

Hanuman

OF ALL THE holy books in India, the Ramayana was by far Maharajji's favorite. And within the Ramayana he was particularly fond of the chapter entitled "Sundarakand."

In Lucknow this old man always came to see Maharajji, and Maharajji would always ask him to recite from the Ramayana. "Sing this part! Sing the part where . . ." and so forth. The man would sing and Maharajji would eat his meal. Maharajji would never sniff or anything, but tears would stream down his face like a child. The Sundarakand was his favorite part.

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When the Ramayana reading was in Kainchi, he'd open his window just a little to listen to it.

THE SUNDARAKAND concerns the exploits of Hanuman, an extraordinarily charming, wise, powerful, and loving monkey whose sole preoc-

cupation was to serve God in the form of Ram. Maharajji never tired of hearing and repeating the adventures of Hanuman as described in the Ramayana and in a special prayer to Hanuman, the Hanuman Chalisa.

Maharajji used to quote from the Ramayana such things as, "I bow down to Hanuman, whose praises can only be sung by Ram. The stories of Ram are so beautiful that the birds of doubt are chased away."

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He loved to hear the Hanuman Chalisa sung by the Westerners early in the morning. He was very happy with it, and in the middle he'd start joking and make everyone laugh.

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From the very beginning, he loved the Hanuman Chalisa very much. In the early days, when a big mob gathered, he would tell them all to sit down and recite the Hanuman Chalisa. When they were all involved in it, he'd get up and go somewhere else.

TO BE IN Maharajji's presence when such stories were repeated seemed to turn these stories into an awesome living truth.

Ordinarily when we read the Hanuman Chalisa, nothing particularly struck us. Sometimes Maharajji would say, "Is it written that Hanumanji will live forever . . . that he was for all time? How?" Maharajji would say only this much and put everyone into a thoughtful state. Maharajji put a spark to the reading.

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Once when we were sitting with Maharajji at Dada's house, a devotee was reciting from the Ramayana. Tears streamed down Maharajji's cheeks, and then he went into a very blissful samadhi state. We were all overwhelmed by the quality of the moment. When the reading stopped Dada suddenly got up and led Maharajji into the other room and closed the door.

MAHARAJJI NOT ONLY honored the story of Hanuman but over the years had encouraged devotees in many places in India to construct temples for the honoring of Hanuman. Some of these temples are small and located in devotee's homes, and others are large public ones to which hundreds come each day. It is not possible to determine how many temples were constructed at Maharajji's inspiration, if not his direct instigation. For someone so aware of the pitfalls of ritual, it seems strange that in his later years he should be so identified with temples. However, everything connected with the temples, starting with the very construction, held subtle teachings. Every temple involved much drama of one kind or another about such aspects as the acquisition of land. And these difficulties embroiled many devotees in processes that in each case intensified their own ultimate faith in the spirit.

The big temple at Nainital is constructed upon a spot where previously there was dense jungle, inhabited by wild animals. Part of the place had been used as a burial ground for very young children (who are not cremated). Local people believed the site to be haunted by ghosts. When Maharajji visited the place and indicated that he wanted to build a temple there, the local officials put up a lot of resistance. Nobody thought that a Hanuman temple could ever be built there.

Maharajji just camped by the side of the road. Each day many devotees would walk out to the spot to be with him. Slowly, slowly the vibrations of the place changed. Once he pointed to a mule shed, which was the only structure near there, and said, "Here there will be a big temple and people will come from all over the world to it." Everyone laughed because it seemed absurd. Then after some time, Maharajji had Hari Dass Baba bring to the place a small murti of Hanuman that he had made, and it was duly installed. That was the beginning of what is now a large temple complex on the top of a high hill to which people come from all over to have darshan.

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The large Kainchi temple is built at a spot where Sombari Maharaj, a great saint of that area, had lived in a cave. The cave still remains at the back of the temple and there is a strong feeling of continuity of spirit there.

Once Maharajji, Siddhi Ma, and Jivanti Ma went at night to the site that was later to become the temple at Kainchi. While the Ma's sat by the roadside, Maharajji crossed over the river and didn't come back for four or five hours. When he did, he said, "I hear the sound here. We shall have a temple."

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When Maharajji was asked why he didn't build an ashram at a particular-holy place, he answered that it was not for such as him to do. This was a very old, old temple site. He would not want to disturb the vibration already set up.

