

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA
National Spiritual Wing

R1 – GANESHA CHATURTHI

1. Name of religious event / Observance / Celebration:

Ganesha or Vinayaka Chaturthi

2. Picture:

2.1 Picture or symbol pertaining to the particular observance/celebration



2.2 The date/period of the religious event

“Ganesha Chaturthi is celebrated on the Chaturthi, i.e. the fourth day of Indian lunar month of Bhadrapada. It usually falls in the month of September in the English calendar”

http://srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Ganesha_Chaturthi.htm

3. About the festival:

“Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God is usually worshipped before commencing any activity in order to remove obstacles and ensure success of the endeavour. He is also the bestower of worldly intelligence and spiritual wisdom.”

http://srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Ganesha_Chaturthi.htm

“Ganesh Chaturthi is one of the most popular of Hindu festivals. This is the birthday of Lord Ganesha. It is the day most sacred to Lord Ganesha. It falls on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada (August-September). Lord Ganesha is the elephant-headed God. He is worshipped first in any prayers. His Names are repeated first before any auspicious work is begun, before any kind of worship is begun. He is the Lord of power and wisdom. He is the eldest son of Lord Shiva and the elder brother of Skanda or Kartikeya. He is the energy of Lord Shiva and so He is called the son of Shankar and Umadevi. By worshipping Lord Ganesha mothers hope to earn for their sons the sterling virtues of Ganesha.”

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

“The following story is narrated about His birth and how He came to have the head of an elephant: Once upon a time, the Goddess Gauri (consort of Lord Shiva), while bathing, created Ganesha as a pure white being out of the mud of Her Body and placed Him at the entrance of the house. She told Him not to allow anyone to enter while she went inside for a bath. Lord Shiva Himself was returning home quite thirsty and was stopped by Ganesha at the gate. Shiva became angry and cut off Ganesha’s head as He thought Ganesha was an outsider. When Gauri came to know of this she was sorely grieved. To console her grief, Shiva ordered His servants to cut off and bring to Him the head of any creature that might be sleeping with its head facing north. The servants went on their mission and found only an elephant in that position. The sacrifice was thus made and the elephant’s head was brought before Shiva. The Lord then joined the elephant’s head onto the body of Ganesha. Lord Shiva made His son worthy of worship at the beginning of all undertakings, marriages, expeditions, studies, etc. Without the Grace of Sri Ganesha and His help nothing whatsoever can be achieved. No action can be undertaken without His support, Grace or blessing.”

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

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Symbolic:

“He has as his vehicle a small mouse. He is the presiding Deity of the Muladhara Chakra, the psychic centre in the body in which the Kundalini Shakti resides.

Lord Ganesha represents Om or the Pranava, which is the chief Mantra among the Hindus. The elephant head is significant in that it is the only figure in nature that has the form of the symbol for Om.

The significance of riding on a mouse is the complete conquest over egoism. The holding of the ankusha represents His rulership of the world. It is the emblem of divine Royalty.

Elephants are very wise animals; this indicates that Lord Ganesha is an embodiment of wisdom.

He is the Lord of Ganas or groups, for instance groups of elements, groups of senses, etc. He is the head of the followers of Shiva or the celestial servants of Lord Shiva.

Lord Ganesha’s two powers are the Kundalini and the Vallabha (power of love).”

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Elder of the brothers:

“Ganesha and His brother Lord Subramanya once had a dispute as to who was the elder of the two. The matter was referred to Lord Shiva for final decision. Shiva decided that whoever would make a tour of the whole world and come back first to the starting point had the right to be the elder. Subramanya flew off at once on his vehicle, the peacock, to make a circuit of the world. But the wise Ganesha went, in loving worshipfulness, around His divine parents and asked for the prize of His victory. Lord Shiva said, “Beloved and wise Ganesha! But how can I give you the prize; you did not go around the world?” Ganesha replied, “No, but I have gone around my parents. My parents represent the entire manifested universe!” Thus the dispute was settled in favour of Lord Ganesha, who was thereafter acknowledged as the elder of the two brothers. Mother Parvati also gave Him a fruit as a prize for this victory.”

