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Vinaayaka or Ganesha or Ganapathi or Vighneshwara---all indicate the elephant God, who is popular among young and old, and who is worshipped as the very first deity, before regularly beginning any ceremony or samskaar, any yaaga or yajna, any vow or fast or pilgrimage. He is the Lord of the Ganas or Divine Forces, inside and outside the human body; He is the Lord, who masters and overwhelms vighna (obstacle), however imminent or eminent.

What does the term Ganapathi signify? "Ga" means Buddhi (intellect). "Na" means Vijnana (Wisdom). "Ganapathi" means one who is the Lord of the intellect and of wisdom. He is also the Lord of all Ganas (spiritual entities). Ganas also symbolize the senses. Ganapathi is thus the Lord of the senses. "Vigatho Nayakah Ithi Vinayakah" (Vinayaka is one who is without a Master above him).

He is also called Lambodhara, which means Guardian of Wealth--Lakshmi Svarupa. Here Lakshmi represents all wealth and prosperity and not only Dhanam (money) for which there is a separate deity called Dhanalakshmi, one of the eight Lakshmis. Here wealth means Sukha and Ananda (pleasure and bliss). Ganapathi endows us with supreme intelligence. These two are termed as Siddhi and Buddhi respectively. Siddhi and Buddhi are described as his two consorts. As He is the Adhipathi (master) of Siddhi and Buddhi, he is regarded as their husband in mundane terms.

Adoration of Vinaayaka as Prathama Vandhana (First deity to be saluted) has been mentioned in the Vedhas. Ganapathi Thathva finds a place in the Vedhas and Upanishaths. Reference to Him is made in the Gaayathri also. He is one who instills purity in body, and fearlessness in the mind. It is said- "Thanno Dhanthih Prachodayaath," giving importance to his tusk. Muushika is symbolic of the darkness of ignorance, while Ganesha signifies the effulgence of Wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Ganapathi, who was endowed with supreme intelligence which enabled him to understand the all-encompassing nature of the Divine, subjected himself to a test by which he could impart to the world this intelligence. Parameshwara invited His two sons, Vinaayaka and Subrahmanya, to go round the world and said that whoever completed the trip first would get a fruit immediately. Subrahmanya mounted his peacock and set out on the race with zest. Ganapathi, who was cast in a big mould and had as his vehicle a mouse, was apparently no match for his younger brother. How could he hope to go round the world? Seeing Ganesha complacently sitting there, without joining the race, the 'Divine parents asked him why he had not yet started on his trip. They urged him to get busy. But Ganapathi continued to enjoy what he was eating and seemed to be in no hurry to make a start.

A little while later, seeing that Subrahmanya was approaching the place, Ganapathi circumambulated his parents and sitting before them claimed that he had gone round the world. Parvathi asked him: "Without going round the world, how can you claim you have done so merely by going round us?" Ganesha replied: "Oh, Mother, the whole earth is permeated by both of you. If I go round you, is it not equal to going round the whole world? What is the purpose of statements such as: Eeshaavaasyam Idham Sarvam (All this is inhabited by the Lord), Vaasudhevas-sarvam idham (Vaasudheva is everything)? You are Omnipresent and to go round you is equivalent to circling the Universe," he said.

Parameshwara presented a fruit to Vinayaka and said: "Because you have a keen intellect, you shall be the master of all the spirits." It is for this reason that Vighneshwara is worshipped by one and all before performing any auspicious function, whether it is entering a new house or performing a marriage ceremony or any other religious function.

There is a popular verse, used on most occasions when Ganapathi is invoked. It mentions various attributes of this God : Suklambardharam (wearing white vesture) is the first, this is the symbol of purity, for, ambara means also the sky, the aakaasha of the heart. Ganapathi is pure, having universal love and compassion. Vishnum is the second attribute, ascribed to Him. Vishnu means that He is present everywhere, at all times.