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In our city, the place where the temple now stands was where people would relieve themselves. It was very dirty. Maharajji came, blew a conch shell to purify the place, and stayed there. People gathered and cleaned it up and built a temple.

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Maharajji frequently used to visit the old Hanuman temple in Lucknow, situated on the banks of the Gomati River. The temple was built before 1960 by a devotee of Maharajji at his request. Maharajji would sit there and give darshan, and though the temple became famous, puja and bhandara to celebrate its opening were never done. Once M asked Maharajji about this, and Maharajji replied, "No, no. Not this temple. We'll have a bigger temple."

One day while driving Maharajji to someone's house they passed by an old bridge which was being replaced by a big new one. Maharajji pointed toward the bank where the construction was going on and said, "There we'll have our temple!" There was no question of doing anything. Later, when driving to Kanpur, Maharajji suddenly shouted, "A wonderful temple has been designed in Lucknow."

Two years later there was a change in government and an old devotee became minister of public works. He came to Maharajji and suggested that the old temple was too small. Maharajji said, "As you like." A few days later the man came by with a fine model of the present temple. Maharajji said, "Yes, make it."

When the new bridge was completed, the old one was abandoned. At the same time, the river began to consume the old temple. The government suggested destroying it, but Maharajji said that a temple shouldn't be destroyed, that nature should run its course.

The government bought the temple for thirty-five thousand rupees as

compensation. Maharajji asked the minister how much the new temple would cost, and he said eighty-five thousand rupees. When asked where the balance would come from, Maharajji said, "It will be made!" Six months later the government had given most of the money, and the owner of the contracting company offered to pay the balance. Then the temple was built on land that was also given by the public-works minister. Two years ago the Gomati flooded and took off the back half of the old temple complex.

THE MOST IMPORTANT teaching of these temples, however, is that they all contain statues of Hanuman. These statues, constructed of stone or cement, were invested through prayer, mantra, and chanting with the spirit of Hanuman, and thus they became murtis and were treated in the same way that one would treat the actual Hanuman.

As the years passed, Maharajji came to spend more and more time at these temples in the course of his wandering, and this tended to strengthen an association in the minds of the community between Hanuman and Maharajji. This association went back to the earliest stories about Maharajji, far predating the construction of the temples.

Exactly what the association between Maharajji and Hanuman is, plays endlessly in the minds of devotees. He talked about Hanuman continuously and named many of us with one or another of the names used to refer to Hanuman, including those names of God to which the word "das [servant of]" was attached; and he instructed many on the path of service and devotion that would bring them ever closer to Hanuman.

A man asked Maharajji, "What should I do for sadhana?" Maharajji said, "Don't bother your head about that, just keep repeating Ram as Hanuman did." This man was an old devotee, now retired from his livelihood work.

SERVE AS HANUMAN SERVED.

SOME DEVOTEES regard Maharajji's focus on Hanuman as due to Maharajji's being a member of a traditional devotional sect in India, in which the relation of devotee to God is like that of servant to master—with Hanuman the perfect embodiment of that form. This sect focuses its devotion upon Hanuman, the monkey-God depicted in the Ramayana as serving God (in the form of Ram) with totally concentrated one-pointedness. His exploits, which reflect this devoted service, bring him into such intimacy with God that he becomes known as the "breath of Ram itself."

Other devotees see the deep intimacy that was often evidenced in Maharajji's dealings with Hanuman as reflecting a bond between them far transcending the usual devotional forms.

When Maharajji was staying at Neeb Karori, it is reported that he spoke to Hanuman directly, as if he were right there.

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Maharajji would visit an ancient (eight-hundred or thousand-year-old) Hanuman temple at Aliganj in Lucknow. He would sit there under a giant shade tree near Hanuman for long periods.

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There used to be treacherous landslides along the ridge that later became the Hanuman Garh temple site. Maharajji told K that all this would stop when Hanuman came; he would protect the place. Since the temple was built, there have been no more landslides.

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Maharajji invited a famous pundit to come to Kainchi and recite the Shrimad Bhagavatam. This man was used to reciting before large and very receptive crowds, and he complained to Maharajji that on this occasion he had to recite to only a few illiterate villagers. Maharajji gently rebuked him and said, "Don't worry. Hanumanji is listening."

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A forest fire in the hills came dangerously close to the temple but stopped just at the perimeter of the grounds. Maharajji said, "The monkey army protected us. They put out the fire."

