

Spiritual Insights into Hindu Deities, Festivals and Rituals

(Ganesha Chaturthi)

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A Hindu festival is a celebration that integrates spiritual, philosophical, religious and cultural aspects of human life. The **spiritual** aspect is based on the basic human instincts of joy and happiness. The **philosophical** aspect is based on the principle that the good always wins in the constant struggle between the good and the evil. The victory of good is to be celebrated. The **religious** aspect deals with the particular rituals of that festival. *The spiritual insights of the stories of the specific manifestation of the God (Supreme Being) make the festival relevant to us.* The **cultural** aspect deals with the customs, activities, food, dress, social interaction with family and friends etc. *In the view of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer, "The planetary positions are favorable to spiritual development on these festivals and one should make use of these special timings".* Thus we see that festivals are not only a celebration and a means for spiritual development but also an effective means to convey the values of life to future generations.

Ganesha Chaturthi is a very important festival celebrated by Hindus around the world. It occurs during August-September of the year (fourth day of Shukla Paksha of Bhadrapada month). The form of Ganesha is not an imagination but is a yogic vision (of the Supreme Being) by the sages. Ganesha also means the ruler of the various faculties especially mind. Symbolically Ganesha's form indicates several concepts for us to focus. He is located as energy form in the Mooladhara Chakra. The elephant face indicates the omniscient wisdom. The large ears refer to the all-pervading listening ability. The goad in right hand denotes the control of mind. The noose in left hand denotes His control over changing world. The sweet dish in His hand signifies the fruits of the sincere hard work. The other hand signifies the protection. The four-hands together denote the four-goals of human life namely dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The curved tusk when bent to right denotes the OM and when bent to left signifies the blessings of spiritual and materialistic wealth. His large belly denotes that the faculties of the universe is embedded in Him. The snake as belt signifies the Kundalini power of yoga. The rat signifies the disturbing and leaky nature of mind. When Lord Ganesha is seated on the mind, it means that His grace firmly enables us to carry out the work successfully with the disciplined mind. Hence Lord Ganesha is worshipped before any work is begun so that no obstacles arise and deter the successful completion.

The story commonly associated with the festival is follows:

"The Goddess Parvati created a son out of her sweat. Then She made him to guard her chamber and told him not to allow anyone to enter. The obedient boy strictly followed the rule. Lord Shiva came to enter Goddess Parvati's chamber. However the boy did not allow Lord Shiva and was very firm in stopping Lord Shiva to enter. The boy did not allow Lord Shiva to pass. In spite of Lord Shiva's intent, the boy did not yield. Lord Shiva became angry and chopped off the boy's head. As soon as Goddess Parvati came to know of this, she was very upset and asked Lord Shiva to bring back Their son. Lord Shiva sent His subordinates to find a suitable head for the boy. They brought the head of a sleeping elephant facing north, and the head was put on the boy. Lord Shiva and

Goddess Parvati blessed Their son who is now worshipped as Lord Ganesha (Lord of all faculties) and also Lord Vighnesha (God who removes all obstacles for the mind).

The spiritual interpretation of the story based on the vision of yoga is as follows:

Goddess Parvati represents Mother Nature. The first layer of Nature is Earth. The interpretation of Goddess Parvati creating Her son using Her sweat refers to Her creating with the first layer of Her body. The element of Earth refers to Mooladhara Chakra in which Lord Ganesha's spiritual energy form is held (Ganesha Atharva Upanishat). Thus we see correspondence between Lord Ganesha, Mooladhara Chakra and the element Earth. After the boy was created, Mother Parvati asked him not to allow anyone into Her chamber. However, this rule does not apply to Her husband Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are not only husband and wife but also are the father and mother of the universe and they are inseparable. When the boy becomes indifferent to this fact and does not allow Lord Shiva, Lord Shiva gives him a punishment by chopping of his head. However after learning from Parvati, Lord Shiva blesses His son with an elephant's head to signify the omniscient wisdom. Then both Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati bless Ganesha as the Lord of all faculties and mind. Thus, Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped before starting any work as His blessings will remove obstacles to our mind.

In addition, on the night of Ganesha Chaturthi, it is forbidden to see the moon. This is because as the story goes, the moon laughed at Ganesha when He fell off His rat. The interpretation of this is that Lord Ganesha is responsible for disciplining the mind. The moon signifies a wavering mind. On Ganesha Chaturthi one should meditate and focus the mind. Looking at the moon on the night of Ganesha Chaturthi, will signify wavering and a lack of focus.

Also in the celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi, the deity of Lord Ganesha is made of mud and is worshipped. Then in the evening, it is submerged in a lake or river. The spiritual insight is that the mud (earth) signifies the Mooladhara chakra and the when it is mixed with water, the energy is raised to a higher Manipoora Chakra. The physical form of the Lord is merged into the formless. Thus, we see that the physical form of the Lord Ganesha, the story and the celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi essentially deal with our mind and the ways of making our mind to take spiritual inner journey to reach the destination of God-realization. We know the utmost importance of our mind in life and living. Thus praying and worshipping Lord Ganesha with spiritual insight can only help us in reaching the goal.

References:

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