

Hanumanasana:

the amalgamation of the myth with the practice



Many yoga poses – asanas – have an elaborate story behind them. Teacher Mayank Dhingra details the story of Hanuman and the challengers he defeated on his journey to Lanka in search of Sita

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The myth

In the epic Ramayana, Hanuman is tasked with searching for Sita in Lanka. Hanumanasana symbolises his giant leap from the southern shore of India to Lanka to achieve this goal.

To travel through the skies quickly, Hanuman, who could increase his size at will, assumed a body of immense proportions. So great was the momentum of his leap that he carried trees in full blossom, which were uprooted by the force. Covered with blossoms, buds and sprouts, Hanuman resembled a mountain. Soon the trees following Hanuman and the blossoms fell off into the sea making the ocean look even more beautiful.

Seeing Hanuman flying across the ocean, the king of the ocean asked Mainaka the Mountain to offer Hanuman a place to rest. But Hanuman had vowed not to rest until he reached Lanka.

The devas [demi-Gods] were very impressed with Hanuman's commitment but decided to test his determination for themselves. They asked Surasa, the Mother of all Serpents, to take a dreadful form of female Rakshasa and eat Hanuman. She tried, opening her mouth wide, but Hanuman immediately doubled his size. Surasa in turn increased her size. Then Hanuman increased his size. Finally when Surasa increased her mouth size to accommodate a Hanuman of 90 yojanas, he swiftly shrunk himself to a size as small as a thumb and flew into her mouth and away. Surasa was very impressed with Hanuman's intelligent handling of the situation and gave her blessings for his journey ahead.

As Hanuman continued he suddenly felt he was being dragged down. He was being attacked by the demon Simhika who had the power to hold one by his shadow. Hanuman thought of trying to fly away, but soon realised that he would have

to go back and reclaim his shadow. As he flew towards Simhika, she opened her mouth to grab him. Hanuman reduced his size, went inside Simhika's mouth and came back out, slashing her vital organs. He was then able to continue his journey without further incident and reach Lanka.

The practice

1. Start in anjaneyasana with your right foot in front. Slowly straighten the right leg out in front of you.
2. Exhale and bending forward, press your fingertips to the floor.
3. Pick your left knee off the floor and



Hanuman had the power to increase his size at will and used this ability to complete his task of finding Sita in Lanka.

take the left leg backwards. Just before you feel you have reached the limit of your stretch, stop straightening your left knee.

4. Inhale and breathe into the hamstrings in the right leg and soften the quadriceps in the left leg. Exhale and carefully drop the front of the left thigh, along with the back of the right thigh towards the ground. The centre of your right knee should point directly towards the ceiling.
5. Ensure your back leg is extended straight out behind, from the hip,

without being angled out to the side. The centre of that kneecap should press on to the floor.

6. Depending on your flexibility, your thighs could now be in contact with the floor and you could either stretch your hands straight up (towards the ceiling) or bring them together in the anjali mudra (salutation seal).
7. Hold this pose for around a minute before releasing it. To do so, press your hands on to the floor and turn the front leg out slightly.
8. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Incorporating the myth into the practice

From anjaneyasana as we straighten the leading leg and feel the first stretch to the hamstrings, it is tempting to stay there and go no further since the rear leg is providing necessary stability and comfort – similar to how Hanuman's journey was interrupted by Mainaka who offered him a place to rest and tempted him with fresh fruit and food. But just as Hanuman brushed away the offer and stayed on course the practitioner has to continue despite the discomfort.

As you lift the left knee off the floor, you encounter your first 'monster' and you realise muscling your way through will only lead to injury. You need to use your intuitive intelligence and, just as Hanuman shrunk himself, you need to make micro-adjustments to overcome this obstacle.

To complete the journey, your thighs have to meet their shadows reflected below, just as Hanuman had to reclaim his shadow from Simhika. This last obstacle is the trickiest to overcome and requires patience and further micro-adjustments. Once the practitioner has mastered this last hurdle he/she can continue with relative ease and raise the hands off the floor to complete the 'journey'. ✨

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