” Then He said to Śatrughna: “Just see, O Śatrughna, the great harm that Kaikeyī has done to the world. Leaving Me an inheritance of sufferings, King Daśaratha has departed from this world. The emperor’s royal fortune which was founded on righteousness is wandering about like a pilotless boat set adrift. Even Rāma Himself, who is Our very greatest protector, has been banished to the forest by this mother of Mine who has given up all righteousness.” Seeing Bharata lamenting in this way in a distracted state of mind, all the women of the palace began to cry pitifully.

At this same time, the illustrious sage Vasiṣṭha, who was conversant in royal duties, entered the court of King Daśaratha. Accompanied by his many disciples, entered the wonderful chamber. It was covered with gold leaf and was studded with pearls and gems, and resembled Sudharmā, the court of the demigods. Vasiṣṭha sat upon a gold seat over which was spread a cloth decorated with a svastika. The sage, who was learned in all the scriptures, then ordered the messengers: “Since there is some urgent business for us to do, please quickly and calmly bring all the brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, fighters, ministers, army commanders, the illustrious Bharata, Prince Śatrughna, Yudhājit, Sumantra and all those who are favorable to Bharata.”

There was a great noise created by the approaching people who came riding chariots, horses and elephants. The common people greeted Bharata with loud cheering as He passed along, as the immortals do to Lord

Indra and as they themselves used to do to King Daśaratha. The assembly resembled a still pool in the ocean that was full of whales and elephants, and strewn with gems, conchshells and sand. Graced with the presence of Bharata, it looked as it used to when King Daśaratha was present.

## BHARATA REFUSES TO BE KING

Bharata, who was very intelligent, looked upon the assembly full of noble people which resembled a night illuminated by the full moon and stars. The glorious assembly was lit up by the brilliant cloth and body cosmetics of the honorable persons gathered there and seated according to status. That assembly of wise people looked as beautiful as the full moon of an autumn night. Looking at all the royal subjects, the priest Vasiṣṭha gently said to Bharata the following words: “My dear son, King Daśaratha, having performed pious deeds, has attained the heavenly world, bequeathing the earth with all its abundant wealth and food grains to You. Remembering the duty of pious persons, Rāma, whose conduct is always truthful, did not disobey the order of His father, as the moonlight does not abandon the risen moon. Your father and eldest brother have conferred sovereignty upon You without any obstacle. Enjoy it with the assistance of the ministers and quickly be coronated. Let the kings from the north, south, east and west, the yavanas from the distant western lands and the rulers of island kingdoms bring You countless jewels as offerings.”

Bharata was overwhelmed with sorrow on hearing this advice. Desiring to do the right thing, He began thinking about Rāma. The youthful prince began lamenting in the midst of that assembly. With a voice choked up with tears and sounding like the cackling of a swan, He said to Vasiṣṭha: “What person like Me could usurp the kingdom from one wise person who has studied the scriptures under a vow of celibacy, has graduated from those studies and is presently engaged in upholding the principles of righteousness? How can I, being born from King Daśaratha, usurp the kingdom when it and I belong to Rāma? In this assembly you should say what is right. Being the eldest and worthiest, and a pious soul like Dilīpa and Nahuṣa, Rāma deserves to inherit the kingdom, as did King Daśaratha. If I commit this sin which does not lead to heaven and which only an unworthy person would do, I will bring disgrace to the Ikṣvāku Dynasty in this world. I am greatly displeased by the sinful act perpetrated by My mother. While

seated here, I offer my respects with joined palms to Śrī Rāma in the impenetrable forest. I shall only follow Rāma. He is the king and best of men and deserves to have sovereignty over all the three worlds.”

Hearing Bharata’s statement which was based on righteousness, all those present in the assembly began to shed tears of joy and fixed their minds on Rāma. Then Bharata continued speaking: “If I fail to bring back the noble Rāma from the forest, I shall Myself stay there in the forest as Lakṣmaṇa is doing. In the presence of all you noble and holy people I declare that I shall try by every means to bring back Rāma forcibly. I have already sent ahead the hired workers and skilled laborers to build a road. I am determined to make a trip to bring back Rāma.” Bharata then said to Sumantra, who was sitting near Him: “Get up at once, Sumantra. Inform everyone of My order to commence the journey and dispatch the army also.” Delighted to be commanded in this way, Sumantra did exactly as he was instructed. The citizens and generals were also delighted to learn about the dispatching of the army to bring back Rāma.

All the wives of the soldiers were overjoyed to hear about the order for the army to begin the journey and urged their husbands to hurry. The generals ordered the soldiers with their wives to get ready to quickly leave on horses, ox carts and chariots as swift as the mind. Seeing that the army was ready, Bharata said to Sumantra who was standing at His side: “Quickly get My chariot ready.” Bowing his head in acceptance of Bharata’s order, the jubilant Sumantra brought the prince His chariot drawn by excellent steeds. Intending to convince His elder brother to return from the forest, Bharata, whose truthfulness and prowess were unfailing, spoke as follows: “Get up quickly, Sumantra, and go inform the generals to get the army ready, for I wish to propitiate Rāma and bring Him back from the forest for the good of the world.” Commanded by Bharata and considering his desire at last fulfilled, the charioteer Sumantra instructed all the leading citizens, generals of the army and friends and relatives of Bharata. In every household, the members of all four castes—the brāhmaṇas, the kṣatriyas, the vaiśyas and the śūdras—jumped up and prepared their chariots, camels, donkeys, elephants and pedigree horses.

## BHARATA REACHES THE GANGES

At daybreak Bharata got up, mounted an excellent chariot and quickly left with a longing to see Rāma. Mounting horse-drawn chariots resembling the chariot of the sun god, all the ministers and priests proceeded ahead of Bharata. Nine thousand caparisoned elephants followed behind Bharata as He advanced. Sixty thousand chariots carrying archers armed with different weapons also followed the illustrious prince. One hundred thousand riders also rode horses behind Bharata. Jubilant at the thought of bringing back Rāma, Kaikeyī, Sumitrā and the glorious Kausalyā rode in splendid chariots. Members of the twice-born classes also set out to see Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. Overjoyed as they were, they talked about Rāma in various ways: “When shall we be able to see Rāma, who is the color of a dark cloud, whose arms are strong, whose truthfulness is unailing, who is firm in His vows and who removes the sorrow of the world? Surely Rāma will relieve our suffering when we see Him, as the sun dispels the darkness of the whole world when it rises.”

Saying many good things at that time and embracing each other out of joy, the citizens continued along. All the highly esteemed merchants, as well as those who were not, and all of the good common people gladly went off to see Rāma. Those who were jewelers, skilled potters, cloth weavers, manufacturers of weapons, makers of fans, woodworkers, gem cutters, ivory carvers, masons, perfumists, famous goldsmiths, blanket weavers, masseurs, doctors, manufacturers of incense, distillers, washermen, tailors, dancers with their womenfold, boatmen and the heads of towns and villages also came along. Meditative brāhmaṇas respected for their knowledge of the Vedas followed Bharata in thousands of ox carts. All the people were nicely dressed in clean clothes and had sandalwood paste mixed with saffron powder smeared on their bodies. They followed Bharata slowly on their immaculate vehicles. Thrilled with joy, the army followed Bharata who had set out on the mission of bringing back His brother.



After travelling a long distance from Ayodhyā on chariots, palanquins, horses and elephants, they reached the area near Śringerapura on the bank of the Ganges. That was where Rāma's friend, the valorous Guha lived with his kinsmen, vigilantly protecting the surrounding region. Upon reaching the bank of the Ganges, which was adorned with ruddy geese, the army which was following Bharata came to a halt. Seeing that the army had stoped and beholding the holy waters of the Ganges, Bharata, who was skilled at speaking, said the following words to all His ministers: "Let my soldiers camp wherever they wish on all sides. After resting, We will cross the ocean-bound river tomorrow. Meanwhile, descending into the river, I wish to offer water to the deceased emperor for his welfare in his present exalted body in heaven." The attentive ministers responded: "So be it." Then they had the troops set up camp in different places according to their choice. After having the army, which looked beautiful with its equipment, camp down along the bank of the great river Ganges, the great soul Bharata also set down and began thinking about how to bring Rāma back.

## BHARATA MEETS GUHA

When Guha, the chief of the Niṣādas, saw that the army had set up camp on the bank of the Ganges, he said to his kinsmen who stood around him: “From here this huge army looks like the ocean. I cannot perceive its end, not even by pondering with the mind. If Bharata has come with evil intentions, as surely He must have, for His flag flies over yonder chariot, then He will either bind us with ropes or kill us for being devoted to Rāma. Desiring to acquire all that wealth of the kingdom which was amassed with difficulty, Bharata is going to try to kill Rāma. But Rāma is my master and friend. Intent on Rāma’s interests, stay here on the bank of the Ganges dressed in armour. Let all the ferrymen accompanied by soldiers remain on the Ganges River to protect it, and let them live on meat, roots and fruits. Let one hundred fishermen dressed in armour man each of five hundred boats. However, if Bharata is actually kindly disposed toward Rāma, this army will safely cross the river today.” Taking sugar candy, the flesh of roots and honey as a gift, Guha, the chief of the Niṣādas, went to meet Bharata.

Seeing that Guha was approaching, Sumantra, who knew how to act according to the time and place, humbly said to Bharata: “Here is Guha, the chief of the Niṣādas, surrounded by thousands of his kinsmen. He is well-acquainted with the Daṇḍaka Forest and is an elderly friend of Your brother Rāma. As such, let him see You, O descendant of King Kakutstha. Doubtlessly he knows where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are.” Hearing Sumantra’s advice, Bharata made the following request: “Let Guha see Me immediately.” Guha was elated to receive permission to see Bharata. Surrounded by his kinsmen, Guha humbly said: “This land is but a pleasure grove of Your kingdom. Your visit has taken us by surprise. We offer You all that we have. Stay in the house of a ferryman, which is Your own. Here are some roots and fruits, both fresh and dried, which the Niṣādas themselves have gathered, as well as wild cereals of various kinds. I hope the army, being well-fed, will pass the night here. After being entertained in different ways, You can go on Your way tomorrow.”

## BHARATA REVEALS HIS MIND TO GUHA

Bharata, who was exceptionally intelligent, replied to Guha, the leader of the Niṣādas in the following way: “Certainly your strong desire has been fulfilled, O friend of My elder brother, in that you wish to entertain such a large army.” Having said this, the glorious Bharata, pointing in the direction of the path to the forest, again spoke to Guha: “By which path shall I reach the hermitage of Bharadvāja? This region on the banks of the Ganges is densely forested and difficult to cross.” Hearing the prince’s inquiry, Guha, who was well-acquainted with the forest, said with joined palms: “Ferry-men who are familiar with this region and very alert will accompany You. I too shall accompany You, O strong prince. This large army is creating a certain doubt in my mind. Are You not on Your way to harm Rāma, who accomplishes tasks with no difficulty?”

Bharata, whose heart was as pure as the sky, affectionately replied to Guha: “May the time never come when such a thing could happen. Do not doubt Me, for Rāma is My elder brother and I consider Him equal to My father. I am going to bring Him back from exile in the forest. I have no other intentions. I am speaking the truth, Guha!” Hearing Bharata’s reply, Guha’s face shone with joy. Then he again spoke to Bharata: “Bless You! I see no one on the face of the earth equal to You who wish to relinquish a kingdom achieved without any effort. Certainly Your lasting fame will spread through the worlds, for You wish to bring back Rāma who has fallen into difficulty.” While Guha was talking with Bharata, the sun lost its splendor and night fell. After settling the army down for the night and being soothed by Guha, Bharata lied down with Śatrughna on the same bed.

Grief born of anxiety about Rāma overcame the great soul Bharata, whose vision was fixed on righteousness and who did not deserve such suffering. As a tree scorched by a brush fire is consumed by a fire in the hollow of its trunk, Bharata, who was burned by the sorrow over the death of His father, was now being burned by the anxiety over the return of Rāma.

All the limbs of His body began to sweat due to the fire of grief, just as the heat of the sun causes the snow pack on the Himalayan Mountains to melt. Bharata was crushed by a huge mountain of anguish: its mass of rock was contemplation of Rāma; its minerals were sighs; its trees were misery; its peak was langor caused by grief; its innumerable animals were swoons; its plants and bamboos were a burning sensation. Breathing heavily, Bharata's mind was greatly disturbed by His present misfortune. Because of His burning with heartache, Bharata could find no peace, like a bull separated from his herd. When Bharata met with Guha, His mind was in great anxiety about the return of Rāma. Therefore, when Guha again met with Bharata, he tried to console Him.

## GUHA CONSOLES BHARATA

The forest-dweller Guha then described to Bharata the laudable attitude of the great soul Lakṣmaṇa, whose strength was immeasurable: “I said to Lakṣmaṇa, who was staying awake to protect His brother, poised with and an excellent bow and arrows and possessing as He did all good qualities: ‘Here is a nice bed prepared for You, my son. Do not worry. You can lie on it at ease. We are all accustomed to hardship, whereas You are accustomed to comfort. We shall remain awake and protect You and Rāma, O pious prince. Indeed, no one is dearer to me in this world than Rāma. Do not be in anxiety. I tell You the truth standing before You. By Rāma’s grace I hope to achieve great fame in this world, abundant piety and wealth and unlimited enjoyment. As such, I and all my kinsmen shall guard with bow in hand my dear friend Rāma relincining on a bed with Sītā. There is nothing in this forest we are not aware of. We can in fact defeat even an army of four divisions in battle.’

“Spoken to in that way, Lakṣmaṇa politely replied: ‘How can I get any sleep, maintain My life or enjoy happiness when Rāma is lying on the ground with Sītā? Behold lying in the grass with Sītā Him whom even all the gods and demons together cannot defeat in battle! King Daśaratha had this exceptional son only after great austerities and many endeavors. With Rāma in exile, the king will surely not live much longer and the earth will soon become a widow. In fact, having raised a loud wail, the palace women must have already stopped crying due to exhaustion. The palace must be quiet by now. I do not expect the king or Kausalyā or My own mother to survive beyond this night.’

“Even if My mother survives in expectation of the return of Śatrughna, the saddened Kausalyā will definitely die. Failing to fulfill his desire of installing Rāma on the throne, My father will die exclaiming that everything is ruined. Those who when the time arrives perform the funeral rites of the emperor will be accomplished in purpose. Happy will be those

who can wander about in My father's capital, whose crossroads are at pleasant locations, whose main roads are well-defined, which has many mansions and palaces decorated with all kinds of jewels, which is crowded with elephants horses and chariots, which resounds with the beating of drums, which is endowed with all good fortune, which is populated with joyful, well-fed people, which has many pleasure parks and which is always jubilant due to festivals organized by different associations. When the term of exile is over, shall We happily return to Ayodhyā with the fortunate Rāma who has fulfilled his promise?’

“Even while Lakṣmaṇa sat and lamented in that way, the night passed by. In the morning, when the sun rose in a cloudless sky, I helped Them mat Their hair in dreadlocks and then ferried Them safely across the Ganges. With Their hair matted and dressed in cloth made from the bark of trees, the strong princes looked like a pair of bull elephants. Equipped with excellent bows and arrows, They looked all around as They departed with Sītā.”

## GUHA RELATES HOW RĀMA PASSED THE NIGHT

Upon hearing the unpleasant news which Guha related, Bharata began thinking intensely about Rāma. Bharata was youthful, had shoulders like a lion and big arms. His eyes were broad and shaped like lotus petals. His body was tender, though strong, and pleasing to see. All of a sudden His mind became totally distraught and He sank to the ground like an elephant pierced by goads. Seeing Bharata unconscious, Guha's face turned pale and he became agitated like a tree during an earthquake. Śatrughna, who was standing nearby, embraced Bharata and in anguish cried loudly. Then all of Bharata's mothers came there. They were emaciated from fasting and were miserable and afflicted by the death of their husband.

Surrounding Bharata, they cried. Kausalyā drew near Him and embraced Him. The grief-stricken lady hugged Him like a cow would her calf and asked Him: "My son, I hope no ailment afflicts Your body. The life of this dynasty now depends on You. Seeing You, O son, I live. Since Rāma and His brother have left and King Daśaratha has died, You are now our only protector. I hope You did not hear any unpleasant news about Lakṣmaṇa or my son Rāma. My only son has gone to the forest with His wife." Returning to consciousness after some time, Bharata consoled Kausalyā and tearfully questioned Guha as follows: "Where did My brother spend the night; where did Sītā and where did Lakṣmaṇa? What did They eat? On what bed did They sleep? Please tell Me, Guha!"

Guha, the chief of the Niṣādas, was elated by Bharata's inquiries and told Him how he entertained his dear guest Rāma: "Different varieties of cooked rice, eatable foods and fruits of many kinds were brought by me to feed Rāma. Rāma accepted it all and then returned it to me. Remembering His duty as a kṣatriya, He did not eat any of it. The great soul pacified us all with the words: 'We can never accept a gift under any circumstances. We can

only give a gift.' Rāma only drank water which Lakṣmaṇa brought. Then Rāma fasted with Sītā.

