

RAMA AND RAVANA IN BATTLE

from the Ramayana

translated by

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As you read this account of the final confrontation between the epic hero Rama and his enemy Ravana, try to identify the qualities and character traits that make Rama an ideal epic hero.

news came to Ravana of
in his camp. One by one,
manders were lost. No one
with battle cries was heard
and shouts and the wailings
of warriors came over the
s of triumph that his cour-
to keep up at a loud pitch in
all. Ravana became restless
t the hall and went up on a
hich he could obtain a full
. He surveyed the scene be-
not stand it. One who had
e in destruction now found
cle intolerable. Groans and
l his ears with deadly clarity;
how the monkey hordes¹
bloody handiwork. This was
n. He felt a terrific rage rising
ed with some admiration for
e told himself, "The time has
act by myself again."

own the steps of the tower,

returned to his chamber, and prepared him-
self for the battle. He had a ritual bath and
performed special prayers to gain the bene-
diction of Shiva;² donned his battle dress,
matchless armor, armlets, and crowns. He
had on a protective armor for every inch of
his body. He girt his swordbelt and attached
to his body his accouterments³ for protec-
tion and decoration.

When he emerged from his chamber, his
heroic appearance was breathtaking. He
summoned his chariot, which could be
drawn by horses or move on its own if the
horses were hurt or killed. People stood
aside when he came out of the palace and
entered his chariot. "This is my resolve," he
said to himself: "Either that woman Sita, or
my wife Mandodari,⁴ will soon have cause
to cry and roll in the dust in grief. Surely,
before this day is done, one of them will be
a widow."

¹ a tribe of spirits aiding Rama in
Ravana.

2. **Shiva** (shē'və): a god of destructive forces; origi-
nally a storm god; he carries a trident.

3. **accouterments** (ə-kōōt'er-mənts): a soldier's
equipment, not including clothes or arms.

4. **Mandodari** (mən-dō'də-rē)

appeared at his camp, Rama was deeply im-
 pressed with the magnitude and brilliance
 of the vehicle. "How has this come to be
 here?" he asked.

"Sir," the charioteer answered, "my name
 is Matali. I have the honor of being the
 charioteer of Indra, Brahma, the four-faced
 god and creator of the Universe, and Shiva,
 whose power has emboldened Ravana now
 to challenge you, have commanded me to
 bring it here for your use. It can fly swifter
 than air over all obstacles, over any moun-
 tain, sea, or sky, and will help you to emerge
 victorious in this battle."

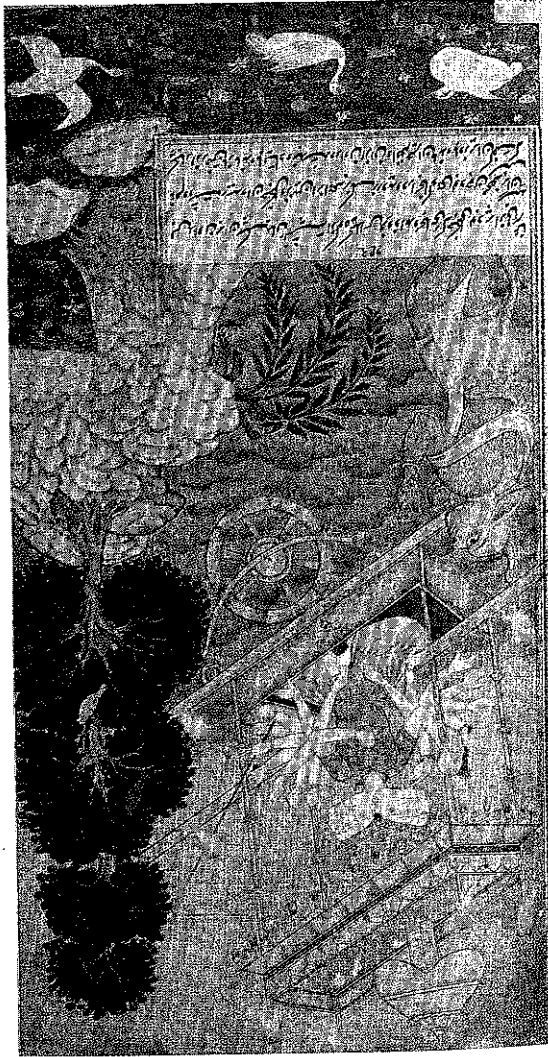
Rama reflected aloud, "It may be that the
 rakshasas have created this illusion for me.
 It may be a trap. I don't know how to view
 it." Whereupon Matali spoke convincingly to
 dispel the doubt in Rama's mind. Rama, still
 hesitant, though partially convinced, looked
 at Hanuman and Lakshmana and asked,
 "What do you think of it?" Both answered,
 "We feel no doubt that this chariot is Indra's;
 it is not an illusory creation."

