

## RESOURCE 4.2

# A Rāmāyana story: Jambavan and Hanuman

There are many stories about Hanuman in the Rāmāyana and other sources. These talk about Hanuman's childhood and how he gained immense qualities – as well as how these were taken away from him. A key moment in the Rāmāyana is when Jambavan – a wise Bear King – and Hanuman are searching for Sita, Rama's abducted wife. They discover she is held on the island of Lanka and are discussing how they can cross the many miles of sea to the island.

Jambavan honoured them all, and responded:

'Once I had a certain prowess in leaping, but now I have reached the end of my prime. Even so, I cannot disregard the matter that Rama is so firmly resolved ... There is nothing lacking for this undertaking of yours, and now I shall call upon the one who shall accomplish it.'

Jambavan called upon the foremost of monkeys, renowned Hanuman, who was sitting at ease by himself.

Jambavan spoke to Hanuman in this way:

'Why do you sit quietly without speaking, Hanuman? For you, Hanuman, are equal in valour and strength even to Rama and Lakshmana. Do you not realise that you are superior to all beings? It is for the service of Rama alone that you have come down upon this Earth.'

'As a child in the great forest you once saw the sun rising, and thinking it was a fruit, you wished to seize it. So you leapt up and flew into the sky. But as you flew swiftly through the sky, wise Indra was filled with rage and threw his *vajra* at you. Then as you fell on a mountain peak your jaw (*hanu*) was broken on the left side. And that is why you are named, Hanuman, "He of the Powerful Jaw".'

'Brahma gave you a boon that you could not be killed by any weapon in the battle, dear child of true valour. Gratified at seeing you undamaged, Lord Indra gave you an excellent boon, which is that your death should only occur when you wish it, Lord.'

'Therefore rouse yourself, for you are valiant and the greatest of jumpers. The whole army is eager to witness your strength. Rise up. Leap across the great ocean.'

For your ability to leap, Hanuman, is beyond that of all other beings. All the monkeys are despondent, Hanuman. Why do you not heed them?'

As he was being praised, mighty Hanuman began to grow. Growing mightier still, he waved his tail in delight. He swelled with power and his appearance was unsurpassed. Rising up, he respectfully greeted the elder monkeys and said this. 'I am the flesh and blood son of the swift moving god of the wind. No one is my equal in leaping. So rejoice, leaping monkeys! I feel certain I can jump ten thousand leagues. And I feel certain I could even uproot Lanka and carry it away.'

Endowed with speed, intent on speed, wise Hanuman composed his mind and turned his thoughts to the island of Lanka.

Source: Sarga 64–66, *The Rāmāyana of Valmiki*. Edited: Goldman and Goldman (Princeton University Press 2021) permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

**Note** that Hanuman is seen by some Hindus as an avatar of Shiva, and Jambavan as a representation of Brahma. As Ram is an avatar of Vishnu, in this scene we see all aspects of the divine coming together.



## Glossary:

**boon** A benefit or blessing given to someone

**Indra** In the ancient Vedic traditions, king of the deities and ruler of *svarga* (the high heavens).

**vajra** Indra's weapon, combining a sword, mace and spear; regarded as the most powerful weapon in the universe. From the Sanskrit word for 'thunderbolt/diamond'.