“Lakṣmaṇa drank the water that was left. All three of Them performed the evening worship with the silent and meditative recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra. After that, Lakṣmaṇa Himself brought blades of kuśa grass and quickly made a nice bed for Rāma. When Rāma and Sītā had seated Themselves on the bed, Lakṣmaṇa washed Their feet and then withdrew to a distance. This is the spot under this iṅgudi tree and this is the same grass upon which Rāma and Sītā slept that night. Slinging over His shoulders a pair of quivers completely filled with arrows and putting on gloves and carrying a big bow, Lakṣmaṇa passed the night only walking around Rāma. Armed with an excellent bow and arrows, I too remained there with my vigilant and armed kinsmen where Lakṣmaṇa was guarding Rāma.”



## BHARATA DECIDES TO BECOME AN ASCETIC

Listening attentively to what Guha was saying, Bharata and His ministers reached the foot of the īṅgudi tree and saw Rāma's bed. Bharata said to His mothers: "Here the great soul Rāma passed the night sleeping on the ground. These are the blades of grass crushed by His body. Rāma, who was engendered by the wise and fortunate King Daśaratha of a great royal lineage, does not deserve to sleep on the ground. Being accustomed to sleeping on a bed piled high with soft blankets and fleece, how does that tiger among men sleep on the ground? He always slept in kiosks on the roofs of palaces and mansions that had floors paved with gold and silver and were covered with fine carpets. They were piled with different flowers and scented with the essence of sandalwood and aloe. The quarters were as bright as a white cloud and resounded with the chatter of parrots. They were cool and pervaded by a sweet fragrance. They challenged the image of Mount Meru with their walls made of gold. Rāma used to be woken in the morning with songs and instrumental music, the beating of drums and the jingle of people's ankle bells. At that time He would be praised by bards, minstrels and panegyrists with suitable songs and verses.

"In this world such a thing is unbelievable and does not appear to Me to be true. Certainly there is no deity more powerful than time, by which Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, was forced to sleep on the ground, and by which Sītā, the lovely daughter of King Janaka and the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha also had to sleep on the ground. This is My brother's bed and those are the marks made when He turned over, crushing the grass into the hard ground with His limbs. I think Sītā slept with Her jewelery on, for here and here can be seen tiny bits of gold. Sītā's veil obviously became ensnared on the grass here, for there are strands of silk stuck to it. I think that Her husband's bed must be cozy, since the chaste and youthful Sītā, who is austere though tender, did not find it uncomfortable.

“Alas! I am doomed. I am so heartless that on My account Rāma and His consort must sleep on such a bed like indigents! Rāma is born in a line of universal sovereigns. He brings happiness to the whole world. He does good to all. His complexion is dark like a blue lotus flower. The edges of His eyes are reddish. His sight is very pleasing. He is deserving of happiness and does not deserve suffering. How did He give up His dear and unsurpassed kingdom to lie down on the ground? Blessed indeed is the highly fortunate Lakṣmaṇa, whose body exhibits auspicious marks. He was able to follow His brother Rāma at a difficult time. Sītā has surely accomplished Her purpose by following Her husband into the forest. We are all in doubt, bereft of that great soul! Now that King Daśaratha has gone to heaven and Rāma has taken shelter of the forest, the earth appears to me to be as desolate as a boat without its helmsmen. Nor can anyone even claim in their minds the earth which is protected by the strong arms of Rāma as He resides in the forest. Although Ayodhyā’s walls are unprotected, its horses and elephants roam about loose, its gateways never closed, its troops demoralized and is desolate and reduced to a wretched condition, its enemies do not claim it any more than one would want to eat poisoned food.

“From this day onward I shall sleep on the ground on a bed of grass, eating only fruits and roots, and shall let My hair become matted and wear cloth made from the bark of trees. I shall happily live in the forest in place of Rāma for the rest of His exile so that His promise is not broken. Śatrughna will accompany Me while I reside in exile, and Rāma with Lakṣmaṇa will protect Ayodhyā. The twice-born brāhmaṇas will install Rāma on the throne of Ayodhyā. May the gods allow this desire of Mine to come true. If He does not agree after being entreated by Me in many ways with My head bowed, then I shall stay with Him for as long as He remains in the forest. He cannot ignore Me.”

## BHARATA'S ARMY CROSSES THE GANGES

Passing the night there on the bank of the Ganges, Bharata rose at daybreak and said to Śatrughna: "Get up, Śatrughna! Why are You still sleeping? Bring Guha, the chief of the Niṣādas, here at once! He will ferry Us across the river. Good luck!" Śatrughna replied: "I have stayed away, thinking of Rāma without sleeping, just as You have." As Bharata and Śatrughna were talking, Guha arrived at an opportune moment and said with joined palms: "I hope You passed the night comfortably on the bank of the Ganges, O descendant of King Kakutstha. I also hope that You, along with Your army, are in good health."

Bharata, who was subordinate to Rāma replied to Guha's affectionate inquiry: "It was a comfortable night for Us, O wise one. And we have been well-entertained by you. Let your boatmen now ferry us across the Ganges on their many launches." Hurrying to the town of Śrīngaverapura, Guha said to his kinsmen: "Get up! Wake up! May you all be truly blessed! Haul the boats ashore. I want to ferry the army across the river. In accordance with their chief's order, they got up and quickly brought from all sides five hundred boats. They also brought other boats known as svastikas, meaning "good luck." These were very beautiful, being decked with flags and hung with large bells, and they were well built and manned by rowers. Then Guha brought an especially beautiful boat which was spread with white rugs and resounding with joyful music.

Bharata and the mighty Śatrughna, as well as Kausalyā, Sumitrā and all the other royal ladies boarded the boat. First the sage Vasiṣṭha and other elderly brāhmaṇas took their seats, after that, the royal ladies. Then the carts and provisions were brought on board. A loud din rose in the sky from the soldiers' setting fire to their campsites, the descent of the troops to the water's edge and the collecting of utensils. When the men were seated, the swift boats festooned with flags and steered by fishermen set sail. Some boats were full of women, others with horses, while others carried costly

chariots and draft animals. When they reached the opposite shore, the passengers were allowed to disembark. Then the boats departed, the fishermen plying them to their respective destinations.

Spurred by their drivers, the festooned elephants swam across the Ganges, shining like winged mountains. Some men crossed seated on boats, while other crossed on rafts, others floated using clay pots and others swam using their arms. After being ferried across the Ganges by the fishermen themselves, the pious army started for the forest of Prayāga, the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā Rivers, at mid-morning. Reaching the area, Bharata relieved the troops, telling them to set up camp. Then the great soul Bharata, accompanied by the family priests and ministers, set out to meet the foremost of sages, Bharadvāja. When they arrived at the hermitage of Bharadvāja, who was not only a brāhmaṇa but also a priest of the gods, Bharata beheld the large and lovely forest with simple thatched huts scattered here and there.

## BHARATA MEETS BHARADVĀJA

After reaching the area of Bharadvāja's hermitage, Bharata left the troops one krośa away and proceeded on foot with His ministers, keeping Vasiṣṭha ahead. He left behind His ornaments and weapons and wore only simple silk garments. When Bharadvāja was clearly visible, Bharata made the ministers halt and He followed after Vasiṣṭha. At the sight of Vasiṣṭha, the great ascetic Bharadvāja immediately rose up from his seat and instructed his disciples to bring water for washing the hands of the guests. Embracing Vasiṣṭha and greeting Bharata, the powerful sage realized that He was a son of King Daśaratha. According to their status, Bharadvāja offered them water to wash the hands and feet and then fruits. Then he asked about the welfare of their dynasty, as well as of Ayodhyā, the army, the treasury, their allies and the ministers. Knowing that King Daśaratha was dead, he did not inquire about him.

Vasiṣṭha and Bharata then inquired about whether everything was well with Bharadvāja's health, sacrificial fire, disciples, trees, deer and birds. Informing them that everything was fine, the glorious Bharadvāja, inquired as follows, bound as he was by affection for Rāma: "For what reason have You come here, leaving behind the care and administration of Your kingdom? Tell me everything, for I cannot free my mind from doubt. The highly illustrious Rāma is the destroyer of enemies and the promoter of joy in this world. He was born from Kausalyā. On the insistence of Kaikeyī, His father exiled Him with His brother and wife saying: 'Dwell in the forest for fourteen years.' I hope that You do not intend to harm Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa out of a desire to enjoy the kingdom without any threat."

Bharata replied with a faltering voice with tears flowing from His eyes due to sorrow: "I am doomed if Your Holiness thinks that I am like that! I could not even contemplate harming Rāma. As such, please do not speak to Me like that again. What My mother said while I was away is not pleasing to Me, nor am I pleased by what she has done, nor will I do what

she has asked Me. Rather, I have come to propitiate Rāma to bring Him back to Ayodhyā and to bow down to His lotus feet. Believing that I have come for that purpose, you should be gracious to Me. Please tell Me where the emperor Rāma can be found.”

Being likewise requested by the priests headed by Vasiṣṭha, the holy sage Bharadvāja kindly said to Bharata: “Service to Your superiors, self-control and following in the footsteps of the godly are proper for You since You were born in the dynasty descending from King Raghu. I knew what was in Your mind. I asked You simply to strengthen Your resolution and to further enhance Your fame. I know where the righteous Rāma is staying along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Your brother is residing on the great mountain of Citrakūṭa. You will certainly go there tomorrow. For now, stay here with Your ministers. Grant me this wish, for You are expert in satisfying people’s desires.” Thereafter Bharata, who was broad-minded and whose intentions were now apparent, said: “So be it.” Then the prince decided to spend the night in that hermitage.

## BHARADVĀJA ENTERTAINS BHARATA

After Bharata decided to stay there, the sage Bharadvāja invited them to accept his hospitality. Bharata said to Bharadvāja: “Surely you have shown the hospitality possible in the forest by washing Our feet and hands.” Laughing softly, Bharadvāja then replied to Bharata: “I know You are a very affectionate person who can be pleased by anything. However, You should allow me to fulfill my desire to feed Your army, O best of men. Besides, why did You come here, leaving the army at a distance? Why did You not come with Your army?” With joined palms, Bharata replied to the sage who was rich in asceticism: “I did not come with My army for fear of offending you, O holy one. In fact, a king or prince should always try to avoid the ascetics in their kingdom. Men, fine horses and elephants in rut are following Me, covering a large area. I came alone so that they would not harm the trees, water, land or huts in the hermitage.”

The eminent sage commanded: “Let the army be brought here!” Bharata immediately had the army brought there. Entering the fire sanctuary, the sage sipped water three times for purification and wiped his lips. He then invoked Viśvakarmā, the architect of the gods, for assistance in providing hospitality for his guests: “I invoke Viśvakarmā, the architect, and Tvaṣṭā, the carpenter. I wish to offer my guests proper hospitality. Please let everything be arranged. I invoke the three gods who are protectors of the world—Yama, Varuṇa and Kuvera—and their leader Indra also. I wish to offer my guests proper hospitality. Please let everything be arranged. Let all the rivers flowing to the east and all those flowing to the west, as well as all those which flow through the heavens, come together here now. Let some flow with date palm liquor, others with rum and others with cool water sweet as sugar cane juice. I invoke the celestial gandharvas, Viśvāvasu, Hahā and Huhū, as well as the celestial damsels and all the other gandharvas. I invoke the apsarās Ghṛtācī, Viśvācī, Miśrakeśī, Alambuṣā, Nāgadattā, Hemā, and also Somā, who has taken up residence on Mount Mahendra. I invoke all the heavenly damsels that wait upon Indra and all the damsels that attend

Lord Brahmā, along with their leader Tumburu, and all their paraphernalia. Similarly, be manifested here the celestial forest Caitraratha presided over by Kuvera which is located in the Himalaya Mountains and whose trees produce fine raiment and jewels as leaves and beautiful women as fruits. Let the glorious moon god provide me here with many kinds of oppulent food, consisting of things which are chewed, swallowed, sucked and licked up, and also beautiful flower garlands fallen from trees, liquor and various kinds of meats.”

In this way, with a concentrated mind and unequalled power, the sage of good vows recited the hymn according to the rules of pronunciation. As the sage, facing east, sat with joined palms meditating on all those gods, they all came one by one before him. Thereafter a cool and pleasant breeze from the sandalwood forests of Malaya and Dardura began to blow, wiping away everyone’s sweat and pleasing the skin with its touch. Then showers of flowers fell from the heavens and the sky reverberated with the beating of celestial drums. Wonderful breezes began blowing and bebies of celestial damsels danced in the skies. Heavenly gandharvas sang and musicians played their lutes. That sound, which rose and fell, was soft, of moderate pitch and steady beat, and could be heard in the sky, on the earth and by all living beings.

While that celestial sound which was pleasing to the ears was being heard, Bharata’s army saw the handiwork of Viśvakarmā. All the land within five yojanas had become smooth and was carpetted in thick grass the color of blue sapphires. On that land appeared all kinds of fruit trees, such as wood apple, kapittha, bread fruit, citron, āmalakī and mango. From the Himalayan region came the Caitraratha Forest replete with celestial enjoyments. There also appeared a charming river on whose banks grew many trees. There appeared white four-roomed cottages, stables for the horses and elephants, mansions and palaces with charming entranceways. There was also a royal palace as bright as a white cloud. It had an exceptional entranceway, was decorated with garlands of white flowers and sprinkled with heavenly perfume. It was four-sided and supplied with couches, seats and conveyences and provided with delicious drinks and opulent food and clothes. All kinds of cooked foods were there, along with clean plates and other utensils, and seats had been set out. There were also fine couches covered with beautiful



spreads. With the permission of the great sage, Bharata entered the palace which was studded with gems.

All the ministers and family priests also followed. They were overjoyed to see the arrayment of lodging. Bharata and His ministers circumambulated clockwise the royal throne, yak tail whisk and parasol as they would a king. Bharata bowed down before the throne to offer respects to Rāma. Taking the yak tail whisk in His hand, He sat upon the seat reserved for the prime minister. All the ministers and family priests also sat down according to their status. Then the commander-in-chief sat down, followed by the camp supervisor. After a short while, by the command of Bharadvāja, streams of milk pudding flowed past Bharata. On the sides of those streams appeared lovely cottages painted with whitewash created by the grace of the brāhmaṇa Bharadvāja. At that time there arrived twenty thousand women adorned with valuable jewels sent by Lord Brahmā. There also came twenty thousand women adorned with gold, gems, pearls and coral sent by Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods. From the Nandana Garden of the heavenly planets came twenty thousand heavenly damsels, embraced by whom a man would look as if he had lost his mind.

The leaders of the gandharvas, Nārada, Tumburu and Gopa, who shone like the sun, sang before Bharata. By the order of Bharadvāja, Alambuṣā Miśrakeśī, Puṇḍarīka and Vāmana began dancing for Bharata. Those flowers which are found among the gods or in the Caitraratha Forest were seen there by the spiritual power of Bharadvāja. Then the wood apple trees began beating clay drums; the vibhītaka trees played cymbals; and aśvattha trees danced by the spiritual power of Bharadvāja. Then pines, palmyras tilaka trees and tamāla trees came there jubilantly, assuming the form of hunchbacks and dwarfs to serve Bharata and His associates. Aśoka trees, āmalakī trees, rose apple trees and any other trees and vines in the forest assumed the forms of young women and took up positions in Bharadvāja's hermitage. These spoke to the soldiers: "Drink wine, you who are thirsty for liquor! Eat rice pudding, you who are hungry! Eat meats fit for sacrifice! You will find whatever you desire." Seven or eight women bathed each man on the charming banks of the river, cleaning off their dirt. Large-eyed women came to massage their feet. Drying the mens' bodies with towels, they then gave them beverages to drink.

The animal keepers fed the horses, elephants, donkeys, camels and oxen who were beasts of burden suitable food. Leading the animals, their keepers fed them sugar cane or fried grains seasoned with honey. After that, the rider could not recognize his horse, nor the driver his elephant, they were so transformed by the food. The army seemed to be intoxicated, deluded and delighted. With their bodies smeared with red sandalwood paste and being surrounded by beves of celestial damsels, they felt as if all their material desires had been fulfilled and said: “We shall neither return to Ayodhyā nor go to the Daṇḍaka Forest. Good luck to Bharata and may Rāma be happy!” In this way too did the foot soldiers, cavalry and elephant drivers consider themselves independent after receiving such entertainment. Being overjoyed, the men who had followed Bharata here in the thousands shouted: “This is heaven!” With garlands of flowers around their necks, the soldiers ran all around, dancing, laughing, and singing. In spite of having eaten that ambrosia-like food, when they saw it again, their minds desired to eat it.

