

Lord Ganesha

Hindus accept the existence of several gods, goddesses, and deities in the forms of animals and planets. Hindus also believe that all these gods/goddesses are not separate entities but different forms (modes) of the same supreme reality (Supreme-God or Paramaatman). Supreme God manifests himself in different forms or aspects for specific purposes. Hindus have free will to choose any form of the supreme God (*Ishta Devata*) to worship and pray. Whichever form they may choose to pray or worship, ultimately it leads to the supreme God.

Lord Ganesha is also one of the many forms of the God. He is also the first child of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. He is known by various names such as Vinayaka (knowledgeable), Vighneshwara (remover of obstacles), Gajanana (elephant faced) or Ganapati (a leader). Lord Ganesha has all leadership qualities. HE is a very unique form of the Supreme God. HIS unique form also carries symbolic meaning. Scholars interpret it in various ways. Following is the most commonly believed symbolic meaning.

Symbolic Meaning:

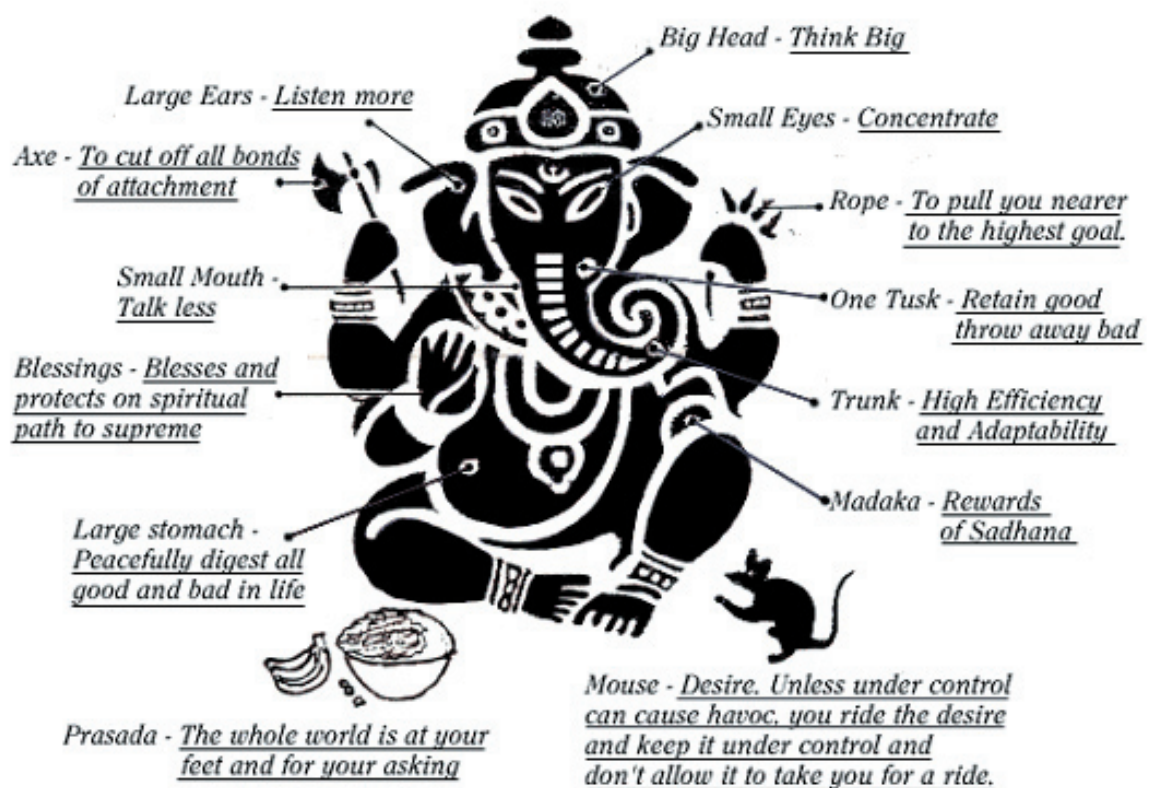
Ganesha has elephant's head, which is big. It symbolizes sharp intelligence and big thinking. An elephant's life is full of radiance, which comes from dignity and self-esteem. Also the elephant shares his food by scattering some around himself. It indicates the sense of generosity.

