

**Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah!**

## **A comparative study of some of the most prominent Ramayanams**

### **VAASISHTTAM**

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**Vaasishttam (Vasishtam) or Njana Vaasishttam (Vasishtam) or Yoga Vaasishttam (Vasishtam)**

It is most relevant, appropriate and important to start our study with Vasishtam. “Vasishtam” is also known as “MahaRamayanam” or “ArshaRamayanam” or “VasishtaRamayanam” or “PurvaRamayanam” or “Njana Vasishtam” or “Yoga Vasishtam” or “BrihathYogavasishtam”. The meaning of the caption “PurvaRamayanam” is the happenings before Ramayanam. When we learn more about Vasishtam we will understand why we have to start the study of Ramayanam with Vasishtam.

Vaasishttam for Raamayanam is like Bhagawat Gita for Mahabharatham. We all know that if Bhagawat Gita is not there then there is no Mahabharatham. Or without a Githopadesam (Advice of Gita) of Lord Sri Krishna Bhagawan to Arjuna in the Kurukshethra battle could have never taken place and the Mahabharatham could have never been written. Similarly, without Vaasishttam the Raamayanam could have ever materialized. The most notable distinction between Githopadesam and Vasishtam are that Githopadesam is incorporated within Mahaabhaaratham, but Vasishtam is not incorporated within Ramayanam.

Vasishtam is the advice given by the great sage Vasishta at the request, guidance, and direction of Viswamithra to Sri Rama in order to bring Sri Rama back to normal routine life. Like Githopadesam, a psychological treatment prescribed by

the greatest of the greatest Psychologist Lord Sri Krishna Bhagawan to cure hysteria infected to Arjuna, the war hero of Mahabharatham; Njjaana Vasishtam is the psychological counseling provided by sage Vasishtha and Viswamithra to cure the mental depression infected to Sri Rama Deva, the hero of Ramayanam.

At the outset let us study the background and the need for Vasishtam. Sri Rama completed his education in all the fields like Academic, Vedic, Political, Legal and Archery under his Kula Guru or Preceptor of the Dynasty, Vasishtha Maharshi. He was the most talented disciple Vasishtha ever had. This means Sree Raama was more scholarly than Manu, Ikshvaaku, Nimi, Reghu, Bhageeretha, Dhileepa, etc. Vasishtha was so delighted and considered that he was so fortunate to be the Guru of Raama.

Vasishtha told Dhesarettha that he is the proudest father of such a master of all disciplines including Vedhaas and Saasthraas. Dhesarettha, naturally, was very proud and happy. He decided to reward his son appropriately and asked Raama what Gift or Present he needs. Raama said that there is no need for any present, but Dhesarettha insisted it is a privilege for him to give a suitable gift to his most talented and scholarly son. So, Raama should accept some presents and request him for whatever he wishes to have. Dhesarettha insisted on telling his wish, whatever it is, and that would be fulfilled. That was a promise. Sri Rama said that he wished to go for a pilgrimage to the holy places. Though Dasaratha was hesitant to send Raama for pilgrimage, Vasishtha advised him not to break his promise, so he had to accept. Dasaratha arranged all types of luxuries and a number of associates to accompany Sri Rama and to ensure all comforts during the trip.

But Sri Rama preferred to go alone as a layman and visit the places and people. Sri Rama was experiencing the life of the common subjects of his country for the first time. He noticed a lot of poor people, a number of sick people, a number of homeless people, a number of beggars, a number of old and handicapped people. Almost at the fag-end of his trip Sri Rama happened to notice an old and sick homeless man being driven away by the local temple authorities when he sought

some refuge overnight inside the temple. The old man was found dead on the street outside the temple the very next morning. As Sri Rama wanted to find out why the old man was not accommodated inside the temple overnight the authorities explained that they were sure that the man was going to die and if he died inside the temple compound then the temple would have been polluted and they have to undergo the very long and clumsy process of purification involving a large number of priests and also a good deal of funding.

Sri Rama was really concerned and deeply worried about the whole incident not only of the traditions and customs but also of the meaning of the very life. The temple authorities advised Sree Raama that he is not to be worried or concerned about the incident as every man will die one day or other. For that matter, any creature born would die. And nobody has the power to stop it. Even Raama is going to die.

Now Sri Rama learned that anything and everything which is born will die for sure. But the saddest and most tragic fact is that the born and living creature has no clue how, when and where the death will occur. Sri Rama's thought about life ultimately reached the conclusion that we are born to die, or the final destination or aim or target of our life is death. And then Sri Rama very logically also thought if we are born to die then why should we live at all? Life is futile, worthless and meaningless as the greatest and the ultimate achievement of life is only death. In short, why we are born to die and why we are living to die was the question churning his mind?

