

20. Significance of Ganesha Principle

EMBODIMENTS of Love! One who recognises his identity with the Divine is a real *Jnaani* (the knower of the Absolute).

All Bhaaratheeya festivals are sacred and invested with deep spiritual significance. They are not to be celebrated as mechanical rituals.

Bhaaratheeyas hail Vighneshvara as; "Oh son of Paarvathi! Master of the *Ganas* (Ganaadhipathi)." Who is this Paarvathi? What is the relationship *between* Paarvathi and Ganapathi? People do not normally enquire into these matters. Usually Paarvathi is considered as the mother of Ganapathi and no one recognises the underlying unity between the two.

Where are Paarvathi and Ganapathi to be located? Are they in the external world or are they immanent in *every* human being? The truth is both of them are all-pervading and convey the message of *Ekaathmabhaavam* (spiritual oneness).

Meaning of the name 'Ganapathi'

What is the meaning of the name Ganapathi? Where are the *Ganas*? What is their form? When you investigate this, you find that *the Jnaanedhriyas* and *Karmendhriyas* (five organs of perception and the five organs of action) are the *Ganas*. The mind is the master over these ten organs. *Buddhi* (intellect) is the discriminating faculty above the mind. The ten senses, the mind and the intellect together constitute the *Ganas*.

In the word *Gana*, *Ga* stands for *Buddhi* (intellect). *Na* means *Vijnaana* (the higher knowledge or wisdom). Ganapathi is the Lord of the intellect and the higher knowledge. The question may be asked: "Are the intellect and the higher knowledge present in the external world or are they to be found within man?" The answer is that He is present within each human being. There is no need to seek for Him in the outside world. Ganapathi dwells in every human being in the form of intellect and wisdom.

When Ganapathi is described as "*Paarvathi thanaya*," who is this Paarvathi? Paarvathi signifies *Prithvi* (Mother Earth). Everyone is a child of Mother Earth.

The meaning of *Paarvathi thanaya* (son of Paarvathi) is that Ganapathi, who is the Lord of the *Ganas*, is the son of Paarvathi, who symbolizes *Shakthi* (the Divine Energy).

The adoration of Paarvathi and Ganapathi is not of recent origin. Ganapathi is lauded at several places in the *Rig Vedha*. This clearly shows that Ganapathi is as ancient as the *Vedhas*.

In several places Ganapathi is mentioned both in the *Vedhas* and the *Upanishaths*. There are many prayers addressed to Ganapathi in the *Mahaa Naarayanopanishath*. There are prayers to him in the *Thaithiriya Upanishath* also. The *Ganapathi Gaayathri Manthra* also figures in the former *Upanishath*.

Ganapathi has the appellation *Vinaayaka* because there is no master above him. He is all powerful and independent. Without recognising the esoteric significance of the *Vinaayaka Principle*, people look only at the external form and offer worship in mundane terms.

Vidhya is total awareness of Life

In what form does *Vinaayaka*--the one who has no master--exist within a human being? It is in the form of the *Aathma*. *The Aathma* has no master. The mind is the master of the *Indhriyas*

(senses) Indhra is the master of the *Indhriyas*. People conceive of Indhra as presiding over his own celestial realm. But as the Lord of the *Manas* (mind), he resides in everyone. The *Buddhi* (intellect) which is the master of the mind, is the very embodiment of *Jnaana* (Wisdom or Awareness). What kind of awareness is this Jnaana? It is Constant Integrated Awareness. It remains unchanged, neither growing nor diminishing. It is called *Vijnaana*. Unfortunately, nowadays *Vijnaana* is equated with science. Science is not *Vijnaana*. Science is phenomenal knowledge. It is based on demonstrability.

Students today worship Ganesha for success in academic studies and for developing into good scholars. As a matter of fact, all that is learnt by these studies may be termed education or learning but cannot be called *Vidhya* (true knowledge or wisdom). To apply the term *Vidhya*, which has a profound inner significance, to modern academic education is a misuse of language. *Vidhya* is awareness of the power that animates every cell in one's being. It is through this awareness that man learns all about the meaning of events in one's life from birth to death. *Vidhya*, in this sense is "a way of life". Everything you do is part of *Vidhya*. It is total awareness of life. It comprehends everything in its totality. It is for this kind of total knowledge that you should pray to Vinaayaka. The acquisition of degrees does not constitute *Vidhya*. To know up to the last moment how you should give up the ghost is *Vidhya*. The entire life of a man should be regarded as one continuous process of learning. A true student is one who pursues knowledge in this spirit. The student is called *Vidhyarthi* (*vidhya* + *arthi*--seeker of knowledge). The knowledge to be sought is not book knowledge or knowledge of the phenomenal world. It is *Aathma jnaana* (spiritual knowledge) that should be sought. Knowledge of the Self is the highest knowledge. The Geetha declares: "*Aadhyaathma Vidhya Vidhyaanaam*" (Among all forms of knowledge I am the knowledge of the Self). The true aim of life is to acquire this knowledge. Vinaayaka is the preceptor for this knowledge. That preceptor is within you. The Vinaayaka Principle is in everyone.