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At the consecration of the Hanuman murti at Kainchi, Maharajji stayed away most of the day. Late in the afternoon he said to a few devotees, "Let's go have darshan of Hanuman. Get a pail of milk. We'll give him some milk." A crowd started to gather around the room, but Maharajji had the door closed, with only three or four devotees inside.

One of the devotees thought, "I have always wanted to see how a murti is fed."

As the devotee thought this, Maharajji turned and said, "Everyone turn around and face the wall and close your eyes." They all did this, but the same devotee wanted so badly to see that he thought of opening his eyes anyway. As he thought this, Maharajji said, "And if you open your eyes you will be blinded." Suddenly they all felt a change of energy in the room. They experienced through closed eyelids a brilliant light and heard the sound of drinking. When they were allowed to turn around they found the pail empty, a tiny puddle of milk on the floor, and some milk dripping from Hanuman's mouth. Maharajji told them to collect the milk on the floor and give it out as Hanuman's prasad.

MAHARAJJI OFTEN told the following story, which some devotees suspected was about himself:

In a small village there was a tiny Hanuman temple to which the local people would come. The practice is for a devotee to bring some sweets and offer them to the murti by giving them to the priest, who then takes the sweets into the room or alcove where the murti is and draws a curtain. Then he offers the sweets to the murti with appropriate mantras. After this the priest usually takes a few of the sweets and sets them aside to be given later to the poor neighborhood children. The rest he brings back to the devotee-donor as prasad, which the devotee then eats as a blessing from Hanuman.

It so happened that the old priest in this village was called away by illness in his family, and he left a young neighborhood boy who loved to be around the temple to take care of the temple while he was away. Soon some devotees came and brought sweets, and the boy took them as he had seen the priest do and went behind the curtain. Even though he had never been with Hanuman when the curtain was closed, he offered the sweets to the murti. But Hanuman wouldn't take them. The boy became upset and demanded that Hanuman take some of the sweets. He even picked up a stick and began to beat the murti. Suddenly all the sweets disappeared from the dish. The boy returned to the devotees, joyfully explaining that Hanuman had accepted their offering. The

devotees, who were used to receiving back a portion of their gift, concluded that the boy had decided to keep all their gift for himself, and beating the boy, they sent him away. When the old priest returned and was told about this incident, he said, "All my life I had hoped to become pure enough so that my offerings would be accepted by Hanuman. But I never was. This young boy had that purity and was so blessed."

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On Maharajji's last day at Kainchi, he stopped for two minutes in front of Hanuman and folded his hands. He was wearing only a dhoti. It was completely silent. This was only the second time, said one long-time devotee, that he had ever seen Maharajji do this. The other time was at the consecration of the murti.

FOR MOST OF US, however, the link we experienced is even more intimate than these stories suggest. For us, Maharajji is Hanuman.

Hanuman's qualities are described in the various texts about him as follows:

I bow to the son of the wind-god, the beloved devotee of Sri Rama, the chief of the monkeys, the repository of all virtues, the foremost among the wise, a fire to consume the forest of the demon race, possessing a body shining as a mountain of gold and a home of immeasurable strength. (Tulsidas, Sri Ramacharitamansa, English translation [Gorakhpur, India: Gita Press, 1968], pp. 595-596)

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Who is this monkey Hanuman? Rama let him loose in the world. He knows Rama and Rama knows him. Hanuman can break in or break out of anywhere. He cannot be stopped, like the free wind in flight. Hanuman can spot a tyrant, he looks at deeds not words and he'll go and pull his beard. Disguises and words of talk cannot confuse a mere wild animal. . . . Hanuman will take your sad tune and use it to make a happy dance. Strong is his guard . . . the Son of the Wind. (William Buck, Ramayana [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], p. 427)

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Hanuman is no monkey, but some god in the form of a monkey. No one can equal him. He is brave and kind, self-radiant, a befriender of the meek, strong and intelligent, and a knower of time and place (adapted from Tulsidas and Buck).

HANUMAN MUST be reminded of his own powers, for he has no self-consciousness.

