

Short Story: Hanuman's Quest for the Mango

Balu

Before I decided to become a physicist, I discovered something else—I had a talent for storytelling. I first realized this when I made my sister and a friend cry with a story, and once, even brought an entire classroom into silence for a short time. At my old institute, most of our coffee breaks would turn into storytelling sessions, where I would share tales with my friends nearly every evening.

Today, while listening to a particular song (“Anjanadri” from movie HanuMan 2024), I was reminded of one such story. It's about the legendary monkey god from Indian mythology—Hanuman, also known as Anjaneya (the son of Queen Anjana). Hanuman’s destiny was intertwined with that of Prince Ram (of Kingdom Ayodhya, he is also Maryada Purushottama, means greater than the greatest men, probably a subject for another story), whom he was meant to help in his quest to rescue his beloved wife, Sita, from the clutches of the mighty demon king Ravana. There are countless stories about Hanuman, but the one in this song centers around his mischievous childhood.

Hanuman was born to King Kesari and Queen Anjana in the kingdom of Anjanadri after they prayed to Lord Shiva (my favorite deity, the god of destruction—specifically, the destruction of ego). As a young child, Hanuman was always hungry, and one day, he mistook the sun for a ripe mango. Driven by his hunger, he leapt into the sky, determined to grab it. As he approached the sun, his enormous shadow darkened the earth, causing widespread panic. People worried about what had happened to the sun at midday.

Seeing this chaos, the king of the gods, Indra, decided to intervene. Riding his magnificent elephant, Airavata (an elephant with a thousand heads), Indra confronted Hanuman and commanded him to stop. But, true to his monkey nature, Hanuman was far too stubborn to listen. This forced Indra to use his powerful weapon, the Vajra, on the young Hanuman. Struck by the weapon, Hanuman plummeted to earth and fell into a coma-like state.

Hanuman's stepfather, Vayu, the god of air/wind, was enraged upon learning what had happened to his son. In his fury, he withdrew all the air from the earth, leaving the world suffocating in desperation. To pacify him, all the gods came together to revive Hanuman and bless him with incredible boons, including immortality, great strength, speed and no weapon could ever harm him again, ensuring he was prepared for the important deeds he would accomplish in the future.

Years later, Hanuman met Prince Ram, who was searching for his kidnapped wife, Sita, in the forests. The monkey god joined Ram on his quest, and their friendship became legendary. Because of a boon granted by Yama, the god of death, Hanuman was promised that death would never come for his soul. To this day, it is believed that Hanuman still walks among us, living in the memories of his beloved Ram. 'Jai Shri Ram'