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“On this day of Vinayaka Chaturthi, various kinds of offerings are made. But He does not accept any oily or fried preparations. All preparations are cooked in steam and offered to him. They offer him Kudumulu and Vundrallu, made by using rice flour and til (sesamum) seeds. Why is such an offering made? For humanity, health is wealth. Those who partake of food cooked in steam remain very healthy. But today, man is running after various delicacies. But, for the elephant health is all-important. Vinayaka too teaches us the same. This preparation of rice flour and til sesamum seeds frees us from all defects of the eye like spots and cataract. A combination of jaggery and til seeds prevents all defects and diseases caused due to bile, wind and phlegm. The rice flour preparation made using steam helps in digestion too.”

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 33, Pg 232, Discourse on 22/08/2001

“What is the significance of such preparations? It is found that oil-less edibles are easily digestible. The til seeds serve to keep down the bad effect of phlegm, bile, and wind in the body. The jaggery in the preparation is conducive to improvement of vision. All these preparations are intended to promote health and are not designed to propitiate the Divine. The energy derived from these edibles is conducive to the promotion of longevity.”

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 31, Pg 240-241 25/08/1998

*“Today, before we start any work, we pray to Lord Ganesha. Without praying to the master of masters, Vinayaka, and thereby, acting in an egoistic way, we are bound to fail. **Vinayaka Chaturthi is the first festival of the year, followed by other festivals.** Bharatiyas begin their daily prayers with a prayer to Lord Ganesha. Vinayaka is the head of spiritual, mental and physical levels. We should sustain and protect all these levels.”*

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 33, Pg 232, Discourse on 22/08/2001

“What is the inner significance of worshipping the elephant-faced deity? The elephant is a symbol of might and magnitude. The elephant's foot is larger than that of any other animal. The elephant can make its way through the densest jungle. In this way, it signifies the quality of a leader who shows the way for others. The elephant is also known for its faithfulness and gratitude. These are the lessons man should learn from the elephant. Intelligence without gratitude is valueless. Every man should be grateful to those who have helped him.”

Divine Discourse: 7 September 1997

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“Once Vyasa embarked upon writing the Mahabharata. Because of immensity of the task of writing down millions of verses, Vyasa sought the help of Brihaspati, the preceptor of the Devas, for a suitable scribe. Brihaspati told Vyasa that none but Vinayaka could carry out the work. Vyasa appealed to Vinayaka for aid. Vyasa stipulated that everything that was written should be understood by the scribe. Ganesa, in his turn, laid down a condition that Vyasa should not pause in dictating the verses so that the stylus with which he would be inscribing the verses on the palm leaves should have no rest. Vinayaka could write down the entire Mahabharata because he was the embodiment of all knowledge. Vyasa could accomplish his prodigious task with Ganesa's aid.

Significance of placing Vinayaka in forefront

The mouse is Ganesa's vehicle. The mouse is a clever and lively creature. As a symbol it: means that we should be clever and diligent in our actions. There is special significance in placing Vigneswara in the forefront before embarking on any undertaking. In a forest, when an elephant moves through the jungle, it clears the way for others to follow. Likewise, by invoking Ganesa, the path is cleared for our undertakings. The elephant's foot is so large that when it moves it can stamp out the footprints of any other animal. Here, again, the symbolic meaning is that all obstacles in the way will be removed when Ganesa is accorded the place of honour. The journey of life is made smoother and happier by the grace of Ganesa.

On Vinayaka Chaturthi day, students place books in front of the Ganesa idol and offer worship. They pray to the deity to illumine their minds. Hence Ganesa is known as "Buddhi Pradayaka", one who grants intelligence. No one should regard Ganesa as uncouth because of his elephant head and his immense belly. Vinayaka is a deity who encompasses the universe within himself. He is a deity of infinite potency. Vigneswara is described as one wearing a white cloth. His body is ash-grey. He is depicted as having four arms and a cheerful countenance. The white cloth signifies purity of mind and heart. By worshipping Him, you must endeavour to achieve similar purity. Vinayaka always appears serene and calm. By his grace, the devotee must seek to achieve similar equanimity, whatever may be the ups and downs in life.”

Address in the Sathya Sai Institute Hostel, on 4-9-1989.

