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Harold Coward, Editor

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Inlaid rosewood Ganapati killing Gajamukhasura

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Ganapati

Song of the Self

John A. Grimes

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

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For Gurumayi

Srinathadi guru ganapatim

Vande guror mandalam

Tasmai srigurave namah

I bow to the Primordial Guru

To Ganapati

To the Guru's Cosmos

Salutations to Sri Guru again and again

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Preface

गणानां त्वा गणपति हवामहे
 कविं कवीनामुपमश्रवस्तमम्
 ज्येष्ठराजं ब्रहणां ब्रहणस्पतं
 आ नः शृण्वन्नुतिभिः सीद सादनम्

gaṇānām tvā **gaṇapatīm** havāmahe,
 kavim kavīnāmupamaśravastamam
 jyestharājam brahmaṇām brahmaṇaspata,
 ā nah śrīnvattūtibhiḥ sīda sādanam

We invoke Thee, Chief amongst all assemblages, Lord of all,
 Of wise ones, the wisest, incomparable in name and fame,
 Eldest prince, prime principle of all prayers,
 Hear us Lord, pray be seated, bless us in our abode
 Rg Veda 2.23.1

Who is Ganapati? On the one hand, with his elephant's head atop a plump human body, he is easily the most recognizable of all the deities in the Hindu pantheon. On the other, he is an enigma. Merely to label him "the elephant-headed god" does not advance one's knowledge very far. That is but to give him a name and, as we shall see, the elephant-headed one has many names. His earliest historical reference was as "Ganapati"; the most popular name by which he is now known is "Ganesa." But a name does not tell us

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who he really is, where he came from, what he embodies or represents.

The profundities of things, their deeper, hidden nature, can be discovered only by penetrating their apparent surface. Ganapati/ Ganesa shapes, and in turn is shaped by, many factors. His sphere of influence touches personal experiences,

religious texts, creeds, moral codes, ritual procedures, rites, myths, stories, parables, dramas, festivals, ethical admonitions, attitudes, and beliefs. In a myriad of ways, Ganapati gives shape to a world, order out of chaos, meaning out of incomprehensibility. Exactly what it all means is another matter, however. Observers, participants, scholars, and devotees are certainly free to read into the materials whatever seems consistent, fair, and faithful to their own understanding. Ganesa is many things to many people.

Further, the Vedic tradition itself informs us that three levels of scriptural interpretation happen *simultaneously*: the extrinsic or physical (*adhibhautika*), the intrinsic or cosmic (*adhidaivika*), and the transcendent or spiritual (*adhyatmika*). O'Flaherty charts four levels of meaning possible in a given myth. 1 These are the narrative (the story itself), the metaphoric (wherein various themes link together), the metaphysical, and the social/psychological. Court-right adds a fifth level of possible meaning, the etiological.2 Of these five levels, he says, "It is important to note that these levels of meaning operate simultaneously. Any adequate treatment of the myths' possibilities for interpretation must take them all into account."3

There are those who say that Ganapati is the writer of one's destiny. At least one legend speaks of him as the scribe of the *Mahabharata*, an Indian epic. Others contend that he is but a quaint elephant-headed god of good fortune, a sort of coffee-table good-luck charm. Others think he is but a derivative of various other deities, made much the way the camel was made by the proverbial committee. Still others believe that he is a manifestation or embodiment of the Divine, though exactly what that manifestation may mean (symbolical, physical, literal, analogical, enigmatic ...) is open to individual interpretation.

Scholarship is replete with records of those who have attempted to plumb the mysteries of Ganapati. Anthropologists, religious aspirants, historians, indologists, philosophers, religionists, sociologists, linguists, artists, and contemporary devotees are but some of the more recent representatives of this enquiry. Each group has attempted, and continues to attempt, to make sense out of this enormously popular deity. And isn't it strange that even though

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Ganapati is so incredibly popular, there has been relatively little work done to date to explain this popularity?

Virtually all scholars are agreed that it is almost impossible to trace, with any precision, the history of Ganesa. His roots and evolution are rife with hints, inuendos, speculations, imaginations, and intuitional guesses. This is to be expected, since there is scant historical evidence that provides any type of certainty as to his origins or the route he took in arriving upon the cosmic stage. Even his devotees are divided when it comes to explaining, Who is Ganapati?

Within the scholastic arena, the definition and parameters of what constitutes "knowledge" are exploding. The days are ending for those who would like to dogmatically privilege rational and visual (i.e., read logical and written) approaches to knowledge and understanding. It was once thought fashionable to propound the doctrine that whatever can be known/thought/understood, *can be said* briefly and clearly. Such a Procrustean bed was nothing more than a methodological presupposition (a demand for empirical evidence as the paradigm of the truth) that foisted a dogmatic criterion of truth upon thought. Map was mistaken for territory.

This work is an attempt to present Ganapati from another possible perspective, from "within" a tradition. As such, it employs (so called) objective materials side by side with subjective interpretations in an attempt to transcend both. The presupposition made is that Ganapati points to the source of all presuppositions. He embodies the Self (*Atman*), which cannot logically be denied nor doubted. The Self is affirmed by the very act of its denial. It is the basis of all proving or doubting. It does not presuppose its own possibility but is the very basis of everything else. Upon the "I" hangs the tale. Anyone who questions it must assume it in order to do the questioning. It is an attempt to describe and invoke a quest into a reflective type of enquiry into the question, Who is Ganapati?

Any and every approach to Ganesa has certain presuppositions built into it. This book's approach is no different. It presumes that one may, in a thoroughly consistent manner, interpret whatever Ganesa materials are available. Further, it presumes that this approach can be made from "within" the material's tradition.

Those in quest of the Divine, in search of the inner Ganapati, are less interested in information *about* Ganapati than in "*who* Ganapati really is," *in a spiritual context*. Ultimately, some will aver, the quest for Ganapati is but a quest for one's own Self. These people presuppose that the Self (*Atman*) is Real, that the individual human being is not (merely) the

physical body, that the individual

is the Self. The consequence of accepting such presuppositions is that Ganesa (who is considered Real) must also be more than/other than a physical body and thus "information about" is not as relevant as "experience of." Spiritual seekers are primarily looking for a personal experience, for personal liberation, and not for information about an "other," no matter how wonderful or interesting or even divine.

In attempting to answer the question, Who is Ganapati? this book assumes the posture of a "quest for the Self." It attempts to describe Ganesa from the point of view of a seeker. Further, it explores the possibility that Ganapati lore need not *necessarily* be parochial but can be logically interpreted or expanded to pertain to all individuals, at all times and all places, by elucidating that its purport pertains to the "I," the Self of everyone.

While acknowledging that all three Vedic levels of interpretation, or all five of O'Flaherty/Courtright's levels of interpretation are simultaneously applicable, this discussion presupposes that that which is grosser, more external, and less pervasive is less real than what is subtler, more internal, and more pervasive. By this type of analysis, one ultimately arrives at the Self, which is the subtlest, most pervasive, innermost Being.

This book brings together materials on Ganapati from such diverse sources as hymns, poems, myths, shrines, practices, and theologies. Hopefully it will allow the reader to free him or herself from a totally analytical perspective and enter into a devotee's perspective. Though it employs information *about* Ganesa, it is more concerned with devotion *within* a tradition and, further, how that devotion may have universal connotations.

One method that some traditional Indian texts employ to invoke a particular perspective is to begin in the form of a dialogue between Lord Siva and his consort Parvati.⁴ This allows one to enter directly into the world of the dialogue. It subtly points one's mind in a particular direction. "Who is Ganapati?" is a many-faceted question. He may be an "other." He may be the product of a fertile imagination. He may be the one asking the question. The possibilities are many. However, one should never lose sight of the possibility that the meaning of a text, or of a deity, may not always be part of surface appearances. Priceless pearls are said to exist in the depths of the ocean. It is simplistic to proclaim their nonexistence merely because one demands their presence on the surface.

The following passages are the author's imaginary internal dialogue in an attempt to point to the direction of the internal footsteps of Ganesa which he hopes the reader will follow. Perhaps they

will give an insight into, or will point towards, the path this book will be taking.

Parvati asked, "That song about the Elephant Prince. Is it some kind of allegory? And the part about not looking back. ."

The sounds of the song rippled along the edges of Lord Siva's mind, and he knew that silence was the only answer.⁵ Nothing happens by chance. Though, who understands? "Those who know, know not . . ."

She continued, "You said that the King of the Elephants lives in the north."

Lord Siva replied, "Flowers dropped on the way. Some think of them as clues, others as entertainment, and still others as sheer nonsense. But clues glide away like a whisp of smoke through outstretched fingers grasping for a never-to-be-forgotten fact. Yet, once, before the time of the kings, it was black and chilling as the touch of ice, of iron. There dwelt a fear, not of appearance itself but of the shifting elusive shapes behind the appearance. Jackals, alert and vicious, with gleaming eyes and an implacable mouth."

"Stop, enough, enough." She felt plunged hopelessly out of her depth and she cried, "Enough, enough of your song."

"You see, clues are not always visible to one's sight. Slowly, patiently. Time is precious but it is not given to every moment to appear magical. Now, listen to my song . . ."

Stories provide written and/or oral clues. Structures present spacial clues. Although there are countless Ganesa temples distributed in every nook and cranny of India, there are eight time-honored self-existent (*svayambhu*)temples in Maharashtra that compose what is known as the "*asta vinayaka* complex." These eight shrines form a *mandala* of sacred space.

Each chapter of this book begins with an anecdote, story, or elucidation of one of the eight *asta vinayakas*. Hopefully these will provide an insight or doorway into who Ganapati/Ganesa is. There is a subtle connection between each Vinayaka and his particular chapter, though they are not always apparent at first glance.

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Indian tradition is fond of employing such connections: eight Ganesas, eight temples, eight chapters, eight contemplations, and so forth." 7

Eight divine doors are employed as thresholds, entrances, focal points to the sacred space that is Ganapati, the lord of beginnings, the keeper of the threshold, as well as the *sanctum sanctorum*.Here is his siren song of the Self, beckoning one to take up the inner quest:

The tale goes on, as is now well known, of the things that were done at that time, of the things that are yet to be done, of the sorrow long foreseen, and of the victory unlooked for.

Ganapati is the writer of one's destiny.

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Acknowledgments

There are three paradigmatic perspectives that an individual may assume in relation to the Divine. When one thinks of oneself as one's physical body, one is a servant to the Master. When one thinks of oneself as an embodied soul, the Divine is the Whole and one is a part of that Whole. When one knows oneself as one really is, one is the Divine.

She loves me very much, though I am but one of Her infinite children. Neither really knowing how to give Her happiness nor competent, still I offer this work to Her. She conceived the idea. She nurtured it. Inside and outside, innermost element everywhere always. Before, behind, above, below, whatever path one travels is Her path. Who can gage how much the child is indebted to the Divine Mother for Her infinite care? Again and again I offer my thanks.

I also would like to offer my immeasurable thanks to the *pujari* of the Sri Ballalesvara Temple at Pali, who, without his knowledge, made my life, as well as that of my family, infinitely richer. As well, I offer my *pranams* to Vedamurti Sri Vivek Godbole and Vedamurti Sri Mandar Khaladakar.

A special word of gratitude goes to the SYDA Foundation. The impetus for the book began in South Fallsburg, took shape in Ganeshpuri, and was nurtured in courses around the world.

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A special word of gratitude goes to Ruth Fisher, Production Editor, and to Carol Newhouse, Copy Editor, for seeing the manuscript

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through the publishing process. Only the author *really* knows their contribution and thus, again and again, I say thank you.

To Bonnie Doyle I extend my deepest thanks for providing the exquisite cover painting of Ganapati.

All of the photographs and drawings are mine.

For these individuals, as well as all the others whom, though too numerous to mention, may the Grace of Ganapati, the lord of beginnings, remover of obstacles, always be with you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

JOHN A. GRIMES
GANESA CATURTHI, 1994

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Scheme of Transliteration

अ	a	आ	ā	इ	i	ई	ī
उ	u	ऊ	ū	ऋ	r	ऋ	r̥
ए	!	়	e	়ে	ai	়ো	o
়ৌ	au	়াঁ	am	:	়h		
ক্	k	খ্	kh	গ্	g	়gh	়h
চ্	c	ছ্	ch	জ্	j	়jh	়h
ত্, ত্	t	়, ত্	th	়, ত্	d	়dh	়h
দ্, দ্	t	়, থ্	th	়, ত্	d	়dh	়h
প্	p	ফ্	ph	শ্	b	়bh	়h
়্য	y	ৱ্	r	়, অ	l	়v	
শ্	s	ষ্	s	়, ম	s	়h	

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Figure 1
Poster of Sri Ganesha Prasanna

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1
Introduction

*Shall I be gone long? Forever and a day.
Where will I go? Ask my song.*
C. D. Lewis

From the Formless to Form

*He who has no beginning
Yet can make a beginning
Can surely make an end.*
W. Krickeberg

Once there was neither Being nor nonbeing. 1 There was neither form nor formlessness. Then . . . , That which was hidden within Itself, That One, stirring, emerging, coming to be. From Itself to the Formless to the Form. Immutable, changeless, everywhere, pervading all, yet not physically such is the mystery.

Suddenly an ancient note piercing the darkness. A song whose birth stirred the slumbering, summoning an eternal mystery to awaken. Emerging from deep within the hidden cave, the human heart, Ganapati's truth flows from the ice cave of the infinite. Housed within our gated dwelling, Ganapati the guest loved and longed for (the subject of chapter two).

That which has no form, can take a form. That which has no name, can take a name. From the formless to form, and back again and again and again (chapter three).

The wheel of time gathers speed, and somewhere between fact and legend, vision and myth, we ask ... Who is Ganapati? There are those who lovingly sing his praises. There are those who worship and adore him. There are those who represent him in art and

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literature. There are those who tell stories about him. There are those who chant his glory. There are those who seek his *darsana*. 2 There are those who invoke and invite his blessings. The thinkers think, the scholars scholasticise, the devotees worship. But what is Ganesa's hidden meaning?

Seemingly incongruous facts coincide simultaneously. Ganapati/Ganesa embodies: an enormous popularity that transcends sectarian and territorial limits; a seemingly rather late, yet dramatic, full-blown appearance into a religious pantheon; 3 a confusing, conflicting, yet interesting and intriguing mythology; and an elephant's head atop a plump human body! To further complicate the picture is the fact that the physical representation of Ganapati offers more iconographic variations than does that of any other Indian deity. Couple this with the fact that Ganapati literature is rife with a seemingly endless number of stories on an unexpectedly limited number of themes. O Ganapati, who are you really? Tell the others what you want, tell them anything, but between you and me, who are you really? (chapter four).

Who is this radiant, enchanting child who dwells within one's heart? 4 Throughout history, saints, sages, and seers have declared that from eternity he dwelt hidden within the womb, in the secret heart cave, until the mother of the universe brought him forth. Then, born into the light of the world, born into one's conscious experience, tusked with bright blue light, he sings his siren song (chapter five).

That each individual human being is a child of immortality (*amrtasya putra*), a manifestation of the Divine, an embodiment of the immortal Self (*Atman*), is a fundamental tenet of most Hindu scriptures and systems. The Self sings its siren song, which impells and compels everyone, everywhere, to seek eternal happiness and not to rest content until it is found. It is a given presupposition of these philosophies that, one day or other, one incarnation or other, all individuals will realize their true nature (chapter six).

A God is worshipped in a particular form, at particular times, in particular places, for particular purposes, addressed by particular names. There are functions to perform as well as petitions to grant. The One Self may appear in many forms. Different aspects of this one great reality are personified as deities, each with its own significant legends and symbols. The singer sings (chapter seven).

You know, there are deep songs and dark songs, ethereal songs and shimmering songs. There are songs that ring and songs that roar. Some are audible, concrete, and tangible, others hover in the air just out of reach, like enticing portents faintly heard far off, and

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still others await their turn patiently (or impatiently) in the unlit temple of eternity. How strange and wonderful they all are. And when two songs murmur together, sometimes they are hostile and antagonistic to each other, and they fight and hate disturbed. They cry out in anger like two mad monsters that, chained up, are biting at their fetters and beating against

the bars of their prison. And sometimes two songs enchant one another, and they embrace, illuminating mystery's mask. Such is the child's journey through the forest of sounds, and round the child are a thousand forces lying in wait, beckoning to caress or devour. The singer, singing, is sung (chapter eight).

Everything is a part of one's song. Each moment is *the* moment. You are not in the worldthe world is in you. You are not the physical body, Awake! The clash of forces, the dance of joy and anguish; everything that throbs or slumbers, like one searching for a hardly dared to be hopemeeting only the corpse of one's desire. Is it possible to change one's song? There is no other way in life, no other song than the one symphony from age to age (chapter nine).

A number of years ago I was asked to give a series of talks on Ganesa. Subsequent to these talks I made plans to do some further research work on Ganesa in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the two strongholds of Ganesa worship within India. In Maharashtra I had a strange experience. I was visiting a samadhi-shrine of a twentieth-century Indian saint. Directly under the place where his body was buried, there was a meditation cave. I entered this cave and sat down to meditate. The cave was pitch black except for the light that emanated from the flames of the oil lamps upon the altar. After sitting down with my eyes wide open, I saw before me a life-size figure of a human body with an elephant's head leaning against the altar wall. I could scarcely believe my eyes and blinked and stared and stared and blinked, yet the figure remained standing there. I observed that his right arm was raised with his right hand in *abhaya mudra* (the gesture of "have no fear"), and the left arm was relaxed with the left hand holding the *gada* (club). His left leg was crossed over his right leg at an angle with the left knee bent. Once I was sure he was really there, I began to search his eyes and to my surprise his large, dark brown eyes were searching mine even as I probed his. I cocked my head this way and that as I peered into his eyes, and to my surprise he was peering the same way into mine. It was as if each of us were simultaneously "checking the other out" to determine if "the other" was really there.

Suddenly the figure of Ganesa turned into a figure of a man standing in exactly the same pose. He was leaning against the wall

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with one hand in *abhaya mudra* and the other holding the *gada*. After a few moments, he dropped the upright fingers of his right hand into a fist except for the little or baby finger, which continued in an upright position. A wheel of light (*cakra*)appeared, encircling his little finger, and he slowly began to rotate the finger; this had the effect of causing the wheel of light to slowly rotate. Suddenly, upon the wheel appeared various beings in various positions. As the wheel rotated faster and faster, these beings began to fly off into space in different directions. And then this person flicked his little finger, and the wheel flew off into an arcing semicircle heading straight for my forehead. It hit me in the forehead, between the eyebrows, and exploded in a flash of light. Waves of bliss coursed through my body and I felt "drunk" with delight.

But that is not the whole story. Soon thereafter I arranged an interview with a *brahmin* priest who was not only a specialist in the *Krsna Yajur Veda* but also a Ganesa *upasaka* (a worshipper of Ganesa). I sent him some questions the first of which was: "Do you know of a standing Ganesa with two arms, one upraised in *abhaya mudra* and the other holding the *gada*?" I said that I had encountered many different *murtis* (images) of Ganapati during my research but that I had never encountered one like this. When I met the priest in person, he asked, "Where did you learn of this *murti*?" I replied, "It does not matter where I learned of such a one, do you know of this Ganesa?" Again he asked, "Where did you learn of this particular Ganesa in the standing position with two arms, one upraised in the gesture of fearlessness and the other holding a club?" Again I replied, "It doesn't matter; do you know him?" He replied that such a Ganesa is described in the *Ganesa Purana*, a Sanskrit text that is an important authority for the Ganapatyas (sectarian devotees of Ganapati) in Maharashtra. Tradition claims that Ganesa in his four-armed form as Mahaganapati will be both prevalent and popular during the early part of the *kaliyuga* (the present Age of Strife), but that as time passes this two-armed form will manifest and become popular as an *avatara* (incarnation) of Ganesa." 5

The *upasaka's* description of scriptural support confirmed my personal experience. Unexpected, it arrived "after the fact." Wonderfully, it confirmed that which had been experienced. More wonderfully, that which was experienced had not, and could not have been, previously known to the author. Hindu tradition claims that one aspect of Ganesa is that he is known for being "easily appeased" (*sulabham*). Is this an instantiation of that characteristic?

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Within the toolbox of the world, scholasticism and devotionalism both exist. May the reader "feel" as well as "understand" what Ganesa, who Ganesa, why Ganesa, where Ganesa might mean. May the reader be allowed to free him or herself from a purely analytical perspective and to sense another, in many ways more culturally accurate, relationship with the material. Who is Ganapati?

Mythmaker, Oathbreaker

Myriad are the ways in which Ganapati has been, and may be, conceived. There are those which refer to him as ... one's song is Ganapati and Ganapati is oneself and Ganapati is the Absolute. God, Ganesa, Ganapati, *Guru*,Self-not a hair's breath's difference. Ganapati is abundance overflowing and good fortune manifest. Ganapati is the *adi ista devata* (one's first personal divinity). Ganapati is *Agni*,fire, sacred and mundane; priest of the sacrifice as well as that into which the sacrifice is poured. Ganapati is the *antaryamin* (the divine spark within). Ganapati is the *Atman*,the indwelling immortal Self. Ganapati is the *nila bindu* (blue pearl) 6as well as the *nila purusa* (blue person). Ganapati is *Varada*,the boon giver. Ganapati is *Brahmanaspati*,the creator, evoker of the worlds, who, by his cry, creates. Ganapati is a child of *Parvati*,the Divine Mother. Ganapati is cosmic. Ganapati dances. Ganapati is the Divine Child. Ganapati is a divine incarnation. Ganapati is elephant faced. Ganapati is everywhere. Ganapati is the gatekeeper. Ganapati is the *Guru* (the Divine Teacher). Ganapati is immanent. Ganapati is the *kundalini sakti* (the cosmic energy that lies coiled within each individual). Ganapati is the lord of beginnings. Ganapati is the lord of the mind. Ganapati is lord of the multitudes. Ganapati is the lord of obstacles as well as the remover of obstacles. Ganapati is a *murti* (image, icon). Ganapati is the *Omkara*.Ganapati is possessor of *siddhi* (perfection) and *buddhi* (wisdom). Ganapati is potbellied. Ganapati is protector of the weak. Ganapati is the *purusa-kara* (the mediator between the human being and the Divine). Ganapati is the Remover of obstacles. Ganapati is seated in the *muladhara cakra* (the fountainhead of evolutionary energy located within each person at the base of the spine). Ganapati is single-tusked. Ganapati is the student (*sisya*).Ganapati is the son of Siva. Ganapati is *svayambhu* (self born). Ganapati is a physical embodiment of *tat tvam asi* [that thou art]. Ganapati is three eyed. Ganapati is the lord of the

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threshold. Ganapati is transcendent. Ganapati is your own Self. Verily, Ganapati is your own Self.

Ganesa, the knower of every beginning, bears one over every difficult crossing. He swings open all the divine doors and gives one easy passage for one's expansion. Ganesa, indeed, is the visible Truth. That thou art (*tat tvam asi*).Ganesa indeed produces, sustains, and dissolves the universe.

Ganapati is the embodiment and essence of sound. Ganapati is pure consciousness. Ganapati is pure bliss. Ganapati is *Brahman*.Ganapati is *sat cit ananda*,Existence, Consciousness, Bliss absolute. Ganapati is one without a second. Ganapati is the visible lord. Ganapati is the invisible lord. Ganapati is wisdom and knowledge.

As the elephant-faced one, surely Ganapati/Ganesa must be the easiest god to recognize since time began and space rolled out. Space and time themselves are his creation. 7He is the great God to be invoked before every act, and especially worshipped and prayed to when changes occur in one's life. Worship of Lord Ganesa is immediate and experiential. Every beginning finds him present. Every moment is his manifestation. One has but to think of him and he is there. He is listening. *Gana* in Sanskrit means a "multitude," *pati* and *isa* both mean "lord." Thus Ganapati/Ganesa is the lord of the multitudes, of all beings.

But is that all? To enquire into Ganapati is to enquire into What-Is. It is to quest after what is real, what is ultimate, what is certain. In this day and age, every television/movie viewer knows that the "final frontier" is space.8But space is not the final frontier. The *final* frontier carries with it an odor of finality, of completeness, of certainty. No matter how far one travels outward, the final frontier will always lie within. Logically, one may always doubt whatever one encounters as an "other." One could travel to heaven and look over to the throne of God and wonder whether or not that "entity" over there is really God. One may always doubt the "other." We are smart enough, sophisticated enough, to know about dreams and hallucinations and visions and illusions and relative perspectives. Think about it-all one may be certain of right now is that one is present. This book may not be real, the act of reading may not be realbut that *you* are present is indubitable.

Is there something certain, something that one may *never* doubt? Ganapati/Ganesa, the elephant-faced, the single-tusked one, points to the fact that one can never doubt one's own Self, the doubter him or herself. No matter where one finds oneself, oneself is *always* there. Why, the very act of doubting oneself is but an affir-

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mation of oneself, for, one can always ask, Who exactly is doing the doubting? To say that "I do not exist" is to affirm the "I" who is doing the doubting. Who is this "I"? That is the essence of Ganesa. But I am getting ahead of myself.

A friendly, slightly chubby, elephant-headed deity is an enigma disclosing space/time's mask. What are space and time but disclosures/appearances of the Divine? Further, space and time are themselves tantalizers. The siren song of Ganapati alluringly *begins* there. *Begins*? When is the true beginning? Logically, one can always ask the question, What went before? *There*? Before space unfolded and the river of time from the ice cave of eternity began to flow, where was there?

Not only are space and time necessary as coordinates to order things and events in the drama known as the story of Ganapati/ Ganesa, the story of the universe, the story of you and me, but they are the foundation/presupposition upon which anything and everything in the known universe depends. Where they end, the great unknown begins. At the same time, they are immense mysteries that the mind cannot contain. They are enigmas, though for different reasons. The riddle of time is the riddle of *beginning*. When is then? The riddle of space is the riddle of *location*. Where is there? Between "no where" and "now here" is just a slip of the pen!

What is 'space'? What is 'time'? The common, everyday individual on the street regularly distinguishes between space and time and understands both. Elephants exist *in* space and *endure* through time. This book doesn't take up much space though it will take some time to read.

These two concepts, space and time, are not unfamiliar. So why is it that, no matter whether one does a little or a lot of analysis, space and time are always revealed as mysterious? No one has any difficulty in understanding me when I say that every *time* I lecture there is a lot of empty *space* in the lecture hall.

Time seemingly consists of three parts: past, present, and future. But even a little analysis reveals that the past doesn't exist anymore and the future does not exist *yet*. Further, even that which exists now, the present, turns out to be exceedingly small. It is only one moment, a single instant, a minute interval without duration. Thus, what is time but a single point without any dimension? (This sure sounds a lot like, God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere ... and to have neither a center nor a circumference is not to be a circle at all . . . each half cancels out the other!)

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It is relatively simple to know the exact time: "at the tone the *time* will be exactly 8:30." Why, even a simple glance at one's watch will suffice to determine the time of day. There do not seem to be any lurking difficulties here, do there? Obviously it is impossible to measure the past (it is gone) or the future (it is not yet come) they do not exist! The present, we just observed, does not have any extension. Thus it, too, is immeasurable. So what exactly is one measuring when one says, "the time is 8:30"?

Space and time are immense mysteries. The more one enquires *what* they are, the deeper one's bewilderment becomes. Not only are philosophers, religious thinkers, scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and so on, not able to adequately define what they are, neither can they specify (with any proficiency) what they *consist* of nor *how* to measure them.

The physical universe is perceived, and, as such, it must be given its due. Space and time are part of the makeup of the cosmos. The problem for the absolutist, the transcendentalist, is to solve how the Transcendent (beyond space and time), the Pure One, became many. It is on this rock that most monistic systems break. Yet, on the other hand, the mythmaker must account for blemishes and impurities that might spoil the prototype. To account for the appearance of space and time is as difficult as to attempt to explain them away.

What is the origin of space and time? What is the human being's origin of the concepts of space and time? Are space and

time (fundamentally) physical and objective or psychological and subjective? Surely so many conundrums all point to the curioser and curioser phenomenon of the common everyday sense of space and time.

"The rule is jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam today."

"It must come sometimes to jam today," Alice objected.

"No, it can't, said the Queen. It's jam every *other* day: today isn't any *other* day, you know." 9

Who is Ganapati? What is Ganapati? Where is Ganapati? Why is Ganapati? Obstacles are found at the boundaries of space and time temporally at the beginning and spatially at the thresh-hold. These are the points of entry the *loci* of highest risk and possibility. Our quest is to discover Ganesa, both in and beyond 'space' and 'time'. Will this lead us to a knowledge of Ganesa as such, that

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is, of *That* which lies beyond all cosmic instantiations? As *mythmakers*, we gather the scattered leaves of the book of the universe. By employing the texts, the stories, the mythology at our disposal, we gain a fixed point of reference. To become *oathbreakers* we must journey beyond break boundaries. We will wield and interpret these texts with only one goal in mind that of breaking the mold, of transcending space and time, of experiencing Ganapati whenever and wherever he may lead. In one respect, texts are self-evident, knowable, and understandable to one endowed with a sharp intellect. But knowledge is definitely not wisdom. Words are not meaning. Map is not territory. Experience is the touchstone, the final court of appeal; and, ultimately, personal experience is that which will create one's own most distinctive and definitive answer to the question, Who is Ganapati?

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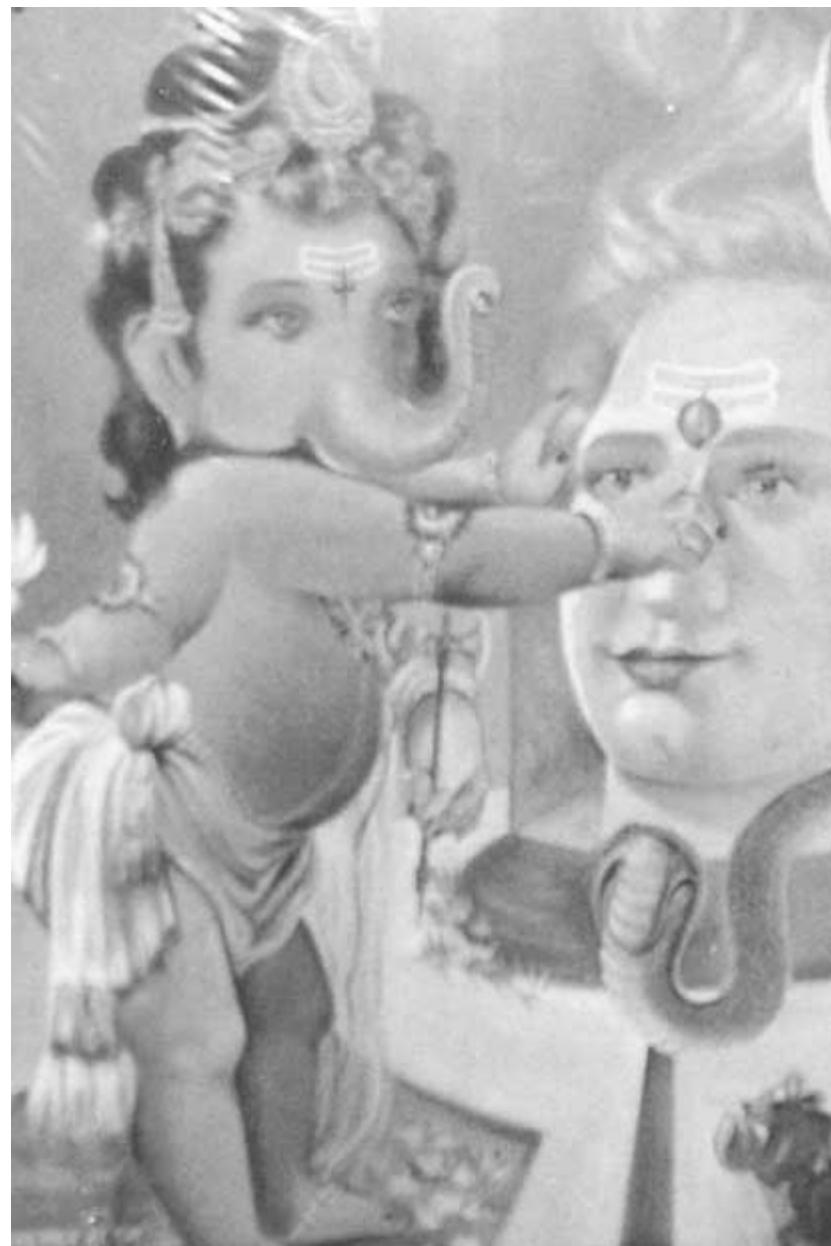


Figure 2
Painting of Bala Ganapati located at Ganapatipule

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Figure 3
Bronze Child Ganapati

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In the Beginning . . .

In the beginning, to be sure, nothing existed, neither the heaven nor the earth nor space inbetween.

So Nonbeing, having decided to be, became and said: "Let me be!"

-Taittiriya Brahmana 2.2.9.1

Sri Girijatmaja of Lenyadri

From the ice cave of the infinite, the cavern of the ecstatic ones, the child issued forth. 1 How long had he dwelt in the

secret chamber within, awaiting the touch? *Lenyadri* means "mountain cave." *Lena*, in Marathi, means "cave" and *adri* in Sanskrit means, "mountain," "stone," "thunderbolt," "the sun," "cloud or mass of clouds"; and with *pati* it refers to Lord of the Mountain or Lord Siva; with *dini* it refers to Parvati; with *dusi* it refers to Indra. *Lenyadri* is the secret mountain cave wherein Ganesa was born.

Some legends claim that Ganesa was *svayambh* (self-born).² Thus, we may refer to passages which say of the heart-cave: "Where all splendors are in the light, and all darknesses in the dark. Brilliant light and gloomy darkness! I praise that transcendent supreme light. Always new, hidden, yet old and apparent to all, the heart-cave, the ultimate, shines alone with the brilliance of the Supreme, with a free and spontaneous self-manifestation."³ To be self-born the stone of darkness must be smitten and removed from the mouth of the cave by Indra's thunderbolt. The touch of the *Guru* must kindle the divine flame within. The hidden light found, the dawn brought to birth, the Sun must remove the clouds that conceal divine sight.

Another birth legend claims that Ganesa was born from the effulgence of his father, Lord Siva, while still others claim that he was born of his mother, Parvati.⁴ The wonderful thing about San-

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skrit in particular, and religious teachings in general, is their protean nature or the enormous number of different meanings a single word can offer. Besides the above cited luxuriance of the word *Lenyadri*, one could cite *hrdaya-guha* (the heart-cave). *Hrt* stands for "the center that sucks everything in" and *ayam* (this), which stands for the Self (*atman*). The heart-cave is closely bound to the *Atman-Brahman* of the *Upanisads*⁵ as well as to the *trikona* (triangle). "The Heart is the subtle vibration of the triangle."⁶ In the round space of the thousand-petaled lotus, there is a triangular lotus, which is formed by the three lines beginning with a, *ka*, and *tha* and which triangle has *ham* and *sa* on two sides.⁷ But further, the vowel *e* in Sanskrit looks very much like an isosceles triangle with its apex pointing downwards; this looks very much like the *yoni* (female sex organ). Thus, the multivalent meanings involving and invoking ideas of a child, a cave, a triangle, an organ of reproduction, a letter of the alphabet, revealing and concealing, light and darkness, Siva and Parvati.

Lenyadri is the place wherein tradition claims that goddess Parvati (Girija) formed a desire (*sankalpa*) to have a son. Thus, she performed austerities (*tapas*) for twelve years in the *Lenyadri* cave. Ganesa, being pleased with her, agreed to grant her wish, and he became her son. On the fourth day of the bright bright fortnight of the month of August/September (Bhadrapada), when the star Swati was in conjunction with the moon and the constellation Leo (*simha lagna*) was ascending, Ganapati manifested himself to Parvati in all his glory. It is claimed that Ganesa spent the first fifteen years of his life residing in the *Lenyadri* cave.

Origins

From the ice cave of the infinite issued forth a torrent of light, a vibrating roar, a river of wisdom flowing ceaselessly. From contraction to expansion. From a point, a drop, a *bindu* expanding into a stream, cascading across the heavens like a streak of blue light. The *bindu* expanding, a universe growing and taking shape. The *Ormkra* exploding into a galaxy of sounds and shapes. Somewhere, down the long corridors of time, where the lash of pain and the bribe of bliss become intertwined, emerge the initial manifestations of Ganesa. The footprints of a god arriving on the frontiers of eternity. Cosmically, "once upon a time . . ."; personally, "now is the time . . ."

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Where did He come from? What is the secret cave of the heart? Where did anything come from? How did x begin? In the world of human beings everything is thought to have a beginning and an end. If it does not, one labels it as either "nonexistent" or "eternal." But is there really such a thing as a beginning or an end? These two inseparable brothers (birth/death) are invariably related to time. But what if one is timeless?

It is nigh on impossible to trace with any precision the history of Ganapati/Ganesa. It is mainly speculation and intuition.⁸ There is scant historical evidence that provides certainty as to his source or the route he took in arriving upon the

cosmic stage. Most modern scholars say that texts and archaeological evidence point toward a period ranging from the second to the fifth centuries of the common era as the time when Ganesa began to *solidify* into the recognizable form we know today.⁹ On the other hand, the pious beliefs of orthodox devotees of Ganesa make reference to his Vedic origins and Puranic mythologies to push his antecedents back in time. After all, the texts are there and the possibilities are alluring. Further, iconographically there are existent images of elephants that, some scholars say, predate even the Vedic age. These may or may not be prototypes of the anthropomorphic image that appears thousand(s) of years later. Then again, as prototypes, they may be even more. Further, artifacts from excavations in Luristan and Harappa, and an old Indo-Greek coin from Hermaeus, present images that remarkably resemble some sort of Ganesa. Interesting but inconclusive, scholars say.¹⁰

Any and every approach to Ganesa has certain presuppositions built into it. Those in quest of the Divine, in search of the inner Ganapati, are not as interested in information *about* Ganesa as in "who Ganapati really is" in a spiritual context. Ultimately, for such individuals, the quest for Ganapati is but a quest for one's Self. These people presuppose that the "Self is real, that the individual is not the physical body, that the individual is the Self."¹¹ The consequence of making such presuppositions is that Ganesa (who is considered real) must also be more than/other than a physical body and thus "information about" is not as relevant as "experience of." Spiritual seekers are primarily looking for a personal experience, for personal liberation, not for information about an "other," no matter how wonderful or interesting or divine.

The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know [*Brahman* to be such and such]; hence we are not aware of any process of instructing about It. That

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[*Brahman*] is surely different from the known; and again, It is above the Unknown. That which is not uttered by speech but that by which speech is revealed, know that alone to be *Brahman*, and not what people worship as an object.¹²

On the other hand, there are those who presuppose that Ganesa is an "other," an object that can be meaningfully discussed and understood. The consequences of this type of postulation is that information becomes not only relevant but all important. This is the domain of "those who want to know" in contrast to the previously above mentioned "those who want to be" (or believe?).

Then, who poses the question, Where did Ganesa come from? Pious devotees or staunch believers in Ganapati do not generally ask such a question. Not seriously at any rate, for they focus on their own personal experience(s) of the Divine or else on how to achieve such experiences. Their predominant interest lies in boons, blessings, and/or Self-realization. It is the scholar, the intellectual, the skeptic, or the atheist who posits such a question. Strangely, such individuals seldom pause long enough to realize that, according to Indian thought, any answer is intimately connected to the person asking the question. In order to know something about Ganapati, the object known, one must first know about oneself, the knower. I may know every bit of information there is to know about Ganesa, but if I do not know who I am, the knower, then all that I know becomes highly suspect. The knower, in every form of knowledge, takes precedence over the known. I can never logically doubt myself, doubt that I exist, but I can forever, in each and every situation, doubt the existence of the known. The level of play is determined by the level of the playing field.

A famous story employed by the Buddha conveys just this point: A person shot by a poisoned arrow refused to have a doctor tend to him until he knew who shot the arrow, how fast it was travelling, who made the arrow, what it was made from in fact everything about the situation. A person who insisted on learning all of this information before accepting help would die. What is imperative, in such a situation, is to pull out the arrow and not to gather information. Likewise, to enquire into where Ganesa came from is to mistake map for territory, it is to misunderstand the predominant reason why Ganesa exists. People may think that they will understand who Ganesa is once they understand where he came from. That is not (necessarily) so.

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Another oft-told story illustrates the same insight. There was a hungry person who chanced on an orchard full of ripe

mango trees. He was told that he could have one, and only one, hour in which to eat all the mangoes his heart desired. However, instead of going into the orchard to immediately commence eating, he stopped on the road and asked the farmer who grew the mangoes, how long did the mangoes take to ripen, what type of mangoes they were, when were they planted, and so on. Finally, at the end of an hour of such questioning, he announced that he was ready to eatonly to be told that his one hour (his life) was over!

The ancient teachings say, "The Self dwells within you as you." Here and now. Not tomorrow. Not in a distant heaven or in ten thousand births from now. The Upanisadic *mahavakya* says, "*tat tvam asi* [that thou art]."¹³ The known is not separate from the knower. Sages proclaim that information is not wisdom, map is not territory, Ganesa is not other than you. It is folly to search outside, in externals, for that which is within.

Those who brood upon the origins of Ganapati, devotees, scholars, curiosity seekers, pandits, speculators, myth makers, information collectors, art historians, and lecture-circuit mahants, uncover clues in all the usual (and unusual places): in authoritative scriptures, ancient myths, rites of worship, iconography, archaeological and geological findings, tribal totems (both Brahmanic and otherwise) and/or in elephant cults. However, a word to the wise: divinity may not be mere cryptically written history, or, to put it another way, footprints are not feet, map is not territory.

The Search Begins

Scholars and devotees of Ganapati have heard that the *Vedas* are the supreme font of divine wisdomthe most ancient, the most authoritative, the most sacred of India's scripturesand thus the search begins (where all good searches should begin: "In the beginning . . .").¹⁴

The reputedly oldest of the *Vedas*,the *Rg Veda*,says, "We call upon you, upon the multitudes, the leader of the multitudes [Ganapati]" which may or may not be a reference to Ganesa.¹⁵ Some scholars think that this passage refers to Brhaspati/ Brahmanaspati and not to Ganesa/Ganapati.¹⁶But who is Brhaspati? The *Veda* tells us he is The Creator of the Word, the giver of knowledge, the father of the gods, the priest who intercedes with the gods on behalf of human beings and protects them against

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obstacles. There is a popular saying, "If it looks like a duck, and flies like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck." However, while a few drops of rain do not make a monsoon, but they do precede its arrival. "*Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*" [Truth is One, sages call it by many names].¹⁷Generally this passage is used to substantiate the Indian "unity in diversity" doctrine. But from it, one could easily infer/propose that Brhaspati and Ganesa are not differentnot from a metaphysical cosmic theory, but at a much grosser level.

The *Rg Veda* says that Brhaspati/Brahmanaspati is a "lord of a group of gods or lord of a group of *mantras*.¹⁸Ganesa/Ganapati literally means "the lord or leader of a group." It looks like a duck to me. Further, Ganesa/Ganapati is popularly known as "Jyestaraja" (elder prince), a name likewise used for Brhaspati/ Brahmanaspati in the *Rg Veda*.¹⁹It sounds like a duck to me.

Brhaspati/Brahmanaspati is continually addressed as "remover of obstacles," "repeller of revilers," "cleaver of the clouds of ignorance," "protector," "defender," "guide," and so on.²⁰These are epithets which Ganesa/Ganapati will soon acquire.

Many scholars shy away from this Brhaspati/Brahmanaspati = Ganesa/Ganapati equation because there is nothing here to do with an elephant. Still, there is such an obvious correlation present that one is hard pressed not to speculate that Brhaspati/ Brahmanaspati is (at least) the embryonic Ganapati/Ganesa of modern times. Moreover, remember that tradition claims that the *Veda* contains the seeds or "footprints" of yet-to-be-seen physical manifestations. From the unmanifest to the manifest: Rudra will become Siva, Agni will become Subramanyam, Ila will coalesce into Sarasvati, Isa transforms into Isvara, and so on.

There are also Vedic passages which refer to Indra as Ganapati²¹and Rudra as Ganapati²²It seems obvious that the aspects and attributes of these deities contributed to the makeup of the classical Ganesa. To state but a couple of obvious "coincidences": Brhaspati, Agni, and Ganesa all have two mothers (*dvaimatura*);Brhaspati, Indra, and Ganesa have huge, pervasive bodies, Rudra and Ganesa each have a rat vehicle; and Rudra and Ganesa each have three eyes (*tryambaka*).²³Brahmanaspati is known for his ability to free his devotees from indebtedness²⁴and is a remover of

obstacles.25In Indian thought, there is no such thing as a coincidence: things don't just happen, they happen just.

In the *Maitrayaniya Samhita of the Krsna Yajur Veda*²⁶we come across the first stray references which leave footprints eerily suggesting (pertaining to?) an elephant. For instance, we find the words

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karata (one having the cheek of an elephant; one having a trunk), *hastimukha* (one having the face or head of an elephant), and *dantin* (one having a tusk).In the same *Krsna Yajur Veda*,in its *Taittiriya Aranyaka* ²⁷we find the words *vakratunda* (one with a twisted trunk) and *dantin* (one having a tusk).

*tat karataya vidmahe, hastimukhaya dhimahi, tan no danti pracodayat*²⁸

[May we know that grotesque one; may we meditate on the one with the elephant face; may that one-toothed one inspire this our knowledge and meditation.]

*tat purusaya vidmahe, vakratundaya dhimahi, tan no danti pracodayat*²⁹

[May we know that divine one; may we meditate on the one with the curved trunk; may that one-toothed one inspire that knowledge and meditation of ours.]

Both these texts from the *Krsna Yajur Veda* mention a *gayatri* addressed to a deity called "*dantin*" (the tusked one). One would expect such a reference to be suggestive of Ganesa, and the famous Vedic commentator Sayana explicitly establishes this identification in his commentary on the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*.³⁰

In the *Narayana Upanisad*,Ganapati is addressed as the god who possesses a twisted trunk (*vakratunda*).³¹

What is this tooth or tusk? The Vedic answer comes: *rtam/ satyam*.That is, the tusk is simultaneously "truth in action" and "spoken truth." The Rg Vedic Brahmanaspati is known as Vacaspati (lord of speech),³²who governs the twenty-one categories (*ganas*)and as such is known as "*gana-pati*." Ganesa is well known as *Omkara svarupa*,the embodiment of the primordial sound, *Om*.He is the first word, *vac*,the imperishable, firstborn of truth, mother of the *Veda* and hub of immortality. In his fully developed mythology, Ganesa will be known as the "lord of wisdom."

"*Om* is all this, the entire universe" [*om iti brahma, om itidam sarvam*].³³Ganapati's tusk, the initial movement of the *bindu*,expanding, became "all this." And then, and then, the next step is the great silence from which the word has sounded. Before being or non-being, That One (*tad ekam*).Then came the Word by which the soundless One became revealed. The thunderous silence, the absolute mystery.³⁴

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We are much to early to speak of any type of form but the subtlest. It is an accepted tenant of Hinduism that that which has name has form and that which has form has a name (*namarupa*)but still we are in subtle waters. However, the manifestation has begun. We know that the human being is said to comprise three components: the five physical elements (*pañcabhutas*)or the physical form, the *buddhi* or intellect, and the divine principle or *Atman*.God's gift to the heart is the intellect, and the intellect lives by discriminating among the elements. Obviously it would be but a matter of time before the intellect began to perform its function, to flicker, to gather material around this seed called "tusk" or whom we will eventually come to call Ganesa.

Indian tradition maintains that, with the passage of time, great portions of the *Vedas* were "lost" and Vedic truths became very difficult to understand. Thus Vyasa Krsnadvaitapayana (Vedavyasa), out of great compassion, wrote the *Puranas*,which were meant to convey Vedic truths in the form of tales and short stories. ³⁵These easy to understand stories and examples have found a place in the heart of the Indian masses; even today, they exert a much greater influence on the mind and imagination of the majority of people than any other Indian religious literature. From little children to simple villagers to illiterate peasants to those with weak spiritual aspirations and small capabilities, the Puranic mythologies have helped to teach simple but fundamental truths of religion, morality, and, at an even deeper level, spirituality.

The classical mythology that eventually accumulated around Ganapati had a different aim than historical accountancy. It is true that the mythology attempted to account for his genealogy, and in this there are various, inconsistent, and incompatible accounts of his birth, parentage, and exploits (as we shall later observe), but the Ganapati mythology's real work was not only to preserve but also to pass on spiritual truths to those individuals who aspired for such. There is no doubt that much in the way of social behavior, ritual practices, and data can be found therein (for those who wish to look for such), but Ganapati ultimately points to the one doing the seeking, not the sought. As long as seekers do not know "who" they are, whatever they "know" will always remain suspect. Of obstacles there are an infinite number. Ganesa is the giver, as well as the remover, of obstacles. The question is not so much who Ganesa is, as an "other," but, Who am I? If I am not my physical body, then Ganesa is not his physical body either. If I am the Self, and Ganesa is the Self, there is naught but the Self then Who am I?

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Those who love the Indian concept of unity in diversity/divinity may interpret the word *gana* as the philosophers do, that is, as "groupings," "classifications." Thus the *ganas* are the foundation of worldly existence. Ganapati/Ganesa is the lord of categories. And we all know that categorizing is what human beings do; it is their distinctive function. It is what introduces order into chaos and makes the world a manageable place to live in.

Who are you? Every individual is an individual precisely because of his or her ability to classify, to group, to distinguish. Thus, in one sense, each person is a *gana-pati*, a leader of a group. The *ganas* are the inhabitants of one's universe, the "others" who dwell therein. In Advaita Vedanta, all thought, all "others," no matter how sublime or how grotesque, if thought to be other than the Self, are but so much ignorance. The Self may appear as an "individual," and for that there may be a song. With time, the *ganas* became associated as Lord Siva's motley crew of attendants, grotesque, mischievous, impish entities. 36*Ganas* may be viewed as transient, limited, children of an "I am my body" mentality. However, *pati*, the lord, is perennial. Do you associate with the drop of water (*gana*) or with the water of the drop (*pati*)? Everything may be a wave in the ocean of consciousness, but there are those who seemingly spend all their time on the sandy beach, refusing to enter the water.

There are also legends of the *vinayakas*, that group of malevolent hangers-on of Lord Siva who were a tribe of malignant spirits conducive of appeasement. There were 280 of them who controlled common dangers, ailments, obstacles of all kinds. Eventually, their number was reduced to 8, and then 4; finally they were reduced by Lord Siva to a single composite form, Vinayaka.³⁷

In the next chapter we will take a closer look at Ganesa as Vinayaka, but in this context it is interesting to note that the word *vinayaka* can be interpreted to mean either "a distinguished individual leader" or "a plurality of a group without a leader."³⁸ "Yat bhavo tat bhavasi" [as you believe, so you experience] or "*mana eva manusyanam karanam bandha moksayoho*" [as the mind, so the individual; bondage or liberation are in your own mind]. Are you a *vinayaka* or the Vinayaka?

Sri Ganapati Atharvasirsa

In the *Atharva Veda* occurs the *Ganapati Atharvasirsa*,³⁹ one of the earliest recorded hymns to Ganapati/Ganesa. It is considered to be the most important Sanskrit text that we have regarding Ganesa and,

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as such, it enjoys the central place of authority for the Ganapatyas.⁴⁰ As we observed, there are those who ask whether this hymn is invoking Ganesa as Ganapati or Brhaspati as Ganapati. Be that as it may, the text itself identifies Ganapati as the embodiment of the all-pervading, ultimate principle, *Brahman*, and celebrates the powers of the deity to overcome all obstacles. The word *tharva* means "weak, vacillating, wavering." *A-tharva* means the absence of these qualities: "firmness, strength, oneness of purpose." *Sirsa* means "intellect," an intellect directed toward liberation (*moksha*). Thus the word *Atharvasirsa* suggests firmness or singlepointedness of the intellect as directed toward one's realization of the Divine.

