

Royal Righteousness in the Ramayana? Faithful Leadership in India's Mythic Masterpiece, By Benjamin B. DeVan

Abstract

Reading revered, sacred, classic, and popular religious texts and stories together is one significant way to enrich inter-religious relationships. This essay explores the *Ramayana* as a Hindu resource for inter-religious conversation by examining the virtues or *dharma* espoused and exemplified by its leading characters. How do the *Ramayana*'s royal exemplars personify qualities essential to faithful leadership? What among their virtues might inter-religious and other leaders apply in their own spheres of influence? Doubling as a companion or discussion guide, this article utilizes R.K. Narayan's user-friendly *Penguin Classics* edition as one succinct and accessible narrative for multi-faith settings.¹

Introduction

How does one lead with integrity? Was there ever a perfect person, a righteous ruler?² Jews may point to Moses, Christians to Jesus, Muslims to Muhammad, and Buddhists to Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.³

In the Hindu tradition, perhaps no model is set forth so regularly as Lord Rama, the central figure in the *Ramayana*, India's mythic masterpiece. Unbeknownst to some of the *Ramayana*'s characters (and initially to Rama himself), Rama appears to the reader as the incarnation or avatar of the Hindu god, Vishnu.⁴ As Vishnu's avatar, Rama for many Indians literally embodies goodness, righteousness, duty, and truth—commitment to *dharma*.⁵

One fruitful way to enrich or initiate inter-religious encounters is by reading revered, sacred, classic, or popular religious texts and stories together. In an Abrahamic context, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament professor Ellen F. Davis and Imam Abdullah Antepli (who once lead a prayer for United States Congress) co-taught a Duke University elective, "Listening Together: Christians and Muslims reading Scriptures."⁶ Halfway around the world from Duke, Carl Medearis describes how Druze, Muslim, and Christian Lebanese Parliamentarians selected Jesus as a noteworthy exemplar they all admired and read the Gospel of Luke together.⁷

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a (or perhaps *the*) Hindu text frequently chosen for this purpose, popular for the past thirty years or so even in American business settings.⁸ Indian intellectuals including Purushottama Bilimoria, Gurcharan Das, and B.K. Matilal have investigated *dharma* in the Indian epic *Mahabharata* within which the *Bhagavad Gita* is situated.⁹ Relatedly, the *Mahabharata* Book III: Vana Parva alludes to *Ramayana* episodes and characters.

But the *Bhagavad Gita* is not the only Hindu text useful for discussions surrounding leadership, for introducing non-Hindus to Hindu sacred stories, or as a resource for interreligious conversations. The *Ramayana* with its *dharma* leitmotif is especially suited for dialogues on leadership, naturally sparking discussion about which characters are worthy of emulation, and in what capacities. In his essay, "Hindu Ethics in the Ramayana," Roderick Hindery agrees: "[i]n the original *Valmiki-Ramayana*, listeners, viewers, or readers must distinguish for themselves which deeds of Rama and others are meant to be normative and which are proposed as anti-types."¹⁰

Ramayana retellings abound in South Asian culture and lore, and controversy persists regarding which, if any, are authoritative.¹¹ The "original" *Ramayana* is often attributed to the poet Valmiki, who may have heard it from the sage Narada, or according to legend from a grieving bird cawing over her arrow-pierced dying mate.¹² The Tamil poet Kamban (c: 1,000 CE) assimilating and interpreting Valmiki exclaimed, "I am verily like the cat sitting on the edge of an ocean of milk, hoping to lap it all up."¹³ R.K. Narayan's *Penguin Classics* edition draws heavily from Kamban, extolling love and reverence for Rama as a youth, disciple, brother, lover, ascetic, and warrior: "In every role we watch him [Rama] with awe and wonder."¹⁴

But Rama is not merely a youth, disciple, brother, lover, ascetic, or warrior. These identities anticipate or complement Rama's role as righteous king. And Rama is not the only auspicious royal exemplar in the *Ramayana*. Rama's father Dasaratha, stepmother Kaikeyi, half-brothers Lakshmana and Bharatha, beloved Sita; the imperial birds Jatayu and Sampathi, and the monkey majesties Hanuman, Sugreeva, Vali, Angada, and Tara; even the demon king Ravana and Ravana's siblings are relevant to consider.¹⁵ This multiplicity of exemplars facilitates the expression and development of myriad insights evoked by vibrant inter-religious encounters.

