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The Formless Assumes Forms To Sustain Morality

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Everyone Bharat is the motherland of many noble souls who earned great name and fame in all the continents of the world.

This is the land of valorous people who vanquished foreign rulers and attained Independence.

This is the land that excelled in music, literature, and other fine arts.

Having been born in this great land of Bharat, oh boys and girls,

it is your sacred duty to protect its rich cultural heritage.

(Telugu poem)

The children of Bharath have celebrated the festival of *Vinayaka Chathurthi* in a grand manner. It was a happy occasion for all.

Embodiments of love, Dear students,

Who is Vinayaka? One has to realise this aspect in the first instance. Vinayaka is the Lord of the universe. He has no leader above Him. He himself is the leader for all. He is the Master of the universe. It is one's misfortune to forget such a Master.

The food that Lord Vinayaka takes is very sacred and refined. It has no oil content at all. Nine varieties of cereals are soaked in water and ground. Thereafter, the paste so prepared is made into "*kudumulu*" (*modakas*) and cooked by steaming. This is the food that is offered to Lord Vinayaka. It is also called "*undrallu*". Since it is cooked in steam with practically no oil content, it is most healthy.

Lord Vinayaka is omnipresent. He communicates by His silence. Even His commands are by silent communication. His movements are subtle. Wherever you see, you can find Him blessing and guiding His devotees on the right path.

The omnipresent Lord Vinayaka can be worshipped by one and all irrespective of religion, nation, and region to which one may belong. He is the Lord of learning and good behaviour; hence, every human being interested in good education and conduct can worship Him and seek His blessings.

It is a mistaken notion to confine Lord Vinayaka to the Hindu pantheon of gods in Bharath (India). It is not true. He is the Lord of the universe, verily, and its leader. That is why He is called 'Vinayaka' (one who has no leader above Him). By contemplating on such a Lord, all our sins will be destroyed. In fact, Lord Vinayaka is our very life-breath. It is sheer ignorance to worship such a great Lord of the universe as a mere idol made of some earthen material or some metal.

Vinayaka is your leader who leads you on the right path. You must therefore develop the feeling and awareness that Lord Vinayaka is within you and with you, constantly guiding you on the Godward path.

The idols of Lord Vinayaka seated on beautifully decorated chariots were brought into this hall in a procession yesterday by the students. Later, they were taken for immersion. What is the inner meaning of this ritual? Why are the idols of Vinayaka immersed in water? The immersion ceremony reminds us of the omnipresent nature of Lord Vinayaka. For, once the idols are immersed in the flowing river, they merge in water and spread everywhere. For example, when you mix sugar in water it merges into it and spreads everywhere. Similarly, Lord Vinayaka worshipped in the form of an idol would reveal His real nature of omnipresence after merging in water.

Lord Vinayaka constantly protects His children. He will always be with them. In fact, children are the property of Lord Vinayaka. Every human being should emulate His example. Children should never forget their parents, since all their life and education are the gift of their parents. Lord Vinayaka bestows *siddhi* and *buddhi* (wisdom and intellect) on His children who worship Him. Everything will accrue to the person whose *buddhi* (intellect) is straight.

Lord Vinayaka has a trunk, which He uses for breathing, drinking, and taking food.

If one enquires into the nature of Lord Vinayaka properly, it would be obvious that He is omnipresent. He is primordial. That is why Lord Vinayaka is worshipped before commencing any work. Even the food one takes will be offered to Him first.

There is a tradition among the *Bharathiyas* (Indians) to worship Lord Vinayaka before commencing even a small work. You might have observed that the musicians start their concert by singing a prayer to Lord Vinayaka. Even our students commence their *bhajans* with a prayer to Lord Vinayaka. In fact, Lord Vinayaka is the leader of your life, who leads and guides you through.

It is not enough to simply worship Him on one festival day like *Vinayaka Chavithi*. There is nothing like a particular day for the worship of the Lord like *Chavithi* (4th day before the full moon fortnight), *Ashtami* (8th day), *Navami* (9th day), etc. *Sarvada sarva kaleshu sarvatra Hari chintanam* (always, at all times, under all circumstances contemplate on God) is the command. Since it may not be possible for people to perform elaborate worship to Lord Vinayaka on all days, three days, five days or ten days are prescribed for one's convenience.

The food offered to Lord Vinayaka is healthy, simple, and easy to cook. Lord Vinayaka is portrayed as having a large belly. Though a variety of dishes are offered to Him, He does not take any of those items. The devotion of people is His food. The nature of Divinity is that He always gives but does not take anything in return from His devotees. Lord Vinayaka is the source and sustenance of all forms of life. He controls the lives and destiny of all beings. In fact, the entire universe is supported by Lord Vinayaka. If control is not in the hands of Vinayaka, there will be only *vinashana* (destruction).