*Santi Mantra**Peace Invocation*

Om bhadram karnebhiih sunuyama
devah

*Bhadram pasyekaksabhir yajatrath
Sthirair angais tustuvamsas tanubhiih*

Vyasema devahitam yad ayuh

Om svasti na indro vrddhasravah

Svasti nah pusa visvavedah

Svasti nas tarksyo aristaneemih

Svasti no brhaspatir dadhatu

Om Tanmam avatu

Tad vaktaram avatu

Avatu mam

Avatu vaktaram

Om santih, santih, santih

Om. May we hear auspicious sounds
May we see auspicious sights

May we enjoy the life allotted to us
by the gods, offering praise with
our bodies strong of limb.

May Indra, of increasing glory,
bestow blessings on us.

May Pusan, the omniscient one,
bestow blessings on us.

May the irresistible Tarksya bestow
blessings on us.

May Brhaspati bestow blessings
on us.

May that [Ganesa] protect me

May that protect the reciter

May that protect me

May that protect the reciter

Om peace, peace, peace

The *Ganapati Atharvasirsa* begins, as all traditional Vedic hymns do, with a *santi patha* (peace chant) at the beginning. It is customary to invoke divine blessings before commencing any auspicious endeavor. Thus, before commencing one's recitation, the devotee invokes the Divine through a peace chant. These *mantras* are said to purify the immediate location and atmosphere surrounding it, to put one in a receptive frame of mind. Unless one is first at peace within oneself, progress in any field of endeavor, whether spiritual or nonspiritual, is very difficult if not impossible.

Om Sri Ganesaya Namah

Om. Salutations to Lord Ganesa

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The *Upanisad* proper begins with a short invocation, adoration, worship, and praise. The prayer commences "Om Sri Ganesaya Namah": I offer my salutations, again and again, to you, O Lord of the *Ganas*. One should note (and we will take up this theme again later) that Ganesa is *Om* and *Om* is Ganapati. Ganapati is familiarly known as "*Omkara svarupa*" (the physical embodiment of *Om*). By beginning with *Om*, the hymn upholds Vedic tradition, for every religious act commences with the chanting of *Om*. *Om* stands for the first-born Word, for *Brahman*, for the Absolute, and one begins with *Om* not only to get the Divine's attention but also to get one's own attention. *Namah* literally means "to bow, to salute, to make obeisance to." It is a corrupt form of "*na-mama*" (this is not mine), and thus it is as good as saying, "O Lord, whatever I am about to think, say, plan, and do is 'not-mine' but yours." There is nothing that is mine, neither this body nor these thoughts. Thus *namah* puts one in an attitude of perfect surrender. In Vedic rituals, the sacrificial oblations are traditionally offered into the fire by saying, "*Agne idam na mama*" [this is not mine]. And just so one doesn't overlook this fact, it is customary to *pranam* or prostrate or at the very least to put one's hands together when one says *namah*. Finally, *Ganapati* means "lord (*pati*) of the categories/multitudes (*ganas*)" and thus all of creation. The word *ganya*, derived from the same Sanskrit root *gan* (to count) means "what is limited" and thus Ganesa is "lord of all that is limited," that is, the entire physical universe.

Om namaste Ganapataye

Om. Salutations to the Lord

of the multitudes

Tvameva pratyaksam tattvamasi

You alone are the visible

manifestation of That thou Art
(tat tvam asi).

Tvameva kevalam kartasi	You alone create all this.
Tvameva kevalam dhartasi	You alone sustain all this.
Tvameva kevalam hartasi	You alone destroy all this.
Tvameva sarvam khalvidam brahmasi	You alone are all this. You are Brahman
Tvam saksadatmasi nityam	You are the eternal, evident Self (Atman)

Immediately after the salutation, we meet the great Upanisadic *mahavakya, tat tvam asi*. This great saying conveys a sense of nonduality between "That" the Divine (*tat*) and "Thou" the individual (*tvam*). It conveys the essential identity between what, on the surface, appears to be two incongruous entities. Then we are told that Ganesa is the personification of Brahma

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(the creator), Visnu (the sustainer), and Siva (the dissolver) of the universe. He is *Brahman* (the Absolute) as well as the Indweller in each and every one of us as the eternal indwelling Self (*Atman*).

Then commences the *svarupa tattva* section, which describes the essential nature of Lord Ganesa.

<i>rtam vadisyami</i>	I speak scriptural truth
<i>satyam vadisyami</i>	I speak experiential truth
<i>Ava tvam mam</i>	Please protect me
<i>Ava vaktaram</i>	Protect the reciter
<i>Ava srotaram</i>	Protect the listener
<i>Ava dataram</i>	Protect the giver (<i>Guru</i>) (of this knowledge)
<i>Ava dhataram</i>	Protect the sustainer
<i>Ava avdnuvacam ava sisyam</i>	Protect the disciple
<i>Ava pascattat</i>	Protect us from the west
<i>Ava purastat</i>	Protect us from the east
<i>Avottarattat</i>	Protect us from the north
<i>Ava dakshinattat</i>	Protect us from the south
<i>Avacordhvattat</i>	Protect us from above
<i>Avadharattat</i>	Protect us from below
<i>Sarvato mam pahi pahi samantat</i>	Protect us from wherever calamity may come during your worship, please give me protection
<i>Tvam vangmayastvam cinmayah</i>	You are the Word embodied, pure consciousness
<i>Tvam anandamayastvam brahmamayah</i>	You are bliss absolute; you are the Absolute
<i>Tvam saccidanandadvitito'si</i>	You are Being, Consciousness, Bliss, nondual
<i>Tvam pratyaksam brahmasi</i>	You are manifested <i>Brahman</i>
<i>Tvam jnanamayo vijnanmaya'o'si</i>	You are knowledge and wisdom
<i>Sarvam jagadidam tvatto jayate</i>	The entire universe is born from you
<i>Sarvam jagadidam tvattastistati</i>	The entire universe is maintained in you
<i>Sarvam jadadidamtvayi layamesyati</i>	Through you the entire universe is

*Sarvam jadadidam tvayi pratyeti
Tvam bhumirapo'nalo'nilo'nabhah
Tvam catvarivakpadani
Tvam gunatrayatitah*

*Tvam dehatrayatitah
Tvam avasthatrayatitah*

dissolved
The entire universe returns to you
You are earth, water, fire, air, space
You are the four levels of speech

You are beyond the three *gunas*
(qualities)
You are beyond the three bodies
You are beyond the three states of
being

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*Tvamkalatrayatitah
Tvam muladharsthito'si nityam*

*Tvamsaktitrayatmakah
Tvam yogino dhyayanti nityam*

*Tvam brahma, tvam visnus tvam
rudras*

*Tvam indras tvam agnistvam
vayustvam*

*Suryastvam candramastvam
brahmabhu*

Bhuvah svarom

You are beyond the three times
You eternally dwell in the *muladhara*
cakra
You are the three *saktis* (powers)
Yogis eternally meditate on you
You are Brahma, Visnu, Siva

You are Indra, Agni, Vayu

You are Surya, Candra, earth,
space,

You are Reality. You are an
embodiment of the sacred word,
Om.

Ganapati is not only the triple-form (*tri-murti*) of the creator (Brahma), the sustainer (Visnu), and the dissolver (Siva) but also the embodiment of the four stages of speech (*para, pasyanti, madhyama, vaikhari*); he is the mysterious *kundalini sakti* (the cosmic energy that lies coiled within the individual); he is an embodiment of everything, both finite and infinite. From this section we meet the inspiration for the tantric geometric representations of Ganesa in the form of the five great elements (*mahabhutas*). The earth, the grossest of the five elements, is represented by a rectangle forming the base (seated, with crossed legs). Water is depicted by a circle (his round belly), fire by a triangle: his tusk, mouth, and upper trunk), air by a crescent (his third eye), and space by a flame (his true Self). This "elemental" *stupa* is claimed to be both the source of Ganapati iconography and the prototype of tantric worship of the Divine in the form of triangles, hexagons, lines, and so forth, with each element represented by a design. As such, Ganesa is conceived of as an embodiment of all the five elements. Further, in tantric worship, the earth is represented and controlled by Siva, water by Ganesa, fire by Sakti, air by Surya, and space by Visnu. This may also be thought of as the bridge that connects Vedic worship (employing only the natural elements) and Puranic *pujas* wherein the elements have condensed into solid images (*murtis*). (See fig. 4.)

Ganesa Mantra

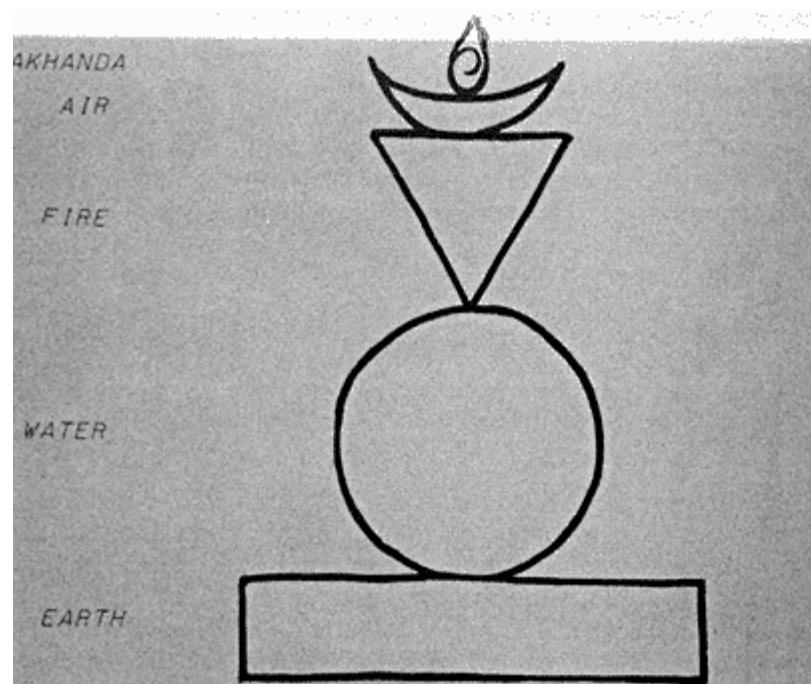
The Eight-Syllabled Ganesa Mantra

*Ganadim purvamuccharya varnadim
tadanantaram*

Anusvarah paratarah

First one utters the syllable *ga* of
the
word *gana* and then a, first of the
alphabet
Add the nasal *m*

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(O Lord Ganapati !) This whole world has sprung up from You. This whole world rests in You. This whole world is coming to You. You are the earth, water, fire, air and space.



Figure 4
Tantric geometric representation of Ganesha in the form of the five great physical elements

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Ganesa Mantra
*Ardhendulasitam tarena
rddham*

etattavamanusvarupam
Gakarah purvarupam
Akaro madhyama rupam
Anusvarascantyarupam

The Eight-Syllabled Ganesha Mantra
Adorn it by a crescent and prefix *Om* to it.
This is the form of your seed *mantra*.
Ga forms the initial letter
A forms the middle letter
M forms the last letter

<i>Binduruttararupam</i>	The <i>bindu</i> is the final form.
<i>Nadah sandhanam</i>	The sounding of it is its enjoyment
<i>Samguhita sandhi</i>	
<i>Saisa ganesavidya</i>	Reciting the entire <i>mantra</i> is the completion
<i>Ganaka rsi</i>	This is the knowledge of Ganesa
<i>Nicrad gayatri chandah</i>	The <i>mantra's</i> sage is Ganaka.
<i>Ganapatir devata</i>	The <i>mantra's</i> meter is <i>nicrt gayatri</i>
<i>Om gam ganapataye namah</i>	The <i>mantra's</i> deity is Ganapati.
	<i>Om</i> , I bow to Lord Ganesa

This section presents the Ganapati *mantra*: "Om gam ganapataye namah" [*Om*, I bow to Lord Ganesa]. All Ganesa *mantras* are said to be *siddhi mantras*, "mystic words" full of powers of perfection. This is Lord Ganesa's root (*mula mantra*). It is also known as his *bija mantra*, for it combines Ganesa's seed (*bija*) sound, *gam*, with the phrase "I bow to the Lord of the *ganas*." This *mantra* is used at the beginning of formal worship (*puja*) as well as for spiritual discipline (*sadhana*).

The seer (*rshi*) of this *mantra* is Ganaka. The meter (*chhandas*) is *Nrcad*. The presiding deity is Mahaganapati. The *anganyasas* are to be performed with: *gam*, *gim*, *gum*, *gaum*, and *gah*.

<i>Ganesa Gayatri</i>	
<i>The Ganesa Gayatri</i>	
<i>Ekadantaya vidmahe</i>	May we know the single-tusker one
<i>Vakratundaya dhlmahi</i>	May we meditate on the one with the curved trunk
<i>Tanno dantih prachodayat</i>	May that tusker one inspire that knowledge and meditation of ours

The *gayatri mantra* is known as *Vedamata*, "Mother of the *Vedas*" or "Mother of Wisdom." It is a subject of deep significance, for it is concerned with the relation between the human being and the Divine. Sages and *siddhas* recommend the use of the *gayatri mantra* in one's daily religious practice. *Gayatri* comes from the San-



Figure 5
Maha Ganapati

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skrit verb root *ga*, meaning "to go toward," "to approach," "to obtain." The *gayatri* is the most sacred *mantra* for any particular deity. Each deity has a *gayatri mantra*, and it is the means to go toward, to approach and obtain the grace and vision (*darsana*) of that deity.

The *gayatri mantra* is said to be triply powerful. It is first of all a word of power, a *mantra*. Second, it is a meter or musical rhythm that has three stanzas consisting of eight syllables each. Third, the *gayatri mantra* is the divine *Devi* (Goddess, the feminine aspect of the Divine) herself, the power that one invokes.

There is a well-known definition that says, "*Gayantam trayate iti gayatri*" [the *gayatri* is that which saves the chanter]. It embodies, in the form of a *mantra*, the highest spiritual aspiration of which a human being is capable.

It should also be noted that the *gayatri* is a *mantra* and a prayer combined. A pure *mantra* depends for its effectiveness solely upon the *mantra sakti* (power inherent in sound). It may or may not have a meaning. However, the *gayatri*

mantra, besides being a *mantra*, also contains the tremendous power of prayer. Thus it is doubly effective. And not only is it more effective than a pure *mantra*, but it is also more attractive to the mind.

The symbolism of the tooth and trunk embody in a concrete form the philosophical and spiritual truths associated with the Divine and it helps an aspirant to recall those truths at the time of meditation. A continued and faithful use of this *mantra* in one's daily life will lead to the gradual unfoldment of one's consciousness at the physical, intellectual, and intuitive levels up to and including self-realization.

If one puts one's finger into a flame for a very short period, one will not feel anything. But if one leaves one's finger in the flame for an extended period of time, the finger will feel hot and the flesh will begin to burn. Similarly, if one chants the *gayatri mantra* regularly, for extended periods with faith and devotion, one will certainly feel and experience the heat, the power of the *mantra*.

Further, the syllables of the *gayatri mantra* are so arranged that the major portion of air inhaled during the process of chanting tends downward toward the seat of the *sakti*. Ganapati is the lord residing on the *muladhara cakra* at the base of the spine, where the spiritual power (*kundalini sakti*) lies sleeping. By chanting the *gayatri mantra* a natural breathing process (*pranayama*) takes place automatically; this facilitates the awakening of this dormant spiritual power.

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The Ganesa *gayatri mantra* is not just words. It is the container for the *Sakti* itself. When one repeats the *gayatri mantra*, one is actually in the physical presence of the deity.

Ganesa's Rupa

Ganesa's Form

*Ekadantam caturhastam pasankusa
dharinam*

*Radam ca varadam hastairbibhranam
musakadhvajam*

*Raktam lambodaram Surpakarana-
kam Raktavasasam*

*Raktagandhanu liptangam
raktapusyai supujitam*

*Bhaktanukampinam devam jagat
karana macyutam*

*Avirbhutam ca srstayadau prakrtai
purusat param*

*Evam dhyayati yo nityam sa yogi
yoginam varah*

One-tuskered, four-handed, holding
the noose and goad

Whose hand bestows fearlessness
and who has the mouse-banner
representing wisdom

Red, with a large belly and whose
ears resemble a grain
winnowing basket

Wearing red garments, whose body
is smeared with red paste and
worshipped with red flower

Who is compassionate towards his
devotees and the cause of the
universe

Who is beyond nature and spirit
and existed before the universe
did

That *yogi* who continually
meditates on him thus is the
best of yogis.

One should meditate upon Ganapati as possessing the above described form. Ganesa is endowed with attributes so as to facilitate one's meditation. In the beginning stages of meditation, the mind needs some qualities to fix upon. Later, these qualities will become a source of great joy as superimposition turns to realization.

Asta Nama Ganapati

The Eight Names of Ganesa

Namo vratapataye

Namo ganapataye

Salutations to the lord who protects

Salutations to the lord of the

*Namah pramathapataye
Namasthe'stu lambodarayaika
dantaya
Vighnanasine sivasutaya sri varada
murtaye namah*

multitudes
Salutations to the premier lord
Salutations to the big-bellied one
with the single tusk.
Salutations to the one who destroys
obstacles, the son of Siva, to the
bestower of boons, I bow again
and again.

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Ganapati is known by many names. The *Mudgala Purana* lists thirty-two names, and the *Sarada-tilaka tantra* lists fifty-one various aspects. There is also the well-known *Ganesa Sahasranamavali*, which presents one thousand names of Ganesa. Here, in the *Ganapati Atharvasirsa*, are listed eight of Ganesa's more well-known names. 41

Phalasruti *The Results*

*Etadartharvasirsa yo'dhite sa brahma
bhuyaya kalpate*

*Sa sarvatah sukha medhate
Sa sarva vighnair na badhyate
Sa pancamahapapat pramucyate
Sayamadhiyano divasakrtam papam
nasatati*

*prataradhiyano ratrikrtam papa
nasayati*

*Sayampratah prayunjano'papo
bhavati*

Sarvatradhiyano'apavighno bhavati

Dharmarthakamamoksam ca vindati

*Idamatharvasirsam asisyaya na
deyam*

Yo yadi mohad dasyati sa papiyan bhavati

*Sahasravartanat yam yam
kamamadhote tam tam anena
sadhayet*

*Anena Ganapatimabhisincati sa
vagmo bhavati*

*Caturthyamanasnajanati sa
vidyavan bhavati*

*Ityarthavanavakyam
Brahmadyavarananam vidyat na bibheti*

Whoever meditates on this
Atharvasirsa becomes one with
Brahman.
He gains happiness everywhere.
All his obstacles are removed.
He is freed from the five great sins.
One who chants this in the morning
destroys all sins committed dur-
ing the night.
One who chants this in the evening
destroys all sins committed
during the day.
Recitation at both times makes one
sinless

Chant it everywhere and become
free from

obstacles and gain religious merit,
wealth, desires, and liberation.
This *Atharvasirsa* should not be
taught to an unqualified student

He who does so due to any tempta-
tion will incur sin.

May one achieve the fulfillment of
all one's desires by chanting this
one thousand times

One who bathes Ganesa with this
recitation becomes master over
speech

One who recites this on the fourth
day of the lunar fortnight while
fasting gains knowledge,
Thus says the sage Atharvana.

One should know what covers the

kadacaneti

Absolute.
Then there is no fear.

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Phalasruti

*Yo durvankurairyajati sa
vaisravanopamo bhavati*

*Yo lajairyajati sa yasovan bhavati sa
medhavan bhavati*

*Yo sodakasahasrena yajati sa vancch-
ita phalamavapnoti*

*Yah sajyasamidghirayajati sa sarvam
labhate sa sarvam labhate*

*Astai brahmanan samyag grahayitva
suryavarsvo bhavati*

*Suryagrahe mahanaghama pra-
timasamnidho va japtva sid-
dhamatro bhavati*

*Mahavidhnat pramucyate mahadosat
pramucyate mahapapat pra-
mucyate*

*Sa sarvavidi bhavati sa sarvavidi
bhavati*

Ya evam vedā ityupanisad

The Results

He who worships Ganesa with *Durva* grass becomes as rich as the God of wealth.

He who worships Ganesa with parched rice becomes famous, successful, intelligent.

He who worships Ganesa with thousands of sweets gets his desires fulfilled.

One who performs sacrifices offering wood, with clarified butter as oblation, obtains everything, he obtains everything.

One who makes eight good-natured persons proficient in the *Atharvasirsa* becomes glorious as the sun.

By reciting this hymn during a solar eclipse, or by sitting on the banks of sacred rivers, or by sitting in front of an image of Ganesa, a spiritual aspirant obtains whatever is promised in these mantras.

He who has this knowledge becomes an all-knower; he becomes an all-knower.

Know this to be true. Thus, the *Upanisad*

In the Indian scriptural tradition, the usual practice is to end the main section of a text with a salutation that will be followed by the *phala sruti* (the recitation of the beneficial effects that accrue to a regular study and/or chanting of the text). This *Upanisad* is no exception to the tradition. Note that the text ends with the words "Thus the *Upanisad* [ends here]." This, along with the peace chants, reveals that this is not just a hymn to Lord Ganesa but part of the great Upanisadic teaching about *Brahman*.

Santi Mantra
Peace Chant

*Om sahanav avatu
Sahanau bhunaktu
Sahaviryam karavavahai*

May we be protected together
May we be sustained together
May we do great deeds together

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Santi Mantra

Peace Chant

*Tejasvinavadhitam astu
Ma vidvisavahai
Om santih, santih, santih*

May our studies be glorious
May there be no hatred
Om peace, peace, peace

This peace chant ends the text.

Translation of the Sri Ganapati Atharvasirsa

Salutations to Lord Ganesa. Om. Adoration to Ganapati, lord of the multitudes. You are indeed the visible manifestation of That thou art. You indeed produce, sustain, and dissolve the universe. All this is pervaded by you. You are the eternal Self. I speak that which is correct. I speak that which is true. I see and glorify thy transcendental form and listen to your great virtues. I adore and worship you. I have dedicated my life for studying your great deeds. Protect me from the west and the east, from the north and the south, from above and below. Protect me from all calamities.

You are the embodiment and essence of sound. You are pure consciousness. You are pure bliss. You are the Absolute. You are existence, consciousness, bliss absolute. You are one without a second. You are the visible lord. You are wisdom and knowledge. This entire universe has emerged from you. Through you this entire universe is maintained. Through you this entire universe is dissolved. The entire universe merges back into you again and again. You are earth, air, fire, water, and space. You are the source of words.

You are beyond the three qualities known as purity, activity, and inertia. You are beyond the three states of existence" the waking, the dreaming, and the deep-sleep state. You are beyond the three bodies: the physical, the subtle, and the causal. You are beyond past, present, and future. You continuously dwell in the spiritual center at the base of the spine. You embody the three powers the power of knowledge, the power of will, and the power of action. Yogins constantly meditate upon you. You are the lord of creation, the lord of preservation, the lord of destruction, the lord of fire, the lord of wind, the solar lord, and the lunar lord. you are the manifestation of the primeval word, the *mantra* "Om."

One day, the goddess Parvati asked Lord Siva, "On whom are you meditating?" He replied, "On Him, who is the supporter of the entire universe." She asked, "May I also meditate upon Him and behold Him?" Lord Siva replied, "Of course," and then He initiated

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Her into the monosyllabic *mantra* "Gam." After Parvati performed austerities for twelve years in a cave at Lenyadri, Ganesa appeared before her. Such is the power of this *mantra*. 42

Commence by uttering the first letter of the word gana, *ga*, then utter the nasal sound *m*. When chanted together they become GAM, the seed sound of you, O Lord Ganesa. This is your form. This appears like the beautiful crescent moon. GA forms the first letter. A is the middle sound, and M forms the last letter. This sound is the essence of all sounds. I meditate on *Nada*, the cosmic sound. I meditate on the holy scriptures. For this *Ganesa-vidya*, this Ganapati wisdom, the sage is Ganaka. *Gayatri* is the meter. Ganapati is the presiding deity of this *mantra*, and the greatest Ganesa *mantra* is Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha.

May we know the one having a single tusk. May we meditate on the one having the twisted trunk [which symbolizes *Om*]. May that tusked Lord enlighten and inspire this knowledge and meditation of ours. [This is the *Ganesa Gayatri*: "Om ekadantaya vidmahe, vakratundaya dhimahi, tanno danti prachodayat."]

I meditate on the one having the twisted trunk, that trunk which inspires me. You have four arms. In your upper right hand you hold the noose. In your upper right hand you hold the goad. In your lower right hand you gesture your blessings, and in your lower left hand you hold your broken tusk. Your vehicle is a mouse, and your color is red. Your huge belly holds all of creation in it and your ears resemble winnowing baskets. Clad in red garments you melt for your devotees, and always protect them. We smear your body with sandal paste and adorn you with red flowers. I offer worship to the primal cause of the universe, the deathless principle. You who were before creation manifested itself, you the imperishable who is beyond Nature, you who gave birth to these worlds, whoever meditates upon you everyday is the greatest *yogi* among *yogis*.

Salutations to the leader of the *ganas*, lord of the hosts of creatures. Salutations to Lord Siva's attendants. Salutations to the cosmic-bellied one. Salutations to the one-tusked elephant lord. Salutations to the remover of obstacles. Salutations to the son of Lord Siva. Salutations to the one whose sight brings blessings. May my praises be offered repeatedly.

Whosoever recites this *Atharvasirsa* will obtain Divinity. That person will realize all happiness. Such a person will never meet with any calamities or obstacles. Such a person will obtain freedom from all evil acts. Whosoever recites this prayer in the evening becomes free of sins committed during that day. Whosoever recites this prayer in the morning becomes free from all sins committed during

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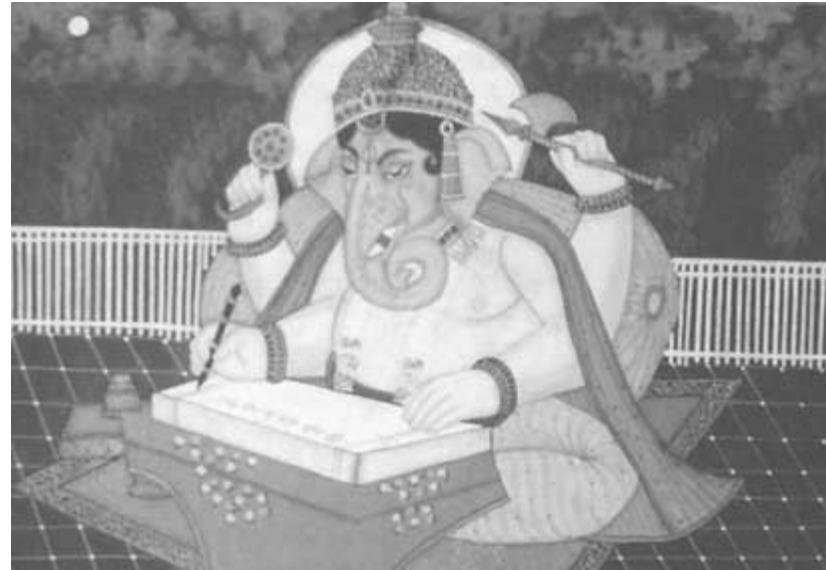


Figure 6
Batik of Ganapati writing the Mahabharata

the previous night. Hence whoever recites this text in the morning and evening becomes free from all sins and obtains the four goals of life, success, love, virtue, and liberation.

One should refrain from teaching this prayer to anyone who lacks faith in it. Whoever teaches it only for the sake of money will lose its blessings. One who recites this hymn one thousand times will find all of one's desires fulfilled.

Those who perform the bathing of Lord Ganesa's image attain eloquence. One obtains divine knowledge if one observes fasting and recites this hymn on the *Caturthi* day [the fourth day of each fortnight of the month, a day special to Lord Ganapati]. Sage Atharvana revealed this hymn for the good of humanity, and through the greatness of this prayer one's veil of ignorance will be removed, and one will be able to realize the Absolute and become fearless. *Durva* grass is sacred to Ganesa, and whoever offers it to Ganesa obtains Kubera's immense riches. Whoever offers parched grain to Ganapati becomes honored, wise, and famous. Whoever offers one thousand sweets to Ganesa gains the fulfillment of all one's desires. Whoever offers burning wood with clarified butter into a Vedic fire while chanting this hymn gains all worthwhile things.

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Whoever teaches this *Atharvasirsa* to eight deserving disciples attains radiance like the sun. Whoever utters this hymn during a solar eclipse in a sacred place obtains the power of the fulfillment of *mantra siddhi*. All one's obstacles will be removed. Such a one will be free from faults and mistakes. The highest wisdom will be achieved. This is the declaration of the *Veda*. This is the *Upanisad*. May it be auspicious.



Figure 7
White marble Yoga Ganapati located at
Sri Siddhi Vinayaka Temple at Siddhatek

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3 Naming is a Very Serious Business

*They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni,
or the heavenly bird of light, Garutmat.*

The seers call in many ways, by many names that which is One;

They speak of Agni, Yama, Matarisvan ...

Rg Veda 1.164.46

Sri Mayuresvara of Morgaon

From the ultimate point of view, God has no name: "*yato vaco nivartante, aprapya manasa saha*" [words return along with the mind, not attaining it]. 1 And yet, mysteriously, the *Upanisads* also say that the "Name is Brahman."2 How powerful is the name? The great sage Valmiki was liberated even though he uttered the name of God contrariwise. Further, it enabled him to tell the life story of Rama. By meditating on the name, Prahlada was protected again and again. The outcast Ajamila was made holy by the name. The list is endless. Even the great god Siva has been relieved from the torments of poison by the power of the name. Therefore, chant the name continuously.3

Mor in Marathi and *mayur* in Sanskrit mean "peacock." The peacock represents the universe; it stands for the ocean of life; it symbolizes victory. His tale spreads afar rays of grace; his tale lightens up with love at the devotion of his devotees and confers upon them boons; his tail watches over the sacrificial fire in which all one's actions are poured; his tail is the supreme *Guru* who expounds the hidden meanings and evokes blissful experiences that illumine devout seekers; his tail is full of wrath, ever ready to crush the pride of his foes.

Morgaon is regarded as the most important of the *asta vinayaka* temples for four reasons: it is the *adhyā pitha* of the *Ganapatiya sampraddya*, it attracts the greatest number of pilgrims, the *Mudgala*

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Purana devotes twenty chapters describing its greatness, and the *Mudgala Purana* states that there are three locations that are of cardinal importance to Ganesa: *Kailasa* in heaven (*swarga*), *Adisesa's* palace in hell (*Patala loka*), and *Mayurapuri* (Morgaon) on earth (*Bhu loka*).

In addition to Sri Mayuresvara 4in the *sanctum sanctorum* at Morgaon, there are eight different *murtis* of the eight important *avatars* of Ganesa in the eight corners of the temple: Ekadanta, Mahodara, Gajana, Lambodara, Vikata, Vighnaraja, Dhumravarna, and Vakratunda.⁵ Also, the temple has four gates facing the four directions, each with an image of Ganapati as he appeared in one of the four cosmic ages. Each gate also simultaneously represents one of the four goals of life (*purusartha*), an aspect of *Brahman*, and is flanked by two attendants. Ballalvinayaka, at the eastern gate, is attended by Rama and Sita, represents *dharma*, and embodies Visnu. Vighnesa, at the southern gate, is attended by Siva and Uma, represents *artha*, and embodies Siva. Cintamani, at the western gate, is attended by Kama and Rati, represents *kama*, and embodies the formless (*asat*) *Brahman*. Mahaganapati, at the northern gate, is attended by Mahi and Varaha, represents *moksha*, and embodies the *Sat Brahman*.⁶

Thus, Morgaon presents a plethora of Ganesa's various names and forms.

The Name Game

Ganapati/Ganesa has been born many times and many legends over. Of whom was he born? From both his parents jointly? Or singly from the earth-dirt of his mother's body or in the waters of his Aunt Ganga or from a ray of the sun or the fire or air of his father's mind or from his father's laughter or out of the ether of cosmic consciousness? Or is he *svayambhu* (self-born)? Or is he birthless (*ajati*)? From one perspective, He belongs to all of these legends; from another, He belongs to none. The sacred texts are aware of these variations, inconsistencies, and even seeming contradictions. One way in which they account for these anomalies is by stating that during the different cycles of cosmic time, different variations occur in the story. In each age, as for each individual, the teachings must be appropriate. A mother feeds all of her children, and it is neither proper nor correct to charge her with inconsistencies or contradictions if she feeds her newborn baby milk, her toddler pabulum, her

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teenager a high-protein, high-fiber meal and tells her grown children to feed themselves.

The story of how Ganesa came into being is told differently in different *kalpas*. Sometimes his head was cut off when Sani looked at him. Here we will tell the story of Ganesa as it is told in the *Sveta(varaha) kalpa*, and according to which his head was cut off by the merciful Siva.⁷

His is an extraordinary tale, told with infinite variety even while maintaining an integral integrity. Some interpreters maintain that the integrity stems from the Indian cyclical structure of time. Others maintain that Ganapati transcends time. Still others propose that the stories' true purport is to teach a lesson, and, in that way, their integrity is maintained. Still others propose ingeniously that all stories are, in fact, Ganesa stories. As he is omnipresent, all stories are but a variation on a single theme. No matter which way one slices it, the only story is his glory, the only glory his story or so the devotees sing.

There is an oft-told tale that speaks of the Grace of Isvara. Once upon a time (which is not a time at all) souls were inert and experienceless. Out of infinite compassion, Isvara created the universe, bodies, minds, and so on, so that the individual may experience its true nature. At the same time, Isvara created the universe for the sheer joy of it. This activity was an expression of his innate bliss and thus causeless. Logically, there appears to be great contradictions here. Experientially, those who swim in that ocean of bliss (shamelessly/guilelessly) revel in telling the tale.

Still, somehow the image of the Beloved has to become visible both within and without. The sweetness of His/Her/Its presence must preside over, and permeate, all of one's experiences. She is the master; He is the friend; It is the lover; He is the savior. It meets us wherever our limitations give It a foothold. She presents Herself to that which the heart and will can respond. He discloses Himself in a myriad of names and forms. It is the father and mother too of our being. She is the source and protector and giver of our desires. And He is the child born to our desire whom we cherish and rear. So, what shall we name it?

Naming is a very serious business. It is an important and sacred act. Who are you? John. *John* is the name that one's parents gave to that particular physical body. Who are you? My thoughts. Thoughts belong to a person; they are not that person. It should be obvious that whatever belongs to one is not one. For instance, you

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say, "my book," indicating that the book *belongs* to you therefore it is not you. Whatever *belongs* to one is adventitious, comes and goes, is not vital to one's existence. One says, "my hair," thereby indicating that one's hair belongs to oneself (and thus could be cut off or dyed or permed or whatever without in any way endangering one's essential Self). Thus, it stands to reason that one is not one's physical body nor one's thoughts nor one's emotions. So, who are you? What is your *true* name? 8

Was I born? Am I my physical body? Am I my thoughts? Am I really so and so? How do I know that I exist? Who were my parents? Have they created me, or have I created them? Am I in the world, or is the world within me? Who am I?

To give someone a name is an important rite: in Sanskrit, name giving is one of the sacred rituals or rites of passage (*samskara*). As a sacrament, giving a name signifies the outward expression of an inner refinement and grace. It is intended to give one a distinct aura. It stands guard against undesirable influences. It may inspire and/or motivate one to live up to the name's meaning. It may also invoke grace through the propitiation of the deity *nama japa*, for the repetition of a deity's name (*mantra*) invokes the divine power. Bestowing a name is one of the first steps leading towards spiritual growth and perfection. It is a *laksana* (defining mark). 9

One's name is the means whereby which one is able to approach the named. It is a means to reach the goal, for the goal is contained in the means. Consciousness of the name leads to consciousness of the named. As one thinks, so one becomes. Like a piece of wood that has been placed in a fire, sooner or later the wood itself will turn into fire. Likewise, a mind that is immersed in God's name will eventually become divine. The individual (*jiva*) becomes the Divine (Siva) through the Name. The *Chandogya Upanisad* says, "Meditate on the Name as *Brahman*." 10

Can you think of the word *tree* without also thinking of its form? There is an intimate connection between the name and the form it represents. Further, it is said that the name is even sweeter than the form. If one thinks of a mango, one immediately becomes happy, and one's mouth begins to water. The word *mango* conjures up an image of a large, sweet, perfect mango. But if one sees a physical mango, all sorts of doubts may arise: Is it sweet? Will it be stringy? Will it taste oily? How much will it cost?"

A god has many names: some hint at His/Her/Its physical appearance; some hint at His/Her/Its attributes; some hint at His/ Her/Its insignia or mount or banner or function or personality or

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temperament or life history. They are His or Her calling cards, so to speak. The name leads to the form (all of creation is but name and *formnama* and *rupa*). The manifest universe is but name and formthe Unmanifest Truth manifests itself cyclically so that one may relate to it.

Each deity's name invokes the salient features of that particular deity. They are suggestions for contemplation. They are calling cards for kinship. They are vehicles of adoration. They are the Divine appearing in the dress of manifestation. The following list contains the most popular names associated with Ganapati/Ganesa

Ganesa	Lord of the multitudes
Ganapati	Lord of the multitudes
Vinayaka	Remover of obstacles
Vakratunda	He with the twisted trunk
Ekadanta	Single-tusked one
Gajanana	Elephant-headed one
Lambodara	Pot-bellied one
Heramba	Protector of the meek
Vighnesvara	Lord of obstacles
Krsnappingaksa	One with the dark brown eyes
Dhumravarna	Smoke-colored or gray one
Vikata	Odd appearance

Two of the most common and popular names of the elephant-headed god are: Ganesa and Ganapati. The name *Ganesa* comes from the Sanskrit *gana*, meaning "hosts, multitudes, troops, categories," and *isa*, meaning "lord or ruler."¹¹ The name *Ganapati* comes from the Sanskrit *gana* and *pati*, meaning "lord." Thus, these two names literally mean the same thing, that is, the *lord or ruler of a group* (of gods, demigods, humans/, animals, spirits, followers, attendants, hymns, and/or *mantras*).

If *gana* is interpreted as the philosophers are inclined to interpret it, as "grouping" or "classifications," this makes the *ganas* the foundation of earthly existence for human beings. Why? We all know that classifying and categorizing is what human beings do; it is their distinctive function. It is what introduces order into chaos, and makes the world a manageable place for human beings to live in. Thus, to be a *gana-pati*, to be a *gana-isa* is to be the creator, the preserver, the organizer of one's world.

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Who were the *ganas*? Mythology says they were Lord Siva's motley assemblage of attendants. They have been described both as benevolent and as malevolent; as short, hardy spirits, as wild but extremely devoted followers, and as gross, misshapen imps. Led by Nandi and Bhrngin, they are individuals you wouldn't want to cross, but if befriended, they are wonder-working friends. Remember, they are part of Siva's favored retinue, which roams the Himalayan slopes undaunted by anything or anyone. Few there are that can challenge them.

The *Vivekacudamani* says, "The mind is one's enemy and the mind is one's friend."¹² If you are a friend to your own higher Self, then you see the Divine everywhere. If your own mind is full of egoism, desires, hatreds and the like, then it is one's own worst enemy. The lord of the *ganas* is Siva. Either one is Siva (lord) or one is *sava* (dead). A thief sees only the pockets of saint, while a saint perceives only divinity.

As we noted earlier, *Ganapati* is the older of the two names; it occurs numerous times in the *Vedas*. The name *Ganesa* does not make an appearance until well after the end of the Vedic age. Both names, however, have been mantrically interpreted thus: *ga* = "wisdom" and *na* = "liberation." This produces the meaning that Ganesa/Ganapati is the lord of wisdom and liberation.

Neither *Ganesa* nor *Ganapati* (nor, for that matter, any other name of Ganesa) need be a personal name. Many commentators take great pains to note that "Ganapati" in the *Vedas* does not refer to a personal deity but is an attribute of Brhaspati or Brahmanaspati.¹³ The *Veda* itself tells us that three levels of meaning are simultaneously being elucidated: the physical (*adhibhautika*), the cosmic (*ddhidaivika*), and the spiritual (*adhyatmika*).

What does this mean for us? At one level, the word *Ganesa* and/or *Ganapati* refers to an anthropomorphic, personal elephant-headed *murti* (image/icon/idol/physical embodiment). At another level, it refers to a cosmic deity or power of the Divine. Finally, at the deepest or most inclusive level, it refers to the Self, that which is "lord of all" precisely because It is all. This should never be lost sight of. For instance, the word *guru* can refer to a "physical human form," or it can

refer to a "universal teacher," or it can refer to the only Reality there is. The first reference is unimaginably limited by space and time. The second reference is more universal, cosmic, though limited still by space and time. The third reference transcends space and time altogether and thus is the most inclusive. Whether names and forms, space and time, are there or not, it is. The other two are limited by space and time, name and form. In

one sense or other, at some time or other, they come and go while the third or "impersonal" aspect immutably persists.

The name *Vinayaka* can be etymologically interpreted in a number of ways. It can be derived from the Sanskrit prefix *vi*, meaning "apart," and the root *naya*, meaning "regulating, controlling, implementing order or discipline (in a group)." Thus, it stands for a leader or guide.¹⁴ However, the word *vinayaka* can also be derived from *vi > ni (nayati)*, meaning "to lead, to take away, to drive away, dispel, expel" and thus indicates "the remover of obstacles."¹⁵ As the remover of obstacles, the name *Vinayaka* is perhaps the most popular name by which Ganesa is known. Mantrically the word *vinayaka* is derived from *vi* (air) and *nayaka* (lord), thus producing the meaning: *Vinayaka* is the lord of *yoga* (or the lord of the breath).¹⁶ In the eighth century of the common era, Visvarupa a commentator of the *Yajnavalkya Smrti*, provided an ingenious derivative meaning of the word as "one who was appointed (*viniyukta*) as the head of a diverse (*vi = vividha*) group or class of men.¹⁷ Finally, if the *upasarga vi* indicates the quality of "distinction" (*visista*), the word *vinayaka* may mean "without" or "deprived of" (a leader). In that case, *Vinayaka* either indicates a distinguished individual leader, one who possesses lordship, or refers to a group or collection, an assembly without a leader. Where there is no leader, obstacles and confusion reigns. Where there is a distinguished leader, one who can do what is needful to be done, all of one's obstacles will be overcome or removed.

My son, you are born in order to destroy the demons and help the gods and *brahmins* who teach the *Vedas*. Stand there in the path that leads to Heaven and create obstacles in the rites of whoever has sacrifices performed but fails to pay the priest's fee.¹⁸

The earliest references to the name *Vinayaka* appear referring to a malevolent group of imps, hangers-on of Siva, a tribe of 280 malignant spirits which demand to be appeased. With proper propitiation, their mischievous influences can be controlled. If not appeased, these mischief makers lead people astray and place obstacles in their path.

The name *Vinayaka* first appears in the *Manava Grhyasutra*, a Vedic manual for domestic rites that lays down various ways of propitiating these imps and freeing oneself from their influence.¹⁹ This work refers to a group of four spirits: Salakatankata, Kusmandarajaputra, Usmita, and Devayajana. These four *vinayakas* are the

causes of destruction, difficulties, impediments, suffering, fear, nightmares, and various other obstacles. The *Yajnavalkya Smrti* mentions four *vinayakas*,²⁰ but with three significant differences, in that they are four aspects of a single *Vinayaka*, who is the child of Ambika and who has been appointed by Rudra and Brahma as the leader of the *ganas* with the power to initiate obstacles.²¹ A commentary on this text states that *Vinayaka* may initiate obstacles in two ways: by undercutting actions that have the power to accomplish various ends and by preventing the attainment of the fruits of actions or rites that have been properly performed.²²

Thus, not only is *Vinayaka* the remover of obstacles, but he is also the creator of obstacles. He operates both at the beginning or threshhold of an action (any movement whatsoever, be it in thought, word, or deed) and at the conclusion of an action. Not only may he cause a priest to forget his lines, but he may cause anyone to forget anything and thus land in difficulties. Further, even if one happens to perform an action correctly, he has the power to obstruct access to the benefits of that action. It is easy to understand why *Vinayaka* has been given pride of place before any other deity. Somehow, that force in the universe that embodies a correct or proper alignment with things as they are must be acknowledged and given its proper and due pride of place. That pristine and preeminent aspect of the Divine is invoked when one addresses *Vinayaka*. No sacrifice or divine action is possible without first invoking or putting in front this deity. He is not an anthropomorphic deity, somehow divorced and separate from oneself. He is the initial manifestation of the Divine, the first movement from the awakening touch of *saktipat*. When kindled, he is the child of Ambika, the divine mother. When dormant, one's hoard of mischievous selfish promptings produce one obstacle after another to the

realization of one's own Self. When looked at from the point of view that one *is* the Self, any thought that denies this fact, that presupposes that one is the physical/mental entity, *already* is an embodiment of an obstacle. Thus, one need not look for external obstacles to arise; one's very thought is an immediate, and the worst possible, obstacle. Further, even if one allows the assumption to pass that one is the physical body, and somehow that individual manages to perform an action properly (*yajna/seva/rta*), if Vinayaka has not been kindled, the fruits of that action may be concealed.

Once, much to the surprise of Siva, he stood transfixed as he watched Ganesa being fashioned out of a mixture of Parvati's sweat and bath water. He exclaimed to her, "A

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son has been born to you without [*vina*]a husband [*nayakena*]. Henceforth, his son shall be named as Vinayaka. He will create thousands of obstacles for the gods and everyone else; and O Devi, the worlds, both movable and immovable, will worship him. 23

Some individuals posit that Puranic texts are uncomfortably aware of the discrepancy between one account (a malevolent, obstacle-creating Vinayaka) and another (a benevolent, obstacle-removing Ganesa) and thus they attempt to disguise Ganapati's demonic/malevolent/mischief-making antecedents through a clever use of false etymologies. In other places, these same scholars change the names but employ the same tactics (i.e., to account for what appears to them to be gross inconsistencies, if not downright absurdities, by evoking psychological theories or evolutionary growth in sophistication or resorting to other tactics of concealment). That something *has occurred* is always noted (e.g., he has a rat for a mount or he is married [or not] or he has single tusk, etc.) but *why* the story is told, *what* the explanation for this special connection is, is not. Theories abound. Perhaps Ganesa is just being his mischievous self. Or perhaps he is connected in some way with agriculture. Or perhaps he is the remnant/evolution of a Dravidian totem.

Perhaps they are correct in assuming that Vyasa (and others) didn't really exist, or, if he (they) did, he was but a simpleton, a primitive heathen struggling to convey theoretical religious truths through the medium of story and myth. Perhaps they are correct in assuming that they know more than the so-called sages who told these stories for the benefit of humanity. Or, perhaps, to enter into the very heart of Ganapati, one must have trod the timeless paths and rekindled the forgotten experience. Who will free the obstacle-maker imprisoned in the cave of the lords (*vinayakas*) of the sense-life? When will the secret of Ganesa illumine the darkness enveloping the minds of individuals? Until this happens, the secret of who Ganapati is will remain a secret, even when it has been revealed.

Of this much we can be certain: whatever stories are told of Ganesa, they are told again and again, and, further, they are told in an infinite variety of ways.²⁴ What the reasons are for this multiplicity and diversity are ultimately left to each individual to interpret.

The name *Gajanana* comes from the Sanskrit root *garj* (to sound, to roar). The Sanskrit *gaja + anana* means an "elephant" or the "one with the elephant's face." Mantrically, *gao* = sound (*nada*)

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and *ja* = "to be born," thus producing the meaning, "the one born from sound" (*nada*). Another mantric derivation is *ga* = "goal" and *ja* = "origin," thus producing the meaning, "the one who is the origin and goal of life."

During the *dvapara yuga* Ganesa appeared as Gajanana to do battle with, and to subdue, the red demon Sindura. After he defeated the demon, Ganapati himself turned red. 25

The name *Gajanana*, like *Vakratunda* and *Ekadanta*, specifically refers to an elephant and/or conveys an elephant's physical characteristics. In the *Mudgala Purana*, Gajanana is one of the eight incarnations (*avatara*) of Ganesa. In this incarnation, he is said to have ridden upon a mouse, blessed the Sankhya yogis, and vanquished the demon Greed (*lobhasura*). A story from the *Mudgala Purana* discusses this incarnation:

Kubera, the god of riches and treasure, once visited Lord Siva in his abode in Mount Kailasa. Being pleased with Kubera, Siva blessed him with a vision of the divine couple, himself and Goddess Parvati. The beauty of Parvati

was so enchanting that Kubera gazed upon her with lust in his heart. Parvati became wild with anger at this discretion of Kubera's and he became frightened. Out of this fear, a demon was born by the name of Lobhasura. Now it so happens that this demon was initiated into the great liberating *mantra*, "om namah sivaya" and after performing much penance, was granted the boon of fearlessness. With this spiritual strength, Lobhasura soon became ruler of the three worlds. Even Lord Siva gave up his control over Kailasa when Lobhasura threatened him. Thus, being tyrannized by this demon, the gods approached the sage Raibhya, who instructed them to propitiate Lord Ganesa as Gajana. Ganesa was pleased with their devotion and appointed Visnu to apprise Lobhasura of his strength. Lobhasura was easily convinced of Gajana's strength and the futility of opposing him, and thus surrendered without a fight. (See *Mudgala Purana* 20.)

The name *Vakratunda* comes from the Sanskrit root *vakra* (curved, bent, crooked, or twisted) and *tunda* (trunk, snout, mouth). Thus, Ganesa is the "one with the twisted trunk."

The *Mudgala Purana* states that Ganapati took the Vakratunda incarnation to subdue the demon Matsaryasura (envy, jealousy,

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rivalry). He embodied the form (*deha*) of *Brahman* and his distinctive mark (*laksana*) was riding upon a lion.

The demon Matsaryasura was born out of the negligence (*pramada*) of Indra. As Indra is the lord of the mind and represents the mind, if the mind is heedless then jealousy arises. When one forgets who one really is, then one feels incomplete and envy raises its ugly head. To believe oneself to be only the physical body entails/implies establishing an entire universe that is other than oneself and thus fertile material for one's possible acquisition. The demon Matsaryasura performed severe penance and obtained the boon of fearlessness from Lord Siva. Thereby he established himself as the lord of the three worlds. That is, when the demonic quality of envy has so permeated an individual, it dominates the three states of existence: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. This being the state of affairs, the gods went to Dattatreya and were informed that they should invoke the grace of Lord Ganesa as Vakratunda by chanting the *mantra* "Gam." This they did and obtained Vakratunda's grace. He told them that he would subdue the demon. When Vakratunda appeared in front of the demon, his very presence so terrified Matsaryasura that he immediately surrendered to Vakratunda and sought refuge at his feet. (See *Mudgala Purana* 20.)

The name *Ekadanta* comes from the Sanskrit root *eka* (one or single) and *danta* (tusk or tooth). Thus, Ganesa is the "single-tusked one."

The *Mudgala Purana* states that Ganapati took the Ekadanta incarnation to subdue the demon Madasura (pride, conceit). He embodied the essence (*dehi*) of *Brahman* and his distinctive mark (*laksana*) was riding upon a mouse.