"Listen, O mighty Hanuman; how is it that you are keeping mum? A son of the wind-god, you are as strong as your father and a storehouse of intelligence, discretion, and spiritual wisdom. What undertaking in this world is too difficult for you to accomplish, dear child? It is for the service of Sri Rama that you have come down upon earth." The moment Hanuman heard these words he grew to the size of a mountain, with a body shining as gold and full of splendor as though he was another king of mountains. (Tulsidas, p. 593)

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You assumed a tiny form to reveal yourself to Sita—then became immense and terrifying to burn Lanka. (Hanuman Chalisa)

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"But my son, all the monkeys must be pygmies like you, whereas the demons are mighty and great warriors. I have grave misgivings in my heart on this score," said Sita.

On hearing this the monkey revealed his natural form, colossal as a mountain of gold, terrible in battle possessing great might and full of valour. (Tulsidas, p. 608)

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He entered the grove, ate the fruit and began to break down the trees. He later said to Ravana, "I ate the fruit because I felt hungry and broke the boughs as a monkey is wont to do."

Ravana laughed and said, sarcastically, "We have found a most wise Guru in this monkey!" (adapted from Tulsidas, pp. 610-614)

HIS APPETITE for love is insatiable.

Sita, the Mother of the Universe, wishes to feed Hanuman because of her intense love for him. Hanuman begins to eat. And she keeps cooking more and offering more and he keeps eating more until the pantry is empty. She borrows food and cooks more, but he keeps saying, "More, Mother, more!" Finally her mother-in-law brings trays of cooked food to help her out, but Hanuman won't eat it even though it is brought out by Sita. With his discriminative power he knows the difference and says, "No, Mother, this is not cooked by your hand." (a folk tale)

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Hanuman's eyes filled with tears as he recalled the Lord's virtues. He ever enjoyed the nectar of the Lord's story. His only desire was to be allowed to remain as a devotee of Rama. Again and again the Lord tried to raise him up; he, however, was so absorbed in love that he would not rise. When Rama asked him what he wanted, Hanuman answered: "Grant me unceasing devotion, which is a source of supreme bliss."

Ram answered: "So be it." (adapted from Tulsidas and Hanuman Chalisa)

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Hanuman says to Ram: "A monkey's greatest valour lies in his skipping about from one bough to another. That I should have been able to leap across the ocean, burn the gold city, kill the demon host and lay waste the Asoka grove was all due to your might; no credit, my Lord, is due to me for the same." (Tulsidas, p. 620)

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Then with his sharp fingernails Hanuman tore open his breast and pulled back the flesh. And see, there was written again and again on every bone, in

fine little letters . . . Rama Rama Rama . . . and in his heart were Ram and Sita. (adapted from Buck and Tulsidas)

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Hanuman, all joy comes to those under the umbrella of your grace, and the work of the world, however difficult, is made easy. (Hanuman Chalisa)

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Then like a storm Hanuman drove away low spirits, like a light he brought courage. (Buck, p. 223)

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To me who was being drowned in the ocean of desolation, dear Hanuman, you have come as a veritable bark. (Tulsidas, p. 607)

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By your very sight, O dear monkey, I have been absolved of all sins. (Tulsidas, p. 600)

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“O, Hanuman.”

“My King.” Hanuman knelt before Rama.

Rama said, “As long as men shall speak of you, you will live on earth. No one can equal you. Your heart is true; your arms are strong; you have the energy to do anything. You have served me faithfully and done things for me that couldn't be done.”

“It's nothing,” Hanuman said, “I am your friend, that's all.” (Buck, p. 426)

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Still today, high in the pine forests lives Hanuman. He will always be listening wherever Ram's name is spoken; he will listen endlessly to his old adventures and his own true stories. So take care. He is here. (Buck, p. 432)

HOW LIKE MAHARAJJI all this is . . . Maharajji who playfully gathers and throws fruit; whose extraordinarily long-armed body changes shape and size, at one moment becoming tiny as a mosquito and at another, vast as a mountain of gold; who moves continuously from place to place with surprising agility and awesome strength; who is a vast ocean of compassion for his devotees; who does not seem to know or acknowledge his own extraordinary powers; but who never forgets his total love of Ram.

As the devotees see it . . .

One day I was sitting with Maharajji on a wall near the Kainchi temple. A pundit was reciting from the Ramayana to a nearby audience, when I suddenly became very uneasy. Maharajji grabbed me by the hand and took me over to the Shiva temple and we sat down in front of it. I looked at Maharajji, but what I saw was a huge monkey. That's all I remember. Others recall that at that moment we both disappeared. Several hours later Maharajji came walking back into the temple, yelling, "Where's Dada? Where's Dada?" A search was started and I was found upstream along the river, just coming back into consciousness. I don't remember anything else.