Rama fastened his sword, slung two quiv-
 ers full of rare arrows over his shoulders,
 and climbed into the chariot.
 The beat of war drums, the challenging
 cries of soldiers, the trumpets, and the roll-
 ing chariots speeding along to confront each
 other, created a deafening mixture of noise.
 While Ravana had instructed his charioteer
 to speed ahead, Rama very gently ordered
 his chariot-driver, "Ravana is in a rage; let
 him perform all the antics he desires and

6. Matali (ma-tal'e')
7. rakshasas (rak'she-saz): malevolent spirits capable of assuming various shapes.
8. Hanuman (han'oo-man'): a form of the name Hanu-
 mat; he is a monkey-king and the principal ally of
 Rama in his war with Ravana.
9. Lakshmana (lak'shme-ne): half brother of Rama;
 known as the embodiment of loyalty.

from the Ramayana

RAVANA WITH CHARIOT. Ravana is typically portrayed as having numerous heads and arms.



The gods in heaven noticed Ravana's de-
 termined move and felt that Rama would
 need all the support they could muster. They
 requested Indra to send down his special
 chariot for Rama's use. When the chariot

5. Indra (in'dra): important Hindu god appearing in
 various forms; sometimes considered the god of
 war, sometimes the chief of all the minor gods.

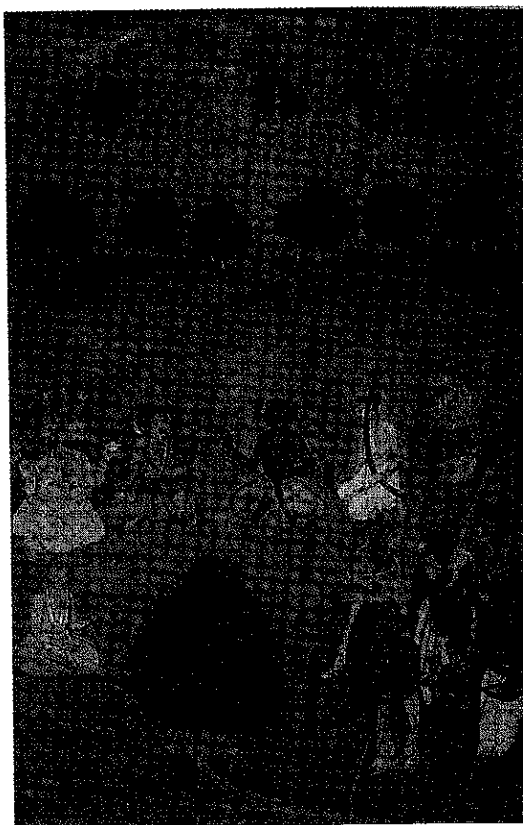
Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; 07 271-297V—Indian Manuscript, late 15th century;
 Miniature, Akbar school; Persian translation of "Ramayana" of Valmiki; 130 miniatures in opaque colors and gold; 27.5 x 15.2 cm
 (10 7/8 x 6") average leaf size

E. Until then be calm; we
hurry forward. Move slowly
you must strictly follow my
will tell you when to drive

stant and one of his staunch-
s, Mahodara¹⁰—the giant
n his physical appearance—
"Let me not be a mere spec-
confront Rama. Let me have
appling with him. Permit me

ole concern," Ravana replied.
o engage yourself in a fight,
his brother Lakshmana."
Mahodara's purpose, Rama
riot across his path in order
Mahodara from reaching Lak-
upon Mahodara ordered his
Now dash straight ahead, di-
a's chariot."

eer, more practical-minded,
would not go near Rama. Let
But Mahodara, obstinate and
n war fever, made straight for
ted to have the honor of a
er with Rama himself in spite
vice; and for this honor he
price, as it was a moment's
a to destroy him, and leave
d shapeless on the field. No-
ana's anger mounted further.
d his driver, "You will not
o." Many ominous signs were
is bow strings suddenly
mountains shook; thunders
skies; tears flowed from the
ephants with decorated fore-
along dejectedly. Ravana, no-
hesitated only for a second,
care. This mere mortal Rama



RAMA IN COUNSEL WITH SHIVA AND BRAHMA, Indian,
c. 1610.