The demon Madasura was created by the sage *Cyavana*. He sought his father's permission to visit the sage Sukracarya (who was his father's brother). He knew that if he propitiated and pleased Sukracarya, he could obtain the boon of being given the power to rule the universe. Sukracarya was pleased with his devotion and initiated him into the *sakti mantra* "Hrim." After performing penance for thousands of years, Madasura was blessed with

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his heart's desire. It was not long before Madasura began terrorizing the three worlds. The gods approached Sanatkumara, who advised them to propitiate Lord Ganesa as Ekadanta. He described the glory of Ekadanta thus: *Eka* stands for embodiment (*maya*) and *danta* stands for truth (*satta*). Thus, *Ekadanta* stands for the supreme truth that wields *maya*. When Madasura saw Ekadanta, he immediately surrendered to him. Ekadanta accepted his surrender and told him, "You are free to enjoy the fruits of any action done with demonic intentions but you must not be present in any place where I am worshipped in a sattvic manner." (See *Mudgala Purana* 20)

The name *Lambodara* comes from the Sanskrit root *lamba* (great, large, spacious, hanging down) *dara* (cave, cavity). Thus, Ganesa is the "Potbellied one."

The *Mudgala Purana* states that Ganapati took the Lambodara incarnation to subdue the demon Krodhasura (anger). He embodied the pure power (sattvic *sakti* of *Brahman* and his distinctive mark (*laksana*) was riding upon a mouse.

Once it so happened that Lord *Visnu* assumed the form of *Mohini*, the enchantress, to delude the demons. The gods and demons had quarrelled with each other over the right of partaking of the nectar (*amrta*) that had arisen from the churning of the ocean of milk. At that time, Lord *Visnu* appeared before them in the guise of a beautiful maiden of maddening charm, and the demons were guilefully made to turn their attention on her for some time during which the gods were able to carry away the nectar. At this time, Lord *Siva* also beheld this seductive form, and out of that encounter was born the terrible demon, *Krodhasura*. For the good of the world, Lord *Ganesa* took the form of Lambodara to subdue this demon. (See *Mudgala Purana* 20)

The name *Vighnaraja* comes from the Sanskrit *vighna* (obstacle) and *raja* (king). Thus, *Ganesa* is the "king of obstacles."

The name *Vighnesvara* comes from the Sanskrit *vighna* (obstacle) and *isvara* (lord). Thus, *Ganapati* is the "lord of obstacles."

The name *Vighnaharta* comes from the Sanskrit *vighna* (obstacle) and *harta* (remover). Thus, *Ganesa* is the "remover of obstacles."

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These three names all represent that aspect of *Ganapati/ Ganesa* that embodies the protector, the guardian. Every god in India, as well as of the *Guru*, has (in one aspect of their embodiment) the right hand shown in a gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*). It is a fundamental insight of Indian thought that the individual is a spark of divinity, whether manifest or not. One already is "bliss incarnate," and this upraised hand is a reminder of that legacy. Divinity protects, guards, blesses, removes any and all obstacles to one's realization of the truth.

As *Vighnesvara* or *Vighnaraja*, *Ganesa* is the lord of obstacles. His traditional place is at the threshold. Thus, he stands both inside and outside, facing equally the demonic and the Divine, placing obstacles and removing obstacles simultaneously. *Ganapati* is lord of beginnings and is present at every beginning, thus at every moment, inclusive. Each moment is a threshold, a new beginning, and in order to begin afresh, the old must give way to the new. To remove an obstacle so that the birth of the new can take place, requires the placing of an obstacle as well as the removal of an obstacle. He both creates and destroys, facilitates and hinders.

Hear, O Parvati, what this son of yours will become. He will be like me in might, heroism, and compassion. This son of yours will become one just like me because of these qualities. He will make obstacles that last until death for those evil and impious ones who hate the *Veda* and *dharma*. Those who fail to pay homage to me and *Visnu*, the supreme lord, will go to great darkness by the obstacles laid before them by this lord of obstacles. In their houses there shall be quarrels without end. Because of the obstacles your son makes everything perishes utterly. For those who do not worship, who are intent upon lies and anger, and are committed to fierce savagery, he will create obstacles. He will remove obstacles from those who revere the traditions, knowledge, and teachers. Without worshipping him, all actions and laws will become obstructed.²⁷

The *Linga Purana* says that the *asuras* and *raksasas* performed sacrifices and other acts of virtue and thereby acquired various boons from *Siva*. Protected by the boons, they fought against the *devas* and defeated them. *Indra* and other *devas* prayed to *Siva* that he should create

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a being who would be the lord of obstacles and thereby would put obstacles in the way of the *asuras* and *raksasas* as they attempted to perform acts of merit. Thus was born an *amsa* (part) of *Siva* who was instructed by *Siva* to assist the *devas* but hinder wicked people. To this day *Vinayaka* has continued to discharge these duties even to individuals dwelling in the world. ²⁸

I was told the following story during my research on *Ganesa* in India. There was a young graduate student, Kokobhai,

who was hired to be the personal secretary to the controller of the Iron and Steel Company of Bombay. This controller was fabulously successful, fifty-four years old, married, with three daughters. He desperately wanted a son. When he turned toward God, he was informed that if he could obtain the grace of a *siddha*, he would get a son. So he instigated a plan. He called young Kokobhai and told him to locate a perfect being (*siddha*). This young lad, as can and often does happen, had recently been told about one Bhagavan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri. He made further enquiries and checked the maps and prepared himself to drive his boss out to this *siddha*'s asrama. Well, in those days there were no paved roads to Ganeshpuri. But with perseverance, they finally arrived in Ganeshpuri only to be informed that there would be "no *darsana* today." Sad and dejected at his fate, the controller said, "Let us go back to Bombay and begin searching for another *siddha*." But young Kokobhai quoted the words of Tukaram Maharaj, "First one should take care of one's physical hunger and only then can one pursue one's spiritual hunger," so they went to the only food stall in town for lunch. As they were sitting there, a person came running, shouting at the top of his lungs, "*darsana, darsana.*" They stood in the que that formed and slowly but steadily they approached the *siddha*. When Kokobhai's boss approached Bhagavan Nityananda, even before he could speak, the *siddha* said, "I know, you want a son. Alright, you will have a son on one condition, that you name him Ganesa." The controller was thrilled as well as stunned. He just stood there, speechless in front of Bhagavan Nityananda. His only desire in life had just been granted. Compassionately, Bhagavan Nityananda looked at him and said, "Well, don't just stand there. Go home and do your duty. Do you think that my words alone will produce the child?"

The name *Krsnapingaksa* comes from the Sanskrit *krsna* (dark blue or black), *pinga* (reddish-brown, tawny), and *aksa* (eye and also

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religious knowledge). Thus, Ganapati is the "one with the dark brown eyes." This denotes His breadth of vision or omniscience.

The name *Dhumravama* comes from the Sanskrit *dhumra* (smoke-colored, grey) and *varna* (color). Thus, Ganesa is the "smoke-colored or grey one."

The name *Heramba* is the name of Ganesa's mother (Parvati). As such the name means that Ganesa is the "protector of the meek and helpless."

Names, Legends, Literature

While names like *Ganapati*, *Dantin*, and *Vakratunda* appear in Vedic literature, Ganesa's plethora of appellations rises with the *Puranas*. If an external all-capable "other" (God) is one answer to life's problems, then that "other" should have a multitude of solutions, for problems never come singly. Another answer to life's problems can be found within the individual human being (*antaryamin*). As this divine inner spark begins to manifest itself, it takes on names and forms. Stories begin to emerge based on personal experiences. The divine spark (*Rama*) begins to manifest in drama. Name and form define the universe. So, a string of Ganesa's names defines the manifest divinity, becomes a particular sketch of who Ganapati is.

Between the Vedic and Puranic literature there occurs the *sutra* and *itihasa* literature. The *Manava Grhyasutra* devotes an entire chapter to the four *vinayakas*.²⁹ The *Yajnavalkya Smrti* deals with the same *vinayakas*.³⁰ The *Baijavapa Grhyasutra* also speaks of the *vinayakas*, though it names them differently.³¹ The *Mahabharata* mentions the four *vinayakas*, Ganesa, Ganadhipa, Ganakrt, and Ganapati.³² and the northern recension contains the legend of Ganesa being the first stenographer, who, at the request of Vyasa, writes down the *Mahabharata*.

However, it was among the classical *Puranas* that Ganapati rose to prominence. The following *Puranas* define, describe, relate stories about, and/or elucidate how to propitiate Ganesa:

Agni Purana (chaps. 71, 179, 313, 318, 348)

Bhavisya Purana (Caturtha-uttara-parva, chaps. 31-33)

Brahma Purana (chap. 39)

Brahmavaivarta Purana (Ganapati khanda)

Brahmanda Purana (chaps. 1-5)

Devi Purana (chap. 114)

Linga Purna (Purva, 1, chaps. 104-5)
 Matsya Purana (chap. 260.54)
 Narada Purana (chaps. 51, 64, 66, 143)
 Padma Purana (Srsti khanda, chaps. 61-63)
 Saura Purana (chap. 43)
 Siva Purana (Rudra-samhita, Kumara-khanda II.4 chaps. 13-20))
 Skanda Purana (Kasi-khanda, chaps. 55-57)
 Varaha Purana (Vinayakotpatti, chap. 23)
 Vamana Purana (chap. 28)
 Visnudharmottara Purana (chaps. 3, 104)

Besides these classical *Puranas*, there are two *Puranas* that deal exclusively with Ganapati: The *Ganesa Purana* and the *Mudgala Purana*. The *Ganesa Purana* not only provides an account of the Ganapatya sect but also contains a *Ganesa Sahasranama* (thousand names of Ganesa) and the *Ganesa Gita* and extolls twelve names of Ganesa as especially important: Sumukha, Ekadanta, Kapila, Gajakarnataka, Lambodara, Vikata, Vighnanasa, Ganadhipa, Dhumraketu, Ganadhyaksa, Phalacandra, and Gajanana. It also describes the four incarnations (*avatara*), Mahotkata, Mayuresvara, Gajanana, and Dhumraketu, which took place in the four *yugas*, namely, the krta, treta, dvapara, and kali. The *Mudgala Purana* provides an account of the eight incarnations (*avatara*) of Ganesa: Vakratunda, Ekadanta, Mahodara, Gajanana, Lambodara, Vikata, Vighnaraja, and Dhumravarna. It has nine sections (*khandas*) and 428 chapters.

The *Mudgala Purana* lists thirty-two names of Ganapati (see figure 9): 33

Bala Ganapati	Ksipra Prasada Ganapati	Tryaksara Ganapati
Bhakta Ganapati	Laksmi Ganapati	Trimukha Ganapati
Dundi Ganapati	Maha Ganapati	Uccista Ganapati
Durga Ganapati	Nrtya Ganapati	Uddanda Ganapati
Dvija Ganapati	Rna Vimocana Ganapati	Urdhva Ganapati
Dvimukha Ganapati	Srsti Ganapati	Varada Ganapati
Ekadanta Ganapati	Sakti Ganapati	Vighna Ganapati
Ekaksara Ganapati	Sankastahara Ganapati	Vijaya Ganapati
Haridra Ganapati	Siddhi Ganapati	Vira Ganapati
Heramba Ganapati	Simha Ganapati	Yoga Ganapati
Ksipra Ganapati	Taruna Ganapati	

The *Skanda Purana*³⁴ lists fifty-six Vinayakas located within the physical precincts of Varanasi:

Abhaya Vinayaka	Jñana Vinayaka	Pranava Vinayaka
Arka Vinayaka	Jyesta Vinayaka	Pramoda Vinayaka
Asa Vinayaka	Ksipraprasada Vinayaka	Rajaputra Vinayaka
Avimukta Vinayaka	Kalipriya Vinayaka	Salakatanka Vinayaka
Bhimachanda Vinayaka	Kala Vinayaka	Simhatunda Vinayaka
Caturdanta Vinayaka	Kharva Vinayaka	Siddhi Vinayaka
Cintamani Vinayaka	Kunitaksa Vinayaka	Srsti Vinayaka
Citraghanta Vinayaka	Kutadanta Vinayaka	Sthuladanta Vinayaka
Dantahasta Vinayaka	Kusmanda Vinayaka	Sthulajangha Vinayaka
Dehali Vinayaka	Lambodara Vinayaka	Sumukha Vinayaka
Durga Vinayaka	Mangala Vinayaka	Trimukha Vinayaka
Durmukha Vinayaka	Manikarna Vinayaka	Uddanda Vinayaka
Dvara Vinayaka	Moda Vinayaka	Uddandamunda

Dvitunda Vinayaka
Ekadanta Vinayaka
Gaja Vinayaka
Gajakama Vinayaka
Gananatha Vinayaka
Heramba Vinayaka

Modakapriya Vinayaka
Munda Vinayaka
Nagesa Vinayaka
Pafichasya Vinayaka
Pasapani Vinayaka
Pincindila Vinayaka

Vakratunda Vinayaka
Varada Vinayaka
Vighnaraja Vinayaka
Vikatadanta Vinayaka
Yaksa Vinayaka

The *Saradatilakatantra* lists fifty-one names for Ganesa:

Amoda	Kamandha	Sura
Bhaktipriya	Kapardi	Surpakarna
Caturmurti	Khadi	Trilocana
Dirghadhvaja	Lambodara	Vakratunda
Durmukha	Mahananda	Vamadeva
Dvisudantaka	Matta	Varada
Dvirandaka	Mattavahana	Varenya
Ekadanta	Meghanada	Vira
Ekapada	Mundi	Vighnaharta
Gana	Nirañjana	Vighnakrt
Gananayaka	Pramoda	Vighnaraja
Ganesa	Sankhakarna	Vighnesa
Ganesvara	Sanmukha	Vimatta
Gajavaktra	Sadasiva	Vinayaka
Gajendra	Senani	Vrsabhadhvaja
Ganesa	Sivottama	Vrsaketana
Jati	Sumukha	Vyapi

The *Ganapati stotra* in the *Narada Purana* lists twelve well-known names of Ganesa: Bhalaçandra, Dhumravarna, Ekadanta, Ganapati, Gajanana, Gajavaktra, Krsnappingaksa, Lambodara, Vakratunda, Vighnaraja, Vikata, Vinayaka.

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Narada uvaca:

Pranamya sirasa devam Gauriputram Vinayakam
Bhaktavasam smaren nityam ayuhkamarthasiddhaye,
Prathamam Vakratundam ca Ekadantam dvitiyakam
Trtiyam Krsnappingaksam Gajavaktram caturthakam,
Lambodaram panicamam ca sastham Vikatam eva ca
Saptamam Vighnarajam ca Dhumravarnam tathastamam,
Navamam Bhalacandram ca dasamam tu Vinayakam
Ekadasam Ganapatim dvadasam tu Gajananam
Dvadasaitani namani trisandhyam yah pathen narah
Na ca vighnabhayam tasya sarvasiddhikaram param
Vidyarthi labhate vidyam dhanarthi labhate dhanam
Putrarthi labhate putran moksarthi labhate gatim
Japed Ganapatistrotaram sadbhish masaih phalam labhet
Samvatsarena siddhim ca labhate natra samsayah
Astanam brahmananam ca likhitva yah samarpayet
Tasya vidya bhavet sadyo Ganesasya prasadatah

Iti Sri Naradapurane Samkatanasanam nama Ganapatistotram samurnam

Narada said:

With head bowed, let him unceasingly worship in his mind the god Vinayaka, the son of Gauri,

The refuge of his devotees, for the complete attainment of longevity, pleasurable desires and wealth
 Firstly, as the *One with the twisted trunk*; secondly, as the *One with the single tusk*;
 Thirdly, as the *One with the dark brown eyes*; fourthly, as the *One with the elephant's mouth*;
 Fifthly, as the *potbellied One*; sixthly, as the *grotesque One*;
 Seventhly, as the *King of Obstacles*; eighthly, as the *Smoke colored One*;
 Ninthly, as the *Moon-crested One*; tenthly, as the *Remover of Obstacles*;
 Eleventhly, as the *Lord of the Multitudes*; twelfthly, as the *One with the elephant's face*
 Whosoever repeats these twelve names at dawn, noon, and sunset,
 For him there is no fear of failure, nay, there is constant good fortune.

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He who desires wisdom obtains wisdom; he who desires wealth obtains wealth;
 He who desires sons, obtains sons; he who desires liberation, obtains liberation
 Whosoever chants this hymn to Ganapati reaches him in six months
 And in one year he reaches perfection, on this point there is no doubt
 Whosoever makes eight copies of it, and has them distributed to as many brahmins,
 He reaches wisdom immediately, by the grace of Ganesa

Here ends, in the holy *Narada Purana*, the hymn to Ganapati called the Remover of Obstacles

Sri Vinayaka Astotra Sata

The 108 Holy Names of Namavalli Lord Ganesa

Om Asritaya Namah

Om Adbhutamurtimate Namah

Salutations to him who is our refuge

Om Adhyaksaya Namah

Om Agnigarbhaccide Namah

Salutations to the one with the wondrous form

Salutations to the foremost presider

Om Agranye Namah

Om Ajaya Namah

Om Akalmasaya Namah

Salutations to him who is the fire within

Salutations to the first born

Salutations to the unborn one

Om Anekarcitaya Namah

Salutations to him who is without impurity

Om Avyaktamurtaye Namah

Salutations to him who is worshipped by all

Salutations to the manifestation of the unmanifest

Salutations to the inexhaustible one

Salutations to the inexhaustible one

Salutations to the granter of devotees' desires

Salutations to the destroyer of devotee's obstacles

Salutations to the one who loves pomegranates

Salutations to him who is celibate

Salutations to him who is free from aversion to the Divine

Om Brahaviduttamaya Namah

Salutations to the foremost knower
of Brahman

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Om Buddhipriyaya Namah	Salutations to him whom intelligence is dear
Om Candaya Namah	Salutations to him who is powerful
Om Cakrine Namah	Salutations to him who wields the discus
Om Candracudamanaye Namah	Salutations to the wearer of the moon on his head
Om Caturaya Namah	Salutations to the ingenious one
Om Caturbahave Namah	Salutations to the one with four arms
Om Daksaya Namah	Salutations to the skillful one
Om Dantaya Namah	Salutations to the self-controlled one
Om Dayayutaya Namah	Salutations to the compassionate one
Om Devaya Namah	Salutations to the resplendent one
Om Dhiraya Namah	Salutations to the courageous one
Om Durvabilvapriyaya Namah	Salutations to him who is fond of <i>durva</i> (grass) and <i>bilva</i> (tree)
Om Dvaimatreeyaya Namah	Salutations to him who has two mothers
Om Dvijapriyaya Namah	Salutations to him who is fond of the twiceborn
Om Ekadantaya Namah	Salutations to the one with a single tusk
Om Ganesvaraya Namah	Salutations to the lord of the multitudes
Om Gajananaya Namah	Salutations to him who has an elephant's face
Om Gatine Namah	Salutations to him who wields the mace
Om Gauriputraya Namah	Salutations to the son of Gauri
Om Grahapataye Namah	Salutations to the lord of planets
Om Gunatitaya Namah	Salutations to him who transcends all qualities

Om Haraye Namah	Salutations to him who is lion-like
Om Hristhaya Namah	Salutations to the rapturous one
Om Iksucapadhrte Namah	Salutations to him who holds the sugarcane bow
Om Indrasipradaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of Indra's power
Om Jatilaya Namah	Salutations to the one with matted locks
Om Jñanine Namah	Salutations to the embodiment of wisdom

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Om Krtine Namah	Salutations to him who works incessantly
Om Kaivalyasukhadaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of absolute happiness
Om Kalikalmasanasanaya Namah	Salutations to the destroyer of Kali's impurity
Om Kalaya Namah	Salutations to the embodiment of time
Om Kamine Namah	Salutations to him who is love
Om Kantaya Namah	Salutations to the beloved one
Om Kuladribhettre Namah	Salutations to him who upholds the mountains
Om Lambodaraya Namah	Salutations to the one with the big belly
Om Mayine Namah	Salutations to the source of all illusory power
Om Munistutyaya Namah	Salutations to him who is praised by sages
Om Musikavahanaya Namah	Salutations to him whose vehicle is the mouse
Om Nagarajayajnopavitavate Namah	Salutations to he who wears a cobra as a sacred thread
Om Nirajanaya Namah	Salutations to him who is without blemish
Om Papaharine Namah	Salutations to the destroyer of wickedness
Om Parasmai Namah	Salutations to him for whom there is

	no other
Om Pasankusadharaya Namah	Salutations to the wielder of the noose and goad
Om Pramattadaityabhayataya Namah	Salutations to him who is feared by ambitious men
Om Prasannatmane Namah	Salutations to the blissful one
Om Putaya Namah	Salutations to the pure one
Om Ramarcitaya Namah	Salutations to the God worshipped by Rama
Om Srstikartre Namah	Salutations to the Creator
Om Saccidanandavigrahaya Namah	Salutations to him whose form is existence/knowledge/bliss
Om Sailendratanujotsanga kelanotsukamanasaya Namah	Salutations to him who is fond of playing with his mother Parvati, daughter of the mountain lord
Om Saktisamyutaya Namah	Salutations to the powerful one

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Om Samaghosapriyaya Namah	Salutations to him who is fond of the Sama Veda
Om Samahitaya Namah	Salutations to the attentive one
Om Samastajagadadharaya Namah	Salutations to the supporter of all the worlds
Om Sarvaripriyaya Namah	Salutations to the dearest son of Siva's spouse
Om Sarvasiddhipradaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of all perfections
Om Sarvasiddhipradayakaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of all fulfillment
Om Sarvatanayaya Namah	Salutations to the son of Siva
Om Sarvatmakaya Namah	Salutations to the omnipresent Self
Om Saumyaya Namah	Salutations to the peaceful one
Om Santaya Namah	Salutations to the peaceful one
Om Sasvataya Namah	Salutations to the unchanging one
Om Siddharcitapadambujaya Namah	Salutations to him whose lotus feet sages worship
Om Siddhidayakaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of fulfillment
Om Sivaya Namah	Salutations to the auspicious one
Om Skandagrajaya Namah	Salutations to the first-born, Skanda's brother
Om Somasuryagnilocanaya Namah	Salutations to him whose eyes are the sun and moon
Om Sridaya Namah	

Om Srikantaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of prosperity
Om Srkaraya Namah	Salutations to him with the beautiful throat
Om Sriprataye Namah Om Stulakanthaya Namah	Salutations to him who manifests prosperity Salutations to the lord of Laksmi
Om Stulatundaya Namah	Salutations to him who has a stout neck
Om Stutiharsitaya Namah	Salutations to him who has a stout trunk
Om Suddhaya Namah Om Surpakarnaya Namah	Salutations to he who is pleased with praise Salutations to the pure one
Om Svalavanyasuthasarajita manmatavighrahaya Namah	Salutations to him with ears like willowing fans Salutations to him who is a vast ocean of sweetness more charming than the god of love

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Om Svayamkartre Namah	Salutations to him who acts independently
Om Svayamsiddhaya Namah	Salutations to the self-established one
Om Tusthaya Namah	Salutations to the content one
Om Utpalakaraya Namah	Salutations to him who holds the blue lotus
Om Vagisaya Namah	Salutations to the lord of speech
Om Varadaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of boons
Om Vanipradaya Namah	Salutations to the bestower of speech
Om Vibhudesvaraya Namah	Salutations to the lord of the wise
Om Vidhaye Namah	Salutations to the controller of destiny
Om Vighnarajaya Namah	Salutations to the lord of obstacles
Om Vinayakaya Namah	Salutations to the remover of obstacles
Om Vitabhayaya Namah	Salutations to him who is free from

Brahmavaivarta Purana 36 lists eight names: Ekadanta, Ganesa, Gajavakra, Guhagrajam, Heramba, Lambodara, Surpakarna, Vighna.

Yogajagama lists eight names: Ekadanta, Ganadhipa, Gajavaktra, Mahakarna, Mahakaya, Vighnesa, Mahodara, Vighnesvara.

Padma Purana srsti khanda 37 lists twelve names: Bhavatmaja, Charukarna, Devamatura, Ekadanta, Ganapati, Ganadhipa, Gajanana, Heramba, Lambatunda, Pasupala, Vighnaraja, Vinayaka.

Cintyagama lists sixteen Ganapatis: Bala, Bhakti, Haridra, Heramba, Ksipraprasada, Laksmi, Maha, Nrtta, Pingala, Rakta, Sakti, Siddhi, Ucchishta, Urdhva, Vijaya, Vira.

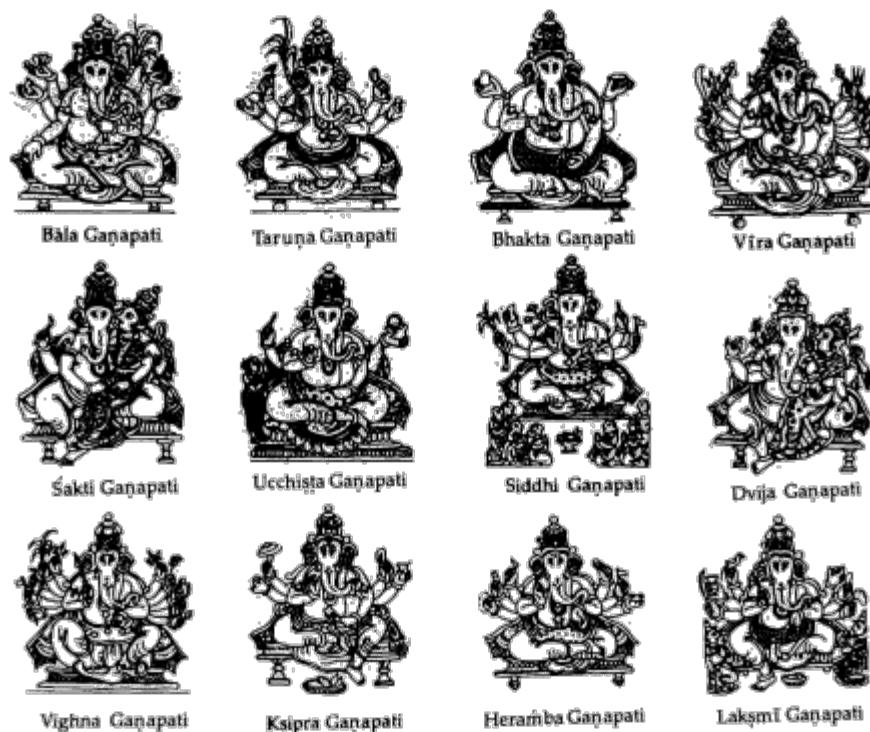
Various *Puranas* mention twenty-one forms of Ganapati that are justified in the context of legends, but we find no iconographic description of these forms: Amoda (delightful), Bhaktavatsala (dear to the devotees), Brahma (the creator), Dhira (valiant), Duritahara (remover of sins), Gajasya (elephant headed), Isa (the destroyer), Kandarpahara (vanquisher of Kama), Kamitarthaprada (one who grants the object of desire), Pañcasya (five headed), Pramatha (commander of Siva's army), Rudra (an aspect of Siva), Sakti (power), Sammohana (ravisher), Sarvasiddhiprada (one who makes all attainments possible), Sumukha (benign looking), Vidhyadhara

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(celestial being), Vidya (god of learning), Visvaksena (commander of Visnu's army), Visnu (preserver), Vira (victorious).

Various texts also mention sixteen characteristics (*sodasaguna*) that are typical of a Ganesa image: *kharva* (dwarf in stature); *mahakaya* (rotund body); *gudhagulpha* (hidden ankles); *lambodara* (potbelly); *vikata* (grotesque in appearance); *vakratunda* (curved trunk); *gajamukha* (elephant head); *khala* (bald head); *surpakama* (large flapping ears like a winnowing basket); *hrasvanetra* (extremely small eyes); *lambanasa* (long nose or trunk); *syamadanta* (black teeth); *dhumravarna* (smokey gray in color); *carvanalalasa* (fond of eating); *digambara* (naked); and *kamandaludhara* (carrying a water pot). 38



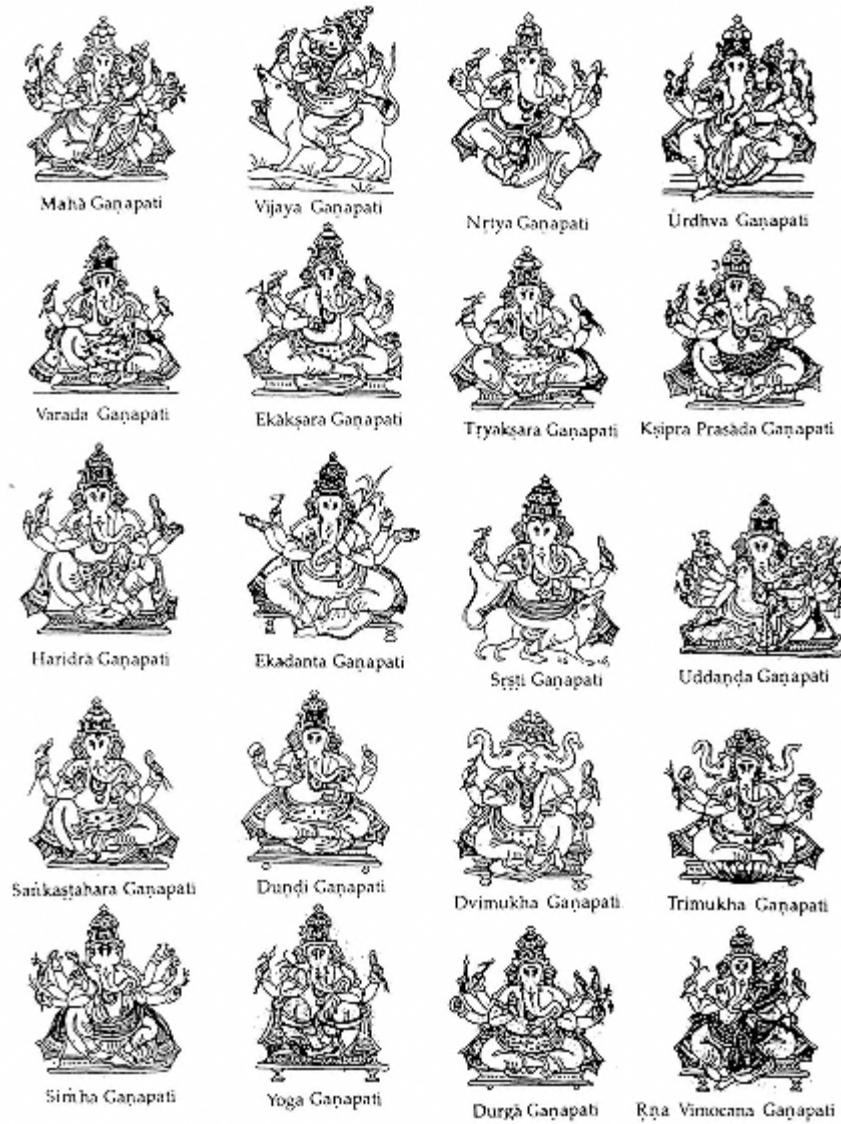


Figure 8
Thirty-two forms of Ganapati

*He desired, "May I be many"; he concentrated in tapas;
By tapas he created the world; creating, He entered into it;
Entering, he became the existent and the beyond-existence;
He became the expressed and the unexpressed.*

Taittiriya Upanisad 2.6.1

Sri Siddhi Vinayaka of Siddhatek

Siddhatek means "a place where one obtains accomplishment/perfection/success (*siddhi*)."
"A place" seems to imply somewhere to go. Whether it is put into the language of "getting rid of what you haven't got" (ignorance) or "obtaining the already obtained" (wisdom), we are already and always fulfilled. Thus we obtain what at Siddhatek? Another facet of Ganesa. We are indeed already perfect, but we do not know it.

As well as being a *siddha*, Ganapati possesses *siddhis* in addition to a consort named *Siddhi*. A dwarfish figure with a rotund body and an elephant's head; sitting, standing, or dancing; riding atop a peacock, a lion, a horse, or a rat; a jet-black stone besmeared with crimson powder; a shining bronze image resplendent with jewels; possessing one, two, three, five or even ten heads, single tusked, auspicious and benevolent, lord of beginnings and keeper of the threshold Ganesa has long been an object of interest and fascination.

It is an enchanting portrait. Ganapati is a child, a god, an elephant, a *siddha*, four armed, and an enigma. He does exactly as he pleases. He is free. He is seen, but he is the seer. He sees what cannot be seen. He can be known, but he is the knower. He knows, but he knows nothing. His secret is that he is himself. His secret is that he is you. His secret is *tat tvam asi*.

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Sri Siddhi Vinayaka of Siddhatek is the place where Lord Visnu was reminded to pray to Ganesa before his fight with the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. By praying, Visnu obtained success (*siddhi*). He killed the demons by the power of the *mantra* "om vakratundaya hum" Further, it is said that the *Siddha* philosophy may be explained in terms of this image.

Of the *asta vinayaka* Ganapatis, this is the only *murti* that has its trunk turning to the right. Such an image is known as a "*siddhi vinayaka*." Such images are thought to be very auspicious, though; worship of them is usually kept highly secret and reserved for Ganapatyas.

Map is Not Territory

In school we use maps to help children understand their own country as well as the world. One points to various cities, states, countries, rivers, mountains, and so on to convey knowledge about the physical world. The map is not the country though it serves as an aid to help convey the names, size, location, topography, and distinctive landmarks of various places. With time and maturity, the glory of one's country, as well as the physical universe in all its details may be made known. Further, a road map of England is not the actual soil of London, but it will convey to one the knowledge of how to get there.

A symbol is a *laksana* (identifying mark, sign). It is the means by which one knows any thing, everything. Symbols either represent or bring to mind something by association in fact or thought. They are the visible/knowable signs by which the invisible is known. All one's knowledge, one's contact with the external world, even the inner mental world, every aspect of life, is based on symbols. Language is nothing but symbols. Carlyle said, "The universe is but one vast symbol of God; nay, if thou wilt have it, what is man himself but a symbol of God."

Every object in the world, animate or inanimate, is a manifestation of the one God. The realization and experiencing of this fundamental truth is the true goal of life. Until a person achieves this unitative consciousness, one should begin by seeking to see God at least in one object through concentration upon that particular object as God.

What goes through one's mind when one sees the symbol "+"? In certain contexts a mathematician would think of addition. In other contexts a railroad conductor may think of a railroad cross-

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ing. However, if one has no idea as to the context in which it is being used, the Western mind immediately makes three virtually simultaneous leaps, *tuk, tuk, tuk*. Without a moment's hesitation or contemplation, like a computer it emits three thoughts: cross/crucifixion/Christ. If pushed to provide a fourth sequential thought, in all likelihood it would be God.

No one thinks that those two little lines are God. No one mistakes the cross for God. And yet, how wonderful that those two little lines enable one, almost force one, to think of God. Such is the case with certain individuals that when one sees an elephant, their mind registers elephant/God or when they see an elliptical stone (*linga*) it registers stone/God, or when they see certain trees or rivers or mountains their mind registers X/God. Is that not wonderful? If it is not idolatry when a Christian sees two lines and thinks of God, then it should not be labeled idolatry when other individuals see other things and think of God. That which reminds one of God cannot but be a beneficial thing.

People do not feel that they are worshipping a cross or an elephant or a tree or a rock when they use these material mediums to commune with the Divine. In worship, the worshipper is only concerned with the Divine. The cross, elephant, tree, and rock symbolize God. They remind us of the God that they are considered to represent. So when people are reminded of the Divine by some particular symbol, what is happening is that their thoughts are directed in prayerful contemplation and supplication. In this process, they get rid of ego and become suffused with God-consciousness.

Further, it should be noted, that these are "disposable" symbols. This may seem like a quite sophisticated idea, the employment of a physical symbol for a subtle reality, but it should be obvious that even an unsophisticated villager understands this fact. After a festival or particular type of *puja* is over, the deity is cast into a body of water. The form is cast back into the formless. One who mistook the form for the "container of the form" would never dispose of the container. This nicely demonstrates that it is not the symbol that is being worshipped but the indwelling Divinity that it reminds one of and that it puts one in contact with.

Every religion has symbols. Some have more and some have fewer, but all have them. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everything one encountered put one in contact with the Divine? Sometimes a distinction is made between an idol and an image, wherein an idol is claimed to be a tangible manifestation of the divine presence wherein an image is said to be merely a reminder of the Divine.

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However, no one denies that the Divine has both personal and impersonal aspects. Symbols of the personal aspect enable one to draw nearer and nearer to the inexpressible grandeur of God. Any and every description is a limitation and approximation of that which ultimately cannot be described. This does not make symbols false; it merely portions or aspects of the Truth.

Human beings have certain limitations. Not everyone can contemplate the Divine in its transcendent form. For directing the mind toward the Divine and keeping it study during contemplation thereon, symbols are invaluable aids. The mind must somehow go from the concrete to the abstract. It may be true that God is omnipresent, but for purposes of worship and relationship, God is conceived as localized in a particular form. There is nothing contradictory in thinking of the transcendent God as having form, even a multiplicity of forms. When God takes human form, no blemish attaches itself to the Divine as a result of this descent. If, out of love, a mother stoops to pick up her child, she in no way is bowing to the child. It is an act of benediction, not submission. Does the chief justice lose his powers when he allows his grandchild to ride on his back? By assuming a form, it is only a mark of God's compassion for the sake of his devotees. Water has no color of its own or any particular shape. But it assumes the color and shape of the vessel containing it. Even so, God, by himself, may have no form. But the mind that thinks of him is a conditioning medium. It seizes hold of him and engenders a relationship, it partakes of communion to the best of its ability.

Symbols attempt to bring the Divine within the grasp of the individual. From the formless to the form and back again. There is an oft-quoted Upanisadic passage that says, "Lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality." The passage is always from the known to the unknown. Spiritual growth is a gradual transformation of the worshipper into the likeness of the worshipped. "As are one's thought, faith, insight, so one becomes." God takes shape and form in a continuing process in one's mind. Earlier we noted the Vedic declaration that there are two types of truth: *satyam* (spoken) and *rtam* (truth in action). As the blue pearl (*nila bindu*) expands into manifestation, facts about the universe reveal as well as conceal the transcendent reality behind the manifestation. Symbols conceal in that they partly the essential content (the Divine) from one even as they partly reveal this essence by suggesting or pointing to it. The *Upanisads* declare

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that everything is eternally *asti, bhati, priyam* (existence, luminosity, joy) even while individual *nama* and *rupa* (names and forms) come and go.

The *Upanisads* employ different techniques by which to interpret the work that symbols do. These include the technique of prior super-imposition and subsequent denial (*adhyaropa* and *apavada*). First, qualities and relations are superimposed upon the Divine so as to obtain some sort of understanding and relationship; then gradually these attributes are negated as a deeper and deeper understanding unfolds. A second technique is the method of *neti, neti*, not-this, not-this. Since the Divine can never be properly denoted by any words, the most appropriate way to indicate the Divine is to say, "*neti-neti*." A third method is to study the words of the Scripture and to listen to the words of the *Guru*. Whatever a "reliable source" says should be followed, for such a source has the ability to bestow divine grace and awaken wisdom.

Without symbols the mind cannot function or conceive, it cannot communicate anything. Further, there is a close connection between a name and the form it denotes. This is the secret of *japa*. The name invokes the form. It is said, "wherever the name of the Lord is sung, there he is."

A thorough symbolic survey of Ganesa would involve scrutinizing everything about him his physique, the objects that he holds in his hands, his gestures, his mount, his stance, the marks on his forehead, and his consorts. There are said to be sixteen common features in the classical Ganapati *murtis*.³ These are: elephant-face (*gajamukha*); twisted trunk (*vakratunda*); protruding belly (*lambodara*); dwarfish stature (*kharva*) or having very short legs (*padambujabhyam ati-vamanabhyam*); odd appearance (*vikata*), fan-like ears (*surpakarna*); small eyes (*hrasvanetra*); long trunk (*lambanasa*); black tusks (*syamadanta*); ash-gray color (*dhurnavama*); naked or clad in a tiger skin (*digambara, vyaghracarma*); bald head (*khavata*); fond of eating (*carvanalalasa*); hidden ankles (*gudhagulpha*); carrying a water-pot (*kamandaludhara*); rat as a mount (*akhuketana*). Let us now analyze some of Ganesa's more common aspects. What these aspects mean derive from various sources: Some are scriptural, others oral, and still others personal. The symbolic interpretations regarding these aspects are many and varied. From a spiritual aspirant's point of view, what is of utmost importance in one's interpretation are those insights which inspire, uplift, and are conducive to greater good.

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Gajamukha (Elephant-Face)

The most distinctive feature of Ganesa is his elephant's head. There are Puranic stories that declare that he was born this way,⁴ although they are the exceptions.

On hearing that (the prayers of the *devas*), the *bow-pinaka*-bearing lord of *devas*, Siva, created the body of the leading *deva* Ganesvara . . . then Ambika welcomed the elephant-faced lord Gajanana.⁵

Once upon a time, human beings performed penances for reaching the heavenly realms. They began entering into heaven in such great numbers that the gods felt threatened and rushed to Siva for help. Siva glanced at Parvati, and she rubbed a little dirt from her body and made an elephant-headed image with four arms and a plump body out of it. It came to life, and Parvati commanded it to create obstacles for the human beings who were performing austerities. As he set out on this task, Siva gave him an axe, Parvati a bowl of sweets, Karttikeya a rat for his vehicle, Brahma omniscience, Visnu wisdom, Indra good fortune, Kubera wealth, Surya valor, and Candra luster.⁶

In the vast majority of the most well-known stories that explain the origins of Ganesa's elephant head, Ganesa is beheaded by Siva, who then replaces (or orders replaced) the missing head with that of an elephant.⁷ The most well-known story (or variations thereof) comes from the *Siva Purana*.

Jaya and *Vijaya* were the two beautiful handmaids of Mother Parvati. One day *Jaya* and *Vijaya* came to Parvati and said, "O Divine Mother, we have a feeling in our hearts that the attendants of Lord Siva are neglecting us as well as you. They are more faithful to Lord Siva than to you. This is our feeling. We think that you should have a very special, very powerful attendant." Mother Parvati heard this but kept quiet. Then, one day Parvati went to take a bath in the large bathing pool in Kailasa. She summoned Nandi, the chief of Siva's attendants, to guard the pool so that no one would enter the area while she was bathing. A short while later, Lord Siva came and

observed Nandi guarding the entrance. Nandi informed Siva of Parvati's instructions but he brushed them aside, entered, and walked up to Parvati. Parvati was astonished to see Lord Siva standing right in front of her. She thought, What is Nandi doing? I had given him an order. Then she remembered the words of Jaya and Vijaya. Yes, she thought, I do need my own attendant. She didn't say this to anyone, not even Siva. So she anointed herself with sandalwood paste and then scraped some off her body and created an exquisite male child. She gave it life by her divine power. The little boy, with great reverence, bowed at the feet of Mother Parvati. Parvati was proud to see her son. She said, "You are my son. Please guard the entrance to this pool. Allow no one inside without my permission." The little boy bowed and took up his position. He had in his possession a spear which his mother had given him and which embodied her power. She had told him that as long as he held this spear no one could do any harm to him. As the boy was guarding the entrance to the pool, Lord Siva appeared. He wondered, who is this little boy? I haven't seen him before. He started to enter but the boy stopped him. The boy said, "You can't enter here." Siva said, "Don't you know who I am? I own this pool. Are you a fool. I am Parvati's lord. Do you think I need permission to enter my own house? Now move." But the child wouldn't move. He had never seen Siva before. He said, "You may be anybody, I don't care. My mother gave me instructions not to allow any one to enter. I will not allow you inside." Siva smiled and ordered Nandi to move the boy. But the child easily defeated Nandi. Soon Siva and the boy were engaged in a terrible fight. Siva made the boy become angry, and the boy threw his spear at Siva. Siva grasped it in his hand and smiled. The boy was now powerless and easily defeatable. The poor child had lost his protective power. Siva cut off his head and went inside. When Parvati heard about what had happened she became furious. She told Siva that she would not be happy unless her child was restored to life. "I want to see my son, alive," she cried. So Siva ordered his guards to go and cut off the head of the first living thing that they encountered with its head facing northward. They found an elephant, cut

off its head, and returned to Siva. Siva joined the elephant's head to the boy's body and blessed him.

Variations of this story include:

When Ganesa was born he was the most beautiful child ever. Parvati, wanting to proudly show this radiant child to Sani. Sani, however, was cursed that anything he looked at would be burned to ashes. Reluctantly, with much encouragement, he looked at the child with one eye only. Nonetheless, Ganesa's was instantly burned to ashes. Lord Visnu immediately mounted upon Garuda and flew northward. There he found an elephant exhausted from intercourse with his mate. Visnu cut off his head and returned to the headless child where he joined it to the body of the child Ganesa. 8

Once the gods and sages experienced great difficulty in accomplishing their tasks, while wicked beings had no difficulty whatsoever. Obstacles seemed to plague only the righteous ones. So the gods went to Siva and asked him why this was so. Siva meditated on the problem and suddenly smiled. The reason for the smile was the understanding that the four primary elements (earth, water, fire, air) had form, while the fifth one, space was formless. This brought to his mind the promise made by the Creator long ago that Ganesa, the lord of obstacles, would be formed by the four primary elements that had form. Ganesa was the answer to the troubles of the gods. From Siva's smile emerged a brilliant and very handsome young boy. Parvati gazed on the boy with love in her eyes, and this made Siva angry. He cursed the boy to become deformed, potbellied, and elephant headed.9

Two explanations of how Ganapati acquired an elephant's head have to do with a battle between Siva and Ganapati and with two mating elephants.

Once there was a battle between Siva and Ganesa that had gone on for a long time without interruption. When the unconquerable Siva, mounted on an elephant, saw that Ganesa was made out of matter (*prakrti*) and filled with ignorance (*avidya*), he knocked him down along

with the elephant on which he was riding. Then Parvati praised Siva and asked him for a boon that he should restore her son whom he had just killed. So Siva joined the head of the elephant to where Ganesa's head had been and pulled out one of his tusks and gave it to him for his ascetic's staff. 10

Once Siva and Parvati were gazing at the *Omkara* when Siva fixed his gaze on the letter A, in the *AUM*, and Parvati fixed her gaze on the letter U. Thereupon, the A became a male elephant, and the U became a female elephant, and out of their union was born Ganesa. 11

There is an unusual story attributed to the *Skanda Purana*, which gives a different version as to *why* Ganapati acquired his elephant's head.

Once Ganesa, in the form of a headless child, was talking with a sage. The sage said, "If you have taken this incarnation in order to reveal righteousness, then quickly reveal to all the head that destroys sorrow; and bring joy to the hearts of all the gods." This son of Parvati, who had no head, replied to the sage, "Once before when King Mahesa bowed at your feet you gave him a blessing. You said to him, 'Your liberation will come through birth in the womb of an elephant, accomplished by Siva's hand.' All this has now come to pass, and this one in the womb has a lovely head, honored by Siva. And he is the one whose head will complete my incarnation." The sage's heart was filled with this miracle, and he said to the child, "Lord, you possess all forms, and times, you are the lord of all, you know what I said to the king, I cannot comprehend your form as the lord." Then Narada, who had been listening to all this said, "How did you become incarnate without a head in the first place? Did someone cut off your head when you were in the form of a child? Remove my confusion, merciful and supreme lord." Drinking in Narada's words, the child said, "A certain demon named Sindura took the form of a breeze, and in the eighth month he entered the womb and cut off my head. Now I will kill him (i.e., Mahesa) because he has the elephant's head." When Narada heard this he said to the lord who had taken the form of the child, "We gods

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know nothing about how that head was joined to you. You must have joined it yourself, according to your own nature." And just as the sage said this, the son of *Uma* appeared to all, complete in all his limbs as the elephant-headed one. 12

What does it mean? When, how, and why Ganapati came to have an elephant's head has been the topic of much debate. Before presenting a few of the more common interpretations that have been presented by others, let me make a few comments.

To expound and propagate concepts is simple. To drop all concepts is difficult and rare. As Protagoras put it, "Man is the measure of all things." Who dares to go beyond measuring? The *Upanisads* emphasized the converse side of the coin, "Those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak." Every possible answer comes within the domain of knowledge, but who is the knower of whatever is known?

Having said this, for the sake of uncovering that which is seemingly covered, we may note that there are those who say it is possible to have an experience of the great ocean/cave of consciousness within. As a rule, the initial experience of this takes the form of a scintillating blue light "within" the heart cave. In this context, *within* is an unusual word for one's experience is that this "ocean of consciousness" transcends dualistic terms like *within* and *without*. Simultaneously, everything is consciousness and yet no thing is.

Be that as it may, if the blue pearl begins to move, its trajectory across the inner sky of consciousness seems to form an arc. It is my contention that this initial movement is what the *Veda* refers to as the *dantin* (tusk). Certainly there is no elephant at this stage of creation. Conceptually, if one then extrapolates the movement of this blue pearl in all directions, one encounters a figure like a *svastika* (which happens to be Ganesa's symbol; see fig. 14). The *svastika* is a symbol of geometric perfection. It can simultaneously represent that which is omnipresent (and thereby stable) and that which is whirling in perpetual motion with its arms rotating one after another like a cosmic pinwheel (the physical universe of name and form). At one and the same moment, one experiences that what is without is equally within, that what is full is equally empty, what is silent is equally active, what is smaller than the smallest is equally larger than the largest, and

what is farther than the farthest is nearer than the nearest. (see figure)

This knowledge is experiential. It need not be ultimately real, nor absolutely unreal, neither illusory nor a dream. "Man is the

measure"; "those who speak do not know." Any description of the experience is limited by the inherent limitations of the mind. Truth or falsity does not pertain to that which transcends duality. Nor will any description affect what "That" is. If you call me stupid, and I am not, why should I be depressed? If you call me brilliant, and I am, why should I rejoice? I am what I am no matter what you may think of me. Thus, if words do not reach the Reality, how is it affected?

But that does not mean that words do not have a use. And thus it would appear that that which makes a human being a human being, the ability to conceptualize, to classify, to not only make a Ganesa, but be a Ganesa is fruitful. From the initial experience of the blue pearl to a swirling tunnel of light to a large head with tiny eyes to a full-fledged mythology concerning a strange elephant-headed human being is not, and need not be, an invention of primitive peoples. One experience leads to another, and one good story deserves another. There is the classical expression "As above, so below," and thus nothing may be quite so coincidental or accidental as it first appears. Betwixt the cup and the lip is many a slip. What is important, at least for spiritual aspirants, is whether or not a given deity or symbol has the ability to convey the liberating experience to the *sadhaka*.

I rather doubt that many spiritual aspirants contemplate where Ganapati's elephant head came from. It is there. If it is pleasing, or informative, or at the least, not distractive, then the possibility is there that something may transpire, communion may be experienced and that is more than enough. How many devout individuals enquire where the Cross came from, or the Kaa'ba? And yet, how many individuals have had deep and transforming experiences from encountering these religious artifacts? I need not know where Buddha came from or why he had those elongated earlobes in order to receive what he wanted to give me.

This being said, let us look at various select interpretations that have been given regarding Ganesa and his attributes and accouterments.

First and foremost, Ganapati is a physical embodiment of the great Upanisadic *mahavakya tat tvam asi* (that thou art). He combines the two seemingly incongruous parts, an elephant's head and a human body, in one form. Thus, like the *mahavakya* that unifies two seemingly incongruous parts, That (*tat*) and Thou (*tvam*), so does Ganesa. He is a physical embodiment of the infinite and the finite, of the immortal and the mortal, of the large and the small, of the manifest and the unmanifest.