The servants, maidservants, wives and troops all felt highly delighted—they all were supplied with new clothes. The elephants, donkeys, camels, oxen, horses and even the deer and birds were fully fed. No one wore clothes that were not clean, nor was anyone hungry or untidy. Nor was anyone seen with hair covered in dust. The people were amazed to see thousands of gold and silver pots adorned with flowers and flags that were filled with the flesh of goats and boars that was seasoned with spices and fruit sauces, flavorsome lentil soups, and fine white rice. The wells in the vicinity were filled with milk pudding. The cows had all become kāmādhenu, which could fulfill any desire and all the trees were dripping honey. The larger wells were full of liquor and were piled around with heated earthen pots full of the roasted meat of deer, peacocks and chickens for the lower castes. There were thousands of pots of cooked grains, tens of thousands of pots of vegetables and millions of plates made of gold. There were clay pots of different sizes and low, wide-mouthed ones that were filled with seasoned yogurt. Some were full of fresh buttermilk flavored and colored with saffron, while others had buttermilk seasoned with cumin seeds. Other pots were filled with delicious white yogurt, while others were filled with milk or sugar.

On the steps of the river banks the people found containers of fragrant powders for bathing. They found whitish twigs with their ends crushed for brushing the teeth with and boxes of pale sandalwood powder for after bathing. There were perfectly clean mirrors, piles of clothes, wooden sandals, leather shoes, containers of eye liner, combs, brushes, parasols, bows, armor, different kinds of beds and seats. There were tanks of drinking water for the donkeys, camels, elephants and horses. There were also stairways descending to the water where one could easily bathe. Those places were full of lotuses and where the color of the sky, with water that was calm and enjoyable to bathe in. They were bordered by deep-blue grass that was suitable as pasture for the animals. The men were amazed to see the arrangement, which seemed like a dream, provided for Bharata by the great sage Bharadvāja. As they enjoyed themselves in Bharadvāja's hermitage as if they were gods in the heavenly Nandana Garden, the night came to an end. Taking leave of Bharadvāja, those rivers, gandharvas and all the lovely damsels left as they had come. The people, however, were still drunk from the wine. They stood smeared with the paste of sandalwood and aloe, as they did earlier. Garlands of flowers were scattered all over the ground and had been crushed by the men.

## BHARADVĀJA SHOWS BHARATA THE WAY TO CITRAKŪṬA

After spending the night with His family and associates, Bharata approached Bharadvāja to find out where Rāma was. Seeing that Bharata had arrived and was standing there with joined palms, the sage, who was offering oblations into the sacrificial fire, said: “I hope You spent the night comfortably in our home. Please tell me, O sinless, did all Your men enjoy the hospitality?”

Bowing down before the sage with joined palms, Bharata replied to the refulgent sage who had come out of his hermitage to meet Him: “I passed the night comfortably with My whole army of men and animals. We have been fully satisfied by you, O holy one. We and our servants passed the night most enjoyably, having been relieved of our fatigue, sumptuously fed and lodged in excellent quarters by you. O honorable one, I ask a favor of you. Behold Me, who am in search of My brother, with a benign expression on My face. Please tell Me where that righteous soul’s hermitage is, which path leads there and how long it will take.”

Bharadvāja, who possessed great splendor and engaged in tremendous austerities, replied to Bharata, who was eager to see His brother: “O Bharata, at a distance of thirty krośas in an uninhabited forest is the mountain of Citrakūṭa, which has pleasant forests and caves. On its norther side flows the Mandākinī River, which is shaded with flowering trees. Not far from the river and near the mountain itself You will find, my son, the thatched hut where They indeed are residing. Heading south, take Your whole army with its elephants and horses. Take a side path on the left and follow it southward. Following that path, You will find Rāma, O most fortunate one.” Hearing the talk about the trip to Citrakūṭa, the emperor’s consorts got down from their vehicles, even though they deserved to remain seated, and surrounded the brāhmaṇa sage. Accompanied by Sumitrā, Kausalyā, who was trembling because of distress, touched the feet of the sage with her hands. Kaikeyī, who was despised by the whole world because of her unfulfilled desire to make Bharata king, also went and touched his feet

out of embarrassment. After walking clockwise around the venerable sage, she stood close to Bharata, vexed as she was at that time. Then the great sage Bharadvāja asked Bharata: “I want to know the particulars about Your mothers.”

With folded hands, Bharata replied to the sage as follows: “O honorable one, this forlorn woman who is emaciated from fasting is the seniormost wife of My father. She is the mother of Rāma, tiger among men, who walks about like a lion. She is like Aditi, the mother of Vāmana. This is the king’s second wife, Sumitrā. Stricken with grief, she looks like a branch of the kaṇṭikāra tree with withered flowers standing in the midst of a forest. The two heroic princes, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna, whose complexion is like that of the gods and whose prowess is unailing, are her sons. Know this heartless and sinful-minded wretch to be My mother Kaikeyī. She is irascible, foolhardy, vain, power-hungry and vulgar, though of noble appearance. Because of her, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa’s careers have ended here and King Daśaratha, deprived of his two sons, has gone to heaven. I consider her to be the cause of My great predicament.”

Having spoken in this way with a voice choked with tears, Bharata heaved a deep sigh like a hissing snake. Bharadvāja, being a sage of tremendous intellect, replied to Bharata as follows: “Do not consider Kaikeyī at fault. Rāma’s exile will have a happy ending. In fact, Rāma’s exile will benefit the gods, demons and the sages who meditate on the self.”

Offering respects to the sage and walking around him clockwise, Bharata took leave of him. He then commanded the army: “Get ready to go!” After hitching horses to the many gilded chariots, the multitudes of people mounted them to continue their journey. Male and female elephants with gold harnesses and flags marched together like thundering clouds. People rode in costly vehicles that were either big or small, while the foot soldiers walked. Riding in exquisite vehicles, the ladies headed by Kausalyā left happily, desirous as they were to see Rāma. Climbing into a palanquin that was as brilliant as the sun and moon, the glorious Bharata proceeded with His retinue. That great moving army crowded with horses and elephants looked like a huge cloud covering the south. Traversing forests inhabited by deer and birds, they skirted the mountains and rivers on the

western shore of the Ganges. The army terrified the deer and birds as it passed through the great forest. Bharata's army, with its spirited elephants and horses, looked beautiful.

## BHARATA REACHES CITRAKŪṬA

The empassioned bull elephants and their herds that lived in that forest were frightened by that great marching army and ran away. Bears and spotted and unspotted deer were seen everywhere in the groves, mountains and river banks. Followed by a huge, noisy army of four divisions, the vituous Bharata proceeded along happily. Bharata's army, which resembled the ocean at high tide, covered the land like the clouds of the monsoon. Covered by countless horses and very strong elephants, the earth could not be seen for a long time. Having travelled a long distance, the animals became tired. Then the splendorous Bharata said to Vasiṣṭha, the foremost of His counselors: "From the looks of this area it is obvious that we have reached the place described to Me by Bharadvāja. There is Citrakūṭa Mountain, there is the Mandākinī River and there in the distance is seen the forest which looks like a blue cloud. The beautiful peaks of Citrakūṭa will soon be trampled by My elephants. Shaken by the pounding of the elephants' feet, the trees on the mountain peaks are dropping their flowers, as dark clouds drop rain during the monsoon season."

Speaking to Śatrughna, Bharata continued: "Look, Śatrughna! The area on the mountain where kinnaras used to frequent is now covered with horses like an ocean full of crocodiles. Running with great speed, these herds of deer impelled forward by the army's approach look like rain clouds driven by the autumn winds. Like men from the south, these soldiers bearing shields as bright as clouds are wearing crowns of flowers on their heads. Now that this quiet and dreadful-looking forest is crowded with soldiers, it looks just like Ayodhyā to Me. The sky is covered with a cloud of dust raised by the hooves of the horses. But then a wind suddenly blows it away as a favor to Me. Look at those chariots, drawn by horses and driven by expert charioteers, racing through the forest, O Śatrughna. See those beautiful peacocks. Frightened, they are running to their homes on the mountain. This place seems most enchanting to Me. This abode of the ascetics is clearly a pathway leading to heaven. The many enchanting-looking spotted

stags look like they are decorated with flowers. Let the soldiers go forward and carefully search the forest so that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa may be found.”

Hearing Bharata’s command, the valliant men entered the forest with weapons in their hands and saw some smoke rising in the distance. Returning to Bharata, they said: “There could be no fire in an uninhabited place. Therefore Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa must be here. If the two princes are not here, then there surely must be other ascetics living here like Rāma.” Hearing this, Bharata replied: “Be alert! Do not go any farther! I Myself shall go along with Sumantra and Dhṛti” After that, the troops remained stationed all around, while Bharata kept His eyes fixed on the place where the smoke was rising. Halted by Bharata, the army could also see the place from which the smoke was rising. Even so, they were not dismayed, for they thought that they would soon be able to see Rāma.



## RĀMA DESCRIBES CITRAKŪṬA TO SĪTĀ

Quite some time had passed since They were living on that mountain. To entertain Sītā and to amuse His own mind, Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, showed His wife the beauty of Citrakūṭa, as Indra would show the Nandana Garden to his mother Śaci: “Upon seeing this pleasant mountain, neither sorrow for the loss of the kingdom nor separation from My family and friends afflicts My mind, O gentle lady. Look at this mountain abounding in flocks of different kinds of birds. Its peaks, adorned with varieties of minerals, seem to be piercing the sky. Some of the peaks look just like silver, others are blood-red, yellowish, red as madder or as brilliant as exquisite gems. Some look like topaz, crystal or the hue of the kewra flower, while others look like stars or silvery mercury. Such are the minerals that decorate that area of the mountain. Frequented by herds of deer of many kinds, as well as packs of harmless tigers, leopards and bears and large flocks of birds, this mountain looks beautiful. There are many pleasant trees providing fruits, flowers and shade, such as: mango, rose apple, āsanas, lodhras, priyālas, bread fruit, dhavas, añkolas, bhavyas, tiniśas, wood apples, tindukas, bamboos, kāśmarīs, neem trees, varaṇas, madhūkas, tilakas, badarīs, āmalakīs, kadamabas, cane, dhanvanas and pomegranates, which enhance the beauty of this mountain.

See kinnaras enjoying as they please as couples on this mountain. Also notice their swords hanging from tree branches, and also the garments of vidyādhara women and the places where they play. With its waterfalls flowing here and there, the mountain looks like an elephant in rut with ichor flowing from its temples. What man would not be enlivened by the aroma of many flowers carried by the wind blowing from the caves? I could live here for many autumns with You and Lakṣmaṇa, and sorrow would not assail Me. I am attached to this lovely place with abundant fruits and flowers, wildlife and mountain peaks. I have reaped two benefits from My exile: My father’s veracity in duty and the pleasure of Bharata. O Sītā, are You enjoying

Yourself in Citrakūṭa with Me, seeing the different things which are soothing to the mind, speech and body?

“My forefathers who were royal sages have said that living in the forest is conducive to immortality after death. All around the mountain there are hundreds of odd-sized rocks of different colors, such as blue, yellow, white and red. Thousands of herbs shine with the wealth of their splendor on the mountain at night like flames of a sacrificial fire. Some parts of the wooded mountain look like houses, others look like flower gardens, while still others are only solid stone. Citrakūṭa looks as if it split the earth open when it rose up. Indeed, this mountain looks beautiful on all sides. See the fine bedding of the love-hungry women covered with the leaves of water lilies, sthagara trees, punnāga trees, birch trees and spread with the petals of lotus flowers. Here You can see, My dear, the crushed garlands of lotus flowers tossed away by loven-stricken women, and the pieces of fruit that they have left. With its pentiful roots, fruits and water, this mountain of Citrakūṭa surpasses Alakā, the capital of Kuvera, Amarāvātī, the capital of Indra, or the Himalaya Mountains. If I can enjoy this time with You, O Sītā, and with Lakṣmaṇa, while sticking to the path of highest self-imposed discipline, then I shall achieve a pleasure that increases the virtue of My dynasty.”

## RĀMA DESCRIBES THE MANDĀKINĪ RIVER

Afterwards, Rāma turned away from the mountain and showed Sītā the charming and holy Mandākinī River, saying: “See the beautiful Mandākinī River lined with sandy banks. It is frequented by swans and cranes and is lined with many kinds of trees bearing fruits and flowers. It is as enchanting as the Saugandhika lake of Kuvera. Although their waters are muddy right now from the herds of deer drinking there, the pleasant river fords delight Me greatly. Sages with matted locks of hair and dressed in tree bark cloth bathe in the river at the proper time, My dear. Here are other ascetics practicing austere vows who are praying to the sun with raised arms as recommended in scripture.

“With its trees shedding their flowers all along the river because of the wind shaking their branches, the mountain looks as if it is dancing. See the Mandākinī River, whose waters sparkle like gems, is bordered by sandy banks and which in some places is crowded with perfected beings taking bath. See the piles of flowers knocked down and scattered about by the wind, and others floating in the river itself, O slender Sītā. Notice how the ruddy geese are climbing the banks while making charming sounds. I cherish the sight of Citrakūṭa and the Mandākinī River more than I do Ayodhyā because of Your presence, O My beauty! Take a bath with Me in this river, whose waters are always stirred up by the perfected beings free from sin who engage in austerity and self-control. Take a bath in the Mandākinī River as a friend would, O Sītā, submerging the red and white lotus flowers.

“Always regard the forest dwellers as You would the citizens of Ayodhyā, the mountain of Citrakūṭa as You would the capital of Ayodhyā, and this river as You would the Sarayu. The dutiful Lakṣmaṇa is determined to carry out My instructions. You also, O princess of Videha, are favorably disposed to Me, which pleases Me. While bathing three times a day in this river and eating honey, roots and fruits with You, I do not long for Ayodhyā

nor the royal throne. The waters of this attractive river are disturbed by herds of elephants and constantly drunk by elephants, lions and monkeys. Because of the flower-laden trees along its banks it is always adorned with flowers in bloom. Surely there is no one who would not feel relieved of fatigue and refreshed by bathing in its waters.” After uttering many good reasons for bathing in the river, Rāma strolled with His beloved across the lovely mountain of Citrakūṭa, which was gleaming like colorful eye cosmetics.

## LAKṢMAṆA SPIES BHARATA'S ARMY

After showing Sītā the mountain river, Rāma sat down on a rock and described to Her the different kinds of forest food. These fruits and tubers are fit for offering in the sacrificial fire. They are sweet and tasty and well-cooked." In this way, Rāma spent His time with Sītā. While He was sitting there, the dust and din of Bharata's army touched the sky. At the same time, the empassioned leaders of elephants ran away from their herds in all directions, being frightened by the great noise. Rāma heard the noise of the approaching army and saw all the elephants running away and thereafter said to Lakṣmaṇa: "O Lakṣmaṇa, look! Do You hear that deep, rumbling tumult? Why have the herds of wild elephants and buffaloes, frightened deer and lions suddenly run off in all directions? Is a king or prince hunting in the forest, or is it some beast of prey? Please go find out what it is. Besides, this mountain is difficult to reach even for birds. Therefore, please investigate all this carefully."

Lakṣmaṇa hurriedly climbed up a śāla tree in blossom. He began scanning all around, starting with the east. As He was looking north, He saw a great army with elephants, horses, chariots and vigilant foot soldiers. He then informed Rāma of the approach of the army, saying: "Please extinguish the fire and have Sītā hide in a cave. And keep Your bow and arrows and shield ready." Then Rāma replied: "Dear Lakṣmaṇa, please look carefully and tell Me whose army You think it is." As if desiring to consume that army like an angry fire, Lakṣmaṇa said: "Obviously after being crowned king and desiring undisputed sovereignty, Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī, comes ready to kill Us both. Over there near that large and broad tree is a chariot whose flag bears the emblem of a kovidāra tree, the insignia of Bharata. Some of the soldiers are riding about as they please on swift horses, others are moving about jubilantly on elephants. Taking up Our bows, let Us resort to the mountain top, O warrior. Otherwise, let Us stay here dressed in armor with raised weapons! We will certainly defeat in battle Bharata, who emblem is the kovidāra tree. Now I shall see Bharata, for whose sake this great calamity

was set upon You, Sītā and Myself, and because of whom You had to forfeit a kingdom which was always Yours. Since Bharata has come as an enemy, He may certainly be killed. I see no harm in killing Him, O Rāma. It is not wrong to kill someone who has wronged one in the past. Bharata has wronged You, therefore it would be unjust to forgive Him. When He is slain, You can rule over the entire earth. Kaikeyī, who desires sovereignty, will soon be agonized by the sight of her son being killed in battle by Me, like a tree being broken by an elephant. I shall kill Kaikeyī also, along with her relations and attendants. Let the earth today be free from this sin! I shall this very day release My repressed anger and scorn against the enemy forces, as a wild fire consumes brush. Piercing the enemies' bodies with sharp arrows, I shall drench the forest of Citrakūṭa with blood. Let beasts of prey drag away the carcasses of the elephants and horses whose hearts have been pierced with arrows, as well as the men killed by Me. After killing Bharata and His army, I will have paid My debt to My bow and arrows."

