

STORY #81

*We can fulfill many ordinary desires within a day, a month, or a year. But to fulfill extraordinary desires, we must strive for innumerable lifetimes. A weak obstacle can destroy a weak thought, but even the greatest obstacle can't destroy a bhavana, a strong thought, or strong conviction. When we use mantra to feed our thoughts we create an ocean of energy and strength.*

THE SQUIRREL AND THE BRIDGE

**I**N THE ANCIENT ALLEGORY of the Ramayan, when Lord Ram received the news from courageous Hanuman that Sita had been kidnapped by Ravan, the king of Lanka, and that she was being kept in Ashoka Vana, he immediately decided to invade Lanka.

Ram's army of monkeys came to the ocean and at once began building a bridge to cross it. A squirrel living nearby watched the huge army of monkeys arriving. She observed them for awhile and soon discovered that there was one special man among them. Each morning the entire army would pay their respects to him by bowing down. Afterwards they would begin their daily task of building the bridge.

One day the squirrel received the audience of that great man. She developed a feeling in her heart of deep love and felt a desire to serve him. Since the bridge building seemed an act of service to this great man, she willingly joined in the task.

The squirrel carefully observed how the monkeys were constructing the bridge. Before the monkeys moved each of the large rocks needed for the bridge, they would chant the name of Ram and the rock would float on the water. Because she didn't have the strength to lift the huge rocks, the squirrel was sad. Yet her strong desire to serve gave birth to an idea.

She went close to the bridge and happily began rolling in the sand on the seashore. Each time she performed this action, sand

would stick to her fur. Then she would place all the sand between the large rocks on the bridge. She would make twenty or thirty trips with sand in the same amount of time that it took a monkey to place one rock on the bridge.

When the monkeys saw her loving, eager service, they were all so moved that they forgot the difficulty of their own labor and hurried to bring the rocks to the bridge. The tiny squirrel had soon inspired the entire army to work more efficiently.

Thus, the monkeys felt that the squirrel had deeper devotion for Ram than they did. They perceived her true love and received more joy from observing her devotion than from the devotion in their own hearts. The strength of our devotion will determine whether it manifests partially or totally. True devotion is always total, no matter how it's displayed.

Soon the sun set and the monkeys stopped their work. Night came and the entire army of monkeys bowed to Lord Ram and sat in front of him. Many of the monkeys were eager to talk about the squirrel's loving service, but they sat silently and looked at the courageous Hanuman for permission to speak. The squirrel was also in silent attendance. Hiding herself at the feet of Hanuman so that no one could see her, she gazed continuously and rapturously at Lord Ram. Naturally the wise Hanuman knew what she was up to, but acted as if nothing was happening.

"Lord," said one monkey eagerly, "Today a tiny squirrel destroyed the sense of ego in our devotion to you. We were carrying huge rocks and she was carrying sand. She continually rolled in the sand on the seashore so that sand stuck to her. She brought the sand to the bridge and placed it between the large stones. In the time we took to bring one rock, she had brought twenty or thirty loads of sand. We experienced boundless joy today at the sight of her loving service."

After hearing this tale, Lord Ram expressed his happiness at the squirrel's service. Suddenly, Hanuman gently picked up the squirrel and lovingly placed her at the feet of the Lord. All the monkeys shouted with joy. The gracious Lord stroked her tiny body. His fingers left impressions on her fur. It was as if the unseen grace of the Lord had become visible.

## FROM THE HEART OF THE LOTUS

Like the squirrel, we're all tiny seekers. Even if we can't attain enough nonattachment to carry big boulders, we'll definitely progress if we carry a bit of sand. Nonattachment is extremely patient and tolerant. It's been standing outside the door of our mind for many lifetimes. It will enter whenever we call it and then the dawn of knowledge, devotion, and yoga will break. As seekers, we're all trying to build a bridge, across the ocean of maya to God. At first we don't even know that Soul bliss exists, but then we see others striving for it and devotion is born. In the end like the squirrel it's our devotion not our worthiness that finds favor with God, and the gracious Lord strokes us with His grace.