

The Ramayana is one of the greatest Hindu epics of all time and dates back to thousands of years. It literally translates to "Rama's Journey" and tells the story of Lord Rama (an avatar of the God Vishnu); his wife (Sita, an avatar of the Goddess Lakshmi); and his brother (Lakshman). For Hindus, Lord Rama is a symbol of *dharma* (i.e. doing what is right and virtuous); Sita is a symbol of virtue and purity; and Lakshman is a symbol of loyalty. Hanuman, who will be introduced mid-way through the script, is worshiped as perfect devotee of the Lord. *The Ramayana* teaches about human behavior, explores in-depth the concept of *dharma*, and provides guidance on living righteously.

Please note that the Hindu American Foundation has taken liberty with the script below, so that its intended middle school audience can grasp and enjoy the basic story and "lessons learned" from this great epic.

Part 1: Exile from Ayodhya

Narrator: It was a bright and beautiful day in Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala. Dasaratha, the King of Kosala, felt like the time was right for him to step down from the throne and appoint a new king. He was blessed with four sons from his three wives. Kaushalya, the eldest, gave birth to Rama. Kaikeyi, Dasaratha's favorite, gave birth to Bharata. Sumitra, the youngest, had twins named Lakshman and Shatrugan. Dasarath's choice as successor was his eldest son Rama, husband of Sita, destroyer of demons, and friend of the good-hearted. The preparations for the coronation ceremony had been made, and today Rama would officially be anointed as the next King of Kosala. King Dasaratha had no idea what was about to happen...

Kaikeyi: I cannot wait for Rama's coronation today! Manthara, my dearest maid, why don't you look as happy as the rest of the kingdom?

Manthara: You fool! The throne should belong to your son, Bharata. You're Dasaratha's favorite queen. But if Rama becomes king, you will become a nothing! Don't forget Dasaratha's promise to you from back in the day. Use it now!

Manthara exits, Kaikeyi ponders, and Dasaratha enters.

Kaikeyi: Dasaratha, I once saved you on the battlefield, and you promised me two wishes. I haven't used them yet, but I want to use them now.

Dasaratha: Okay. No problem, but there are a couple of rules. Rule number 1: I can't kill anybody. Rule number 2, I can't make anybody fall in love with anybody else. Rule number 3: I can't bring people back from the dead. It's not a pretty picture. Other than that, you got it.

Kaikeyi: I wish for my son Bharata to be the next king of Kosala, and I wish for Rama to be banished to the forest for 14 years so that he does not challenge Bharata's authority.

Dasaratha: Are you crazy?! I accept your first wish, but please reconsider the second! Exiling Rama to the forest for 14 years is like suicide! Evil lurks in the forest!

Kaikeyi: You talk as if there is now no light left in the world, but know this -- the night is darkest just before the dawn, and I promise you the dawn is coming! You may be worried about Rama right now, but I know Bharata will be a great king...[*Dasaratha collapses in shock*]

Rama, Sita, and Lakshman enter.

Rama: Whoa...what happened to dad!?!?!

Kaikeyi: Well, he certainly doesn't have nerves of steel, that's for sure!

Rama: But what's the problem?

Kaikeyi: Your father does not have the strength to fulfill the two wishes he promised me -- that Bharata become King and you become exiled to the forest for 14 years.

Rama: If my dad doesn't have the strength to fulfill his promise, I will do it for him. Consider it done.

Lakshman: Rama, you won't be alone! I'll come too! I've got your back, bro!

Sita: I'm coming too! I will always be by your side!

Lakshman: We three will destroy evil and uphold King Dasaratha's name by carrying out his promise to Kaikeyi. We will be known as the Fellowship...of the King!

Rama and Sita give Lakshman a funny look.

Bharata enters.

Bharata: I just heard the news. Mom, you can't do this! I want Rama to be King!

Kaikeyi: Don't question me. Mothers always know best!

Rama: Calm down, Bharata, we'll be fine!