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Maharajji says that all the stones in Chitrakut are like precious jewels. SM, however, said, "Why collect stones, when you have Maharajji?" Just after that conversation, Maharajji was at the temple and had gone to the bathroom. Afterward SM helped him wash his hands. As he walked away there was an imprint of his wet foot on the small stones there. She collected these and put them in her sari. When her daughter came, SM told her to take them back and keep them at the house. Some days later she returned home and opened the box where she kept the stones. On each stone there was some imprint of Hanuman. Her husband didn't believe her so he got a magnifier and, sure enough, there they were. Later the box and stones all mysteriously disappeared.

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One day Maharajji was in his room while Dada was in the kitchen. Maharajji yelled, "Dada," and Dada ran to the hallway and found Maharajji standing outside his door with no blanket, his dhoti hanging down in the back like a tail. His body was of tremendous size, filling the hall. Dada fell at his feet and Maharajji went back into his room.



Once many people were sitting around Maharajji. He seemed to be in an exalted state, and a small girl was there sitting at his feet. Suddenly she began to weep. People asked her why she was crying. She said, "I can't say! I just saw Ram and Sita there inside Maharajji's chest." She then proceeded to describe the garments Sita wore and how they looked. Maharajji kept silent.



Seeing Maharajji would put some devotees into samadhi; others would then ask him to put them into it, too. Once when this happened Maharajji got angry, but later, during his bath, he started to scratch his back, and those devotees saw fur on his back and heard him growl like a monkey. They were all filled with ecstasy.



A certain man, every time he came near, would take one look at Maharajji and pass out cold. When they would revive him, all he would say is, "All I saw was a huge monkey."



"Maharajji's body pulsed with Ram," said a devotee.



On one occasion, one woman said to her husband, "I hear something in the next room." Their bedroom was near the room that they keep for Maharajji,

but at this time he was not staying there. They went in to see what was causing the noise and found tracks just like Maharajji's footprints, all the way up the wall to the ceiling.

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SM said she once saw Maharajji's body with Ram written on every cell.

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Maharajji was once in Haridwar and planted himself on the doorstep of a sanyasi. This fellow developed a dislike for Maharajji and unsuccessfully tried to chase him away. One day the sadhu was preparing some very fine sweets with raisins, almonds, and so forth. Maharajji was watching and making comments. The sadhu said that he wouldn't share them and told Maharajji to go away, but Maharajji stayed right there. When the sweets were ready, the sadhu went to the Ganga to bathe, leaving Maharajji to guard the house. When he returned he found most of the sweets gone. Maharajji said that they looked appetizing, and so he had to try one; they were so good that he had kept eating them until they were almost gone.

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Dada, a professor of economics, described how he graded exam papers until late at night in his study at home, then went to bed. The house was securely locked and Maharajji was several hundred miles away. When Dada awoke in the morning, he found scrawled across the top paper the words ॥॥ ॥॥ ॥॥ (Ram, Ram, Ram). It was apparently just Hanuman at play.

SOME devotees not only saw Hanuman in Maharajji, but heard him as well . . .

At a reading of the Ramayana, when the reader asked what section he should recite, Maharajji said, "Recite the part where I am talking with Vibhishan." (It was, of course, Hanuman who spoke with Vibhishan.)

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Once in the midst of a discussion about the Kainchi temple, Maharajji said: "Do you think I'm collecting properties and becoming a landowner? I have absolutely no attachment to anything. I could leave everything just as I did Lanka." (In the Ramayana, Hanuman burned Lanka.)

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Once, at Dada's, Maharajji was feigning sickness and had the doors of his room locked from outside. Later he was seen running down the street. When questioned about how he had gotten through the locked doors, he said, "The monkey became as small as a mosquito and flew out the window."

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"Maharajji, you can do anything. You are Hanuman."

"I'm not Hanuman. I can do nothing . . . I am everything. I can do anything for anybody."

MAHARAJJI SAID, "EVERYWHERE I LOOK
I SEE ONLY RAM, AND THAT'S WHY I'M
ALWAYS HONORING EVERYTHING."

I DO NOTHING. GOD DOES EVERYTHING.

Hanuman, bestow your grace upon us,

Divine Guru

O, Son of the Wind, reliever of suffering,

embodiment of blessings,

live always in our hearts.

—Hanuman Chalisa