Narayan's *Ramayana* is one accessible, affordable, and cogent English rendering for adult readers.¹⁶ Narayan is a native Indian easily utilized for Hindu and non-Hindu interlocutors possessing a basic command of English. Diana Eck, director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard, uses Narayan to stimulate conversation among undergraduate and graduate students, some with no prior *Ramayana* exposure.¹⁷ At 192 pages, Narayan's English retelling is more succinct than others by William Buck (461 pages), Krishna Dharma (480 pages), Ramesh Menon (720 pages), Arshia Sattar (696 pages), Kamala Subramaniam (695 pages), and the multivolume Princeton edition by Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten where the sixth volume alone is 1632 pages.¹⁸

Dharma and Dasaratha

Narayan opens by introducing Rama's human father, King Dasaratha, as a compassionate and courageous ruler loved and honored by his subjects, whose one sorrow was childlessness.¹⁹ Fearing to sire no successor, Dasaratha seeks divine assistance and marries three women. Kausalya births Rama. Kaikeyi births Bharatha. Sumithra delivers twin sons Lakshmana and Sathrugna. Dasaratha arranges the best tutoring available, and happily watches his children mature.²⁰ When Rama begins to win his peoples' hearts, gently inquiring after their wellbeing and showing empathy for their everyday concerns, the people respond, "With you as our Prince and your great father as our guardian, we lack nothing."²¹

Dasaratha administers justice and fulfills other duties of state without begrudging less glamorous responsibilities of public service.²² He shelters his kingdom from evil, is hospitable to visitors and emissaries, and supports the holy sages. When the sage Viswamithra asks to take the adolescent Rama and Lakshmana demon hunting, Dasaratha lets them go, recognizing that his sons will not and must not be compelled to perpetually tarry in childhood.

Viswamithra spins a yarn for the boys as they travel, "Thataka's story," illustrating how parents can be (initially) holy, filled with valor, purity, and wild energy; but their offspring may be scoundrels or worse. To adapt the Biblical Proverbs 22:6, parents can "train a child up in the way s/he should go," but each person is finally accountable for his or her own actions. Nor does past virtue ensure sustained integrity.²³

Unlike Dasaratha's more consistent virtue, the once pure Thataka grows bitter and cruel after her sons are punished for their devilry. She becomes more dreadful than Yama, the god of death, who is said to take life only at a ripe time.²⁴ Viswamithra displays Thataka and her sons as negative examples—*a-dharma*. Rama debates the wisdom and justice of lethally confronting Thataka, yet determines that allowing Thataka's rampages to continue might be a greater evil than defeating or even killing her.²⁵ Readers can inquire into whether Rama acts rightly and the repercussions of Viswamithra's counsel for Rama and Lakshmana's facing more formidable foes.

Karma, Kaikeyi, and Kooni

Soon after his first demon slaying, Rama meets Sita, a very different woman from the self-abased Thataka. Rama is drawn to Sita with all his heart but, "If she were married he would instinctively have recoiled from her."²⁶ Rama restrains himself even after betrothing Sita, awaiting their fathers' blessings and wedding ceremony.²⁷

By this time, the aged Dasaratha aims to “lay aside the burdens of office.”²⁸ Who better than Rama to succeed him? Rama by reputation embodies compassion, an impartial sense of justice, and the courageous strength necessary to protect his people from hostile forces.²⁹ Dasaratha nevertheless reminds Rama, “You will pursue a policy of absolute justice under all circumstances. Humility and soft speech—there could be really no limit to these virtues. There can be no place in a king’s heart for lust, anger, or meanness.”³⁰

But as the city celebrates, Kaikeyi’s maiden Kooni provokes Kaikeyi to panic by deceptively maligning Rama’s intentions.³¹ Kooni represents the false or depraved adviser, as well as the tremendous consequences potentially set in motion by appealing to fear.³²

Kaikeyi subsequently wrests the kingdom from Rama by calling on two favors (boons) Dasaratha owes her, effectively banishing Rama for fourteen years and crowning her son Bharatha king. Dasaratha will not withdraw his promises to Kaikeyi for “convenience.”³³ Nor does Rama expect him to: “A word given is like an arrow. It goes forward. You cannot recall it midway.”³⁴ Rama goes into exile so Dasaratha can fulfill his pledges to Kaikeyi, and Rama shows no bitterness toward Kaikeyi or Kooni. In contrast to his malefactors, Rama observes “no distinction” in *dharma* toward a mother and stepmother.³⁵

Dasaratha acknowledges that *dharma* binds even the king. This brings grief to Dasaratha and his citizens through Rama’s resultant exile, but Dasaratha will not forsake the integrity that enabled him to reign with courage and compassion, to love and be honored by his people.

