**The Sincere Squirrel**

Ravana, the horrendous ten-headed demon king of Lanka, abducted Lord Rama’s beloved wife Sita. Lord Rama started a search for her and got help from the Vanara king, Sugriva, and his army. They came across Jatayu, a vulture, who was severely mutilated by Ravana. He informed Lord Rama that Ravana abducted Sita and took her to Lanka.

In order to reach Lanka they had to cross a huge ocean. Lord Rama consulted with King Sugriva, Lord Hanuman, and his brother Lakshmana. They thought that building a bridge to Lanka was the best idea. They decided to make the bridge out of rocks. The entire Vanara army helped Rama create the bridge by lifting hills and boulders. They hooted and hollered while trying to get the largest boulders to impress Lord Rama. Other creatures wanted to help too. The birds would drop grass and moss in small apertures and the fish would gather pebbles and search for a large enough gaps to put pebbles through.

One squirrel saw this and tried to help by gathering small pebbles. Soon he became too tired to carry any more pebbles. He was sad that he cannot help anymore. Then he had an idea. He scurried towards the water and quickly dipped himself in and rolled around in the sand. Then he ran towards the bridge and shook off the sand that was on his body. The Vanaras became agitated when the squirrel started to get in their way. They told him that mere sand won’t help the bridge compared to their boulders. “Get out of our way and let us do our jobs!” The squirrel calmly continued working.

Finally one Vanara became so frustrated that he picked the squirrel up and flung him off the shore. Lord Rama watching this caught the squirrel before the impact and gently set him down. He told all the Vanaras that they were strong and brave and did wondrous things for the bridge but they should always remember that any task, big or small, should always be appreciated. The Vanaras became ashamed of what they had said and done to the squirrel and apologized. All the while, Lord Rama gently stroked the back of the squirrel with his fingers and three lines appeared where the Lord’s fingers had touched it. It is believed that squirrels got their stripes as a reward for their hard work.

This story tells us the devotion of a hearty squirrel who tried to help Lord Rama the way that he could. Any job that is done sincerely and with full devotion is a great service to god.