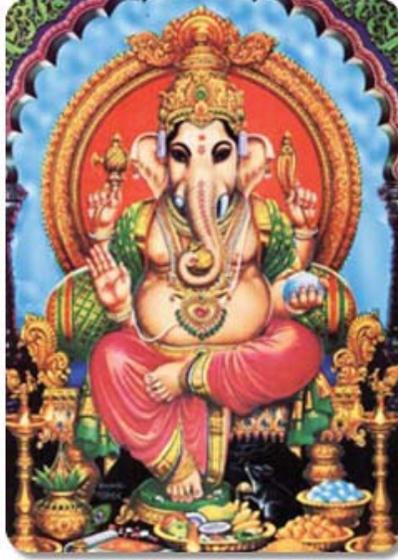


Sri Ganesha

Lord Ganesha, also called Vinayak (knowledge) or Vigneshwar (god to remove obstacles) is the elder son of Lord Shiva and Parvathi. Ganesha is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheons. He is revered as the remover of obstacles, lord of beginnings, patron of arts and sciences, and deva of intellect and wisdom. This god of knowledge is worshipped or remembered in the beginning of any auspicious performance for blessings and auspiciousness. Worshipping Ganapathi endows men with courage and confidence needed to enter upon and carry through tasks in this world.

He has an elephant's head, four hands, and a big belly. His vehicle is a tiny mouse. In his hands, he carries a rope (to carry devotees to the truth), an axe (to cut devotees' worldly attachments), and a sweet dessert (to reward devotees for spiritual activity). His fourth hand's palm is extended to bless people.

A unique combination of his elephant-like head and a quick moving tiny mouse vehicle repre-



sents tremendous wisdom, intelligence, and presence of mind. The elephant is well known for its intelligence. In the forest of life to clear the pain, sorrow, and suffering, one should tread along the path shown by the intellect, symbolized by the elephant. The mouse (mooshika) is a symbol of darkness and follower of the senses. Vinayaka is described as the rider on a mouse because he has control over the darkness and mastery over the Vaasanas (desires and ignorance). He is called Ganapathi because he is the supreme lord of the Ganas (Ganas are the embodiments of the organs of perception and of action). "Ga" means intellect. "Na" means "Wisdom", and "Pathi" means master. He is the embodiment of all potencies, and is the Pranava Swarupa (embodiment of Aum) and hence the first prayer is always addressed to him.

*PRADHAMAM VAKRATUNDAM CHA, EKADANTAM DWITEEYAKAM
TRUTEYAM KRISHNA PINGAKSHAM, GAJAVAKTRAM CHATURDAKAM
LAMBODARAM PANCHAMAM CHA, SHASHTAM VIKATAMEVA CHA
SAPTAMAM VIGHNARAJAM CHA, DHUMRAVARNAM TADHASHTAKAM
NAVAMAM BALACHANDRAM CHA, DASAMAM TU VINAYAKAM
EKADASAM GANAPATHIM, DWADASAM TU GAJANANAM.*