Some readers of the *Ramayana* will disagree with Dasaratha’s decision, but Dasaratha is conceivably second only to Rama representing royal righteousness in the *Ramayana* by serving ungrudgingly, vigilantly protecting those under his care, and stepping aside when ruling indefinitely might amount to “avarice.”³⁶ Dasaratha’s example supplies an opening for reflection on succession, transition, and delegation vital to any flourishing enterprise.

Rama, for his part, does not despair but resolutely embarks again with his half-brother Lakshmana on an expedition of spiritual exercises and demon slaying. Lakshmana does not go quietly but rails, “I’ll be the fate to overpower fate itself...Whoever dares to oppose my aim will be destroyed. I [will] establish you [Rama] on the throne as your right, irrespective of what a female serpent has tried to do. My blood boils and will not calm down.”³⁷

Rama quells Lakshmana’s anger, assuring him their immediate destiny is renunciation and dwelling with the enlightened forest hermits. “Do you want to let your anger rage until you have vanquished an innocent brother who has no part in this, a mother who has nursed us, and a father who was the greatest ruler on earth?”³⁸

Despite Rama’s rebuke, Lakshmana epitomizes the loyal first officer or second-in-command who diagnoses injustice and pre-empts any urge for Rama to state similar sentiments. Lakshmana’s anger is not baseless, but born from honest zeal that simultaneously tempts Rama and helps them to deliberate their next move.³⁹ Rama rejects Lakshmana’s proposal as hasty and misdirected, explaining to Lakshmana why they must redirect their zeal.⁴⁰

Rama also intuits a “bigger picture” to *dharma*. Rama’s descent from riches to rags may be a privilege in its own way, a joy to be embraced implicitly if not explicitly as part of a larger plan interweaving *dharma* and *karma* to achieve better benefits than might have occurred had Rama immediately ascended to the throne: Rama submitting to exile permits Dasaratha to discharge his accrued *karma* and *dharma*, Kaikeyi to receive her prize, and Rama to rid the world of Ravana.⁴¹

Rama even refuses to despise Kooni, but perceives *karma* is repaying him for youthful foolishness. Rama remembers with remorse at least one episode when he made fun of Kooni and threw clay clods at her. “Even when you realize that the one before you is an enemy and must be treated sternly, do not hurt with words. Even in jest...even [to] the lowliest.”⁴²

Rama’s youthful folly affords an occasion for repentance. Every leader is subject to *karma* and *dharma* toward even the “lowliest” they influence.⁴³ Despite youthful indiscretions,

Rama personifies humble nobility, the king in exile who must become low before being lifted high, who by becoming poor becomes richly faithful to *dharma*, who is banished in mourning, yet returns to reign in glory. Rama's character is variedly reminiscent of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Ruth, David, and Solomon in the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus in the New Testament,⁴⁴ Muhammad in Mecca, Siddhartha Gautama, Confucius and his legacy in China, and a veritable host of ancient and modern myths.⁴⁵ *Dharma* seems to call myriad mythical and historical leaders to be humble before exalted, or exalts them precisely because they are humbled, or because they humble themselves.

But Rama's humility does not save him from sadness in seeing Sita with her finery and jewels discarded when so recently she had dressed herself as befitting a queen.⁴⁶ Rama reminds Sita that Dasaratha's vows do not apply unequivocally to her, but Sita's love for Rama binds her to set aside courtly finery for a time: "Fourteen years!...(a) living death for me without you...a forest or a marble palace is all the same to me."⁴⁷ Sita sacrifices physical comfort for the loftier joy of companionship with her beloved. Where Sita's treasure is, there her heart is also.⁴⁸

Rama realizes his *dharma* encroaches on others like Sita, Lakshmana, and the Kosala people who implore Rama to return as king even when he cannot, and Bharatha who protests to Kaikeyi, "You have had the cunning, the deviousness, to trap the King into a promise, and not cared that it meant death to him. How am I to prove to the world that I have no hand in this?"⁴⁹

Bharatha begs Rama to stay home and be crowned, lamenting as the Biblical David does when faced with a comparable conundrum when his former adversary turned ally Abner is assassinated by David's close associate, Joab.⁵⁰ For both Bharatha and David, their intense sincerity persuades their people they had no part in either duplicitous treachery.