The large elephant head represents the macrocosm of the Divine while the human body represents the microcosm or the physical. The spiritual is above and the physical is below. The larger and more significant part of Ganapati, his elephant's head, represents the eternal witness. Many paintings of Ganapati depict a red elephant's head and a flesh-colored body. Iconographically, this depiction reveals the distinction between the human and the Divine. Even etymologically, the *GA* (*gaja*) stands for the elephant and *NA* (*nara*) stands for the human being. Or, again, the *GA* represents the yogic goal of liberation, the unmanifest, while the *IA* stands for *jati* (creation), the beginning, the source of creation. Ganesa is the *PATI* or lord of *GA + NA*; he is the lord of all, the lord of both the manifest and the unmanifest, Ganapati.

Ganesa was to guard his mother's door. He is known as the gatekeeper as well as the lord of beginnings. His beheading took place at a threshold, as all beginnings do. Every beginning is the end of the old and the beginning of the new. In order to transcend the physical and ascend to the Divine, one must "lose one's head," that is, give up one's egotistical viewpoint. One must be both a victor and a victim. One is a victim because one's head must be lost. One is a victor because the new is a new beginning, a divine manifestation.

The elephant has a huge head. Since ancient times, the elephant has been known as an emblem of sagacity. To a student of Indian thought, and even more, to a spiritual aspirant, one needs a great head to conceive of, and understand, the

science of the Self. One needs a keen intellect to probe into the discipline of hearing the texts (*sravana*), reflecting on its meaning (*manana*), and becoming firm in one's understanding (*nididhyasana*). This great head is symbolic of auspiciousness, strength, and intellectual prowess.

Further, the elephant is known as the largest and strongest of the animals in the forest. Yet he is gentle and, amazingly, a vegetarian. The elephant is known for its politeness when tamed and for its ferociousness and destructive power when angered. This dual nature of the elephant can also be seen in the versatility of its trunk. It can uproot a gigantic tree, destroy an entire forest, or pick up a tiny pin with the same instrument. He is affectionate and loyal to the mahout (even helping him onto its back/bestowing grace) and is pleased and loyal when love and kindness is shown to him.

Ganapati's large head symbolizes wisdom. It represents an individual of perfect wisdom, a completely realized being who is in the world but not of the world. His feet are on the ground and his head is in the clouds. His is a unique combination of knowledge

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(*jñana sakti*) and action (*kriya sakti*). Not only is his head an instrument for knowledge, but, unlike most other creatures, his trunk is an organ of action.

A single elephant's head for Ganesa is the most common. However, there are two-, three-, four-, and five-headed Ganesas. The two-headed form is associated with Agni, the three-headed form with Siva; the four-headed form with Brahma; and the five-headed Heramba is usually interpreted as representing either the five primary elements (*pañcabhutas*) or the five aspects of Siva (*Tatpurusa, Aghora, Vamadeva, Sadyojata, and Isana*).

Ekadanta (Single Tusk)

Just as there are two predominant variations in the story of how Ganesa obtained his elephant's head, there are two paradigm stories about his single tusk. Either his elephant head was single tusked from the time he acquired it, or one tusk was lost at a later stage. 13

Siva, after beheading Ganesa, sent the gods northward with the command to cut off the head of the first living being they encountered, which just happened to be a single-tusked elephant. 14

Once Parasurama arrived at Kailasa to meet with his lord and *Guru*, Lord Siva. However, since Siva was asleep, Ganapati would not let Parasurama enter. A duel broke out between them, and in that duel, Ganapati's right tusk was broken when Parasurama struck him with an axe that Siva had given him. 15

Once upon a time, Ganesa received countless *modakas* from his devotees, and he ate so many sweets that his stomach became large and distended. Then, mounting upon his little mouse, he proceeded home. It was dark and the overburdened little mouse was having a difficult time of it. Suddenly a snake crossed the road in front of him and the mouse jumped in fright, throwing Ganesa to the ground. This fall caused his stomach to split open and all the sweets rolled out pell mell. Ganesa patiently gathered the sweets, put them into his belly once again, and then killed the snake and tied it round his belly for security. The moon, who had been watching all this,

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laughed out uproariously, which made Ganesa furious. Ganesa plucked out one of his tusks and threw it at the moon. This caused the universe to go dark, and, by the pleading of the gods, Ganesa agreed to modify his curse somewhat and to restore the lustre of the moon, but only on the condition that the moon gain and lose its light by waxing and waning each month. 16

Gajasura had obtained the privilege of not being killed by a beast, a man, a god, or a demon. Ganapati, not being one of these, as he was half god, half elephant, was the only one who could deal with him victoriously. The demon broke off the god's right tusk, but Ganapati, using it as a spear, transfixed Gajasura, who transformed himself into a rat and became the vehicle of Ganapati. 17

We also noted the story of either Siva pulling out Ganesa's tusk or of Ganesa pulling out his own tusk so as to make an ascetic's staff.¹⁸

The *Puranas* generally conclude that Ganapati was left with only his right tusk intact. However, iconographic representations usually make him carry the broken left tusk in his right hand.

A story that appears only in the northern recension of the *Mahabharata* relates the legend in which Ganesa, at the request of Vyasa, writes down the entire *Mahabharata*.¹⁹ The conditions of the contract stipulated that Ganesa would continue to write only so long as Vyasa did not stop dictating. Vyasa agreed to this condition for only as long as Ganesa never ceased writing. Some versions of the story add that Ganesa could write down only what he first understood. This condition gave Vyasa some needed time to pause and think, thus upholding his end of the bargain, for, he interspersed his dictation with such complex sentences as compeled Ganesa to ponder over them before writing them down. In any event, it is said that while Ganesa was writing this monumental work (on palm leaves), his pen broke. Without hesitating, he reached up and broke off one of his tusks and continued writing without a moment's break in his work as the writer. For this reason, Ganesa is called the single-tusked one. It represents that no sacrifice is too great for a noble cause and that the resourceful one knows no impediment. Without stopping to consider whether this act would deface his beauty or cause pain to his body, he conquered any desires he may have and sacrificed himself for the good of all. Surely no sacrifice is too great for the sake of learning.

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Ganapati is considered to be the god of wisdom. The tusk represents a writing instrument or the tool by which learning is facilitated. It is also symbolic of *Advaita* (nonduality). To follow one god, one religion, one faith is the highest authority. There is nothing higher than nonduality. Further, the tusk represents discrimination, the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is unreal.

The tusk is an instrument by which the elephant plunges into the earth to uproot a tree. As discrimination, it is the instrument by which one can uproot ignorance from one's life. One should not be a victim to likes and dislikes, or pleasure and pain; always being tossed between the dualities. One should transcend likes (*raga*) and dislikes (*dvesa*) and become immersed in the Self. The single tusk reminds one of this fact.

Another way to interpret the tusk is to claim that it symbolizes the manifest universe. The *Mudgala Purana* explains that the single tusk is symbolic of *maya*, from which all names and forms proceed. Before there was creation, there was nothing. It is from *maya* that two, and hence multiplicity, commences. Therefore, the tusk stands for creation as well as that which supports creation. It is strong and powerful. It is durable. It represents the divine power (*sakti*) of God.

Another interpretation explains that the head of Ganapati signifies *Brahman*, the attributeless Reality, while the human body, from the neck downwards, signifies *maya* or the principle of phenomenal existence. The Self's (*Atman*) involvement with the world is characterized by mind and speech, which is the meaning of the term *vakra*. Thus, Ganapati is named *Vakra-tunda*.

If the tusk stands for *dharma*, for righteousness, for truth, the broken tusk seems to violate the law of the universe. Symbolically, Ganesa breaking his tusk signifies the incredible sacrifice that the Divine makes for aiding humanity. Further, it may be interpreted as demonstrating that Ganesa is beyond the rules of cosmic orderliness and that he is the source of those rules. There are stories that depict Ganesa following the cosmic law, and there are times when he transcends the law. The tusk reminds people not only that they may relate to, and commune with, Ganesa, but also that they must soar into superhuman heights and transcend name and form.

Vakratunda (Twisted Trunk)

Ganapati is referred to as *Omkara svarupa* (the personification of the primordial word, Om). His curved elephant's trunk is a representa-

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tion of the *pranava mantra*, *Om*, the sound from which the world was created. As the *pranava* is the Upanisadic symbol for *Brahman* (the Absolute), this identification declares that Ganapati is *Brahman* Itself. Further, this identification of Ganesa with *Om* is immediate and physical, because his curved or twisted trunk reminds one of the *devanagari* letter. Similarly, the Tamil *Om*  has the physical appearance of an elephant's head with a dangling trunk (see figure 9).

In the highly symbolic language evolved by Vedic *rsis* to reveal the nature of the Divine, Ganesa forms the first letter, *Om*. From the ice cave of the infinite, when the *bindu* began to expand with the first emanations of manifestation, the vibrations of *Om* emerged. This *Om* is Ganesa. He is the first Word, *Vac*, the Primordial Cause. The *Siva Purana* says, "Omkara came out of my mouth. Originally it indicated me. It is the indicator and I am the indicated. This *mantra* is identical with me." 20

Om is thought to be the most comprehensive, most universal sound-symbol and signifier of the Absolute. Comprising three letters (*matra*) "A-U-M" plus the fourth (*turiya*), or that which is the changeless ground of A-U-M, *Om* manifests as the totality of existence, that is, the waking or physical, dreaming or psychical, deep sleep or causal, and the transcendental, which is the source of the first three.

The *Mandukya Upanisad* begins by saying that "*Om* is all this; whatever was, is, and will be, as well as that which is beyond the triple conception of time." *Om* comprises the three *matras*, 'a'-*kara*, 'u'-*kara*, 'm'-*kara* plus the *matra-less* (*a-matra*) fourth (*turiya*) or the *bindu*. The first three *matras* correspond to the three quarters of the self, that is, the waking (*jagrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*susupti*). By enquiring into these three states of experience, one will come to realize the Selfs true nature which is constant and unchanging. One will discover the fourth, *turiya*, as the one reality of which these three states are changing appearances. Pervading these three changing states, the fourth is that which is constant. The Self or the "I" is present whether the physical world with its external objects, the psychical world with its internal objects, and the causal world with its lack of objects exist or not. The Self is the knower of objects as well as the knower of a lack of objects. These three states are within space, time, and causality and rest on the fourth like the pictures of a motion picture rest on the screen without affecting it.

The Sanskrit alphabet is arranged in accordance with the order of the origination of sounds in the vocal system, commencing from the larynx with the opening of the mouth, passing through

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OM in Sanskrit

OM in Tamil

Figure 9
Om in Sanskrit and Tamil script

the throat, and ending with the closing of the lips. Between the opening (pronounce the letter *a*, the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, as "uh") and closing of the mouth (pronounce the letter *m*, the last letter of the Sanskrit alphabet), all the other letters/ sounds that represent all one's experiences and concepts, are produced. Thus between *a* and *m* come every other possible sound and word. Inserting the vowel *u*, which rolls through the throat over the entire length of the tongue, the beginning, middle, and end of every possible sound has been covered.

The *matras A-U-M* are symbolic not only of all sounds and of all the possible states of experience but also of the three planes/ worlds/lokas of existence. They represent the three planes of *bhuh*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*. These represent this world, the middle region, and the next world in the famous *Gayatri mantra*. When *Om* is uttered, the phenomenal as well as the noumenal, the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, and the personal as well as the impersonal are represented. Hence *Om* is called the most perfect signifier of the Divine (*tasya vacakah pranavah*).

Once Siva and Parvati were gazing at the *Omkara* when Siva fixed his gaze on the letter A, in the *AUM*, and Parvati fixed her gaze on the letter U. Thereupon, the A became a male elephant, and the U became a female elephant, and out of their union was born Ganesa. 21

In literary usage, Om is written in one of two ways: ao\ or aom(. It is written symbolically as. It does not take much imagination to visualize an elephant in this symbol. Some aver that it was this pictorial similarity that, with the passage of time, concretized into the symbol for Ganesa, and Ganesa became the personification of

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the symbol *Om*. For instance, it is easy to find his potbelly (which, being represented by the letter A signifies the entire universe within him, even as A represents the physical plane) and yet he also stands transcending it. The letter U represents his head even as the letter U represents the psycho-mental world.

The syllable *Om* is an "excellent boat to cross the ocean of worldly existence." 22 This sentence contains a play upon the word for Om which is *Pranava*. *Pra* = "of the *prakrti*" (nature or worldly existence) and *navam* = (*navam*) "an excellent boat." Thus, it is that which leads to liberation or, it may mean, there is no world for you, that is, you are free from the troubles of the ocean of worldly existence.

The *Katha Upanisad* says, "This syllable [*Om*] is, verily, the Absolute. This syllable, indeed, is the highest of the high; knowing this very syllable, whatever anyone desires will, indeed, be his." 23

The Ganapati six-syllabled (*sadaksari*) *mantra* is "*Om vakratundaya hum*." Tradition says that Lord Visnu killed the demons Madhu and Kaitabha with the power of this *mantra*. Further, Visnu, in his incarnation as the dwarf, Vamana, learned this *mantra* from his father, Kasyapa, and by it killed the demon, Mahabali. Indra was redeemed from the curse of the sage Gautama with the power of this *mantra*. Subramanyam (Karttikeya) obtained the grace of his brother, Ganesa, and destroyed the demon Tarakasura with the power of this *mantra*.

Simultaneous with the emanations of the *Omkara*, Ganesa appeared as *Nrtya Ganapati*, dancing with great abandon, swirling, whirling, creating, preserving, and dissolving. The Om is the *pranava nada* (primordial sound); it is the *anahata* (transcendent or unstruck sound) vibration; it is *anadi* (beginningless, eternal). As these concepts are so subtle, so beyond the comprehension of the mind, they are given in the symbolic form of *Om*. All this is in keeping with the spiritual tradition of symbolically concretizing and personifying abstract concepts and entities. The movement is from the known to the unknown. When a sapling is small, it needs a protective fence around it to provide a space wherein it may have a chance to grow into the splendor that is contained within its tiny seed. Once, the tree is fully grown, it no longer needs a protective fence around it. Not only can it take care of itself, without the need of physical and external protections, but it now freely dispenses shade and protection and even the possibility of future trees. Likewise, subtle and obtuse truths are protected, transmitted, and nurtured by this symbolic concretizing.

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Figure 10
Calligraphy using Ganapati's various names

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The trunk is the most peculiar organ of the elephant. It has the unique capacity of performing both gross and subtle activities. It can uproot a huge tree, destroy an entire forest, or pick up a tiny needle from the ground. One rarely finds such a combination of subtle and gross actions being performed by a single instrument.

In some images the trunk hangs straight down, while in others either it turns right or left, or it swirls. Most images have the trunk turning to Ganesa's left (the onlooker's right). In this position it resembles the letter *L*. Tradition maintains that this is the type of image that the majority of devotees should use for purposes of *puja* (worship). It is said that a Ganapati whose trunk is on his right side is extremely particular that his worship be performed in the exact manner prescribed in the scriptures. The Ganesa with his trunk on his left side is easier to please and bestows boons freely.

There is a group of devotees, Ganapatyas, who worship Ganesa above all other deities. They employ images of Ganesa with his trunk turning right. When the trunk turns right, great secrecy is maintained and the rules regarding purity must be strictly adhered to. A *puja* must be performed daily without fail and *durva* grass must be one of the items included in the *puja*.

Various interpretations are given in regard to Ganapati's trunk. It is said to be symbolically linked to the *kundalini sakti* (the cosmic energy that lies coiled at the base of the spine in an individual). Depending upon the direction in which the trunk turns, some interpreters have linked it with the *ida*, *pingala*, or *susumna ida nadi*. The *ida nadi* is on the left side of the spine, the *pingala nadi* is on the right side of the spine, and the *susumna* is the central channel. The left-turning or moon (*candra*) *nadi* has easy and lax rules. It is cooling and one may do *puja* any way one wants, at any time, at any place, with any materials, and it gives immediate results. A Ganesa with a left-turning trunk is said to be extremely easy to please. A right-turning or sun (*surya*) *nadi* has hard and strict rules and requires much austerity (*tapasya*). The sun is hot and difficult to please, and, as a rule, one worships this type of Ganesa when one is interested solely in liberation. This type of image is more powerful and thus requires greater purity and greater attention. As a rule, those individuals who practice tantric *upasanas* employ the use of a right-turning trunk.

For a *yogi*, Ganapati's trunk represents the *kundalini sakti*. When the trunk is facing straight forward, it means that the *susumna* is wide open. When the trunk is swung straight up into the air, it means that the *kundalini sakti* has risen to the crown of the head (*sahasrara*). It is also said that a Ganapati with a swirling

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trunk is the most auspicious type of Ganapati to worship for he may be approached from "any direction."

As a general rule, when one encounters a Ganesa with his trunk facing straight forward or curving to his right, the trunk will be carrying a pot of the nectar of immortality (*amrta*). This represents the attainment of immortality for an individual. Further, it is generally thought that a trunk that curves to the right is a symbol of spiritual progress. If the trunk curves to Ganesa's left, it usually is reaching for, or holding, a bowl of sweets (*laddhus* or *modakas*). Some interpret this to mean an involvement of the mind acting through the sense organs, while others say that it symbolizes the bliss of spiritual attainment (sweeter than the sweetest).

Ganapati's trunk is symbolic of his Grace. It can both lift up devotees from their state of ignorance and scent the subtle things necessary to be done. Further, the trunk is a mighty weapon whereby Ganesa can remove obstacles from a follower's path. It is also symbolic of the unity of all beings and all things.

Finally, Ganesa's trunk is symbolic of discrimination (*viveka*). Ganesa may use his trunk for destructive or constructive purposes. He can use it for great and for small actions. The trunk hangs between his tusks and thus symbolizes that one must discriminate between the dualities of the universe and be attached to neither.

Lambodara (Potbellied One)

Another distinctive feature of Ganapati is his huge stomach. It is vast enough to contain the entire universe. It is the cosmic womb wherein may be found all that is. Thus Ganesa can digest all that life can present, he can stomach anything. This makes him not only a *stithaprajna* (one with great serenity and equanimity) but also one able to swallow all the sorrows of the universe. This is another way of demonstrating his protective powers.

Ganesa's big belly (*lambodara* meaning "hanging, extended, or protruding") is explained by a story in the *Brahma Purana*. 24

Ganesa as a little baby was drinking milk from his mother's breast for such a long time that even when he was full, he would not stop. Thus, his brother, Karttikeya, never got a chance to drink. Lord Siva, their father, who was watching this, ascribed Ganesa's greed to his jealousy for his brother and called him "lambodara."

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This grotesque, awkward, and corpulent body is symbolic of the truth that beauty of the outer, physical form has no connection with inner beauty and spiritual perfection.

Kubera, the god of wealth and celestial treasurer, was proud of his great riches. He once visited Kailasa and visited with the divine family. In his vanity, he thought he would show off his wealth to Lord Siva and so he

hosted a lavish dinner. Siva and Parvati said that they were not coming but that Kubera could take and feed the child, Ganesa. Siva warned him that Ganesa was a voracious eater, but proud Kubera replied, "I can easily feed this little child to his heart's content." The little child caught hold of Kubera's little finger and followed him to his kingdom. Once there, Ganesa sat down to eat. And as he ate, his appetite grew and he began to eat, faster and faster. Kubera's army of servants had a difficult time keeping up with the child. Ganesa grew impatient at the slow pace of serving and began to eat the dishes, the vessels, the furniture, the palace, the trees, all of Kubera's kingdom in fact. Kubera pleaded with Ganesa to stop but the child merrily said, "If you don't feed me, I will eat you too." Kubera rushed to the feet of Lord Siva and pleaded and implored for help. Siva said, "I warned you." Kubera said, "Lord, please forgive me for my foolishness and vanity. Save me or I will be eaten up too." Siva agreed and gave Kubera a handful of puffed rice saying, This will satisfy his hunger." With humility, Kubera rushed back to the palace and offered the rice with love and humility, and immediately Ganesa's hunger was appeased. Thus did Kubera learn that a handful of puffed rice, offered with love and humility and eaten with devotion is more important and filling than all the wealth that Kubera possessed.

Ganesa's huge belly physically reminds one of *siddhas* who have large bellies by virtue of their retaining (*kumbhaka*) their *prana*.

Pasa (Noose)

Ganesa typically carries two weapons in his upraised hands: the noose (*pasa*) and the goad (*ankusa*).²⁵ The noose, usually found in

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his upraised left hand, conveys the idea of bondage. Worldly attachments and desires are a noose, and the *pasa*, as a weapon, catches or snares the delusion of desire. It is Ganesa's "gentle" weapon, which he employs to capture, and then hold onto, obstacles or difficulties, to direct one along the right path much as a rider guides his steed by the use of the bridle and the reins. One should make the mind like a bridle that keeps the horses of the mind from running about wild. By it, Ganapati keeps individuals on the right track. Likewise, with the noose, Ganesa is able to pull his devotees nearer and nearer to the truth. Eventually he will tie such a devotee down to the highest truth.

Ankusa (Goad)

The other weapon that is usually found in one of Ganesa's hands, generally the upraised right hand, is the goad (*ankusa*). It is said to be his "fierce" weapon. It is used to remove obstacles or difficulties from one's path. If one does not learn the truth by gentle persuasion, then more drastic measures are needed. Just as a mahout uses the goad to control and guide an elephant, Ganesa uses his goad to drive one in the right direction. If an individuals will not cut off their attachments to the world on their own initiative, then Ganesa will be forced to use his goad to sever these attachments.

Surpakarna (Large Ears)

Ganapati's ears are large enough to hear the prayers of everyone, but like the winnowing basket, they are capable of shifting out what is good for the supplicant from what is not. Thus, the ears symbolize discrimination and discernment or the ability to separate the essential from the nonessential. They are able to act like winnowing baskets that separate the chaff of falsehood from the grains of truth.

The ear is important because the (inner) ear is the sense organ that "heard" the *Vedas*. Thus, the ears are a symbol of wisdom. They are also a constant reminder that one should be ever attentive to talking less and listening more.

Musaka (Mouse)

Ganesa is called "the one whose mount is a mouse"²⁶ (*adhashthan musakanvitam*).²⁷ He is also known as "*musaka vahana*." The winds

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of time blow chilly and cold and a force impels him forward, for he has a rendezvous with destiny. There are no accidents in this universe. Things don't just happen, they happen just.

Ganapati's mouse deserves special mention, for it is a comic figure, a controversial figure, an enigmatic figure, an ancient figure. The mouse is mentioned in the *Yajurveda* as the sacrificial offering (*purodhasa*) that is buried in the ground while Brahmin priests perform the sacrifice meant for the fulfillment of a desire.²⁸ In this sacrifice, this symbolic mouse is Siva's share of the animal offering. In another variation of this story, Agni assumed the form of a mouse and hid himself in the earth.²⁹ We also have the story that in the *Tryambaka homa*, a sacrificial rite, a mouse is described as Rudra's vehicle.³⁰ In chapter one we noted that Agni, Rudra, and Ganesa share not only this incident but others as well.

The metamorphosis of *Agni* into a mouse, the mouse burrowing into the earth, its subsequent presentation to Siva, and Siva's bestowal to Ganesa seems to function as an overt allegory of a mystical nature.

Then there is the Puranic story that says, "when all the gods offered Ganesa presents after his name-giving ceremony, the Earth gave him a mouse to serve as his vehicle."³¹ And the *Ganesa Purana* tells of the curse bestowed upon the *gandharva* Kraunca that turned him into a mouse for his unrighteous behavior.³²

A third variation of the story of the origins of Ganesa's mouse is:

When he was nine years old, a huge mouse appeared in the *asrama* where Ganesa was staying and began to terrorize everyone, including all the creatures therein. When Ganesa appeared on the scene, the mouse disappeared. Ganesa, however, made a loop with his rope and threw it down and lassoed the mouse. The mouse struggled, but in vain. Then Ganesa subdued it and made it his vehicle. The humbled mouse said that he had been a *gandharva* and once upon a time he had trampled upon the sage *Vamadeva* when he was hurriedly leaving *Indra's durbar*. The sage cursed him to be a mouse and when he pleaded mercy, the curse was modified so that he would meet Ganesa in Parasara's *asrama* and would become his vehicle and thus worthy of worship even by gods. (See *Ganesa Purana* 2.134-138)

Many, if not most of those who interpret Ganapati's mouse, do so negatively: it symbolizes *tamoguna* as well as desire;³³ it stands

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Figure 11
Musaka in Dasa Bhuja Cintamani Temple, Pune

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for the darkness of the bowels of the earth into which he burrows and the depredation of fields at harvest time, and it is nervous and chattering; 34it symbolizes the petty desires of men that nibble away at their personalities and their inner selves;35it is the self-annihilating power of desire.³⁶

However, not one of the other Indian deities "rides upon a negative vehicle." Visnu sleeps upon the infinite (*Ananta*) and rides upon the *mantra* (Garuda), Siva rides upon delight (*Nandi*), *Sarasvati* rides upon the swan/I am he/the breath (*Hamsa/Soham*). It is logical to assume that Ganapati's mouse plays a similar role, or, even otherwise, it is certainly more uplifting and beneficial to interpret the mouse in positive, rather than negative ways. "As one thinks, so one becomes."

Ganesa is the divinity hidden within humanity. He is also known as the dweller in the secret heart-cave. The mouse represents the "carrier" of the Divine covered over by darkness hidden in the bowels of the earth (divinity hidden within the physical body). Some have called it the external manifestation of the soul that lives inside the body. By day it shuns the sunlight, and by night it roams the world. Even so does the human being shun the light of divinity and roam the world in the darkness of ignorance unless and until he or she has the proximity or presence of the Divine.

In India, pure gold is known as "*musa-gold*." The crucible used for melting gold is called a "*muz*." Coincidentally (?) the burrow where the golden mouse lives is also called a "*muz*." Even the word *mouse* in the English language derives from this word *muz*. In Sanskrit, the word for mouse is *musakam*.

His is that shining form that gives heat in yonder sun and that is the brilliant light in a smokeless fire, as also the fire in the stomach that cooks food. For thus it has been said: he who is in the fire, and he who is here in the heart, and he who is yonder in the sun, he is One.³⁷

A tiny mouse carrying the heavy weight of Lord Ganesha! "This is my Self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice, than a barley corn, than a mustard seed ... this is myself within the heart, greater than the earth."³⁸

The mouse may be thought of representing Grace. Grace is unseen and silently moves into every nook and corner of a dwelling. It is always present, always working, though it is seldom visible. Also, the mouse is the smallest mammal in whom the relationship of mother and child is readily apparent. The elephant is the

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Figure 12
Musaka in Sri Vignesvara Temple at Ojhar

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largest land mammal. This demonstrates the truth that all beings, high and low, big and small, are vehicles of the Divine. Further, between the elephant head and the mouse-vehicle resides the human being-physical body. Of all creatures, the human being has the capability to know who he or she really is. Only a person can manifest a conscious awareness of divinity.

When one hears of an elephant riding upon a mouse, one's imagination is piqued. One wants to enquire into how such a thing could be. *Voila*, one is hooked. From the known to the unknown, such is the path of the quest. The ludicrous stirs up a spirit of enquiry. Enquiry (*vicara*) leads to discrimination (*viveka*). Discrimination leads to detachment (*vairagya*). Detachment leads to liberation (*moksa*).

Another meaning of the word *musaka* is "thief." Some interpret Ganesa's mouse as representing the mind. The mind is like a thief. You must watch it constantly, not because you want anything from it, but because you don't want it to steal. Some individuals want to control their mind, but it is, by its very nature, uncontrollable. It is nothing but movement, fluctuations (*vruttis*). It hides behind the shapes of illusion. But the mind is also one's friend, in that it may be used to dispel illusions. Ride the thief; don't let the thief ride (steal from) you.

When the notion of liberation appears in the mind, liberation is a certainty. Once a living being has heard, and understood, that liberation is a real possibility, within one's reach, one will *never* forget. It is the first message from within. It will take root and, in due course, grow into the blessed shape of Divine Grace manifest. Let the "mouse" steal your illusions; not your Self. He can chew his way through anything; squeeze through the smallest hole; and he seems everywhere. "Smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest." And so hard to catch. "Those who think they know do not know; those who do not know, they know."

In *Taittiriya Brahmana* there is a reference to a feud between *Agni* and the other gods. *Agni*, angered, disappeared into the earth in the form of a mouse. When a truce was made, the mouse was presented to Siva. Then Siva, energized by the possession of this mouse created Subramanyam. After that birth, he gave the mouse to Ganesa, Subramanyam's brother.

Finally, there are those who claim that Ganapati's mouse represents the *kundalini sakti*. Ganesa rides the divine energy as it rises up from the bowels of darkness up through the *susumna*, where it penetrates the *cakras* on its way to the abode of Lord Siva, the *sahasrara*. As we shall see, there is a tale that speaks tells of the mouse

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being enticed by the scent of a sweet (*modaka*) to come out of its hole and take a bit of this nectar of immortality. It is the bliss of immortality that lures the human being heavenwards.

Modaka (Sweet)

Ganesa is extremely fond of wisdom, the sweet of bliss (*ananda*). He is known as "*modaka priya*."

The gods were filled with happiness at the birth of Ganesa and Karttikeya and presented Parvati with a sweet that is called "great intelligence" and the "nectar of immortality." Its virtues include: anyone who merely smells it will become immortal. He who eats it will become learned in the scriptures, skillful at weapons, knowledgeable in the *Tantras*, a writer and painter, one who has both worldly and spiritual knowledge. 39

Ganapati is the lord of wisdom and as such he is depicted as rotund and gluttonous. His appetite for the bliss of immortality is unceasing. The liberated one sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself. This state reveals itself in eternal bliss. It is the liberated one alone who can be said to be immersed in everlasting bliss. Such joy is no longer precariously dependent on external stimuli but is irrevocably secured as a result of his inner transformation. It is externally indicated by the gentle smile that uniformly plays on the face of the liberated one.

That Light whose smile kindles the universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse of birth can
quench not,

That sustaining Love which through the web of being
blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of the fire for
which all thirst;
Now beams on me consuming the last clouds of cold
mortality.40

The *modaka* or *laddhu* or *korukkattai* that Ganesa's trunk invariably turns toward, or that he is holding, or that is found in

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one of his hands, is symbolic of wisdom, of that which gives liberation. The word *modaka* derives from the Sanskrit root *mud* (joy, delight). The Self is said to be of the nature of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), bliss (*ananda*). One seeks bliss because one is of the nature of bliss. Nothing else will ultimately satisfy one than to experience that which one truly is.

Obtaining what one likes seemingly brings one joy. Thus, Ganapati holds out the incentive and enticement of "giving one what one wants, so that ultimately one will want what he has to give." It is because one mistakenly looks for complete and lasting bliss in external things that one eventually becomes disappointed. Bliss is not truly "outside" but within. This should be self-evident with a little analysis. One and the same object does not provide one with the same quality or quantity of bliss at different times. Nor does it provide different individuals with the same bliss. If bliss were innate to an object, this should be the case. Further, it is because the fluctuations of the mind cease upon attaining one's desired goal that one feels a momentary joy. If one begins to long for a piece of chocolate cake, one feels restless until that object is obtained. Mistakenly, one believes the joy that one feels upon putting that first bite of cake into one's mouth, comes from the cake. In reality, it comes from the quieting of the mind. No longer is the mind flickering, fluctuating, flitting hither and yon demanding cake. The joy comes from this quieting of the mind and not from the seemingly simultaneous attainment of one's desired object.

The *modaka* is a symbol of *ananda* (bliss), of the joys of spiritual practice that Ganesa gives to his devotees. A *modaka* is literally a sweet wheat or rice ball, which is invariably found in Ganapati's trunk, hand, and/or a bowl nearby.

Sindura/Rakta varna (Crimson/Red Color)

Ganesa is associated with the color red (*rakta vama*).

rakta varnam, rakta malyamaram
rakta gandhanuliptangam, rakta pushpais supujitam

<i>Raktam lambodaram</i> <i>surpakaranakam Raktavasasam</i>	Red, with a large belly and whose ears resemble a grain- winnowing basket
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<i>Raktagandhanu liptangam</i> <i>raktapusyai supujitam</i>	Wearing red garments, whose body is smeared with redpaste and worshipped with red flower
--	--

Ganapati's complexion is red. He wears a red/orange/yellow *dhoti*. He is fond of red flowers. He is described as being "red like the sun's rays" (*arunachaya*). He is described as "occupying the center of the sacred fiery triangle (*tejo mandala madhya gatham*)". He symbolizes fire: the fire of spirituality, the fire of the *kundalini sakti*, the fire of aspiration.

The petals of the *muladhara cakra* are described as being red. Ganesa is the presiding deity of this *cakra*. Within this

cakra is the triangle (*trikona*) within which is the seed of desire (*kama bija*), which is fundamental to all manifestation, transformation, and dissolution. The world over, desire is thought of as being represented by the color red. This red *bija* is self-manifest and encircled three and one-half times by the bright *kundalini sakti*. Ganesa is associated with this energy by his curved trunk, suggestive of the serpentine nature of the energy. He is known as "*rakta-tunda*" (he of the red trunk).

Svastika

The *svastika* is an ancient symbol representing auspiciousness. The word can be divided into the components *sva* (one's own) and *astika* (it is). Thus, it means "that which is one's own or that which is independent." Since the Divine is the only independent entity in the universe, the *svastika* is a symbol for God. Everything else is dependent upon the Divine for its existence, maintenance, and dissolution. The sign has been associated with Ganapati most probably because he is the lord of good fortune and this sign is the sign depicting good fortune.

When the blue pearl (*bindu*) begins to move at the commencement of creation, its initial movement forms a line. If one extrapolates that movement into the four cardinal directions, a cross is depicted. If one would like to convey the idea of omnipresence, one may put "flags" on the ends of the arms of the cross and thus a *svastika* is formed (see fig. 13).

Sometimes it is said that the *svastika* represents the fact that all paths to the Divine, whether straight or crooked, this or that, eventually lead *only* to the Divine. It is a symbol of geometric perfection.

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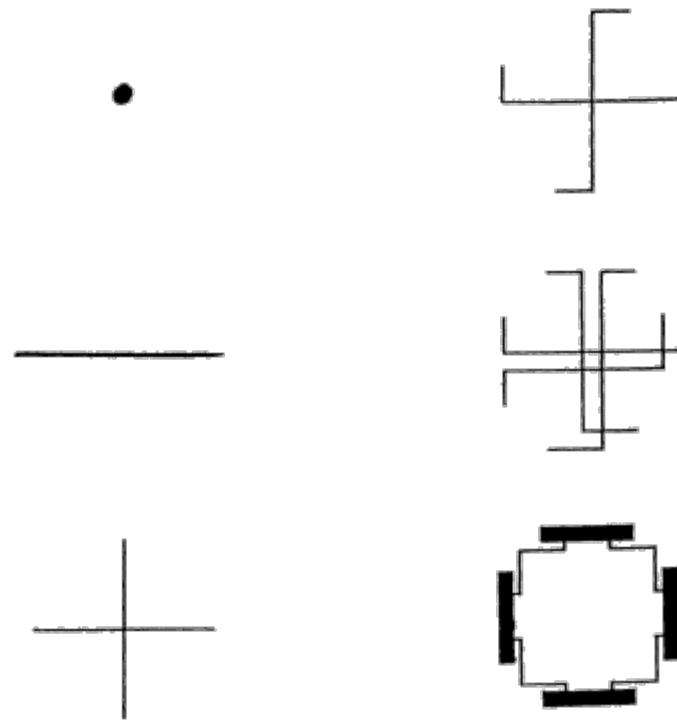


Figure 13
Svastika

In the mind's eye it can be conceived of either as stationary or as being in perpetual motion, with its arms whirling like a giant cosmic pinwheel. In a clockwise rotation, it seems to depict the outward dispersion of the universe while in a counterclockwise rotation, it seems to depict the universe imploding back into its essence.

Other Attributes

Ganapati is shown with other attributes, depending on the roles taken by him in his various incarnations. Each deity is generally depicted as representing one dominant aspect of the Divine, and, besides being the focal point of devotional

expressions, a deity's attributes are symbols meant primarily to orient one's thoughts and feelings. Images give tangible expression to universal truths, abstract concepts of philosophy, and mystic realization. They serve as links between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the transient, the formless and that with form.

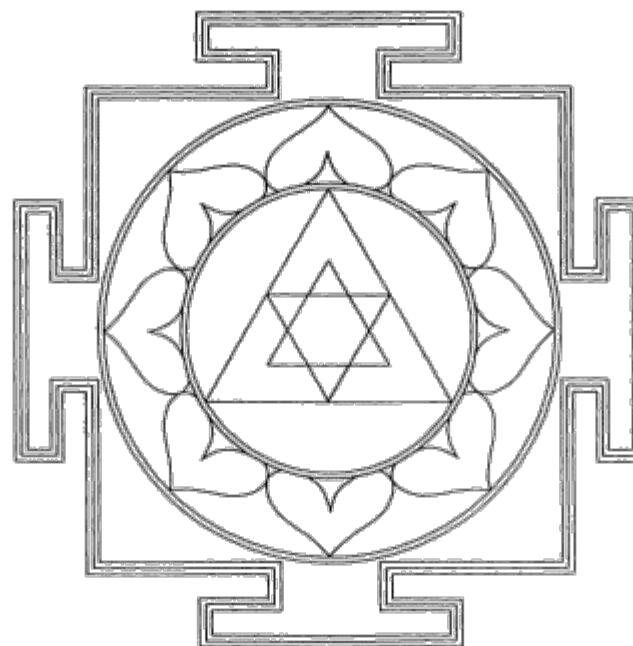
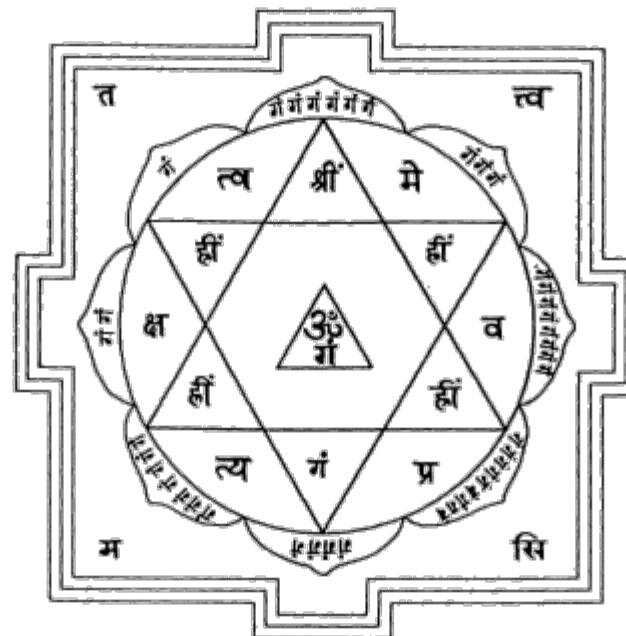


Figure 14
Ganapatibija yantra and Ganesa yantra

The most popular form of Ganesa is depicted with four arms. However, the early images, like those at Gokarna and most of the *asta vinayakas* of Maharashtra, have only two arms. The six- and eight-armed Ganapatis are said to be tantric. The ten-armed Ganesa is also tantric, though it involves an association with Visnu. Twelve-, sixteen-, and eighteen-armed Ganesas are rare and are thought to possess great amounts of power (*sakti*).

For destroying negative tendencies, Ganapati may hold one or more weapons. Some of the common ones we have not yet noted include: his father's weapons, the trident and axe, which represent the destruction of ignorance, desires, and attachments; a spear (*sakti*), bow (*karmuka*), arrows (*sara*), dart (*kunta*), discus (*cakra*), sword (*khaaga*), hammer (*mudgara*), mace (*gada*), conch (*sankha*), and/or snake (*naga*).

In his peaceful roles, Ganapati is seen holding: the pomegranate (*dadima/bija puraka*) symbolizing the all-pervading consciousness, the power of life; a rosary (*japamala* or *aksamala*) symbolizing prayer as well as the fifty-one letters of the Sanskrit alphabet; a pot of water (*kalasa*) symbolizing purity or grace; a serpent (*naga*) around his belly (*yajnopavita*) symbolizing the *kundalini sakti*; a rose apple (*kapittha*) or *jambu* fruit symbolizing that which has neither beginning nor end, like the *linga*; a pot of jewels (*ratnakumbha*) symbolizing his power to grant material and spiritual wealth; a lotus (*kamala*) symbolizing perfection; a coconut (symbolizing, when it is broken, the shattering of the ego; it is also likened to the breaking of our brittle shell of ignorance to reveal the sweet milk of spiritual truths inside); sugar-cane stalk (*iksu*) representing either the fire of desire (in that the lower part of the stalk is very sweet while the upper part is less sweet) or the truth (it is outwardly hard of attainment but once reached, the inner layers are infinitely sweet); a garland, fly-whisk, *vina*, fruits of various kinds, sprig of grain, bouquet of flowers, radish, book, and so on.

Ganesa is usually shown with three eyes (*tri-netra*). The third eye in the middle of the forehead indicates wisdom, divine knowledge. Sometimes the left eye is elucidated as representing the letter A the right eye as representing the letter U, and the third eye as representing the letter M. It is said that the third eye indicates a complete understanding of the *pranava* or *Omkara*. Further, the third eye is depicted as the place where one pierces the knot of Rudra (*rudra granthi vibheda*).

Ganapati is frequently depicted as sitting on a throne with one leg upraised and the other one hanging down. The human being generally moves about the world using both feet. Further, the human being moves about the subtle mental realm with the two

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feet of the mind and the intellect. A perfect being (*siddha*), on the other hand, has integrated these two and made them one. Or, one could say that one aspect of one's personality deals with the world while the other is ever rooted in single minded concentration on the Supreme. One should be in world, but not of it. Still another aspect to this dangling foot is that the entire universe may be said to wait at Ganesa's feet (like the mouse who sits among all the riches of the world but dares not claim, let alone consume, until he is told).

Introduction to Jñanesvar's Jñanesvari

A wonderful description of Ganapati occurs in saint Jñanesvar's opening invocation to his *Jñanesvari*. Its symbolism is most evocative.

Salutations to Lord Ganesa. *Om* salutations to the Supreme Being. Only the *Vedas* are capable of describing you. Victory to that self-existent one who is of the nature of the Self. O Lord, you are the illuminer of the intelligence. The *Vedas* are your beautiful form. Their flawless words are your body. The *Smritis* are your limbs. The eighteen major *Puranas* are your ornaments. The Epics are your jingling bells. The wisdom of the sages is your waistcloth. Your six arms are the six systems of philosophy. Their various theories are the six weapons held therein. The art of reasoning the the hatchet. Logic is the goad. The philosophy of Vedanta is the delicious sweet held in your hand. Rejection of Buddha's teachings is your broken tusk. The teachings of the Universal Self is the lotus (*varada mudra*). The establishment of righteousness (*dharma*) is the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*). Your trunk is pure discrimination. The tusk is the wisdom of impartiality. Your two ears are action and knowledge. The bees hovering overhead are the sages. The corals on your temples are duality and non-duality. The flowers adorning your head are the ten principle *Upanisads*. A of AUM is your legs. U of AUM is your belly. M of AUM is your head. 41

What is Ganesa? One Possible Answer

A parable told in numerous spiritual traditions presents another insight into, and possible answer to, the question, "What is Ganesa"? My rendition of the tale is as follows.

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Six blind men were sitting outside and they were having a discussion. Just then the sound of the bell of an elephant was heard and someone told them that an elephant was going to pass that way. They became eager to see it. They all wondered what an elephant looked like and the mahout took pity on the blind men and stopped the elephant near them. They rushed forwards and each one touched a different part of the elephant's body. One grabbed a leg, another a tail, a third the ear, a fourth the tusks, and so on. They were in ecstasy, each one of them thinking that he was holding the entire elephant. Each one exclaimed, "What a wonderful elephant," though he was holding just a part of the animal. Then the elephant went on its way. Each of the blind men retained a strong impression of the elephant in his mind. They picked up their discussion and began to tell each other about the elephant, describing what the elephant was like with the passion and zeal of a philosopher describing a new system of philosophy. The one who had held onto the ear said, "An elephant is just like a winnowing basket." The one who held the tail said, "That's a lie. The elephant is not like a winnowing basket. The elephant is like a snake." The third, who had held onto his leg, said, "I don't know what you are talking about. The elephant is like a strong, stout pillar." The fourth blind man, who had grabbed the elephant's tusk, said, "None of you have the least idea of what an elephant is really like. An elephant is the size of a human arm, slightly curved, and quite hard. It is rather like a spear." The fifth said that the elephant was like a long hose and the sixth argued that it was like a wall. So six blind men, none of whom had seen the elephant, were each defending their particular viewpoint and attacking the others. Those six fellows had not seen the elephant in its entirety; they were only describing various parts of its body.

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5 Songs That Ring, Songs That Roar

*The One unmoving is swifter than thought,
The gods cannot overtake It, for It travels ever in front;
It moves and It moves not, It is far away from us, and
It is very close.*
Isa Upanisad 4

Sri Mahaganapati of Ranjangaon

Once upon a time, a child of the rsi Grtsamada worshipped Ganesa and received the boon that he would conquer the entire universe. Ganesa gave him three cities made of gold, silver, and iron and told him that as long as they existed, he could not be defeated. Because of these three cities, the child was known as the demon Tripura. Further, Ganapati told him that Lord Siva alone would be able to defeat him. Quickly Tripura defeated Indra and ruled the three worlds, humiliating both gods and human beings. He extinguished the sacred fires and prohibited worship of the gods. The sage Narada told the gods to take refuge in Ganapati by chanting the mantra "Om." Ganesa was pleased with their worship and taught them the *sankatanasan stotra*. He said, "Whoever chants this *stotra* when in danger will be protected by me." Then Lord Siva worshipped Ganesa, who told him that whenever someone remembers Ganesa, Ganesa will appear before that person and remove his or her obstacles. Lord Siva was then blessed by Ganapati, and received a *mantra* from him, plus the *Ganesa Sahasranama*, which enabled Siva to destroy the three cities and to defeat the demon Tripura. Ganesa told Siva that by chanting the *Ganesa Sahasranama*, one will obtain victory in every endeavor, one will have all of one's obstacles removed, and one will achieve whatever one desires. Thus, listen to the stories of the lord and be happy.

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Four Yuga Avatars of Ganesa

In the city of Pune, Maharashtra, there is a Ganapati Temple that has been built in strict accordance with the directions given in the *Ganesa Purana*. The entire temple is laid out in the form of a huge Ganesa yantra. According to the *Ganesa Purana*, there should be two doors, an inner one and an outer one, on three sides of the temple (*mandir*). The eastern side should have an (outer) lion door and an (inner) tiger door. The southern side should have an (outer) crow door and an (inner) deer door. The western side should have an (outer) horse door and an (inner) mouse door. At the south entrance should stand the two doorkeepers (*dvarapalaka*) Pramoda and Moda as well as Ganesa's two sons, Lakshya and Labha.

The main *sanctum sanctorum* of the *mandir* also has two doors, again as per the *Ganesa Purana*: an outer elephant door and an inner peacock door. On each side of this entrance are personified four of the eight supernormal powers (*siddhis*). On the left are the capacity to grow small and penetrate all things (*anima*), the ability to rise up or grow light (*laghima*), extreme heaviness (*garima*), and extensive magnitude (*mahima*). On the right side of the entrance are the powers of extreme reach (*praptih*), obtaining all the objects of one's desire (*prakamyam*), infallibility of purpose (*vasitvam*), and fulfilling all of one's desires (*yatrakamavasayitvam*).

The main *sanctum sanctorum* has five images (*murtis*) in it. On the left side of the main *murti* are images of Samarth Ramdas and Ganapati's consort Riddhi. On the right side of the main *murti* are Hanuman and Ganesa's consort Siddhi. In a small niche under the main altar is a ten-armed silver *murti* of Ganesa with a right-turning trunk (*siddhi vinayaka*) that tradition ascribes as having once belonged to, and been worshipped by, the great Maharashtrian saint Eknath Maharaj.

Presiding in the center of the main altar is the *murti* of Ganapati known as "the ten-armed wish-fulfilling remover of obstacles" (*Dasa Bhuja Cintamani Vinayaka*). This *murti* was discovered by Sri Damodar Sitaram Khaladakar some fifty years ago in a well on the temple's property. Its date is uncertain, but there is a reference to a *murti* with this form in the *Mahabharata*. In any event, the *murti* is unique and very old. In its ten arms, Ganapati holds: the bow (*dhanus*), an axe (*parasu*), the noose (*pasa*), the goad (*ankusa*), a rosary (*mala*), a sword (*khadga*), a broken tusk (*danta*), a mace (*gada*), and a sweet (*modaka*); his right lower hand is upraised in the gesture of bestowing blessings and fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*). In his trunk, which turns toward his left, he is holding a

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jewel (*ratna*). He has three eyes (*tri-netra*) and an *Omkara* on his forehead. He is sitting on a lotus (*padma*) with one leg is resting on a mouse and the other leg resting on a serpent (*naga*).

Covering the walls of the temple are paintings depicting various episodes from the *Ganesa Purana*. For instance, besides well-known events from the mythology of Ganapati, there are paintings depicting the four incarnations that Ganesa assumed during the four cosmic cycles of time (*yugas*).

In the *Ganesa Purana*, Ganapati is described as taking a different incarnation (*avatara*) in each of the four cosmic ages (*yugas*). In the *krta yuga*, Ganesa incarnates as Vinayaka (or Mahotkata), the son of Kasyapa and Aditi. He has ten arms and a red complexion, he rides upon a lion, and he incarnates for the purpose of killing the demons Davantaka, Narantaka, and Dhumraksa.

During the *krta yuga*, in the present State of Bengal on the banks of the river Ganga, there lived a pious *rshi* Rudraketu and his wife, Sarada. They had two strong, handsome sons, Devantaka and Narantaka. The boys loved to worship Lord Siva, and one day it so happened that the sage Narada was greatly pleased with the boys' valor and taught them the great redeeming five-syllabled *mantra* "*Om namah sivayah*." In time the boys received a boon from Lord Siva and were granted that no one, neither god nor angel, neither human being nor animal, could kill them. Thus, they became invincible and began to ravage the three worlds. While all this was taking place, Lord Vinayaka agreed to become the son of the *rshi* Kasyapa and his wife Aditi, specifically at the request of Aditi. Thus, Vinayaka veiled his divine form and took on the appearance of a normal human baby. His body was strong and muscular, and his face was serene and handsome. Kasyapa named him Mahotkata, meaning a person of strong physique. At the age of sixteen, Mahotkata was requested by his father to proceed to Kasi and attend the wedding of the crown prince. On his way, he encountered the demon *Dhumraksa*, whom he slew. Then, while in

Kai, he encountered the two demons, Davantaka and Narantaka. Vinayaka resumed his original form of part elephant and part human and killed the two demons. With the purpose of his incarnation completed, he reassured his parents that he would be present in a subtle

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form wherever the goddess Bhavani was worshipped and then ascended to his celestial abode. 4

During the *treta yuga*, Ganapati incarnates as Mayuresvara, the son of Lord Siva. He has six arms and a white complexion, he rides upon a peacock, and he incarnates for the purpose of killing the demon Sindhu.