Bharata: No, this is wrong. You are king. I'll be your stand-in King for the next 14 years, but as soon as you come back, you are taking your rightful place on the throne. For the next 14 years, your shoes will be on the throne and I will not step one foot into Ayodhya.

Kaikeyi: Enough chit-chat. What are you guys waiting for? You three leave at once, and let Bharata's coronation begin.

Bharata: There will be no coronation, mother. Rama is the rightful King and I will not take his place. *[to Rama, Lakshman and Sita]* I wish you three a safe and pleasant time in the forest. May the force be with you all.

Rama: We'll be fine, Bharata. We're going to the forest, not a galaxy far far away! Let's roll guys!

Rama, Lakshman, and Sita exit.

Narrator: And so with bravery, the trio of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman ventured into the forest, unaware of the many adventures that they would encounter in the near future.

Part 2: The Forest

Narrator: Rama, his wife Sita, and his brother Lakshman, royalty from Ayodhya, find themselves in the forest for 14 years because of Rama's commitment to keeping promises, even if this one was his father's. The forest was magnificent and vast. Great sages lived within the forest lived, and the trio paid their respects to the ashrams of the various sages. Unfortunately, the forest was also home to a growing number of demons who created mischief and terrorized the holy sages. The king of the demons was the all powerful, evil Ravana. Knowing of Rama's strength and goodness, the sages appealed to him to rid the forest of the demons. Rama agreed and went about fulfilling his promise. One beautiful day in the forest, Rama, Sita, and Lakshman get a visit from the evil demoness Shurpanaka, the sister of King Ravana...

Lakshman: Man, it's going to be a long 14 years out here.

Sita: You're telling me.

Rama: Sssshhh, I think I hear something!

Shurpanaka emerges.

Shurpanaka: Hey Rama. I really like you.

Rama: Huh? What are you talking about?

Shurpanaka: Will you marry me?

Rama: No sorry, I'm already married. But maybe you can ask my bro Lakshman over there!

Lakshman throws Rama a nasty glare. Shurpanaka saunters over.

Shurpanaka: Hey Lakshman, how about you?

Lakshman: What?

Shurpanaka: Marry me?

Lakshman: Yeah sure, that's why you approached Rama first! No thanks, I'm not interested. You can leave now.

Shurpanaka: OMG, I've never been so humiliated. This is all her fault! [*points at Sita*]

Shurpanaka attacks Sita. Lakshman cuts off Shurpanaka's nose. She runs off crying.

Narrator: Shurpanaka ran to her brother, the all powerful King of Lanka, Ravana, and told him what happened. He immediately made plans for retaliation with his uncle Mareech, who transforms himself into a golden deer.

The golden deer streaks past Rama, Lakshman, and Sita.

Sita: Look Rama!! Did you see that?

Rama: Yup.

Sita: Well?

Sita looks up at Rama and flashes a big smile.

Rama: What?

Sita: You know how much I love the animals. I'd love to have that deer as a pet!

Rama: Your wish is my command.

Rama runs off, leaving Lakshman to ensure Sita's safety.

Lakshman: So... how are you holding up?

They hear Rama yell.

Narrator: Mareech mimicked Rama's voice to trick Lakshman into thinking Rama was in trouble. Mareech knew Lakshman, being the loyal brother he was, would run to Rama's aid, while Sita stayed behind...

Lakshman looks at Sita, still waiting for a response.

Sita: What are YOU waiting for?

Lakshman: I asked you how you're doing...

Sita: GO HELP YOUR BROTHER!! What is wrong with you??

Lakshman: He's fiiiiiiiine! Nothing can happen to him. He is all powerful. Plus, he made me promise not to leave you alone!

Sita: What?? Are you crazy? He's calling your name for help! Go now!!

Lakshman: Fine...but wait, please don't step outside this line okay? It'll keep you safe.

Sita: Alright, just please go!

Lakshman draws a line around Sita and the hut, then runs off. Ravana arrives, dressed like a poor old man.