After five days of mourning, Kosala's ministers and royal priest ask Bharatha to rule in Rama's place since Kosala will otherwise have no legitimate king. But Bharatha instead pursues Rama. Bharatha's garb and demeanor proclaim his distress. Bharatha wears garments of tree-bark, "accomplishing the journey on foot as a penance, following Rama's own example."⁵¹ Lakshmana doubts Bharatha at first, but when Bharatha draws near and pleads forgiveness, offering to abdicate, Lakshmana apprehends Bharatha's constancy is genuine.⁵²

Rama cannot accept Bharatha's abdication. That would violate *dharma* by nullifying Dasaratha's boons to Kaikeyi. Once Bharatha freely relinquishes his kingdom, *dharma* demands Bharatha receive it back by reigning as regent in Rama's place. Bharatha places Rama's sandals on the throne to symbolize the true king in whose stead he governs, and vows self-immolation if Rama does not return promptly at the appointed time.⁵³ While other people might battle bitter rivalry over possessions, authority, and borders, it is astonishing to find Rama and Bharatha deferring to *dharma* and relinquishing the throne to each other by asserting: "Yours, not mine."⁵⁴

Rama's Reign Delay

When Rama departs into exile, he is not idle nor does he meditate indefinitely with hermits. Rama envisions liberating the oppressed and establishing peace, gentleness, and justice as his critical responsibilities, never losing sight in this new location of his goal to thwart the asuras, "fiends who infested this area causing suffering and hardship to all the good souls who only wanted to be left alone to pursue their spiritual aims in peace."⁵⁵

As with the approaching clash with Ravana, an assault on Sita draws Rama's and Lakshmana's attention to evils infesting the land, provoking Lakshmana to battle Ravana's demon sister Kamavalli who attempts to deceive Rama about her true character, projects her avarice onto Sita, and threatens Sita while Rama is away. Lakshmana reflexively protects Sita, wounding Kamavalli but letting her live, perhaps perceiving she is not as degraded or destructive as Tharaka.⁵⁶ *Dharma* and *karma* employ Kamavalli as a link to Rama's confronting Ravana who lusts for Sita and kidnaps her in retaliation for Lakshmana wounding Kamavalli.

Ravana kidnaps Sita when, like Kaikeyi before her, Sita succumbs to fear. Sita fears for Rama's life when he carries on a hunt. She badgers Lakshmana to defy Rama's instructions to protect her and orders Lakshmana to find Rama. The great Eagle Jatayu, a divine monarch pledged to defend Dasaratha's descendents, guards Sita in Lakshmana's stead.⁵⁷

Jatayu tries to dissuade Ravana, but Ravana prevails and mortally wounds Jatayu. With a great effort of will, Jatayu keeps himself alive until Rama and Lakshmana arrive, searching for Sita. With his dying breath, Jatayu encourages Rama and Lakshmana, "Do not despair, you will succeed in the end."⁵⁸ Hanuman reiterates Jatayu's example to the noble warrior monkey, Angada, "Do not despair or give up. There is much that we could still do...Remember Jatayu, how he died nobly fighting Ravana to the last."⁵⁹

Before Rama and Lakshmana engage Ravana, they face a difficult dilemma with the regal monkeys Hanuman, Sugreeva, Vali, Tara, and Angada. After listening to Sugreeva's grievances against his brother Vali, Rama assists Sugreeva in combat without hearing Vali's side of the story.⁶⁰ Lakshmana cautions Rama, "I am not certain whether Sugreeva is trying to involve you in anything more than [a mere spat]...I do not know if we should participate in this struggle at all. How can you trust as an ally one who has not hesitated to intrigue fatally against a brother?"⁶¹

When Vali is mortally wounded, his ensuing parley with Rama further complicates the question of whether Sugreeva or Vali is more in the right. Vali claims that Rama has judged him wrongly, that acquiring his brother's wife to protect her while her husband was away was legitimate within Vali's society.⁶² Vali maintains, "It is my primary duty to help the weak and destroy evil wherever I see it. Whether known or unknown, I help those that seek my help."⁶³

Karma may be at work since Sugreeva was likewise "unknown" to Rama, but sought Rama's help against Vali. Vali acted based on what he "knew." So does Rama. Rama faced a thorny decision without clear access to pertinent facts. Choosing *not* to act, or to delay action could also have repercussions. Leaders may never know the full extent they align with the most virtuous parties in a conflict, and must balance urgent priorities with diligent care.

Sugreeva's true character remains in doubt. He commissions armies to reinforce Rama against Ravana, but only after sinking into alcoholic stupor and narrowly avoiding a war with his erstwhile allies for flagrantly failing to uphold his promises in a timely manner. Angada reprimands Sugreeva, "you gain your ends and then forget your responsibilities."⁶⁴

Ravana's Folly and Restoration?