During the *treta yuga*, in the capital city of Gandaki in the kingdom of Mithila, there lived a pious king, Cakrapani and his wife, Ugra. By the grace of a solar *mantra* bequeathed by the famous sage Saunaka, Ugra became pregnant. After a few months, Ugra was unable to bear the extreme heat that enveloped her body, and she abandoned the fetus in the ocean. The king was very sad. With time, this fetus developed into a strong and radiant child. When he cried, the entire earth trembled. The ocean, knowing the father's sadness, returned the child to his father, who was overwhelmed with joy. He named the boy Sindhu, meaning "ocean" because of his unique birthplace. While this was taking place, Parvati enquired of her lord, Siva, "on whom are you meditating?" Siva replied, "On he who is the supporter of the entire universe." She asked, "Can I meditate on him too?" Siva said, "Of course, and initiated her into the Ganesa *mantra* "GAM." She retired to the Lenyadri hills and performed penance for twelve years. Then, being pleased with her worship, Ganesa appeared before her and granted her a boon. She said that she wished that Ganesa would be born as her son, and he said, "So be it." Thus Ganesa was born to Parvati at Lenyadri and was named Gunesa by Siva. Once, little Ganesa knocked a large egg down from a mango tree, and when he did so, the egg cracked and out came a peacock. Ganesa mounted the bird and thus acquired the name of Mayuresvara. Meanwhile, Sindhu had performed great penance himself and eventually obtained a boon from the Sun saying that he would rule the three worlds and have the nectar of immortality (*amrta*) in an ever-full bowl. However, he was warned that his immortality would be lost if he ever broke the bowl. So he swallowed the bowl to protect it and then began to terrorize the three worlds. The gods beseeched Ganesa, in the form of Gunesa, to help save

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the world. The lord quickly appeared and cut Sindhu's general, Kamalasura, into three pieces, defeated his army, and then cut open Sindhu's body and emptied it of the life-giving nectar. With the purpose for which he was born completed, Ganesa prepared to leave his body. His little brother, Karttikeya, beseeched him not to go. Ganesa replied, "Where could I go, I am the inner consciousness in all beings. I dwell in everyone's heart eternally." Then he gave the peacock to Karttikeya and ascended to his celestial abode. 5

During the *dvapara yuga*, Ganesa incarnates as Gajana, the son of Lord Siva. He has four arms and a red complexion, he rides upon a mouse, and he incarnates for the purpose of killing the demon Sindura.

During the *dvapara yuga*, Lord Brahma yawned, and from that yawn was born a beautiful male child. As soon as the child appeared, he began to yell, and his cries shook the three worlds. Brahma looked at him in wonder and exclaimed, "Who are you and where are you from?" The child laughed and said, "You are the knower of everything. Why do you ask me such questions? I am your son and have been born out of your yawn. Please accept me, give me a name, a place to live, food to eat, and duties to perform." Brahma replied, "Since you have a flawless pink complexion, you shall be called "Sindura." Further, you shall have the power to conquer the three worlds and roam where you will." Sindura marveled at his powers and wondered to himself, I did not perform any penance or learn any knowledge. How is it that I have such powers? He wanted to test the limits of his easily acquired powers and began looking for a proper subject upon whom he could experiment. He searched high and low but couldn't find anyone who could even begin to test him. So he returned to Brahma and said he was going to experiment on his father. Brahma was aghast and said, "I was enticed by your beauty and gave you boons, little knowing that behind your charm lay concealed a crooked mind. You are a demon now and Lord Ganesa will be born to kill you." When Sindura's reign of terror became intolerable, Parvati gave birth to a divinely beautiful

child. The child

was exquisite, though it had an elephant's head with large ears and a trunk. He was red complexioned and had four arms, short legs, and a potbellied stomach. Siva remarked that one should not be carried away by the external appearance of things. The inner person is invisible to the physical eyes. Who can recognize the Lord when he comes? Then Ganesa requested Parvati to transport him to the womb of queen Puspika, wife of king Varenya of Mahismati on the banks of the river Narmada. Pleased by their devotion, Ganesa had promised them that he would be born as their son. When the queen saw her newborn son with an elephant's head, she was taken aback. When the court astrologer declared that this child would cause the destruction of the royal dynasty, the king and queen abandoned the child in the forest. The sage Parasara found the child, recognized its divinity, and took it to his *asrama*. The little Gajana grew and mastered all knowledge by the time he was nine years old. One day, a gigantic mouse came to the *asrama* and began destroying everything in sight. When the mouse saw Gajana, it fled in terror into the lower worlds. But Gajana caught the mouse with a rope and made it his mount. The mouse was humbled and said that once it was a celestial *gandharva* that was cursed by the sage Vamana to assume the form of a mouse. Now it was time for Ganesa to fulfill his mission, and so he took up the goad (*ankusa*), noose (*pasa*), axe (*parasu*), and lotus (*padma*), mounted his mouse, and killed the demon Sindura. King Varenya repented, and Ganesa gave him the discourse known as the *Ganesa Gita* 6

During the *kaliyuga*, Ganapati incarnates as Dhumraketu (or Surpakama). He has two arms and an ash-gray complexion, he rides upon a horse, and he incarnates for the purpose of killing the numberless demons of the *mleccha* army.

During the *kali yuga*, Lord Ganesa will incarnate as Dhumraketu. During this period, human beings will be short lived, and their minds will be filled with all kinds of negative thoughts and feelings. There will be chaos throughout the world, and it will be almost impossible to find good and noble values upon the earth. Human beings will act like demons, like barbarians, and to

restore peace to the earth, Ganesa will incarnate with two arms, an ash-gray complexion, riding upon a horse. 7

The *Linga Purana* states that the incarnations of Ganapati are for the destruction of demons and for the benefit of gods and pious people.⁸ Compare this with the *Bhagavadgita*: "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age."⁹

Asta Vinayaka Avatar

The *Mudgala Purana* is in the nature of a dialogue between Daksa, son of Brahma, and the sage Mudgala. In this *Purana*, details are given of eight of Ganesa's incarnations (*avatara*) who took birth in order to conquer the vices, the inner enemies that afflict the human being.¹⁰ These vices are personified in the form of demons whom Ganapati subdues. The symbolism employed is not always easy to unravel, especially in regards to specific details of the legends told. Further, the symbolism used can be applied to multiple situations. To elucidate this by an example: A child has no real knowledge of the attainments of an adult. An ordinary adult cannot understand the attainments of a learned individual. A learned individual cannot plumb the depths of a sage. Each according to his own. Likewise, these myths should be approached with a certain attitude, under certain conditions, and in a certain manner.

These stories should stimulate thought. They are also multidimensional, and should not be read only at a literalist level or only at a literary level. The inner dimensions of such stories makes them capable of revealing, according to the stage of development of the individual, more and deeper levels of truth. One should never mistake the vehicle for the objective.

According to the *Mudgala Purana*, there are eight incarnations of Lord Ganesa:¹¹

1. *Vakratunda*, an embodiment of the form of *Brahman*, rode upon a lion and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Matsaryasura (envy, jealousy).

From the carelessness of Indra, who represents the mind, was born the demon Matsaryasura. With the passage of time and the perfecting of its nature, Matsaryasura was able to obtain the grace of Lord Siva, was able to achieve

great success. He obtained the boon of fearlessness and went on to conquer the three worlds, the three states of consciousness, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Indra's fellow *devas*, the *indriyas* [sense organs] were easily conquered and became slaves to jealousy. Matsaryasura even conquered Lord Siva. There was nothing that envy could not consume. However, when the mind [*Indra*] and the sense organs [*indriyas*] invoked the grace of Lord Ganesa, Ganesa's very presence so terrified the demon that Matsaryasura immediately sought refuge at his feet. Ganesa forgave him and restored the lost glory and kingdom to the gods. 12

2. *Ekadanta*, an embodiment of the essential nature of *Brahman*, who rode upon a mouse and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Matsaryasura (arrogance, conceit).

The demon Madasura was created by the sage Cyavana. He sought his father's permission to visit the sage Sukracarya (who was his father's brother). He knew that if he propitiated and pleased Sukracarya, he could obtain the boon of being given the power to rule the universe. Sukracarya was pleased with his devotion and initiated him into the *Sakti mantra* "*Hrim*." After performing penance for thousands of years, Madasura was blessed with his heart's desire. It was not long before Madasura began terrorizing the three worlds. The gods approached Sanatkumara who advised them to propitiate Lord Ganesa as Ekadanta. He described the glory of Ekadanta thus: *Eka* stands for embodiment [maya] and *danta* stands for truth [*satta*]. Thus, Ekadanta stands for the Supreme Truth that wields *maya*. When Madasura saw Ekadanta he immediately surrendered to him. Ekadanta accepted his surrender and told him, "You are free to enjoy the fruits of any action done with demonic intentions but you must not be present in any place where I am worshipped in a sattvic manner. 13

3. *Mahodara*, an embodiment of the wisdom of *Brahman*, rode upon a mouse and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Mohasura (delusion, confusion).

The demon Tarakasura was so troublesome that the *devas* went to Lord Siva to ask his blessings. However they

found Siva deep in bliss and unreachable. Thus the *devas* approached Mother Parvati for assistance in destroying the demon. Seemingly without acknowledging their pleas nor helping them, Parvati assumed the form of an alluring woman and began wandering around the place where Lord Siva was sitting deep in meditation. Siva awoke from his *samadhi*, and as he was carefully scrutinizing this woman before him, she vanished; in her place appeared an extremely handsome and powerful demon named Mohasura. With the passage of time, this demon became invincible and conquered the three worlds with no difficulty whatsoever. The *devas* were so tormented that they approached Lord Ganesa in the form of Mahodara. Being pleased with their devotion, Mahodara blessed them and granted them the boon of fearlessness. He then proceeded to where Mohasura was and the demon surrendered without even putting up a fight. 14

4. *Gajana*, who was born to bless the Sankhya yogis, rode upon a mouse and took this incarnation to overcome the demon *Lobhasura* (greed).

Kubera, the god of riches and treasure, once visited Lord Siva in his abode in Mount Kailasa. Being pleased with Kubera, Siva blessed him with a vision of the divine couple, himself and Goddess Parvati. The beauty of Parvati was so enchanting that Kubera gazed upon her with lust in his heart. Parvati became wild with anger at Kubera's indiscretion. Kubera, noting Parvati's anger, became frightened. Out of this fear, was born a demon by the name of Lobhasura. Now it so happens that this demon was initiated into the great liberating *mantra*, "*om namah sivaya*" and after performing much penance, was granted the boon of fearlessness. With this spiritual strength, Lobhasura soon became ruler of the three worlds. Even Lord Siva gave up his control over Kailasa when Lobhasura threatened him. Thus, being tryannized by this demon, the gods approached the sage Raibhya who

instructed them to propitiate Lord Ganesa as Gajana. Ganesa was pleased with their devotion and appointed Visnu to apprise Lobhasura of his strength. Lobhasura was easily convinced of Gajana's strength and the futility of opposing him, and thus surrendered without a fight.¹⁵

5. *Lambodara*, an embodiment of the pure (*sattva*) power of *Brahman*, rode upon a mouse and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Krodhasura (anger).

Once it so happened that Lord Visnu assumed the form of Mohini, the enchantress, to delude the demons. The gods and demons had quarrelled with each other over the right of partaking of the nectar (*amrta*) that had arisen from the churning of the ocean of milk. At that time, Lord Visnu appeared before them in the guise of a beautiful maiden of maddening charm, and the demons were guilefully made to turn their attention on her for some time, during which the gods were able to carry away the nectar. At this time, Lord Siva also beheld this seductive form and out of that encounter was born the terrible demon Krodhasura. For the good of the world, Lord Ganesa took the form of Lambodara to subdue this demon. The demon sought protection from him the moment he viewed Lambodara. ¹⁶

6. *Vikata*, an embodiment of the illuminating nature of *Brahman*, rode upon a peacock and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Kamasura (lust).

The demon Kamasura was born from Lord Visnu. After performing penance for thousands of years, he was finally blessed with success. He was granted the boon of ruling the three worlds. He married Trsna (thirst or desire) and they had two sons, Decay and Corruption. The *devas*, being unrelentingly tormented by this demonic family, approached Lord Ganesa in the form of Vikata. Pleased with their devotion, he blessed them and brought the demons under control¹⁷

7. *Vighnaraja*, an embodiment of the preserving of *Brahman*, rode upon the celestial serpent, Sesa, and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Mamasura (possessiveness).

One day, after Lord Siva was married to Parvati, Parvati, in a mood of merriment, broke out into a loud laugh. From out of this laughter was born a handsome male form. Parvati was surprised at this sudden appearance and asked him who he was and what he wanted. He said that he was born out of her laughter to serve her. She

named him Mamasura since he was created out of a sense of "Me and my-ness" as she laughed. He left her and went to the forest to perform austerities. He fell into bad company, developed bad habits, and married Mohini (enchantment). In the course of time, he became the ruler of the three worlds. The *devas* propitiated Lord Ganesa in the form of Vighnaraja who thereby subdued the demon and reestablished righteousness and truth. ¹⁸

8. *Dhumravarna*, an embodiment of the destructive nature of *Brahman*, rode upon a horse and took this incarnation to overcome the demon Abhimanasura (attachment, pride).

Once upon a time, the Creator Brahma, blessed the Sun with lordship over the world. Such was the allurement of this boon that the Sun had the thought, All the worlds are governed by action, and as I am the Lord of action and govern its movement, I can consider myself Lord of all. As this thought passed his mind, he sneezed and out of the sneeze arose a demon by the name of Aham. This demon soon gained control of the three worlds. Aham then married Egoity, daughter of Negligence, and they had two sons, Arrogance and Happiness. Eventually, tired of being tormented, the *devas* sought Lord Ganesa's help. He appeared in the form of Vighnaraja, rescued them, and subdued the demon Abhimanasura.¹⁹

That these stories are symbolic requires no other elucidation than to note that the first six of the eight demons that are subdued are the well-known "six inner enemies" listed in the *Satcakra Nirupana*.²⁰ *Kama*, *krodha*, and *lobha* are also well known as the "three gates to hell," and the *Mahabharata* names *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *bhaya*

(fear), and *svapna* (sleep) as the five sins.²¹ As such, these demons are obstacles that an individual must overcome in order to achieve liberation, and Ganesa is best known as Vinayaka, remover of obstacles. Further, one should note that these eight demons are presented in a logical order, with each succeeding demon being the cause of the preceding one, until at last one reaches desire, which is the root cause of suffering. The two subtlest demons, Mamasura and Abhimanasura, are emanations of what is known as "*ahamkara*" and "*mamakara*" (I-maker and mine-maker). An individual who identifies him or herself with the psycho-physical organism is truly one whose troubles have started.

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All of one's troubles are, in fact, nothing more than the body's troubles. It is this false superimposition of what one is not (the physical body or not-self) upon what one is (the Self) that is the cause of all of one's suffering.

Thus, the stories of these *avatars* provide a spiritual seeker with eight different contemplations. They provide spiritual teachings to those who have ears to hear. It should also be noted that these demons are nothing more than fluctuations of the mind. Certainly they are powerful demons, but, it should be noted, they are internal demons and not physical monsters roaming somewhere outside in the world. As such, they are to be subdued and not killed. The mind is one's friend and the mind is one's enemy. Its nature is to fluctuate, and thus it is a thief for its movements steal the silence of the Self.

However, these eight demons have positive and negative sides. If one employs them in a positive manner, one will find great expansion in one's spiritual practice. For instance, when a spiritual seeker performs every action in a selfless manner, work becomes worship. With such an outlook, desire (*kama*) can be used positively by desiring the good of others, desiring to improve oneself, desiring to sacrifice all the fruits of one's actions to the Divine. The mind is a bundle of thoughts and as such can never be completely emptied. However, thoughts can be put to one's greater good. They can be employed as servants instead of masters.

Asta Vinayaka Temples

In Maharashtra there are eight shrines sacred to Ganapati (*asta vinayaka*). They are all located within a hundred-kilometer radius from the city of Pune, and, taken together, these eight self-existent (*svayambhu*) monoliths form a *mandala* demarcating the sacred cosmos of Ganesa. They delimit the body or cosmic form of the deity. Urban space begins to mingle with sacred space and take on cosmic meaning. That is, for purposes of contemplation, meditation, and worship, the formless, omnipresent One is depicted with name and form so that one may relate to, and aspire for Divinity.

If one visits all eight of the shrines on a single pilgrimage (*yatra*), then one is said to have done a circumambulation (*pradaksina*) of the Divine (see p. 131 for the story of Ganesa's *pradaksina* of his parents). *Pradaksina* is the act of walking clockwise around a deity or sacred object, always keeping it to one's right side to show respect. Not only is this an imitation of the movement of

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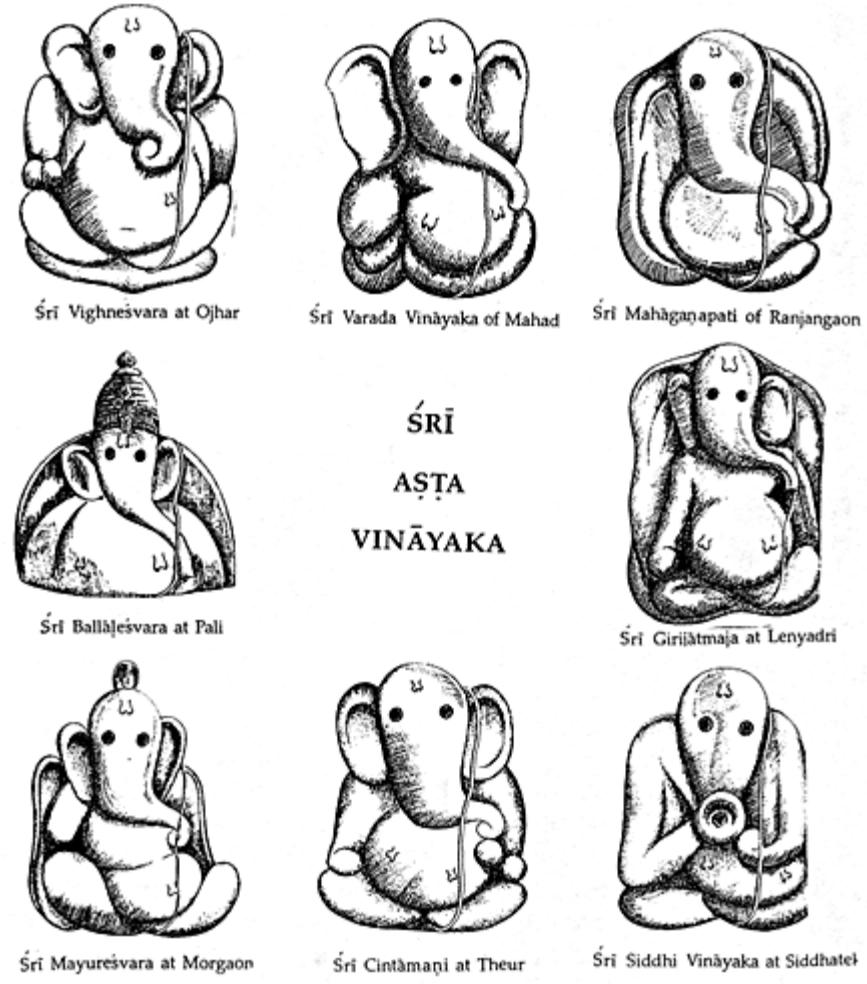


Figure 15
Sri Asta Vinayakas

the sun (which aligns one with the cosmic order of things), but it also invokes a shining godward thought that represents divine illumination. This interplay between a physical movement and a conceptual idea replicates, in ritual terms, the unity of sacred space with mundane space. No longer is one "outside" the limits or boundaries of the Divine; one rendezvous with, participates in, the cosmic dance.

These eight shrines are said to have "naturally" appeared on the earth in the form of elephant-faced/bodied stones. As such, they

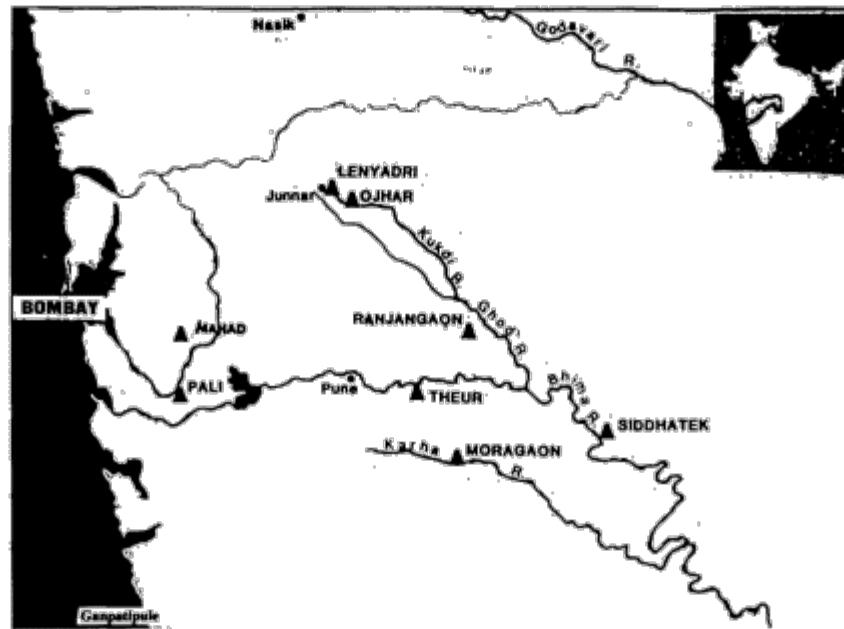


Figure 16
Map of the Sri Asta Vinayaka temples in Maharashtra

invoke awe and limitless power in the hearts of devotees. Each shrine celebrates a particular form of Ganapati, complete with its own lore and legends. These eight are: Sri Mayuresvara at Moragaon on the Karha River; Sri Girijatmaja at Lenyadri; Sri Vighnesvara at Ojhar on the Kukdi River; Sri Siddhi Vinayaka at Siddhatek on the Bhima River; Sri Cintamani at Theur on the Mulamutha River; Sri Ballalesvara at Pali; Sri Varada Vinayaka of Mahad; and Sri Mahaganapati at Ranjangaon. 22

One must be blessed by Ganesa even to feel a desire to perform a pilgrimage to one or all of these shrines. The threshold must be crossed, a beginning thought must somehow arise. At any given moment there is present an obstacle in the form of the thought that prevents just such a thought from arising. This obstacle must be removed, and only then can one desire to pay one's respects to Ganesa.

Sri Mayuresvara of Margaon

Once upon a time, the creator Brahma was struck with desire. That is, his own mind-born child, *kama* (desire), arose from within. Thus

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Brahma is said to be the father of desire. Worse still, Brahma's desire then took the form of lust for his own daughter, Sarasvat. This desire of his so weakened him that he was unable to continue creating the universe. He sought the assistance of the *devas* to atone for this behavior. Acceding to his supplication, Lord Visnu created the river Ganga, Lord Siva created the Narmada River, Surya created the Yamuna River, and Devi created the Sarasvati River. However, none of these rivers were able to cleanse Brahma of his incest. Thus, all the *devas* together, called upon the Turiya Tirtha River to appear. Brahma bathed in its waters, and his transgression was cleansed. So he put the sacred waters into his waterpot and went to worship Lord Ganesa at Margaon. As he entered the shrine he stumbled and spilled the water contained in his waterpot. He attempted to pick it up, but Ganesa prevented him from doing so. So to this day the water remains there as the sacred Karha River.

This is considered to be one of the more important of the *asta vinayaka* shrines. 23 It is called the "*adhya pitha*" or first monastery of the Ganapatya Sampradaya. The main statue of Ganesa is a *svayambhu* (self-manifested) image in the sitting posture with his trunk turning to his left. Textual references say that he has four arms and three eyes. He holds the noose (*pasa*) and goad (*ankusa*) in his upper hands, while his lower right hand rests on his knee and his lower left hand holds a sweet (*modaka*). Diamonds are embedded in his eyes and navel. Over his head rests the hooded Nagaraja. To his

left and right are brass *murtis* of his consorts, Siddhi and Buddhi. Located directly in front of Ganesa are his *vahana*, the mouse (*misaka*) and the peacock (*mayura*).

The *Mudgala Purana* devotes twenty chapters to describing the greatness of this *ksetra*. Tradition claims that the temple is both beginningless and endless. Even at the time of the great dissolution (*pralaya*), Ganapati takes *yoganidra* here. Legends relate how, Brahma, Visnu, Siva, Devi, and Surya all meditated at this site in order to know who created them and for what purpose. They all perceived a flame in the form of the *Omkara*, out of which Ganesa emerged to bless and remind them that anyone who worships Ganesa before commencing any endeavor will overcome all obstacles for success.

In all there are twenty-three Ganapati *murtis* at this site, including the eight traditional *avtaras*, who reside respectively in the eight corners of the shrine. Just outside the main shrine are images of Ganesa's vehicle, the mouse, as well as a *Nandi*.²⁴ They are the customary guardians of the entrance and look devotedly toward Ganesa's image inside.

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The shrine has four gates, and they represent not only an embodiment of different divine principles but also the four goals of life. They are protected by an image of Ganapati as he appeared in various *yugas*, attended by pairs of gods and consorts in portal niches. A particular feature of this shrine is that one should make a pilgrimage (*yatra*) to these four gates, one day at a time, commencing with the first day of the first half of the month of *Bhadrapada* (August/September) and then reaching the *sanctum sanctorum* on *Ganesa Caturthi* (the fourth day after the new moon, the most auspicious day for worship of Ganesa). Also, near this temple on the Karha River, there are a number of bathing ponds (*tirthas*) where pilgrims come to bathe and expiate their misdeeds. These include: the Karhaganga River itself (representing the ultimate *tirthaturiya tirtha*), the Ganesa Tirtha, Vyasa Tirtha (destroyer of ignorance *avidyanasa tirtha*), Kapila Tirtha (giver of wisdom *jñana tirtha*), Bhima Tirtha (giver of strength), and Rsi Tirtha (giver of righteousness *dharma tirtha*). Above the doorway to the temple is written a Sanskrit *sloka*:

O Ganesa, you dwell on the banks of the Turiya [the Karha River, which represents pure consciousness], which gives the greatest bliss. Your self-established bliss is beyond the realms of dull-witted ones. O Lord of the peacock. I thus meditate on you, Guru of Brahma, Visnu, Siva, Devi, and Ravi. 25

On the eastern side of the temple one may find both *bilva* and *sami* trees and on the western side there is a *tharti* tree, which is known as a *kalpa vrksa* (wish-fulfilling tree). A final place to visit at this temple is the tiny cell to the side of the *sanctum sanctorum* that houses the images of Vitthala (Vithoba) and Rakhumai, images that tradition says were placed there by the famous saint, Tukaram Maharaj, when he visited this shrine in the seventeenth century.

It was at this temple, tradition claims, that Parasurama worshipped and obtained the blessings of Lord Ganapati by chanting Ganesa's *mantra*. It is also the place where Ganapati killed the demons Sindhu and Kamalasura.

Once there was a righteous king who had no children. He performed penance to the Sun, who being pleased, appeared to him and said he would have a son. In due time, his wife became pregnant, but unable to carry the seed, the embryo leaped from her womb into the ocean.

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After the child had grown, he reappeared at his parents house and they named him "Sindhu" because he came from the ocean. Sindhu performed great penance himself and eventually obtained a boon from the Sun saying that he would rule the three worlds and have the nectar of immortality (*amrta*) in an ever-full bowl. However, he was warned that his immortality would be lost if he ever broke the bowl. So he swallowed the bowl to protect it and then began to terrorize the three worlds. The gods beseeched Ganesa, in the form of Gunesa, to help save the world. The Lord quickly appeared and cut Sindhu's general, Kamalasura, into three pieces, defeated his army, and then cut open Sindhu's body and emptied it of the life-giving nectar. Lord Brahma gave his two daughters to Gunesa in marriage and then Brahma and the other gods established a shrine at Morgaon to commemorate Ganesa's appearance in the form of Gunesa. 26

Sri Girijatmaja of Lenyadri

O Ganesa, you who dwell in the secret cave, located high above the realms of sense pleasures, which gives divine delight to those who enter therein. You are the lord of the mountain. You are the destroyer of the eight inner demons. Thus I meditate upon you, *Guru of gurus*.²⁷

The shrine of Sri Girijatmaja of Lenyadri is located three miles from Junnar in the surrounding hills.²⁸ The temple of Ganapati is carved high into the side of a mountain. Gazing at the wall of solid rock from a distance, who would imagine that high up on its face there was a cave wherein tradition claims Mother Parvati, consumed with a desire to have Ganesa as her son, did severe austerities for twelve years? One must ascend a wall of rock, almost straight up, 283 steps, to reach the cave. One must ascend the barren rock of an infinite number of sense pleasures. And, after ascending the sheer rock face of the mountain, one must find and enter the secret cavern that has no supporting pillars within.

On a *suddha caturthi* (the fourth day of the bright fortnight) in the month of Bhadrapada (August-September), Parvati made a clay image of Ganesa and performed *puja* to it. The Sanskrit root *puj* is multivalent. It means to "worship," to "collect," to "bind together," to "embrace," to be "intelligent." Thus, to perform a *puja*

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is to "bring together, to bind together or embrace oneself intelligently." It is to honor the Self, to manifest the Self, to create the Self. This Parvati did, and Ganapati became alive; he agreed to be born in her house. Within the house known as the physical body, one should see that Ganesa is born. When Ganapati is born, no further obstacles will ever hinder one again.

The mouth of the cave faces South while the *murti* (image of Ganesa) within faces North. This means that Ganesa's back faces toward the entrance to the temple. Efforts to dig from the other side of the mountain so as to see his face have not succeeded. The *svayambhu* image that is visible in the Lenyadri cave is quite unique and mysterious. Of the eight *asta vinayaka murtis*, it is the most distinctive. It is set deep in the darkness of the cave at the far wall, so when you see him you wonder if he is facing you or facing in the other direction. Beside his present image are images of Hanuman and Sivasankara.

During my *yatra* to Lenyadri to have Sri Girijatmaja's *darsana*, immediately as I left the entrance to this cave, a tiny mouse ran across my path. He disappeared into a crack in the side of the mountain, and my gaze swept outwards for hundreds of miles to the surrounding countryside.

Sri Vighnesvara of Ojhar

The king of Hemavati, Maharaja Abhinandana, once performed a great sacrifice. Indra became afraid that if this sacrifice were to be completed successfully, his powers would be diminished. So he ordered Kala to create obstacles during its performance and, eventually, to destroy it. The fierce Kala not only destroyed the king's sacrifice but began to create obstacles for all sacrifices everywhere. Thus he was given the name of Vighna (obstacle maker). When righteousness disappeared from the three worlds, the *devas* propitiated Ganapati requesting him to save the world. Ganapati took an incarnation as the son of Parsva and Dipavatsala and when Vighnasura discovered that he could not overcome Ganapati, he surrendered to him and requested that Ganapati take his name as part of his own. Ganapati agreed to this request and thus was known as Vighnaraja (the lord of obstacles). He also said, "Wherever I am not remembered before one commences any work, you may bring obsta-

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cles into such an activity. But you must never harass my devotees."²⁹

This temple is located six miles from Junnar in the Junnar Taluk.³⁰ Like all the other *asta vinayakas*, this is a self-born image (*svayambhu murti*). He is in a sitting position, facing east, with his trunk turned toward his left side. There are diamonds embedded in his eyes and navel. On either side of him sits brass *murtis* of his consorts, Siddhi and Rddhi.

Sri Siddhi Vinayaka of Siddhatek

Arising from the lotus-navel of Lord Visnu, Brahma, the creator, went about his work of creating the universe while Visnu was absorbed deep in his *yoganidra* (yogic sleep). While Brahma was creating, two powerful demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, emerged from the dirt in Visnu's ears. Immediately they began to make trouble for Brahma, hoping that thereby they would wake Visnu from his sleep,. Visnu awoke and began to fight the demons, but they could not be killed. So he prayed to Lord Siva, who told him that he could not win because he had forgotten to propitiate Lord Ganesa. So Diva invoked Ganesa by chanting the *mantra* "Om Sri Ganesaya Namah" for one hundred years at Siddhatek. Pleased by Visnu's *tapas*,Ganesa bestowed blessings and *siddhis* on him. He went and killed the demons. The place where Visnu performed *tapas* and obtained *siddhi* came to be known as Siddhatek³¹

The present temple was built by Ahalyabai Holkar at end of 1700s. It is located on the northern bank of the Bhima River.³²It is approachable from the small village of Boribel, which is six miles away on the southern bank of the Bhima. Thus, one must cross the river by boat in order to reach the shrine, which is set on a small hill. Upon my approach to the river, the van became hopelessly entrenched in the bottom of a muddy ravine. I doubt whether ten men could have extricated the van. Moments after I directed a prayer to Ganesa, a tractor fortuitously appeared, seemingly from out of nowhere and pulled the van to dry ground. We proceeded with happy hearts down the dirt lane to the bank of the river,

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where we caught a boat for the far side and the temple of Sri Siddhi Vinayaka.

The temple faces north, and the image of Ganesa is in a sitting posture with his trunk turned to his right. This is the only one of the eight *asta vinayaka murtis* that has its trunk turned to the right. Not only does Siddhatek mean a place where one obtains *siddhi* (success/perfection) but a *murti* of Ganapati whose trunk turns to the right is known as a "Siddhi Vinayaka."

Sri Cintamani of Theur

King Abhijit and Queen Gunavati had a son named Gana. He grew to be a very strong and brave though greedy and short-tempered warrior. Lord Siva was so pleased with his worship of him that he granted him boons like lordship over the three worlds and escape from death by anything that possessed the three *gunas*.One day, while hunting in the forest, Prince Gana chanced upon *rsi* Kapila's *asrama*.The sage welcomed the prince and invited him, along with his army, for lunch. It so happened that Kapila had a wish-fulfilling gem named Cintamani and, with its help, he was able to feed the entire army with the finest, tastiest of foods. When the greedy Gana saw this gem, he immediately desired to possess it. At first he politely asked the *rsi* to give it to him. But when the sage refused, Gana took it by force. The sage Kapila was a devotee of Lord Ganapati and prayed for his assistance. Being pleased with Kapila's devotion, Ganapati appeared to prince Gana in a dream with his army of warriors, one of whom cut off Gana's head. Gana awoke and, instead of being afraid, immediately proceeded with his army to Kapila's *asrama*,where he intended to kill Kapila. On the way Gana was stopped by his father, Abhijit, who advised him to return the gem to Kapila. But Gana ignored his father and began assaulting the *asrama*.Ganapati's *sakti*,Siddhi Devi, appeared there, and in order to protect the *asrama*,created Laksa, a warrior with one thousand arms. While Laksa destroyed Gana's army, Ganapati beheaded Gana himself. The wish-fulfilling diamond was returned to Kapila, who, having grown tired of it, asked Ganapati if he might not remain in that place instead. Ganapati agreed and, to

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commemorate the event, took the name of the stone upon himself and ever since has resided in Theur under the name of Cintamani Vinayaka. 33

This is one of the larger and more famous of the *asta vinayaka* shrines.³⁴It is located very near to Pune on the Mulamutha River. The temple's main gate is facing North but the *murti* of Ganesa is facing East. Ganesa is in a sitting position and his trunk turns toward his left.

The present temple was originally built by Gosavi Moraya and then renovated during the reign of Peshwa Madhavrao I in the late eighteenth century. Madhavrao used to worship at this temple before engaging in any battle and then, after a battle, he would come here to give thanks. There is also a bell in this temple that was made in Europe and brought here as part of the war booty from Chimaji.

Sri Ballalesvara of Pali

Once upon a time there was a businessman named Kalyana and his wife, Indumati. They lived in the village of Pallilpur. They had a son named Ballala, who, from a very young age, was attached to worshipping Lord Vinayaka. His worship was so sincere and so transparent that other children were attracted to it. They used to sit together and worship Ganesa and the other Gods with small stones. This worried the parents of these children because they felt that their children were becoming lazy and neglecting their studies. The only outcome would be that they would not learn any useful work, either for themselves or for their families.

Once, when the children went into the forest, they discovered a large stone. At the insistence of Ballala, they built a small temple around the stone and began worshipping it as Ganesa. Ballala brought *durva* grass and *bilva* leaves, *kumkum* and sandalwood paste. Some of the children did *puja*, while others danced; some chanted, and some meditated. They all became so deeply immersed that they forgot all about hunger or thirst, day or night. When the children didn't return home, the parents went to Kalyana's house and asked where Ballala and the children were. They shouted, "Where is your Ballala?"

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At his insistence, our children have gone into the forest with him. He is the leader and he is spoiling them. You must control your son or we will complain to higher authorities."

Kalyana became wild with anger. He picked up a stick and went into the forest. When he came upon all the children immersed in worship of Ganesa around the little temple that they had constructed, his anger knew no bounds. He smashed the temple and broke the stone image of Ganesa, scattering the pieces, while all the children fled in fear. But Ballala, who was deeply immersed in meditation, sat unmoving and thus was easily caught by his father. His father beat him unmercilessly and blood flowed freely. His father then tied him to a tree saying, "Let me see which God protects you now," and went home.

Little Ballala started praying to Lord Ganesa, "O Vinayaka, you are called Vignesvara because you remove the obstacles faced by your devotees. The *Vedas* and *sastras* proclaim that you never forget your devotees. Then why is it that I am facing such obstacles by worshipping you?" Little Ballala was least concerned with his physical condition, neither with being beaten up nor with being tied to a tree. But he was very angry and sad to see the little temple to Ganesa smashed and the image desecrated. He pronounced a curse: "Whoever has done this, let him become blind, deaf, dumb, and hunchbacked." Though he was afflicted with pain, hunger, and thirst, he kept chanting the name of Ganesa until he fainted.

Lord Ganesa was moved by the devotion of the little boy and took the form of a *brahmin*. He touched the child, and immediately the child awoke with his hunger and thirst gone and his wounds miraculously healed. Ballala felt waves of bliss surge through his body. Spontaneously he prostrated before the *brahmin*, whom he intuitively knew to be Ganesa. Ganesa said, "Your curse will come true. Further, in your father's next birth he will encounter great misery for his father will drive him away. Now, little Ballala, ask me for any boon that you want."

With folded hands, little Ballala said, "Let me always have unshaken devotion toward you. I please request that you remain here permanently and remove the mis-

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eries of the people who come to you."Lord Ganesa said, "I shall ever remain here. I will take your name before mine and henceforth be known as Ballalesvara Vinayaka. Further, the stone *murti* which your father threw away shall henceforth be known as Dundi Vinayaka. It is a *svayambhu* (self-manifested) image and should be

worshipped before you worship me as Ballalesvara Vinayaka." Thereupon Ganesa disappeared, and in his place stood a large black stone with the form of Ganesa appearing on it. 35

This shrine is located in the coastal mountains to the west of Pune.³⁶The current temple, built by Morobadada Phadnavis, brother of the famous Nana Phadnavis, is located at one end of the village of Pali. The *mandir* is very beautiful and faces east. At sunrise, during *daksinayana*,the sun's rays fall exactly on Sri Ballalesvara in the main *sanctum*.Sri Ballalesvara faces east and is about three feet high; his trunk turns toward his left side. There are beautiful diamonds in his eyes and navel. Behind the *murti* is a silver background, and on it one finds Ganapati's consorts, Siddhi and Rddhi, waving *camaras*.Outside the *sanctum sanctorum*,Ganapati's *musaka* (mouse) sits facing the *murti* with a *modaka* in his hands. This *murti* is dressed daily in five brightly colored silk *dhotis* and wears silverfish (*makara*)earrings, a silver *Om* pendant on his forehead, gem-studded necklaces around his neck, and a silver crown upon his head.

This temple was the eighth and last of the *asta vinayaka* temples that I visited. When I arrived, the priest asked me to sit down and "wait." He then proceeded to perform a number of *abhisekas* (ritual bathings) of the *murti*.The image was bathed in water, milk, curds, and honey. Then the priest "dressed" the *murti* in five brightly colored silk *dhotis* and put silver *makara* earrings on his ears, a silver *Om* pendant on his forehead, gem-studded necklaces around his neck, and a silver crown upon his head. This was the only Ganapati of the eight *asta vinayakas* that was dressed or wore ornaments while I performed my *yatra*.After the priest had finished worshipping and dressing Ganesa, he said, "Now, have your *darsana*.One can imagine how thrilled I was. I asked a person standing nearby to inform the priest (in Marathi) that I had just completed a *yatra* of the eight *asta vinayakas* and what a grand finale this was!

This temple has a special bell, which is made of an alloy of five metals (*pañcadhatu*).The bell was made in Europe and brought to India and installed in the church of Vasai-Sasti in the Konkoni

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region by the Portugese. King Chimaji Appa, of the Peshva regime, defeated the Portugese and brought the bell to this temple.

Sri Varada Vinayaka of Mahad

In Vidarbha, there was an extremely brave king named Bhima. For a very long time he had no children. Then, with the blessings of Lord Ganesa he fathered a son who was as brave and handsome as himself. This son, Rukmangada, was also a devotee of Ganapati. Once upon a time, Rukmangada went hunting in the forest and was overcome with thirst. He went to the nearby asrama of the *rsi* Vacakni. Upon his arrival, Mukunda, the wife of Vacakni, became infatuated with this handsome young prince. But the prince refused her advances, and so, in a fit of anger, she cursed him to become a leper. He withdrew to the surrounding forest and began to perform penance. The sage Narada happened to pass that way, and observing the prince, instructed him to go take a dip in a nearby lake. The prince did so and was relieved of his leprosy. Indra came to know of Mukunda's infatuation and, disguising himself as Rukmangada, went to her and conceived a child. The child of this union, Grtsamada, was also strong, handsome, and intelligent. But the other sages shunned him because of his lineage. So he retired deep into the forest and lived upon dry leaves while standing upon one leg for years on end. Finally, Lord Ganesa was pleased with his *tapas* and gave him a boon (*varada*),due to which he became so renowned as a *rsi* that his name came to be chanted at the start of the Ganesa *mantra*.Further, since Lord Ganapati gave him this boon (*varada*)at this place, Ganesa became known as Varada Vinayaka, the lord who bestows boons. 37

Mahad is very close to Pune.³⁸The present temple is carved out of stone and faces east. Tradition says that the *rsi*, Grtsamada, built the original temple and a *svayambhu* Ganesa, in the form of Varada Vinayaka, was installed therein. The present *murti* is in a sitting position with its trunk turning toward its left side.

There is a small pond behind the temple, and tradition says that the present *murti* of Ganesa was recovered from this pond sometime in the late seventeenth century.

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Figure 17
Sakti Ganapati with consort
(early-nineteenth-century Kangra styled)

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Sri Mahaganapati of Ranjangaon

Once upon a time, a child of the *rshi* Grtsamada worshipped Ganesa and received the boon that he would conquer the entire universe. Ganesa gave him three cities made of gold, silver, and iron and told him that as long as they existed, he could not be defeated. Because of these three cities, the child was known as the demon Tripura. Further, Ganesa told him that Lord Siva alone would be able to defeat him. Quickly Tripura defeated Indra and ruled the three worlds, humiliating both gods and human beings. He extinguished the sacred fires and prohibited worship of the gods. The sage Narada told the gods to take refuge in Ganesa by chanting the *mantra* "Om." Ganesa was pleased with their worship and taught them the *sankatanasan stotra*. He said, "Whoever chants this *stotra* when in danger will be protected by me." Then Lord Siva worshipped Ganesa, who told him that whenever someone remembers Ganesa, Ganesa will appear before that person and remove his obstacles. Lord Siva was then blessed by Ganesa and received a *mantra* from him plus the *Ganesa Sahasranama*, which enabled Siva to destroy the three cities and to defeat the demon Tripura. Ganesa told Siva that by chanting the *Ganesa Sahasranama*, one will obtain victory in every endeavor, one will have all of one's obstacles removed, and one will achieve whatever one desires. 39

This shrine dates back to the ninth century, and the present temple, which faces east, was built by Peshwa Madhavrao in 1768.⁴⁰ The *murti* of Ganapati is in a sitting position with his trunk turning left, although the trunk swirls back toward the right at the tip.

Tradition says that the original *murti* of this shrine had twenty hands and ten trunks and that this *svayambhu* image is located in an underground room directly below the present *sanctum sanctorum*.

The One Clad in White; or, What You See Is What You Get

Before the beginning of any worship in South India, the worshipper knocks the two sides of his/her forehead⁴¹ with wrists crossed and fists clenched while saying this *sloka*:

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Figure 18
Maha Ganapati

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suklambaradharam visnum
 sasivarnam caturbhujam
 prasannavadanam dhyayeth
 sarvavighnopasanthaye

This *sloka* has a profound meaning, a superficial meaning, and (has been given by nonbelievers) a perverted meaning. *Suklambaradharam* literally means, "one who is clad in white." *Visnum* means, "he who is all-pervading." *Sasivarnam* means, "he whose complexion is gray like that of ash." *Caturbhujam* means, "the one with four arms." *Prasannavadanam dhyayeth* means, "the one who always has a pleasing appearance." *Sarvavighnopasanthaye* means, "the one who removes all obstacles."

Vinayaka is the deity dressed in white who always removes all bad qualities, instills good qualities, removes obstacles, and confers peace on the devotee who meditates on him. At least, this is how a theistic believer interprets the prayer.

However, nonbelievers have made its meaning into something of a joke by construing it to mean: "It is a description of a *four-legged, ash-gray donkey* who *wanders everywhere* with a *bland look* on its face while carrying *white clothes* on its back."

There is a famous *sloka* that says, *yat bhavo tat bhavasi* [as one's belief, so one's experience]. A thief sees only the pockets of a holy person. Mirabai only saw nectar where the king had sent poison.

Ganapati was born: from his mother alone; from his father alone; from his mother and father; from two mothers, Parvati and Ganga; from two elephants; self-born. He was born from: his mother's sweat/dirt/sandalwood paste; from his father's laughter/splendor/space; from a servant, Malini; from an elephant; from blood; or self-born. Of course there is also the nonorigination theory (*ajati-vada*), which states that nothing is ever born and nothing ever dies.

How are we to react to this plethora of myths? What do they mean? Obviously those who read or listen to these myths bring their own assumptions and presuppositions along with them. What might make sense to one individual is farfetched nonsense to another. The underlying presupposition of this book has been to seek out meanings that not only will foster a positive interpretation but, moreover, will promote a genuine quest for spiritual truth(s).

Some points to consider:

1. In Indian thought, the female principle (Parvati) represents Nature, change, and potency, and the male principle

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pie (Siva) represents transcendency, immutability, and latency.

2. For the human being, which is a mixture of Siva and *sakti*, to manifest its divinity, it must necessarily "lose its head" or the egocentric idea that it is essentially the physical body.

3. Siva contributes the idea of wisdom by replacing the old head with a new one.

4. The human being must die to the old before becoming the new.

5. The new elephant's head "takes" to the old body as if it essentially belonged there.

6. With the acquisition of the elephant's head, Ganapati acquires all boons.

7. Ganesa or the divine child is brought to life out of the "dirt" of the old life. It is a transformation from within, not a new creation from without.

8. Siva, the sage, does not need a child; Parvati, Nature, would not be nature without creation.

9. Regarding Ganesa's celibacy, "one makes the bargain only once," that is, initiation and liberation are one time occurrences. To be born is all that is required.

10. Gods and goddesses exist within the individual.

11. Parvati means "one having (*vathy*)the three aspects (*parva*). " These three aspects are: knowledge (*jñana sakti*),action (*kriya sakti*),and will (*iccha sakti*).These three need Siva or *cit-sakti* to give life to whatever they do.

Formerly, all the gods and sages who were rich in asceticism undertook various actions and were successful in them. I believe that the gods exist in our own minds. When our preoccupation is with the objective world, which is perceived as separate from us and which we want to exploit for the fulfillment of our own desires, we create demons. When we develop an understanding that our true nature is divine and begin to selflessly sacrifice all our actions to the Divine, the gods are born.

Then later, those who were on the wrong path were successful in their actions, while those on the right path achieved success only

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in the face of great obstacles. So the gods worried greatly and talked together about how they might thwart the success of those who were on the wrong path. Talking together, those dwellers of the triple heaven decided to go to Lord Siva, on Mount Kailasa.

As I see it, demons never worry about obstacles. They dash against them and smash them. The gods, on the other hand, are sensitive enough to realize their own inner worth and want to overcome obstacles instead of being consumed by them. Lord Siva is said to reside on Mount Kailasa. The word *Kailasa* comes from the syllables *ka* (head) and *vilas* (residence). Thus, the residence of the *jiva* is in the head. Siva resides in the thousand-petaled lotus, and if Siva leaves the body, the body becomes inert. We are born of the Light. *Gajam* means "elephant," but it also has the meaning "earth born of sound." *Gao* means *nada* and *jam* means "birth." *Gajam* symbolizes the finite material world, while *ajam* is the infinite, that which is formless, is pure spirit.

At Kailasa, the gods met Siva and bowing before him, they said, "O three-eyed Lord who holds the trident, you should cause obstacles to arise for everyone without exception." When the gods had spoken, Siva was filled with great joy and looked at Uma (Parvati) with an unblinking eye. As he was gazing at her in the presence of the gods, he thought to himself, "Why is there no form of me in the sky? I have form in earth, air, fire, and water, but there is not one of me in space?" As he was thinking this thought he laughed, and a beautiful boy took form out of the splendor of his knowledge.

Ganesa originated from the splendor of Siva's aura. Thus it is said that the mind becomes frustrated and fatigued when it turns outwards. However, when it turn inwards it is refreshed. Kailasa is the "residence" of an individual's divinity. *Ka* means "head," and *vilas* means "residence." The three-eyed one who lives in Kailasa holding the trident represents that Siva, the Lord of the three worlds, has the power to overcome the three *gunas*.The Formless One knows that there is no place where he is not. That which has form is that which is formless. Duality exists only where ignorance reigns. Knowing this, Siva laughed.

When Uma saw this captivating child with beauty and radiance, she looked upon him with an unblinking eye. As Siva observed her fickleness, he became angry, thinking this beautiful youth was deluding his eyes. So he cursed him saying, "Little boy, you shall have an elephant's head and a potbelly." Then Siva, who had become filled with rage, rose up with his body shaking and water flew out from the pores of his hair and fell to earth. Where

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each drop fell, an imp (*vinayaka*)rose up. They began to create obstacles everywhere. Then Brahma said, "Since this child was born of your mouth, let him be the leader of the *vinayakas*,and they will be his followers.

There is a story to illustrate this variation of Ganesa's genealogy:

Uma was unable to behold this divine form, and so Siva cursed him to assume a large belly and an elephant's head. Until the mind is steady in wisdom, it becomes attracted to the beauty of the physical, forgetting that it is the Divine within that makes it beautiful. When this happens, a sacrifice must be performed. How can an individual's being be widened and the birth of divinity become achieved in his own consciousness? This can be

done through sacrifice. The entire world is a dumb and helpless sacrifice in which the individual is bound as a victim to the unseen gods. The individual's life has to be turned into a conscious and voluntary offering to the higher existence so that the soul becomes, not the victim, but the master of the sacrifice. One becomes divine through sacrifice. For performing the acts of sacrifice, the liberating word must be found, the word that arises out of the depths of one's own heart.

This Song Is for You

Modern individuals have found themselves homeless. They are alienated from themselves, alienated from the world, and alienated from others. They have found themselves estranged in a large world with all of its horizons contracting. The last horizon is within:

Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. 42

Estrangement from oneself, estrangement from the Beloved. Teaching stories are designed as a means to help remove these feelings of alienation and estrangement. For those "with ears to hear," the journey begins. Listen to the following dialogue, written by the author, in hopes of locating one's heart.

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She said, "Tell me something about Ganesa, so that I may understand."

He said, "You cannot understand unless you have first experienced Ganesa."