4. Suggested programme or method of observing the event:

“The festival is usually celebrated for a period for three days in Prasanthi Nilayam. On the first day, the students sing devotional songs and Stotrams (hymns) and present cultural programmes in the Divine Presence and Bhagawan grants His discourse. During the next two days, students and staff of Bhagawan's Institutions worship idols of Lord Ganesha in their respective premises. On the third day of the festival, the idols are brought to the Sai Kulwant Hall in a grand procession of colourful and exquisitely designed chariots amidst chanting of hymns and singing of Bhajans. After offering final worship and Arati, it is customary to immerse in the idol in a nearby lake or pond as it is the belief that Lord Ganesha takes with him the troubles and the bad tendencies that act as obstacles on the spiritual path.”

http://srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Ganesha_Chaturthi.htm

“On the Ganesh Chaturthi day, meditate on the stories connected with Lord Ganesha early in the morning, during the Brahmamuhurta period. Then, after taking a bath, go to the temple and do the prayers of Lord Ganesha. Offer Him some coconut and sweet pudding. Pray with faith and devotion that He may remove all the obstacles that you experience on the spiritual path. Worship Him at home, too. You can get the assistance of a pundit. Have an image of Lord Ganesha in your house. Feel His Presence in it.”

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

Suggestion/Guide for South Africa at centre level (a programme):

- Conduct bhajans (3 Oms, bhajans, Aarathi)
- Sing any Ganesha stotrams (hymns)
- Have a talk on Ganesha Chaturthi for about 10 minutes.
- Our Bal Vikas children could present a short cultural item/s.
- Total duration 90 minute.

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5. Verbal dedication / prayer / chant / other - with meanings:

“His Mantra is *Om Gung Ganapathaye Namah*. Spiritual aspirants who worship Ganesha as their tutelary Deity repeat this Mantra or *Om Sri Ganeshaya Namah*.”

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

“The devotees of Ganesha also do Japa of the Ganesha Gayatri Mantra. This is as follows.

*Tat purushaaya vidmahe
Vakratundaaya dheemahi
Tanno dhanti prachodayaat”*

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

“The following are some of the common Names of Lord Ganesha:

Dhoomraketu, Sumukha, Ekadantha, Gajakarnaka, Lambodara, Vignaraja, Ganadhyaksha, Phalachandra, Gajanana, Vinayaka, Vakratunda, Siddhivinayaka, Surpakarna, Heramba, Skandapurvaja, Kapila and Vigneshwara.

He is also known by many as Maha-Ganapathi”

http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf

6. Any personal offering / sacrifice / practice

“On Vinayaka Chaturthi day, students place books in front of the Ganesa idol and offer worship. They pray to the deity to illumine their minds”

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol:22, Sathya Sai Institute Hostel, on 4-9-1989

7. Other material for preparation / discussion:

7.1 Any other recommended material that could be used for additional information / preparation, such as VCDs, DVDS, books, charts, etc

8. Bibliography / Reference Section for all references used

1. <http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/Prayers/prayers.htm>
2. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 12, Ch 27, Pg 32*
3. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 20, Ch 15, Pg 345*
4. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol:24, Discourse 12-9-1991, Ganesh Chaturthi*
5. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 31, Pg 240-241*
6. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 33, Pg 232, Discourse on 22/08/2001*
7. http://www.sivanandaonline.org/graphics/ebooks/swami_sivanandaji/download/hindu_fasts_festivals.pdf
8. *Divine Discourse: 7 September 1997*
9. *Address in the Sathya Sai Institute Hostel, on 4/9/1989*

9. Divine Discourse: Vinayaka worship ranks first

*“One may have mastered the Vedantic texts
And perfected the art of expounding them;
If his mind is not well filled with good qualities,
His scholarship is like the crop grown on barren soil.
If you cannot comprehend the Swami in front of you
And wander in search of God all over,
You are like the man who went in quest of ghee
While having butter in his hand.*

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! Prakriti (the phenomenal world) is what is directly apparent to man and which deludes him. It is an aggregation of objects. In its natural state, every object is mutable. Such impermanent objects are incapable of giving enduring Ananda (bliss). The object which gives you pleasure is transient. The individual who experiences that pleasure is also impermanent. How can an impermanent being derive lasting bliss from a perishable object? It is, therefore, necessary at the outset to forget the impermanent so that one may be qualified to experience the eternal and unchanging Reality.