If any ruler in the *Ramayana* is utterly debauched, Ravana is the obvious candidate. Unlike Dasaratha who steps down at a fitting moment, Ravana "is led astray by greed, and then succumbs to the particular illusion of power: the dream of perpetual dominance."⁶⁵ Ravana treacherously conveys a façade of sanctity by disguising himself as a holy man to kidnap Sita. Ravana is "the grand tormenter" of his subjects and betrays his benefactors.⁶⁶ He surrounds himself not with wise counselors, but flatterers.⁶⁷

Ravana is selfish, self-deluded, quick to anger, and fickle. He flippantly underestimates his adversaries, and like his sister Kamavalli, is blinded by sexual lust.⁶⁸ He does not accept generous terms of peace, nor appreciate Rama for at first sparing him after Rama disarms Ravana in battle. Ravana's brother Vibishana justifiably defects after failing to persuade Ravana to abandon foolishness.⁶⁹ *Dharma* and *karma* coalesce, bringing Ravana to ruin.

But is Ravana irredeemable? He shows empathy for Kamavalli and initially strives to spare Jatayu.⁷⁰ When Ravana dies:

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 pristine form—of one who was devout and capable of tremendous attainments. His constant meditation on Rama, although an adversary, now seemed to bear fruit, as his face shone with serenity and peace...What might he not have achieved but for the evil stirring within him!⁷¹

Return of the King and Queen

Just as *dharma* demands Rama first decline Kosala's kingship, fourteen years later Rama must (re)assume it. Bharatha's *dharma* as regent is complete.

But all is not yet well for Sita. The Kosalans and maybe Rama himself question Sita's faithfulness during her long and arduous captivity. Just as Vibishana is unable to tolerate Ravana's dishonorable rule, so *dharma* requires Rama and his people to evaluate Sita as a capable queen, and she is vindicated.⁷² However, it is important to note that some commentators identify Sita's trial by fire as suggesting Rama plays the role of an abusive husband instead of an exemplary spouse.⁷³ Rama in certain instances might thus reveal *a-dharma* in his apparently less than ideal conduct exuding the impression of a vengeful, suspicious, or anxious spouse by yielding to personal insecurities and public pressure at Sita's expense.

Much may be concluded concerning faithful leadership or royal righteousness in R.K. Narayan's rendering of the *Ramayana*. Dasaratha rules with compassion and courage, steps down at a suitable time, protects his people from evil, trains capable successors, shows hospitality to dignitaries and emissaries, and supports holy sages without bitterness or surrendering to fear, lust, sloth, or avarice. Kamavalli, Kaikeyi, Kooni, Ravana, Sugreeva, and Thataka provide negative examples or *a-dharma* through their assorted vices and corruptions.

Bharatha, Lakshmana, and Sita as Rama's second, third, or fourth in authority regularly lend Rama strength rather than envying or undermining him.⁷⁴ Bharatha presides as a provisional regent and restores the administration of Kosala to Rama at the proper time. Lakshmana is a loyal counselor, warrior, and companion. Sita is Rama's devoted bride and fellow sovereign receiving abundant attention in Hindu liturgy and literature.⁷⁵

Each character in the *Ramayana* has one or more parallels in other religious, historical, and literary contexts. Considering how these illumine and challenge each other will animate dialogue not only among Hindus, but among all who enjoy inter-religious encounter. Examining whether, how, or in what way *dharma* echoes or deviates from "submission" to the Ultimate (the very definition of Islam), the Word or Logos in Christianity and Greek philosophy, and "the Tao" of Chinese mysticism is preeminently apropos. Additional counterparts to the qualities and actions of the *Ramayana*'s royal exemplars await discovery and extrapolation in print and conversation. Even Rama himself provocatively participates in intra- or interfaith relations by establishing a Shiva linga memorializing an imaginably rival deity after Hanuman helps Rama rescue Sita.⁷⁶ Hanuman in turn exudes "devotional service to his master."⁷⁷

Rama's interactions with Vali and Sita are rife with moral ambiguities, but Rama's humility, chastity, courage, compassion, determination, restraint, timely rebuke, perseverance in confronting evil, magnanimity toward enemies, careful deliberation, readiness to learn from his mistakes and to teach others accordingly, and kindness toward "even the lowliest" are arguably worthy of emulation.⁷⁸ Meeting Rama and other exemplars through interpreters such as R.K. Narayan holds significant promise for energetic dialogue now and in the future.

