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In Africa, artistic depictions of elephants- such as rock paintings- have been found that date back thousands of years, clearly indicating the prominence this creature had amongst the people, even at such an early period. Although their range is more restricted now that it was in previous years, you can still find the elephant as a featured character in stories and folktales throughout the continent. In many of these tales, the close relationship between elephants and humans is displayed by the fact that members of each species often take on the form of the other. Stories from Chad, Kenya and the Zulu region of southern Africa all talk about how, under certain circumstances, elephants have taken on human form, how humans have become elephants, and how elephant children have been born from unions in both cases. In Tanzania, there is a story about

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- [Potential Dollar Crash in 2015 - Here's How to Move to Gold](#)

[What's This?](#)



The advertisement features the Xfinity logo at the top. Below it, the text "XFINITY TRIPLE PLAY" is prominently displayed. A central graphic consists of two overlapping yellow arrows pointing right; the front arrow contains the text "GET A GREAT OFFER" and the back arrow contains "30-DAY MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE". At the bottom right, there is a yellow button with the text "LEARN MORE" and a right-pointing arrow.

how the elephant was once a human being but got swindled out of all of his limbs except one, which became his trunk, and the Ashanti people of Ghana held elephants in such high regard that when they found one dead in the wild, they honored it with a funeral fit for one of their tribe's own chiefs.

Another place where the elephant possess symbolic importance is India, and perhaps here, more than anywhere else, that significance is on a truly massive scale. In addition to being used in battle for thousands of years, elephants are endowed with prominent religious symbolism in India. Before Hinduism as we know it became fully established in the sub-continent, one of the chief gods worshipped in the region was Indra. Associated predominantly with thunder, Indra's mount was the sacred white elephant Airavata, thus the connection between elephants and the divine was established early in India. In that vein, the elephant also has a symbolic role in Buddhist tradition. Before Siddhartha Gautama, the Indian prince who would later become the Buddha, was born, his mother had a dream in which a white elephant announced the birth of her son. This association of elephants with divinity continued into the development of mainstream Hinduism. The god Ganesh, son of Shiva and Parvati and called the "remover of obstacles", is usually depicted with the head of an elephant. According to the Mahabharata, one of India's greatest epic poems, Shiva accidentally cut off the head of his son and, quickly looking around for a replacement, spotted an elephant and placed its head on his son's shoulders.

Despite elephants not being native to their general homelands, the Ancient Greeks and Romans were acutely aware of the power of these animals, and in certain periods elephants acquired a distinct association with military strength and, subsequently, military triumph. Alexander the Great encountered war elephants at the Battle of the Hydaspes River (located in modern-day Pakistan) in 326 BCE, and in later years coins were often issued that depicted Alexander and his Hellenistic successors wearing the scalp of an elephant as a crown or headdress. Hannibal, the legendary general from Carthage (roughly equivalent to modern-day Tunisia, the capital of Tunisia) used elephants on his famous march across the Alps, and in both Alexandria, Egypt and later in Rome, elephants were displayed in marches, processions and triumphal parades.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, the elephant appeared in bestiaries (books detailing animals and their various important attributes and associations) as symbols of innocence, purity and chastity. The reasoning behind this symbolism supposedly dates back to the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose works began to permeate Medieval Europe through European contact with Islamic scribes and translators. According to Aristotle, a bull (male) elephant did not engage in sexual intercourse while his mate was pregnant, and with the high emphasis placed on faithfulness and virginity in Medieval Europe, perhaps it's not surprising that such associations made the elephant a positive symbol.

Symbolizes: strength, loyalty, good memory, patience, wisdom, marital happiness.

China: strength, wisdom, prudence, energy, sovereignty.

Christianity: the enemy of the serpent (which in turn is associated with Christ), chastity and kindness.

Roman art: represents longevity, immortality and victory over death.

Categories: [Animal Symbolism \(/category/13\)](/category/13), [Religious Symbols \(/category/5\)](/category/5).

Elephant (/symbol/2181) is part of the [Hindu Symbols \(/group/29\)](/group/29) group.