

The Ramayana

Many years ago, in a city in India called Ayodhya, Prince Rama lived with his beautiful wife Sita and his stepbrother Lakshman. The king had named Rama as his successor. However, years earlier the king had given his wife, Rama's step mother, a wish the king would fulfil. Because of her jealousy she asked the king to send Rama away from the palace to live in the forest for 14 years, so that her own son, Bharatha, could rule in his palace.

The people of Ayodhya loved Rama and were sad to see him leave the city. They and the rest of his family, including Bharatha, tried to persuade Rama to stay. Rama said that his father's promise and wishes had to be obeyed and so prepared to leave the palace to go and live in the forest. Lakshman, his step brother and Sita, his wife, decided to go with Rama.

- *Imagine how difficult it was to leave the palace with all his family and friends, with people trying to persuade him to stay, to go and live in the forest.*
- *What do you think this says about Rama?*
- *Have you ever had to do something you really didn't want to do, but knew you had to?*
- *What do you think it says about Sita and Lakshman, that they were prepared to go with Rama?*
- *Do you think this made it easier or harder for Rama to leave?*

Rama, Sita and Lakshman were very happy living in the forest. They ate the fruits and berries and made friends with the birds and animals. The wicked king of Lanka, whose name was Ravana, watched Sita and wanted her to be his own wife. He waited until Rama and Lakshman had left Sita alone in their hut in the forest and, disguised as a beggar, he went to Sita to ask for food. When Sita opened the door, Ravana kidnapped her and carried her off in his magic flying chariot to the island of Lanka. As they flew through the skies Sita shouted for help, but the only living thing to hear her was a bird. The bird tried to help, but Ravana shot him with his arrow.

When Rama and Lakshman found that Sita was missing, they went in search of her. They found the injured bird, who told them that Ravana had taken Sita to Lanka. The only way Rama could rescue Sita was to fight the wicked Ravana.

- *Have you ever lost something or someone or been lost yourself, even if only for a little while?*
- *Imagine how terrified it was for Sita.*
- *Imagine how Rama felt, knowing that his wife had been kidnapped?*
- *What words would you use to describe the actions of the little bird?*
- *What words would you use to describe Ravana's actions?*

Rama and Lakshman travelled to Lanka. On their journey they met Hanuman, the monkey king, who promised to help them. When they got to the sea, Hanuman ordered his monkeys to make a bridge so that Rama and Lakshman could cross to the island. A great battle was fought until Rama killed Ravana and rescued Sita.

By now, the 14 years were over and Rama, Sita and Lakshman could return to Ayodhya. The people came out to welcome them, including Rama's step brother, Bharatha, who had ruled in place of Rama. To remind everyone that Rama was the true king he had placed a pair of Rama's sandals on the throne for the whole 14 years.

To show their joy the people of the kingdom lit small lamps called divas. The twinkling lights led Rama, Sita and Lakshman back to the palace. Rama became king and ruled the people well and with kindness.

- *How do you think the people felt when Rama, Sita and Lakshman felt returning to the palace?*
- *Have you ever returned home after a long while away? How did it feel?*
- *What do you think about the actions of Bharatha?*
- *Why do you think Hindus love this story so much?*

