# Common Questions about Yoga and Ramayana

## How Does Ramayana Help Me Understand Yoga?

Ramayana is a story with characters, events, and locations, etc. The characters relate to each other like father-son, husband-wife, or hero-villain, etc. **We intuitively understand these characters and their relationships.**

Yoga has concepts like Energy, Consciousness, and Ahamkara (Ego) etc. We have to learn one concept at a time. **These concepts relate to each other in a specific way. We need to learn those relationships.** A student may make a mistake in understanding a concept or relating these concepts with each other. It could be a costly mistake.

**Sage Valmiki wrote Ramayana in such a way that he explains Yoga concepts and their relationships in a story.** His characters represent fundamental concepts of Yoga. For example, Shri Ram represents Higher Consciousness, Sita represents Energy, and Hanumana represents Prana, etc. We will put characters and their relations of Ramayana side by side to Yoga concepts and their relationships. We see that we discover a hidden relationship between Yoga concepts. Let us take a few examples of these hidden relationships.

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| **Ramayana Character and Relationship** | **Yoga Concept and Relationship. Do Yoga Books Explain This Concept?** |
| Ravana abducts Sita. | Our Ahamkara controls the way we use the Energy. Yoga books explain this concept. |
| Hanumana finds Sita. | In Yoga, we learn that doing Pranayama releases the Energy. This is an example of the wrong relationship between Pranayama and the Energy. Paranaawakens the Energy and the Higher Consciousness releases it from control of Ahamkara. |
| Shri Ram kills Ravana. | Consciousness dissolves the Ahamkara into itself. Most Yoga books explain that we must irradiate Ahamkara. |
| Shri Ram rescues Sita. | When the Ahamkara dissolves into the Consciousness, it releases the Energy from control of Ahamkara. Yoga books do not explain this relationship. |
| Shri Ram and Sita separate according to His wish. | This is the final status of the Energy and the Consciousness. Yoga books do not explain this relationship. |

As we can see, within five lines of reading Yoga and Ramayana side by side, we discovered three gaps in our understanding of Yoga! This is just a beginning. There are 10 to 15 important characters in Ramayana. Each one of them clarifies a critical concept in Yoga and explains the relationship with other concepts. Imagine the wealth of knowledge if we can map all the characters of Ramayana to Yoga concepts!

Ramayana is the work of an imaginative and an advanced Yogi – Sage Valmiki. Reading Ramayana as a document of Yoga needs an open mind. It is challenging, partly because we do not have sound knowledge of Samkhya, Yoga, or Ramayana. If we do this hard work, the reward is beyond any measurements.

**Ramayana teaches us about our Consciousness. Shri Ram is one of many names of the Consciousness. Similarly, Yoga also teaches us about the Consciousness. Thus, there are two different ways to learn about the Consciousness.**

## How Yoga And Ramayana Are Related?

Sage Patanjali wrote Yoga Sutra almost a thousand years after sage Valmiki. He relied on Samkhya as a foundation for Yoga. Using his eight steps, he set the goal of Yogi to be in Samadhi, in which Yogi experiences the Universal Consciousness. The first verse of Yoga Sutra teaches about the Consciousness. In the last verse, it teaches us about the Universal Consciousness. Thus, Yoga is a path that takes us to the experience of Universal Consciousness. Sage Patanjali used the word Yoga for the eight-step path, which includes Pranayama. Hence, we will use the word Yoga the way he used it.

When we see Ramayana from the angle of Yoga, we see it teaches us about the goal of Yoga – the experience of Universal Consciousness. It explains the complex concepts of Yoga like the Prana, Kundalini (Energy) and the Consciousness using a story. **It warns a Yogi about the difficulties on a path of Yoga. It offers valuable advice to reach the end goal of Yoga.** Let us see how it helps us learn Yoga.

In this book, we see that Shri Ram represents Consciousness and the Universal Consciousness. Shri Ram is the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu. The Sanskrit word “Vishnu” means “One who is present everywhere”. Thus, Lord Vishnu represents Universal Consciousness.