Ravana: Miss, do you have any spare change or food?

Sita: Nope, sorry. *[turns her back to him]*

Ravana: Aww, come on, I'm starving here!

Sita: Alright, alright.

Sita gets a piece of bread for the old man and tries to give it to Ravana without stepping outside the circle, but she trips out. Ravana grabs her wrist and drags her away, cackling in an evil fashion.

Narrator: Lakshman finds Rama, who is perfectly fine, and the two brothers quickly realize that they had been deceived. With mounting horror, they returned to their hut, only to realize that Sita was gone...

Rama: SITA!!!! [*falls to his knees*]

Lakshman: OMG. How did this happen? You think my circle didn't work?! How could my circle not work?! My circles always work! Or did she step out? Man. [*notices Rama, sitting there, looking stricken*]. It'll be fine! You're Rama -- the Almighty! The Upholder of All that is Right! The Promise Keeper! There's got to be a happy ending! Let's go find her!

Lakshman drags Rama off, who is still stricken, and they wander through the forest, yelling Sita's name.

Rama: It's no use, we're never going to find her! [*starts tearing up*]

Lakshman: Of course we will. Good always prevails. We will find her.

Hanuman soars in and strikes a superhero pose.

Hanuman: Never fear, Hanuman is here!

Rama: Wow, can you really help us?

Lakshman: Have you seen a pretty lady in an orange sari being dragged off by anyone?

Hanuman: Indeed, I have! I saw one fair maiden being dragged off by Ravana. She dropped some of her ornaments. [*pulls them out and shows them to the boys.*] Do they look like hers?

Rama: That's the bracelet I gave her and the necklace I gave her! I can't believe she dropped everything...

Lakshman: She dropped it so it would be easier for us to follow her! Who's this Ravana?

Hanuman: I'll tell you all about him and his kingdom in Lanka. I'll even help you get an army to fight him if you do me a little favor first.

Rama: Name your price!

Hanuman: Let's go meet my friend Sugreeva, so he can explain.

Rama: Hey Sugreeva, what's the deal? Hanuman said you could use my help?

Sugreeva: Yes, I could! My brother, Bali, took my wife, and I need help to get her back!

Rama: What is going on in this forest? Why do people keep stealing other people's wives??

Hanuman: Tell them how.

Sugreeva: My brother and I used to be really tight. He was the King, and I was his assistant. So when this demon came down, Bali had to fight it to protect his people. He took the demon to a cave and told me to wait outside, and to run and protect the kingdom in the off chance that he lost. Bali has a boon that makes

him 3 times stronger than anyone he fights, so I figured that Bali would be done before sunset....

Rama: Umm, what happened to Bali?

Sugreeva: I ended up waiting outside the cave for a whole year because I didn't know if the fight was over. Then one day, a stream of blood trickled out of the cave. I assumed that Bali had lost and rushed back to protect the kingdom. A few years later, Bali came back! I was so happy to see him! But he thought I had tried to steal his throne, so he banished me and took my wife for himself. I tried to fight him, but I can't beat him with his awesome boon.

Hanuman: Isn't that messed up?

Rama: Don't worry, Sugreev. If you promise to help me after I get you back your wife and the throne, I'll help you take down Bali.

Sugreeva: Deal. What's the plan?

Rama: Challenge Bali to a fight. I'll hide in the bushes and shoot him with my arrow. Here, take my special necklace so that I can tell you two apart.

Sugreeva: Alright, lets go!

Sugreev approaches King Bali.

Sugreeva: Hey Bali! Give me my wife back!

Bali: No way, little brother. She is mine now!

Sugreev roars in rage and throws himself at Bali, they begin to fight. Rama is hiding behind a bush, and when he gets the chance, he shoots Bali.

Bali: Ahh! How could you do this, lil bro? You had me stabbed, err shot, in the back by a stranger? That's a low blow. Doesn't your little friend know about Dharma, the code of righteous conduct? This is wrong!

