

Sri Hanuman: Devotee, Diplomat and General

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Sri Rama's temples are in many countries around the world. It is very common and normal to see in the temples the divine icons (murthis) of Sri Rama, Sita Devi, Lakshmana and Hanuman (Anjaneya). Hanuman has a special place in the hearts of Sri Rama and Sita Devi but every devotee of Sri Rama and Sita Devi has a place in the heart of Hanuman. Loyalty, bravery, great strength and character are synonymous with Hanuman. We are looking in this article at some events that show Hanuman's unique and extraordinary roles as an unquestionable devotee of Sri Rama, Diplomat and General (warrior).

The Devotee

The disappearance of Sita Devi was the catalyst that triggered the various events needed to uproot Sri Rama from the peaceful forest life and move Him into Lanka to initiate the divine plan to get rid of tyrant king Ravana. While Sri Rama and Lakshmana were wandering in the forests in search of Sita Devi, they arrived at the beautiful Pampa Lake located near Rasyamukha hills. Sugriva lived in the hills and was ever afraid of his mighty brother Vali. As he saw the two royal brothers, he immediately suspected that his brother Vali had sent them. As panic and uncontrolled fear sets in Sugriva, he immediately sent Hanuman to find out about the two persons. Hanuman had extraordinary intuition and other abilities. By carefully watching the facial expressions and body languages of Sri Rama and Lakshmana, he came to a quick and comfortable conclusion that they were not sent by Vali. The meeting of Sri Rama and Lakshmana with Hanuman is the final episode of Aranya-Kanda. Fearing that his vanara appearance may not be appropriate, he approaches the royal brothers as a mendicant or monk. The calm, gentle and pleasant words from Hanuman to Sri Rama and Lakshmana provide valuable guidance in the area of diplomacy. As usual, Lakshmana had his own concerns and apprehensions about the mendicant. Sri Rama said to Lakshmana that Hanuman's facial and eye expressions and words indeed confirmed that he was the emissary of Sugriva. It also calmed Lakshmana from reacting hastily and improperly. The meeting between Hanuman and Sri Rama shows that Hanuman is a diplomat *par-excellence* and a pious person of great humility. In fact, the first meeting between Sri Rama and his greatest devotee turned into an eternal bond between the two.

Sugriva had momentarily forgotten the promise made to Sri Rama to help in locating Sita Devi. When Hanuman reminded Sugriva about the promise made to Sri Rama, he quickly recognized his responsibility and duty. Sri Rama intuitively felt that Hanuman would locate Sita Devi and handed over a ring to him to show it to her when she is located. Hanuman, Angada and others were unable to find Sita Devi for a long time. They expressed their anguish and disappointment in not finding Sita Devi. The despondency turned into joy when Sampati, the divine vulture, told Hanuman, Angada and Jambavan the approximate whereabouts of Sita Devi. Along with great abilities, we find Hanuman had an unusual characteristic trait resulting from a rishi's blessings. He would remember or realize that he had extraordinary strength at critical times only when he was specifically reminded about it. Jambavan reminded Hanuman of his abilities and thereby

Hanuman was encouraged to leap across the sea to Lanka. Now Hanuman quickly recognized his immense abilities and assumed a gigantic size to fly over the sea. Once he reached Lanka, he reduced to a small size. As he entered Lanka by night, he saw the magnificent city well-guarded by an army of rakshasas. Hanuman entered Lanka by leaping over the main gate of the city. According to the military strategy of the time, it is said that one should enter into enemy's city by not passing through its main gate. It is a delight to read in Cantos 2 and 3 of Sundara Kanda the detailed description of the magnificent Lanka, a city built by divine architect.

The Diplomat

During Hanuman's first visit to Lanka, he had the dual responsibilities of being an emissary (diplomat) as well as a strong warrior (military-general). Hanuman was also well versed in military science. As he anxiously looked for Sita, he observed that the city had a number of spies watching the people. He located an emaciated and unhappy woman surrounded by rakshasas in the Ashoka grove. Her single piece of clothing was worn-out and she was generally in a pitiable condition. Yet, Hanuman noticed she was beauty-personified and dignified. He observed that she had some of the ornaments as Sri Rama had described them. Hanuman ultimately came to the conclusion that she was indeed Sita Devi. Devotee Hanuman mentally sought Sri Rama's blessings. Sita Devi surrounded by rakshasas sat under a tree. Hanuman saw Ravana enter the grove and approach a weeping Sita Devi. Hanuman anxiously watched as Ravana using soft, tender and passionate words asked her to accept him. The brave hearted Sita Devi was neither intimidated nor influenced by the personality or the words of Ravana. She placed a blade of grass so that she did not have to look directly at him and told Ravana to surrender to Sri Rama if he wanted to preserve his kingdom and not suffer terrible consequences. She informed Ravana that her abduction was an event of destiny for fulfilling his destruction. Angry and humiliated Ravana then ordered the guards to do whatever was necessary to pursue Sita Devi to accept him and hastily left to his palace.

Hanuman watched all these proceedings with great distress and concern for Sita Devi. His eyes were flooded with tears. He decided it was time for him to talk and comfort her. After considering the various options available, Hanuman while sitting on the tree narrated in a sweet musical voice the story of Sri Rama, beginning from the birth of Sri Rama and ending with him perched on the tree. Sita Devi was sitting below it. The narration by Hanuman reaffirms the level of extreme devotion he had for Sri Rama. Sita Devi who had only heard harsh and negative words about Sri Rama in Ashoka grove was stuck with supreme wonder and happiness at hearing the story of Sri Rama. Hanuman came down from the tree and in the most sweet and polite way enquired about her identity and also to confirm whether she was the consort of Sri Rama, even though he was quite certain she was Sita Devi. She then told details of her life. Hanuman indicated that he was an envoy (diplomat) of Sri Rama. However, She was still suspicious that Ravana had come in the guise of a vanara. It was the turn of Hanuman to prove that he was indeed the envoy of Sri Rama. He identified Sri Rama by describing his physical personality and indicating the various marks on his body. Hanuman handed over the ring given by Sri Rama and this restored full confidence in her that Hanuman was indeed a messenger and an envoy sent by Sri Rama. Sita Devi heard from Hanuman about Sri Rama's extreme grief at his separation from her. Hanuman offered to carry her on his back to Sri Rama. Sita Devi declined the offer but asked him to bring Sri Rama. She said that she would not willingly touch the body of anyone

other than Sri Rama. It shows the extreme and extraordinary strength of character of Sita Devi. She handed Hanuman a jewel to be given to Sri Rama.

The General

Having accomplished the diplomatic mission of finding Sita Devi and talking to her, he wanted to test the strength of Ravana's military force. His assignment quickly changed from being a diplomat to a mighty military General. Hanuman caused havoc in Lanka. He willingly let the rakshasa soldiers to capture him, easily escaped to set Lanka on full fire, took a big leap across the sea and safely returned to Sri Rama. General Hanuman had won the first battle for Sri Rama in the war against Ravana. Later, when Sri Rama's army marched into Lanka, Hanuman, the super devotee and General *par-excellence* took a stellar role in protecting Sri Rama and Lakshmana at various critical times during the most ferocious war. Sri Rama's army had many brave vanara warriors but no one was braver, more militarily and diplomatically skilled, disciplined and devoted than General Hanuman.

Indeed Hanuman, the extraordinary devotee is the *ideal* Devotee, Diplomat and General.

Sri Rama, Sita Devi Bless all.