Ganesha has large ears, but small mouth. It indicates that one should talk less and listen more, but retain only the positive and constructive things. Large ears are also a symbol of acute and superior hearing. Ganesha's small eyes indicate sharp vision and concentration. Small eyes are also a symbol of foresight.

Trunk is the symbol of high strength, efficiency and adaptability. It can move the biggest obstacles and yet infinitely gentle in handling delicate objects.

Ganesha has one full and other half tusk. The partial tusk symbolizes intelligence and the full tusk symbolizes faith. Both are needed to progress in life. However the intelligence often falls short in providing answers to life's burning questions. When it falls short, faith in God and ourselves can lead us in life successfully. Full tusk also symbolizes that one should retain good and throw away bad things.

Ganesha's four hands have four things - Ankush (Elephant driver's iron rod or axe) It indicates us to cut off all bonds of attachment and restrain desires and passions. Paash (cord or rope) symbol of restrain and punishment. Modak is dry and hard from outside and sweet from inside and nourishing. This represents that



hard work (saadhana) brings joy, satisfaction and nourishment to

our souls. Aashirwaad means Ganesha blesses and protects us on our spiritual path to the Supreme.

Ganesha has large Stomach. HE peacefully digests all good and bad things without losing control. Ganesha's small legs indicate that one should not move hastily. He must not rush into anything. Each step must be slow, deliberate and well thought of.

Mouse-vehicle of Ganesha symbolizes desire. Desire, if not in control, can cause havoc. Ganesha rides on the mouse. One should ride the desire and keep it under control and do not allow desire to take you for a ride.

Durva, meaning grass, is placed on the head of Ganesh. The grass is something that we constantly walk on or trample on, paying little heed to it, while in fact it contributes so much to our survival by giving us oxygen. But we give importance to Durva by placing them on his head. This tells us no matter how much you are looked down upon or insignificant to others or not given the importance you deserve, you are important to Him. Red Flower indicates red color. Red color stands for total change or revolution.

Lord Ganesha possesses all leadership qualities. The best pooja offered to Lord Ganesha is to inculcate those qualities in us.

Ganesha Chaturthi:

Chaturthi means the 4th day of the month according to the Hindu calendar. It is the day of Lord Ganesha. Especially, 4th day of the month Bhaadrapada (August-September) is celebrated as a Ganesha Festival. It is the most popular festival of Hindus. People install Clay figures (moorti) of Lord Ganesha in their houses and perform pooja everyday in the morning and evening. The festival is so popular among the masses that its preparations start happening months in advance. His statues are also installed in the street corners and extravagant arrangements are made for decoration. Prayers are performed on the daily basis. The artists who make

Ganesh statues compete with each other to make bigger and more elegant statues. These statues are then carried on decorated floats to be immersed in the sea. This immersion is accompanied by drumbeats, devotional songs and dancing.

Pooja:

Pooja is the Hindu ritual of worshiping God in a systematic manner as described in the Vedic scriptures. An image or symbol of the deity is kept and worshiped by chanting the mantras & verses. The various names of the deity and the mantras are recited. Various offerings like fruits, flowers, sweets, milk etc. are offered. It is a way of expressing ones faith in God, a way of seeking salvation and a way of seeking His blessings. It also gives you discipline, satisfaction and peace of mind.

Worship of God in any form and in any way one likes is good as it reduces the negative side of one's Karma and improves the positive effects. Before doing any auspicious work, Lord Ganesha is to be worshiped. Before doing any pooja, Lord Ganesha's pooja is to be performed first. Gather following items to do pooja.

- ❧ Lord Ganesha's Moorti (or a big framed photo)
- ❧ Plantain leaf (if available or a plate) and rice for installing Lord's pratimaa.
- ❧ One plate (preferably a metallic) and some rice (2-3 cups)
- ❧ Ghantaa (bell)
- ❧ two coconuts or bananas
- ❧ Betel leaves, supaari (Betel Nuts)
- ❧ haldi, kumkum, akshata, flowers, garlands
- ❧ panchaamrita (honey, milk, ghee, curds, sugar - all in one cup)
- ❧ 2 small lamps with ghee and a cotton wick
- ❧ Agarbatti (and no camphor) and a match-box
- ❧ 2 small cups and a spoon, preferably metallic