

From The Ravana of Lust To The Ramsetu of Love

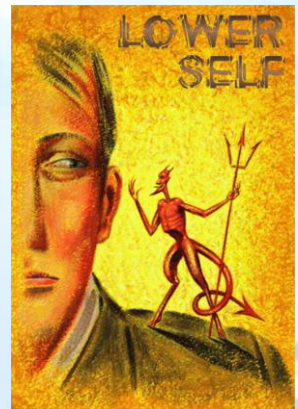
During the construction of the celebrated Rama-setu, Lord Rama wondered how the stones thrown by the monkeys were floating. One night, he went alone to the coast to test if stones thrown by him would float too. To his dismay, every one of his stones sank. Embarrassed, he looked around to see if anybody had noticed his failure.



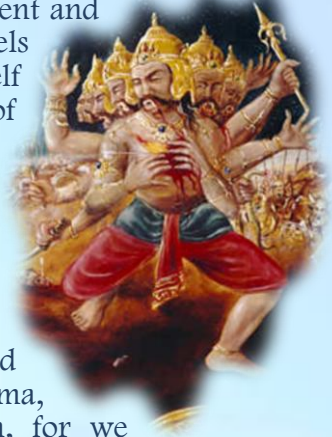
He saw his beloved servitor-monkey Hanuman standing behind, smiling. Rama enquired, "Hanuman, how is that your stones float, but mine sink?" Hanuman folded his hands and said, "My dear Lord, this is just your *lila* to teach us. You are making huge planets float in space, so what is the difficulty for you to make stones float in water? Before throwing stones in water, we write your name on them. By their floating, you teach that anyone who takes shelter of your holy name will fearlessly float in the turbulent ocean of this material world. And by the sinking of the stones thrown by you, you teach that those rejected by you have no chance of floating."

This endearing pastime is typical of the hundreds of divine loving exchanges that fill the Ramayana and make it one of the world's most cherished devotional classics. Indeed, eminent literary historian A. A. Macdonnell notes, "Probably no other work of world literature has produced so profound an influence in the life and thought of a people as the Ramayana." The Ramayana teaches us to face worldly adversities, even atrocities, with courage, dignity, integrity and humility, as did Rama when exiled, Sita when abducted and Hanuman when frustrated while searching for Sita.

Ravana, the ten-headed demon king whose gigantic effigies are set ablaze with flaming arrows on Dussehra, teaches us the perils of succumbing to worldly passions. Born in a virtuous lineage and empowered by the blessings of Shiva, Ravana had the potential to



be a great leader - even of the celestials. Unfortunately, all his potential was misused because he let himself be conquered by his lower self. Blinded by lust and infatuated by might, he viewed the entire creation as meant for his selfish enjoyment and ravished celestial and terrestrial damsels indiscriminately. Ultimately, when he let himself be captivated by lust for Sita, the goddess of fortune, he paved the way for his own fatal misfortune.



The timeless charm of Ramayan is not just because it graphically depicts the fall of selfish bodily lust, but also because it depicts the triumph of selfless spiritual love. When we understand our identity as spiritual beings and direct our love towards the Supreme, Lord Rama, that spiritual love conquers all, even death, for we continue that divine love in the eternal spiritual abode of the Supreme. We get glimpses of that divine love in the heroic, adventurous service of Hanuman, the unflinching, fraternal devotion of Lakshmana and the unwavering, conjugal chastity of

Purification

Gratification

Sita. However this pure loving nature, when covered by the craving for selfish bodily enjoyment, transmogrifies into lust, just as a soothing white light, when covered by a red film, becomes jarring. Ravana personifies this perversion that binds us to the mortality and misery of this world. Despite his unrestricted indulgence, Ravana was never satisfied, because the Bhagavad-gita declares that the way to happiness is not gratification, but purification, of lust.

The Ramasetu, by which Rama reclaims Sita, apart from being a historical reality is the quintessential expression of divine love. It represents the causeless grace by which the Lord reclaims the souls distanced from him. Just as the Ramasetu was built by the devoted vanaras, the path of divine love has been charted by devoted saints like Valmiki in prehistoric times, Tulsidas in medieval times and Srila Prabhupada in modern times. Therefore on this Dussehra, let us celebrate the fall of the Ravana within us and let us march on the setu of divine wisdom and love back to the Lord of our hearts.