Offerings to Vinaayaka

There is a practice among Hindus when they go to Gaya to give up what they relish most among vegetables and fruits. In modern times this practice has been perverted in such a way that what are given up are the vegetable and fruit they do not like. In this connection there is a mythological story which reveals how the practice of offering fresh green grass to Ganapathi during the Vinaayaka Chathurthi festival originated.

Once, the story goes, Paarvathi and Parameshvara were playing the game of dice, with Nandheeshvara (Parameshvara's vehicle, the bull), as the umpire. Although Eeshvara lost the game, Nandhi declared Him as the winner. Enraged at this unfair decision Paarvathi cursed Nandhi that he would be afflicted with an incurable disease. Nandhi, seeking Paarvathi's forgiveness, explained that he gave the verdict in Parameshvara's favour because the latter was his master and his duty as a servant was to serve him. Paarvathi relented and said that Nandhi would be freed from the curse if he offered to her son Ganapathi what was most relished by Nandhi. Nandhi pondered for a moment and declared that what he loved most as a bull was fresh green grass. He would offer that to Ganapathi. That was how the practice of including fresh green grass among the offerings made to Ganapathi during festival occasions came into vogue.

Ganapathi accepts as offerings many things which men consider useless and trivial. One of the names of Vinaayaka is *Arkadronapriya* (one who loves thummi and jilled flowers which are

usually not valued by people). Other offerings to Vinaayaka include a special kind of grass. There is a story relating to this.

Why Eeshvara is known as 'Bhola Shankara'

once upon a time there was an *Asura* (demon) named Gajaasura. He performed a penance. Eeshvara, pleased with his penance, offered him as a boon whatever he desired. Eeshvara is a deity who is easily propitiated. Hence he is known as Bhola Shankara. When he is pleased with a devotee, He gives the devotee whatever he asks. Sometimes he gets into a difficult situation, as in the case of Bhasmaasura who was granted by Shiva the boon to turn into ashes anyone on whose head he placed his palm. Immediately after getting the boon Bhasmaasura wanted to test his power by trying to place his hand on Shiva's head itself!

What was the boon Shiva gave to Gajaasura? The demon desired that fire should go forth from him continuously so that no one dare approach him. Shiva granted him the boon. Gajaasura continued to do penance and Shiva used to appear before him off and on once Shiva asked him what he wanted. The demon said- "I want you to dwell in my stomach." Shiva granted the boon and lodged himself in the demon's stomach. Shiva's consort Paarvathi, searched for Shiva everywhere and could not find Him. As a last resort, she went to her brother, Vishnu, and appealed to Him to trace the whereabouts of her husband. The all-knowing Lord assured her: "Don't worry dear sister. Your husband is Bhola Shankara. He grants readily whatever boon his devotee prays for, without considering the consequences. I suspect that he must have got into some trouble. I shall find out what has happened."

How Vinaayaka got Gajaasura's head

Vishnu, who is the director of the cosmic play, staged a minor drama. He converted Nandhi (Shiva's bull) into a dancing-bull and led it before Gajaasura, while himself assuming the role of a piper playing music on the pipe while the bull did the dancing. Gajaasura was in ecstasy over the dancing performance of the bull. He asked the piper (Vishnu) what he wanted. The piper replied- "Can you give what I ask?" "What do you take me for? I shall readily give you whatever you ask." The piper said: "If that is so, release from your stomach Shiva who is dwelling there." Gajaasura then realised that the piper was none other than Vishnu Himself, who alone could know the secret of Shiva's presence inside his stomach. He fell at the feet of Vishnu, released Shiva from his stomach and prayed to Him for a boon. He said- "I have been blessed by many boons from you. My last request is that all should cherish my memory by worshipping my head after I pass away" Shiva thereupon brought his son and placed Gajaasura's head on him.

Ever since, the tradition has prevailed in Bhaarith that every auspicious function of any kind commences with worship of Ganapathi. It was the result of Shiva's boon to Gajaasura.

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 highly intelligent. The elephant is also known for its fidelity and gratitude. In any circumstance it will not forget its master. Even in its last moments, if it hears the voice of its master it will open its eyes and look for him. It will sacrifice its life for its master. 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.

