

LORD GANESHA (VINAYAGAR)

- Lord of Wisdom and Success

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Our concept of '*ishtadeiva*' encourages us to worship God through our favourite deity or *avathara*, but every Hindu will worship the elephant headed Vinayagar, who is often lovingly referred to as 'Pillayar'. Hence, He is the most powerful unifying force in Hinduism and is even claimed to be 'in charge of Hinduism'. In fact, He is worshipped in some form or other in many parts of the world and is the most popular object of worship in Maharashtra state in India. First worship is always to Vinayagar, who is propitiated first and foremost even in the celestial world. He exists in physical form with elephant head and trunk in the astral and celestial worlds. A visit to the recently discovered (1989) Pathala Bhuvaneshwar Caves at the foothills of the Himalayas will convince us Vinayagar is worshipped not only in temples and homes but also in trees, leaves, clay, grass, riceballs, sweetmeats, etc.

Names and Forms

Vinayagar is referred to by 108 names e.g. Pillayar, Ganesa, Ganapathy, Vigneshwara, Gajamuha, Ekadanta, etc. and He takes sixteen (16) forms. Each name has a specific meaning for example in 'Ganesa' or 'Ganapathy', *ga* = *buddhi* (intellect), *na* = *siddhi* (success), '*ga*' also means our five (5) *karmendryas* (organs of actions) and '*na*' our five (5) *jnanendryas* (sense organs); '*pathi*' = Lord. Hence, Vinayagar is the Lord of wisdom, intellect and success. 'Vigneshwara' = Lord of obstacles, both causing as well as removing them. 'Vinayaka' = none superior to Him. 'Gajamuha' = elephant

faced. 'Ekadanta' = with only one tusk. Each of the 16 forms has an explanation. But the most outstanding feature of every form is the manifestation of AUM the '*pranava*' (by the elephant head and trunk). All mantras begin with 'AUM'.

Origin

Long long ago, at the beginning of *Kretayuga* (1st age), Lord Siva's consort Parvathi created a beautiful boy out of Herself in order to guard Her privacy (so that no one could get into Her apartments). One day, Lord Siva insisted on seeing Her but the divine child would not budge. Siva, in pretended fury, but really to teach the world the significance of 'AUM', beheaded the child with His trident. The grief-stricken Parvathi implored Siva to restore Her son's life. The Lord had earlier given a boon to the elephant headed demon Gajasura that he would always be a part of divinity after his death (resulting from Lord Vishnu's cleverly drawing out the Sivalingam which by Siva's boon had been within Gajasura's body). Siva now ordered His attendants to bring the first head they could find. In accordance to divine plan, the dead Gajasura's head was the first head to be found; and Siva gave life to Parvathi's son by implanting the elephant head on Him. Parvathi, still not completely appeased, insisted that Her son should be propitiated by all the celestial beings as well as mortals, and that first worship must be to Him. This was granted by Siva. This son came to be known as Vinayagar, and His advent is celebrated to this day as "*Vinayagar Chathuthi*", which falls usually in September every year.

Greatness

- a) Among all God forms, Vinayagar best manifest AUM the *pranava* in both form and sound. An elephant roar resembles AUM, which is the primary sound of creation which originated from sound (not light). Vinayagar's trunk is *naadam* (sound) and its curled tip is *bindu* (energy).
- b) Vinayagar is revered as the Lord of wisdom, success and memory for many reasons – large brain and ears (hearing everything), small eyes (discrimination) etc. He is a total '*brahmachari*' but His divine intellect (*buddhi*) and success (*siddhi*) are sometimes portrayed as His two 'wives'. (This is a misnomer).
- c) Vinayagar sits at the *moolathara* chakra (spiritual centre) at the lower most part of our spine and gradually propels our *kundalini* energy upwards towards the *manipura* chakra higher up. He is the 1st step in *kundalini* yoga.
- d) He knows best our past karmas and hence guides us accordingly. He is also the guardian and custodian of the gravitational force and so most concerned with our worldly life, creating obstacles when we are wrong, and removing obstacles when we are on the right path. Even Lord Muruga was unable to win Valli over till He had propitiated His elder brother Vinayagar, who then appeared (as the *pranava*) to Valli in the elephant form.
- e) Vinayagar's wisdom is seen in several episodes. In the contest for the fruit of wisdom (*jnanapalam*). While Muruga raced away on His peacock round the

universe, Vinayagar calmly circumambulated His parents (Siva and Parvathi) claiming the entire universe to be in them and thus won the fruit of wisdom.

- f) He teaches that no physical sacrifice is too great for destroying evil as well as for propagating spiritual knowledge and dharma. For the former He used His right tusk as a weapon to subdue Mausika the mouse-headed demon. For the latter He broke His right tusk to complete writing the Mahabharatha (the greatest epic of all time) while it was dictated by Sage Veda Vyasa (in 8800 verses) who had found Vinayagar to be the most qualified ONE to write the epic.
- g) Vinayagar's five (5) *shaktis* are love and compassion for family, for relatives and friends, for culture and discipline, for dharma, and for charity.

Symbolism

The form of Vinayagar is perhaps the best illustration of Hinduism's grand and lofty symbolism.

- a) Elephant head and trunk – AUM the *pranava*
- b) Large brain – wisdom and intellect
- c) Trunk and small eyes – discrimination and concentration
- d) Large ears – able to hear and know everything
- e) Lord of the *Ganas* – Lord of *buddhi* and *siddhi*
- f) Noose – trap of worldly life, causing obstacles
- g) Goad – removes obstacles
- h) Broken tusk – doing good (writing the Mahabharatha), as well as destroying evil (conquering Maushika)
- i) Crown – power and authority

- j) Umbrella – Mausika’s wife who wanted to be near Her Lord (mouse)
- k) Rope on waist – the serpent who had guarded Vinayagar during His *tapas*.
- l) *Mothakam* – sweetness of spiritual bliss
- m) *Kalasa* pot – containing sacred Ganga water
- n) Protruding belly – containing the entire universe; worldly life is also important
- o) Uplifted right hand = *abhaya mudra* – blessing devotees
- p) Mouse as vehicle – ego, controlling the destroyer of books (knowledge)
- q) Holding the Vedas – importance of learning
- r) Seated with one leg folded – spiritual life; the other leg (on the ground) = worldly life
- s) Coconut offering – ego, karmas and *maya*
- t) *Thoppukkaranam*
- * The *devas* after being conquered by the *asuras*, were humiliated by

having to worship them thus. After being rescued by Vinayagar, the *devas* voluntarily worshipped their rescuer in the same manner. So we too worship Vinayagar thus.

- * Lord Vishnu’s discus was taken away by Lord Vinayagar into His mouth and He refused to return it. Finally Vishnu did “*thoppukkaranam*” sending Vinayagar into fits of loud laughter with mouth wide open thus expelling the discus to Vishnu. We too please Vinayagar by performing this form of worship to Him.
- * Knocking the head stimulates the brain.

Mantras

The common mantras for worshipping Vinayagar are:-

- a) AUM Ganeshaya Namaha!
- b) AUM Vigneshwaraya Namaha!
- c) AUM Gam Ganapathayae Namaha!

AUM TAT SAT!