② What do Shiva and Brahma send to help Rama?

is of no account, and these omens do not
concern me at all." Meanwhile, Rama paused
for a moment to consider his next step; and
suddenly turned towards the armies sup-
porting Ravana, which stretched away to the
horizon, and destroyed them. He felt that
this might be one way of saving Ravana.
With his armies gone, it was possible that
Ravana might have a change of heart. But it
had only the effect of spurring Ravana on,
he plunged forward and kept coming nearer
Rama and his own doom.

Rama's army cleared and made way for
Ravana's chariot, unable to stand the force

of his approach. Ravana blew his conch¹¹ and its shrill challenge reverberated through space. Following it another conch, called "Panchajanya,"¹² which belonged to Mahavishnu¹³ (Kama's original form before his present incarnation), sounded of its own accord in answer to the challenge, agitating the universe with its vibrations. And then Marali picked up another conch, which was Indra's, and blew it. This was the signal indicating the commencement of the actual battle. Presently Ravana sent a shower of arrows on Rama; and Rama's followers, unable to bear the sight of his body being studied with arrows, averted their heads. Then the chariot horses of Ravana and Rama glared at each other in hostility, and the flags topping the chariots—Kavana's ensign of the Vena¹⁴ and Rama's with the whole universe on it—clashed, and one heard the stringing and twanging of bowstrings on both sides, overpowering in volume all other sound. Then followed a shower of arrows from Rama's own bow. Ravana stood gazing at the chariot sent by Indra and swore, "These gods, instead of supporting me, have gone to the support of this petty human being. I will teach them a lesson. He is not fit to be killed with my arrows but I shall seize him and his chariot together and fling them into high heaven and dash them to destruction." Despite his oath, he still strung his bow and sent a shower of arrows at Rama, raining in thousands, but they were all invariably shattered and neutralized by the arrows from Rama's bow, which met arrow for arrow. Ultimately Ravana, instead of using one bow,

11. conch (kānch): a shell used as a trumpet.

12. Panchajanya (pān-cha-jān'yā)

13. Mahavishnu (ma-hā-vish'nū)

14. ensign of the Vena: banner with the image of an ancient stringed instrument.

15. Garuda (gar'oo'do)

16. Lanka (lāng'ka): Ravana's kingdom

used ten with his twenty arms. Rama suddenly realized that Ravana change his tactics and ordered to fly the chariot up in the sky. He attacked and destroyed a great part of the monkey army supporting the ordered Marali, "Go up in the air and follow Ravana, and don't slacken speed across the dome of the earth. Ravana's arrow was bent upon everything in the world. But Ravana's arrows, the gods pursued. Presently Ravana's arrows pierced the charioteer fell. The charioteer fell for a while in grief, undecided and recovered and then he recovered and offensive. At that moment the Garuda¹⁵ was seen perched on the post, and the gods who were that this could be an auspicious sign. After circling the globe several times, dueling chariots returned, and it was continued over Lanka.¹⁶ It was in the very clear about the location of the ground as the fight occurred here everywhere. Rama's arrows pierced armor and made him wince. He was insensible to pain and imperious that for him to wince was a great better. But at this moment, Rama changed his tactics. Instead of using his arrows, which were

so invoked several super-
create strange effects: he
use of various asthras¹⁷
made dynamic with special
his point, the fight became
supernatural powers, and
an attack with other super-

and that the mere aiming of
twenty of his arms would
cause the mortal whom he
viously thought of destroy-
effort was proving formi-
arrows were beginning to
pain. Among the asthras
was one called "Danda,"¹⁸ a
Shiva, capable of pursuing
its target. When it came
the gods were struck with
arrow neutralized it.

said to himself, "These are
ms. I should really get down
ss." And he invoked the one
—a weapon which created il-
fused the enemy.

incantations and worship, he
apon and it created an illu-
all the armies and its lead-
na²⁰ and Indrajit²¹ and the
ringing them back to the
ently Rama found all those
it, were no more, coming on
s and surrounding him. Every
emy's army was again up in
emed to fall on Rama with
This was very confusing and

Rama asked Matali, whom he had by now
revived, "What is happening now? How are
all these coming back? They were dead." Ma-
tali explained, "In your original identity you
are the creator of illusions in this universe.
Please know that Ravana has created phan-
toms to confuse you. If you make up your
mind, you can dispel them immediately."
Matali's explanation was a great help. Rama
at once invoked a weapon called "Gnana"²²—
which means "wisdom" or "perception." This
was a very rare weapon, and he sent it forth.
And all the terrifying armies who seemed to
have come on in such a great mass suddenly
evaporated into thin air.