## RĀMA CHASTISES LAKṢMAṆA

Rāma pacified the enraged Lakṣmaṇa who was full of animosity against Bharata, and then said to Him: “What is the use of a bow or a sword and shield when the mighty Bharata, longing to see Me, has personally come? I made a pledge to fulfill father’s request. If I killed Bharata, what would I do with a kingdom tainted by such an outrage? I will not accept something that would cause the destruction of My relatives and friends any more than I will eat poisoned food. I desire virtue, wealth and enjoyment in this world, O Lakṣmaṇa, for all My brothers I swear this to You. I wish sovereignty for My brothers, as well as Their protection and happiness. I swear by My bow!

“It is not hard for Me to conquer this earth hemmed in by oceans, but I do not even desire the post of Indra through unjust means. If any happiness comes to Me without Bharata, Yourself or Śatrughna, let fire burn it to ashes. I think that when Bharata returned to Ayodhyā, He heard how I had been banished to the forest with Sītā and You, and how We were dressed in tree bark and had matted hair. Because He is fond of Us, having an affectionate heart, He has come here to see Us out of remorse. Bharata has not come for any other reason. He has become angry with His mother Kaikeyī, speaking unkind words to her, and, with the consent of father, has come to offer Me the throne.

“This is a suitable time for Him to see Us. He would not harm Us even in His mind. What offense did Bharat commit against You in the past that You have such fear of Him today? No harsh or unpleasant words should be said to Bharata. Whatever offensive thing is said to Bharata, the same is said to Me. How could sons kill their father in any distressing situation, or how could one brother kill the other brother who is his own life? If You say such a thing again for the sake of sovereignty, I shall tell Bharata when I see Him to give the kingdom to You. Bharata will surely accept My request, saying: ‘So be it!’”

Chastised in this way by His virtuous brother, Lakṣmaṇa hid His face with His hands out of shame. Embarrassed by His brother's remarks, Lakṣmaṇa replied: "I think Our father King Daśaratha Himself has come to see You." Seeing Lakṣmaṇa's humiliation, Rāma replied: "I also think that the strong-armed king has come here to see Us. Or else, considering Us as deserving of comfort and thinkinf of Our forest exile, I think he will take Us back home. Sītā, who has always enjoyed the best comforts, will also be taken from the forest by My glorious father. There can be seen father's two beautiful pedigree horses that are as swift as the wind and spirited. There is our father's famous and aged huge elephant named Śatruñjaya, stomping about in front of the army. But I do not see father's famous brilliant white umbrella. This is My one doubt. Do as I say and get down from the tree." In this way did the righteous Rāma speak to Lakṣmaṇa. Getting down from the top of the śāla tree, Lakṣmaṇa stood with joined palms at Rāma's side.

Bharata instructed his army: "I do not want Rāma's hermitage trampled." Therefore they set up camp around the mountain. It is said that the army of elephants and horses covered an area of one and a half yojanas around the mountain. Having been brought by Bharata, who was free from pride, for the purpose of propitiating Rāma, the army shone brightly around Citrakūṭa.



## BHARATA FINDS RĀMA'S HUT

When the army was camped beside the mountain of Citrakūṭa, the mighty Bharata wanted to walk on foot to the place where His brother was. When the army had just finished setting up camp as Bharata had instructed, Bharata said to His younger brother Śatrughna: “Quickly search this forest with this multitude of soldiers and with the Niṣādas. Let Guha, surrounded by thousands of his kinsmen, carrying in their hands, bows, arrows and swords, personally look for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Surrounded by My ministers, preceptors, brāhmaṇas and citizens, I shall personally walk on foot all over this forest. As long as I do not see Rāma, or the powerful Lakṣmaṇa, or the greatly fortunate Sītā, I will have no peace. As long as I do not see My brother's beautiful face, which resembles the moon, or His eyes like lotus petals, I will have no peace.

“Lakṣmaṇa has certainly achieved His goals because He sees the highly effulgent face of Rāma, which resembles a spotless full moon and which is adorned with eyes like the petals of a pink lotus. I shall have no peace until I can hold on My head My brother's feet, which are marked with signs of royalty. I shall have no peace until Rāma is installed on the ancestral throne, His body wet from being anointed with holy water. Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, has certainly achieved Her goals because She follows Her husband, who is the protector of this land up to the sea. Most fortunate is this mountain of Citrakūṭa, which is like the Himalaya Mountains, for Rāma resides on it, as Kuvera resides in the Caitraratha Garden. This impenetrable forest which is infested with ferocious beasts, has certainly fulfilled its purpose, for the great king Rāma, the foremost wielder of weapons, is residing here.”

Saying this, Bharata, who possessed exceptional glory, entered the great forest on foot. He passed through groves of trees, whose tops were full of flowers, growing on the mountain's peaks. Quickly climbing up a śāla tree on top of Citrakūṭa Mountain, He saw smoke rising from the fire at Rāma's

hermitage. Concluding that Rāma was there, the splendid Bharata and His brother Śatrughna rejoiced like when one reaches the shore after travelling across water. After seeing on Citrakūṭa Mountain the hermitage of Rāma, which was frequented by holy people, Bharata ordered the army to halt. He then hurried ahead with Guha.

## BHARATA MEETS RĀMA

Once the army was camped, Bharata, who was eager to see His brother, proceeded forward, pointing out the way to Śatrughna. Bharata made the following request to the sage Vasiṣṭha: “Bring My mothers quickly,” then He proceeded forward. Sumantra also followed not far behind Śatrughna, for He was as anxious to see Rāma as was Bharata. As He was walking, Bharata could see several leaf huts fit for ascetics and a thatched hut with a doorway built by His brother, so it is said. In front of that hut Bharata saw a pile of broken pieces of wood for burning, as well as piles of flowers for worship. He also saw here and there pieces of kuśa grass and cloth tied on trees by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as an indication of how to reach the hermitage. He also noticed nearby the cottage big piles of dried dung of deer and buffaloes for burning for heat during cold weather.

As the elated Bharata walked along, He said to His ministers and Śatrughna: “I think we have reached the place described by Bharadvāja. The Mandākinī River must not be far from here. These pieces of cloth tied high up on the trees were probably put there by Lakṣmaṇa as markers in case He needed to go on the path at some odd hour of the night. On the side of the mountain swift elephants with raised tusks roam about trumpeting at one another. There in the forest can be seen the thick, black smoke of a sacrificial fire which ascetics are maintaining. Here I shall see My brother Rāma, who is always respectful to His superiors, jubilant and looking like an great sage.”

After a while, Bharata reached Citrakūṭa on the bank of the Mandākinī River and said to the people following Him: “Having found this solitary place, Rāma, the ruler of men, sits down like a hero on the ground. Cursed be My birth and life! Because of Me the extremely effulgent Lord of the world has fallen into adversity. Renouncing all His desires, He is residing in this forest. Reviled by the world, I shall fall at the feet of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa in order to appease Them.”

As He was lamenting in this way, Bharata reached the large and beautiful leaf hut. It was covered with leaves of *śāla*, *tāla* and *aśvakaṛṇa* trees and looked like a large altar lightly covered with blades of *kuśa* grass for the execution of a sacrifice. The hut was adorned with strong gilded bows like Indra's that were effugent and fit for inflicting the enemy. Stored in quivers were frightful arrows shining like sun beams, as the faces of the serpents of *Bhogāvatī* are illuminated by the jewels on their heads. There was a pair of swords in gold scabbards, shiny shields decorated with gold filigree and finger guards made of iguana skin and adorned with gold hung on the wall. Thus the hut was as unassailable by the enemy as a lion's cave is by a deer.

Focusing His eyes for a while, Bharata saw sitting in the cottage nearby His elder brother *Rāma* wearing His matted dreadlocks in a bun on His head. He was dressed in a black deer skin and tree bark cloth and resembled the sun. *Rāma*'s shoulders were like those of a lion and His arms were very large. His eyes were like petals of the white lotus. He was looking like the king of the earth right up to the shores of the sea. He was seated on an earthen dīaz covered with blades of *kuśa* grass with *Sītā* and *Lakṣmaṇa*, as if He was the chief priest at a sacrifice. Upon seeing Him, Bharata became submerged in an ocean of sorrow and ran to Him. Sobbing, He was unable to control His voice, which was choked up with tears as He spoke as follows: "Here is My older brother sitting surrounded by wild deer when He deserves to be seated in an assembly surrounded by His subjects. He who was accustomed to wearing thousands of different garments in the city of *Ayodhyā* is dressed here in the skin of deer in obedience to His father's order. How does that same *Rāma* who used to adorn His hair with colorful flowers of many kinds now bear on His head the weight of matted hair? He who deserved to acquire merit through the execution of sacrifices enjoined in the scriptures is striving for merit achieved by the mortification of the body. How is it that He whose body used to be smeared with sandalwood paste is now covered with dirt? *Rāma*, who deserves comfort, has met with this misfortune on My account. Cursed is My life, merciless as I am and despised by the world!"

With His lotus-like face covered with perspiration, Bharata fell crying on the ground, unable to touch *Rāma*'s feet. The mighty Prince Bharata simply cried out: "O noble one!" and said no more because of the

His anguish. Seeing Rāma, He could not saying anything more, His voice being choked up with tears. Weeping, Śatrughna also bowed down before the feet of Rāma. Embracing Them both, Rāma began shedding tears. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa then embraced Sumantra and Guha, as when the sun and moon form a conjunction with Jupiter and Venus in the sky. Seeing the four princes, who were worthy of riding royal elephants, come together in that great forest, all the inhabitants of the forest shed tears of joy.

## RĀMA INSTRUCTS BHARATA

Rāma saw Bharata fallen on the ground with folded hands, looking like the sun as the end of the age. Bharata was difficult to recognize because of His matted hair and tree bark clothes. When Rāma recognized His pale-faced and emaciated brother, He lifted Him up with His own hands. Embracing Him, smelling His head and sitting Him on His lap, Rāma affectionately asked Him: “Where could Your father be that You have come to the forest like this? You should not have come to the forest as long as he is alive. Oh, but I am glad to see You after such a long time, though You are difficult to recognize! How did You come to the forest, My dear brother? Is father not in good health? Otherwise, why would You have come here? I hope the forlorn king has not left suddenly for the other world. I hope Your perpetual sovereignty has not been broken. I also hope You are serving father well. Is King Daśaratha, whose is dedicated to duty all right? Is the brāhmaṇa Vasiṣṭha, who is learned, always engaged in acts of righteousness and the perceptor of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty being given proper respect? Are Kausalyā and Sumitrā happy? I hope the noble Queen Kaikeyī is pleased. Is Vasiṣṭha’s intelligent son who is a priest expert in rituals performing offerings and sacrifices? Are You respectful of the gods, forefathers, servants, preceptors, elders, physicians and brāhmaṇas. I hope You are respectful to Sudhanvā, Your military teacher, who possesses knowledge about the use of arrows and other fine weapons and who is skilled in statecraft. Have You secured ministers who are valiant, learned, self-controlled, conversant with omens and from noble families, like Yourself? A secret that is well-kept by ministers and counselors expert in politics is the root of success for a king. I hope You do not suffer from drowsiness or sleeplessness. And do You spend the late hours of the night thinking about how to increase Your wealth? I hope You are not making deliberations on Your own or with too much consultation, and I hope the news of Your decisions does not reach the public prematurely. I hope, considering Your own self-interest, You quickly begin promising enterprises in a small way without delaying. I hope Your subjects only know about Your plans when they are already accomplished or in the

process of being carried out, and not before. I hope You prefer one intelligent person to a thousand fools, for one wise person can profit even during times of financial difficulties. If a king keeps thousands or tens of thousands of fools, they cannot help him. Even just one minister who is intelligent, valiant, clever and clear-sighted can bring great wealth to a king or prince. I hope Your best servants are entrusted with important service, Your second-best servants with average duties and Your lowest servants with the least important services. I hope You engaged Your best ministers, whose position is hereditary and who have proven themselves in loyalty, in the most important matters. I hope the citizens do not become agitated by the stern rule in the kingdom and therefore insult Your ministers. I hope the sacrificial priests do not refuse to officiate at Your sacrifices, as they would to a degraded person or as a wife would to a husband who cohabited with a vulgar woman. One who does not get rid of a doctor who aggravates maladies, a servant intent on disgracing the master or a warrior seeking sovereignty, will be killed by these. I hope You have appointed a person who is satisfied, resolute, valorous, intelligent, of spotless character, well-born, dedicated and clever as the commander-in-chief. Have You properly honored Your foremost warriors who are mighty and skilled in fighting and whose prowess has been shown on the battlefield? I hope you supply them with provisions properly and pay their salaries on time and without delay. Servants become extremely angry with their masters when their provisions and salaries are delayed, and that in itself is highly unnecessary. I hope all the principal members of Your family are devoted to You. Do they purposefully lay down their lives for You? I hope You have appointed as ambassador someone from the kingdom who is learned, skillful, witty and eloquent. Keep an eye on the eighteen functionaries of the enemies and your own fifteen functionaries, using three secret spies for each. I hope You remain vigilant of enemies who, after being expelled, have returned, even though they are weak. I hope You do not patronize materialistic brāhmaṇas, foolish and conceited as they are, they are expert in useless pursuits. Basing themselves in logic and reason, these fellows of depraved intelligence interpret the main scriptures in a nonsensical way. Are You fully protecting the renowned Ayodhyā, which has been inhabited in the past by Our valiant ancestors, which has strong gates, which is crowded with elephants, horses and chariots, which is always busy with brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas engaged in their particular occupations, whose citizens are self-controlled

and enthusiastic, which is crowded with thousands of noble people, which is full of many palacial buildings and populated with learned people?

“The kingdom of Kosala has hundreds of shrines and is crowded with well-established people. It is graced with temples, drinking fountains and terraced lakes. Its men and women are jubilant and it is always celebrating festivals organized by associations. Its fields are well-cultivated, has abundant dairy cows and is totally devoid of violence. It has irrigation systems and is free from predatory beasts. There is no cause for any fear in Kosala. It has many mines, is not inhabited by sinful people and was well-protected by our ancestors. Is everything all right in the kingdom? I hope You are kind to those who cultivate the land and protect their cows. Are those people, dependent as they are on their occupation, happy at present? I hope You have protected them and supplied them with their necessities, for all the inhabitants of the kingdom should be dutifully protected by the king. Are You pacifying the womenfold, giving them proper protection? I hope You do not put too much faith in them and do not confide Your secrets in them.

“Are the the forest reserves for wild elephants being maintained? Do You have enough dairy cows? I hope You are not satisfied with the number of mares and she-elephants that You have. Do You rise early each day, O prince, and show Yourself properly attired to the public on the main thoroughfare? I hope that workers do not come before You whenever they want, or that they are unable to come before You at all. A middle course in this regards is the cause of financial gain. Are all your fotifications fully supplied with wealth, food, weapons, water, war machines, craftsmen and archers? Is Your income large and Your expenses low? I hope Your wealth is not given to unworthy persons. I hope Your wealth is expended for the purpose of God, Our ancestors, the brāhmaṇas, unexpected visitors, warriors and all Your friends. I hope that You do not release any thief who has been apprehended for a due reason, questioned and identified by witnesses at the time. In a disagreement between the rich and poor, do Your wise ministers judge the case impartially? The tears of one convicted falsely destroy the sons and cows of one who rules for the sake of pleasure. Do You try to conciliate the old, the young and the important physicians with charity, good thoughts and words? I hope You greet Your teachers, elders, ascetics, guests,



gods, shrines, and perfected brāhmaṇas, bowing down to them. I hope You do not neglect Your spiritual duties by excessive attention to Your material affairs and that You do not neglect Your material affairs by excessive attention to Your spiritual duties, nor neglect both by excessive longing for sense enjoyment. Do You divide Your time appropriately for the activities of religiosity, economic development and enjoyment, wise as You are in these matters? Do the brāhmaṇas learned in all the scriptures and all the citizens of the capital and nation pray for Your welfare, O wise prince? I hope You avoid the fourteen things that pollute a king, namely: atheism, untruthfulness, anger, negligence, procrastination, avoidance of the learned, enthralment with the senses, execution of state affairs without consultation, following the advice of fools, failure to launch plans, failure to keep secrets, failure to recite prayers for auspiciousness when necessary and failure to stand up to receive everyone who visits.

“I hope that after understanding them, You properly deal with the ten evils, the five kinds of fortifications, the four means of success, the seven requisites for administration, the eight persons to be shunned, the three pursuits, the three branches of learning, conquest of the senses, the six characteristics of polity, disasters wrought by nature and man, the twenty kinds of kings, the entire population of the kingdom, the making of journeys, the meting out of punishment, the arrayment of troops in battle, duplicity and the waging of war.

“Do you consult with three or four ministers as recommended, and do You do so all together or individually? I hope Your study of the Vedas has been fruitful, and so also Your endeavors. Has Your wife borne a son or Your knowledge borne fruit? I hope that Your conclusion is the same as Mine, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, for it leads to long life, fame and the fulfillment of religious duties, economic development and enjoyment. Are You following the way of life of Our father and forefathers which is the auspicious path followed by the pious? I hope You never eat sumptuous food alone, but share it with friends who wish to eat. The wise king who after achieving the whole world rules over His subjects justly, ascends to heaven upon departing from this world.”

## BHARATA REQUESTS RĀMA TO ACCEPT THE KINGDOM

When Rāma realized that Bharata was affectionate to Him, both He and Lakṣmaṇa began questioning Him: “I want to hear from You why You have left the kingdom to come here dressed in tree bark cloth and deer skin with Your hair matted. Please tell Me everything.” After being strongly embraced and addressed in this way by the great soul Rāma, Bharata replied: “O noble one, after carrying out a task difficult to perform at the behest of his wife Kaikeyī, pained as he was with grief for his son, the mighty king ascended to heaven. My mother committed a great sin that has robbed her of glory. Failing to achieve sovereignty, My widowed mother, afflicted with grief, will fall into a most terrible hell. Grant this favor upon Me who am Your servant—like Indra, be coronated king of Ayodhyā this very day. You should be merciful to these subjects and all Our widowed mothers who have gathered at Your side. By primogeniture the throne is Yours. Therefore take the throne for Yourself. With due regard for duty, satisfy the desires of Your relatives, O respectful prince! With You as her lord, let the earth cease to be a widow, as when the night sky of autumn is brightened by a spotless moon. At the request of these ministers and Myself with a bent head, be kind to Your brother who is Your disciple and servant. You should not ignore father’s honored ministers, who have served in that capacity for a long time, O tiger among men.”

Talking in this way, Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī, with tears in His eyes, clasped the feet of Rāma again, touching them to His head. Embracing Bharata, who was continually sighing like an elephant in rut, Rāma said to Him: “How can a noble man possessing goodness, prowess, and dedication to vows, as I am, commit sin for the sake of a kingdom? I do not find even the slightest fault in You, O destroyer of enemies! Do not be so foolish as to despise Your mother. Superiors always have freedom of action with respect to their wives and children, O sinless one. You should understand that the holy ones in this world consider Us to be the wives, sons and disciples of the

king. The king had the right to have Me stay in the forest dressed in tree bark and deerskin or in Ayodhyā. The same respect shown Our father who was honored by the world should also be shown to Your mother Kaikeyī, O knower of what is right. Since I was commanded by My virtuous mother and father to go to the forest, how can I do anything else? You must accept the kingdom and be honored by the world, while I must reside in the forest dressed in tree bark. After giving two different instructions for Us before the people, King Daśaratha went to heaven. The king, who is the preceptor of the world, is Your authority, O righteous soul. As such, You should enjoy the share allotted to You by Our father. Taking shelter of the Daṇḍaka Forest for fourteen years, I shall enjoy My share given Me by Our great-souled father. That which Our righteous father has requested Me to do I consider My highest welfare, and not everlasting sovereignty over all the worlds.”

## RĀMA REQUESTED TO PERFORM FUNERAL RITES

After hearing Rāma's statements, Bharata replied as follows: "Of what good is the code of royal conduct for Me to whom it does not correspond? It has always been the custom among Us that as long as the first son is alive, a younger son cannot become king. Come back with Me to prosperous Ayodhyā and get Yourself crowned king for the preservation of Our dynasty. Some say that the king is only a man, but I consider him a divinity, for his conduct in regards to duty and economics show him to be superhuman. While I was in the kingdom of Kekaya and You had gone to the forest, the wise monarch who was esteemed by the pious, ascended to heaven. When You had just left Ayodhyā with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the king, overwhelmed with grief, departed for heaven. Get up, O tiger among men! Offer libations of water to father's spirit. Śatrughna and I have already done so. It is said that water offered by the beloved son becomes inexhaustible in the world of the forefathers, and You are certainly very dear to father. Grieving for You, desiring to see You and being so very attached to You, he could not divert his mind from You. Broken-hearted because of his separation from You, he left this world thinking of You alone."

## RĀMA OFFERS WATER TO HIS DECEASED FATHER

When Rāma heard the distressing news of His father's death related by Bharata, He lost consciousness. For Rāma the dire news was like the thunderbolt of Indra released on the battlefield. Raising His arms, He fell on the ground like a blossoming tree cut down with an axe. Rāma lay fallen on the ground like an elephant fallen asleep from exhaustion after pounding its tusks against a river bank. His brothers and Sītā wept as They sprinkled water all over Rāma. After regaining consciousness, Rāma began to wail piteously, shedding tears from His eyes. Upon hearing that His father, the emperor, had ascended to heaven, the righteous Rāma said to Bharata: "What shall I do in Ayodhyā now that father has reached his destined end? Who will take care of Ayodhyā without that best of kings? What affair of his can I, his unfortunate child, perform for him who died out of anguish for Me and whom I did not even cremate? O Bharata, Your goals are attained because You and Śatrughna were able to perform all of father's funeral rites. Even when My exile in the forest is expired, I shall be unable to bear returning to Ayodhyā which has been deprived of its ruler and which is therefore agitated. Now that father has gone to the other world, who will give Me instructions when I have returned to Ayodhyā? On seeing Me so well-behaved, father used to talk kindly to Me. From whom shall I hear such words pleasing to the ears now?"

After speaking to Bharata in this way, Rāma turned to Sītā, whose face resembled the full moon, and said: "Your father-in-law has died, O Sītā! You are bereft of Your father, Lakṣmaṇa! Bharata relates the news of the emperor's ascension to heaven."

When Rāma spoke in this way, profuse tears flowed from the eyes of those illustrious princes. Then They all consoled Their brother Rāma and said: "Offer libations of water to Our father, the ruler of the earth." When Sītā heard that Her father-in-law, the great king, had gone to heaven, She

could not see Her beloved husband because Her eyes were full of tears. Consoling Sītā, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Bring a lump of pulp of iṅgudi fruit, as well as a piece of bark cloth to wrap around My waist and another to wrap around My torso. I shall go to the river bank to offer water to the spirit of Our father. Let Sītā walk in front, and You after Her. I will follow behind, for such is the procedure for such a dreadful ceremony.”

Consoling the princes, Sumantra, who had been Their perpetual servant and who was full of steadfast devotion to Rāma, helped Rāma descend the bank of the holy Mandākinī River. With difficulty They reached the bank of the beautiful, swift-flowing Mandākinī River, which has nice fords for crossing and is always graced with flower-bearing trees. Descending to a ford that was clean and free from mud, They offered water to the king saying: “Father, this water is for you.” Holding water in the cup of His joined hands, Rāma stood facing south and spoke plaintively: “Let this pure water offered by Me today endlessly serve you, O tiger among men, who have gone to the world of the forefathers.” Climbing back up on the bank of the Mandākinī River, Rāma, along with His brothers, then offered balls of rice to His father.

Placing the pulp of the iṅgudi fruit mixed with wild plums on blades of kuśa grass spread out on the ground, Rāma cried as He said: “O great king, be pleased to eat this which is our food. Whatever a man eats is also eaten by the gods.” Climbing back up on the bank of the river along the same trail, Rāma ascended the mountain of Citrakūṭa, which was crowned with a beautiful summit. Reaching the entrance of His leaf hut, Rāma grabbed the hands of Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa. The crying of the brothers and Sītā, which sounded like the roaring of lions, echoed from the mountain. Bharata’s soldiers became alarmed when they heard the loud tumult during the offering of water to the deceased king. They said: “Bharata has surely met Rāma. This loud noise is evidently from Them mourning for Their dead father.”

Leaving their conveyances, all the soldiers ran single-mindedly to the place where the sound came from, facing that direction. Those who were very young rode on horses, elephants and well-decorated chariots, while others went on foot. Although Rāma had not been away from home for long,

desiring to see Him, everyone ran to His hermitage, as if He had been away for a long time. Eager to see the meeting of the brothers, they hastily proceeded on different kinds of vehicles and hoofed beasts. Being trampled by the many wheeled vehicles and animals, the earth produced a rumbling sound like the sky filled with turbulent clouds. Terrified by that noise, the bull elephants and she-elephants went to another forest, scenting the air with their ichor. Boars, deer, lions, buffaloes, śṛmāra deer, gokarṇa deer, tigers, wild cows and spotted deer became stricken with fear.

Ruddy geese, swans, water fowl, herons, kāraṇḍava ducks, male cuckoos and cranes flew in utter confusion in different directions. The sky was covered with birds frightened by that sound, while the land was covered with men. Both looked wonderful at that time. Then the people suddenly saw the illustrious and blameless Rāma, the tiger among men, seated on the earthen dais. As they were approaching, the people had been criticizing Kaikeyī and Mantharā, and their faces were wet with tears. Seeing that those people were so distressed, Rāma embraced them as if He was their mother or father. He immediately embraced some men on the spot, while others greeted Him by bowing down. The prince approached them and received everyone according to their status. The cry of those great souls resounded on the earth and in the sky, in the caves of mountains and in all directions. It sounded like the beating of clay drums.

## VAŚIṢṬHA, KAUSALYĀ AND OTHERS SEE RĀMA

Placing the wives of King Daśaratha in front, Vasiṣṭha proceeded forward with the desire of seeing Rāma. Making Their way slowly toward the Mandākinī River, the queens saw Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa at the ford. With a face withered by tears, Kausalyā spoke to the depressed Sumitrā and the other queens: “Here is the ford taken by those fatherless children who have been exiled from the kingdom into a life of hardship, though They are unwearied by Their activities. O Sumitrā, does your son Lakṣmaṇa Himself ever tirelessly bring water to My son from this ford? Your son is not reproachable even though He has performed menial tasks for Rāma. Whatever is useless to one’s brother is considered blameworthy by the virtuous. Let this son of yours, who does not deserve the present hardships, immediately give up His present occupation as a menial servant.” The open-eyed Kausalyā then saw the iṅgudi fruit and balls of rice placed on the kuśa grass that was spread on the ground with its tips facing south.

Seeing this offering by Rāma to His father, Queen Kausalyā said to all the other wives of King Daśaratha: “Look! Here is the offering made by Rāma in accordance with scriptural rules to His father, the lord of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. I do not consider this food fit for the emperor who is like a god. After being the ruler over the four corners of the earth, how will the emperor, who is like Indra himself, eat these lumps of inferior food? Nothing seems more saddening to me than the fact that the wealthy Rāma should have to offer His father this crushed pulp of iṅgudi fruit. Why does not my heart break into thousands of pieces upon seeing this offering made by Rāma to His father?” The other queens consoled Kausalyā, then they all left. Reaching the hermitage in which Rāma was, they saw Him looking like an immortal god fallen from heaven.



Distressed to see Rāma deprived of all luxuries, His mothers wept bitterly. Rising from His seat, Rāma, the tiger among men, grasped the lotus feet of all His mothers. With the palms of their soft hands that were pleasing to the touch, the wide-eyed ladies wiped the dust off of Rāma's back. Stricken with remorse upon seeing the ladies, Lakṣmaṇa greeted them one by one after Rāma did. The royal ladies treated Lakṣmaṇa, whose body possesses auspicious marks and who was born from King Daśaratha, the same way they treated Rāma. Touching the feet of Her mother-in-laws, Sītā also stood before them with tears in Her eyes. Embracing Sītā as if She was her own daughter, Kausalyā said to Her: "Why has Rāma's wife, the daughter of King Janaka and the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha, met with suffering in the desolate wilderness? Sorrow burns me as fire burns wood when I see Your face, which looks like a lotus flower scorched by the sun, a crushed lily, gold covered by dust or the moon obscured by clouds."

Coming before Vasiṣṭha as His mother was speaking in that way, Rāma touched the feet of the sage, who resembled the fire god, as Indra would touch the feet of his preceptor Bṛhaspati. After doing so, Rāma sat down with him. Then the virtuous Bharata with all His friends, ministers, important citizens, soldiers and righteous men sat down below Rāma. Seeing Rāma dressed as an ascetic and shining with glory, Bharata, who was seated nearby, joined His palms to speak, just as Indra does before Lord Brahmā. Everyone was very eager to hear what Bharata was going to say to Rāma after bowing and offering respects. Surrounded by Their well-wishers, Rāma, who was firmly dedicated to truth, Lakṣmaṇa, who was noble-minded, and Bharata, who was righteous, They looked like the three sacrificial fires surrounded by the officiating priests.

## BHARATA IMPLORES RĀMA TO BE KING

The night passed as these tigers among men grieved in the company of Their well-wishers. When the night ended with a brilliant dawn, They offered oblations in the sacrificial fire and chanted the Gāyatrī mantra on the bank of the Mandākinī River. Thereafter Bharata, Śatrughna and Lakṣmaṇa, accompanied by Their well-wishers, approached Rāma. They sat down without saying anything. Then, in the midst of them all, Bharata said to Rāma: “My mother has been consoled and the kingdom given to Me. I give it to You. Enjoy it without impediment. As a levy breached by a strong current of water is difficult to repair, so is this kingdom difficult to be managed by anyone other than You. I cannot equal Your ability anymore than a donkey can the speed of a horse or a bird the speed of Garuḍa. Happy is the life of one upon whom others are dependent; miserable, the life of one who is dependent on others.

“A tree planted and nurtured by a person may grow into a huge, fat-trunked tree difficult for a dwarf to climb, but when, though having borne many flowers, it does not produce fruit, the person is not pleased because it did not fulfill the purpose for which he planted it. This is an analogy, O strong-armed one. Try to understand its meaning, since You, Our great master, does not care to instruct Us, Your servants at this time. Let the leaders of all the guilds see You, the conqueror of enemies, seated on the throne like the sun shining all around. Likewise let the impassioned elephants trumpet during Your journey, and let the ladies of the palace rejoice to see You with peaceful minds.”

When all the different citizens heard Bharata’s exhortation to Rāma, they approved it saying: “Very good!” Seeing the illustrious Bharata lamenting in that way, Rāma comforted Him with the following words: “The embodied soul does not have freedom of action, for the individual person is not God. It is Destiny that drags one here and there. All accumulations end in depletion; all elevations end in fall down; all unions end in separation; and

all life ends in death. As all ripe fruit must face the calamity of a fall, all persons who are born must face the calamity of death. As a house supported by old pillars collapses, persons fallen into the grip of old age and death transpire.

“A night that passes never returns; the Yamunā River flows into the sea which is full of water. The passing of days and nights quickly ends the life span of all living beings, as the rays of the sun evaporate water in the summer. Grieve for Yourself! Why do You grieve for someone else? Indeed, the life of everyone, whether they stay at home or leave, is coming to an end. Death always walks with Us and sits with Us when We do. After travelling a long distance, Death returns with Us. When wrinkles appear in the skin and the hair turns gray, how can a person weathered by age reverse this? People rejoice when the sun rises and they rejoice when it sets, but they do not notice the diminishment of their lives.

“People rejoice to see the arrival of a season as if it were something new. Yet with the change of seasons the lives of all living beings is diminished. As one piece of driftwood meets another in the ocean and drifts apart at a particular time, so also wives, children, relatives and wealth separate after coming together; their separation is certain. No living being in this world can escape its destiny. For this reason, there is no use in mourning for the death. As a person travelling a road on being passed says ‘I shall follow you from behind,’ We are on the path already trodden by Our forefathers. Why lament that which cannot be avoided?

“The passing of life does not return any more than does a stream. One should therefore engage oneself in the pursuit of happiness, for it is taught in scripture that all living entities are meant to enjoy happiness. Our father, the emperor, was a righteous soul and most fortunate. Having performed many sacrifices and remuneration for the priests, he became cleansed of all sin and ascended to heaven. Well capable of supporting his dependents, he completely protected the citizens. He acquired wealth by just means, Therefore Our father has gone to heaven. Having lead an outstanding life and enjoyed great delights, there is no need to grieve for him. He has gone to that heaven achieved by the godly performers of pious deeds. Our father has given up his old human body and has attained a divine transcendental form full of bliss in the spiritual world. No one as wise,

learned or intelligent as You and I are should grieve. A sober person should by all means give up every kind of grief, lamentation and crying. As such, be at ease. Do not grieve. Return home and live in Ayodhyā. Thus have You been requested by father.

I too shall carry out Our noble father's order where he has enjoined Me to stay. It is not justifiable for Me to reject his command, O subduer of the enemy. He deserves to be respected by You always, for he is Our friend and Our father. By the act of residing in the wilderness, I shall fulfill the request of Our father that is well thought of by those who practice virtue. One who wants to attain the spiritual world must be religious, merciful and obedient to one's spiritual master. Remembering the virtuous conduct of Our father King Daśaratha, be situated in the self according to Your own nature, O best of men."