She said, "Ridiculous. I do not have to understand an apple to know whether it is bad or not."

He said, "True, but if you are looking at a good orange and you think it is a bad apple, you need to understand less about apples and more about oranges."

She said, "Then why do you write books and give lectures if experience is so necessary?"

He said, "Because the outward is the conductor to the inward. Books and lectures teach something of the outward aspects of the inward. Without them, no one would even begin to approach the inner."

She said, "But why can't I do it without books and lectures."

He said, "For the same reason that you cannot think without words. You have grown up using the mind, thinking thoughts, reading and hearing, and so, in the beginning, the inward can only speak to you through the outward."

Though the details of the various stories differ, all of them may be said to be valid because of the truth that underlies them. As we hear each story, let us try to dive deep into the inner essence and discover the truth which animates each.

JyestarajaElder Brother (Variations on a Theme)

Once upon a time, Siva and Parvati were playing with their two sons, Ganesa and Karttikeya. 43All the *devas* decided to pay their respects to the divine couple. The Scriptures say that whenever you visit God in the temple or the *Guru* or elders or children, you should always take something with you to offer. So the *devas* brought a fruit containing the nectar of immortality. Upon learning of this gift, the sons' eyes grew wide. Both of them suddenly had their eye upon this enticing immortality-bestowing divine fruit. Both brothers demanded the fruit. "Mom, I want that," they said in unison.

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Parvati replied, "My sons, this is no ordinary fruit. It contains *amrta*.By merely smelling this fruit, one will attain immortality. By eating it, everything will accrue to that person. So, one should possess great merit to receive this fruit. I

want you to prove your merit to me. The first one to encircle the world three times and return back here will be declared the winner." Karttikeya immediately jumped onto the back of his vehicle, the peacock, and flew off. He stopped only at sacred spots along the way and offered prayers. He thought to himself, the fruit is mine for how can my chubby brother, riding on the back of his little mouse, go faster than myself? It is impossible. Meanwhile, Ganesa kept quiet. Then, slowly he stood up and very reverently, with folded hands, performed three *pradaksinas* around his parents. When his parents asked why he was not encircling the globe, he replied, "The entire universe is within you. To encircle you is to encircle the universe. To respect and serve you means that I have obtained all the merits of going to all the holy places. He who is devoted to his parents is infinitely more meritorious than the one who leaves the parents at home, uncared for, and then goes from place to place, dipping in waters and ponds." His parents were pleased and awarded the fruit to Ganapati.

The most well-known version of this story occurs in the *Siva Purana*:

Siva and Parvati had two sons, Ganesa and Karttikeya. Both of them aspired to marriage. Their parents said, "You are equal in our eyes. Thus, to determine which of you will get married, an auspicious marriage will be performed for the son who can encircle the world first." When he heard this, Karttikeya immediately took off on his peacock, but Ganesa stood pondering in his mind. He proceeded to take a bath and then perform worship to his parents. After praising them, he circumambulated seven times around them and then said, "Let my auspicious marriage be performed now." His parents were surprised at his remarks. But Ganesa calmly said, "Is it not said in the Scriptures that anyone who worships his parents and circumambulates them will derive the merit of circumambulating the earth?" When Siva and Parvati heard this, they were astonished not only at their son's cleverness but also at his wisdom. And so, Ganesa was married to Siddhi and Buddhi. 44

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The person of wisdom sees all things as *Brahman*. The egoistic person, who believes they are the doer, cannot understand, no matter what is said.

In South India, Ganesa is a bachelor. There is a story for this.

Once upon a time, in Kailasa, Ganapati was teasing a cat. In a playful mood, he pulled the tail of the cat, rolled it over on the ground, and caused it much pain, as rambunctious young children are prone to do. After some time, Ganesa tired of this game and ran to his mother, Parvati and snuggled down on her lap. When he looked up and saw her face, he observed that she was in great pain. Further, he observed that her body was covered with dirt and scratches. He asked her, "What happened to you mother? What causes you pain and how did you become dirty and scratched?" She looked lovingly at her son and said, "You did." Ganapati could not believe it and protested, "How can that be? I never hurt you nor would I ever." As Ganesa could not understand, Parvati explained, "All bodies and all forms are mine only." It was thus that Ganesa took a vow never to marry, for he did not want to break the injunction that prohibits one from marrying one's own mother.45

All beings are a part of divinity. Hurting one's fellow creatures, human or animal, means hurting God. It is for this reason that one should not even criticize another. To criticize another is to criticize God, for who, ultimately, is responsible for all creatures, great and small?

A two-handed Ganesa is rarely seen. In Karnataka, at Gokama, there is a two-handed *murti* one hand holds a stick and the other hand is in the upraised gesture signifying "have no fear" (*abhaya mudra*). How this particular *murti* appeared is as follows: Once, long ago, the great ten-headed demon Ravana did a long and arduous penance (*tapas*) in order to win a boon from Lord Siva. When Siva appeared before him, he asked as a boon the *atmalinga* that signified "all of Siva." Siva is known to be extremely compassionate, and so he gave the *atmalinga* to Ravana, on the condition that it would lose its power if Ravana ever put it down. Ravana agreed and immediately began misusing its power by abusing everyone and everything in the universe. The *devas* became very frightened and upset. Out of compassion for the suffering plight of humanity, Ganesa appeared in the form of a little boy, a cow-herder, to get it back. Just then, Ravana wanted to perform his daily ablutions. He presented the *linga* to the little cow-herder asking him, "Can you hold it? I'll be back soon. You must not put it down. Can you do this?" The little boy replied, "Yes, I can do that. But if you don't come in a short time, I will put it down. And you know, if I

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place it on the ground it must stay there for that is the speciality of this *linga*." Ravana agreed and hurried off. Almost immediately little Ganapati called out, "It's too heavy. Come back." When Ravana didn't appear, the child put the *linga* down. Ravana returned and was furious. He yelled at the boy and tried to lift the *linga*, but he couldn't lift it. In the process of attempting to lift it, Ravana twisted it. That is how the *linga* got its name. Then, out of frustration for having lost the *atmalinga*, Ravana hit little Ganesa on the forehead and thus the *murti* took the shape of a cow's ear. When Ravana hit Ganapati, Ganapati didn't retaliate. He just resumed his own celestial form and the image became a *svayambhu murti* there.

No one should ever retaliate for anything done to them. To be defamed or disgraced or disfigured is really a great blessing. One should clap one's hands and rejoice at one's great good fortune when such an occurrence happens. If one can do this spontaneously and instantaneously, one becomes a self-manifested embodiment of divinity. On the other hand, if one retaliates or defends oneself, even for an accusation or blow that one did not truly deserve, then one must reap the appropriate consequences.

A variation of this story relates how Ganesa prevented a *linga* from being stolen. 46Once, Ravana attempted to carry away a *Sivalinga* from Maharashtra to Lanka and establish it in his capital. This would not only render the capital invincible but also deprive the *devas* and devotees of their object of worship. Thus Lord Visnu beseeched Ganesa to place an obstacle to prevent Ravana's theft of the *linga*. Lord Siva had said that if this *linga* were to be established in Lanka, it would remain immovable, and it would be impossible even for the gods to take it back once it was installed. So Ganesa appeared in front of Ravana and gained his trust. Ravana needed to relieve himself and perform his morning rituals before proceeding to Lanka, so he asked the boy to hold the *linga* for him. While Ravana was performing his rituals, Ganapati placed the *linga* on the ground, and it immediately took root. This took place at Mahabalesvara, which is in Maharashtra. To this day Mahabalesvara serves as a place of pilgrimage and worship for both Siva and Ganesa devotees.

"Sri Mahaganesa Pañca Ratnam"

This "Garland of Five Gems on Ganesa" by Adi Sankaracarya Bhagavatpada praises the true significance of Lord Ganapati.

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Holding with delight the sweet *modaka*, Ganesa always grants to the devout the delight of everlasting liberation. He wears the crescent moon on his forehead. He protects those who meditate upon him. He is the matchless leader. He destroys the terrible demons of ignorance. He dispels the misery of those who take refuge in him. To him, Lord Vinayaka, I bow in obeisance.

He is terrible to those who do not turn to the all-pervading power of God. He is luminous like a million morning suns. He is adored by both *devas* and *asuras*. He saves one from danger. He is the lord of *devas*, lord of wealth, lord of the tremendous forces of nature, lord of the subtle principles of the universe, the lord supreme, the one transcendental being. I always take refuge in him.

He brings well-being to the whole universe. He destroys the terrible forces of evil. He has an all-consuming potbelly. He is the giver of boons. He is everlasting. He is bountiful. He gives joy, well-being, and glory to those who worship him. I salute this ever effulgent being.

He dispels every ill and suffering of his devotees who constantly pray to him. He is the son of Lord Siva, the destroyer of demons. He is the remover of the pride of demons. His terrible might can dissolve the entire universe. He is adored by the valiant like Arjuna. The elephant-faced lord emanates strength from his powerful countenance. To this timeless elephant-faced lord I bow in obeisance.

He is graceful with shining teeth. He is the son of Lord Siva, who is the lord of *Yama*, the lord of death. His form is not conceivable by thought. He is eternal. He is the destroyer of all miseries. He dwells in the heart of *yogis*. I always remember the one-tusked lord.

Whoever chants with devotion this hymn every day in the early dawn while meditating upon Sri Mahaganesa will be freed from all afflictions. They will enjoy good health, have noble children, prosperity, long life, divine gifts,

and talents. 47

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Figure 19
Bronze Trimukha Ganapati located at
Dasa Bhuja Cintamani Temple, Pune

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Figure 20
Bronze Yatra Ganapati

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6

Who Am I?

*Just as rivers flowing to the ocean merge in it,
Losing their name and form.
So the wise individual, freed from name and form,
Manifests the Divine. Do you identify with the
drop of water or the water of the drop?*
John A. Grimes

Sri Cintamani of Theur

Cintamani was the precious jewel that was rescued from the ocean of milk. Sometimes the ocean appears full of waves, and sometimes it seems waveless. Waves are nothing but drops of water, while the ocean is the water of the drop, transcending name and form (*nama* and *rupa*). Name and form are like a mass of foam, or ice in the midst of the ambrosial ocean of consciousness. Ganesa wears a garland of *cintamanis* around his neck when he dances in the form of Nrtya Ganapati. The *cintamani* is literally "jewel of the mind," which stands for an enlightened mind or pure Consciousness. It is that which transforms one vision from one of duality to one of nonduality. Instead of being misled by the multiplicity of names and forms, one dances in the bliss of the experience that everything is the Self.

An individual, thinking oneself possessed of name and form, finite, mortal, limited, must be rescued from this ignorance. In actuality, one is a pure diamond, a precious jewel, not different from the Divine that they seek. Kabir said, "It makes me laugh to hear of a fish in water, athirst." Tukaram said, "I went in search of God and could not find him. Then, at last, I discovered that I, the seeker was the sought, I was God, that which I was seeking."

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Once upon a time there was a king and queen who had a son. Due to circumstances the young prince was separated from his parents at birth. He was found and raised by a group of thieves who lived in a forest. As the prince grew, he took to life in the forest and became proficient in his companion's ways. However, one day, the king's minister discovered the young prince in the forest and told him that he was really a prince. The prince replied, "What nonsense. I am a thief and not a prince. Thieves speak deceptively in whispers like this, while princes speak boldly and forcefully like this. Thieves sneak around hunched over like this while princes walk fearlessly and upright like this." The minister said, "You see, you are a prince. You walk and talk like one." There never was a moment when the prince was not a prince. He was born royal. All that happened was that he "obtained the already obtained." He learned the liberating wisdom that he was, in reality, a prince and not, as he had believed, a thief.

King Abhijit and Queen Gunavati had a son named Gana. He grew to be a very strong and brave though greedy and short-tempered warrior. Lord Siva was so pleased with his worship of Him that He granted him boons such as lordship over the three worlds and escape from death by anything that possessed the three *gunas*. One day, while hunting in the forest, Prince Gana chanced upon *rsi* Kapila's *asrama*. The sage welcomed the prince and invited him, along with his army, for lunch. It so happened that Kapila had a wish-fulfilling gem named Cintamani and, with its help, he was able to feed the entire army with the finest, tastiest of foods. When the greedy Gana saw this gem, he immediately wished to possess it. At first he politely asked the *rsi* to give it to him. But when the sage refused, Gana took it by force.

The sage Kapila was a devotee of Lord Ganapati and prayed for his assistance. Being pleased with Kapila's devotion, Ganesa appeared to prince Gana in a dream with his army of warriors, one of whom cut off Gana's head. Gana awoke and, instead of being afraid, immediately proceeded with his army to Kapila's *asrama*, where he intended to kill Kapila. On the way Gana was stopped by his father, Abhijit, who advised him to return the gem to Kapila. But Gana ignored his father and began assaulting the *asrama*. Ganesa's *sakti*, Siddhi Devi, appeared there, and in order to protect the *asrama*, created Laksa, a warrior with one thousand arms. While Laksa destroyed Gana's army, Ganesa himself beheaded Gana. The wish-fulfilling diamond was returned to Kapila, who, having grown tired of it, asked Ganesa if it might not remain in that place instead. Ganesa agreed and to commemorate the event, took

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the name of the stone upon himself. Since then, he has resided in Theur under the name of Cintamani Vinayaka. 1

Tat Tvam Asi (That Thou Art)

Once, many years ago, I had a "chance" meeting with an Indian saint. He asked, in broken English, "Been India?" Since I had been in India for a number of years, the best, most easily demonstrable answer was to wobble my head in the characteristic side to side manner known to most Indians. The moment he saw that "wobble" he got a big grin on his face, entered the room, and closed the door behind him. He asked me, "Who you?" Having lived in India and being used to this type of English and being young and polite I began to answer him, "I am John Grimes," but just as I reached the G of Grimes, he said, "Bas, family name, who you?" (*Bas* is Hindi for "stop, enough.") Again, since I had lived in India and

studied Indian thought, I very confidently and boldly began to reply, "I am the immortal *Atman*," but just as I reached the *A* of *Atman*, again he stopped me with another "*Bas*, book name, who you?" With the first "stop," he wiped out the idea that I am my physical body. With the second "stop," he wiped out my entire mental universe. What was left? With two small words he had succeeded in conveying to me that I was neither my physical body nor my mental knowledge. How to answer him? So I said, "I do not know." Quick as a wink, he responded, "Find out." I replied, "How?" He responded, "Not how, find out." Again I asked, "How?" He was holding a handkerchief in his hand and he opened his fingers and let the handkerchief drop to the ground and as it fell he said, "Let go." Again I asked, "How [to let go]?" He responded, "Not how, let go." And then he turned and left the room.²

Almost twenty years passed before I learned that this monk supposedly did not speak English. How interesting! A person who did not speak English magnificently managed to teach the Vedantic truth that one is neither one's body nor one's thoughts, all in two words. As if that was not enough, he then proceeded to teach me how to "find out who I really am" with another two words ("let go"). We all know how to let go, we do it every night when we go to sleep. We never asked our mother, "Mom, how do I go to sleep?" We just "let go" and sleep came. However, we become confused, disturbed, when someone asks us to "let go" of all of our preconceived notions as to who we are. Like this, we look for a technique in order to meditate or to find an answer to the question, Who am I?

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Mahavakya (Great Saying)

According to Advaita Vedanta, the Self (*Atman*) is one and nondual. The pluralistic universe of an individual's day-to-day experience, which appears to one as real, is an illusory superimposition that is neither real nor unreal. This appearance is rooted in ignorance (*avidya*), which conceals the real (*sat*) and projects the unreal (*asat*). One's entire experience of life seems to involve differentiations like, I am male, I am old, I am hungry, I am meditating, I am seeking liberation, I am having a vision, and so on. These differentiations are based on the superimposition of one thing on another or the attributes of one thing on another due to ignorance.

Upon the same tree there are two birds on one branch. One is calm, silent, majestic, immersed in his own glory. The other bird is eating sweet and bitter fruits by turns, hopping from one branch to another, becoming happy and miserable consequentially. After some time, the restless bird eats an exceptionally bitter fruit, becomes disgusted, and for the first time sees the other bird who appears impartial to sweet or bitter fruits, who is neither happy nor sad but serene, who resides content in its own Self. The restless bird longs for this condition but soon forgets and restlessly begins searching for sweet fruits, and hoping to avoid bitter ones again. After another extremely bitter experience, he again attempts to get closer to the other bird. And so it goes, again and again, until at last, the restless bird begins to feel a change about himself. All he thought himself to be has faded away and he realizes that he was only mistaking a substantial looking shadow for his real self. He was, in essence, the other bird all the time. This eating of fruits, bitter and sweet, and this weeping and happiness, rotating by turns, was all a dream, a vain chimera, an illusion. All along he was a majestic bird, calm and silent, glorious and majestic, beyond grief and sorrow.³

If the Self is one and nondual, what is the status of the world, what is the status of all this multiplicity, including myselfwhat I think I am and what I think the world is? Even if it is true that appearances are illusory superimpositions, it still appears that there is a duality. The Self may exist, and I seem to exist, and this "I" may even be the Self. But there seems to be something else, an

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"other" or second if you will. Even if what I think I am is illusory, still it is "something" illusory. To put it another way, if the Self and the world are nondual, one and the same, then there is no reason to seek the Self (for there is nothing that it is not). Yet, if that is the case, why am I miserable and happy, by turns? That seems to imply duality. On the other hand, if the world and the Self are different, then surely that is duality. To answer this question, Advaita relates a tale.

One day a washerman was taking his donkeys to the forest to graze them. He happened to chance upon a newborn lion

cub. The lion cub did not know that it was a lion, and so the cub grew up with the donkeys. As time passed, by living in their company, the lion began to speak like the donkeys, to eat with them, and to travel back and forth to the river carrying laundry on its back. The lion grew up thinking of himself as a donkey. One day, when he was grazing on the river bank with his donkey brothers, another lion came down to the river to drink. While he was drinking he caught sight of this young lion and was shocked and puzzled to see him standing in the midst of donkeys in such a pitiful condition. He came closer to the young lion and said, "Brother, what are you up to?" The young lion replied, "I am grazing with my brothers." Shocked, the elder lion said, "How can you call them brothers? They are asses and you are a lion. Come with me and look at your reflection in the water. Look at your reflection and then look at my reflection. Is there anything similar about us?" The young lion gazed down at his reflection and saw that he looked just like the old lion. The old lion demanded, "Are they your brothers or am I your brother? Now stop braying like a donkey and roar like a lion." The young lion began to roar. All the donkeys as well as the washerman ran away.

Was the young lion ever a donkey? No. He only thought he was a donkey. Was the young prince ever not a prince? No. He only thought he wasn't. The human being is not a limited, unhappy, imperfect being. Human beings only believe they are small, finite, mortal creatures. Once one discards this ignorant superimposition, one will manifest the strength, the glory, the majesty that one is and always has been. It is only one's awareness that need be changed. We never were limited, and never will be limited, because we are the Self. Though a mirage appears in the desert, there never was, is not now, nor ever will there be water there. Though subjects and objects appear in one's nightly dreams, they are not real. Upon waking the next morning, one thinks, Oh, it was but a dream. It is improper to ask, Where did they go?

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Generally, the human being directs all one's thoughts, actions, everything, outward. This is because the sense organs are turned outward and attuned to contacting things from the outside. To turn within is the first requirement regarding the question, Who am I? Individuals whose attention is turned outward, by that very act, excludes any possibility of discovering who they really are. An object, the known, will never be the knower. Yet strangely, even in the act of turning outward, the divine consciousness within one is not excluded. It is merely unnoticed.

Whether an individual knows it or not, Vedanta says that they are this divine inner consciousness. That which conceals this truth from an individual's conscious experience is one's ignorance, one's age-old habit of clinging to externals. If one were to dive deep within, it is impossible not to find the so-called secret heart-cave, the ocean of consciousness, the mysterious Self, the source of one's very being. God dwells within you as you. That thou art. I am *Brahman*. One understands such scriptural declarations when one comes to experience, first hand, the divine essence that is within one, that one really is and always has been.

There is a tale about ten simpletons that reveals the truth of Advaita Vedanta in seven easy steps. It seems that, once upon a time, seven simpletons set out on a journey. Eventually they came to a large, swollen river. The current was strong, and there was no bridge available with which to cross the river. Thus they decided to swim across. When they reached the other side, their leader decided to count their number to determine whether they all made it safely or not. His worst fears were confirmed. He counted only nine members present. He asked each of the other simpletons to count and they reached a similar conclusion, there were only nine of them present and thus one of them must have drowned. They looked high and low, upstream and downstream, but no trace of the missing person could be found. That could mean only one thing. He had been drowned while crossing the river. They began to weep and their grief was inconsolable. Soon a wandering pilgrim came by. Wondering why these individuals were weeping, he asked them what the matter was. Their leader related the entire tragic story of how ten of them had started out on a journey and, after crossing the swollen river, only nine of them had remained, with the tenth man drowned, dead, and gone. The pilgrim was a wise person and a quick glance revealed to him that there were still ten of them present. He guessed how each one of them counted only nine. Obviously every fool had counted all except himself. Thus the pilgrim announced, "the tenth man is not dead but alive." The simpletons

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began to excitedly crowd around the wise pilgrim and shout, "Where is he? Where can we find him? Please take us to him." The pilgrim pointed his finger at the leader and said, "You are the tenth man." At once the mystery was solved.

The tenth man the leader was searching for was none other than himself. The redeeming knowledge came in a flash: "I am that missing tenth man!" All their sorrow immediately disappeared, and their tears of agony were replaced with waves of bliss.

All human beings are on a journey, as it were, the journey of life. At some stage each individual suddenly becomes aware of someone or something missing. Each person thinks, "there must be more to life than this." What or where that something is one does not know. But deep down, everyone intuitively has this feeling. (The knowledge that the tenth *person/Brahman* is one's own Self is obscured. "I do not know where the tenth *man/Brahman* is" ignorance arises.) Thus begins the search to discover if there is someone or something that can bring fulfillment, that can make render one's incompleteness complete. But, at this stage, one does not know who or what it is or even if it really exists. (The existence of the tenth *person/Brahman* is concealed, the tenth *person/Brahman* seems absent "I do not see *Brahman* nor do I know if *Brahman* exists.") Some people just give up at this stage, discontinue their search for ultimate, eternal, unceasing bliss, and settle for momentary pleasures and pains. Others begin to notice their sufferings and feelings of incompleteness and begin to search for a solution. (One has the feeling that the tenth person is dead. One has the feeling that one is an ordinary human being subject to birth, death, fear, ignorance, delusion, pain, finitude, and so on.) A wise person or teacher enters the scene and reveals that the tenth *man/Brahman* is living/exists. (This is indirect knowledge.) This wise person then reveals to the leader of the ten simpletons that you are that tenth man. (Direct knowledge.) This knowledge immediately destroys the grief and suffering caused by the thought that the tenth man was missing. It destroys the individual's sense of fear, finitude, sorrow, and mortality. At the same time, this knowledge produces bliss at the discovery of the missing man. The individual experiences ineffable bliss that arises from one's own innermost Self.

This reality that exists within each and every person is pure Consciousness, pure Awareness, the Self. The name does not matter. It is what the various names are pointing toward that is of paramount importance. No person can even say that they do not know it. In the very act of denying its existence, one must presuppose it to deny it! No one can say, "I do not exist." Who is the I who is saying

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that "I" do not exist? Of nothing else in the universe, or beyond the universe, can this be said. This is the uniqueness and speciality of this consciousness, though until it is experienced it might as well be said to not exist at all. Nearer than the nearest and yet seemingly farther than the farthest. "It is only when you search for It, that you lose It. You cannot take hold of It, but then you cannot get rid of It."

The mark of this ocean of consciousness is that it always exists, and it exists by and in itself. It is totally independent, needing neither effort nor support for its existence. To seek it within oneself, all that is necessary is to understand who or what is doing the seeking. One's habitual pattern is to go in search of it as if it were just another object, even if the greatest, grandest object of all. But that is precisely the problem.

The only thing that one knows for certain, with absolute certainty, is the fact that "I am." Nothing else has this certainty. But, the problem is, one does not know *who* this "I am" is. Are you the physical body or is it you who has the body? Do you know the body or does the body know you? Be clearly aware that the body is an object and that you who knows of, and can observe, the body are quite apart from it. You pervade the entire body and are aware of every part of it, but it does not know you. Even the feeling that you have a particular name and form belong only to the mind, and you as the knower of the body and the mind, are apart from both.

You are That, that reality that cannot have a seer to see it as an object. That, which remains after all knowledge and all ignorance has vanished. You are That reality where all that is illusory has been absorbed; where the duality of a "Thou" and a "That" cannot survive. When the source of consciousness itself has been reached, consciousness disappears. Then, the source of consciousness and all that appears within consciousness is the Self.

A Great Saying (*mahdvakya*) is an identity statement that reveals the nonduality of the Absolute (*Brahman*) and the individual (*Atman*). How can there be any understanding of this statement so long as the identification with the body as a separate entity does not cease? Or of the understanding that others are not different from oneself?

Who is the "me" who is going to have this understanding? If the one who wants to "achieve" this understanding is none other than the "me" or "ego" or the mind, it cannot be achieved. The thief cannot become a policeman to catch the thief. The mind cannot destroy the mind. The mind or me is a creation within space and time, and it is only that kind of

understanding that is not of space and time that can destroy the timebound mind or ego.

The statement *tat tvam asi* [that thou art] appears nine times in the *Chandogya Upanisad*. Advaita contends that the individual soul is nothing but pure Consciousness, which appears not by itself but in association with the psycho-physical apparatus. This association is but an illusory appearance due to ignorance. In the statement "That thou art," *That* refers to pure Consciousness.

Interpretation of Mahavakya

The knowledge that one obtains through *sruti* texts like *tat tvam asi* 4 is immediate and nonrelational. Such texts signify the transcendental nondual Reality. *Tat tvam asi* [That thou art]: *That* (*tat*) refers to the Absolute or *Brahman*; *Thou* (*tvam*) refers to the individual; *art* (*asi*) points to the essential nondifference between the two. *Brahman*, by nature, is infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, immoral, and so on. The individual, seemingly is finite, mortal, limited, and so on. How can that which is infinite, immortal, and so on be nondifferent from that which is finite, mortal, and so on?

Indian thought avers that words convey their meaning through three kinds of signification, that is, primary signification (*mukhya vrtti*), secondary signification (*laksana vrtti*), and signification based upon a knowledge of a similarity of qualities (*gauni vrtti*). As well, one must take into consideration the coordinate relation (*visesana visesya sambandha*) of the words in the text.⁵ These are defined as follows:

1. *Primary signification*: A word used to convey a sense (through either a genus (*jati*), quality (*guna*), activity (*kriya*), or relation (*sambandha*)) that exists in the sense that is conveyed.
2. *Secondary signification*: When the literal meaning of a text is unintelligible, then one or more of the words constituting it must convey some other meaning that is invariably connected with the primary meaning. There are three types:

a. *Exclusive*: *Jahal-laksana* is when the implied meaning of a word of expression excludes the primary meaning. The implied meaning is other than, but nonetheless related to, the primary meaning, which is completely given up, in the sentence, "The village is on the river," the primary meaning of the word *river* is completely given up and the bank or shore, which is related to the river, is implied.

b. *Inclusive*: *Ajahal-laksana* includes the primary meaning in the implied sense. Here, a meaning is implied that is other than the primary meaning of the word yet is related to it, with the primary meaning not being given up, in the sentence, "The school works today," the word *school* indicates the members of the school. Thus, the primary meaning is maintained and included in the implied meaning.

c. *Quasi-inclusive*: *Jahad-ajahal-laksana* is when a part of the primary meaning of a word is given up and part of it is retained, in the sentence, "This is that John," the meaning of the word *this* refers to John as qualified by present time, place, etc., and the meaning of the word *that* refers to the same John as qualified by past time, place, etc. The primary meanings of the two terms are incompatible. Thus, in quasi-inclusive implication, part, of the meaning of the words *this* and *that*, viz., the individual John, is accepted and another part of their meaning, viz., "as qualified by temporal and spatial aspects, etc., " is rejected.

3. *Gauni-vritti*: Signification based upon the knowledge of a similarity in qualities is when the literal sense of a sentence is unintelligible and one of the words in the sentence conveys some other meaning that has the same qualities that are present in its primary meaning. For instance, "John is a lion" is unintelligible if it means that a man (John) is literally an animal (lion). But it makes sense to understand that John possesses the qualities of valor, cruelty, strength, and so forth the qualities that are present in the primary sense of the word *lion*.⁶

4. *Coordinate relation*: *Samanadhidharanya* is the grammatical principle that states that one entity may have two aspects,

for example, a blue lotus has "blueness" and "lotusness."

5. Substantive-attribute relation: *Visesana visesya sambandha* is the subject-predicate relation. The flower (lotus) is what is qualified by a color (blue).

This brings us to the heart of the matter. The Great Sayings appear to be unintelligible in their primary meanings. The word *That* (*tat*) primarily refers to *Brahman* (which is omnipresent, omni-

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scient, omnipotent, etc.) and the word *thou* (*tvam*) primarily refers to the individual self (which is finite, limited, mortal, etc.). Thus, it is with the above stated interpretive tools that Advaitins attempt to overcome this dilemma and demonstrate that the Great Sayings do, in fact, coherently signify that the individual Self (*Atman*) is non-different from the Absolute (*Brahman*).

In the statement, "That thou art," one may claim that "thou" refers to one's ego-nature on the grounds of grammatical coordination (*samanadhihikaranya*). Just as there is grammatical coordination between the words *I* and *fair* in the expression, "I am fair," so too, there seems to be grammatical coordination between the words *thou* and *That*.

However, grammatical coordination need not *necessarily* imply identity. There are two types of grammatical coordination: coordination in the sense of sublation (*badhayam samanadhihikaranya*) and coordination in the sense of oneness (*aikye samanadhihikaranya*). One should employ this grammatical principle carefully. In the expression, "I am fair," fairness is a characteristic of the body, but, the body is not "I."

Just so, one may interpret this *mahavakya* by means of the grammatical principle of coordination in the sense of sublation.⁸ For instance, there is the example of the judgement, "This post is a man."⁹ In one's earlier judgement, one believes that an object (a man) is a post. But a subsequent judgement, upon closer scrutiny, reveals that it is post. Likewise, one's original judgement believes that the "I" refers to one's ego-nature, while a subsequent judgement sublates this earlier view and reveals that 'T' is the Absolute. Upon realization, the ego-nature is sublated. The "I" with adjuncts is not the Self; the "I," in its essential nature, is the Self.

It is also possible to interpret this *mahavakya* another way. In its primary (*mukhya* or *prasiddha vrtti*) meaning, *thou* equals one's ego-nature. Because this primary meaning is unintelligible, one must resort to a secondary meaning (*laksana vrtti*). The type of secondary meaning that is sometimes invoked in such a situation is "exclusive" (*jahal-laksana*). The primary meaning of *thou* (consciousness with attributes) is completely given up, and a secondary meaning (consciousness without attributes) other than, but nonetheless related to the primary meaning is accepted.

There is still another way in which *tat tvam asi* can be interpreted. There exists a similarity between the Self and the ego. Both have the common qualities of subtlety, inwardness, and behave as if they are the perceiving Self. On this account, one may interpret the text by means of signification based upon the knowledge of sim-

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ilarity of qualities (*gauni vrtti*). Thus, the Self is implied by a word (*I*) that primarily refers to the ego even though the ego is material and insentient and cannot be equated with *Brahman*.

Finally, one may interpret *tat tvam asi* directly or in a primary sense to mean "thou or the individual self" is the "That or the Absolute" on the strength of the knowledge that the ego-notion cannot exist without the Self.¹⁰ All that is not the Self, is not Consciousness, is not-real and therefore cannot even appear to exist without the aid of the Self. Thus, in a peculiar and interesting twist, *I* (or any word for that matter) must refer to the constitutive being of anything whatsoever and as such designates that which is self-evident, immediate, direct, and certain, that is, the Self.¹¹

Thus, the word *I/thou* may be applied to the Absolute by:

1. grammatical coordination in the sense of sublation

2. indirect exclusive usage
3. figurative usage
4. primary meaning

We have observed that the knowledge that is derived from *tat tvam asi* is immediate and nonrelational. Normally sentences are relational, and yet we observe that a relational sentence, *tat tvam asi*, gives a nonrelational meaning. The relational, verbal sense (*vakyartha*) of the text will give a non-verbal, unitary, impartite meaning (*avakyartha*). It is interesting that nonrelational *Brahman* knowledge can arise from a relational sentence.

There are three steps/considerations that must be taken into account in the understanding of a *mahavakya*:

1. *Grammatical coordination (samanadhiranyā jñāna)*: grammatical coordination or relation that exists between two terms, for example, between *blue* and *lotus* in "blue lotus" or between *tat* and *tvam* in "*tat tvam asi*."
2. *Subject-predicate relation (visesana visesyatā jñāna)*: knowledge that dualistically includes the knower and the known.
3. *Indirect implication (laksya laksana sambandha jñāna)*: implied meaning inherent in the terms of a statement

Now, a sentence sense (*vakyartha*) can be of two kinds

1. *Relation of duality (bheda samsarga)*: in which the meaning

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of a sentence is conveyed through a relation obtained among the words conveying the difference, for example, "bring the cow with a stick" (wherein, from the usage of the various words, difference is *known*/*stick*/*cow*/*bring*/ etc.)

2. *Relation of nonduality (abheda samsarga)*: in which oneness is known through the relation of the words, for example, "blue lotus" or "*tat tvam asi*."

There are two types of nondual relations:

1. *Relation with oneness (samsarga abheda)*: in which there is oneness with relation; the object is one though it has multiple meanings/attributes
2. *Identity statement: (svarupa abheda)*: in which two entities referred to are actually identical/one

Before we actually interpret the *mahavakya* "*tat tvam asi*," it should be noted that an understanding of a *mahavakya* involves a twofold benefit. Even in an empirical statement that involves grammatical coordination, there is this *twofold* benefit. For instance, in the statement, "blue lotus," the color blue benefits, as does the flower lotus. The idea of "blueness" removes all other possible colors from the lotus and that which is blue is precisely a "lotus." Thus, each is enriched and benefits from their association.

In a similar manner, *tat*, by its association with *tvam* removes the misconception that it is remote, unattainable, hidden, and so on, and reveals itself as that which is ever-manifest, immediate, direct, and the innermost Self. In a similar manner, *tvam*, in its association with *tat* removes the misconception that it is mortal, finite, bound, and imperfect, and it reveals itself as that which is self-existent, ever-pure, ever-free, and immortal. Thus, what was conceived of as the farthest of the far is revealed as nearer than the nearest; what appeared to be unattainable is already attained; what is ever hidden is really self-manifest. 12 Or, as Gaudapada said, "This view [that there is duality] is only for the sake of instruction. When the truth is known, all this duality is gone."13

Now, there are three steps or considerations to take in interpreting the meaning of *tat tvam asi*:

1. *Samanadhiranyā*: The connotations of the two terms *That* and *thou* are different. *That* refers to *Brahman* which

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is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and so forth, and *thou* refers to the individual self, which is finite, bound, limited, and so on. When the meanings of two words are different, one usually thinks that their denotations are also different. However, where there is grammatical coordination present in a sentence, the things referred to are not different. The words *That* and *thou* are in grammatical coordination and thus refer to the same object, even as *blue* and *lotus* refer to the same object.

2. *Visesana visesya sambandha*: In order to do justice to the different connotations of, and the coordinate relation between, these two terms, one must invoke the subject-predication relation. In the expression, "the blue lotus," one object is denoted while, being a flower, it also possesses a blue color. Thus, though the two terms have different connotations, they have the same denotation. This way of construing the meaning is known as "identity that involves relation" (*abheda samsarga*).

3. *Laksya laksana sambandha*: There is a difficulty involved in interpreting *tat tvam asi* by *abheda samsarga*. It works well with "the blue lotus" because there is a subject-predicate relation. But with the *mahavakya*, there is an identity wherein *thou* cannot be an attribute of *That*. Thus, one must apply the relation of nonduality (*svarupa abheda*). It would be unintelligible to identify *That* with *thou* in view of the fact the determinants of the two terms are mutually incompatible. In other words, this statement cannot be treated as an attributive judgement. The import of the statement is identity but not a relational identity. Thus, the nonrelational meaning of the text can be revealed only by recourse to its implied meaning. Thus, according to Suresvara,

On our view, the relations such as *samanadhi karanya* (which connect words and their meanings) directly bring out the nonverbal import of *Tat tvam asi* like the identity of ether through the cancellation of the different adjuncts. 14

What has been emphasized is that, in employing the secondary meaning of the terms in the *mahavakya*, one has removed the incompatible determinants of each term. By removing omni-

science, omnipotence, and so on, from *That* and by removing limitedness, boundness, fallibility, and so forth, from *thou* while retaining the common element between them, that is, consciousness, he has demonstrated that *tat tvam asi* conveys a sense of nonrelational identity.

Some implications of this interpretation include: What we usually associate with *thou* (suffering, etc.) is canceled by its association with *That* and what we usually associate with *That* (remoteness, etc.) is canceled by its association with *thou*. 15

After explaining the meaning of the great Vedic statement "That thou art," the *Guru* exhorts the aspirant to meditate on his real nature:

That which is beyond caste and creed, family and lineage, which is devoid of name and form, merit and demerit; That which transcends space, time, and sense-objects, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That supreme *Brahman*, which cannot be comprehended by speech, but is accessible to the eye of pure illumination; which is stainless, the Embodiment of Knowledge, the Beginningless Entity, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That which is untouched by the sixfold wave of decay, death, hunger, thirst, grief and delusion meditated upon by the *yogis* in their hearts, but never grasped by any sense organ; which the intellect cannot know, that unimpeachable *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That which is the Ground of the universe and its various parts, which are all creations of *maya*; which Itself has no other support; which is distinct from the gross and the subtle; which is partless and peerless, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That which is free from birth and growth, development and decline, disease and death; which is indestructible; which is the cause of the projection, maintenance, and dissolution of the universe, that *Brahman* thou art.

Meditate on this in thy mind.

That which, though One only, is the cause of the many; which refutes all other causes and is Itself without a cause; distinct from *maya* and its effects, the universe, and ever free, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

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That which is free from duality; which is infinite and indestructible; which is supreme, eternal and undying; which is taintless, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That which, though One, appears manifold owing to ignorance, taking on names and forms, attributes and changes, Itself always unchanged, like gold in its modifications, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind.

That beyond which there is nothing; which shines above *maya*, and is infinitely greater than the universe; the Inmost Self of all; the One without a second; the true Self, Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute, infinite and immutable, that *Brahman* thou art. Meditate on this in thy mind. 16

The words are there, but because the individual has known only knowledge through the mind, there is also a deafness to the meaning of the sacred words. These words should be not the "starting point" of one's spiritual journey but the crowning affirmation of one's plenary experience.

Having said this, Ganesa lore in particular, and the *Mudgala Purana* specifically, affirms that Ganesa is a physical embodiment of two seemingly incongruous parts. Somehow Ganapati, who has the head of an elephant and the body of a human being, is the unifier of these disparate parts. He is the unifier, but not in the sense of adding parts together and obtaining a whole: he is what he is. He is a symbol, it is true, but a symbol of that which has no parts. The concept of 'monism' can posit a single entity with internal distinctions, for example, a single tree with leaves, branches, flowers, fruits, etc. or a single God with internal distinctions but the absolute nonduality that *tat tvam asi* or Ganesa points to is a nonduality or radical monism in which there are no internal distinctions either. The insight this nonduality implies is that the "non" of nonduality categorically and universally says "not-this, not-this" (*neti-neti*) to every type of concept, inclusive.

Thus whether *tat* refers to the elephant head and *tvam* refers to the human body or whether *tat* refers to the *nirguna* transcendent Absolute and *tvam* refers to *saguna* anthropomorphic Ganapati or *tat* refers to an *avatara* and *tvam* refers to a *jiva*, That and thou are non-different. In the realm of nonduality, everything is complete, its own proof, meaning and purpose. Where all is one, no supports

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are needed. Two from one, this is the root of suffering. Perceive all is one without two. Pure Consciousness, pure bliss.

For those who are eminently qualified to realize the truth of nonduality, even one hearing of the *mahavakya* will be enough. Once there was a great sage, Uddalaka. He had a son, Svetaketu, who was extremely intelligent, clever, and alert. When Svetaketu was twelve years old, Uddalaka sent him to a teacher for instruction saying, "Everyone in our lineage is a knower of *Brahman*." Svetaketu studied for many years and returned to his father proud and arrogant. He thought that his knowledge was greater than his father's. He had studied so much; he knew so much. But Uddalaka was a sage. He had experienced the Truth. So he let his son behave like that for a while, and then one day he called him and said, "You have learned so much. But tell me, did you learn That by learning which all things are known?" Svetaketu said, "No, I don't know That. My teacher must not have known That for he didn't teach it to me." His father said, "Return to your teacher and ask him to teach you That." Svetaketu returned to his teacher but was told that only his father knows the Self. So Svetaketu returned to his father feeling much humbler. He said, "Dear father, will you teach me That?" Uddalaka gave him the teaching "That thou art" [*Tat tvam asi*]. 17

He who realizes the Truth is liberated from bondage. What is the Truth? It is that there is nothing other than the Self.

Ganapati is not something and the individual is another. God dwells within you as you. That thou art. If one is not the body, then neither is God or anyone else the body. The Self is not in some remote region, unknown and unrealized. Uddalaka points to his son and says, "That thou art."

Some interpreters declare that Ganesa is an embodiment of *Tat tvam asi* and delineate that his elephant's head represents the animal kingdom and his two legs represent the human kingdom and his four arms represent the kingdom of the gods (*devas*). This illustration reinforces the all-pervasive nature of That. It indicates an aspect of the Truth and therefore should not be pressed too far. The various parts of Ganesa are all held together by his life force. If the life force leaves a certain part, that part withers away. Although it is not visible, it is from that invisible force that the universe has arisen, even as from a minute seed the great banyan tree grows. Reality is omnipresent, even as salt is present everywhere in salt water. It is not experiencable through the sense organs, yet it can be realized.

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Sankaracarya declared that the object of the story of Uddalaka and Svetaketu was to show the oneness of the Self. One may be extremely learned in sacred lore, but if one has not known the truth about the Self, one lives but in vain. The truth is that the Self is extremely subtle, distinctionless, all pervading, One, undefiled, indivisible, pure Consciousness. Likewise, the purpose of Ganesa is to reveal the one, nondual Self.

This revelation is ultimately based on one's own personal experience. To say that there is only nonduality is but second-hand information. To repeat what others have said is second-hand information. It is only when people have the experience of *tat tvam asi* for themselves that they can truly say that they are That and that That is they. All else is so many words. Thus the saying, "Those who know do not say and those who say do not know." When all has become That, who is to say what? "Words turn back."

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Figure 21
Silver Ganapati belonging to author

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Figure 22
Rosewood Maha Ganapati

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7

Worship of Ganapati (Puja)

*Ganesa is the ritual, Ganesa is the offering,
Ganesa is he who offers into the fire of Ganesa
If a person sees Ganesa in every action,
That person becomes Ganesa.
Ganesagita 3.30*

Sri Vighnesvara of Ojhar

There is nothing self-contradictory in thinking that the formless God has a form or even a multiplicity of forms. 1 Water

has no color or particular shape of its own. But it assumes the color and shape of the vessel which contains it. Even if God has no form of his own, the mind which thinks of him is a conditioning medium. For purposes of rapport, where is the harm?

The king of Hemavati, Maharaja Abhinandana, once began to perform a great sacrifice. Indra ordered the demon Kala to create obstacles for the sacrifice because, if he did not, Indra would lose his position as the lord of the three worlds. The fierce Kala not only created obstacles for that sacrifice, but for all gods and individuals everywhere who perform righteous actions. Thus he became known as Vighnasura, the demonic giver of obstacles. Slowly, righteousness disappeared from the earth. In panic, the gods approached Ganapati for help. Being pleased with their worship, Ganesa took an incarnation as the son of Parsva and Dipavatsala. After a struggle, the demon Vighnasura realized his inability to defeat Ganapati and surrendered at his feet.

How to Worship Ganapati

Ganesa is called "*Adi-devata*," the first god to be worshipped.² He is known as the lord of beginnings and is traditionally invoked first,

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not only by Ganapati devotees, but also by devotees of any other god or goddess. At the beginning of a text, at the commencement of a classical dance performance or the opening song of a concert, even the initial shrine that is visited when one visits a temple, this is Ganesa's domain. It is said that Lord Siva first worshipped Ganesa before he fought with the demon Tripura; that Lord Rama first worshipped Ganesa before he fought Ravana; that Adisesa first worshipped Ganesa before he undertook to bear the entire earth on his back; that Indra first worshipped Ganapati before he vanquished Vrtra; that Durga first worshipped Ganesa before she killed Mahisasura; that Lord Krsna first worshipped Ganapati before he set out to absolve himself of a false charge (of murdering Satrajita); that Lord Visnu first worshipped Ganesa before he sought the three steps from Bali; that Lord Brahma first worshipped Ganapati before he began creation; and that Manmatha first worshipped Ganesa before he commenced to charm humanity.

In the *Krsna Yamala Tantra*, there is a list describing how the gods benefitted by initially invoking Ganesa in connection with a form of his known as *Rna-harana-kartr*.³ Also, though it is well known that different gods are to be invoked for different benefits, there is a reference that claims that by worshipping Lord Ganesa one may secure every benefit possible.⁴ The logic behind this claim is that all the gods are but variant forms of Ganesa.

He is Siddhidata, the grantor of success, and, as such, is invoked for success at the beginning of every undertaking. He is Vinayaka, the remover of obstacles. He is the doorkeeper and the guardian of the threshold. Finally, he is learning and wisdom. To open the gates to success, to cross the threshold of empirical existence (*samsara*), to reveal or unveil the divinity within, one must necessarily invoke that which Ganesa represents. Every beginning represents a threshold. It is a doorway into a new and potentially magical moment. Every moment is a sacrifice, whether dumb or conscious. At all times, in all places, each and every thing is simultaneously: a sacrificer unto the sacred sacrificial fire, in turn a sacrifice itself and an embodiment of the omnipresent act of sacrifice.

Ganapati is the ritual. Ganapati is the offering. Ganapati is he who offers unto the sacrificial fire that is Ganapati. If a person sees Ganapati in every action, that person becomes Ganapati, nay, what is there that is not Ganapati, period.

Puja is usually translated as "worship." It derives from the multivalent Sanskrit root *puj*, meaning "to worship." This root also means "to honor"; "to serve"; "to collect or bring together"; "intelligent"; "to shine." *Puja* is therefore "an intelligent bringing together

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of luminous elements (in the form of a *murti*) in order to honor or worship. Thus, a *puja* is a type of ritual that, unlike in a Vedic sacrifice (*yajna*), employs the use of an image (*murti*). The term *puja* is used to denote a ritual of worship of an image or an aniconic form of a deity as well as of any other object that is considered to possess special power and be sacred.⁵ Any such ritual worship, whether performed with a special ritual procedure or not, by a person trained in

ritualism or not, in a temple or in a home, can be referred to as a "puja."

Vedic rituals are a coordinated and extended series of ritual actions performed either for the benefit of the patron or sacrificer (*yajamama*) or, for the prosperity of the entire world. Such rituals require the assistance of officiants or *brahmin* priests. As a general rule, the sacrifice takes place outdoors, and the primary elements, earth, water, air, and space (and their modifications and representatives in the form of natural substances, i.e., wood, milk, clarified butter, fruits, etc.) are what are offered into the sacrificial fire. When the fire consumes these elements, their subtle essence is conveyed thereby to the particular deity that is being invoked.

On the other hand, a *puja* usually takes place in a temple or permanent sacred space and does not entail the use of offerings into a sacred fire. It is performed either by an individual or a priest for the prosperity, blessings, welfare, or boons of an individual or individuals. In general, it may be said that *pujas* represent an act of devotion. They are performed to:

1. receive the deity's blessings
2. develop an awareness of one's own inner divinity

Further, a *puja* involves three actions:

1. the devotee presents an offering to the deity
2. the devotee is granted the blessed sight of (*darsana*) the deity
3. the devotee in turn receives a blessed article from the worship (*prasad*)⁶

Finally, three things are usually associated with the worship of a deity:

1. *Yantra* (or *cakra*) is a geometrical design with mystic significance for every part of it. The deity is believed to reside in the *yantra*.

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2. *Mantra* consists of mystic syllables. By uttering the *mantra(s)*, one invokes the deity associated with it. Also, it surcharges the atmosphere with a divine presence, and the devotee and the deity are both enveloped by that divinity.

3. *Murti* (or *pratima* or *arca*) are physical objects consecrated for worship.⁷ They may be movable (*cala*) or immovable (*acala*). The latter are fixed on pedestals and cannot be moved once they are installed, and thus there is neither invocation nor dismissal for them.

The purpose of worshipping a deity is to receive its blessings. One may not know where the deity truly resides, but if space is made, if one opens oneself to the possibility of receiving a blessing, then anything is possible. One does not know *how* the telephone works, but it does. People use the telephone, and, providing one dials the right numbers, the expected party is reached. Similarly, if one performs a *puja* with the expectation that they will contact the party of their choice, a connection is made. A telephone has the ability to bring an unseen voice across vast distances. If that is the case with a physical instrument, how much more so should it be with a subtle instrument.

It is said that there are many aids to help one to achieve the great goal of human life. According to one's intellectual and emotional needs, different means of approaching the deity have been given to us by the Guru. The Divine, within and without, can be worshipped at three levels: the intellectual or wisdom based (absolute nonduality), the emotional or devotional (qualified nonduality), and the physical or external (duality).

First, one may communicate with the Divine externally, in the form of an image, statue, *murti*. The worshipper is one entity, and the worshipped is another, completely separate. Second, one may meditate on the Divine, internally, within one's heart, as the inner ruler (*antaryamin*). The worshipper and the worshipped are not exactly identical but not exactly different either. Finally, one may contemplate the Divine as oneself, as omnipresent, all-pervasive. Or, to put it in other words, first one is in the Light. The Light is one thing, there and you are another, here, and you are in the Light's presence. Then, one can turn within and find that the Divine can be wherever one is. The Light is within oneself. Finally,

one is the Light. From the point of view of logic, it is a natural progression from that which occurs to one occasionally to that which occurs to one continually to that which one really is.

External or physical *puja* is very important because it is a great aid in overcoming the negative thoughts that are in one's mind. Not only does it teach one obedience and surrender, but it trains the mind. To perform external worship requires one to sacrifice one's time, one's resources, one's knowledge, one's energy. As one sacrifices into the ritual fire that is the Divine, one has the experience that Divinity is the giver of results. One learns to serve instead of command; one learns patience instead of demanding; one learns to give instead of to take.

For instance, when one offers flowers to an image, the flowers are said to represent the latent tendencies or residual impressions (*vasana*) that cling to an individual. They are also called "*samskaras*," and they express themselves through one's thoughts, words, and deeds. The word *vasana* also means "fragrance," and thus, they are the "fragrances that flavor" all of a particular individual's actions. They are what make you, as a distinct individual, you.

