

## DIWALI STORY

Once upon a time many thousands of years ago, there lived a wise king Dasrath who ruled in Ayodhya. The king had three queens and 4 sons. Ram was the eldest prince followed by Bharat, Lakshman and Shatrughn. When the princes grew up they all got married one by one. The eldest prince Ram married a beautiful princess named Sita. The four princes and their wives lived happily together in the kingdom. Time went by. King Dasrath was getting old so he appointed Prince Ram as the Regent.

Many years earlier, King Dasrath had granted 2 wishes to his queen Kaikeyi. Now this queen thought that if Ram became King, he will kill her son Bharat. So she asked the king to grant her 2 wishes :

- send away Ram in the forest for 14 years.
- Make her son Bharat the regent.

The King was sad but because he'd made a promise to the queen, he sent Ram into exile. And so, Ram went away along with his younger brother Lakshman and his wife Sita.

When Bharat came to know of this he was very furious with his mother for what she had done. He followed Ram into the forest and begged him to return, but Ram refused, saying that he must honour his father's word.

Bharat returned sadly to Ayodhya. King Dasaratha, was so sad that he died of grief.

Bharat refused to be king. He ruled Ayodhya in Ram's name and never sat on the throne

Ram, Sita and Lakshman lived in the forest for many years.

One morning, a rakshasni, a female demon, called Surpanakha saw Ram, and begged him to marry her. Ram refused, saying he was already married. She then asked Lakshman, who also refused. Then she threatened to eat Sita if neither of the brothers married her. In anger, Lakshman cut off her nose and her ears.

Furious, Surpanakha went to her brother Ravan for help. Ravan was a great and powerful demon, and ruler of the golden city of Lanka. He had 10 heads and 20 arms, and had been granted a boon by the gods - that neither god nor demon could kill him. When Ravan heard his sister's story he was so furious that he carried Sita away to his kingdom

When Ram and Lakshman came back, they didn't find Sita home. They learn from the birds and animals that Sita had been carried off by Ravan.

Ram and Lakshman set off to find Sita. On the way they are helped by all the animals of the forest, particularly the bears and the monkeys. Among the monkeys, Hanuman becomes Ram's strongest ally and closest friend. Hanuman is not an ordinary monkey - he is the son of the Wind, and had the power to fly over mountains and across oceans. He finds out where Sita is imprisoned in Lanka and then Ram and Lakshman march at once towards Lanka, with their army of monkeys and bears and kill all the demons. Now only Ravan remains. The battle between Ram and Ravan rages for ten days, with neither winning. Finally Ram uses a special arrow given to him by the gods and kills Ravan.

Ram and Sita are reunited.

By now their 14 years of exile are over, and they decide to return to Ayodhya. Hanuman goes ahead and gives Bharat the good news. The entire kingdom celebrates the return of Ram, Sita and Lakshman. Ayodhya is decorated with flowers and lamps. Ram is crowned king of Ayodhya, and Sita his queen. Ram rules for many many years. He is a good and great king.

More than five thousand years later, Ram is still remembered in India where he is worshipped as a god. His return to Ayodhya with Sita, and his coronation as king, is celebrated on Diwali, one of the most important festivals in India. All over the country, lamps are lit, and homes, shops, offices, streets are decorated and fireworks set off in his honour, in much the same way as was done in Ayodhya all those thousands of years ago. Diwali day is a holiday all over India, with schools, colleges and most offices and shops closed in celebration.