After speaking to Bharata in this way for almost an hour, urging Him to carry out His father's command, Lord Rāma became silent.

## BHARATA VOWS NOT TO RETURN TO AYODHYĀ

When Rāma, who was loved by the common people, became silent, the righteous Bharata spoke to Him as follows: “Who in this world is like You, O conqueror of foes! Sorrow does not afflict You, nor does happiness delight You. Though highly respected by the elderly, You inquire from them about Your doubts. Why would one grieve if he had developed the state of mind in which he considered death the same as life or nonexistence the same as existence? One who knows the difference between matter and spirit as You do should not be despondent upon meeting with adversity. You have the same good qualities as the immortals. You are true to Your word. You are all-knowing, all-seeing and wise, O Rāma. Endowed with such qualities and knowing about the origin and end of all things, unbearable suffering cannot inflict You.

“I am not pleased by the sinful deed perpetrated by My mother for My sake while I was away. Please be kind to Me. I am bound by the ropes of morality and therefore do not kill this sinful woman who is My mother, even though she deserves punishment. How can I, being born from the noble King Daśaratha, knowing as I do what is right and wrong, perpetrate an hateful deed? I do not denounce father in public because he was My preceptor, performed many pious acts, was aged, a monarch, deceased, My father and like a worshipable deity for Me. Indeed, what man, knowing the principles of righteousness, would do a sin so unproductive of piety and prosperity to please a woman, as father has? The scriptures say that at the end of life all living beings become bewildered. That has been illustrated in this world by what the king has done. Bearing in mind the noble purpose, counteract the transgression committed by father due to anger, delusion and rashness.

“In this world, he who corrects his father’s transgression is considered a good son. He who acts otherwise is the opposite. Therefore, be

a real son. Do not uphold the evil deed committed by father which transgresses morality and is despised in this world by the wise. Please do this to save Kaikeyī, Myself, father, Our friends and relatives, the residents of Ayodhyā and all the people of the kingdom. Why this talk of forest life, the duties of a warrior, matted locks of hair and obedience? You should not act in such a contradictory way. The first duty of a kṣatriya is to be coronated king, O wise one, after which he can protect the subjects. What kṣatriya would set aside his obvious duty for one that is doubtful, purposeless, contingent on the future and uncertain. If it is that You want to follow duty born from hardship, achieve Your hardship by protecting the four divisions of society.

“The knowers of duty declare that household life is the best of the four orders of life. Why, then, do You wish to renounce it, O knower of duty? I am definitely junior to You as far as age, learning, strength, rank and birth. How, then, can I rule the earth when You are still alive? Because I am a child devoid of intelligence, good qualities and status, I cannot live without You. O knower of duty, rule over this preeminent kingdom with Your relatives in accordance with Your own prescribed duties as a kṣatriya. Let all the ministers and priests headed by Vasiṣṭha who are learned in sacred texts anoint You king on this very spot. Anointed by us as Indra was by the maruts, and having conquered the world by Your might, go rule over Ayodhyā! There You can repay Your debt to the gods, sages and forefathers, completely destroy Your enemies, satisfy Your friends and relatives with the things they desire and instruct Me.

“Let Your friends rejoice today on Your coronation. Let those who would do evil flee in all directions in fear. Cleaning away the guilt of mother and I, save father from sin this day. I implore You with a bowed head, be merciful to Me and all Your relatives, as Lord Śiva is to the departed spirits. Otherwise, if You go back to the forest from here, I shall accompany You.”

After being entreated by the depressed Bharata in that way, Rāma was not inclined to return to Ayodhyā but stood firm in His dedication to His father’s request. Seeing Rāma’s firmness, the people, though distressed, felt joy. They were sad that He was not going to Ayodhyā and were happy that He remained determined to uphold His father’s promise. The priests,

heads of guilds, ministers and queens whose eyes were full of tears praised Bharata who was speaking in that way and also implored Rāma.

## RĀMA'S REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING

The glorious Rāma once again replied to Bharata: “You just stated that You are the son of King Daśaratha and Queen Kaikeyī. Long ago, O brother, while marrying Kaikeyī, Our father promised Your maternal grandfather the kingdom as a suitable price. Greatly pleasing by Kaikeyī in a battle between the gods and demons, King Daśaratha bestowed upon her two boons. Then, binding him with an oath, Your famed mother, who possesses a remarkable complexion, requested the two boons: sovereignty for You and exile for Me. Urged in that way by her, the king granted her the two boons.

“I have also been ordered by My father to reside here in the forest for fourteen years as part of the boon. In this way, I, who have no rival and stand by the truthfulness of Our father, have come to this desolate forest with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. You too, O greatest of kings, should maintain Our father’s truthfulness by getting Yourself coronated immediately. Free the mighty king from his debt for My sake, O Bharata. Save Your father and please Your mother, O You who are familiar with the principles of duty. My dear brother, in the scriptures there is a statement by the glorious and intelligent King Gaya addressed to the forefathers as he performed a sacrifice in the region of Gaya: ‘Since a son delivers his father from the hell called put, he is called putra, or he who protects his father in every way. One should desire many virtuous and learned sons so that at least one of them might go to Gaya to perform the śrāddha rite there.

“All the wise kings in Our line have believed this, O descendant of King Raghu. Therefore, protect Your father from hell! Return to Ayodhyā with Śatrughna and the twice-born brāhmaṇas and protect the citizens. Without further delay, I too shall enter the Daṇḍaka Forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. You be the ruler of men and I shall be the ruler of beasts. Return happily to Ayodhyā, the foremost of cities, now and I shall gladly enter the



Daṇḍaka Forest. Let the royal umbrella, repulsing the hot sunlight, spread its cool shade over Your head. I too shall eventually seek the dense shade of these forest trees. Let the unequalled Śatrughna be Your assistant and let the famed Lakṣmaṇa be My principle companion. Let Us four worthy sons uphold Our father's truthfulness. Do not be dejected."

## JĀBĀLI'S REASONING

After Rāma tried consoling Bharata in this way, the topmost brāhmaṇa Jābāli presented arguments based on materialistic principles to the wise Lord Rāma: “Very well, O descendant of King Raghu. You should not make a useless proposition like an ordinary man, for You possess noble intelligence and are given to austerities. Who is the friend of anyone? What can be gained from anyone by anyone? For alone is a living being born and so also does he die. Therefore, one who is attached to others as his mother and father should be considered insane, for no one is related to anyone. As a person traveling to another town passes the night somewhere and the next day leaves that place, in the same way are father and mother, hearth and home for one. Ordinary persons become attached to them, but not so an intelligent person.

“Abandoning the throne inherited from Your father, You should not tread the wrong path which is bumpy, scattered with thorns and fraught with difficulties. Be installed on the opulent throne of Ayodhyā. The city is eagerly awaiting you like a woman whose husband is abroad. Savoring royal pleasures, O prince, enjoy in Ayodhyā as Indra does in heaven. King Daśaratha is nothing to You, nor are You related to him. The king was someone and You are someone else. Therefore, do what has been recommended. The father only supplies the seed of a living being. And a person's birth in this world is but the result of a fecund woman's carrying a united sperm and ovum. The king has gone to the destination to which he had to go. Such is the way for all living beings, while You are being tormented for no reason.

“I lament those who are dedicated to wealth and duty, not others, for after suffering so much in this life, they come to an end at death. People in this world perform śrāddha rites thinking that these will please the forefathers. Just see the waste of food! What can a dead man eat? If the food eaten by one person can benefit the body of another, then one might as well

offer śrāddha to a travelling person so that he does not have to eat on the road. Enjoining us to execute sacrifices, give in charity, undertake vows, practice austerities and renounce the world, these books were compiled by very intelligent fellows to encourage charity to themselves. O highly intelligent one, please understand that there is nothing but this world. Accept only what You can see with Your senses. Reject that which cannot be physically perceived. Respecting the judgement of the wise, which is authoritative for the whole world, and having been requested by Bharata, accept the royal throne.”

## RĀMA REJECTS JĀBĀLI'S PHILOSOPHY

After hearing what Jābāli said, Rāma spoke from the authoritative Vedic literatures, using His good intelligence: “The advice which you just gave regarding My attainment of material desires is not worth following. The course of action which you have prescribed, though appearing proper, is not so at all. One who transgresses the mandates of scripture, engages in sinful activities or takes up a way of life or philosophy opposed to that of the Vedas, is not respected by saintly persons. It is conduct alone that determines whether one is high-born or not, corageous or not, pure or impure. One who does what you have recommended would be accepted as noble, though ignoble, clean, though unclean, good-looking, though ugly, well-behaved, though misbehaved.

“If I take up unrighteousness cloaked in righteousness, which leads to the degradation of society, I would be abandoning pious activities for unauthorized ones. What wise person who knows what is to be done and what is not to be done would respect Me in this world when I have performed dispicable acts and corrupted the world? By following the course of action recommended by you and giving up My vow, by what means shall I be able to attain heaven? The result would be that the whole world would engage in licentious activities, for the common people always imitate the activities of royalty. Truthfulness devoid of cruelty is the actual eternal activity for kings. Therefore, truthfulness is the soul of a kingdom. The world is founded on truthfulness.

“The Vedic sages and gods too have only respected truthfulness. Indeed, one who is truthful in this world will attain that highest place which is imperishable. People turn away from one who speaks lies as they do from a snake. Righteousness is meant for truth, which is said to be the root of everything in this world. In this world only truth is God. Righteousness is always dependent on truth. Truth is the basis of everything. There is no

higher destination than truth. Charity, acts of piety, sacrifices, austerities and the Vedas are founded on truth and therefore dependent on it.

“As a result of their actions, one man rules the world, another takes care of his family, one man sinks down to hell, another is elevated to heaven. Why, then, should I, who am true to My promise, not carry out the request of My father, when I have sworn under an oath of truthfulness to do so? Neither out of greed, illusion or the darkness of ignorance shall I break my father’s pledge, true to My word as I am. We have heard that neither the gods nor the forefathers accept the offerings of one who breaks his promise, deviates from truth or has an irresolute mind. I consider this virtue of truthfulness to be imperative for all living beings. The burden of asceticism practiced by the saintly persons is very pleasing to Me. I shall certainly renounce the duties of a kṣatriya, which are actually impious, though possessing a modicum of piety, for they are observed by petty, cruel, greedy and evil-acting men.

“A sinful deed is threefold: having decided in one’s mind to commit a sin, one verbalizes it with the tongue and carries it out with the body. Land, fame, glory and wealth seek one who is truthful. The wise pursue truth, therefore one should worship truth alone. What you have recommended to Me with the logical words, “this is good, do it,” is certainly improper. How could I who have given My promise to reside in the forest flout that promise by doing as Bharata says. I took a firm vow in the presence of My father, and Queen Kaikeyī was thoroughly delighted at the time.

“While living in the forest I shall remain pure, follow a restricted diet and worship the forefathers and gods with roots, flowers and fruits. With the five senses fully satisfied, free from vice, devout and fully aware of what is to be done and what is not to be done, I shall carry out My duty to My father. Having attained this earthly planet, one should perform actions which are auspicious. The gods Agni, Vāyu and Soma are enjoying the fruit of pious activities. After performing one hundred sacrifices, Indra was able to attain heaven. The Vedic sages also ascended to heaven after performing tremendous austerities.”

Thereafter, Prince Rāma, whose might was awesome, then proceeded to refute the atheistic statements made by Jābālī: “Saintly persons say that truthfulness, righteousness, valor, compassion for all living beings, polite speech, and respect for brāhmaṇas, gods and guests constitute the path leading to heaven. Completely carrying out their religious duties as required, and having fully understood their purpose through the instructions of the sages, the brāhmaṇas attain those worlds to which they desire to go. I denounce My father’s act of taking you in when you are a firm unbeliever who has deviated from the path of virtue. It is common knowledge that one who preaches such materialistic philosophy should be dealt with like a thief. Therefore, for the welfare of the citizens this is most appropriate. The wise should not even see the faces of such materialists. Long before you, brāhmaṇas performed manifold pious deeds, giving up all interest in enjoyment in this world and the next. Therefore, brāhmaṇas have performed auspicious deeds and executed sacrifices. The foremost sages who are devoted to righteousness associate with godly persons. They are endowed with spiritual glory, are abundantly endowed with munificence, are nonviolent, devoid of any blemish and deserve to be respected by everyone.”

To the great soul Rāma who was speaking angrily, Jābālī humbly addressed the follows words which showed himself to be a believer in God: “O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty! The words I spoke do not constitute atheism, nor am I an atheist. I do not believe that the spiritual world and other spiritual things do not exist. According to the circumstances I become a theist, and when the circumstances change, I may again become an atheist. At this time the circumstances arose in which I gradually began making atheistic remarks. O Rāma, the reason for my having spoken in that way was to somehow or other convince You to return to Ayodhyā.”

## VASIṢṬHA REQUESTS RĀMA TO BE KING

Seeing Rāma angry, Vasiṣṭha spoke to Him as follows: “O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, the sage Jābāli also accepts the continual reincarnation of the soul in this world. The reason He spoke atheistic philosophy to You was to convince You to return to Ayodhyā. O Lord of the world, learn from me about the creation of this world.

“In the beginning there was only water. From that was produced the earth. After that, the self-born Brahmā appeared, along with the demigods. Appearing as a divine boar, Lord Viṣṇu lifted the earth out of the water. Then Brahmā, assisted by his self-realized sons, manifested everything within the universe. The eternal, everlasting and imperishable Brahmā was born from the ether. From Brahmā was born Marīci, and Marīci’s son was Kaśyapa. Vivasvān was born from Kaśyapa. Vaivasvata Manu was himself a son of Vivasvān. Manu was the previous progenitor of creatures and his son was Ikṣvāku.

“Know that Manu previously entrusted this opulent earth to Ikṣvāku, the first king of Ayodhyā. Ikṣvāku’s son was known as the glorious Kukṣi. Kukṣi’s son was the valliant Vikukṣi. Vikukṣi’s powerful and majestic son was Bāṇa. Bāṇa’s strong-armed son was called Anaraṇya, who practiced strenuous austerities. During the reign of King Anaraṇya, the best of the pious, there was never draught, nor famine nor thieves. King Pṛthu was born, they say, from King Anaraṇya. From Pṛthu was born the greatly powerful Triśaṅku. Do to the unfailing promise of Viśvāmitra, Triśaṅku ascended to heaven in his very material body. Triśaṅku’s son was the very famous Dhundhumāra.

“From Dhundhumāra was born the formidable Yuvanāśva. Yuvanāśva’s son was the glorious Māndhātā. From Māndhātā was born the highly powerful Susandhi. From Susandhi were born two sons: Dhruvasandhi

and Prasena. Susandhi's son was the renowned subduer of enemies, Bharata. From Bharata was born a physically strong son known as Asita. The kings of the Haihayas, Tālajaṅghas and Śūra-śaśabindus became his rivals. They combined their forces and attacked King Asita, forcing him into exile, so he took up the life of an ascetic, residing on the peak of a delightful and excellent mountain. His two wives became pregnant, so it is said. One of them, named Kālindī, who was most fortunate and had eyes resembling lotus petals, desired to have an excellent son. She therefore offered prayers to the sage Cyavana, a descendant of Bhṛgu, who was as effulgent as a demigod. In order to kill Kālindī's fetus, the other co-wife administered her poison.

"The sage named Cyavana resided in the Himalaya Mountains. Approaching the sage, Kālindī greeted him. Being pleased, he said to her who desired a son: 'You shall have a son, my lady, who will be a great soul and renowned throughout the world. He will be just, most formidable and the destroyer of the enemies of his dynasty.' After hearing this, she circumambulated clockwise around the sage and took leave of him. Returning home, the queen gave birth to a son with eyes like lotus petals and who was as effulgent as Lord Brahmā. The child was born with the poison that had been administered by the queen's co-wife with the intention of killed the fetus. Therefore the child was called Sagara, which means "with poison." Desiring to perform a sacrifice on the new moon day, King Sagara had his sons dig out the ocean, and the speed of their digging frightened the creatures of this planet.

Sagara's son was Asamañja, so we have heard. Being a doer of sinful deeds, he was rejected by his own father while alive. Asamañja's son was Amśumān, and Amśumān's son was the valiant Dilīpa. Dilīpa's son was Bhagīratha. From Bhagīratha was Kakutstha born, afterwhom all the descendants in his dynasty are called Kākutsthas. Kakutstha's son was Raghu, for which reason his descendant are called Rāghavas. Raghu's powerful son was Kalmāṣapāda, who was famous in this world as Pravṛddha and Saudāsa. He was later cursed to become a man-eating Rākṣasa. Kalmāṣapāda's son was Śaṅkhaṇa, so we have heard. He was so chivalrous that he died with his army in battle. Śaṅkhaṇa's most valliant son was the splendid Sudarśana. Sudarśana's son was Agnivarṇa, and Agnivarṇa's son was Śighraga. Śighraga's son was Maru, and Maru's son was Praśuśruva.



