

What Happens When You Listen.

From A.K. Ramanujan, *Folktales from India*. (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993), p. 55.

A villager who had no sense of culture and no interest in it was married to a woman who was very cultured. She tried various ways to cultivate his taste for the higher things in life but he just wasn't interested. One day a great reciter of that grand epic the *Ramâyana* came to the village. Every evening he would sing, recite, and explain the verses of the epic. The whole village went to this performance...

The wife nagged him and nagged him, trying to interest him... This time, he grumbled as usual, but decided to humor her. So he went in the evening and sat in the back...[and] he slept through the night. Early in the morning, ... sweets were distributed ... and someone put some in the mouth of the sleeping man. He woke up and went home. His wife was delighted that her husband had stayed through the night and asked him eagerly how he enjoyed the *Ramâyana*. He said, "It was very sweet." The wife was very happy to hear it.

[The next night] he sat against a wall, and before long fell asleep...In the morning...when he went home and his wife asked him eagerly how it was, he said, "It got heavier and heavier by morning." The wife said, "That's the way the story is." On the third day, he sat at the edge of the crowd, and was so sleepy that he lay down on the floor and even snored. Early in the morning, a dog came that way and pissed into his mouth a little before he woke up and went home. When his wife asked him how it was, ... he said, "Terrible. It was so salty." His wife knew something was wrong. She ... didn't let up till he finally told her he had been sleeping through the performance every night.

On the fourth day, his wife went with him, sat him down in the very first row, and told him sternly that he should keep awake no matter what might happen. So he sat dutifully in the front row and began to listen. Very soon, he was caught up in the adventures and characters.

On that day, the reciter was enchanting the audience with a description of how Hanuman the monkey had to leap across the ocean to take Rama's signet ring but it fell into the ocean. Hanuman had to get the ring back quickly and take it to Sita in the demon's kingdom. While he was wringing his hands, the husband who was listening with rapt attention said, "Hanuman, don't worry. I'll get it for you." Then he jumped up and dived into the ocean, found the ring in the ocean floor, brought it back, and gave it to Hanuman. Everyone was astonished.

They thought this man was someone special, really blessed by Rama and Hanuman. Ever since, he has been respected in the village as a wise elder, and he has also behaved like one. That's what happen when you really listen to a story, especially to the *Ramâyana*. ✦