Significance of steam-cooked offerings to Ganesha

There are some inner secrets that should be noted in the worship of Ganesha. Bhaaratheeyas make some special offerings to Ganesha as food offerings. These preparations are made entirely by using steam instead of heat from a burning stove. Combining rice flour with jaggery and *thil* (sesame) seeds, balls are prepared which are cooked in steam. In Ayurvedha this edible is accorded a high place for its curative properties. The jaggery in the edible is a remedy for various ailments. The til seeds serve to purify the arteries. It also helps to improve the vision. The inner meaning of all this is that the food offerings to Ganesha have health giving properties. It should be noted that edibles cooked in steam are easy to digest. In the Super Speciality Hospital, steam-cooked *idlies* (rice cakes) are offered to heart patients the very next day after surgery. Oily preparations are not given. Idlies are given because they are easily digested.

The Vinaayaka Principle, in short, symbolises health, bliss, peace, wisdom, prosperity, and many other things. Unfortunately this truth is not recognised by most people. People are content to offer some kind of mechanical worship to any odd figure made of clay and add to the pollution around them. What should be offered to God are things which will please Him. This is what Paarvathi enjoined on Nandheeshvara. She told him: "Offer to my son what will please him and what is most pleasing to you."

The Vinaayaka festival is designed to celebrate the offer of such pleasing things to Ganesha.

Symbolism of the Mouse

Another notable fact about Vinaayaka is his vehicle, the *Muushika* (mouse). What does the mouse represent? It represents darkness, which is the symbol of ignorance. The mouse moves about in the dark. Ganapathi is regarded as controlling the darkness of ignorance.

The mouse is also known for its strong sense of *Vaasana* (smell). Based on the smell emanating from an object, the mouse finds its way to it. The inner significance of *Vaasana* in relation to humanity is the heritage of *Vaasanas* which they bring from their previous lives. These *Vaasanas* (inherited tendencies) account for the actions of human beings in their present lives. They also signify desires. Without recognising this underlying significance and desires, people merely wonder how a large being like Vinaayaka could ride on a tiny creature like a mouse.

Vinaayaka signifies the triumph of wisdom over ignorance and of egolessness over desires.

Once there was a contest between Vinaayaka and his younger brother, Subrahmanya, as to which of them would go round the world first. Vinaayaka was highly intelligent and had extraordinary discriminating power. Above all, he was totally free from self-interest of any kind. This is the supreme attribute of the Divine. There is no trace of self-interest in what the Divine does. Few people can understand the true nature of God's love. Men tend to compare their own love with that of God. They do not realise that their love is based on attachment to what they like or what they are accustomed to enjoy the attraction or otherwise is not inherent in the objects themselves but in the *vaasanas* (cravings based on past impressions) of the individuals concerned.

Vivekanandha's discovery

Vivekanandha discovered this truth by observing the reactions of different persons to the same situation. seeing a man who had fallen on the wayside after taking intoxicating drinks, two thieves, who were themselves drunk, remarked that the man must be a thief like themselves who

had got drunk after a thieving expedition in the night. A man subject to epileptic fits thought that the man must have fallen in a fit. A *saadhu* seeing the unconscious state of the man, thought that he might be a *yogi* in a state of *Nirvikalpa Samaadhi* (super conscious state of meditation) and started massaging his legs reverentially. These varied reactions showed that men judge things not as they really are, but on the basis of their own feeling and experiences. Vivekanandha then realised that his doubts regarding the spiritual eminence of Svaami Raamakrishna were the result of his own misguided thinking and had no relation to Paramahansa's qualities.

he realised that there was no blemish in Raamakrishna and the fault lay with his own feelings. He regretted having come away from Raamakrishna and confessed to his mother his grievous mistake. He appealed to his mother to permit him to go back to Raamakrishna. She allowed him to act according to his inclinations. Vivekanandha realised that man's wayward thoughts accounted for his doubts and confusion regarding the Divine. The Divine is beyond blemish and deficiencies. Hence God is described as perfect, free from any taint, formless and attributeless. Ganapathi has been described as *Aprameya* (transcendent and all-encompassing). Hence he can be worshipped in any manner.

Prayers and tests

Chittibabu, in his speech earlier, appealed to Svaami to give you all good qualities, good thoughts and the strength to lead a good life. He went on speaking about receiving favours from Svaami, but said nothing about what he was offering to Svaami. God is ready to offer anything you want. But you must be eligible to receive it, like a depositor who can withdraw money up to the amount of his deposit. The same rule applies to what one can receive from God. It depends on the size of his deposit with the Divine. Then the cheque of his prayer will be duly honoured.