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Culture, Christian Apologetics Journal, Huffington Post, Journal of Religion and Europe, Africanus Journal, Wesleyan Theological Journal, Patheos, and more. He also recently published a book chapter in *The Legend of Zelda and Theology* (Gray Matter, 2011, edited by Jonny Walls) and earlier on Martin Luther King, Jr. in *How to Get a Life: Empowering Wisdom for the Heart and Soul* (Humanics, 2003, edited by Daniel McBrayer and Lawrence Baines).

Notes

¹ I am grateful to Karen DeVan and Finnian Moore Gerety for feedback on an early draft of this essay.

² Cf. R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (Penguin Classics) (New York: Penguin, 1972, 2006), xxi.

³ Cf. e.g. Lin-Chi Lu, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi* (trans. Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 52.

⁴ E.g. Narayan, xi, 13, 65, 91, 94, 127-128, 145, 155. Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), 27; Cornelia Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen (eds.), *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1978), 64, 70.

⁵ Cf. e.g. Linda Hess, "Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man's Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67:1 (1999), 1-32; Roderick Hindery, "Hindu Ethics in the Ramayana," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 4:2 (Fall, 1976), pp. 287-382.

⁶ Ben DeVan, "Evangelicals and Muslims Loving God, Each Other, and the World Together?" *Huffington Post*, February 21, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-devan/evangelicals-and-muslims-_b_825242.html.

⁷ Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2008), 141-142.

⁸ E.g. Pete Engardio with Jena McGregor, "Karma Capitalism: Times Have Changed since Gordon Gekko quoted Sun Tsu in the 1987 Movie *Wall Street*. Has the *Bhagavad Gita* replaced *The Art of War* as the Hip New Ancient Eastern Management Text?," *Bloomberg Businessweek* (October 30, 2006), online: http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_44/b4007091.htm; John H. Barnett, "A Business Model of Enlightenment," *Journal of Business Ethics* 4 (1985), especially 61.

⁹ Purushottama Bilimoria, Joseph Prabhu, and Renuka Sharma (eds.), *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges Volume I* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), especially 16, 22, 44, 86, 97, 103, 114, 313; Gurcharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata* (Delhi, India: Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Association with Motilala Banarsidass, 1989).

¹⁰ Hindery, 290.

¹¹ Cf. Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991). Philip Lutgendorf, "All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context," *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan Wadley, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 217-253 analyzes a popular television *Ramayana* serial. Cf. two accessible resources for general audiences: Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106-107; Kim Knott, *A Very Short Introduction to Hinduism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 2000), 40-42.

¹² Cf. Diana L. Eck, "Following Rama, Worshipping Siva," *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India* (ed. Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison, Groningen, Netherlands: Egbert Forsten and Paris, France: Ecole Française d'Extreme-Orient, 1991), 50; Flood, 107, 288; Knott, 41; Narayan, xxi, xxiv, xxiii, 33, 148, 149.

¹³ Kamban in Narayan, xxiv.

¹⁴ Narayan, xxv, brackets added.

¹⁵ Rama's mother Kausalya in Narayan's narrative principally serves to comfort Dasaratha and be perceived by Kaikeyi as an antagonist (cf. 38, 38, 42, 42, 46, 47, 49, 55, 58).

¹⁶ Children's and youth versions of the *Ramayana* proliferate. Two published in the twenty-first century are: Bhakti Mathur and Maulshree Somani (Illustrator), *Amma, Tell Me about Ramayana!* (Bangalore, India: Anjana Publishing, 2007); Bulbul Sharma and K.P. Sudesh (Illustrator), *The Ramayana for Children* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹⁷ Eck used Narayan's translation, for example, in her spring 2010 "Hindu Worlds of Art and Culture" course.

¹⁸ William Buck, *Ramayana* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1976); Krishna Dharma, *Ramayana: India's Immortal Tale of Adventure, Love, and Wisdom* (Varanasi and Kathmandu: Pilgrim's Publishing, 2004); Ramesh Menon, *The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic* (New York: North Point Press, 2001, 2003, 2004); Arshia Sattar (trans.), *Ramayana* (New York: Penguin Global, 2000); Kamala Subramaniam, *Ramayana: Tenth Edition* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2009); Robert P. Goldman, Sally Southerland Goldman, Barend A.E. van Nooten, *Ramayana Of Valmiki: An Epic Of Ancient India (Princeton Library of Asian Translations), Vol. VI, Yuddhakanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Narayan, 4. Dasaratha's archetypal childless sorrow is paralleled by many Biblical characters and other figures who supply multiple opportunities for inter-religious and comparative engagement surrounding (in)fertility.

²⁰ Narayan, 6.

²¹ Narayan, 6. Cf. Absalom in 2 Samuel 15 who similarly curries his peoples' favor, but for insurrection reasons.