The presence of three gunas in the cosmos

The entire cosmos is a manifestation of the three gunas: Satwa, Rajas and Tamas. They have been identified with the three colours: white, red and black. It is impossible for man to conceive of a world without these three qualities. It is not possible to find in Nature a situation in which these three qualities are present in equal measure. When the Satwic quality is predominant, the Rajasic and Tamasic qualities are quiescent. When the Rajasic quality is dominant, the other two are subdued. When the Tamasic quality is dominant, Satwa and Rajas are subdued. It is seldom that all the three qualities are equally balanced and in harmony with each other. Likewise in the human body, these three qualities are present in every limb. It will be clear that these three qualities are manifest in the physical universe, in the human body and in the human mind. The Srutis (sacred texts) have also declared that the universe is made up of these three qualities. With reference to man, there is the view that there are three states: Prakriti, Avidya and Maya. In course of time, the term Prakriti was applied to man's body. In some parts of the country, people are in the habit of referring to individuals as Prakriti. In North Canara, people say: "My Prakriti is not well," when they want to convey that their body is not well. Prakriti refers to that which is subject to all kinds of Vikriti (distortions and changes). This Prakriti is the basis of all creation. The second term is Avidya. Avidya means that which is the opposite of knowledge. Avidya makes one treat what is unreal as real and what is real as unreal and thereby deludes him and makes him pursue sensual pleasures. This Avidya follows Prakriti in the world as a shadow. Because of this Avidya, man is unable to recognise his true nature. Avidya is the cause of man's inability to comprehend his true form. As long as Avidya remains, man can never be free from troubles.

Combined power of Prakriti, Maya and Avidya

The third term is Maya. Maya is the delusion which makes one imagine the presence of that which is not present. As long as this state of bhrama (delusion) remains, it is impossible to comprehend the Brahman (the Omni-Self). What is this delusion? Here, for instance, is a rope. But in the twilight of dusk, one mistakes it for a snake. When a lamp is brought, it is found that there is only the rope. The snake was never there and the rope was always there. Only the momentary delusion caused the appearance of the snake and the absence of the rope. This is called Maya. It makes one imagine the presence of what is not there and not perceive what is really there. To believe in the existence of that which is nonexistent and in the non-existence of that which is the real truth is the effect of Maya. It is the combined power of these three--Prakriti, Avidya and Maya which accounts for man forgetting his true nature. Man often imagines that he has accomplished many things. Presuming that all that he achieves are entirely due to his own efforts and abilities, he deludes himself and forges his own bonds. He forgets the truth that there is higher power which is the driving force for action as well as the author of the results thereof. This is the primary nature of bhrama (delusion).

Prayer to Vinayaka gets rid of delusion

To get rid of this delusion and enable man to comprehend his inherent divine nature, the ancient sages taught a prayer. This prayer is the one that is addressed to Vinayaka. Who is Vinayaka? In the sloka beginning with the words, "Suklaambaradharam Vishnum," only the form of the deity is described. But there

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is another inner meaning for the name Vinayaka. "Suklaambaradharam" means one who is clad in white. "Vishnum" means, He is all-pervading. "Sasivarnam" means His complexion is grey like that of ash. "Chathurbhujam" means He has four arms. "Prasannavadanam" means, He has always a pleasing mien. "Sarvavighnopasaanthaye" means, for the removal of all obstacles, "Dhyaayeth," meditate (on Him). Vinayaka is the deity who removes all bad qualities, instils good qualities and confers peace on the devotee who meditates on Him. This is how the theistic believers interpret this prayer. The atheists have made a parody of it by construing the prayer as a description of a donkey, which carried white clothes on its back, is ash-grey in colour, wanders everywhere, has four legs, and has a bland look.

There is no master above Vinayaka

The Vinayaka-principle, however, has only one meaning, which is relevant to everyone irrespective of whether he is a believer or a non-believer. "Vinayaka" means that He is totally master of Himself. He has no master above Him, He does not depend' on anyone. He is also called Ganapathi. This term means He is the lord of the ganas---a class of divine entities. This term also means that He is the master of the intellect and discriminating power in man. He possesses great intelligence and knowledge. Such knowledge issues from a pure and sacred mind. This knowledge leads to Vijnana (wisdom). Because He is the master of Buddhi (intelligence) and Siddhi (wisdom or realisation), He is described as the Lord of Buddhi and Siddhi. Buddhi and Siddhi are referred to as the consorts of Vinayaka.