To enable your prayers to reach God you have to affix the stamp of 'faith' and address it with 'love'. If you have faith and love, your prayers will reach God regardless of distance.

You must see that your love for God is pure and unsullied. You must be prepared to subject yourself to God's rests. The sooner you pass these rests, the nearer you will get to God.

There can be no spiritual advance without going through these rests. Students should be aware that for going to a higher class they have to pass the prescribed rests.

In life, you are tested as to how much you are attached to the ephemeral things of the world and how much you yearn for the Divine. If your love for God is a tiny fraction of your love for mundane things, how do you expect God to shower His grace on you? (Svaami sang a song of Jayadeva in which he exhorts men to devote at least a fraction of the time they spend on their possessions and family to contemplation of God who will come to their rescue at the time of death).

How much more sacred it would be if men thought about God even for a few moments out of the many hours they waste on thinking about worldly things? People should develop their faith in this truth. Whatever faith they have in themselves that faith they should have in God. That is the mark of greatness. One who has no faith in himself, how can he have faith in God? Turn your faith away from the temporal and the transient to the unchanging eternal reality.

Power of faith

The power of faith is illustrated in an incident from the life of Christ. Once a blind man approached Jesus and prayed: "Lord! Restore my sight." Jesus asked him: "Do you believe that I

can restore your sight unhesitatingly: "Yes, Lord!" "If that is so, then open your eyes and see it," said Jesus. The blind man opened his eyes and got his sight. Likewise, people pray to Svaami to give something or other. Do you believe that I have the power to give what you seek? My response is dependent on your faith.

Even a person like Vivekanandha had doubts about Svaami Raamakrishna Paramahansa's saintliness. There have always been doubting Thomases. To test Raamakrishna's aversion to wealth and possessions, Vivekanandha once kept some gold coins under the pillow of Raamakrishna. The moment he reclined on his bed, Raamakrishna felt as if he was lying on a bed of thorns. Immediately, Vivekanandha realised how baseless were his doubts. He felt that to rise to the heights of the great souls he himself should elevate his soul. Men today are like a man on the ground who wishes to see the pilot of a plane moving in the sky. The only way he can see the pilot is to get into the plane himself. To experience God you have to aspire for a vision of God. That is the way to lead an ideal and blissful life.

Ganapathi should be worshipped for this purpose because he is the master of the senses and only the mastery of the senses can make man turn his mind God-ward. If you want to lead a life of happiness, free from troubles and difficulties, you have to pray to Ganapathi, the remover of all obstacles. There is no need to go to any temple. Vighneshvara dwells in each one of you as your *Buddhi* (intelligence) and *Vijnaana* (wisdom). When you make proper use of your inherent intelligence and wisdom, you will be successful in life.

People must realise the inextricable union of *Prakrithi* (Nature) and *Purusha* (the Supreme Divine) and base their life on this sense of oneness.

Humanness is a combination of the body and consciousness. Man has to embark on self-scrutiny as the first step in spirituality. Only then the reality can be comprehended. No one undertakes self-examination, though everyone is ready to condemn others. Only the person who is prepared to examine and punish himself for his lapses is competent to judge others.

Why Ganapathi festival lasts for ten days

Students! Realise that you have a conscience that is your guide and consciousness which represents your divinity. Ganapathi, who presides over the senses, should be your guide in acquiring mastery over the senses. There is an inner meaning in worshipping Ganapathi for ten days. The idea is that each day should be dedicated to acquiring control over one of the *Indhriyas* (sense organs).

Students and devotees should realise that control of the senses is quite simple. What is necessary is not to encourage negative feelings when they arise, but to adopt positive attitudes. For instance, Buddha confronted the anger of a demon with his love and transformed him.

Many students today are subject to depression and are confused in mind. The reason for this is their weakness owing to lack of self-confidence. When there is total faith in God there will be no room for depression.

Students! There is need for observing festivals like Vinaayaka Chaturthi for external satisfaction, but what is more important is to realise the inner significance of Vinaayaka worship which is likely to have lasting effect. The worship of inanimate idols should lead to contemplation on the subtle spiritual entity represented by the idol. This is the process by which realisation of the *Aathma* (Self) takes place.

Realise and act on the basis that the living Divinity is within you, Ganapathi represents the ideal person who is guided by intelligence and wisdom. Engage yourself in acts which will please the Divine such as moderation in speech, giving up ill-will and hatred and eschewing all bad thoughts and restraint on desires. By combining spiritual practices with academic studies make your life fruitful.

Discourse in Sai Kulwant Hall on 7-10-1997.

God is ignored in sunshine. He is wanted only when there is no light. Devotion must persist and flourish, unaffected by time, place or circumstance.

Baba