Praśuśruva's son was the highly intelligent Ambarīṣa. Ambarīṣa's son was Nahuṣa, whose valor was unfailing. Nahuṣa's son was Nābhāga, who was most righteous. Nābhāga had two sons—Aja and Suvrata. Aja's righteous son was King Daśaratha. You are his eldest son and are known by the name Rāma. O ruler of the world, accept this kingdom which is yours and look after it. Amongst all the descendants of Ikṣvāku the first-born son has always become king. A younger son has never become king while an older son was alive. The eldest son is always crowned king. Yourself being a Rāghava, do not at this time reject the ancient traditions of Your dynasty. As glorious as You are, rule this earth abounding in gems and comprising many nations, as did Your father.

## BHARATA OFFERS TO TAKE RĀMA'S PLACE

After speaking to Rāma in that way, Vasiṣṭha, the family priest of the king, again spoke righteous words to Rāma: “As soon as one is born in this world, one has to honor several preceptors, O descendant of Raghu; they are the ācārya, the father and the mother. O best of men, the father produces a person’s body. But the preceptor gives realized knowledge and is therefore called guru. I am not only your father’s preceptor, but yours also, O chastiser of the enemy. By carrying out my request You will not deviate from the path of the pious. Here are your councillors, family relations and tributary kings. By performing your duty in relation to them, my son, You will not deviate from the path of the pious. You should not neglect Your duties toward Your aged and righteous mother. By following her request You will not deviate from the path of the pious. By fulfilling the request of Bharata, who is entreating You, You will not transgress Your bounds, O descendant of Raghu, for You are endowed with truthfullness, righteousness and valor.”

Being instructed by His spiritual master with such sweet words, Lord Rāma Himself replied to Vasiṣṭha, who was sitting peacefully: “The service rendered by the mother and father to their son, such as giving him whatever they can, putting him to rest, massaging his body with oil, always speaking to him sweetly, and nourishing him, cannot be easily repaid. Indeed, the order given by My father, King Daśaratha, who gave birth to Me, shall not be proven false.”

After Rāma finished speaking in this way, the broad-chested Bharata, being greatly dismayed, spoke to the charioteer Sumantra who was standing nearby: “O Charioteer, immediately spread a mat of kuśa grass on this piece of level ground here. I shall pressure my noble brother until He is pleased with Me. I shall lie down in front of Rāma’s hut like a penniless brāhmaṇa fasting with his head covered, until He agrees to return to Ayodhyā.”

Bharata, who was extremely perturbed, glanced at Sumantra, who was staring at a Lord Rāma. Then He Himself spread the kuśa grass mat on the ground and sat down. Then the most radiant Rāma, the best of royal sages, said to Bharata: “My dear brother Bharata, what have I done that You wish to put pressure on Me? Only a brāhmaṇa should restrain people by lying on one side at their doorways. But warriors whose heads have been anointed with holy water should not sit at anyone’s door. Arise, O tiger among men. Having given up this terrible vow, leave this place and return to Ayodhyā, the best of cities.”

Looking all about him, Bharata said to the citizens of the state as He sat there: “Why don’t you plead with My elder brother?” Then the people of the capital and countryside replied to the great-souled Bharata: “O descendant of Kakutstha, we know that You speak properly to Lord Rāma. But this most fortunate prince also stands by the request of His father. Therefore, we are not able at this time to dissuade Him from His present course of action.” Hearing their statement, Rama spoke these words: “O Bharata, just try to understand these words spoken by Our well-wishers whose vision is fixed on righteousness. After hearing both what they said and what I am about to say, understand them fully. Get up, O strong-armed one, and touch Me and water.”

Then Bharata got up, touched water and said: “My dear assembly members and ministers, please listen to Me. I never requested My father for the kingdom, nor did I ever instruct My mother in this regards. Neither do I agree with My brother Rāma, who knows the highest principles of righteousness. If it is necessary to uphold the veracity of My father’s words, I Myself shall live in exile in the forest for fourteen years.”

Amazed upon hearing the sincere words of His brother, the righteous Rāma looked at the citizens of the capital and kingdom and said: “Whatever My father sold, deposited or purchased while alive cannot be annulled by Me or by Bharata. I cannot send a substitute for Myself into exile, as this is completely reproachable. Kaikeyī’s request was reasonable and My father’s action was virtuous. I know that Bharata is forgiving and naturally respectful to His superiors. In this regards, everything will be fine with this great soul who is true to His word. When I have returned from the forest, I shall become the supreme ruler of the world along with this virtuous

brother. As a boon was requested from the king by Kaikeyī, I am fulfilling that pledge. Accepting this instruction from Me, release Our father, the emperor, from falsity.”

## BHARATA RECEIVES RĀMA'S SANDALS

The great sages gathered there were amazed to see the thrilling meeting of the two brothers of unparalleled glory—Rāma and Bharata. Hosts of great sages who were there invisibly and those who were there visibly praised the two extremely fortunate brothers who were descendants of King Kakutstha: “The two princes, Rāma and Bharata, are always noble, conversant with the principles of righteousness and practicing the same. After hearing Their conversation, we wish to hear it again and again.”

Then the hosts of sages, who were longing for the death of the ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa, hastily addressed Bharata, the tiger among men, with one voice, saying: “O prince of noble lineage, You are most intelligent, the executor of outstanding deeds and of wide renown. You should accept Rāma’s request, if You have any regard for Your father. We wish to see Rāma freed for good from this obligation to His father. And because of eliminating his debt to Kaikeyī, King Daśaratha ascended to heaven.”

Having spoken in this way, the gandharvas, great sages and royal sages all departed for their respective destinations. Pleased by their statement, the effulgent Rāma shone brilliantly. With great delight showing on His face, Rāma respectfully praised the sages. Bharata, however, joined His palms and, as His body trembled, again addressed Rāma with a faltering voice: “O Rāma, considering the custom of royal succession in Our dynasty, You should comply with it, thus fulfilling my request and that of Your mother. I cannot single-handedly manage the kingdom, nor can I satisfy the citizens of the nation when they are completely attached to You. Our kinfolk, warriors, friends and well-wishers await You exclusively, as farmers do a rain cloud. Accepting this kingdom, O most intelligent one, administer it. You are the one who is able to give complete protection to the people, O descendant of Kakutstha.”

After speaking in this way, Bharata fell at the feet of His brother and further entreated Him with exceedingly sweet words and by exclaiming “O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty!” Rāma placed on His lap His brother whose complexion was swarthy and whose eyes were as broad as lotus petals, and spoke to Him with a voice like a swan in rut: “My dear brother, surely You can protect the entire earth with the natural wisdom born of humility which you have just exhibited. Do all Your affairs, however big they may be, in consultation with Your councillors, well-wishers and wise ministers. The moon may lose its effulgence, the Himalayas may shed their snows and the ocean may transgress its boundaries, but I will not forsake My father’s promise. My dear brother, whether Your mother acted out of concern for Your welfare or out of greed for sovereignty, do not take her action so seriously. And You should treat her as Your mother.”

Thereafter Bharata said the following to Rāma, the son of Kausalyā, who was equal to the sun in splendor and as pleasing to see as the new moon: “O noble one, please place Your foot on this pair of sandals. These will definitely supply the needs and maintain the assets of the people.” Placing His feet on the sandals and then removing them, Rāma, the most glorious tiger among men, gave them to the great soul Bharata. Bowing respectfully to those sandals, Bharata said to Rāma: “O descendant of King Raghu, for fourteen years I shall wear matted locks of hair and bark cloth for clothes and eat only fruits and roots. Longing for Your return, I shall dwell outside the city. The rule of the kingdom will be carried out by Your sandals, O destroyer of enemies. However, if I do not see You the day after the fourteenth year is concluded, I shall enter in fire.”

Giving His approval by saying, “So be it,” Rāma affectionately embraced Bharata. Then He also embraced Śatrughna and spoke the following: “Take care of Mother Kaikeyī. Do not be angry with her. Sītā and I pledge You to this oath.” Speaking in this way, Rāma, whose eyes were brimming with tears, bade farewell to His brother, so it is said. Accepting those resplendent, ornate sandals, Bharata, who was conversant with duty, circumambulated Rāma clockwise, then placed those sandals on top of His own head, which resembled that of an excellent bull elephant. Then, offering respects to the people according to their station, including preceptors, ministers, subjects and His two younger brothers, Rāma, who was unshaken in the execution of His duties like the Himalayas, bade farewell to them all.

His mothers, whose throats were choked up with tears due to sorrow, were unable to say goodbye to Him. Offering respects with folded hands to all His mothers, Rāma, weeping, entered His own hut.

## BHARATA RETURNS TO AYODHYĀ

Carrying Rāma's sandals on His head, Bharata was ecstatic and, accompanied by Śatrughna, He mounted a chariot. Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, Jābāli of firm vows, the royal ministers and everyone else honored for their advice proceeded ahead of the chariot. Keeping the great mountain of Citrakūṭa to their right, they proceeded eastward, crossing the pleasant Mandākinī River. Seeing thousands of different kinds of dazzling minerals, Bharata, followed by the army, left the mountain behind them. Not far from Citrakūṭa Bharata saw the hermitage in which the sage Bharadvāja resided.

Arriving at Bharadvāja's hermitage and getting down from His chariot, the valiant Bharata, the delight of His dynasty, prostrate Himself before the sage's two lotus feet. Thereafter, the delighted sage Bharadvāja said: "My son, did You find Rāma and did You accomplish Your task?" Having been questioned in this way by the sage Bharadvāja, Bharata, who was devoted to duty, replied to Bharadvāja: "Being requested by His preceptor and by Myself, Rāma, who was highly pleased and of steadfast prowess, replied to Vasiṣṭha in the following way: 'I shall certainly carry out My father's request, which was that I should remain in the forest for fourteen years.' Being spoken to in that way, the highly learned Vasiṣṭha, who is expert in speaking, spoken these momentous words to the skillful speaker Rāma: 'Be pleased to give these wooden sandals encrusted with gold filigree to Bharata. Fulfil the needs of the people of Ayodhyā, O highly intelligent prince.' Having been requested in this way by the sage, Rāma, who was facing east, gave me His wooden sandals encrusted with gold to rule the kingdom. Having departed from there as permitted by the great soul Rāma, I am bringing those auspicious sandals to Ayodhyā."

Upon hearing this good news from the great soul Bharata, the sage Bharadvāja spoke the following words which were very remarkable: "O tiger among men, as water flows to a low place, it is not at all surprising that noble behavior should be found in You, O best of those who know how to behave



properly. Your father, the mighty King Daśaratha, is free from debt by having a righteous son like You, devoted as You are to duty.”

Joining His palms together, Bharata clasped the feet of the sage who had spoken and began to request permission to leave. After circumablating Bharadvāja again and again, the splendid Bharata then departed for Ayodhyā along with His ministers. The huge army following Bharata returned to Ayodhyā riding chariots, ox carts, horses and elephants.

After crossing the divine Yamunā River, which was rippled with waves, they all once more saw the Ganges River, whose waters are holy. After crossing with His relatives that river which was full of pleasant waters, He entered the lovely town of Śrīngaverapura. Leaving Śrīngaverapura, he again saw Ayodhyā, so it is said. Seeing Ayodhyā deprived of His father and brothers, however, Bharata, who was stricken with sorrow, spoke these words to His chariot driver: “O charioteer! See how Ayodhyā is desolate and does not look well. It is deprived of its former beauty, joyless, wretched and is completely quiet.”

## AYODHYĀ'S GLOOMY APPEARANCE

Riding in a chariot which produced a deep, pleasant sound, the highly renowned Bharata soon entered the city of Ayodhyā. Cats and owls prowled the streets and the doors of the houses were closed to the entry of people. It was enveloped in darkness, like the new moon night in which the goddess Kālī is worshiped. It looked afflicted like star Rohiṇī, the dear consort of the moon, when the planet Rāhu is in the ascendant, although she normally shines brightly. It resembled a feeble mountain stream whose meager waters had become hot and agitated, whose water fowl had become scorched by the sun and whose small fish, large fish and amphibious creatures had vanished. It resembled a smokeless flame of fire shining like gold that had been extinguished after being sprinkled with sacrificial milk. It resembled an army which had suffered in a major conflict, with its armor smashed, its flags borne on horses, elephants and chariots torn and its great heroes killed.

It resembled a tumultuous ocean wave crested with foam which had been rendered quiet by a softer wind. It resembled a sacrificial altar which, after the sacrificial ceremony has been completed, is cleared of all sacrificial paraphernalia, abandoned by the sacrificial priests and left in desolation. It resembled a cow eager for breeding that was standing in a pen, but who had been abandoned by her bull and, pained by this, was refusing to eat fresh grass. It resembled a new necklace of pearls that had had its finest quality, highly polished, sparkling rubies and other gems removed. It resembled a star which had suddenly fallen from its place in the sky when its pious merit was exhausted and which, upon reaching the earth, was deprived of its natural splendor. It resembled a forest creeper laddened with flowers at the end of spring and frequented by agitated bees that had been scorched by a blazing forest fire.

The entire city, with its subdued traffic and meager commercial transactions, resembled a cloudy sky with the moon and stars covered. It resembled a smashed liquor tavern, its floor unswept and strewn with

broken cups and saucers, its stock of liquor gone and its liquor drinkers killed. It resembled a water shed which had collapsed and lost all its water, with its base crushed and sunken and its tanks destroyed. It resembled a broad and long bow string with nooses at both ends which was lying on the ground after being severed from its bow by the arrows of a hero. It resembled a fallen mare which, having been urged on by her driver skilled in battle, was killed by the enemy army.

Bharata, the glorious son of King Daśaratha, who was sitting in His chariot, spoke as follows to the charioteer who was driving the best of chariots: “I wonder how it is that the resonate sound of vocal and instrumental music is no longer heard in Ayodhyā as it used to. The fragrance of fermented honey, scented flower garlands, sandalwood paste and aloe which use to permeate everywhere, cannot be smelled at all. One does not hear the sound of excellent conveyances, the neighing of fine steeds, the trumpeting of excited elephants nor the loud rumbling of chariots.

“Since Rāma’s exile to the forest, none of these is presently heard in this city. Greatly distressed since Rāma left, the young people do not use sandalwood paste or aloe paste, nor garlands made with expensive wild flowers. Neither do they make trips outside wearing garlands of many different fragrant flowers. Festivals are not held in the city because of the sorrow felt over the banishment of Rāma. The splendor of this city has indeed departed with My brother. This city of Ayodhyā appears no brighter than a dark moon night during a tempest. When will My brother, having returned like a great festival, bring immeasurable happiness to Ayodhyā, like a rain cloud during a hot summer. The avenues are no long adorned with young people dressed in fashionable clothes as they proudly stroll through the city of Ayodhyā.”

After speaking in this way to His charioteer, the grief-stricken Bharata entered the city of Ayodhyā and then His father’s residence, which, without His father’s presence, resembled a cave without its lion. Seeing the royal residence bereft of its radiance, like a day deprived of sunlight by the demigods, and appearing untidy in every corner, the self-controlled Bharata was overcome with grief and shed tears.

## BHARATA RETIRES TO NANDIGRĀMA

After bringing His mothers back to Ayodhyā, Bharata of firm vows, being stricken with grief, then spoke the following words to His preceptors: “I ask your permission to go to Nandigrāma. Bereft of Rāma, I shall endure all this suffering there. Alas, King Daśaratha has ascended to heaven and My elder brother has gone to the forest. I am simply waiting for Rāma to rule the kingdom, for He is the most glorious king.”

Hearing these wonderful words uttered by the great soul Bharata, all the ministers and the family priest Vasiṣṭha said: “Impelled by love for Your brother, the words You have spoken are most praiseworthy, O Bharata. Only You are capable of such feelings. As desirous as You are for Your relatives’ association and as determined as You are to procure Their welfare, You have taken up a noble path. Who would not approve of Your decision?”

After hearing the sweet reply of the ministers, which was as He had hoped it would be, Bharata told His charioteer: “Get My chariot ready.” He then spoke with a joyful countenance to all His mothers and mounted the chariot along with Śatrughna. After getting on the chariot, Bharata and Śatrughna, glowing with delight and surrounded by the ministers and family priests, quickly departed. With their superiors and twice-born brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha leading the way, they all headed eastward along the path leading to Nandigrāma. All the residents of the city, and the army too, with its elephants, horses and chariots, followed after Bharata without being asked to do so. Seated on the chariot, the righteous Bharata, devoted as He was to His brother, quickly proceeded towards Nandigrāma, carrying the wooden sandals on His head.