The mouse is the vehicle of Vinayaka. What is the inner significance of the mouse? The mouse is considered as the embodiment of the sense of smell. The mouse is a symbol of the attachment to worldly vasanas (tendencies). It is well known that if you want to catch a mouse you place a strong-smelling edible inside the mouse-trap. The mouse also symbolises the darkness of night. The mouse can see well in the dark. As Vinayaka's vehicle, the mouse signifies an object that leads man from darkness to light. The Vinayaka-principle, thus, means that which removes all the bad qualities, bad practices and bad thoughts in men and inculcates good qualities, good conduct and good thoughts.

Another name for Vinayaka is "Vighneswara." Easwara is one who is endowed with every conceivable form of wealth: riches, knowledge, health, bliss, beauty, etc. Vighneswara is the promoter of all these forms of wealth and removes all obstacles to their enjoyment. He confers all these forms of wealth on those who worship him. Vinayaka is described as "Prathama Vandana" (the first deity who should be worshipped). As everyone in the world desires wealth and prosperity, everyone offers the first place for worship to Vigneswara. It is only when the inner meanings of various aspects relating to the Divine are understood that worship can be offered to the Divine meaningfully. Unfortunately, as only the superficial and worldly meanings of the scriptural texts are expounded these days, men's devotion is growing weaker continually. It is essential for everyone to understand the inner meaning of the Vedantic texts.

Faith in God should never waver

One may have immense faith in God. But from time to time, the power of Maya may undermine this faith. In Mahabharata even staunch devotees of Krishna like Dharmaja and Arjuna displayed hesitancy in acting upto the advice of Krishna and had to be taught their duty through Bhishma and Draupadi respectively. Faith in God should never waver. In no circumstance should anyone go against the injunctions of the Divine. Whatever worship one may offer, however intensely one may meditate, if one transgresses the commands of the Lord, these devotional practices become futile. The reason is that the Divine has no selfish objective or aim. It is out of small-minded selfish motives that people act against the sacred commands of the Lord. Even small acts of transgression may in due course assume dangerous proportions. Like the clouds in the sky which are brought together or dispersed by the winds, the passage of time brings about for man the union or separation of associates and happiness or sorrow. Time is the form of God. It should not be wasted. It is to understand such sacred truths that festivals like Ganesa Chaturthi are celebrated.

Ganesa's intelligence

How did Vinayaka acquire siddhi (supreme powers)? His parents held a contest for their two sons--Ganesa and Subrahmanya. They said they will offer their grace in the form of a fruit to whoever came first in circumambulating the universe. The younger son Subrahmanya set out immediately on his peacock to go round the universe. On seeing Subrahmanya approaching his parents, almost at the end of his trip, Vinayaka, who had been quietly sitting all the while, got up and went round the parents and sat down. Parvathi observed that Subrahmanya, who had taken so much trouble to go round the universe, should be

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declared the winner. Parameswara asked Vigneswara what was the inner significance of his going round the parents. Ganesa replied: "The entire universe is permeated by both of you. The entire creation is a manifestation of the Siva-Sakti form. It is an act of delusion to attempt to go round this phenomenal universe. To go round both of you is the true circumambulation of cosmos." Then Parvathi exclaimed: "Yours is the fruit." Ganesa became the Lord of ganas (the Divine hosts). Easwara was so much impressed with the supreme intelligence of Vinayaka that he told him: "All those who wish to worship Me, will offer their worship first to you."

Such was the grace showered on Vinayaka. What is the reason? Ganesa's faith in the Lord and His omnipresence. The right path for all people is to develop faith in God and lead godly lives. Vighneswara is also regarded as gaja thelivi (one endowed with the wisdom of the elephant). The elephant is noted for its supreme intelligence. It is also known for its absolute loyalty to its master. It is ready to sacrifice its life itself for the sake of its master. The direct proof of this is Sai Githa (Bhagavan's elephant). Ordinarily hundreds of cars will be passing on the road. Sai Githa will take no notice of them. But when Swami's car happens to pass that way, it will instinctively notice it. It will rush to the road raising its familiar cry. What love for Swami! It will be no exaggeration if faith is equated with the elephant. When an elephant moves among the bushes, its path turns into a regular passage for all animals. It is thus a pace-setter for all animals. Vinayaka is a leader for all deities. Faith in Vinayaka should be developed as the exemplar for all deities and he should be worshipped as the embodiment of Divinity"

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol:24, Discourse 12-9-1991, Ganesh Chaturthi Day.