Sri Rama concluded his pilgrimage and came back to the palace with a logically conclusive decision to end his life by starving. Sri Rama decided to stay alone, closed inside his room without eating and drinking and without involving in any type of entertainment or other activities. After few days like this the associates and servants of Sri Rama came running to Dasaratha in the assembly hall of the palace and appraised of the situation and warned them that if this continues then Sri Rama is going to die in a few days as he has already lost a lot of weight and turned to be very pale, thin and lean.

This was the time Viswamithra visited Dasaratha's palace to invite Sri Rama and Lakshmana to his monastery to protect the concluding ceremony of the sacrifice he was conducting. Viswamithra asked Dasaratha to summon Sri Rama to the assembly hall to find out the cause of the dejection and desperation and depression of Sri Rama. Sri Rama has been brought to the assembly hall of the palace and asked him to explain the cause of his depression, desperation and dejection. As Sri Rama explained that he had convincingly concluded that the final and ultimate purpose of life is death and therefore the futility of life, Viswamithra immediately diagnosed that Sri Rama is under acute depression.

Therefore, Viswamithra requested the chief Preceptor of Dasaratha, Vasishta, to give Sri Rama proper counseling and clear out all the doubts he had in his mind. This entire Vasishtam is the philosophical, spiritual, material and scientific advice provided by sage Vasishta to Sri Rama for eighteen continuous days. This advice is in the form of very simple and straightforward stories. Vasishta was able to clear out all the doubts Sri Rama had about life and also was able to bring Sri Rama back to lead a normal routine life with full of interest and enthusiasm. We are sure that without the advice of Vasishta or without Vasishtam the Ramayanam story could have ever taken place.

Let me quote some relevant portions of one of the stories from Vasishtam to get an idea how simple and straightforward and interesting these stories are and also how meaningful they are. The name of this story is "Balakaakhyayikopakhyanam" meaning "The Story Told to a Young Boy". The purpose of the story is to illustrate the power and strength of our mind and also to illustrate the breadth and depth of our mind with this simple and interesting story. And also, this story will illustrate that we are fully controlled by our mind and the interest in our life is also coming from within our mind.

The story: A young boy used to insist his mother tell a story before he can go to sleep. This continued daily and the mother was in a dilemma as she was out of any story. So, the mother with utmost interest told him the following story –

The king of a non-existing country had three sons. They possessed all positive qualities like bravery, smartness, intelligence, beauty, etc. Two of them were never born and the third one was never even in the womb of his mother. One day all three of them proceeded for a pleasure trip. They enjoyed the tastiest fruits found in the thick woods and trees in the sky. They climbed up on those trees and spent time playing on the branches of the trees in the sky. (These trees were grown in the sky and not on the ground.) Then they noticed three rivers with huge waves. And one of those rivers was fully dried out and the other two never ever had even a drop of water. These boys enjoyed swimming and taking bath in those rivers. They also drank sufficient ambrosia like water from those rivers. Then by evening they reached a city which was not even possible to be developed sometime in the future. They could hear the sound of the conversations of the people inhabited there from a far distant place. Then those boys saw three beautiful palatial homes there. One of those homes does not even have any roofs or walls or pillars or columns or rooms. The other two palaces had never ever been there in the imagination of anyone's mind. They noticed three pots or plates of pure gold inside the home. Of those pots one was fully covered with dust and the other two were broken and shattered. They cooked food in one of those pots and fed all the Brahmins and then they also ate food to their fullest satisfaction. These boys lived there for a long time with all comforts and luxuries.

Then Vasishta told Sri Rama that boy never even thought of the genuineness of the story. He simply accepted the story as factual as told by his mother. Vasishta explained to Sri Rama, Oh Sri Rama! Those who do not have the capacity to think analytically will accept this material world as factual as the boy did to the story. Here the mother had told the boy the nonexistence of the city, the nonexistence of the boys, etc. repeatedly but still then her son was taking for granted all as factual. The lesson is that Sri Rama is not supposed to go by what he has seen or what he has been told as all what he had seen or what he had been told need not be true. We believe what we see or experience as true, but the real truth lies beyond what we see or experience or hear.

Vasishta continued that in order to get liberated from these materialistic distresses and difficulties and thereby to attain permanent peace you must be able to understand that this materialistic world that we see is not real. Sri Rama, we are living in an illusory world. The birth and death are also not real. And even after death there could be births and deaths again and again and they truly are cyclical. Therefore, you do not need to be worried and or depressed about what you are seeing and experiencing around you.

Sri Rama, therefore, you please get involved yourselves actively and work hard to discharge the duties entrusted on you as a prince. That is your duty and that is your responsibility.

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