Shashivarnam is the third adjective, used. Of the complexion of ash or Vibhuthi; that .is to say, glowing with

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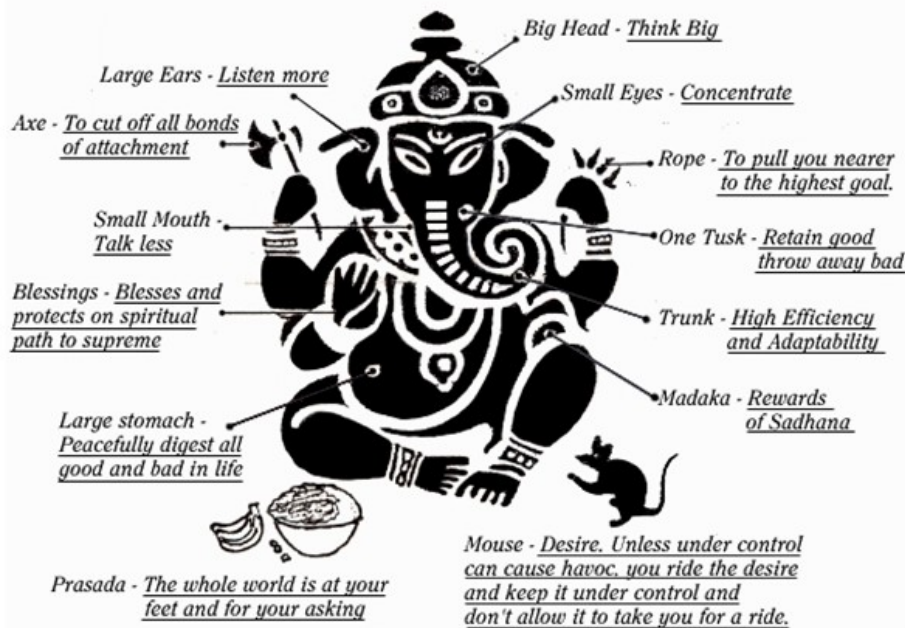
spiritual splendour, with the majesty of spiritual attainments, achievements and potentialities. These are also called Vibhuthis, for, in the Geetha, we find Krishna saying, wherever you see Power, Glory, Majesty (vibhuthi), know that it is Mine! Ganesha is OM personified Ganesha is bathed in His Divine Glory; that is the significance of the attribute, shashivarnam.

Chathur-bhuja (Four-handed) is the next denotation. This means that apart from two visible hands, He has two invisible hands, that are available for the' two divine uses of (1) Blessing the devotee, and (2) Guarding him from danger. The last: of the descriptive word is: Prasannavadhanam (of graceful countenance). The countenance depicts the inner calm, happiness and balance, inner grace and mercy, the consciousness of strength and sovereignty. Without intelligent discrimination, no skill or strength can be profitably used. One must know how fire, for example, or the electric current, has to be used and how far one can deal with it as an instrument for our needs. The senses of man are also like fire; they have to be kept under constant vigil and control.

No worship can succeed unless the heart is pure and the senses are mastered. Ganesha is the God who helps overcome obstacles; but, He will create obstacles when good endeavour is obstructed by bad influences; He will clear the path for the sincere Saadhaka (spiritual aspirant). He is Prasannavadhanam (of beneficial looks) when you pray to Him for good ends; but, He will not be that, when you seek His help for nefarious stratagems! He is Pranava-swaruupa, the Om personified; so, He is auspiciousness itself. When God is adored and man is injured, there can be no auspiciousness in such deeds.

The teaching of Vinayaka is one of sacrifice. You may not heed the contents of the Puraanas, but you should not miss the vital principles which they convey to mankind. When Vinayaka was writing the Mahabharatha to the dictation of Sage Vyaasa, the latter laid down the condition that Vinayaka should go on writing non-stop whatever Vyaasa said. But Vinayaka also stipulated a condition that Vyaasa should never stop his dictation but should go on without a break. While he was writing, Vinayaka's pen broke and he did not hesitate to break one of his tusks to use it as a pen. That is why he is called Ekadhantha or one with a single tusk. This is a shining example of the spirit of sacrifice that Vinaayaka exhibited for the welfare of humanity. That is why the Vedas proclaim that it is only by sacrifice one can attain immortality.

Ganesha Symbolism



Jai Ganesh