It is a fact that people cannot live without air. It is the very life principle not only of humans but of all living beings. Lord Vinayaka permeates this life principle. He is the very embodiment of our breath. He is the *Soham Tattwa* (Soham Principle), verily.

The breathing process consists of three actions: *puraka* (inhaling), *kumbhaka* (holding the breath), and *rechaka* (exhaling). The regulation of these three actions is called *pranayama*. The processes of inhaling, retention, and exhaling of the air must be regulated in such a way that equal time is taken for each process and that the entire exercise is done in a natural manner without any strain. Then only is *dhyana* (meditation) possible.

Lord Vinayaka is the presiding deity of *pranayama*. He confers *vidya* (education) and *siddhi* (success in aim) on people. That is why He is extolled as *Siddhi Vinayaka*. These two are of ut-

most importance to a human being. Since there is none to explain this secret, people celebrate the festival of *Vinayaka Chaturthi* in a casual manner without realising its underlying significance.

It is customary in Bharath for the elephants to lead the ceremonial processions in any temple. We should realise the significance of an elephant leading the procession. Of all the beasts, the elephant is the largest in size. Once an elephant walks along a particular path, the footprints of all other beasts including that of a lion or a tiger will be erased by those of the elephant. The path made by an elephant even in a thick forest could be used by vehicles like a chariot in the earlier days or a car or a bus in modern times. That is why the marriage procession of Sri Rama in the Treta Yuga was led by an elephant brigade. The scene of that ceremonial procession was beautifully described thus:

Chariots, elephants, and horses,
The entire army of Dasaratha followed
The elderly Sage Viswamitra,
Emperor Dasaratha and his ministers too accompanying
The marriage procession of Sri Rama moved on.
What a beautiful sight to behold!"
(Telugu poem)

The elephant is such a majestic animal that its very trumpeting can silence the noise of all other animals, including the dog. The call of an elephant is so majestic and powerful. Lord Vinayaka has the face of such a majestic and sacred animal. Unfortunately, one does not realise the greatness and significance of His form and worships His idol in a casual and routine manner.

Not only Vinayaka but all physical forms attributed to divinity convey some deep spiritual meaning. However, God is not confined to mere physical form. Divinity has neither birth nor death, for it transcends physical form.

For example, who is *Brahman*? It is not the four-headed divine form that is usually associated with the creation. It is the Transcendental Principle that goes beyond name, form, and attributes. The primordial sound *Aum* is nameless and formless, as is the inhaling and exhaling process referred to as *soham* (I am that). *Brahman* has neither birth and death nor beginning and end. It is the Eternal Transcendental Principle that permeates the entire universe.

Neither birth nor death for Him, the Eternal One,
Neither beginning nor middle nor end for Him, the Ancient One,
Neither He takes birth nor dies nor is killed,
The all-pervading Atma is everywhere
As a witness to everything.
(Telugu poem)

Never forget such a Divinity. The one Divine Principle is present in every human being, nay in every living being. In fact, Divinity has to be understood as the principle of unity in diversity. Unity is *Brahman*.

Dear Students,

It is mere illusion to confine Divinity to one form like Rama, Krishna, Vinayaka, etc. If you make proper enquiry, it would be clear that the physical forms of Divinity are of human creation. They are born out of one's own imagination. No one has ever been able to visualise the nameless, formless, and attributeless Divinity.

For example, the artist Ravi Varma portrayed Divinity in different forms like Rama, Krishna, etc., based on his imagination and the descriptions contained in the epics and spiritual texts. But

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no one has ever been able to visualise God in a physical form. Yet, the physical form has an underlying meaning. For, the physical form cannot exist without a meaning.

Never forget the physical form. It is only from the physical form that morality spreads. The physical form sustains and propagates morality in the world by its own personal example. Thereby, morality gains strength in the world.

I was very happy to witness the enthusiasm of the students in celebrating the *Vinayaka Nimanjanam* ceremony. I am happy that the students have been able to understand the *Vinayaka Tattwa* (Principle) at least to a certain extent.

No one can understand the true nature of Divinity without understanding the spirit behind the different spiritual activities. One has to understand who Lord Vinayaka is, in the real sense. When you realise that He is the omnipresent leader, you can understand His divine nature well. You have to celebrate different festivals with proper understanding of their spiritual significance.