At the end of Ramayana, Shri Ram takes the form of Lord Vishnu. Hence, Shri Ram represents the Consciousness and the Universal Consciousness. **Thus, both Yoga and Ramayana lead us towards the Consciousness and the Universal Consciousness.**

Looking for Yoga in Ramayana is like searching for salt in the sea water. Once you know the taste of salt in a drop of seawater, you know the entire sea is salty. Similarly, once you know how to relate Yoga to Ramayana, the entire Ramayana unfolds in front of you as an expression of Yoga!

## What Benefit Will I Get by Learning about Shri Ram?

Who does not want to live a better life? Everyone cares about his life. Everyone wants to live as long as he can. No one wants pain and misery. As per Yoga, learning about your Consciousness can lead us to a better life.

**The Consciousness is the difference between a living person in this moment and his dead body in the next moment.** Indian culture gave several names to the Consciousness. Shri Ram is one such a name. From birth to death, we tied His name to every occasion in life. Even after death, people take His name while taking the dead body for cremation.

What is the use of taking His name when a person is dead? However, if a person spends just a few hours of his time in learning about Ramayana, then he can relate himself to Shri Ram. Besides, you already know the story of Ramayana. We can easily relate the story to Yoga. Building a relationship with Shri Ram is neither about Ramayana nor about Yoga. **It is about knowing your Consciousness.** It will be very useful to learn about it, as it can help to live our life much better. Possibly, it may be useful even in the moments before death.

# A New Perspective on Valmiki Ramayana

Valmiki Ramayana is a work of imaginative and highly advanced Yogi. When we see it from Yoga angles, we realize that it is a complex document. Its characters map to several Yoga processes, explain their relationships, give warning signs or guidance to a Yogi, etc. Hence, it is difficult to understand completely.

When we encounter any such a complex document, we try to reduce its complexity by dividing it into pieces or layers. Then, we look at each piece individually and try to understand the function of that part by itself. We identify common patterns. This process is like a process a Software Programmer follows when he comes across a complex software. **Valmiki Ramayana is exactly like a complex software, with layers and patterns in it.** Here are some ways to help us understand the Valmiki Ramayana.

## Layers in Valmiki Ramayana

When we build a house, first we put the foundation and then the walls, etc. Similarly, when we read Valmiki Ramayana, we need to understand the layers and their sequence. There are four layers in Valmiki Ramayana. Each subsequent layer uses the previous layer, like the walls of the house use the foundation to support them.

1. **The first layer is the characters like Sita, Shri Ram, Laxmana, Hanumana, and Ravana.** These characters represent our Energy, Consciousness, devoted mind, Prana, and Ahamkara, respectively. We will study these characters and their Yoga meaning in the next few chapters.
2. **The way these characters relate to each other becomes the second layer.** For example, Hanumana finds Sita in Lanka. It represents Prana finds Energy in Muladhara Chakra. Each relation in Ramayana teaches us something about Yoga. We saw a few examples earlier.
3. **The third layer is the most important level for us. It has various signs, symptoms, recommended actions, and warnings related to the path of Yoga.** Some warning signs also apply in other paths, not just Yoga. For lack of a better word, we will call them as safeguards for spiritual aspirants.Stories of king Vishwamitra and Trishanku, of demons Viradha and Kabandha, and of actions of Hanumana are all examples of these safeguards. There are hundreds of safeguards in Ramayana. We will study and interpret a few of them.
4. **Finally, as the fourth layer, sage Valmiki indirectly refers to the various Chakras.** He shows their general locations, their effects, suggests how to avoid their imbalance and the effects of such an imbalance. When sage Valmiki deals with the Chakras, he has to go by the indirect references to Chakras like vehicles of Chakra or the color, etc. He cannot declare them explicitly because that hurts the storytelling, and the story risks becoming a discourse. In addition, sage Valmiki does not use chakras in all events. There are many instances where sage Valmiki gives us safeguards, but does not refer to Chakras. Hence, chakras become the fourth layer.