By worshipping an image with flowers, one is offering all of one's thoughts, words, and deeds at the feet of the god. Only fragrant, freshly cut, unsmeared flowers should be offered. They are picked up, one at a time, with the right hand. The fingers should point downward while picking up the flower. This denotes the five sense organs, which, in their present state, are outward or downward oriented, engaging with the physical world. When the flower is picked up, the palm turns upward and the fingers naturally follow, depicting that the sense organs are now directed upward or inward toward the Divine. As the flower is lovingly placed on or near the image, one's utters the word *namah* which means "salutation or I bow to." It is a corrupt form of *na-mama*, which means "not-mine." In Vedic sacrificial rituals, one offers these oblations into the sacrificial fire while saying "*agne idam na mama*" [this is not mine]. It is as good as saying, "O Lord, what I am offering is not mine. There is nothing that is mine. Everything, including my thoughts, words, deeds, even my body, are all yours." Thus, it is a supreme act of surrender and fosters an attitude of surrender in the worshipper.

Pujas take many different forms. A simple worship may consist of an offering(s) of traditional items such as turmeric powder, red powder (*kumkum*), flowers, sandalwood paste, incense, and so on. Such a *puja* requires neither much knowledge of ritualism nor time. More elaborate types of worship consist of an offering complete with a certain sequence of items (*upacara*), each one being accompanied by the recitation of certain *mantras*. Such types of *pujas* may

vary from 16 items to 108 or even more. As a rule, the name of a *puja* is often given according to the number of items that are being offered, that is, *pañcopacara puja* (5 five items), *sodasopacara puja* (16 items), and so on.

The next point is that there are numerous deities in the Indian tradition. There is Siva and Visnu and Ganesa and Lakshmi and Durga and on and on. The Scriptures praise them all as but so many names and forms of the Supreme. The *Vedas* make this very clear by saying that "Truth is One, sages call it by various names" [*ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*]. What is imperative is that one chose one particular image (*murti*) as one's personal icon (*ista murti*, in this case Ganesa, and see one's *Guru/God* in that personal deity). Know that by doing such, the *Guru/God* is all deities and that to worship one is to worship all. "*Gurur brahma, gurur visnur, gurur devo mahesvarah.*" Further, one should realize that the deity chosen is not different from oneself. One may think of themselves as being in the presence of the deity. But one may also think that the deity is present within themselves. Finally, one will come to experience that one *is* the deity and the deity *is* oneself. First, one is in the presence of the *murti* or in the presence of a physical form or in the Light. With time, one will come to realize that what the *murti* represents is within one. The Light is within oneself. Finally, one comes to experience that one *is* the Light.

The *pañcayatana puja* (worship of the five forms), which was popularized by Sankaracarya, invokes the five deities Ganapati, Visnu, Siva, Devi, and Surya. It was instigated primarily to unite the five principal deities of the five major sects (Ganapatyas, Saivas, Vaisnavas, Saktas, and Sauras) on an equal status, and, coincidentally, it takes into account the five physical elements. Ganesa represents the element water, Visnu represents space, Siva represents earth, Devi represents fire, and Surya represents air.

For our purposes, this *pañcayatana puja* has a couple of interesting points. First, we have already observed that the Ganapati *murti* was tantrically formed out of the five physical elements. Secondly, Ganesa is the presiding deity over the water principle. There are Vedic hymns that say that "In the beginning" there was nothing but water. This is also noted in the *Manusmṛti*: "He, desiring to produce beings of many kinds from his own body, first with a thought created the waters, and placed his seed in them." Finally, *murtis* of Ganesa are always immersed in water.

Nothing, not even a blade of grass, ever moves in this universe unless willed by the Divine. In ignorance and pride, one mistakenly imagines oneself as the doer, the dispenser, the achiever of all

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things until sometime, somewhere, some incident makes one realize that there is an inexorable law governing the workings of the universe with a supreme intelligence that is both immanent and transcendent.

Ganesa is extremely adaptable. He is the most easily acceptable of all the Indian deities, because there are no strict rules or canons binding down his worship, as is the case with the other deities. He can be worshipped in any form, even as a small triangular pyramid of turmeric or a pot on which thin string has been crisscrossed and then filled with water, mango leaves and a coconut. His *murti* can be made out of any substance whatever. Wealthy devotees may have a golden Ganapati or one made out of precious or semiprecious stones. Others have silver or bronze *murtis*. Aesthetes may have blown glass or ivory Ganesas. Traditionally, sandalwood Ganapatis are hung over the entrance/exit to a door. During certain festivals, images are fashioned out of clay. Ganesa can be conceived in literally any way the devotee desires.

When one decides to obtain an image of Ganesa it is important how to choose the image/statue/murti. What is of utmost importance is that one chooses an image that pleases one. It should invoke feelings of devotion and inspiration. There should be an immediate feeling of joy inside when one looks at the statue. Perhaps this joy arises inexplicably, or perhaps it arises for aesthetic or artistic or iconographic reasons. Whatever, what is important is that one has a feeling of inner joy when one beholds the image.

After applying this first test, there are some qualities to look for in a Ganesa *murti*. These are described in scriptural literature on the subject regarding worship and exist, besides for intellectual reasons, from personal experience of those who have delved deep into the realm of image-worship. Sometimes these qualities seem inexplicable or mysterious, and the line that divides the mental from the physical becomes blurred. Nonetheless, the well-known saying is "*sruti, yukti, anubhava*": first hear the text, then reason about it, and finally experience for yourself. The proof is in the pudding. The final court of appeal is always personal experience.

First, the trunk should generally bend to the *murti's* left, in the shape of the letter *L* when the devotee looks at it. Such an image is easy to worship and bestows boon freely. A Ganapati in which the trunk curves to his right is extremely particular about how his worship is to be performed. Such an image is said require worship performed in an exacting manner. These images are very particular in regards to what is offered, when it is offered, and how it is offered.

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Second, the eyes should look directly at you; they should not look up, down, or sideways. Then the *murti* will freely and easily bestow its grace and blessing on one. This is the case, even in the physical world when one wants to get someone's attention: the speaker is quite particular about the listener looking at him or her. Otherwise, there is a feeling that the listener is distracted, uninterested, or far away, lost in thought. The same requirement holds in regards to a *murti*. Further, *sakti* (power) is said to emanate from one's eyes, and thus they are a great source of energy and conveyors of great power.

Third, although there are many scriptural instructions for making an image of Ganapati, these can be neglected by an artist without necessarily rendering such a *murti* inauspicious. For instance, though the Scriptures suggest that a Ganesa should have his broken tusk on his right side and his weapon(s) on his left side, some Ganesas (which are nevertheless auspicious) have their broken tusks on the left side and their weapons on their right. Again, the Scriptures describe the specific color for Ganapati's face, and yet many artists color the elephant face the same grey or flesh color as they color

his human body. A general rule in this regard is that one's devotion is more important than scriptural details. It is only an ardent worshipper of Ganapati who patronizes him above all other deities that should be, and is, concerned with all the various scriptural details regarding his worship.

Fourth, since there are so many poses in which Ganesa may be depicted, it is difficult to know all the nuances of the proper ways in which he can be made. Therefore, the Scriptures give a test to find out if a particular Ganesa is auspicious for you (i.e., whether that particular Ganapati suits that particular person). They suggest that after you obtain an image, you take it home and keep it standing on a plate of rice in a sacred place. Do not worship it for seven days. If all is well during that period, then you may keep the image. If difficulties appear, then submerge the image in a body of water, for example, a well, pond, lake, or ocean.

Life has obstacles in it. In one sense life is obstacles. Psychologically, if for no other reason, it makes sense to invoke some positive force that will enable one to overcomes life's difficulties.

Ganesa is said to preside over the *muladhara cakra* (the fountainhead of evolutionary energy, located at the base of the spine, where it is coiled up like a sleeping serpent). When activated, the human consciousness expands and unknown and unexpected faculties emerge. Subtle powers of intelligence and accomplishment arise. For this reason, Ganesa is well known as Vighnesvara (lord of

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obstacles) and Siddhi Vinayaka (bestower of success). He represents the divine power that works from the lower levels removing obstacles and uplifting life to stages of supreme consciousness. The *Mahabharata* says, "*puja vighnakartmam athava prathamam krtam*" [one worships Ganesa solely to pacify obstacles and those who place them and to secure their cooperation]. 10

Minimum Requirements

To perform worhsip (*puja*)of an image requires at the least: an image, a place to perform the worship, and time set aside in which to perform such worhsip. Subsequently we will note that one's personal act of worship may include many more items, but these are the bare minimum.

1. Murti/Image/Picture: For any external worship of Ganesa, the first requirement that is absolutely necessary is a *murti*,an image (or photo) of Ganesa. Not only should this image be a source of happiness, it should also invoke feelings of serenity within one. Second, his trunk should turn toward his left side, and his eyes should be looking directly at you.
2. Place: Besides the image, one must have a place to keep it. First and foremost, the place should be neat and clean. Not only should the place be neat and clean, but so should the worshipper. One should always wash oneself and wear clean clothes before performing a *puja*.It is said that "cleanliness is next to godliness." This shows respect and reverence, not only for the *murti* and the Divinity it represents, but also for oneself and the Divinity that dwells within.
3. Time: The next thing that is indispensable is time to conduct one's worship. Morning is always said to be the most auspicious time to worship God. It is true that all time is God's time and all place's are God's places; however, from the perspective of a spiritual aspirant, early morning is most beneficial. If worship is done in the morning, one will reap its grace, its boons, its benefits all day long. Further, if *puja* is done in the morning, it means not only that the worship is sure to be performed that day (and not put off and ultimately dispensed with for the day/week/

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year because one is too busy, tired, and so on) but also that one begins one's day with Divine thoughts. One may perform worship as often as is convenient. However, for Ganapati, there are certain times that are said to be special and/or to be more auspicious. Every Friday is a special day for Ganesa. It is his special weekday. Next, comes the fourth day after the new and full moons. Every lunar month is divided into a bright half when the moon waxes and a dark half when the moon wanes. *Vinayaka caturthi*,the bright half, is said to be more auspicious and is regarded as an appropriate time to begin new undertakings. The dark half is less auspicious, a time of decline, and generally new

projects are avoided during this time. These two days (the fourth day after both the new and full moons) are known as "caturthi," which means "the fourth." Some people invoke Ganesa on the fourth day of the dark half of each month, particularly, in the hopes of averting difficulties and avoiding obstacles. 11 Once a year comes *Mahaganesa caturthi* or *Mahavinayaka caturthi*, the fourth day of the bright half of the month of *Bhadrapada* (August/September). Some people call this Ganapati's birthday or the day of auspicious beginnings. This day is considered the most auspicious day associated with Ganesa. 12

Puja

Besides these minimum requirements (the image, place, and time), *pujas* range in complexity from the relatively simple to the wonderfully complex. They differ in regards to what words (*mantras*) are said, what gestures (*mudras*) are employed, what images (*murti* or *vigraha*) are used, what aims the worshipper has, the nature of the aspirant, and the objects employed. They also vary according to the intensity of one's devotion, one's ability to afford the items necessary for any given *puja*, or the occasion. However, no matter how simple or complex the *puja*, it establishes a heightened communion between the worshipper and the worshipped. While the *puja* is being performed, there is an intimate physical, mental, and spiritual connection between the devotee and the deity.

If nothing else, all *pujas* share in the fact that a sacred area and a sacred time are established in which one infuses life into the image (*pranapratistha*) and in return receives blessings (*prasad*).

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Even as Lord Siva gave new life to the beheaded child, so too, does the worshipper bestow life in the image. 13 In whatever way this is accomplished, by a word (*mantra*) or a ritual item (*durva* grass) or a resolve (*sankalpa*), for the duration of the worship, the worshipper and the worshipped are intimately related. Whether this is an actual physical phenomena or merely a subjective increase in emotion, in some sense or other, the Divine and the human have commingled. When that happens, there is a necessarily a bestowal of Grace or the bestowal of blessings, whether they take the form of leftover "spiritual food" (*prasad*) or other less tangible forms. *Prasad* is "that food which is presented to the image of a deity or that left for one's *Guru* or that which is available for devotees to consume." It comes from the Sanskrit root *sad*, "to sit," and the prefix *pra*, "down." Thus, it literally means a "settling down." When one is in communion with the Divine, one has settled down into their own Self. The gift of divinity or of one's own Self is the true *prasad*, all else is but leftovers. Thus, one should partake of the ritual *prasad* as if it is God's grace, in total, and not merely a part of it or something that has somehow magically become something it was not just a moment before.

Each act in a *puja* is not only physical and/or mental, but also symbolic, cosmic, and spiritual. Sprinkling, sipping, and bathing are symbolic of purification, of the worshipped as well as of the worshipper and the surroundings. Various offerings symbolize the surrendering of one's latent tendencies (*vasanas*) as expressed in thoughts, words, and deeds. To cite but one example: when one offers a flame or light to the deity, it simultaneously represents: a physical light, the light of spiritual aspiration, the kindling of one's inner *sadhana*, the birth of a spiritual practice, an inner purification, a reenactment of the cosmic ritual of sacrifice, an offering of gratitude and thanks, the light of the Divine.

Sodasopacara Puja

Of the various types of *pujas*, the one with sixteen (*sodasa*) items or offerings (*upacara*) is very common. This type of ritual consists of preliminary acts including rites for the purification of the devotee and the implements used in the *puja*, removal of obstacles and declaration (*sankalpa*) to perform the worship. Then a series of sixteen main services is offered, beginning with the invocation of the deity and so on. Each offering is accompanied by the recitation of a stanza from the *Rgveda Purusasukta*. 14 These Vedic *mantras* are the

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most important *mantras* used in the worship, though Puranic *mantras* are also employed. The *Purusasukta* describes the sacrifice of the *purusa* by the gods through which the world was created. This establishes a relationship among the image, the cosmos, and the individual worshipper.

Thousand headed is the *Purusa* with a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; encompassing the Earth on all sides, the *Purusa* exceeded it by ten fingers' breadth. *Purusa*, indeed, is all this, what has been and what will be, the lord of the immortal spheres, which he surpasses by consuming food. Such is the measure of the *Purusa's* might and greater still than this is *Purusa*. All beings are one-fourth of him, three-fourths are the immortal in heaven. Three-fourths of *Purusa* ascended high, one-fourth took birth again here. From this *Purusa* spread in all directions into animate and inanimate things. From *Purusa* the Shining One was born; from this Shining One *Purusa* again manifested. As soon as he was born, he extended himself all over the Earth both behind and before. Using *Purusa* as their oblation, the gods performed the sacrifice. Spring served them for the clarified butter, Summer for the fuel, and Autumn for the offering. This extended *Purusa*, then first born, they besprinkled on the sacred grass. With him the gods performed the sacrifice, as did also the heavenly beings and seers. From this sacrifice, fully accomplished, was gathered curd mixed with butter. Thence came the creatures of the air, beasts wild and tame. From this sacrifice, fully accomplished, were born the hymns, melodies, and meters, from this were born the sacrificial formulas. From this were horses born, all creatures with two sets of teeth; from this were born cattle; from this were born sheep and goats. When they divided the *Purusa*, into how many parts did they divide him? What did his mouth become? What his arms? What are his legs called? What his feet? His mouth became the *brahmin*; his arms became the warrior prince, his legs the *vaisya*, from his feet the *sudras*. The Moon was born from his mind; the Sun came into being from his eye; from his mouth came Indra and Agni, while from his breath the Vayu was born. From his navel came the air; from his head unfurled space, the Earth from his feet, from his ear the four directions. Thus have the worlds been organized.

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Seven were the sticks of the enclosure, thrice seven the fuel sticks were made, when the Gods, performing the sacrifice, bound *Purusa* as the victim. With the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed to the sacrifice. Those were the first established rites. These Mighty Ones ascended up to heaven where dwell the Shining Ones, the ancient gods, and other beings. 15

Interestingly, the word *purusa* means both "God" and "individual" and thus is quite applicable. Although the number of services is always counted as sixteen, their kind and sequence varies from source to source. One such list is: 16

1. invocation/welcome (*avahanam*)17
2. seat (*asanam*)18
3. water for washing the feet (*padyam*)19
4. water for washing the hands (*arghyam*)20
5. water for sipping (*acamaniyam*)21
6. bath (*snanam*)22
7. clothes (upper and lower garments) (*vastram*)23
8. sacred thread (*yajnopavitam*)24
9. fragrant paste (*gandham/candanam*)25
10. flowers, garlands offered with *mantras* (*arcanam*)26
11. incense (*dhupam*)27
12. light/lamp (*dipam*)28
13. food (*naivedyam*)29
14. betel leaves and betel nuts (*tambulam*)30
15. prostration and circumambulation (*namaskara,31 pradaksina*32)

16. offering flowers and *mantras* (*mantra puspanjali*)³³

After the image has been infused with life (*pranapratistha*), the above sixteen ways of service (or whatever the number one plans to perform) are performed. In this regards one should note the following points. The lamp (preferably an oil lamp), bell, cup, spoon,

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kumkum/bhasma/turmeric/incense holder, and tray should all preferably be made out of silver. Copper is also acceptable, but the general rule is to use the finest and purest materials when making an offering to the Divine. The foods that are offered should be pure (*sattva*), that is, fruits, milk, and milk products, *modakas*, various leaves, betel nuts.

This worship is followed by any one of several prayers to Ganesa, one of which invokes him thus:

Vakratunda mahakaya
 Suryakoti samaprabha
 Nirvighnam kurumedeva
 Sarvakaryesu sarvada

O lord with the twisted trunk and the massive body
 With the brilliance and light of a million suns
 Lead me on a path that has no obstacles nor hindrances
 Clearing the way in all that I do, ever and always

To summarize this ritual in three simple moments, as Courtright, following Van Gennep and Turner, says,

The *puja* can be viewed structurally in terms of the threefold diachronic or processural form: entry into the ritual sphere, transformation of the conditions of reality between the deity and the devotee, and exit into the world outside the ritual.³⁴

First, one enters into the presence of the deity. Second, one is transformed (momentarily/permanently) as the ritual is being performed, that is, the deity is somehow present within one and/or one is present within the deity. Finally, the deity returns to its cosmic state (or, the worshipper becomes the deity).

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Figure 23
Yoga Ganapati in Sri Siddhi Vinayaka Temple at Siddhatek

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Lovers of the Beloved

*Then there was nothing left of me,
Nothing except that love . . .*
Avvaiyar

Sri Ballalesvara of Pali

Only He and I know the vow made between us. I would be anything at all for Him. He gave himself to me and took me from me. Now I ask, who is the wiser? I gained endless bliss. What did You gain from me? 1

Once upon a time there was a businessman named Kalyana and his wife, Indumati. They lived in the village of Pallilpur. They had a son named Ballala who, from a very young age, was attached to worshipping Lord Vinayaka. 2 His worship

was so sincere and so transparent that other children were attracted to it. They used to sit together and worship Ganesa as well as other deities with small stones. This worried the parents of these children because they felt that their children were becoming lazy and neglecting their studies. The only outcome would be that they would not learn any useful work, either for themselves or for their families.

Once, when the children went into the forest, they discovered a large stone. At the insistence of Ballala, they built a small temple around the stone and began worshipping it as Ganapati. Ballala brought *durva* grass and *bilva* leaves, *kum kum* and sandalwood paste. Some of the children performed *puja* while others danced; some chanted and some meditated. They all became so deeply immersed that they forgot all about hunger or thirst, day or night. When the children didn't return home, the parents went to Kalyana's house and asked where Ballala and the children were. They shouted, "Where is your Ballala? At his insistence, our children

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have gone into the forest with him. He is the leader and he is spoiling them. You must control your son or we will complain to higher authorities."

Kalyana became wild with anger. He picked up a stick and went into the forest. When he came upon all the children immersed in worship of Ganesa around the little temple that they had constructed, his anger knew no bounds. He smashed the temple and broke the stone image of Ganesa, scattering the pieces while all the children fled in fear. But Ballala, who was deeply immersed in meditation, sat unmoving and thus was easily caught by his father. His father beat him unmercilessly and blood flowed freely. His father then tied him to a tree saying, "Let me see which God protects you now," and went home.

Little Ballala started praying to Lord Ganesa, "O Vinayaka, you are called Vignesvara because you remove the obstacles faced by your devotees. The *Vedas* and *sastras* proclaim that you never forget your devotees. Then why is it that I am facing such obstacles by worshipping you?" Little Ballala was least concerned with his physical condition, with being beaten up or tied to a tree. But he was very angry and sad to see the little temple to Ganapati smashed and the image desecrated. He pronounced a curse: "Whoever has done this, let him become blind, deaf, dumb, and hunchbacked." Though he was afflicted with pain, hunger, and thirst, he kept chanting the name of Ganesa until he fainted.

Lord Ganesa was moved by the devotion of the little boy and took the form of a *brahmin*. He touched the child, and immediately the child awoke with his hunger and thirst gone and his wounds miraculously healed. Ballala felt waves of bliss surge through his body. Spontaneously he prostrated before the *brahmin* whom he intuitively knew to be Ganapati. Ganesa said, "Your curse will come true. Further, in your father's next birth he will encounter great misery, for his father will drive him away. Now, little Ballala, ask me for any boon that you want."

With folded hands, little Ballala said, "Let me always have unshaken devotion toward you. I please request that you remain here permanently and to remove the miseries of the people who come to you."

Lord Ganesa said, "I shall ever remain here. I will take your name before mine and henceforth be known as Ballalesvara Vinayaka. Further, the stone *murti* that your father threw away shall henceforth be known as Dundi Vinayaka. It is a *svayambu* (self-manifested image) and should be worshipped before you worship me as Ballalesvara Vinayaka." Thereupon Ganesa disappeared,

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and in his place stood a large black stone with the form of Ganesa appearing on it.

Avvaiyar

In South India, in the ninth century, lived a woman of unsurpassed wisdom. Nameless, she was known as Avvaiyar or "respected old woman," that is, Grandmother. Abandoned by her parents at birth, the birthless One protected her. Raised by wandering minstrels, she became the minstrel/poet *par excellence*. Unsurpassed as a devotee of the rider of the mouse, he, her true Self, filled her entire being. The siren of the Self beckons . . .

Though Tamil saints are little known outside of Tamil Nadu, they evoke immediate and spontaneous upsurges of emotion in the Tamil country. The innocent child-saint Sambandar, the charismatic impudence of Sundaramurti, the deep despair and soaring ecstasy of Manikkavachakar's God-intoxication, the guileless friend to philosophers, princes, and peasants, Grandmother Avvaiyar are, each and every one, household names, and their hymns are sung daily.

Some Tamil saints belong to the upper castes, some belong to the lower castes, and some are outcastes. Grandmother Avvaiyar was a unique mixture. Another distinctive feature of Avvaiyar was her friendship with the great Nayanmar saint Sundaramurti⁴ and his royal companion, King Cheraman Perumal. Unlike North Indian saints who, as a rule, were generally lone God-intoxicated individuals, South Indian saints, more often than not, were part of a community of saints. They walked together, they toured together, and, in Avvaiyar's case, they ascended to Kailasa together.

Most of what we know about Grandmother Avvaiyar comes to us from her emotional outpourings and expressions of rapture in song and poetry. "Those who worship Lord Vinayaka with great devotion and offer flowers at His feet will be blessed with eloquent speech, with a pure heart, as well as the blessings of Mahalakshmi," so sang Avvaiyar. She further sang that Lord Vinayaka came to her in the form of a *Guru* and blessed her with the true knowledge. He removed all of her *karmas* and blessed her to overcome the cycle of birth and death. In a word, he made her immortal.⁵

Avvaiyar, throughout her long and illustrious life, sang innumerable poems in the Tamil language, both for adults and for children. Due to her inimitable style with its utter simplicity, she is easily the most popular figure in Tamil literature. There is not a Tamil

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home where her poems are not known or sung. Even today, when children enter a school, the first lesson they learn is her poem of the alphabet (*atticudi*) and not a nursery rhyme. Thus, in Tamil Nadu, Avvaiyar intimately influences every person at a very impressionable age.

About 800 C.E., a saintly couple lived in South India. The husband's name was Bhagavan, and his wife was Adi. It was an uncommon marriage, especially for those days, because Bhagavan was a *brahmin* by caste, while Adi was an untouchable (*candala*). During that period in Indian history, *brahmins* would not even look at or speak with an untouchable, let alone marry one. Even more unusual, Adi made a vow to Bhagavan that she would abandon any child she may have as soon as the child was born. From such frightening and terrible vows as this, legends are born.

Bhagavan was not an ordinary person. He was one who lived on faith, one hundred percent faith. Such was the greatness of the man. This we will understand once we hear more of Avvaiyar's story. As to his greatness, who can comprehend it?

Once it so happened that Adi gave birth to a female baby. When she saw the newborn baby she could not bare to wrench herself from her flesh and blood. Tears started rolling down her cheeks. She knew mentally that she had to leave the baby because she had given her word to her husband. But her heart was breaking at the plight of the child. Such a woman she was that she cried not for herself but for the apparently helpless infant who had just entered the world. Things don't just happen, they happen just. A miracle happened. Grace descended. The newborn baby starting talking to her mother in the form of a poem:

O mother, O my dear mother. God, who brought me forth into this world, is he dead? The Lord who has given me this human birth, is he dead? No, the eternal One is always with me. Even if there is a deadly famine in the country, it is His burden to protect me, O my mom. So don't break your heart over me, go. Go, mother, without fear.

So the mother abandoned her newborn baby and went on her way. Soon, a poet, who was passing that way, chanced to see this baby lying by the side of the road. Not having been blessed with any children of his own, and out of a poet's tender compassionate heart, he took the child to his house and brought her up. How interesting the hand of fate. A poet without a child discovers a child without a parent-a child who is destined to become the poet among poets.

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Once, when Avvaiyar was having an audience with the Chola King, he asked her where she came from. She sang a song in reply:

My legs are paining, paining for I have walked very fast for a long long time. O Monarch of the land watered by the sacred Kaveri River wherein the pearl-oysters in the water open their mouths to drink the honey dripping from the trees overhead. What place shall I call my own, a wanderer like me?

History does not record what name, if any, the poet gave to the little child. Thus, until the little child received the name of Grandmother (Avvaiyar), no one knows what she was called. But history does inform us that from a very young age, this child was strongly attracted to Lord Ganesha.

A very interesting thing happened when this child was four years old. One day, a friend of her father visited their house. He was also a poet. Both the poets, the father and the friend, were talking to each other. All of a sudden the friend said, "O my dear friend, yesterday I was inspired to compose two wonderful lines of poetry. I received a great inspiration for a poem, though, only the first two lines of the poem formed themselves in my mind. However much I try to complete the other two lines, they just will not come. The father said, "Why don't you sing that poem to me and let me try to complete it. Quote the two lines for me and let me hear them." Then his friend recited: "If you do a good deed, when will it give the result?" He posed the question but could not provide the answer to it. He said, "No matter how much I try, I cannot complete the poem. The last two lines just won't come. When will it give the result? When will it give the result?" He was struggling, struggling hard to get the inspiration to complete the poem. While he was doing that, the little child, who was there looking at him, couldn't stop laughing. She laughed and laughed and said, "Oh uncle, this is not hard, it is not difficult at all." The poet was offended by her laughter and said, "What does a four-year-old child know about poetry? If you think it is so easy to compose great poetry, why don't you try? Go ahead, why don't you recite the next two lines for us?" The child said, "Alright. If you want me to do so, I will do it right now." She recited, "If you do a good deed, when will it give its result?" Those were the first two lines that her father's friend had composed. Then the little said, "When will it give the result, don't doubt so." That is how she started. "It is bound to give you the result like the water

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that you offer at the foot of a coconut tree gives you the result through its head."

Avvaiyar's poem, in reply to the poet, was not an elucidation of the law of cause and effect (*karma*). It wonderfully illumined both *what* the poet had done as well as its meaning. What her poem alluded to was, when one pours water at the roots of the coconut tree, what does the tree do? It grows and gives one the result through the fruit at "its head," that is, the top of the tree. Very quickly, very simply, and very precisely, but with great confirmity, the tiny child spoke eloquently about the law of *karma*. What she said implied that the good or bad deed that one performs right now, even though one doesn't see the result immediately, still it is bound to produce its fruit or give one the appropriate result one day. This was the second poem Avvaiyar composed.

This little child, as has already been mentioned, was attracted to Lord Ganapati from a very young age. She often uttered the *mantra*, "Om Vinayaka Siddhi Vinayaka." As a little girl, Avvaiyar aspired to become the world's greatest poet because her father was a great poet. Since there was always poetry in her home, her aspirations moved in that way. As the proverb says, One becomes what one associates oneself with. To accomplish this aspiration, the little girl often chanted "Siddhi Vinayaka," the *mantra* known to fulfill one's desires.

Daily, early in the morning, she would worship Lord Vinayaka. How she would worship him also makes a very interesting story. She would take, in a plate, four different cups with four different offerings to Lord Ganapati. In one cup she would pour milk. In another cup she would pour honey. In another cup she would have some kind of rice pudding (*payasam*). And in the last cup she would have some nuts. She would offer this to Lord Vinayaka, and she would sing a famous poem of her own composition:

O Lord Vinayaka I am offering you all these four ingredients. O elephant-faced Vinayaka, please bestow the gift of poetry, music, and drama on me. 6

Daily she would ask Lord Ganesha to bless her with poetry, music, and drama. Daily she would say, "O Vinayaka, I am giving you these four things would you please give me these three things?" It was a kind of bargaining. You know, devotion almost always starts with bargaining. One asks the Lord to please give one this, and in return one will offer him

thata rather childish, beginner's petition or bargain. "I will do this, if you will please do that."

So this little girl, just a child, used to say to Lord Ganesa, "I will give you all these four"and sometimes she would mix all the four, the milk, honey, nuts, and *payasam* together and make it one nice big sweet. Or, at other times, she would offer them one by one. So she would entreat him, "I will give you these four; please give me the three boons of poetry, music, and drama." Thus, the child's devotion began with this type of bargaining devotion with Lord Ganapati. Eventually, however, she ended with complete surrender, as all great devotees do.

When Avvaiyar became a young girl, she was very beautiful. Further, she was also very intelligent. Naturally, people from the wealthy families in both her village and the surrounding areas came to her foster father's house and asked for her hand in marriage for one of their sons. This was the custom in those days, and Avvaiyar, being such a prize catch, was naturally very much sought after. However, Avvaiyar had no desire to marry just anyone. She wanted to be married only to Ganesa. Her heart belonged to God and her only desire was to serve God. The young girl was in a quandary, for she didn't know how to tell her father that she didn't want to marry a human being. She didn't know how to get rid of this seemingly insurmountable obstacle. In India, such a situation is difficult. A young girl is not so independent that she can go against her parent's wishes. If this is the situation even today, imagine how impossible the situation would have seemed to her eighteen-hundred years ago!

The child began thinking and pondering what to do. She thought, "Oh, I don't want to be entangled with the worldly life." Suddenly the nature of her problem dawned on her, and she exclaimed, "Oh my youth is the problem. It is my youth, my beauty, that is the hindrance to my heart's desire." So she began praying, "Oh Lord Vinayaka, please bless me so as to appear like an old woman." With real sincerely and a heartfelt longing she thought of this solution and prayed most earnestly. Finally, one day she was in great anguish and she decided that today must be the day. "Today, Vinayaka, I want you to make me appear like an old woman. Please grant me the boon that I ask." She pleaded and sang her desire.

Oh Ganesa, please bless me to appear like an old woman. 7

With folded hands she meditated on Lord Vinayaka to bless her with this boon. After a short while, she felt a shower of flowers

upon her. When she opened her eyes, she was surprised to see flowers all around her, and she was stunned to find that her body looked like that of an aged woman. It not only looked life but was an aged woman's body. Her hair had turned all white, and her skin was wrinkled; she rejoiced.

Avvaiyar burst into praise for Lord Vinayaka and out cascaded a great hymn that is considered in South India to be analogous to Revelation, to the *Vedas*.Every syllable in this hymn is considered to be a sacred *mantra*.In this poem she says that Vinayaka appeared to her with a blue body. Ganesa came and resided in her heart, and when she saw his form in her heart, it was blue. Like a mother who would help her daughter in her distress, Ganapati became her mother and blessed her.

Now, what could her father say? What objection could he raise? He understood that she was not an ordinary little girl. It was at this juncture in her life that Avvaiyar left her foster home and began wandering all over Tamil Nadu composing and singing songs. She loved the common people and the common people loved her. She sang lots and lots of songs, not only spiritual poetry, but also secular poetry offering very dharmic instructions on how to live righteously.

She sang of the pure love of simple folk,

Poor Bari, the shepherd held me by my cloth and would not let me go from his house. Simple Kari of Paliyanur gave me his pickax and lovingly beseeched me to dig with him. Cheraman lovingly asked me to go to Kailasa with him. These three love-offerings rank high, right there with the little blue sari that the shepherd girls, Angava and Sangava, so lovingly gave for me to wear.

Once Avvaiyar was caught in a heavy downpour. By chance she came upon a tiny cottage in the forest and entered. She was dripping wet and shivering with cold. The owner of the house was absent, but his two young daughters received Avvaiyar with great love and joy and entreated her to put on one of their "half-saris," which young maidens wear. They sweetly asked her to sit by the warm fire and to eat a simple meal of vegetables and *ghee*. Avvaiyar sang:

These girls with arms all full of bangles,
They served me their feast, warm and fragrant

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And asked me to eat as much as I liked, pouring ghee
on it.

It was green and they said it was only vegetables cooked,
But really they served me nectar (amrta).

Listen to her radical song about the caste system:

If you ask me, there are only two castes. One, the good people who help the poor in distress and the other who never help. This is the true Scripture, the high caste serve while the low born don't.

She sang of the four goals of life (purusartha):

Righteousness (dharma) is relief of distress.

Wealth (artha) is what you acquire by avoiding
unrighteous actions.

Pleasure (kama) is the oneness of mind and mutual
helpful of loving individuals.

And when you think of the Beyond, giving up these three,
Comes the ever-blissful liberation.

Once when Avvaiyar was wandering in a forest, she became very tired, as she had been wandering for a long time. On her way through the forest, she had come upon a Siva temple and she thought, why shouldn't I stop at this Siva temple and rest a while? So she entered the temple and sat down near the *sanctum sanctorum*. She was so tired that, without her conscious knowledge, she stretched her legs toward the *Siva lingam* as she lay down to rest. Just then the priest of the temple came and saw what she had done. He became wild and started yelling at her, "Oh, old lady, how dare you to do this. Old age is not an excuse to point your feet toward the *Siva lingam*. You must immediately remove your feet from this direction and point them in some other." Avvaiyar looked at the priest and without the least perturbation and with a smiling face she said, "Excuse me, I am very sorry. But please show me a direction in which Siva is not and I shall stretch my legs that way." The priest was stunned by her reply. A similar story is included in accounts of the life of Namdev, a Maharashtrian saint.

Another time, Avvaiyar was walking in a beautiful orchard. There she saw a nice *jambu* tree. When she saw the tree full of *jambu* fruits, she desired one or two of them to eat. This desire occurred to her because her lord, Ganesa, is very fond of *jambu* fruits and she,

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knowing this, thought of him. A very famous *sloka* on Lord Vinayaka suddenly came to her mind: "Gajananam bhuta ganadi sevitam kapita jambu phala sarvita paksitam" so she desired a *jambu* fruit even as Vinayaka, her lord, loved *jambu* fruits. When she looked high up into the tree, she was surprised to see a small boy sitting on a branch merrily eating *jambu* fruits. With a majestic voice she spoke to the boy and said, "Oh my little friend, will you give me some *jambu* fruit?" That precocious little boy looked at the old lady and said, "Oh my grandma, I can give you some *jambu* fruit, but do you want hot *jambu* fruits or cold *jambu* fruits?" Avvaiyar replied, "Huh, what do you mean, hot or cold *jambu* fruits? Are there such things as hot and cold *jambu* fruits?" She had never heard of such a thing. She kept turning it over in her mind: What does this mean, what does this mean? Avvaiyar was an embodiment of knowledge, an embodiment of

Sarasvati, and she couldn't understand the little boy's puzzling words. She began to pray, "Oh Vinayaka save me from this embarrassing situation." With great humility she prayed, saying, "I cannot understand what this little boy is talking about. I think that this boy is pulling my leg." But Vinayaka did not help her; he did not give her the answer. So finally she thought, "All right, let me pose as if I know all about hot and cold *jambu* fruits," and so she replied, "Give me some hot *jambu* fruits." The little boy reached up and shook the branch and a few of the ripened *jambu* fruits fell to the ground. Avvaiyar picked up one *jambu* fruit with her fingers and blew on it to remove the dirt that had stuck to it. The little boy smiled and roared with laughter saying, "Grandma, grandma, blow well, it must be very hot." She looked at him, and he laughed and laughed and said, "It is very hot, isn't it? Blow well, and be careful, for if you eat it without blowing on it to cool it off, it may scald your mouth." Finally, the bell rang, the light flashed, and the truth dawned on Avvaiyar. She understood that this little boy was just pulling her leg. He was having a great joke at her expense. There is really no such thing as a hot *jambu* fruit or a cold *jambu* fruit. There are only *jambu* fruits. And then, when she saw the small boy laughing with great delight high in the tree, she smiled at how he had fooled her. She burst into laughter and laughed and laughed, and she sang a very wonderful poem.

Here is an old ax that did not mind the hardest ebony, but now before a plaintain stem, it acknowledges defeat.
For two nights now I cannot sleep, for I have confessed

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defeat before this youth in the jungle grazing the black buffaloes.

When the little boy jumped down to the ground, Avvaiyar saw that he was Lord Karttikeya, the younger brother of Lord Ganapati. She had been given Karttikeya's *darsan*. Karttikeya smiled and said, "Please don't be sad grandmother, I just wanted to hear you speak. That is why I played this sport. Will you be so kind as to answer me if I ask you something?" Avvaiyar said, "With pleasure." He asked her four questions, "What is hard? What is sweet? What is big? What is rare?" Avvaiyar sang her replies to him in poetic form.

Poverty is hard, poverty is hard, poverty in young age is harder. Harder still is incurable disease. Exceedingly hard is faithless woman (or man). The hardest is to take food from her (him) who does not have love for you.

Solitude is sweet. Sweeter is worship of the Lord. Still sweeter is the company of the *Guru*. Sweetest is moving with the *Guru* day and night.

The world is big. Brahma, the creator, is bigger. Brahma was born out of the navel of Visnu, so Visnu is bigger still. Since Visnu sleeps on the ocean of milk, it must be bigger than Visnu. All the oceans were just one sip for the great sage, Agastya, so he is larger still. Agastya was born out of an earthen pot. Since a pot is but a small piece of earthen clay, the earth must be bigger than Agastya. The earth is carried by Adi Sesa, the large serpent on which Lord Visnu sleeps, so Adi Sesa must be larger than the earth. Adi Sesa is but a tiny ring on the finger of Mother Parvati, so she is larger than Adi Sesa. But Parvati always merges herself into Lord Siva so he must be greater. But Lord Siva is contained in the heart of a devotee, so a true devotee must be the greatest of all. Such a devotee's glory is indescribable.

Rare is the human birth. Sankaracarya, Meerabai, Purandaradas all sang, "Only through God's grace may we obtain that rarest of births, the human birth." Rarer still is human birth without deformity. Rarer still is a human birth interested in wisdom. Rarest is human birth with one possessing charity and penance. Charity and penance are the way to heaven. The doors of heaven within your own heart will be opened with these two. How great it is to do *seva* and pursue the path of liberation.

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Avvaiyar sang innumerable songs and wandered all over Tamil Nadu. Finally it became time for her to give up her body. One day she was performing a very elaborate *puja* to Lord Ganesa. She was performing the *puja* with great love and concentration. Slowly, slowly she voiced each word of the worship. Time seemed to stand still, and Avvaiyar was lost in the worship of her lord. At that time, she suddenly had a vision in which she saw two other great Saivite saints, Sundaramurti Nayanmar and Cheraman Perumal going to Kailasa. Sundarar was ascending to Kailasa on the back of a

pure white elephant, and Cheraman was on a white horse. Avvaiyar couldn't control her thoughts, "Oh, Sundarar and Cheraman, my spiritual brothers, are ascending to Kailasa." When she saw these two very dear friends ascending to Kailasa, she was anxious to join them. Immediately she started hurrying through her *puja*. She started singing her chant faster and faster. Lord Vinayaka saw her chanting so quickly, so hurriedly, and without any real concentration, and he said, "Avvaiyar, why are you performing the chant like this? Why are you in such a hurry?" Avvaiyar replied, "Oh Ganesa, my spiritual brother, Sundarar, and King Cheraman are ascending to Kailasa right this very instant, and I am most anxious to join them. It is for this reason that I want to finish my *puja* quickly. I don't want to leave the *puja* to you unfinished; however, I do want to go to Kailasa with my friends. I want to finish the *puja* quickly and then join them." Ganapati smiled and said, "Don't worry Grandma, you do your *puja* leisurely. I will drop you in Kailasa before they arrive there. I promise."

Avvaiyar turned her attention within and began to sing the last song of her illustrious earthly life. This song was a hymn of praise to her personal god (*ista devata*), Lord Ganesa, and it was entitled, "Vinayaka Ahaval," (invocation to Vinayaka). Before we look at this hymn, let us first note the following.

Ganapati sits on the *muladdhara cakra*. If one worships him with true devotion, he can lift one up in no time. This is the inner meaning of this episode. Thus, as soon as Avvaiyar finished her *puja* and placed the sacramental offerings at his lotus feet, Ganesa appeared before her, lifted her up with his trunk, placed her next to Lord Siva in Kailasa before Sundarar and Cheraman arrived there. After Cheraman arrived, he asked Avvaiyar how she had come ahead of them. She replied by singing the glory of Ganesa:

O King, is there anything unattainable to those who intensely contemplate the fragrant feet of the son of Umayal,
of sweet and comely speech? The thunderous thud of the swift elephant and that of the agile horse

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must give place to that of the rider of this old dame. He is none other than the mighty Mahaganapati. 8

The last hymn of praise Avvaiyar sang was the *Vinayaka Ahaval*. In it she extols Ganesa's form, glory, grace, and worship. The following is a concise, lucid translation of the original text.

Vinayaka Ahaval (Invocation to Vinayaka):

Cool, fragrant lotus feet with anklets tinkling sweet,
Gold girdle, flower-soft garment setting off the comely
hips,
Potbelly and big, heavy tusk, elephant face with the
bright, red mark,
Five hands, the goad, the noose, blue body dwelling in
the heart;
Pendulous jaws, four mighty shoulders, three eyes and
the three musk-tracks,
Two ears, the gold crown gleaming, the breast aglow
with the triple thread,
O Being, bright and beautiful!
Wish-yielding elephant, born of the Master of mystery
in Mount Kailasa,
Mouse-rider fond of the three famed fruits;
Desiring to make me yours this instany
You like a mother have appeared before me,
and cut off the delusion of unending births; stilled my
mind in tranquil calm beyond speech and thought;
Clarified my intellect, plunged me in bliss which is the
common ground of
Light and darkness;
Boundless beatitude you have given me,

Ended all affliction, show the way of grace,
 Siva eternal at the core of sound, Siva lingam
 within the heart,
 Atom within atom, vast beyond all vastness!
 Sweetness hid in the hardened node,
 You have steadied me clear in human form all
 besmeared with holy ashes;
 Added me to the congregation of your servants true
 and trusty;
 Made me experience in my heart the inmost meaning of
 the five letters;

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Restored my real state to me, and rule me now, O Master
 of Wisdom,
 Vinayaka; Your feet alone, Your feet alone are my sole
 refuge. 9

This final poem of Avvaiyar may be said to embody the quintessence of all that is Lord Ganapati. It is traditional for a great soul to convey the essence of its wisdom before departing this worldly scene, and herein Avvaiyar shares her experience of divine grace with those left behind. The first fourteen lines of the poem describe Ganesa's form from his feet to his head. Lines fifteen through seventy-two describe Ganesa's Grace-bestowing nature.

Avvaiyar's poem is a living being's testimony to the mystery of Grace, to one's personal experience of one's innermost Self and how that Self is truly non-different from the Supreme Self. The intellectual problems concerning Ganapati's origins and his place in the pantheon and the truth or ridiculousness of his many myths and legends all pale into insignificance before the presence of mother Avvaiyar. Who dares to match wits with her, she who was so uniquely fortunate to have been chosen to match wits with the divine child Karttikeya? What will all of one's scholarship amount to if its sole purpose is to deny the truth of her awareness of Ganesa? Who is the loser, if one is left dismissing her experiences as nothing more than ephemeral outpourings of an overworked imagination?

The poem begins and ends by invoking Lord Ganapati's lotus feet. Feet symbolize divine grace. Feet symbolize the foundation on which God or the *Guru* stands. Feet symbolize *Tat* and *Tvam*, meaning, the individual and the Absolute are One. Feet symbolize the two elements in *so'ham* which also means "I am That." To bow to, or to offer one's salutations to the feet, signifies humility. Thus, by both commencing and concluding her poem by evoking the lotus feet of the Lord, Avvaiyar extolled the greatness of grace, of wisdom, of devotion, of humility. The feet are the foundation upon which all else will be built.

From the known to the unknown, from the obvious to the not so obvious, from the physical to the subtle. Ganapati's feet seem simple enough. They are there, and you are here, and you may offer salutations to them. The feet are at the bottom of the body. But the feet are also at the bottom of the spinal column. Ganesa's feet are mystically placed at the *muladhara cakra*, which is not outside of oneself but within. Think about it. Prostrations may also be offered there, inside, at the foot of the mystic *kundalini sakti*, at the doorway or threshold to one's inner spiritual power and awaken-

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ing. Feet cross the threshold. Feet commence the journey. And a journey of a thousand miles begin with a single step, one foot after the other.

The lotus feet of Lord Ganesa guard the inner sanctuary, which eventually culminates in Kailasa, 10 the mountain peak where Lord Siva resides. There, at the crown of the body, at the top of the *susumna*, lies the thousand-petaled lotus. By meditating on Ganapati's lotus feet, Avvaiyar was blessed with a vision of his cosmic body radiating light. Boundless bliss and the end of all afflictions was hers. "He, my true Self, filled my entire being."

We should take Avvaiyar's example and follow her. We should walk the path that she walked. She states that the way is within. Lord Ganesa is within. The true Self is within. It is true that she commences with a description of his physical form that reads like a description of Ganesa's iconographic representation. However, she concludes with the highest communion within. From beginning to end, limitations expand until "speechless, mindless, immersed in the glory of illumination within." No more opposing factors of duality, no more conflicting thoughts of within and without, no more darkness. The age-old dilemma of Who am I? has been removed.

Who can know Ganapati? Who can know the Real? Who can know his or her own true Self? Only those who have experienced it. Information, intellectual movements of the mind that circle around the inner heart cave, have no conception of what they are missing. Will the thought of milk ever quench one's thirst? By definition, the mind that operates by exclusion, by division, cannot experience nonduality. Until one surrenders to the feet, until one lets go, Ganesa will remain but a nice idea, a bronze statue on a shelf, a quaint and interesting deity residing in a foreign land.

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Who Is Ganapati/Ganea?

To make an end is to make a beginning

The end is where we start from

T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

This is love: To fly toward a secret sky,

To cause a hundred veils to fall each moment,

First to let go of life, finally, to take a step without feet ...

Heart, I said, what a gift it has been

To enter this circle of lovers,

To see beyond seeing itself...

Jalaludin Rumi

Sri Varada Vinayaka of Mahad

Life shall be the price offered in this love's game of chess where the lord shall be enticed and lured to come and play. He who shirks to offer his head may wait indefinitely for entrance to Him. Why this demand by the just and merciful lord? 1

In Vidarbha, there was an extremely brave king named Bhima.² For a very long time he had no children. Then, with the blessings of Lord Ganesa he obtained a son who was as brave and handsome as himself. This son, Rukmangada, was also a devotee of Ganapati. Once upon a time, Rukmangada went hunting in the forest and was overcome with thirst. He went to the nearby hermitage of the sage Vacakni. Upon his arrival, Mukunda, the wife of Vacakni, became infatuated with this handsome young prince. But the prince refused her advances, and so, in a fit of anger, she cursed him to become a leper. He withdrew to the surrounding forest and began to perform penance. The sage Narada happened to pass that way, and observing the prince, instructed him to go take a dip in a

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nearby lake. The prince did so and was relieved of his leprosy. Indra came to know of Mukunda's infatuation and, disguising himself as Rukmangada, went to her and conceived a child. The child of this union, Grtsamada, was also strong, handsome, and intelligent. But the other sages shunned him because of his lineage. So he retired deep into the forest and lived upon dry leaves while standing upon one leg for years on end. Finally, Lord Ganapati was pleased with his austerity and gave him a boon (*varada*), due to which he became so renowned as a sage (*rsi*) that his name came to be chanted at the start of the Ganesa *mantra*. Further, since Lord Ganesa gave him this boon (*varada*) at this place, Ganesa became known as Varada Vinayaka, the lord who bestows boons.

Ganapati

The question Who is Ganapati? would be better worded, Who or what is *not* Ganapati? How can one see the Divine in one place and miss it in another? Ganesa is a tantalizer. He is part elephant, part human, a deity, fully God! He is an immense mystery that the mind cannot comprehend, that knowledge cannot contain. He is a pathless land. He is the song that calls to every individual who is seeking to find the basic, intrinsically intelligible bedrock from which everything arises and in which all experience culminates. Is there a Ganapati, anywhere, that is so certain that no reasonable individual could possibly doubt its veracity? The siren of the Self beckons.

Ganesa is simple and open to all. Why does one complicate the picture? Ganapati is loving and lovable. He includes all, accepts all, purifies all, protects all. It is that which is not Ganesa that is difficult and a source of trouble. What is not, Ganapati wants, demands, expects, covets, possesses. When one feels incomplete, one searches and confronts and fears and avoids. To divide and particularize is natural. Things appear to be different, but they are not separate. Ganesa is One. Distinctions there may be, but never opposition.

Ganapati/Ganesa is a name, representing a special form. A simple combination of letters. Be not misled by the (particular) name/form. For the formless to manifest, for the unknown to be known, it must assume a name and a form. Everything in the universe has a name and a form. But that which is held to be especially dear to a lover, which is thought to be representative of the Divine, has a *special* name and a *special* form. What is special about its name and form is that this particular name and form fills its lover with bliss. Other, worldly names and forms do not possess this

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power. Also, whatever particular name and form that is held dear is said to possess the power to lead one from that which has form to the formless.

There resides a special something in names and forms. The name recalls the form to one's mind. Likewise, the form recalls the name to one's mind. The two are intimately linked together.

Lord Ganapati/Ganesa, lord of the *ganas*, has been prayed to, worshipped, and adored in one form or other since time began and space rolled out. Time and space itself are his creation. He is the great god to be invoked before every act, and especially worshipped and prayed to when changes occur in one's life. Worship of Lord Ganapati is immediate. One has but to think of him and he is there. Close your eyes and visualize his *murti*, and a direct communication has been established. He sits there on the *muladhara cakra*, present and available. Speak to him. He is listening. Of the 330 million gods in the Hindu pantheon, none is so widely loved and revered as Lord Ganesa. This friendly, slightly chubby pachyderm has found a place under every village tree, in every Hindu heart, in homes and temples around the world. No other deity is so popular, so frequently praised or prayed to. His giant belly contains the universe, and his left hand holds the sweetest of delights, spiritual liberation. He is protector and confidant. He is boon giver, remover of obstacles, champion of virtue, gentle guide, possessor of *siddhis*, lord of the mind. He is good fortune manifest, time embodied, and abundance overflowing. He is the first *ista devata*, regardless of sectarian beliefs and emotional tendencies. His worship naturally and sweetly leads to the other great gods. Plump and lovable. He is the potent unifying force.

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is the *Absolute*. There is nothing that Ganesa is not. Ganesa is the unbounded deep in whom all the waves of all the worlds naturally rise and fall. But he does not rise or fall. He is still. He is free of duality. When there is only One without a second, what is there to rise or fall? Where? On whom? What is "I" or "mine" or "this" or "that" or even, the "Absolute"?