Ravana then shot an asthra called
"Thama,"²³ whose nature was to create total
darkness in all the worlds. The arrows came
with heads exposing frightening eyes and
fangs, and fiery tongues. End to end the
earth was enveloped in total darkness and
the whole of creation was paralyzed. This
asthra also created a deluge of rain on one
side, a rain of stones on the other, a hail-
storm showering down intermittently, and
a tornado sweeping the earth. Ravana was
sure that this would arrest Rama's enter-
prise. But Rama was able to meet it with
what was named "Shivasthra."²⁴ He under-
stood the nature of the phenomenon and
the cause of it and chose the appropriate
asthra for counteracting it.

Ravana now shot off what he considered
his deadliest weapon—a trident endowed
with extraordinary destructive power, once
gifted to Ravana by the gods. When it started
on its journey there was real panic all round.
It came on flaming toward Rama, its speed

(es): weapons endowed with super-

s.
e)
)
(kum-bə-kār'nə)
e'jit')

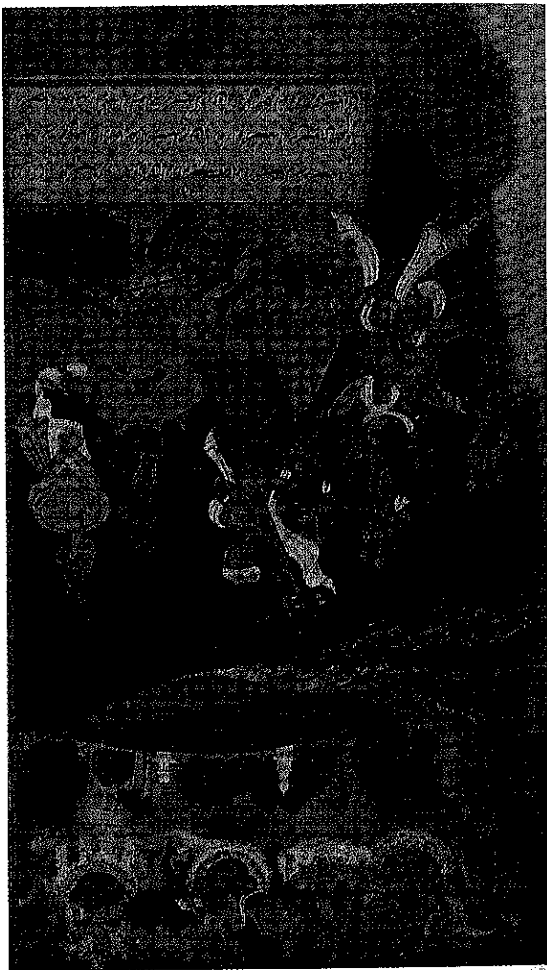
22. Gnana (gnā'nə)

23. Thama (tā'mə)

24. Shivasthra (shi-vā'strə)

When Rama noticed his arrows falling down ineffectively while the trident sailed towards him, for a moment he lost heart. When it came quite near, he uttered a certain mantra²⁵ from the depth of his being and while he was breathing out that incantation,

25. mantra (man'tra): a formula believed to have magical power; used in incantation.



RAMA IS PRESENTED WITH THE CELESTIAL WEAPONS.
How are these weapons, or astras, special?

Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 071271-537R=Indian Manuscripts (late 18th century; Mughal; Akbar school; Persian translation of "Ramayana" of Valmiki; 150 miniatures in opaque colors; and gold). 27.5 x 15.2 cm. (10 7/8 x 6) average leaf size

Rama now selected an ruda (which meant "eagle" off the serpents with their and destroyed them. See Kavana's anger was roused and he blindly emptied a c in Rama's direction. Rama's half way and turned them went back and their sharp themselves in Kavana's over Kavana was weakening. Rama was at the end of his learning and equipment. All his learning and equipment were of no avail and he had to the end of his special gift. While he was going down

him prisoner."
With this resolve, Kavana vomited fire and various fangs and red eyes, in from all directions. Rama now selected an ruda (which meant "eagle" off the serpents with their and destroyed them. See Kavana's anger was roused and he blindly emptied a c in Rama's direction. Rama's half way and turned them went back and their sharp themselves in Kavana's over Kavana was weakening. Rama was at the end of his learning and equipment. All his learning and equipment were of no avail and he had to the end of his special gift. While he was going down

g up. The combatants were
to grapple with each other
ed that this was the best
ff Ravana's heads.²⁷ He sent
d arrow which sliced off one
ds and flung it far into the
rocess continued; but every
as cut off, Ravana had the
aving another one grown in
's crescent-shaped weapon
ly busy as Ravana's heads
p. Rama lopped off his arms
again and every lopped-off
and the chariot and tried to
n by itself, and the tongue
wagged, uttered challenges,
na. On the cast-off heads of
nd minor demons, who had
in terror of Ravana and had
ased him, executed a dance
asted on the flesh.

