

MONKEY MYTHOLOGY

Monkey mythology is an important part of both Hindu/Buddhist lore (India) and Zodiac/Taoist/Buddhist lore (China). The monkey is portrayed initially as foolish, vain, and mischievous. Yet, in each tradition, the monkey learns valuable lessons along the way, makes changes, and eventually gains redemption. **The monkey thus embodies the themes of repentance, responsibility, devotion, and the promise of salvation to all who sincerely seek it.** This symbolism is still common in Buddhism as practiced today. In modern meditation practices in many Buddhist sects, one must first subdue the "monkey mind" before meditation can yield results. The goal is to overcome the restless monkey mindset, to stop jumping from branch to branch, to stop grabbing whatever fruit comes into sight, to stop being fooled by mere appearances. Salvation is within the grasp of all who seek it if they remain true, sincere, and dedicated.

INDIA - HINDU MONKEY LORE

The Sanskrit term Vanara means monkey or forest dweller. In India, the most widely known Vanara is **Hanuman**, the monkey warrior who appears in the epic Hindu tale **Ramayana**. Even today, Hanuman is a very popular village god in southern, central and northern India, and artwork of Hanuman can still be found easily in India and other nations in Southeast Asia.

INDIA - BUDDHIST MONKEY LORE

Monkey lore plays a prominent role in the early years of Buddhism in India. Among hundreds of tales in the **Jataka** -- perhaps the oldest extant collection of Buddhist folklore originating in India and Sri Lanka around the 3rd century BC -- the Historical Buddha was said to have lived many prior lives in many different forms before attaining enlightenment.

CHINA - ZODIAC MONKEY LORE

The monkey appears often in pre-Buddhist and post-Buddhist China. In Western nations, the monkey is perhaps known most widely as the 9th animal among 12 in the Chinese Zodiac. Most scholars believe the Chinese zodiac originated sometime before 1100 BC, centuries prior to the Historical Buddha's birth in India around 500 BC.

CHINA - BUDDHIST MONKEY LORE

The Chinese story named Yuanhou Zhuyue, tells of a group of monkeys who attempt to catch the moon's reflection, but all are drowned in the effort. This parable is hard to date. Buddhism was introduced to China in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, and this parable probably originated during this time or soon thereafter.

JAPAN – MONKEY LORE

Monkey lore in Japan resonates with deep Chinese undertones and strong Shinto overtones. These are blended together into a hybrid symphony of Buddhist beliefs and practices, making Japanese monkey lore a very complex, confusing, curious, and challenging topic -- a topic that stretches back to Japan's first encounters with Chinese Geomancy, Chinese Taoism, the Zodiac Calendar, and Mahayana Buddhism. By the time Buddhism reached Japan (mid-6th century AD), the monkey and monkey lore were already common elements in Buddhist legend, art, and iconography in India, China, and mainland Asia.

Japanese Buddhist Statuary: Gods, Goddesses, Shinto Kami, Creatures and Demons.
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