²² Narayan, 7.

²³ Cf. Ezekiel 33:12-16, Matthew 21:28-32.

²⁴ Cf. Narayan, 12-13; Zimmer, 171.

²⁵ Cf. the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna constituting the greater part of *The Bhagavad Gita*.

²⁶ Narayan, 25 presents Rama intuiting Sita's availability as a wife.

²⁷ Narayan, 31-32.

²⁸ Narayan, 33.

²⁹ Narayan, 34.

³⁰ Narayan, 35.

³¹ Kooni is also called "Mandara" in another useful introduction to Hinduism for general readers, Ed. Viswanathan, *Am I a Hindu? The Hinduism Primer* (San Francisco, CA: Halo Books, 1992), 79. Cf. Knott, 42; Lutgendorf, 232.

³² Narayan, xxvii, 37-39, cf. 106; 1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10; Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6.

³³ Narayan, 43. Before he dies, Dasaratha confesses that once on a forest hunt, he accidentally shot and killed a young boy, the caregiver of two blind parents. Upon hearing of their son's death, the parents were overcome with grief and cursed Dasaratha to suffer a similar anguish (Narayan, 50; cf. Dimmitt and Buitenen, 247). This does not stop Dasaratha from trying to resist or reverse *karma* (the cosmic force ensuring fitting results for one's actions) but *karma* relentlessly incorporates Dasaratha's plans to thwart it. Dasaratha parallels the exploits of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* – another king who sought and failed to resist fate.

³⁴ Narayan, 54.

³⁵ As with Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; as with Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and their maidservants in Genesis; and as in the life of Muhammad where Aisha is the favored wife, polygamy often facilitates strife. Cf. e.g. Lelia Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), especially 51, 60, 105; Christiana de Groot, "Genesis," in Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (eds.), *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 1-27.

³⁶ Narayan, 34. Dasaratha stands in contrast to the demon king Ravana whose more honorable brother Vibishana warns, "A man loses his honor and name only through lust and avarice" (Narayan, 58).

³⁷ Narayan, 52, brackets added; cf. Kinsley, 70.

³⁸ Narayan, 52.

³⁹ Not unlike Jesus's temptation by Peter to avoid suffering in Matthew 16 and Mark 8.

⁴⁰ Comparable again to Jesus's rebukes to Peter, James, and John in Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 9 and 22; and John 18. E.g. "Put your sword back into its place" (Matthew 26:52, Revised Standard Version).

⁴¹ Cf. Romans 8:28 and Joseph to his duplicitous brothers in Genesis 50:19-20, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today” (NRSV).

⁴² Narayan, 106, brackets added.

⁴³ But cf. Narayan, 57, who idealizes Rama, “If Rama committed a seemingly wrong act, it would still be something to benefit humanity, like a mother forcibly administering a medicine to her child.”

⁴⁴ Cf. Philippians 2.

⁴⁵ To name just a few familiar examples in pop culture: King Arthur, *Beauty and the Beast*, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, Aslan and Prince Cor in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King*, and *Mulan*.

⁴⁶ Narayan, 53. Though Sita later dons Anusuya’s gifts of jewels and fine clothing (Narayan, 62).

⁴⁷ Narayan, 53; cf. Flood, 66, 109; Kinsley, 4; Knott, 42, 44; Viswanathan, 79.

⁴⁸ Matthew 6:1 and Luke 12:34. J.K. Rowling in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Arthur A. Levine, 2007), 325, alludes to this quotation also in the context of relationships.

⁴⁹ Narayan, 58.

⁵⁰ 2 Samuel 3.

⁵¹ Narayan, 59; cf. Dimmitt and Buitenen, 86; Knott, 42.

⁵² Narayan, 60.

⁵³ Narayan, 61, 151, 152. The sandals imagery resembles Jesus and John the Baptist in Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27; and Acts 13:25. Bharatha’s actions preempt additional delay. I (the author of this paper) have participated in several informal Hindu-Christian conversations comparing Hindu scriptures to *Lord of the Rings* and *Aesop’s Fables*. Unlike Denethor, the Steward of Gondor in Peter Jackson’s adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, Bharatha does not imagine or style himself as a suitable heir to Dasaratha’s throne. Nor does Bharatha resist Rama’s eventual return as Denethor does with Aragorn.

⁵⁴ Narayan, 60, italics in original.

⁵⁵ Narayan, 63; Zimmer, 171.

⁵⁶ Cf. Smeagol/Gollum’s crucial but possibly unexpected role in *Lord of the Rings*.

