

## Hanuman

Hanuman is one of the many deities of the Hindu tradition. He is regarded as the monkey-general of a mythic monkey kingdom, known as Kiskindha. In Hindu tradition, Hanuman is most commonly known for his role in the *Ramayana* [a *Sanskrit* epic featuring the characters of Rama, Sita, Hanuman, and Laksmana], in which he is a great ally to Rama and Laksmana [Rama is the central character of the *Ramayana* epic; Laksmana is his brother who accompanies Rama during his banishment from his kingdom]. The *Ramayana* describes how Hanuman was devoted to Rama and willingly set off to Lanka to search for Sita. Rama is unable to go himself; he had been expelled from the city for his 14 year exile. Earlier in the *Ramayana*, Rama had said that “[e]verywhere, even among the animals, can be found good creatures that follow the ways of righteousness, that are brave and provide a sure place of refuge” (Regier 995). This statement fits the description of Hanuman, for he is a loyal and virtuous being, and he is willing to endure the risk of crossing into Ravana’s land to save Sita. Hanuman does find Sita, but she refuses to return with him because of her loyalty to her husband. She is unwilling to touch another man, and believes that it is Rama’s duty (*dharma*) to save her himself (Regier 995).

Hanuman also demonstrates a few great powers that are useful in his role in the *Ramayana* epics. In the *Sundarakanda* [5<sup>th</sup> book of the *Ramayana* ], Hanuman becomes a major character, with a talent for jumping extremely far distances. This is demonstrated in his jump between Mount Mahendra to Lanka’s Mount Trikuta His duality as a monkey-hero is demonstrated in this leap between the two territories and his search for Sita. Hanuman’s essential presence in the story is indicated by “the fact that the poet devotes nearly two hundred verses to the description of his jump” (Geldman 13). Hanuman further demonstrates his unique powers by his ability to change his size at will, for example during Hanuman’s leap to Lanka “he takes on a

size that is said to be immeasurable. As he flies along, his shadow on the sea below is said to measure ten leagues in breadth and thirty in length” (Geldman 44).

Hanuman demonstrates that his moods are constantly changing. “[I]n some ways parallel to Hanuman’s vast and sudden changes in size are his sharp swings of mood throughout the first half of the *Sundarakanda*” (Geldman 47). Hanuman begins his journey to Lanka with lots of enthusiasm and optimism, but when faced with difficulties he “lapses into gloomy thought” (Geldman 47). After finding Sita, Hanuman decides to cause mayhem in Lanka. Ravana sends his forces after Hanuman, but all are unsuccessful in restraining the monkey. Ravana finally sends out his son, a powerful warrior, Indrajit, who soon realizes that he too is unable to kill Hanuman. However, he was able to acquire a “divine weapon of the god Brahma” which was able to impede any further destruction caused by Hanuman (Geldman 10). The *Ramayana* never directly says that Hanuman was immortal, but

“both accounts of his birth , one in the *Kiskindhakanda* and one in the *Uttarakanda*, indicate that his is to be no ordinary life span. In the former, Jambavan reports that Indra had conferred on him the great boon of being able to choose the moment of his death. In the latter Brahma foretells that he will be long-lived” (Geldman 54).

If it is then true that Hanuman is able to decide when he will die, this may account for Indrajit’s realization that even as a mighty warrior he will never be able to kill Hanuman. This demonstrates that Hanuman is not like the other monkeys in the monkey kingdom, although he has a beast-like quality when it comes to his rashness and spontaneity, like the other monkeys. He demonstrates his god-like quality with his powers, his personality, and his being the first to find Sita.

According to Geldman, Hanuman is presented in a “dual nature” (47). He is represented as a monkey with monkey instincts, but is also represented as a hero in the way that he is continually attempting to save someone. His continual changing in size emphasizes this duality. He can appear in a gigantic size, representing his heroic/divine qualities. Or he can shrink down to a size that is smaller than the average human. The dual-nature of Hanuman can be compared with Rama’s contrasting personality,

“[If] the liminal nature of the *avatara* and the particulars of its associated boon-motif account for the ambiguity of Rama’s nature as a god-man, then the same factors would appear to determine the ambivalent status of Hanuman as both god and beast.” (Geldman 47)

Hanuman’s behaviour, and his powers are the result of his parentage. He is the “mind-born” son of Vayu, the wind god, and Anjana. It is said that he can move with the swiftness of the wind as a result of his family line. In the *Sundarakanda*, it is said that his father helps him leap between the two kingdoms on his search for Sita (Geldman 41).

Although the *Ramayana* is the text through which Hanuman gained his popularity, it is not the only epic in which he has appeared. In the *Mahabharata*, in the Kadali forest Hanuman meets his half-brother Bhima; the two are both sons of the wind god, Vayu. The two met when Hanuman was sleeping over a path on which Bhima was travelling. Bhima requested that Hanuman move out of the way so that he could pass. Hanuman replied by asking Bhima to move his tail to one side. Bhima, though the strongest of the Pandava Brothers, could not budge Hanuman’s tail. Hanuman then introduced himself to Bhima in the form that he took while crossing the ocean to Lanka (Nagar 386).

Hanuman is a widely worshipped deity in India; “[h]is images are smeared with the sacred colour vermilion, to denote the estimation in which he is held, and the universal admiration of his devotion as a model faithful servant” (Monier-Williams 140). He is looked up to, and is admired for his faithfulness to Rama. He went to rescue Sita a woman that he had never met, nor seen before, without any thought for his own well-being. Located in Delhi is the Sri Hanuman Maharaj (Great Lord Hanuman) temple, a building made of white marble dedicated to Hanuman (Lutgendorf 311). “According to many Hindus, the popularity of Hanuman—who in narrative often expands his physical form—has itself been steadily expanding in recent decades. Certainly its iconic manifestations have been growing, as groups of prominent patrons vie with one another to erect larger and larger *murtis* of the great monkey in highly visible locations” (Lutgendorf 312). “He [Hanuman] exemplifies both ‘*sakti* and ‘*bhakti*’—briefly ‘power’ and ‘devotion’” (Lutgendorf 315). For this reason he is widely admired, and well-liked.

Hanuman is also widely popular because of his deviant childhood. Hanuman’s childhood stories appeal to many people because of its human-like quality. As a child he ascends towards the ‘rising sun’ in an attempt to grasp it. However, the god Indra sees this as a threat and sends him plummeting back down, breaking Hanuman’s jaw; hanu means jaw, giving Hanuman his name. Hanuman’s father Vayu then threatens the entire cosmos. To make up for what happened to Hanuman, each deity grants him with a unique boon, giving him his particular powers that are useful in his adventures during adulthood (Lutgendorf 317).

Hanuman played a key role in the *Ramayana* and other stories featuring him. He is widely well known in Hinduism, and by many other people around the world. Hanuman’s incredible dedication is what makes him an ideal character to respect and support.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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Lakshmana

Sita

Ravana

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*Sundarakanda*

Indrajit

*Kiskindhakanda*

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<http://www.webonautics.com/mythology/hanuman.html>

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<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/scottandrewh/hanuman.html>

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**Article written by: Kristin Barry (March 2006) who is solely responsible for its content.**