As you can see, just by considering these layers, we see the complexity of Valmiki Ramayana. **I organized this book based on these layers.** We will study each layer independently. We will not follow the story in a sequence. The assumption is the reader knows the basic story Ramayana. However, the widely known story of Ramayana comes from other versions of Ramayana. **The Valmiki Ramayana differs from other versions. It will be very helpful to read the Valmiki Ramayana.**

## Patterns in Valmiki Ramayana

There is one more way sage Valmiki added complexity in Valmiki Ramayana. We will call it a pattern. A pattern is something that an artist ingrains in his artwork. Let us study five patterns.

**Pattern #1 - Law of Duplication Ramayana**

We often see action-replays while watching sports on TV, where the event is shown multiple times from different angles. If we visualize Ramayana, we see that sage Valmiki replays almost all the events. We see that similar events happen, sometimes back-to-back, sometimes a few chapters later. This duplication of events is the signature style of sage Valmiki. He used it so seriously, as if he was rule-bound to do so. Whenever a particular event happens, the first thing that comes to mind is a similar event occurred somewhere else within Ramayana. Let us take some examples to clarify this point.

1. Shri Ram lifts and breaks Lord Shiva's bow in verse 1-67-17. In verse 1-75-13, he picks up Lord Vishnu’s bow.
2. Shurpanakha talks about Sita’s beauty to Khara in verse 3-19-17 and then again to Ravana in verse 3-34-16.
3. Sugriva tests Shri Ram’s strength two times, the first time with a demon skeleton, and the second time when Shri Ram shoots an arrow through seven trees.
4. Shri Ram takes Sugriva to fight with Vali two times. First time, Shri Ram cannot distinguish Sugriva from Vali because they look very similar to Him. Second time, Shri Ram makes Sugriva wear a garland so Shri Ram can identify Vali.
5. Two demons kidnap Sita. First time, demon Viradha kidnaps her and second time, Ravana abducts her.

There are countless examples of such duplications in Valmiki Ramayana, practically everywhere. With this pattern in mind, we can spot the additions that may be added to the original script of Valmiki Ramayana. These additions to the original script appear just once and thus give away their secret!

**For example, the verse pertaining to the creation of the four castes, mentioned in the Purusha-Sukta, appears in Valmiki Ramayana only once, in the Aranya-Kanda (verse 3-14-30). Therefore, this verse is imported from the Purush-Sukta, which is written later than Valmiki Ramayana, and inserted in Valmiki Ramayana at a later date.**

Now we know that every event in Ramayana must have a duplicate event somewhere in it, can we think of a duplicate event of Shri Ram’s exile from Ayodhya? Was there any other prince of Ayodhya sent into exile? Please see the verse 1-38-21 for an answer.

**Pattern # 2 – Sage Valmiki Always Mentioned Shri Ram in Present Tense**

Sage Valmiki wrote Ramayana and taught it to Lava and Kusha. They recited it in front of Shri Ram in his court. We read Ramayana the way the twins narrate it in front of Shri Ram. We see the entire story in flashback. Instead of telling a story in past tense, it is told in present tense. **Sage Valmiki always mentions Shri Ram in the present tense. Shri Ram is the Consciousness. The Consciousness is always in the present tense – here and now.**

## References to Manipura, Swadhisthana, and Muladhara Chakras

When Hanumana jumps toward Lanka, the story mentions all the events and locations in between, which we can use as reference to the Chakras. **In addition, his actions show us the way to go through the Chakras, their effects, and the precautions to take to avoid danger.** One function of the Prana is to jump over the Manipura and Swadhisthana Chakras to the Muladhara Chakra. We will study Valmiki Ramayana verse by verse, and correlations with the Chakras information. In this chapter, we will focus on the Manipura, Swadhisthana, and Muladhara Chakras.

**Let us make a hypothesis and see if we can find any references in Valmiki Ramayana to Chakras that serve as proof: Hanumana / Prana jumps from Anahata Chakra over the Manipura Chakra and the Swadhisthana Chakra to the Muladhara Chakra.**

**Events that happened before in the story:** Ravana had abducted Sita to Lanka. So, Shri Ram sent Hanumana, Jambavan, and others to the south direction to search for Sita. They came to the ocean, which they cannot cross. At this point in the story, Jambavan reminded Hanumana about his actual nature and Hanumana jumped over the ocean.

**Events in terms of Chakra**: Hanumana represents Prana in the body. Prana is in the heart, which is Anahata Chakra. Lanka represents Muladhara Chakra. So, Prana has to jump from Anahata Chakra to Muladhara Chakra. When the moment Hanumana realizes his actual nature, he grows, as mentioned in verse 5-1-11. Then he jumps towards Lanka.

Verse 5-1-4 to 5-1-6 describe a “mountain called as Mainak, with golden hue peaks of mountain rose and was like molten gold”. Manipura Chakra has a downward-facing red triangle in the middle and fire as its element. If you invert this triangle, we can imagine it as a mountain with a golden hue as referred to in. Verse 5-1-133 says that Hanumana touches and then flies ahead toward Lanka. This touch-and-go logic regarding the Manipura Chakra shows that the Prana passes by this Chakra.

**Verse 5-1-29 and several other verses describe the ocean as an abode of crocodiles. Crocodile symbolizes the Swadhisthana Chakra.**

Next, Surasa, a snake-like animal with bloody red eyes and powerful fangs, attacks Hanumana. She is a friendly goddess of some sort and is there to test him. Surely, she is not an enemy. **The name “Surasa” translates to "good taste." It is a reference to the Swadhisthana Chakra because it is associated with a sense of taste and a sense organ, tongue.**

Initially, Hanumana tries to avoid entering the mouth of Surasa as she has assumed a horrible form. Surasa had a boon from Lord Brahma that Hanumana must enter her mouth. Hanumana defeats Surasa by a smart trick. He expands his body, making Surasa open her mouth wider, and then quickly becomes small, enters her mouth, and comes out, avoiding in this way going through her body.

We can interpret Surasa’s boon like this: while going toward the Muladhara Chakra, the Prana must go close to the Swadhisthana Chakra, but not through it. It is the only path available to the Prana while going toward the Muladhara Chakra. There is no way to avoid it.

**Hanumana making his body large and small is a reference to Pranayama, where we inflate and deflate our belly with air.** Note that Mainak – the gold-colored mountain – and Surasa – the snake-like animal – are not hostile. They represent two points on the map of the body, which the Prana has to pass by closely.

Next, a demon by the name of Simhika attracts Hanumana by his shadow. In verse 5-1-191, we read that her mouth is as big as Hanumana’s body, so he can see her internal organs. This time again, he becomes minuscule and enters the demon’s mouth. While passing through her, he tears her internal organs with his nails and comes out.

**The internal organs mentioned in the story surely stand for our intestines. Scratching of the intestines is a reference to the bleeding that may occur because of Pranayama.** The correct practice of Pranayama invariably involves applying a Mula-Bandha/Root Lock. We can use the root lock to direct the Apaana, Prana that works in the abdomen, upwards. In Pranayama, all we are trying to do is bring these two different Prana (Prana and Apaana) together. We force the Apaana upwards by tightening the anus and force the Prana downwards by breathing air deep into the stomach. When these two forms of Prana meet, it creates a connection that facilitates the Prana’s entry into the Muladhara Chakra. This mixing of two components of the Prana is an essential precondition for the upward movement of the Energy.

**Expanding and contracting the stomach and applying the root lock stretches intestines and rectal organs. Doing it excessively, forcibly, and without a guru’s guidance, may cause bleeding. It is an important warning sign given to us by sage Valmiki.**

According to verse 5-1-206, when Hanumana reaches Lanka again, he becomes regular in size. Verse 5-2-49 tells us that Hanumana reduces himself to the size of a cat while entering Lanka. **It shows that we need a minuscule amount of the Prana to enter the Muladhara Chakra. We need not apply an excessive force. We need to avoid strenuous breathing.**

When Hanumana is at the gate of the city of Lanka, a female demon attacks him. **Verse 5-3-40 mentions that Hanumana does not use his full strength to hit her; he hits her as gently as possible. It is a reference to the gentleness required while performing Pranayama.** It tells us to avoid being too forceful in doing Pranayama. The reason is that the use of excessive force takes the attention away from Pranayama, and it allows the Ahamkara to attach itself to the process which reinforces the Ahamkara.

Here again, we learn that this female demon enjoys a boon granted by Lord Brahma, which is that when a monkey will defeat her, destruction of Lanka will follow. This boon shows us an obvious fact in terms of Body-Mind-Energy-Consciousness. **When we are successful in properly doing Pranayama, the Prana will enter the Muladhara Chakra, and the stage will be set for Ahamkara to lose ground.**

The role of Pranayama ends when the Prana enters the Muladhara Chakra. However, the Prana / Hanumana continues to play a vital role throughout the rest of Ramayana. When Hanumana locates Sita, he respectfully requests her to come with him. Although it sounds very logical for her to run away with him, Sita refuses this quick escape.

Sita or the Kundalini stands for the Energy, which manifests itself as fire. Her name is Sita, which may mean “coolness” because of the root “sit” in her name, but she is cool only in the presence of Shri Ram. **Sita escaping with Hanumana means the Kundalini rising the moment the Prana enters the Muladhara Chakra. With no higher Consciousness/Shri Ram around to tame her fire, it might mean a human may get a large amount of heat in the body.** As is, when the Prana enters the Muladhara Chakra, it releases a fractional amount of the Energy. This small amount of the Energy not only burns the Chakra but also heats the entire body. If you Google "Kundalini Heat,” you will find several posts asking for help. You will find posts from people who did unguided and unrestrained Pranayama, cannot bear the heat generated because of it. Yogis knew this phenomenon, and it is documented in the Yoga books. This phenomenon directly results from Pranayama, and it is a sign that the Prana has entered the Muladhara Chakra. Even a minor twist in this coiled up Energy can create an unbearable firestorm inside our body. A complete rise of the Energy at this stage will feel like a nuclear explosion within us; it is best to avoid it.

**Sage Valmiki is compassionate in describing this event in advance for us. He famously represents it as Hanumana burning Ravana’s Lanka.** This is an important warning sign and a symptom of the success of Pranayama. The heat released by the Kundalini may affect the Swadhisthana Chakra as it is very near to the Muladhara Chakra. It may cause an imbalance, as the person may try overindulgence in desires generated from the Swadhisthana Chakra.

A similar effect may occur at the Manipura Chakra, where a person may overcome desires created by the Swadhisthana Chakra, but may succumb to those created by the Manipura Chakra.

**Sage Valmiki knew the peril that may unfold when Prana enters the Muladhara Chakra. Hence, he created the character of Hanumana, who is a symbol of devotion and celibacy. The quality of devotion helps rectify imbalances at the Manipura Chakra. The quality of celibacy helps constrain desires flaming out of the Swadhisthana Chakra.**

# Shri Ram Defeats Ravana: Story and Its Meaning In Terms of Yoga

Until now, we saw Valmiki Ramayana from different angles. **Now, we will focus on the story and its meaning in terms of Yoga.** We will go line by line of Yuddha-Kanda, starting from chapter 6-40, where events of the war are described.

## Sugriva’s Brash Reaction

In verse 6-40-1, Shri Ram, Sugriva, and others ascend Mount Suvela to get a magnificent view of Lanka. Before war, any general of an army would like to survey the battlefield from the highest viewpoint. Verse 6-40-2 tells us that Lanka is a beautiful city, with excellent layout and beautiful groves. Shri Ram looks at the town as if he is a tourist and there is no information about Lanka that could be useful for the upcoming battle.

From the top of Mt. Suvela, Shri Ram, Sugriva, and others see Ravana standing outside of his palace, probably looking at Shri Ram’s army. Verses 6-40-3 to 6-40-6 give a description of Ravana. What we get is a description of him we are already familiar with. Ravana is wearing a red cloak, and he has smeared red sandalwood paste all over his body. He is adorned with golden ornaments. He proudly displays scars on his body, which are marks of enormous battles he has won. **We know that Ravana stands for Ahamkara, and his red color comes from the color of the Muladhara Chakra. Besides red, the Muladhara Chakra also has a golden color in it. So, we see that Ravana is wearing golden ornaments.**

According to verse 6-40-8, when Sugriva sees Ravana from the top of Mt. Suvela, he becomes angry and, in an impulsive reaction, jumps toward Ravana. Verse 6-40-9 tells us that Sugriva completely underestimates Ravana and considers him a mere straw.

**From verses 6-40-10 to 6-40-27, we get the description of a fierce battle between Sugriva and Ravana.** There is no mention of either of them winning. Thus, they were both equal in power. **In verse 6-40-28, we read that Ravana uses his magical powers to fight against Sugriva. Sugriva recognizes his limitation against Ravana’s powerful magic and backs off**. Verse 6-40-29 tells us that Sugriva jumps back from Ravana’s palace and returns to Mt. Suvela, where Shri Ram is.

As expected, Shri Ram does not approve of this misadventure. He tells Sugriva that it was a wrong and reckless action, not fit for a king. Sugriva’s impulsive attack and the act of backing-off make little sense to anyone and confuses Ravana too.

**In terms of military strategy to win the war, Shri Ram, and others who stayed with him, missed an excellent opportunity for a quick victory.** Ravana was a high-value target for Shri Ram’s army, and they spotted him with no guards accompanying him. Therefore, killing Ravana was the correct military strategy. It would have saved them from bloodsheds and would have ensured a quick victory for them.

**In fact, Sugriva’s impulsive decision to attack Ravana in this situation is very logical**. Ideally, Shri Ram and others should have followed his lead. If we think in terms of military strategy, where winning the war with minimum losses to your side is the aim, then Shri Ram is wrong.

The only justification for Shri Ram to be correct in this situation is if Shri Ram and his army were not ready to start the war for some strategic reason. In that case, Sugriva would provoke a war when his side was not ready. However, this is not the case for Shri Ram’s army because, immediately after scolding Sugriva in verse 6-41-26, Shri Ram marches His army toward the city of Lanka. Nothing happens in between these two events, so there is no reason for Sugriva or anyone to hold back from attacking Ravana. **Therefore, Sugriva was correct in attacking Ravana at this instance, while Shri Ram is wrong in not following Sugriva’s lead and incorrect in scolding him.**

**Whenever we see Shri Ram is not following our normally understood conventions or logic, we are looking at a puzzle.** Like all other puzzles we see in Ramayana, this one puzzle too resolves itself, if we consider this event to be happening within ourselves. When we consider Shri Ram as the Consciousness, then the whole thing reveals itself as an obvious fact.

What does it mean when we say that a soft heart (Sugriva) attacked the Ahamkara (Ravana), and the Consciousness (Shri Ram) stood by?

This event represents yet another warning sign by sage Valmiki. He warns us not to fight the Ahamkara with a soft heart (with the emotions) because it is not possible to defeat the Ahamkara emotionally. Although the heart, filled with lots of emotions, seems to be a worthy competitor for the Ahamkara, the Ahamkara has something more that the heart cannot beat. The Ahamkara has a vast array of tricks, and the emotions of the heart have no solutions to those tricks.

**The central message of this story is the pursuit of spirituality should not be a knee-jerk action, with no thought in it. It should not be an emotional response. In that case, the Ahamkara wins the war easily.**

If we understand this warning sign, we can understand the reasons behind Shri Ram’s inactions – he is not ready for the last war with the Ahamkara. The existence of an emotional response itself means that the stage is not yet set for the last war with the Ahamkara. Therefore, the Shri Ram waits for the right moment.

In verse 6-41-25, we read that Shri Ram knows the right time to act against Ravana is, and knows that this time is not the right one. Therefore, instead of killing Ravana swiftly in a commando style of action, Shri Ram advances the entire army toward Lanka.

To certify that Shri Ram knew the best time to act. We get many omens. Those signs have nothing to do with the actual story. Signs like a harsh wind blowing in verse 6-41-13, and many others until verse 6-41-20, are in the same category – a cover for Shri Ram’s inaction, because he has to wait for the right moment.