⁵⁷ Rama healed Jatayu’s elder brother Sampathi after Sampathi nearly sacrificed himself to save Jatayu from sunstroke. Sampathi subsequently rules the Eagles after Ravana kills Jatayu (cf. Narayan, xviii, 119, 120).

⁵⁸ Narayan, 89; cf. Eck, *Banaras*, 89; Eck, “Following Rama, Worshipping Siva,” 59-60.

⁵⁹ Narayan, 118.

⁶⁰ Also spelled, “Sugriva,” cf. Eck, “Following Rama, Worshipping Siva,” 60, 62; Knott, 43.

⁶¹ Narayan, 99, brackets added.

⁶² Contrast Lakshmena and Jatayu’s ostensibly chaste protection of Sita.

⁶³ Narayan, 103.

⁶⁴ Narayan, 111.

⁶⁵ Narayan, xv.

⁶⁶ Narayan, xv, 4, 74, 85-87. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14; Dimmitt and Buitenen, 86; Knott, 43. Ravana betrays divine facilitators of his power. Dante’s *Inferno* correspondingly places traitors to benefactors in the deepest circle of hell.

⁶⁷ E.g. Narayan, 76, 125; cf. 1 Kings 12, 22; 2 Chronicles 10, 18.

⁶⁸ E.g. Narayan, 80, 87, 121; cf. Dimmitt and Buitenen, 213.

⁶⁹ Narayan, 132. As in the Biblical Proverbs, “foolishness” involves both wickedness and recklessness.

⁷⁰ Narayan, 89. Eck, *Banaras*, 289, remarks that Ravana, “is a brahmin as well as a demon whose death incurred for Rama...terrible sin...The *linga* (a nondescript sculpture in honor of the god Shiva) that Rama established came to be considered one of the great *lingas* of light, so holy that it destroys the worst sins by merely beholding it.” Cf. Lutgendorf, 32-37 for a discussion also of Kaikeyi’s potential redemption.

⁷¹ Narayan, 146-147. Cf. the dragon in the 2007 Warner Brothers film adaptation of *Beowulf*. Will *dharma* pursue Ravana in a future life? Two bestselling series of novels integrating similar themes are Robert Jordan (with Brandon Sanderson), *The Wheel of Time* (New York: Tor/Tom Doherty Associates, 1990-) which includes a powerful and evil sorcerer (of sorts) named “Rahvin,” and Stephen King, *The Dark Tower* (Various, 1982-2004).

⁷² Narayan, xi, xiv, 147-150; but cf. Flood, 108; Kinsley, 74, 76. Knott, 43, 45 extrapolates, “To modern Western readers...this might seem heartless...but Rama must think and act according to his *dharma* as king. He must give this role priority over and above his personal inclination or belief in Sita’s chastity.”

⁷³ Cf. e.g. Sally J. Sutherland, “Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109:1 (January-March, 1989), 63-79, especially 77-78; Hess, especially 2-19; Hindery, especially 301-303, 312-313.

⁷⁴ Narayan is silent on any such ambitions, assuming Bharatha, Lakshmana and Sita’s absolute loyalty. For a contemporary variation on this theme involving more explicit emotional struggle, see Ron Weasley’s character in Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, especially 375-381.

⁷⁵ Cf. Dimmitt and Buitenen, 70-71, 88, 223; Eck, *Banaras*, 263, 377; Flood 66, 78, 108-109; Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 64; Kinsley, 70-71, 73, 78, 81; Narayan, 134-137, 148-153.

⁷⁶ Cf. Eck, *Banaras*, 263; Eck, *Darsan*, 43, 68; Kinsley, 72-73; Narayan, 96, 104, 107, 112-124, 130-132, 140, 147, 148, 153, 155-157. But Flood (108, cf. Narayan, xxviii, 91) calls Hanuman “the son of the wind-god, Vayu.” Narayan references Brahma and Shiva aiding Rama’s combat with Ravana (cf. xxviii, 4, 9, 10, 18-21, 25, 26, 64, 67, 80, 86, 89, 95, 95, 100, 103, 107, 128, 140, 143, 144, 146, 150, 151). Moreover, establishing a Shiva *linga* signifies Rama’s humility as an incarnation of Vishnu, since the *linga* partly symbolizes Vishnu and Brahma’s inability to fathom the depth and height of Shiva, cf. Eck, *Banaras*, 289; Eck, *Darsan*, 68; Eck, “Following Rama, Worshipping Siva.” Kinsley presents Rama as also helped by Kali before and after defeating Ravana (119, 139).

⁷⁷ Flood, 146; cf. Narayan x, xxviii.

⁷⁸ Narayan, 106.