Rama: You're wrong, Bali. My actions weren't non-dharmic, YOURS were. A little brother is supposed to be like a son, and his wife like a daughter-in-law. Stealing Sugreev's wife was the lowest thing you could have done. You deserve this.

Bali: You're right, and I repent. Sorry, little bro. [*dies, Sugreeva is moved*]

Rama: Sugreeva, you're now king. Sooooo, could I borrow your army like you promised?

Sugreeva: Sure thing, Rama. Lanka is down south! I'm coming with you. Let's go!

Part 3: Getting Sita Back

Narrator: Rama, his wife Sita, and his brother Lakshman have been banished to the forest for 14 years. In the forest, an evil demon named Ravana kidnaps Sita. Hanuman, who lives in the same forest, agrees to help Rama find his wife since Rama did him a favor. We find Hanuman, using the extraordinary powers he

possesses, flying to Lanka to begin his search for Sita, hoping to give her a token from Rama.

Hanuman tiptoes quietly in search of Sita.

Hanuman: Man, you'd think there'd be some clue of Sita somewhere...I've pretty much searched all of Lanka by now!

Hanuman walks and spots Sita.

Hanuman *[to himself]*: That's got to be her!

Hanuman walks slowly to Sita.

Sita: Who are you!?!?! Another one of Ravana's assistants here to torment me, I bet!

Hanuman: Actually, my name is Hanuman, and I come as a messenger for Rama.

Sita: Rama!?!?! Where is he? He hasn't forgotten me, has he?

Hanuman: No, not at all. He hasn't forgotten about you... he's been trying to find you ever since you were taken from him! Now that I've found you, I can take you back to him.

Sita: I am Sita, the faithful Princess of Ayodhya, and will not let any man other than Rama save me! And anyways, I still don't have any proof that you aren't one of Ravana's men or that I can trust you.

Hanuman: Maybe this will clear your mind then. Rama told me to give it to you. *[gives Sita Rama's ring]*

Sita: This is my husband's ring! You must be telling the truth then. Give this to Rama *[gives Hanuman her ring]*...and tell Rama to hurry up and get me!!!!

Hanuman exits.

Narrator: Hanuman made his way back to Rama's camp to report all his findings, but not before setting fire to all of Lanka except the land Sita was sitting on. Rama ordered his men to build a bridge to Lanka, and after the bridge's completion, Rama's army began their assault on Lanka. Ravana watched as his men went down one by one by one...

Fighting ensues in the background.

Ravana: Arrgh!! This is not going according to plan at all. You there *[to Ravana's soldier]*! Soldier! Come over here now!

Ravana's soldier: Yes, sir.

Ravana: Do you know what my watch is telling me? *[holds watch to his ear]*

Ravana's soldier: It's peanut-butter jelly time!?

Ravana: NO, YOU FOOL! IT'S TELLING ME THAT IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GO KILL Rama! NOW GO!

Ravana's soldier goes into battle, and Rama kills him in one second. Ravana shakes his head.

Ravana [to himself]: Incompetent fools. I guess I'll have to do this myself.

Rama and Ravana face each other like in a good old fashioned duel.

Ravana: Hungry Rama? I'll gladly serve you a free knuckle sandwich!

Rama: No thanks, I'm fasting today. I wouldn't eat right now if I were you anyways...you are about to taste a whole lot of pain!

Narrator: Ravana and Rama fight an epic battle...but Rama wins in the end after Vibhishan, Ravana's pious brother, prompts him to shoot Ravana in the navel. Rama and Sita are finally reunited.

Rama: Sita!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sita: Rama!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Narrator: And so with great happiness Rama, Sita, Lakshman, and the rest of the Rama's army made their way back to Ayodhya, since their 14 years of exile were up by this time. The city of Ayodhya was so overjoyed at Rama's return that they decorated the whole city with lamps to guide his way home. They called this day Diwali, after the clay lamps set out for him. Hindus around the world celebrate Diwali as the time that good defeated evil. Happy Diwali!