ow desperate. Rama's arrows
nselves in a hundred places
nd weakened him. Presently
a faint on the floor of his
ng his state, his charioteer
d drew the chariot aside. Ma-
to Rama, "This is the time to
demon. He is in a faint. Go

it away his bow and said, "It
are to attack a man who is in
wait. Let him recover," and

na revived, he was angry with
for withdrawing and took out
ing, "You have disgraced me.
ok on will think I have re-
his charioteer explained how
led the fight and forebore to

attack when he was in a faint. Somehow, Ravana appreciated his explanation and patted his back and resumed his attacks. Having exhausted his special weapons, in desperation Ravana began to throw on Rama all sorts of things such as staves,²⁸ cast-iron balls, heavy rocks, and oddments he could lay hands on. None of them touched Rama, but glanced off and fell ineffectually. Rama went on shooting his arrows. There seemed to be no end of this struggle in sight.

Now Rama had to pause to consider what final measure he should take to bring this campaign to an end. After much thought, he decided to use "Brahmashtra,"²⁹ a weapon specially designed by the Creator Brahma on a former occasion, when he had to provide one for Shiva to destroy Tripura,³⁰ the old monster who assumed the forms of flying mountains and settled down on habitations and cities, seeking to destroy the world. The Brahmashtra was a special gift to be used only when all other means had failed. Now Rama, with prayers and worship, invoked its fullest power and sent it in Ravana's direction, aiming at his heart rather than his head; Ravana being vulnerable at heart. While he had prayed for indestructibility of his several heads and arms, he had forgotten to strengthen his heart, where the Brahmashtra entered and ended his career.

Rama watched him fall headlong from his chariot face down onto the earth, and that was the end of the great campaign. Now one noticed Ravana's face aglow with a new quality. Rama's arrows had burnt off the layers of dross, the anger, conceit, cruelty, lust, and egotism which had encrusted his real self, and now his personality came through in its

28. staves: staffs.

29. Brahmashtra (brä'mä'stre)

30. Tripura (trip'oo-re)

27. Ravana is a demon-king usually
ten heads and ten pairs of arms.

pristine form—of one who was devout and capable of tremendous attainments.³¹ His constant meditation on Rama, although as an adversary, now seemed to bear fruit, as his face shone with serenity and peace. Rama noticed it from his chariot above and commanded Matali, "Set me down on the ground." When the chariot descended and came to rest on its wheels, Rama got down and commanded Matali, "I am grateful for your services to me. You may now take the chariot back to Indra."

Surrounded by his brother Lakshmana and Hanuman and all his other war chiefs, Rama approached Kavana's body, and stood gazing on it. He noted his crowns and jewelry scattered piecemeal on the ground. The decorations and the extraordinary workmanship of the armor on his chest were blood covered. Rama sighed as if to say, "What might he not have achieved but for the evil stirring within him!"

At this moment, as they readjusted Kavana's blood-stained body, Rama noticed to his great shock a scar on Kavana's back and said with a smile, "Perhaps this is not an episode of glory for me, as I seem to have killed an enemy who was turning his back and retreating. Perhaps I was wrong in shooting the Brahmasstra into him." He looked so concerned at this supposed lapse on his part that Vibishana,³² Ravana's brother, came forward to explain, "What you have achieved is unique. I say so although it meant the death of my brother."

"But I have attacked a man who had turned his back," Rama said. "See that scar." Vibishana explained, "It is an old scar. In ancient days, when he paraded his strength around the globe, once he tried to attack the

31. attainments: accomplishments.
32. Vibishana (vɪ'be-shà'ne)

grandeur." Rama accepted the explanation. "Honor him and cherish his memory so that his spirit may go to heaven, where he has his place. And now I will leave you to attend to his funeral arrangements, befitting his

one though fresh blood is flowing on it." Rama accepted the explanation. "Honor him and cherish his memory so that his spirit may go to heaven, where he has his place. And now I will leave you to attend to his funeral arrangements, befitting his

gored in the back by one of the tuskers and that is the scar you see now; it is not a fresh one though fresh blood is flowing on it."

divine elephants that guard the four directions. When he tried to catch them, he was gored in the back by one of the tuskers and that is the scar you see now; it is not a fresh

THE DEATH OF RAVANA.



Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; 07.271.2-10—Indian Manuscript, late 16th century; Mughal; Akbar school; Persian translation of "Ramayana" of Valmiki; 130 miniatures in opaque colors and gold; 27.5 x 15.2 cm; (10/7/8 x 6") average leaf size