

SRI RAMANUJA VAIBHAVAM

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In the last issue we read about *Sri Ra:ma:nuja's* early education under the tutelage of the renowned scholar *Ya:davapraka:sa* in *Ka:nchipuram*. When *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* began to justifiably question the validity of his teacher's interpretations, *Ya:davapraka:sa's* mind turned to evil thoughts of putting an end to this boy's life. So, he organized a pilgrimage to the North along with his disciples, including *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* and his cousin *Govinda Bhattar*. His scheming mind thought of how this could serve doubly to his advantage. He could first do away with his disciple, and then bathe in the *Ganges* to wash away his sin.

Soon after starting this journey, the teacher and his disciples reached the foot of the *Vindhya* range, which at the time was desolate for the most part. *Ya:davapraka:sa* thought this would be the ideal place to accomplish his evil task. One night, *Ya:davapraka:sa* shared his plot with a few of his students who supported him in this plot. But, little did they realize that *Ra:ma:nuja's* cousin, *Go:vinda* was within earshot of their conversation.

Late one night, *Go:vinda* shared all that he had heard with *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* and convinced him to hide in the forest so that he would not be found. *Ra:ma:nuja* immediately left



the place where everyone was camping for the night, and raced off into the thick of the surrounding forest. After a quick search, the teacher and other students came to the conclusion that some wild animal must have killed the boy and pretended to mourn in the presence of *Go:vinda*. The group then moved on

with their pilgrimage.

It was at this point that a significant incident occurred in *Sri Ra:ma:nuja's* life that led to his unwavering faith in the Lord. Being alone and lost in the forest, *Ra:ma:nuja* found solace in the Holy Names of the Lord. He soon found that his fear, hunger and thirst no longer bothered him. He soon began walking towards the South, in the hopes that he would be able to retrace his steps back to *Ka:nchipuram*.

After a few hours, *Ra:manuja* decided to rest under the shade of a tree. It was here that almost out of nowhere, a hunter and his wife approached him. The kind lady asked the boy if he was lost in the forest and also questioned him about his home and destination. *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* replied that he was from the temple town of *Ka:nchipuram*, and was hoping to find his way home. The lady replied that she and her husband were also going to *Ka:nchipuram*, and that they would be happy to accompany him home. Although the hunter's appearance was

not very comforting, *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* was impressed with the affection shown to him by the couple and decided to accept the lady's offer.

The three of them began their walk towards the south and as the sun began to set, they halted under a tree for the night. Very early the next morning, the lady expressed that she was very thirsty, and asked her husband to fetch her some water. *Sri Ra:ma:nuja*, out his sense of service and magnanimity, said that he would be glad to fetch the water, instead, and headed towards a well he spotted nearby. When he returned he found the couple missing. He searched the vicinity for a while but saw no sign of the kind couple who had helped and supported him so much. However, off in the distance, *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* found familiar signs of a huge temple tower.

As he approached the village that surrounded the temple, he asked a passerby where he was and what temple was off in the distance. The traveller exclaimed that he was nearing the town of *Ka:nchipuram* and the tower was that of the Temple of Lord *Varadara:ja*. *Ra:ma:nuja* could hardly believe what he heard and saw. How it could be that he had made it all the way from the *Vindhya* range to his own home town in such a short time? Tears rolled down his cheeks as he realized that the hunter couple was none other than the divine couple *Sri Maha:lakshmi* and *Na:ra:yana* who saved his life and brought him back home.

Recalling how, in the guise of the hunter's wife, *Maha:lakshmi* requested water, *Sri Ra:ma:nuja*

committed himself to bringing water everyday from the same well which he had found for the daily *Thiruva:ra:dhanam* for *Sri Pe:runde:vi* (the name of *Maha:lakshmi* at *Ka:nchipuram*) and *Sri Varadara:ja*. This well is used to this day for this same purpose.

Meanwhile, *Ya:davapraka:sa* and his troop of disciples reached the *Ganges*, and began to perform traditional religious worship on its banks. One day, while *Sri Go:vinda* was bathing in the river, he found a large *Sivalinga* in the water. The teacher was overjoyed and hugged the little boy saying that the consort of *Uma* was pleased with him and thus had come to him for worship. As instructed by *Ya:davapraka:sa*, *Govinda* began worshipping this linga and after the party's return to the South, arranged for the construction of a temple for him at *Ka:lahasthi*. It was this *Go:vinda Bhattar* who was later brought back into the *Sri Vaishnava* faith by *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* and became popular as *Emba:r*. On meeting *Ya:davapraka:sa* after their return, *Sri Ra:ma:nuja* prostrated to the teacher and did not show any signs of hatred or sadness towards him. This made the teacher feel really ashamed for having allowed his anger and jealousy to take him to the point of wanting to do such evil acts. He hugged *Ra:ma:nuja* affectionately and requested him to continue his studies with him. But, *Sri Ra:ma:nuja*'s discovery of true knowledge lay ahead of him. How he met the great *Ya:muna:cha:rya*.... Next issue..

Jai Srimannarayana !