After entering Nandigrāma and quickly getting down from the chariot, Bharata immediately said to His superiors: “This kingdom has been especially entrusted to Me by My brother, along with this pair of wooden sandals encrusted with gold to provide for Our necessities.” Bowing His

head, Bharata offered that endowment to the sandals and then, pained with sorrow, addressed the crowd of ministers: “Hold the royal umbrella over these sandals. I consider them to be equal to the lotus feet of My brother. My older brother’s sandals will protect the principles of righteousness in this kingdom. Out of affection My brother has entrusted Me with custody of the kingdom. I shall look after it until Rāma returns. As soon as Rāma Himself returns, I shall have the pleasure of beholding His two lotus feet after I place them on these sandals.”

“After being reunited with My elder brother and having put aside this responsibility by giving the kingdom back to Him, I shall serve Him as I did My father. By relinquishing the stewardship of the kingdom and city of Ayodhyā to Rāma, along with these excellent sandals, I shall be absolved of sin. When Rāma is coronated, the joy and glory of the kingdom will be four times greater than during My rule. ”

Lamenting in this way, the forelorn Bharata ruled the kingdom Nandigrāma remorsefully with the help of the ministers. Bharata also donned the garb of an ascetic, wearing bark cloth and matted hair, and resided with sobriety accompanied by His army. Longing for the return of Rāma, Bharata, who was very fond of His brother and engaged in carrying out His instructions in order to satisfy His request, installed the sandals as the representative of Rāma and then resided at Nandigrāma. Bharata deferred the entire administration of the kingdom to the sandals of Rāma. After installing Rāma’s sandals, the glorious Bharata ruled the kingdom in submission to them. Whatever matter arose or whatever valuable gift was offered, Bharata presented it first to the sandals of Rāma and then dealt with it accordingly afterwards.

## THE ASCETICS ABANDON CITRAKŪṬA

Some time after Bharata had returned to Ayodhyā, as Rāma continued living in the forest, He noticed that the ascetics were eager to leave the area due to fear. He saw that the ascetics, who had previously lived happily in the shelter of Lord Rāma in His hermitage at Citrakūṭa, now appeared anxious. The anxious ascetics made signals towards Rāma with their eyes and eyebrows, and calling one another, they whispered among themselves. Seeing their apprehension, Rāma was worried about Himself and, joining His palms, spoke to the head of the sages: “O honorable one, perhaps My ancestors’ virtuous conduct is not found in Me, or I have committed some transgression which has displeased the ascetics. I hope the ascetics have not detected in My younger brother Lakṣmaṇa some impropriety committed out of carelessness and which is unbecoming of a great soul. I hope that while Sītā was serving you She did not accidentally commit any offense.”

Thereafter the sage, who was not only advanced in years, but also in the practice of asceticism, spoke as if trembling to Rāma, who is merciful to all living beings: “My son, how could Sītā have committed any wrong when She is the embodiment of auspiciousness, is always engaged in auspicious activities and especially attendant to ascetics. Because of You the ascetics are confronted with peril by rākṣasas. Out of anxiety, they are discussing the matter among themselves. A rākṣasa of the name Khara, who is the younger brother of Rāvaṇa, is driving away all the ascetics who live in Janasthāna. He is impudent, eager for battle, merciless, fond of eating human flesh, proud and sinful. And he cannot stand You, my son.

“Ever since You began residing in this hermitage, my lad, the rākṣasas have been harassing the ascetics. They show themselves before us in many different forms that are disgusting, savage, freightful and disquieting to see. Bringing the ascetics into contact with impure and inauspicious things, the ignoble beasts slaughter those standing before them. Making themselves invisible, those fools enter the various hermitages and enjoy

killing the ascetics there. When it is time to offer oblations into the sacred fire, they scatter the sacrificial laddles and other utensils, extinguish the fire with water and crush the clay water pots. Desirous of abandoning those hermitages besieged by such wicked creatures, the sages are now urging me to go to some other region. Therefore, before those evil ones do any physical harm to the ascetics, we shall certainly abandon this hermitage. I shall, with my associates, take shelter of the hermitage of the sage Áśva, which is not too far from here and which abounds with many kinds of edible roots and fruits. O Rāma, if Your mind is inclined, leave this place with us before Khara acts against You. Although You are always alert and capable of dealing with any threat, Your stay in this place and that of Your wife also is now at risk. “

Prince Rāma could not convince the sage with arguments, eager as he was to go. After praising Rāma, offering Him advice and taking leave of Him, the head of the ascetics, accompanied by his associates, abandoned the hermitage. Lord Rāma followed the sages to see them off as they left that place and offered respects to the sage who headed the group. Being completely pleased with Him, they gave Him some instructions about His duty. When they allowed Him to, He returned to His own hut to rest. Lord Rāma did not leave the hermitage for a moment now that it was abandoned by the sages. The ascetics too always remembered the superexcellent qualities of Lord Rāma.

## RĀMA MEETS THE SAGE ATRI

After the sages had left, Rāma, thinking about what they had said, did not want to stay there any longer for many reasons: “I saw My brother Bharata, My mothers and the people of Ayodhyā here. Because their memory haunts Me, I am constantly suffering. Besides, the area has been greatly polluted by the dung of the horses and elephants of the great soul Bharata’s army while it camped here. Therefore, let Us go elsewhere.”

Thinking in this way, Rāma, the best of the Raghu Dynasty, departed from there with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Reaching the hermitage of the sage Atri, the glorious Rāma offered him respects. The illustrious sage also welcomed Rāma as if He were his own son. After personally offering Rāma all the hospitality due a guest, the sage also welcomed the most fortunate Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā.

Atri, the foremost of sages, who was conversant with the execution of duty and was engaged in the welfare of all living beings, then summoned his aged wife Anasūyā, who was most fortunate, austere and dedicated to religious practices, and said to her, “Please welcome Sītā, the princess of Vaideha.”

He then introduced Anasūyā to Rāma: “My dear son, this is Anasūyā. When the land was continuously scorched by drought for ten years, through her practice of severe austerities and strict observance of rules and regulations she produced edible roots and fruits and made a branch of the sacred Ganges flow nearby this hermitage. She engaged in intense penance for ten thousand years and thus hindered any obstruction of our sacred rituals and sacrifices. To pacify of the gods, she reduced ten celestial nights into one. This is she, who is like Your own mother, O sinless one. Let Sītā approach this aged hermitess who deserves the respect of everyone and who is always free from anger.”



When the sage finished speaking in that way, Rāma said: “So be it.” Glancing at Sītā who knew what was right, He said the following: “O princess, You have heard what the sage just said. For Your own good fortune quickly approach the hermitess. She has become famous in this world as Anasūyā, or one free from envy, as well as by her deeds. Go to her side immediately.”

Hearing these words from the illustrious Rāma, Sītā approached the ritheous wife of Atri, who, due to old age, was wrinkled, grey-haired, cold and constantly trembling like a banana tree in a storm. Sītā offered respects to the fortunate Anasūyā who was devoted to her husband, and introduced Herself by uttering Her own name. After greeting the hermitess who had never committed an offense, Sītā with joined palms gladly inquired about the lady’s health.

Seeing the highly fortunate and dutiful Sītā, the elderly woman said in a comforting manner: “Luckily Your eyes are fixed on righteousness. Abandoning Your relatives and self-pride, O noble Sītā, You are by good fortune following Rāma who has been exiled to the forest. A sublime world awaits that woman who remains dear to her husband, whether he resides in the city or forest, or whether he is good or bad. For women endowed with innate goodness, their husbands are like worshipable deities, regardless of whether they are misbehaved, lusty or completely bereft of wealth.

“Therefore, after due consideration, I do not see any better friend than one’s husband, nor one more capable of giving protection in all circumstances, like the ever-lasting result of the execution of penance. However, ignorant of impropriety of their character, they do not follow their husbands, but go about as they please. Those perverse women whose hearts are full of lusty desires hen-peck their husbands. Women who commit such misdeeds certainly achieve infamy and fall down from righteousness, O Sītā.

“On the other hand, women like You, who are endowed with many virtues and have learned the difference between good and bad, ascend to heaven as do those who perform pious activities. As such, remain chaste and devoted to Your husband. Consider Him to be Your ultimate worshipable Deity. And serve Him at the proper times. Living with Your husband, assist

Him in the execution of His duties. Thus You will attain both fame and virtue.”

## ANASŪYĀ'S GIFTS TO SĪTĀ

Thanking Anasūyā for what she said, Sītā began to reply slowly and without enviousness: “These words spoken by one as noble as you are not at all surprising. But I am already aware that a woman’s husband is her superior. Even if My husband were ignoble or without any means of livelihood, I would have acted the same without any further consideration. How much more so in the case of Rāma, who is praiseworthy due to his good qualities. He is kind to all living beings, has conquered His senses, has steadfast affection, and is righteous and as dear as one’s mother and father. The mighty Rāma treats the king’s other wives just as He does His own mother Kausalyā. Once King Daśaratha’s loving glance had reposed upon the queens, Rāma, as fond as He was of the king and knowing His duty, gave up all pride and treated them as His mother.

“Whatever instructions I received from My mother-in-law as I timidly left for the desolate wilderness are fixed in my mind. I also remember the instructions given by My mother at the time when she gave My hand in marriage before the sacred fire. Your instructions have fortified My remembrance of these, O lady engaged in the practice of virtue. The only austerity required of a wife is the service of her husband. By serving her husband, Savitrī is magnified in the heavenly region. Rohiṇī, the best of women and a deity in the heavenly world cannot be seen even for a moment without the moon. Women who have such exceptional and unswerving devotion for their husband attain the worlds of the gods by their pious deeds.”

Hearing what Sītā had said, the delighted Anasūyā smelled Sītā’s head, then spoke to engaden Her: “Of course I have tremendous power achieved by the execution of many different ritualistic observances. On the basis of that power, O Sītā of holy vows, choose a boon. Your words are reasonable and just, and I am pleased by them. What can I do to please You?” Surprised by what Anasūyā said, Sītā, smiling sweetly, replied to the

lady who had acquired strength through penance: “All My needs are already taken care of.” Hearing this, the dutiful hermitess was most pleased and declared: “Aha, Sītā, I shall fulfill Your whimsy. This excellent and celestial garland of flowers, these clothes and ornaments, cosmetics and costly unguents—let me give these to You, O Sītā, to beautify Your limbs. They befit You and will never deteriorate. O daughter of King Janaka, when these heavenly cosmetics are applied to Your limbs, You will decorate Your husband as Lakṣmī does the immortal Lord Viṣṇu.”

Then Sītā accepted the clothes, cosmetics, ornaments and flower garland as a unexcelled gift of love. After accepting that gift of love, the glorious Sītā sat with joined palms at the side of that lady whose wealth was austerity. Then Anasūyā, while sitting beside Sītā, began questioning Her in order to hear some pleasing narration: “I have heard, O Sītā, that the illustrious Rāma achieved You in a svayamvara ceremony. I wish to hear a detailed account of this. Please relate the full story to me exactly as it occurred.”

Hearing her request, Sītā, who was dedicated to the practice of virtue, said to the hermitess: “Please listen.” Then She began narrating the story: “The gallant king of Mithilā is known as Janaka. He is conversant with the principles of righteousness, is engaged in the duties of a monarch and rules the world justly. While the king was tilling a field, holding the handles of the plough, from the furrowed earth I arose, they say, and so I became the king’s daughter. When the king, who was scatter seeds of grain at the time, saw Me with all My limbs covered with dust, He was surprised. Having no other children, he lifted Me up and placed Me in His lap. Declaring, ‘This is my daughter,’ he showered Me with affection. Then a superhuman voice was heard speaking from the sky: ‘So be it, O monarch. From the moral point of view this girl will be your daughter.’

“My father, the king of Mithilā, was overcome with joy. The king obtained vast wealth by having Me as his daughter. I was then given like a coveted object, to the pious but elderly queen, who was like a goddess. I was raised by that affectionate woman with motherly love.

“When My father saw that I had attained the age when a girl easily finds a husband, he experienced anxiety like a person who by misfortune

loses all his wealth. In this world, the father of an unmarried girl, even if he is equal to Indra, is insulted by the suitors, whether they be his equals or inferiors. Realizing that such calumny was not far away, he could not cross over this ocean of anxiety any more than could a person without a boat swim across the sea.

“Remembering how I was not born from a mother’s womb, the king could not, even after long consideration, find a fitting suitor for Me. While he was thinking in this way, the idea occurred to him: ‘In accordance with the code of conduct followed by the warrior caste, I shall allow Her to choose a match in a svayamvara ceremony. In a great sacrifice the great soul Varuṇa kindly bestowed upon my ancestor Devarāta an outstanding bow, quiver and an inexhaustible supply of arrows. Kings were unable to move it, not even in their dreams, as if men, even through great exertion, were unable to move it because of its weight. After previously inviting all the kings in the world, My father, truthful as he is, had the bow brought into the gathered assembly and announced: ‘He who can lift this bow and string it will have the hand of my daughter in marriage. Of this there is no doubt.’

“On seeing that super-excellent bow which was as heavy as a mountain, the kings offered their respects and left, being unable to lift it. After a long time, however, the highly effulgent Rāma, who is standing here, came with the sage Viśvāmitra to see a sacrifice. My father dutifully received Rāma, whose prowess is unfailing, along with His brother Lakṣmaṇa and Viśvāmitra. Afterwards the righteous soul Viśvāmitra said to My father: ‘Here are the two sons of King Daśaratha—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. They are eager to see your celestial bow. Please show it to Prince Rāma.’

“Being requested in that way by the brāhmaṇa, My father asked that the celestial bow be brought, and showed it to the prince. In a mere instant, the mighty Rāma bent the bow, attached its string and pulled it back. While pulling the string with full force, the bow broke in two at the middle. The bow’s breaking produced a tremendous sound like that of a thunderclap. True to his word, My father was ready, with an excellent vessel of water, to give My hand in marriage. Not knowing the desire of His father, the king of Ayodhyā and His master, He did not accept Me at that time. Afterwards My father invited My father-in-law, the aged King Daśaratha. I was then given

by My father to the self-realized soul Rāma. My beautiful, younger sister Ūrmilā was given as a wife to Lakṣmaṇa by My father himself. This is how I was given to Rāma during the svayamvara ceremony. In accordance with the principles of righteousness, I am fully devoted to My husband, who is the best of valliant heroes.”

## ENTERING THE HEART OF THE DANḌAKA FOREST

After hearing the great story of Sītā's marriage, Anasūyā smelled the head of Sītā. Embracing Sītā, she said: "What You have said in clear terms is sweet and interesting. I had already heard how Your selection of a husband took place. I would be delighted to hear more of Your story, but the brilliant sun has set, ushering in the peaceful night. The noise of birds returning to their nests to sleep for the night after flying about during the day in search of food can be heard. The hermits, their skin and bark cloth wet with water after bathing, are returning together with uplifted vessels filled with water. Now that the sage Atri has offered oblations into the sacrificial fire according to scriptural ordinance, a column of dark blue smoke is being carried away by the wind.

"Although the land in the far distance is not densely covered with foliage, it is becoming very unclear. Rākṣasas that prowl at night are moving all about. The deer in this grove are lying down on the sacred altars. The night fully adorned with stars has set in, O Sītā. The moon enveloped in silvery beams can be seen very clearly in the sky. You may go. I give You permission. Be an assistant to Rāma. I too have been well pleased by Your sweet words. In the mean time, dress Yourself with the clothes and ornaments before me, O princess of Mithilā. Gratify me by decorating Yourself with these divine ornaments, my darling. After dressing Herself and offering respects with a bowed head, Sītā, who looked like a daughter of the gods, then went to meet Rāma.

Rāma saw Sītā decorated in that way and was overjoyed by the gift of love given by the hermitess. Sītā then told Rāma everything about how the hermitess had lovingly given Her the ornaments. Rāma, and Lakṣmaṇa too, were very glad to see the hospitality offered to Sītā, a hospitality very rarely seen among human beings. Seeing that Sītā, whose face shone like the moon, had been so nicely honored by the hermits, Rāma happily passed the

night with Them all. When the night ended, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa bathed and then took leave of the ascetics dwelling in the forest, who just finished offering oblations into the sacrificial fire.

The ascetics who were dwelling in the forest then told the two princes about the area of that forest that was inhabited by rākṣasas.

“Rākṣasas that eat human flesh and who can assume any guise, as well as blood-thirsty beasts of prey, live in this great wilderness, O descendant of Raghu. They devour any ascetic or celibate monk who has not rinsed his mouth after eating, or is careless. This is the path followed by great sages who live on fruits in the forest. It is better that You take it to penetrate the dense forest.” After addressing Rāma in this way with joined palms, the ascetics recited benedictory prayers for Him. Thereafter Rāma entered the forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, as the sun enters a mass of clouds.