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JATAYU the vulture

In Ramayana, lots of animals helped Rama but the one that stands out in my mind is Jatayu, the great vulture.

It all started when Sita saw a beautiful deer in the forest. She wanted it really badly so Rama set off to bring it to her. He left Lakshmana in charge of guarding Sita but little did they know that the deer was actually a demon. Rama found the demon and killed him but when the demon died he changed his voice to sound like Rama and cried for help. Sita heard this and began to worry. She told Lakshmana to help Rama but he said no since he had strict orders from his brother. Sita threatened to commit suicide if he didn’t go and find Rama. So as a last resort, Lakshmana put a magical barrier around the hut and told Sita not to cross it. This barrier is called Lakshman rekha. Lakshmana then went off to find Rama.

Soon, the demon king Ravana came and saw Sita. He was blinded by her beauty so he took the form of a sage and went to the hut. He asked for some food and said that he hadn’t eaten for days. Sita went and brought him some food. Knowing about the Lakshman rekha, Ravana pretending to be old and frail asked her to step closer. When she stepped over the Lakshman rekha, Ravana revealed his true form. He pulled her into his chariot and flew off. Sita started shouting for help and Jatayu, the vulture heard her. He knew Rama and Rama’s father – Dasharatha. He rushed over to help. He put up a good fight with Ravana but alas, Ravana cut off both of his wings and flew off.

Later when Rama and Lakshmana came looking for Sita, they saw the dying Jatayu. Jatayu told them what happened to Sita and how he tried to save her. He told them that Ravana was going in the South direction. Feeling sorry for the wounded Jatayu, Rama gave his blessings and launched an arrow to the ground to invoke the seven sacred rivers to help Jatayu attain moksha.

Jatayu’s selfless act of fighting with Ravana cost him his life. To thank Jatayu for his noble action, Rama rewarded him by helping him attain moksha – freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth.