# Layer 1: Character as a Yoga Concept

We saw that there are four layers in Valmiki Ramayana. They are – 1) Character as a Yoga Concept 2) Character’s Relationship with Each Other 3) Safeguards for Spiritual Aspirants and 4) Indirect References to Chakras.

Here we will study Yoga interpretation only few characters. For all other characters, please read e-book Yoga Ramayana.

**We will classify the characters according to their complexity to understand the Yoga concept it represents: Easy to understand, Difficult to understand and Hard to understand.** Few characters become hard to understand because their meaning depend upon some other concept.

Ramayana is seemingly a simple story of victory of Shri Ram over a Ravana. However, we find an incredible level of complexity, if we map characters used in Ramayana to ourselves. When we realize that these are not just characters, they become mind-boggling puzzles. **They are real-life processes within us. They matter to us most, as a difficult to understand Yoga concepts.**

## Easy to Understand Character # 1: Sita

There are hundreds of characters in Ramayana. Each character has its own puzzle for the reader. However, no other character throws more puzzles at the reader than the character of Sita.If we consider her just as a human, it is not possible to understand her role. **Unless we consider her as an Energy/Shakti/Kundalini, to solve these puzzles is impossible.** Let us take some time to understand her character in depth. No amount of ink and paper is enough to underline her importance.

Sita’s birth is a mystery. As the legend goes, king Janaka found a box with a baby inside while tilling the land. Think for a moment; if someone had put a live baby underneath land, then that person had already tilled the land. If someone had dug a hole and put a baby in it a few days before, king Janaka should have found a dead baby or only a skeleton. Tilling of land and discovery of a live baby cannot happen at the same time. Then, how do we explain the riddle of Sita’s birth at the human level? **The only answer is that she represents an Energy.** The suggestion by Valmiki that she was not born normally matches Newton’s law of Energy. Both agree that we cannot create Energy.

When Sita is ready to dissolve her appearance, she requests the earth to open up and swallow her. If she were an ordinary human being, we could have justified her birth as adoption by king Janaka. However, we cannot explain her disappearance as a human. Humans cannot create earthquakes on-demand. **Sita represents the Energy, and the Energy cannot be destroyed, which means she cannot die like humans.** Hence, she disappears into the earth. Thus, we see that sage Valmiki’s representation of Energy matches Newton’s law of Energy.

Let us go directly to Valmiki Ramayana and confirm that sage Valmiki saw Sita as the Energy/Shakti/ Kundalini. We will study the verses where Hanumana first saw Sita. Sage Valmiki dedicates three chapters to describe Sita in captivity of Ravana from Hanumana’s perspective.

Sage Valmiki sets this moment intentionally in the early morning hours, when everything appears golden and fiery red. **The verses in these chapters are the most beautiful and critical verses of Ramayana. Therefore, we will read each verse carefully.** We will try to see if these descriptions create specific images in our mind and help us in our search for the Energy in our Muladhara Chakra. Please focus on the words that evoke the golden-fire color or words like “braid” and “snake.” In addition, note the specific details of highly energetic, moving, or bright object encapsulated by some cover.

* Verse 5-14-38 tells us Hanumana saw land, springs, and trees in a golden-fire color.
* Verse 5-14-39 says Hanumana saw his body glowing in golden red color, because of the light radiating from the surroundings. If you visit any temple of Hanumana, you will find him in golden red color; that color comes from these verses.
* In verse 5-15-19 through 5-15-35, sage Valmiki gives the description of Sita in the Ashok garden. It is also a description of the Energy in our body locked up at the Muladhara Chakra. In verse 5-15-19, Hanumana sees Sita for the first time. She is wearing an ochre colored sari, which is soiled. Female demons surround her. She is weak because of fasting. She looks very miserable.
* Verse 5-15-20 describes Sita as a form that emerged out of the fire, glowing with radiance, but veiled in smoke
* In verse 5-15-21, sage Valmiki describes Sita as a lotus plant without a lotus flower, covered with mud. The mud is symbolic of earth, which is an element of the Muladhara Chakra.
* Verse 5-15-24 compares the condition of her being surrounded by female demons with that of a deer separated from its herd and surrounded by hounds, showing the agility with which the Energy moves.
* **Verse 5-15-25 describes Sita as a braid made up of three flexible strands of hair and as a coiled up snake - a classic description of the Kundalini.**
* Verse 5-15-32 again describes her as a fire covered by smoke and as a forgotten treasure.
* In verse 5-15-37, sage Valmiki mentions that she is wearing a coat of dust and looks like a bright moon covered by clouds.
* Verse 5-16-25 again says that her body is smeared with dirt just as a lotus plant is smeared with mud. Note that dirt is symbolic of earth, which is an element of the Muladhara Chakra.
* Verse 5-20-7 gives the same description, but this time through the eyes of Ravana, who comes to see Sita to convince her to marry him, so he can avoid a likely attack from Shri Ram.
* **In verse 5-19-9, Ravana sees her as a great, writhing female serpent bound in a spell.**
* **Verse 5-19-13 says that Ravana sees her as a blazing faraway fire, capable of destroying the world.**

Verses 5-20-9 and 5-20-13 are critical as they contain the exact description of the Kundalini coiled up at the Muladhara Chakra. If you search the internet, you will come across several pages that describe the Kundalini in the same words. **These verses prove that sage Valmiki saw Sita as the Kundalini, the Energy locked up in the Muladhara Chakra.** In case you still have doubt, please read the next paragraphs carefully.

Let us review the verses at the end of Valmiki Ramayana, where Shri Ram defeats Ravana. After the war ends, and Vibhishana becomes the king of Lanka. Shri Ram asks Vibhishana to bring Sita to him. In verse 6-115-21, Shri Ram tells Sita, “I won you back to restore my honor.” He then tells her she is “free to go wherever she likes.”

**In verse 6-116-15, in a befitting response to Shri Ram, Sita reminds him she was born out of the earth, and her father, king Janaka, was a mere disguise for her to be born.** Sita tells Shri Ram that “he is behaving like someone who does not know of her actual nature”. However, not wanting to live a life of blame, she plans to enter fire and asks Laxmana to set up a bonfire. **Note that Sita does not enter fire to pass any test or to remove any doubts about her purity.** After telling everyone assembled there, “my heart never moves off of Shri Ram,” in verse 6-116-32, Sita plunges into the blazing fire.

In verse 6-118-1, the fire god appears in person, with Sita in his hand. Verse 6-118-4 tells us that Sita comes out of the fire in precisely the same state in which she went in. Even her flower ornaments did not burn in the fire. **What can go thru fire and come out unharmed? Only fire can go through fire and come out unharmed.**

From verse 6-118-15, Shri Ram tells everyone that he had always known the actual nature of his wife, Sita, as the Energy. Having known this, he had ignored her jumping in the fire, as he knew the fire could not burn fire.

* In verse 6-118-15, he says, “I know Sita, who is always in my mind, and she has undivided affection for me.”
* In verse 6-118-16, he says, “Ravana could not harm her as her own power protects Sita.”
* **In verse 6-118-18, he says, “Sita is a blazing tongue of fire; Ravana had no chance of laying his hands on such a fire.”**
* **In verse 6-118-19, he says, “Sita does not differ from me, just as sunlight does not differ from the sun.”**

These verses tell us the Sita is the Energy. In Yoga terms, the Energy and Consciousness are always together. Hence, Shri Ram must represent the Consciousness.

Here we learn about Sita’s actual nature first, and then we come to understand Shri Ram’s nature. We get an important message here for a Yogi – we understand the Energy first and then the Consciousness.

## Easy to Understand Character # 2: Shri Ram

After giving a stern reply to Shri Ram that He is acting like a common man and behaving as if He does not know her real nature as an Energy, Sita jumps into the blazing fire. In verse 6-117-1 we read, Shri Ram becomes very sad, and tears roll off from his eyes. At this instance, He behaves like an ordinary man.

After witnessing this sad turn of these events, Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, Indra, and a host of other gods, intervene. In verse 6-117-6, they question Shri Ram how he could not recognize himself as a god. They ask Him, “Why he is still behaving like a commoner?” In verse 6-117-11, Shri Ram tells them he thinks he is a normal human being called Ram, the son of Dasharatha, of the city of Ayodhya. He asks them, “Since you are gods, you tell me who I am. What is my actual nature?”

From the verse 6-117-12 to verse 6-117-33, Lord Brahma tells Shri Ram about his actual nature.

* In verse 6-117-12, Lord Brahma tells Shri Ram, “You are Lord Vishnu, wielding the discus.”
* **In verse 6-117-14, he says, “You are the Universal Consciousness;** you exist before the beginning of creation, you are in the middle of creation and you remain after the creation ends. You are an essential nature of all living beings; your presence is everywhere, and you are four armed (Lord Vishnu).”
* In verse 6-117-15, he tells Shri Ram, “You are the lord of senses of human beings; you are the soul of the entire universe.”
* In verse 6-117-16, he says, “You are the rationalizing intellect; you are the origin and dissolution of the entire creation.”
* In verse 6-117-17, he says, “You are behind the working of all senses; you offer protection and refuge to everyone.”
* In verse 6-117-18, he says, “You are the essential teaching of the Vedas. You are the first creator of all worlds and the Lord of all.”
* In verse 6-117-20, he says, “You are the sacred syllable AUM. No one knows your origin or your end; no one knows who you are.”
* In verse 6-117-21, he says, “You appear in all created beings, as you appear in a cow and a Brahmin; you exist in all quarters, mountains, and rivers.”
* In verse 6-117-22, he says, “You have thousands of feet, eyes, and heads; you bear the earth with all its living beings and its mountains.”
* In verse 6-117-24, he says, “Brahma, the creator, is like your heart; all other gods are like mere hair on your limbs.”
* In verse 6-117-25, he says, “There is nothing in this world without you.”
* In verse 6-117-28, he says, “Sita is no other than Goddess Laxmi, and you are Lord Vishnu.”

The verses describe Shri Ram as Universal Consciousness. This event happens at the end of Valmiki Ramayana. At the end of this book, we will see the event where Shri Ram assumes the form of Lord Vishnu. Shri Ram represents both Consciousness operating within the body and Universal Consciousness. We will focus on Shri Ram as Consciousness.

We are used to thinking of Shri Ram as a God. But when Yoga tells us He is the Consciousness within us, then we cannot really understand what does that mean. We do not have any idea about our Consciousness. That is okay. Sage Valmiki knows that we do not understand the Consciousness. He wrote Ramayana to teach us about it and to give us indirect ways to approach it.

## Easy to Understand Character # 3: Hanumana

**Hanumana is “the most important character” of the story for us.** He is the catalyst that brings Sita and Shri Ram together and speeds up the action in the war. Sage Valmiki gives us many clues about real nature of Hanumana.

**Hanumana is the son of the air god, which connects him directly to air, and thus, to our breath. He stands for the Prana in our body, which we take in through the air.** The Prana is a form of the Energy in our body. It differs from the Energy we have discussed so far, which is the consort of the Consciousness. To describe this relationship in a better way, sage Valmiki has depicted the relationship between Sita and Hanumana as that of a mother and a child. The relationship between the Prana and the breath needs no explanation. Prana, the vital breath, circulates through our body and performs various functions. We will learn about the functions of the Prana in subsequent chapters.

After Jambavan reminds Hanumana of his real nature, Hanumana jumps over the ocean toward the Lanka. Although he performs several heroic deeds in this story, his journey to locate abducted Sita has no parallel. **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. We will see them when we discuss Chakras.

One function of the Prana is to jump over the Manipura and Swadhisthana Chakras to the Muladhara Chakra. In later chapters, we will study Valmiki Ramayana verse by verse, and find out their correlations with the Chakras.

Prana is a vital component of the air that we breathe. Hence, Sage Valmiki describes the relationship between the air god and Hanumana as that of a father-son duo. Prana sustains our life; when it goes out of the body, we die. However, sustaining life is a very broad term and needs an accurate definition. Let us see what it means.

**Within our body, the Prana is responsible for many activities. These are classified into two groups – major and minor, both numbering five.** Since the Prana is a form of Energy, all these activities are movement or heat related. To understand the Prana, we must track its movements in our body. When we can identify a particular movement, we can apply logic to see the Prana behind it.

**Most prominent movement in our body is the beating of the heart. Energy or the force that makes our heart beat is called the Prana.** Primary source of Prana is the air we breathe; food is the secondary source.

Second major activity of the Prana is in the abdomen region, where it controls excretion-related movements of the body. Here, it is called Apaana, and it is a critical concept in Yoga. **Shri Krishna introduces Prana and Apaana in Gita. He summarizes the complete science of Yoga as the “mixing of the Prana and the Apaana”.** This description looks rather simple, but it is very difficult to understand its meaning.

Understanding what Apaana is can be difficult. Making it move upwards toward the Prana is even more challenging. The way is to learn the root lock, practice it for a good amount of time with a wait-and-watch approach. When the root lock triggers the upward movement of the stomach on its own (the word, Yoga uses, is flying instead of moving), you will know the power of Apaana.

The name of Prana operating in the throat and head region is Udaana. These are very low-frequency vibrations. One of the strange things about the Udaana is that its activities go a few centimeters above our head. The name of Prana operating in the stomach is Samaana. It and is responsible for digestion. The name of Prana which circulates blood in the entire body is Vyaana.

Besides these five major Prana(s), there are five minor Prana(s): Naga is responsible for hiccups; Kurma performs the function of opening and closing the eyes; Krikara induces hunger or thirst; Devadatta makes us yawn. Finally, Dhananjaya causes decomposition of the body after death.

In the ordinary state of the body, activities of Prana are difficult to observe. Only when these activities exceed existing levels, we feel the Prana in the body. When we do Pranayama, the level of Pranic activity goes up. When it exceeds a certain threshold, we can notice the Prana. **The results of Pranayama are not immediately visible. Pumping air in and out of the body alone does not mean a person is doing Pranayama.** It needs a guru to teach us the conceptual background of the overall framework, a sincere desire to succeed and practice over a period. **Pranic movement happens because of the intention of a person. Hence, if we are looking for proof of the Prana, we must have the intention to see Pranic activity.**

## Easy to Understand Character # 4: Ravana

**Ravana represents our Ahamkara (Ego).** Our Ahamkara is insecure. It seeks to grab power and prefers a life of indulgence. We see these characteristics in Ravana. He is a king of demons. He is powerful, active, and indulgent in sensual pleasures. His capital city, Lanka, is extremely rich, with golden palaces and marvelous gardens. Even though Ravana has defeated all enemies and he lives on an island, Lanka is closely guarded, which shows his insecurity. “Lam” from “Lanka” (in English spelling, letter m is missing) is the letter of the Muladhara Chakra. **It is associated with a sense of insecurity, which is closely related to the Ahamkara.**

Ravana is an undisputed king of the demons, yet, he feels separated from the others. He does not trust anyone. He does not pay heed to any of his counselors. He is a hard worker, a great fighter, and knowledgeable in numerous arts. Our Ahamkara surely has all these qualities.

One of Ravana’s names is "Dashanana," which means "one with ten faces." **His multiple faces show the various masks that our Ahamkara wears. Thus, when we see Ravana as an Ahamkara, we feel that we are familiar with him.**

In chapter 3-32, sage Valmiki describes Ravana, with all his characteristics. **Let us understand Ravana a little better and see if any of his traits relates to us.**

* Verse 3-32-4 tells us Ravana is radiant, and he is sitting in an **exquisite vehicle**.
* Verse 3-32-4 tells us he **is covered in gold** from top to bottom and seated on a golden throne.
* Verse 3-32-6 tells us he is a **brave and invincible warrior**.
* Verses 3-32-7, 10, 11, 12, 13 tell us he fought many wars, and has bruises to prove his valor.
* Verse 3-32-8 tells us he has twenty arms and ten heads. We could interpret this to mean that he is ten times more active and smart than others.
* Verse 3-32-9 tells us he is dressed in **beautiful clothes and many ornaments**.
* Verse 3-32-13 tells us he uses every way to humiliate his defeated enemies. Essentially, his standard of values and ethics are substantially lower for his enemies. For a student of history, there is nothing new in it. All the victorious armies do the same. Using substandard values and ethics creates terror in the heart of the defeated enemy. It helps in quelling any future uprising or challenge against the conqueror.
* In verse 3-32-14, we read about Ravana’s vehicle, which he snatched from someone, and about **his other glittering possessions**.
* Verses 3-32-15 and 3-32-19 tell us **he collects good things** but is envious of other people’s good belongings. Not only is he envious of others, he also makes efforts to destroy their good possessions.
* In verse 3-32-17, we read he practiced ascesis before and **gained a lot of power**.
* Verse 3-32-17 tells us any known power in the world would not defeat him.
* Verse 3-32-20 tells us Ravana is ruthless with his enemies. He is heartless, with punishing those, who went against his wishes.
* In verse 3-32-22, we see **he is dressed in exquisite clothes and jewelry, and looks fantastic in them**.

**Do any of these characteristics sound familiar to us?** Even though a gap of 3000 years or more separates this description and us, it comes close to us. Even though Ravana is a demon king, his most terrible crimes look like petty thefts, when compared to the deeds of human dictators and conquerors. There are no massacres of defeated enemies, no mountains of severed heads, no mass graves, and no execution chambers. He has no agenda of ethnic or racial cleansing. He does nothing that matches our experience of dictators and conquerors.

Sage Valmiki was aware of these types of horrible crimes committed by kings in his time too, yet he does not mention them. **Sage Valmiki’s Ravana is not as evil as human kings and dictators, modern or ancient. Instead, he is an ordinary person like any of us**.

Unlike Shri Ram, who has practically nothing except a bow, Ravana has everything we desire and adore. **He has pride, power, wealth, position, gold, beautiful palaces, beautiful wives, devotion, valor, selective ethics, conquered enemies, and much more**. Don’t we wish all these things in our lives? Maybe, not all the things, but don’t we crave at least a few of them?

We may think Ravana was some a ruthless dictator of some country in the past, but that is wrong. Ramayana is part of literature dedicated to the "study of self." Thus, its purpose is to help us understand ourselves. If sage Valmiki wanted to write something that matches the horrible acts of dictators, he could have done so easily. In that case, character of Ravana becomes problematic for a common man to imagine himself in the role of Ravana.

Only when we honestly understand Ravana within ourselves as our Ahamkara, we see the real Shri Ram as the Consciousness. Those, who do not understand Ravana, will not recognize Shri Ram, even if he is staring in their face. We know Ravana represents our Ahamkara. We also know there is no Ahamkara in the Higher Consciousness. **To recognize its absence, we need to recognize its presence.**

**Besides personification of the Ahamkara, Ravana is also an example of one more significant concept – the Rajas Guna.** Ravana is extremely dynamic and a busy demon. He concurred almost all other kings. He rules a large kingdom. He is an expert in 64 different arts. He is an extraordinarily accomplished warrior. He has many other qualities that tell us he is highly active. Ramayana uses his character to show the nature of Rajas Guna. **The Rajas Guna is present in everyone. It is responsible for all the activities we do. This force of nature pushes us into action, whether physical or mental.** By itself, it does not recognize any limits or does not control itself on its own. A Rajas Guna dominated person gets entangled in one action after another, possibly in multiple actions at the same time.

## Easy to Understand Character # 5: Kumbhakarna

Kumbhakarna is Ravana’s brother.He eats for six months and sleeps for the remaining six months. It requires an army of demons just to wake him up! **He represents Tamas Guna.** Tamas Guna is characterized by inertia**. A Tamas Guna dominated person has a tendency of overeating, oversleeping, and overindulgence in sensual pleasures. This person resists the call of action.** He can find many reasons for not doing any action or justify his inaction. Tamas Guna is present in everyone. When it dominates, it brings a lot of troubles.

**Tamas Guna has a momentum.** Even if an overweight (as an example of Tamas dominated person) starts exercising, his weight does not drop right away. His weight will go up before it goes down. Even after Kumbhakarna’s hands are cut, they keep moving. In addition, when his head is cutoff, his body crawls long distance**. It tells us that even if a person overcomes Tamas Guna, it will continue to exert its power for some time.**

## Easy to Understand Character # 6: Vibhishana

The Sanskrit word Vibhishana means "not horrible". Like Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana advises Ravana to return Sita to Shri Ram. When Ravana did not pay heed to his advice, Vibhishana deserts Ravana’s camp and joins Shri Ram’s side. He becomes a key advisor to Shri Ram. He helps Laxmana to kill his nephew – mighty and invisible Indrajit. After the defeat of Ravana, Shri Ram honors Vibhishana as a close friend. Shri Ram crowns Vibhishana as king of Lanka and returns to Ayodhya.

**Through Vibhishana, Ramayana explains Sattva Guna.** **It is attracted towards spirituality. It tries to search for god or higher power or purpose.** Rajas and Tamas Guna do not know any balance. They do not check themselves. Sattva Guna seeks to balance all of them together.

Both Ravana and Kumbhakarna, symbolic of Rajas and Tamas Guna, battle Shri Ram. However strong and brave they are, Shri Ram ultimately defeats them in battle. Shri Ram defeats Ravana (Rajas), but does not become king of Lanka. Shri Ram neutralizes Kumbhakarna (Tamas), but does not become lazy. He befriends Vibhishana (Sattva Guna), uses it, and rewards it too. **However, Shri Ram steps away from Vibhishana (Sattva Guna) too as a king of Lama.**

Spirituality is an activity dominated by Sattva Guna. However, ‘good’ it is, it differs from the Consciousness. **The Consciousness is not the same as these three qualities of nature. It is “above and beyond” them and will always remain that way.** The three Guna and their relation to the Consciousness are the most significant findings of Yoga. Ramayana helps us understand it.

## Easy to Understand Character # 7: Mandodari

Along with Sita, Mandodari is one of the five important females in Puranic stories. She has a minor role to play in Ramayana. We know Ravana represents the Ahamkara. Mandodari is Ravana’s wife. She represents the Rationalizing Intellect or Buddhi.

When Ravana abducted Sita and brought her to Lanka, Mandodari did not approve of his action. Mandodari comes out as rational about these events. She advises her husband not to take the wrong course of action. Giving advice and keeping composure in a distressing situation shows the Rationalizing Intellect / Buddhi.