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganapati is Agni. Agni the divine child; Agni priest of the sacrifice; Agni the purifier; Agni the immortal guest in our mortality (*yo martyesu amrtah rtava*). Agni who is also called Brhaspati/Brahmanaspati/Indra/Ganapati. Agni has two wives, Svaha and Svadha, who sit on either side of him, just as Ganesa has Siddhi and Buddhi. Agni/Ganapati is the devourer and enjoyer. When he devours, he enjoys and in the process purifies. He removes the dross, one's obstacles and gives blessings in return.

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Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is the *inner dweller* (*antaryamin*). He lives within you, as you. He is not apart from you, he is not an "other." Whatever you truly are, that he is. There, within the heart, is the immortal one, the resplendent one. His is that shining form that gives heat in yonder sun and is the brilliant light in a smokeless fireas also the fire in the stomach that cooks food. For thus has it been said: he who is in the fire, and he who is here in the Heart, and he who is yonder in the sun, he is One. He is the immortal self that abides in all beings as their *antaryamin* and guides them from within.

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganapati is lord of beginnings, master of the threshold. Ganesa is the gatekeeper. Ganapati is giver of obstacles and remover of obstacles. He sits on the *muladhara cakra* at the base of the spine. Do you want to enter the shrine? In order to enter the sacred space, one (he) must be beheaded. The old must give way to the new. Somehow one must get past him to enter the shrine. One should hear the liberating word and enter into its song.

Ganesa presides over the *muladhara cakra*, which is the fountainhead of the evolutionary energy at the base of the spine where it is coiled up like a sleeping serpent. When activated, the human consciousness expands and unknown and unexpected faculties emerge. Subtle powers of intelligence and accomplishment arise. Thus Ganapati represents the divine power that works from the lower levels, removing obstacles and uplifting life to stages of supreme consciousness.

Ganesa must also be given pride of place. He must be invoked at every beginningto enter a shrine, to commence a meditation, to seek the Self. He is the placer of obstacles and the remover of obstacles.

One's inner virtues churned the ocean of consciousness within until a great poison began to flow out. The practitioners of the virtues were warned that they should pay homage to Lord Siva, but they were eager to fulfill their desires and so they ignored this advice. Soon the poison began to spread throughout one's universe and all good things fled to Brahman for protection. Brahman could do nothing. Brahman directed them to Lord Visnu, who directed them to Lord Siva. Ganesa said to Siva, "Just to amuse myself I have created all these obstacles, which are difficult to overcome. Because of fear and illusion, others do not worship you or me and so they encounter

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terrible obstructions to their actions." Siva then said, "Even though this world is perishable, there is also the imperishable. Look within. What is the use of sacrifices, asceticism, or undertaking any action, or of thinking all is One or all is many? If you attempt to do things yourself and ignore the Divine within, no success will happen. That is why you are suffering. Ganapati is there to bring every action to a successful conclusion. Why don't you honor him?"⁴

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is the *blue pearl*. He is the radiant, enchanting light that dwells within each and every heart. There, in the secret heart cave, the blue pearl resides until the spiritual aspirant brings it into the light of consciousness. Then, born into the conscious light of the world, born into one's conscious experience, tusked with bright blue light, he sings his siren song.

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is a *boon giver*. Ganapati is an embodiment of grace. Some think that to receive grace, unimaginable preparation is necessary. Everyone speaks of worthiness. However, some say that true worthiness is to welcome the grace that is already within you, just waiting to be received. Grace is mysterious. Some people imagine that they have been waiting for Ganesa's or God's or the *Guru's darsana* for so long. Imagine how long Ganesa, God, *Guru* have been waiting for one to look in their direction!

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is *Brahman* (the Absolute). Everywhere and nowhere. He is in temples and homes and hearts. He is your own Self. Who is Ganesa? Ganesa is the *elephant-headed god*, quaint, grotesque, awesome, utterly lovable. Who is Ganapati? Ganapati is the *Guru*. Guiding, protecting, taking one by the hand and leading one right into the vast inner expanse of the sacred space within the human heart. Who is Ganesa? Ganesa is one's *ista devata*. Emotions well up, and wave after wave of bliss pulsates throughout one's body. He is one's own chosen Lord. Who is Ganesa? Ganesa is *lord of the mind*. In one of his hands he holds the *ankusa*, which tames the wild mind like a goad tames a wild elephant. In the *Ramayana*, it once so happened that Laksmana was asked by Sita how one could control their untamable thoughts. Laksmana replied, "Use the *ankusa*." Also, each individual has a unique mind. Ganapati is lord of all minds, and thus he is the only deity that can be approached in the manner one wishes. He gives to each his or her heart's desire. Who is Ganesa? Ganesa is a *murti* that signifies personification, incarnation, and formation. Who is

Ganapati? Ganapati is the *Omkara*, which periodically and cyclically instigates the process of creation. He is the lord of all, manifest and unmanifest. He is where the human and the Divine, man and elephant, meet and become one.

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is the *son of Lord Siva*. The divine will of Siva transformed the A of *Aum* into a male elephant. Uma's gaze at the U of *Aum* turned it into a female elephant. From their communion came forth the divine leader, Ganesa, to extricate individuals from the countless cycle of births and deaths.

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganapati is the *Self*. In a sentence, Ganesa simply means "Self-realization is but the removal of obstacles to the recognition of the eternal, immanent, inner Self, here and now." Any time is the time to worship Ganesa. All time is God's time. Any place is the place to worship Ganesa. All places are God's places. To seek Ganapati outside oneself in the form of an "other" is to limit the places and times that one can commune with him. To seek Ganesa inside oneself is to make possible a permanent and omnipresent ability to be in his presence. To become Ganapati is the final word, for then, who is there to worship whom and with what?

Who is Ganapati/Ganesa? Ganesa is the physical embodiment of *Tat tvam asi*. Why look for Ganesa in the outside world? Why look for Ganesa just in the form of an elephant-faced plump deity? Individuals are so used to looking for unending fulfillment where it is not. Turn within. The inner energy will awaken. Once there was a ferry sitting on the bank of a river and a ferryman was loading it. He put everything he possibly could into the boat. Then he tried to row away but the boat would not move. He thought that perhaps he had put too much into the boat and so he took out a few things. But still it did not move. He began to suspect that someone was bewitching him so he broke a coconut to break the spell. Nothing. Then he cut a lemon but that didn't work either. Then he went and called a priest and the priest made him perform a ritual. That too, didn't work. So he began repeating a *mantra*, but even that didn't help. Just then he spied a holy man walking by and he asked for him help. The saint asked, "What has happened?" He replied, "My boat won't move." Back came the reply, "You fool. Don't you know that your boat is tied to the dock? Unless you untie the rope, how can the boat possibly move?" 5

People are like that ferryman. They want the ferry of spirituality to move forward, but until they untie the rope of their ego, which is keeping them tied to the limited dock of the world, they won't move. So instead of repeating the *mantra*, "I, I, I," repeat *Tat tvam asi*, "That thou art," and realize its import.

There are those who believe that Ganapati is that immensity which presides over the destiny of all mortal things. He knows what is in everyone's, and everything's, best interest. He alone provides the fetters that bind, and he alone frees for liberation. In this aspect he is known as *Ganesapasa*, the one who wields the noose of the law. Further, the binds he looses are known to be of three types: the highest (*uttama*), middling (*madhyama*), and the lowest (*adhamma*). The noose of the first type leads to liberation (*moksha*), and it has to be tightened up (*ut*); the noose of the lowest category binds one to the wheel of worldly existence (*samsara*), and it has to be thrown down (*ava*); finally, the middling type of noose must be loosened halfway (*visrathaya*). That is, one must break the chains of devouring desire, loosen the radiant herds, and enter into the secret cave of the heart.

Notes

Preface

1. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (Oxford, 1973), 2.

2. Courtright, *Ganesa*, 19.
3. Ibid.
4. In the Indian Puranic context, Ganesa is the child of Siva and Parvati. In chapter three we will explore this mythology in greater detail.
5. Lord Siva as Dakshinamurti teaches the Truth through silence.
6. Maharashtra ("the Great Country") is the Marathi-speaking region of western India; it occupies a central position between North and South India. The region was formed into a state in 1960 when the Bombay State was divided into two states: Maharashtra and Gujarat. Although Ganesa is worshipped all over India, Maharashtra, along with Tamil Nadu, in the south, is one of India's two *major* regions of Ganesa worship.
7. As but one example, Adi Sankaracarya established four monasteries, one in each of the four cardinal directions, each presided over by one of his four chief disciples. Each monastery was the keeper of one of the four Vedas *and* one of the four Great Sayings, which are found within the four Vedas.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. There are Vedic texts that invoke a primeval "One" (*tad ekam*) beyond Being and non-being. For instance, see the famous *Nasadiya Sukta* in *Rg Veda* 10.129.1.

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2. *Darsana*, literally "to have sight of," or "to see," is a Sanskrit word that means "to have the auspicious sight of" the Divine in the form of an image, person, or set of ideas.

3. Ganesa most mysteriously makes his initial appearance as the eldest son of Lord Siva and Parvati, right smack dab in the middle of the divine family. A fine entrance indeed!

4. In this context, the child, i.e., Ganesa, is used as a metaphor for the birth of one's own conscious spiritual awakening; the heart is a metaphor for Consciousness, the Self, one's true nature; the Mother is a metaphor for the *Guru* or that embodied manifestation of God's grace that gives the awakening touch called "*saktipat*."

5. Author's personal experience.

6. Blue pearl is Baba Muktananda's name for the *bindu* called *Nilesvari*, which is the house of the Self.

7. See *Atharvasirsa*.

8. From the introduction to the television series *Star Trek*.

9. Alice to the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Beyond the Looking Glass: With Annotated Alice*, with introduction and notes by Martin Gardner (New York: New American Library, 1960), 247.

Chapter 2: In the Beginning

1. This is the first of the eight Ganesas (*asta vinayaka*) that will head each chapter. There is no significance to the order in which they are presented other than the fact that each one that begins a particular chapter has a particular relevance to that chapter. For more on Girijatmaja of Lenyadri, see *Ganesa Purana*, chaps. 73-126.
2. *Svayambhu* images are said to be self-existent and thus naturally holy. They are said to require no rites of sacralization (*pranapratistha*) for their sacredness because they have appeared without any human agency.
3. See Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart of Siva*, p. 89. Abhinavagupta, *Paratrishika-laghuvrtti*, introductory verses, p. 1:

yatra tejasi tejamsi tamamsi ca tamsyalam
 tejamsi ca tamamsy etad vande jyotiranuttaram
 sadabhinavaguptam yat puranam ca prasiddhimat
 hrdayam tatparollasaih svayam sphurjaty anuttaram.

4. For a full account of the birth legends of Ganesa, see chapter 3.

5. See Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart of iva*, pp. 64-73.

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6. *Paratrisika-laghuvrtti* of Abhinavagupta, comment on verse 9.

7. Akathadi trirekhabje, sahasradala mandale; hamsa parsva trikone ca, smaret tanmadhyagam gurum (*Gurugita* verse 58).

8. Coomaraswamy proposed that he began as *ayaksa*, Getty believed he originated as the totem of a Dravidian tribe, others proposed he was originally a Dravidian deity, Aravamuthan postulated that his origins were Vedic, Courtright stressed the point that there is no need to create a theory about the origins of Ganesa, and so on, and so on.

9. See Getty, *Ganesa* xvii; Courtright, *Ganesh*, 7; Brown, *Ganesh*, 2, 6, 19, 49, 69; etc. There are those, i.e., Barth, *Religion of India*, 197; Mitra, "Ganapati," 461-81, who argue for an earlier origin but if the question is put in the recognizable form we know today then there is little room for argument.

10. See A. K. Narain's article, "Ganesa: A Protohistory of the Idea and the Icon," in Brown, *Ganesh*, 19-48, for more information regarding Ganesa and iconography. Also see the *Pratima Kosha*.

11. Brahman satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva na 'parah.

12. na tatra caksur gacchati na vag gacchati no manah; na vidmo na vijanimo yathaitad anusisyat; anyad eva tad veditad atho aviditad adhi; iti Susruma purvesam ye nas tad vyacakasire; yad vaca nabhyuditam ylena vag abhyudyate; tad eva brahma tvam viddhi nedam yad idam upasate (*Kena Upanisad* 1.3-5).

13. *Chandogya Upanisad* 6.8.7.

14. Note Swami Vivekananda's words: "In books and temples vain thy search, thine only is the hand that holds the rope that drags thee on. The Self is all in all, none else exists" (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* vol. 4 [Calcutta, 1989], 394).

15. *Rg Veda* 2.23.1. This is the earliest mention of Ganapati. According to the *Aitareya Brahmana*, this reference is to Brahmanaspati (*Aitareya Brahmana* 1.21.1: gananam tva ganapatim havamahe iti brahmanaspatyam). However, already by time of the *Asvalayana Grhyasutra*, 169.8-9, it states that it is a reference to Ganesa: gananam tva ganapatim havamahe iti ganapateh. All translations are the authors unless stated otherwise. "gananam tva ganapatim havamahe, kavim kavinamupamasravastamam jyestharajam brahmanam brahmanaspata, a nah srnvattutibhiih sida sadanam" *Rg Veda* 2.2.3.1. [We invoke thee, O Ganapati of the troops (*ganas*), *brahmanaspati* of the prayers (*brahmanas*), the most creative among the creative artists, abounding in treasure beyond measure, the most brilliant among the superior beings. Listen to our prayers, come with your blessings and assurances into our abode and be seated.] Interestingly, "gananam tva ganapatim havamahe" also opens the *Sri Rudram Camakam* of the *Krsna Yajur Veda*. One can observe that Rudra and Ganesa were

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closely connected, and, further, it is Ganesa who is invoked at the beginning of any auspicious work. So the question may be asked, Is this a reference to Rudra or to Ganesa?" The *Parisista* to the *Asvalayana Grhyasutra* declares that "gananam tva ganapatim havamahe" does refer to Ganapati, p. 169, lines 8-9.

16. *Rg Veda* 2.23.1. Everyone from Wilson to Griffiths to Courtright to R. G. Bhandarkar makes reference to the fact that this Ganapati is a reference to Brhaspati or Brahmanaspati. The *Aitareya Brahmana* 4.4 explains this passage as a reference to Brhaspati. A. K. Narain states that this name is not a personal name but an attribute of Brhaspati or Brahmanaspati (in Brown, *Ganesh*, p. 21). Note, however, that Brhaspati and Brahmanaspati are lords of wisdom, a title that Ganesa will soon acquire (if these are not, in fact, references to him. Two scholars who propose that this reference is a reference to Ganesa, even if a veiled prototype, are S. K. Ramachandra Rao and V. S. Agrawala.

17. *Rg Veda* 1. 164, 46.

18. gananam tva ganapatim havamahe kavim kavinam upamasravastamam, jyestarajam brahmanam brahmanas pata a nah srnvann utibhih sida sadanam (1); sunitibhir nayasi trayase janam yas tubhyam dasan na tam anho asnavat, brahmadvisas tapano manyumir asi brhaspate mahi tat te mahitvanam (4); tvam no gopah pathidrd vicaksanas tava vrataya matibhir jaramahe, brhaspate yo no abhi hvaro dadhe sva tam marmartu ducuna harasvati (6) (*Rg Veda* 2.23.1, 4, 6); and praitu brahmanas pathi pra devy etu sunrta, aca viram naryam panktiradhasam deva yajnam nayantu nah (*Rg Veda*; 1.40.3).

19. gananam tva ganapatim havamahe kavim kavinam upamasravastamam, jyestarajam brahmanam brahmanas pata a nah srnvann utibhih sida sadanam (*Rg Veda* 2.23.1).

20. See the following passages from the *Rg Veda*: 2.23.3, 17. Also see in *Rg Veda*: a vibadhy parirapas tamansi ca jyotismantam ratham rtasya tistasi, brhaspate bhimam amitradambhanam raksohanam gotrabhidam svarvidam; visvebhyo hi tva bhuvanebhyas pari tvastajanat samnah samnah kavih, sa macid maya brahmanas patir druho hanta maha rtasya dhartari (2.23.3-17); rtajyena ksiprena brahmanas patir yatra vasti pra tad asnoti dhanvana, tasya sadhviro isavo yabhir asyati nrcaksaso drsaye kamayonayah (2.24.8); yas tastamba sahasa vi jmo antan brhaspatis trsadhastho ravena, tam pratnasa rsayo didhyanah puro vipra dadhire mandrajihvam (4.50.1, 4); a vedhasam nilaprstam brhantam brhaspatim sadane sadayadhwam, sadadyonim dama a didivansam hiranyavarnam arusam sapema (5.43.12). Also see Bali, *Brhaspati in the Vedas and the Puranas*.

21. For instance, *Rg Veda* 10.112.9; stirnam te barhiih sua indra somah krta dhana attave te haribhyam, tadoCASE purusakaya vrsne

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marutvate tubhyam rata havinsi yan abhajo maruta indra some ye tvam avardhann abhavan ganas te, tebhish etam sajosa vavasano 'gneb piba jihvaya somam indra (*Rg Veda* 10.112.9). Also see: 6.21.12 and 10.111.3.

22. For instance, *Taittiriya Samhita* 4.1.2.2; *Maitrayaniya Samhita of Krsna Yajurveda* 2.7.2, 3.1.3; and *Vajasaneyi Samhita* 2.15.

23. See *Rg Veda* 7.92.8; *Sukla Yajur Veda* 3.46; *Taittiriya Brahmana* 1.6.10; *Satapatha Brahmana* 12.6.2; and *Vajasaneyi Samhita* 3.57-63.

24. visvebhyo hi tva bhuvanebhyas pari tvastajanat samnah sanmah havih, sa macid maya brahmanas patir druho hanta maha rtasya dhartari (*Rg Veda* 2.23.17).

25. *Rg Veda* 10.108

26. *Maitrayaniya Samhita of Krsna Yajurveda* 2.9.1.

27. *Taittiriya Aranyaka* 10.1.5.

28. *Maitrayaniya Samhita of Krsna Yajurveda* 2.9.1.

29. *Taittiriya Aranyaka* 10.1.5.

30. He says, "bijapuragadeksukarmuka ity agamaprasiddhamurtidharam vinayakam prartha-yate."

31. *Narayana Upanisad, Anuvaka*.

32. "brhati vak, vag vai brhati, tasya esa patih" (*Chandogya Brahmana*), See also these passages in the *Rg Veda*. gananam

tva ganapatim havamahe, kavim kavinamupa-masravastamam, jyestharajam brahmanam brahmanaspata, a nah smvattutibhih sida sadanam (2.23.1); pra nunam brahmanas patir mantram vadaty ukthyam, yasminn indro varuno mitro aryama deva okansi eakrire (1.40.5).

33. *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.1.8.

34. *Om* is *Brahman*; *Om* is all this universe (*Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.8). *Om* is *idam sarvam* (*Chandogya Upanisad* 2.23.3). *Om* is the eternal *Brahman* (*Katha Upanisad* 2.16). Two *Brahmans* are to be known; one as sound and the other *Brahman* supreme. Having known *Brahman* as sound one reaches *Brahman* supreme (*Maitri Upanisad* 6.25).

35. The *Mahapuranas* are attributed to Vyasa. Whether one man was or was not the author of these texts and whether Vyasa is or is not Krsnadvaipayana is not our concern in this context.

36. See *Padma Purana*, *srsti* 40.400. The eleven Rudras are called "Ganesvaras" in the *Padma Purana*. The family of the *ganas* runs into *crores* (are infinite). They are known as "kaleya" and are very fierce and equipped with weapons. *Padma Purana* 40.477-79 says that they are the best among men, always remain in the proximity of Siva, can assume any form at will,

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are brave, enthusiastic, virtuous, strong, pervade the entire universe, and so on.

37. See Courtright, *Ganesa*, 131-36, and S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Ganeshkosa*, 36-45, per the Vinayakas.

38. See A. K. Narain's article "Ganesa: A Prehistory of the Idea and the Icon" in Brown, *Ganesh*, 22.

39. See Courtright, *Ganesa*, 252-54; Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesha*, 121-38; Navaratnam, *Aum Ganesa*, 101-18.

40. The Ganapatyas are distinguished by four features: worship by the *durva* blades of grass, recitation of the Ganesa *mantra*, wearing on the forehead *pundra* mark with red sandal paste (*rakta candana*) and observance of the fourth day of the lunar month as especially sacred to the deity.

41. See chapter three of this work for complete lists of Ganapati's names.

42. Story from the *Ganesa Purana*.

Chapter 3:

Naming Is a Very Serious Business

1. *Taittiriya Upanisad* 2.4.1.

2. Vag vai samrat, paramam brahma (*Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 4.1.2).

3. These examples of the greatness of the Name are from Samartha Ramadas's *Dasa Bodha*.

4. For more on Mayuresvara of Morgaon, see the entire sixth *kanda* of the *Mudgala Purana*.

5. From the *Mudgala Purana*. Also, see chapter six of this work.

6. Ballalvinayaka is lord of strength, *dharma* is righteous, Vighnesa is lord of obstacles, artha is wealth or accomplishment, Cintamani is the fulfiller of desires, Kama and Rati are the god and goddess of pleasure, kama is pleasure, Mahaganapati is the supreme lord, Mahi is the earth and Varaha is the boar incarnation.

7. *Siva Purana* 2.4.13.5-6.

8. Note that all religions proclaim that the Absolute, God, the Divine's true name is unspeakable. To cite one instance, there are ninety-nine well-known names of Allah, but His one-hundredth name, his true name, is unknown.

9. For example, a definitive *laksana* of Krsna, besides his name, is his flute. The *laksana* of Jesus is a lamb or a cross.

The *laksana* of Ganesa is his elephant's head. For those who know and adore these individuals, the

laksana itself will be enough to invoke strong feelings of love. Likewise, their names evoke that which they represent.

10. sa yo nama brahmety upaste (*Chandogya Upanisad* 7.1.5).

11. For more on these two names, see Narain "Ganesa: The Idea and the Icon," in Brown, *Ganesh*,21-22. For more on Ganesa's names in general see: Lal, *Ganesha*,40-43; Parthasarathy, *Symbolism of Hindu Gods*,8; T. A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*,46-47; Jagannathan and Krishna, *Ganesha*, 5.

12. *Vivekacudamani sloka* 174. The passage continues, "Therefore the mind is the only cause that brings about man's bondage or liberation." Also see *Bhagavad Gita* 6.6, which says, "bandhur atma 'tmanas tasya, yena 'tmai 'va 'tmana jitah/anatmanas tu satrutive, varteta 'tmai 'va satruvat."

13. For but one of numerous examples, see A. K. Narain, "Ganesa: The Idea and the Icon," in Brown, *Ganesh*,21.

14. Monier-Williams, *English-Sanskrit Dictionary*,971-72. S.V. "Vinayaka."

15. Monier-Williams, *English-Sanskrit Dictionary*,971. S.V. "Vinayaka."

16. Karunakaran, *Riddle of Ganesa*,31.

17. A. K. Narain, "Ganesa: The Idea and the Icon," in Brown, *Ganesh*,23. For Visvarupa's commentary *Balakrida* on *Yajnavalkyasmrti*,see T. Ganapati Sastri, ed., *Yajnavalkyasmrti* (Trivandrum, 1921; reprint, Delhi: Munsirama Manoharalala, 1982): 174.

18. *Linga Purana* 105.14-16; *Skanda Purana* 1.2.27.7-14.

19. *Manava Grhyasutra* 2.14. See also *Agni Purana* 264; *Brhatsamhita* 58.9; *Garuda Purana* 100; *Visnudharmottara Purana* 2.105; *Yajnavalkyasmrti* 1.270.

20. In the *Mitaksara* version of the *Yajnavalkyasmrti* 1.271.94 their number has been increased to six: Mita, Sammita, Sala, Katankata, Kusmanda, and Rajaputra.

21. *Yajnavalkyasmrti* 1.271.94

22. *Mitaksara* on *Yajnavalkyasmrti* 1.271.94

23. *Vamana Purana* 28.71-73.

24. The *Puranas*,which are the primary source for Ganesa's stories, are relatively recent compilations by Indian standards. Further, they are compilations of shifting oral traditions that reflect various sectarian allegiances.

25. *Ganesa Purana* 2.126ff.

26. Lord Siva says in the *Linga Purana* 1, chap. 104:

Tava avatarae daituanam
vinasaya mammatmaja
davanam upakarartham
dvijanam brahma vadinam

[0 my son, this incarnation of yours is for the destruction
of demons and for the protection of the righteous. Create

obstacles for those who go against *dharma*, bringing them to their knees and remove all the troubles of your devotees who walk in the path of *dharma*.]

27. *Skanda Purana* 1.2.278-14; *Linga Purana* 105.12-16; cf. *Varaha Purana* 23.

28. *Linga Purana Purva*, 1. chap. 104.

29. *Manava Grhyasutra* 2.14.

30. *Yajnavalkyasmrti* 1.271-94.

31. See Hazra, "Ganapati Worship," 263-64.

32. See Sorensen, *An Index to the Names in the Mahabharata*

33. This same list is found in the *Sri-tattva-nidhi*, an illuminated manuscript that was commissioned by Krsna Raja Wodeyar III, the maharaja of Mysore.,

34. *Skanda Purana: Kasi Khanda* 57.115-17.

35. Published in *Brhat Stotra Ratnakara* (Sri Venkatesvara Press, Bombay, 1885), 5.

36. *Brahmavaivarta Purana* 3.44.85.

37. *Padma Purana srsti khanda* 6.3.

38. *Pratima-kosa* 142.

Chapter 4:

Fingers Pointing at the Moon

1. For more on Siddhi Vinayaka of Siddhatek, see *Mudgala Purana*, fourth *Kanda*, fifteenth chapter.

2. *Chandogya Upanisad* 2.14.

3. See S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Ganesakosa*, 231.

4. *Vamana Purana* 28.58; *Linga Purana* 105.7-10. *Siva Purana* 2.4, chaps. 13-17; *Matsya Purana* 154.501-5; *Skanda Purana* 142.1-36, 27.5-14,

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and 204.48-54; *Suprabhedagama* (in T. A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 1.1:44-45); in Jayaratha's *Haracaritacintamani* (chap. 18).

5. *Linga Purina* 105.7-10.

6. *Skanda Purana Nagara Khanda* 42.1-36. Variations of this story appear in *Skanda Purana Nagara Khanda* 204.48-54; *Skanda Purana Kaumarika Khanda* 27.5-14; *Skanda Purana Prabhava Khanda* 32, 38, 52.

7. *Brahmavaivarta Purana* 3, chaps. 11-12; *Siva Purana* 2.4 ch. 13-20, 2.5.3; *Skanda Purana* 1.1.10.27ff., 3.2.12.15-20, and vol. 34; *Varaha Purana* 23.17-18; *Devibhagavata Purana* 111-16; *Bhagavata Purana* 35.

8. *Siva Purana* 2.4.13.5-6.

9. *Varaha Purana Prajapala Mahatpasamvada* 23.3-32.

10. *Skanda Purana* 1.1.10.29-38.

11. Attributed to *Kanci Puranam*; see *Navaratnam, Aum Ganesa*, 148.
12. *Sabdakalpadruma*, vol. 2, p. 291.
13. Stories that say he had it from the moment he acquired the elephant head include: *Siva Purana* 2.4.19.49 ("prathamam militas tatra hasti capy ekadantakah"). Stories that relate how he lost one tusk include: *Brahmanda Purana* 2.3.41.51-55; 3.43.42.1-13; *Sisupalavadha* 1.60; *Haracaritacintamani* 18.23-24.
14. *Siva Purana* 2.4.19.49.
15. *Padma Purana*, chaps. 61-63; *Brahmanda Purana* 2.3.41.51-55; 3.43.42.1-13; *Brahmavaivarta Purana* 43.1-42.
16. Getty, *Ganesa*, 20. Also see Courtright, *Ganesa*, 81, and T. A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 51.
17. *Ganesa Purana* 2.134; also see Getty, *Ganesa*, 15, and Courtright, *Ganesa*, 80.
18. Courtright, *Ganesa*, 36, 79, for the two versions of this story.
19. See Rajasekhara's *Balabharata* or *Pracandapandavanataka*.
20. *Siva Purana Vidyesvara Samhita*, chap. 10, verses 65-66.
21. Attributed to *Kanci Puranam*, see *Navaratnam, Aum Ganesa*, 148.
22. *Siva Purana Vidyesvara Samhita*, chap. 17.
23. *Katha Upanisad* 1.2.16.
24. *Brahma Purana* 114.11.
25. The goddess Lalita traditionally holds these two weapons in her upper hands also. In the *Lalita Sahasranama* it is said that desires have the

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- form of a noose (*raga svarupa pasa*); that is, uncontrolled desires, like a noose, entangle human beings in delusions.
26. I prefer to translate *musaka* as "mouse" rather than "rat." In India, there are what is known as the "city *musaka*" and then there are the "country *musaka*." Ganesa's vehicle is the city *musaka*.
 27. *Matsya Purana* 260.55.
 28. See Somayaji, *Concepts of Ganesa*, 6; Lal, *Ganesa beyond the Form*, 58.
 29. agnirdevo'bhyo nilayat. akyurupam krtva sa prthivim pravisat (*Taittiriya Brahmana* 1.1.3.3).
 30. akhus te rudra pasus tam jusatva. See also *Taittiriya Brahmana* 1.6.10; *Satapatha Brahmana* 12.6.2; *Vajasaneyi Samhita* 3.57-63.
 31. vasundhara dadau tasmai vahanaya ca musikam (*Brahmavaivarta Purana* 3.13.12).
 32. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*, 52-53.
 33. Somayaji, *Concepts of Ganesa*, 53-54.
 34. Lal, *Ganesa beyond the Form*, 58.
 35. Jagannathan and Krishna, *Ganesa*, 94.
 36. Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*, 4.

37. *Maitri Upanisad* 6.18. In *Principal Upanisads* Radhahrishnan.
38. *Chandogya Upanisad* 3.14.3. In *Principal Upanisads* Radhahrishnan.
39. *Padma Purana: Srstikhanda* 65.8-11.
40. Shelley, *Adonais* 54, in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Random House, 1951), 306.
41. *Inaneshwar's Gita*, rendered by Swami Kripa Nanda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1.

**Chapter 5:
Songs That Ring**

1. For more on Mahaganapati of Ranjangaon, see *Ganesa Purana*, chaps. 38-47.
2. This temple is known as *Dasa Bhaja Cintamani Nivas*. It is located in Tulasi Bagwale Colony, Plot #43, Sahakar Nagar #2, Pune 9. The head *brahmin* priest and Ganesa *upasaka* is Sri Mandar Khaladakar.

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3. simharudho dasabhujah krte namra vinayakah
 tejorupi mahakayah sarvesam varado vasi
 tretayuge bahirrudhah sadbhajo'pyarjunacchavih
 mayuresvaranamra ca virvyato bhuvanatraye
 dvapare raktavame'savakhurudasrvaturbhujah
 gajana iti khyatah pujitah suramanavaih
 kalai tu dhumravame'savasvarudo dvihastavan
 dhurmaketuariti khyato mlecchanikavinasakrt
(Ganesa Purana 1.18-21)

4. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. See *Ganesa Purana, Krida Khanda* 1.18. simharudho dasabhujah krte namnavinayakah, tejerupi mahakayah sarvesam varado vasi. Also see Rao's *Ganesa Kosha*, 145-46.
5. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. See *Ganesa Purana, Krida Khanda* 1.19. tretayuge bahirrudhah sanbhajo'pyajurnacchavih, mayuresvaranamna ca visvyato bhuvanatraye See also Rao's *Ganesa Kosha*, 145-46, Mate, 11-14, Courtright, 214, and *Mudgala Purana* 6.1-45.
6. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. See *Ganesa Purana, Krida Khanda* 1.20. dvapare raktavarne'savakhurudhasrvaturbhujah, gajana iti khyatah pujitah suramanavaih. See also Rao's *Ganesa Kosha*, 145-46.
7. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. See *Ganesa Purana, Krida Khanda* 1.21. kalai tu dhumravarne'savasvarudho dvihastavan, dhurmaketuriti khyato mlecchanikavinasakrt. See also Rao's *Ganesa Kosha*, 145-46. It is interesting to note that the Vaisnava tenth incarnation, *Kalki*, will ride upon a white horse. In fact, in many religions of the world, the coming savior is described as riding upon a white horse.
8. tavavataro daityanam vinasaya mammatmaja, devatanamupakarartham (*Linga Purana* 105, 15).
9. paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskrtam, dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge-yuge (*Bhagavadgita* 4.8).
10. See *Mudgala Purana*: *khanda* 2 *ekadanta*, *khanda* 3 *mahodara*, *khanda* 4 *gajana*, *khanda* 5 *vikata*, *khanda* 6 *vighnaraja*, *khanda* 7 *dhumravama*. Also see Rao's *Ganesa Kosha*, 146-47.
11. *Mudgala Purana* 20.
12. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. vakratundavatasva dehanam brahmadharakah, matsrasurahanta sa simha-vahanagah smrtah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

13. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. ekadantavatato vai dehinam brahmadharakah, madasurasya hanta sa akhuvahanagah smrtah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

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14. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. mahodara iti khyato jnanabrahmaprakasakah, mohasurasya satruva akhuvahanagah smrtah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

15. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. gajananah sa vijneyah samkhyebhyah siddhidayakah, lobhasurapraharta vai akhugasva prakitirtah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

16. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. lambodaravatato vai kroddhasuranibarhanah, saktibrahmakhugah sadyattasya dharaka ucyate. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

17. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. vikato nama visvyatah kamasuravidahakah, maruravahanasvayam saira brahmadharah smrtah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

18. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. vighnarajavatarasva sosavahana ucyate, mamatasurahanta sa visnubrahmeeti vacakah. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

19. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story. dhurnavaravatarambhabhimanasuranasakah, akhuvahana ekasau savatma tu s ucyate. For reference: *Mudgala Purana* 20.

20. *Satcakra Nirupana* verse 18, p. 364.

21. *Mahabharata* 12. 255.7.

22. For more on these eight, see Keshavadas, *Lord Ganesa*,88-89, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavininayaka Temples*,1-21, Courtright, *Ganesa*,207-17, and Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,147-57.

23. For more on Mayuresvara, see *Mudgala Purana* 6; Mate, *Temples and Legends*,1-25, Ananthanarayanan, *Glory of Ganesa*,1-4, Keshavadas, *Lord Ganesa*,69-81.

24. Nandi is the vehicle for Lord Siva and there is a tale as to how this particular Nandi came to be located here. Near Morgaon, about ten kilometers away, is a famous temple of Siva (Bhulesvara) at Yavat. The people of Yavat had placed an order with a craftsman to carve this particular Nandi with a view to be placed before Siva at Yavat. But after it was carved, the road to Yavat led through Morgaon. As soon as the cart which was carrying the image passed in front of the Ganesa temple in Morgaon, it broke spilling the image on the ground. All attempts to move the image subsequently failed and when plans were being made to chisel the image down, Nandi appeared before the priests and voiced his desire to be near Mayuresvara.

25. See Courtright, *Ganesa*, 215.

26. See Mate, *Temples and Legends*,11-14, Courtright, *Ganesa*,214, and *Mudgala Purana* 6.1-45.

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27. Song sung at Lenyadri.

28. See Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,4-6, Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,154-55.

29. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.

30. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,155-56, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,6-7.

31. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.

32. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,148-49, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*, 7-8.
33. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.
34. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,153-54, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,8-9.
35. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.
36. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,150-51, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,10-11.
37. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.
38. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,151-52, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,12-13.
39. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.
40. See Chinmayananda, *Glory of Ganesa*,156-57, Ananthanarayanan, *Astavinayaka Temples*,15-18.
41. The Yoga tradition claims these spots on the forehead are the places where the nerves are connected to the intellect.
42. Y. B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion."
43. *Murugan* or *Subramanyam* as he is known to South Indians.
44. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the well-known Puranic story which is best known in *Siva Purana* 2.5.19.15-20..
45. Author's condensed and paraphrased version of the Puranic story.
46. See Sarasvati Gangadhara's *Gurucaritra*.Also see Jagannathan and Krishna, *Ganesha*,27, and Courtright, *Ganesa*,138.
47. muda karatta modakam sada vimukti sadhakam
 kaladharavatamsakam vilasi loka raksakam
 anayakaika nayakam vinasitebha daityakam
 natasubhasu nasakam namami tam vinayakam

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natetarati bhikaram navoditarka bhasvaram
 namat surari nirjaram natadhikapaduddharam
 suresvaram nidhisvaram gajesvaram ganesvaram
 mahesvaram tamasraye paratparam nirantaram

samasta loka sankaram nirasta daitya kunjaram
 daretarodaram varam varebhavakram aksaram
 krpakaram ksamataram mudakaram yasaskaram
 manaskaram namaskrtam namaskaromi bhasvaram

akincanarti marjanam cirantanokti bhajanam
 puraripurvanandanam. surari garva carvanam
 prapanca nasa bhisamam dhananjayadi bhusanam
 kapoladanavaranam bhaje puranavaranam

nitanta kanta dantakantim antakantakatmajam
 acintyarupam antahinam antaraya krntanam
 hrdantare nirantaram vasantameva yoginam
 tamekadantamekameva tam cintayami santatam

mahaganesa pancaratnam adarena yon'vaham

prajalpati prabhatake hrdi smaran ganesvaram
arogatam adosatam susahitim suputrata
samahitayurasta bhutim abhyupaiti so'cirat.

Chapter 6: Who Am I?

1. For more on Cintamani of Theur, see *Mudgala Purana, kanda 2*, chapter 13.
2. Author's personal experience.
3. Paraphrase of *Mundaka Upanisad 3.1*. In *Principal Upanisads*.
4. *Naiskarmyasiddhi 3.1-3, 5, 9-10;, 22-29, 53, 75-80, 117-22*.
5. See *Vedantaparibhasa 4*, pp. 93-102.
6. *Gauni-vrtti* resembles *laksana-vrtti*. For their difference see Kumarila Bhatta's *Tantravartika* or Sarvajnatman's *Samksepariraka*.
7. *Naiskarmyasiddhi 2.28*.
8. Ibid., 2.29.
9. See *Pancadasi 8.42f.* and *Siddhantalesasangraha 1.34*, where this verse is discussed.
10. *Paiicadasi,2.56*.
11. This is the central topic of Grimes, *Problems and Perspectives in Religious Discourse: Advaita Vedanta Implications*.

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12. See *Mundaka Upanisad 3.1.7-8*.
13. *Mandukyakarika 3.18*.
14. *Naiskarmyasiddhi 3.9*. The sentence, "the ether in the pot is the ether in the sky" is unintelligible without referring to the ether without any limiting adjuncts or qualifications.
15. Ibid., 3.10.
16. *Vivekacudamani 254-63*.
17. *Chandogya Upanisad 6.1.1--6.16.3*

Chapter 7: Worship of Ganapati

1. For more on Vignesvara of Ojhar, see *Mudgala Purana, kanda 4*,chapter 15.
2. Among numerous relevant texts, see *Narada Purana 3.65*.
3. See S. K. Ramacandra Rao, *Ganesa kosa*,for this reference.
4. Ibid.
5. In general, there are two types of *pujas*,Vedic *pujas*,which employ the *mantras* from the Vedic literature, and tantric *pujas*, which involve speacial ritual techniques. The basic difference between them is that the worshipper identifies with the deity in tantric *pujas* by the use of special rites such as *bhutasuddhi*, *nyasa*,and so on. Tantrism also imagines that the deity comes from within or from the devotee's heart, while Vedic *pujas* assume that the deity comes from outside

the *murti*. Tantric *puras* also employ the frequent use of symbolic gestures (*mudras*), seed sounds (*bija*), diagrams (*mandala*, *cakra*, *yantra*) and meditation (*dhyana*).

6. *Prasad* literally means "grace."

7. The *Bhagavata Purana* 11.27.12 says images are made from: stone, wood, metal, clay, painted, sand, mental or jewels. The *Skanda Purana* says they may be made from: jewels, gold, silver, copper, brass, metal, stone, wood, and clay. For more details, see H. D. Smith and K. K. A. Venkatachari, *A Sourcebook of Vaisnava Iconography* (Madras, 1969), 15-59.

8. Ganesa is worshipped in the form of a red stone from the Narmada River, Visnu in the form of a *salagrama* stone, Siva in the form of a *bana linga*, Devi in the form of a metallic stone, and Surya in the form of a *suryakanta* gem or crystal.

9. *Manusmrti* 1.8.

10. *Mahabharata* 3.65.23.

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11. There is a story about this. Siva defeated the demon *Tarakasura* on this day because he had worshipped Ganesa before going into battle. See G. S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men* (Bombay, 1962), 99-100.

12. This day is also known as the day when Ganesa cursed the moon and caused it to wax and wane. Also, on this day the story is told in connection with this myth of Krsna and the *syamantaka* jewel. See Courtright, *Ganesa*, 169-70.

13. The *mantra* "devasya prana iha pranah" [the life of the worshipper is the life of the god] is recited dissolving the separation between them.

14. *Rg Veda Purusasukta* 10.90.

15. Ibid.

16. See Buhnemann, *Puja*. Preliminaries consist of: sipping of water (*acamana*), breath control (*pranayama*), salutation to the gods (*devatavandana*), prayer (*prarthana*), announcement of place and time and declaration (*desakaloccarana/samkalpa*), recalling Ganapati (*ganapatismarana*), rite for taking the seat (*asanavidhi*), purification (*nyasa*), worship of the vessel (*kalaSapuja*), worship of the conch (*sankhapuja*), worship of the bell (*ghantapuja*), worship of the lamp (*dipapuja*), sprinkling (*proksana*), and meditation (*dhyana*). Number 6, bath, includes bath with milk (*payahsnana*), bath with curd (*dadhisnana*), bath with ghee (*ghrtasndna*), bath with honey (*madhusnana*), bath with sugar (*Sarkarasnana*), bath of water with sandalpaste (*gandhadakasnana*). Other services include: ritual bath (*abhiseka*), unbroken rice (*aksata*), fruit (*phala*), gift (*daksina*), prayer (*prarthana*).

17. om sahasrasirsa purusah sahasraksah sahasrapat, sa bhumim visvato vrtva'ty atisthad dasanigulam (*Rg Veda* 10.90.1). agaccha devadevesa tejorase jagatpate, kriyamanam maya pujam grhana surasattama. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, avahanarthe puspanjalim samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja*).

18. om purusa evedam sarvam yad bhutam yac ca bhavyam, utamrtatvasyesano yad annenati-rohati (*Rg Veda* 10.90.2). nanaratnasamayuktam kartasvaravibhusitam, asanam devadevesa prityartham pratigrhyatam. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, asanarthe tulasi patram samarpayami (the deity is offered a tulasi or holy basil leaf as a substitute for a seat decorated with gold and jewels) (*Sodasopacarapuja*).

19. om etavan asya mahima'to jyayams ca purusah, pado'sya visva bhutani tripad asyamrtam divi (*Rg Veda* 10.90.3). padyam. grhana devesa sarvaksemasamartha bhoh, bhaktyd samarpitam deva lokanatha namo'stu te. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, padyam samarpayami. Tradition says six people are worthy of *arghya*: teacher, officiating priest, father-in-law, king, friend, brahmin (*Sodasopacarapuja*).

20. om tripad urdhva ud ait purusah pado'syehabhat punah, tato visvan vy akramat sasananasane abhi (*Rg Veda* 10.90.4). namas te deva-

devesa namas te dharanidhara, namas te jadadadhara arghyam nah pratigrhyatam (*Sodasopacarapuja*).

21. om tasmad vira! ajayata virajo adhi purusah, sa jato aty aricyata pascad bhumin atho purah (*Rg Veda* 10.90.5). karpuravasitam toyam mandakinyah samahrtam, acamyatam jagannatha maya dattam hi bhaktitah. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, acamaniyam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja*).

22. om yat purusena havisa deva yajnam atanvata, vasanto asysid ajyam grisma idhmah sarad dhavih (*Rg Veda* 10.90.6). gangasarasvatirevapayosninarmedajalaih, snapito'si maya deva thata santim kurusva me. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, snaniyam samarpayami, pancamrtaih snapayisye (*Sodasopacarapuja* 1.5). This water is identified with the water of all the sacred rivers. After the water-bath follows a bath with the five sacred substances, milk, curd, ghee, honey, sugar. Besides being medicinal, curds gives power, honey gives life, ghee gives brilliance, water give immortality.

23. om tam yajnam barhisi prauksan purusam jatam agratah, tena deva ayajanta sadhya rsayas ca ye (*Rg Veda* 10.90.7). sarvabhusadlike saumye lokalajjanivarane, mayopapadite tubhyam vasasi pratigrhyatam. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, vastram samarpayami, acamaniyam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 1.6). These should be untailored pieces of cloth, preferably made of silk. A yellow garment for Visnu, a white one for Siva, a red one for Ganesa, Devi, and Surya.

24. om tasmad yajnat sarvahutah sambhrtam prasadajyam, pasun tams cakre vayavyan aranyan gramyas ca ye (*Rg Veda* 10.90.8). devadeva namas te 'stu trahi mam bhavasagarat, brahmasutram sottariyam grhana purusottama. sri amukadevatabhyo namah, yajnopavitam samarpayami, acamaniyam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.2). The sacred thread is worn by *brahmins*, *ksatriyas*, and *vaisyas* on the left shoulder and under the right arm.

25. om tasmad yajnat sarvahuta rcah samani jajnire, candamsi jajnire tasmad yajus tasmad ajayata (*Rg Veda* 10.90.9). srikhandam candanam divyam gandhadhyam sumanoharam, vilepanam surasrestha candanam pratigrhyatam. amukadevatabhyo namah, *candanam samarpayami* (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.3). Sandalwood paste is known for its cooling qualities. It is applied with the ring finger of the right hand.

26. om tasmad asva ajayanta ye ke cobhayadatah, gavo ha jajnire tasmattasmaj jata ajavayah (*Rg Veda* 10.90.10). malyadini sugandhini malatyadini vai prabho, mayahrtani pujartham puspani pratigrhyatam. sevantikabakulacampakapatlabjaih pumnagajatikaravirara-salapuspaih, bilva-pravalatulasidalamalatibhis tvam pujayami jadadisvara me prasida. amuka-devatabhyo namah, puspani samarpayami *Sodasopacarapuja* 2.6). Ganapati likes *durva* grass; not to Devi, *tulasi* to Visnu, not to Ganesa; *bilva* leaves to Siva, not to Surya. See *Mudgala Purana* 5.31 for the reason Ganesa

doesn't like *tulasi*. Flowers should be offered with middle and ring finger of the right hand. They should not be smelled before they are offered.

27. om yat purusam vy adadhuh katidha vy akalpayan, mukham kim asya kau bahu ka uru pada ucyete (*Rg Veda* 10.90.11). vanaspatisodbhuto gandhadhyo gandha uttamah, aghreyah sarvadevanam dhupo 'yam pratigrhyatam. amukadevatabhyo namah, dhupam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.8).

28. om brahmano 'sya mukham asid bahu rajanyah krtah, uru tad asya yad vaisyah padbhyam sudro ajayata (*Rg Veda* 10.90.12). ajyam suvartisamyuktam vahnina yojitam maya, dipam grhana devesa trailokyatimirapaha. bhaktya dipam prayacchami devaya paramatmane, trahi mam nirayad ghorad dipo 'yam pratigrhyatam. amukadevatabhyo namah, dipam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.9).

29. om candrama manaso jatas caksoh suryo ajayata, mukhad indras cagnis 'ca pranad vayur ajayata (*Rg Veda* 10.90.13). naivedyam grhyatam deva bhaktim me hy acalam kuru, ipsitam me varam dehi paratra ca param gatim. sarkarakhandakhadyani dadhiksiraghrtani ca, aharam bhaksyabhokym ca naivedyam pratigrhyatam. amukadevatabhyo namah, naivedyam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.10).

30. pugiphalam. mahad divyam nagavallidalair yutam, karpurailasamayuktam. tambulam pratigrhyatam.

amukadevatabhyo namah, tambulam samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.11).

31. om nabhya asid antariksam sirsno dyauh sam avartata, padbhyam bhumir disah srotrat tatha lokan akalpayan (*Rg Veda* 10.90.14). namah sarvahitarthaya jagadadharahetave, sastango 'yam pranamas te prayatnena maya krtah. namo 'stv anantaya sahasramurtaye sahasrapadaksisirorubahave, sahasranamne purusaya sasvate sahasrakotiyugadharine namah. amukadevatabhyo namah, namaskaran samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.12).

32. om saptasyasan paridhayas trih sapta samidhah krtah, deva yad yajfnam tanvana abadhnan purusam paum (*Rg Veda* 10.90.15). yani kani ca papani janmantarakrtani ca, tani tani vinasanti pradaksinapade pade. amukadevatabhyo namah, pradaksinah samarpayami (*Sodasopacarapuja* 2.16). One always walks around the image clockwise, always keeping it to one's right side to show respect. If this is not possible, the devotee may turn around himself on the spot.

33. om yajnena yajnam ayajanta devas tani dharmani prathamany asan, te ha nakam mahimanah sacanta yatra purve sadhyah santi devah (*Rg Veda* 10.90.16). *Sodasopacarapuja* 2.17.

34. Courtright, *Ganesa*,176.

Chapter 8: Lovers of the Beloved

1. Paraphrase of a quote from Manikkavacakar.
2. For more on Ballalesvara of Pali, see *Ganesa Purana*, *prakarana* 7, chaps. 22-24, and *Mudgala Purana*, *kanda* 8, chapter 14.
3. For information on Avvaiyar see, Rajagopalachari, *Avvaiar*; Navaratnam, *Aum Ganesa*; Sivaya Subramuniya, *Lord Ganesha*.
4. The Nayanmars (leaders) are sixty-three Saivite saints who are venerated and worshipped in South India. Sundaramurti was one of the four great Nayanmars (collectively known as "Nalvar") and Cheraman Perumal was a Kerala King and close friend of Sundarar. When Sundarar mounted the white elephant sent by Lord Siva to take him to Kailasa, Cheraman, unwilling to be left behind, mounted his own white horse and whispered the great liberating *mantra* "Om namah sivayah" in its ear, upon which the horse is said to have flown to Kailasa.
5. See Avvaiyar's poem, *Vinayaka Ahaval*, in Navaratnam, *Aum Ganesa*, 49-51. See Avvaiyar's poems in Rajagopalachari, *Avvajar*, 25-32.
6. Tamil oral tradition. Related to me by Harikatha Bhagavathar Balameera Chandra Balasubramanian. (Note: All of Avvaiyar's hymns quoted herein were related by her.)
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Adoration to Vinayaka [*Vinayaka Ahaval*]

Citak kalapac centa marayppum, Patac cilampu palaicay patap
 Ponnaray nanum puntuki latayyum, Vanna marunkil valarntala
 kerippap
 Pelay vayirum perumparak kotum, Vela mukamum vilankucin
 turamum
 Ancu karamum ankuca pasamum, Nencir kutikonta nila
 meniyum
 Nanra vayum naliru puyamum, Munru kannum mummatac
 cuvatum
 Irantu ceviyum ilankupon mutiyum, Tirantamup purinul tikaloli

marpum

Corpatan katanta turiya meynana, Arputa ninra karpakak kalire
 Muppalam nukaru musika vahana, Ippolu tennai atkola ventit
 Taya yenakkut taneluntaruli, Mayappiravi mayakkam aruttut
 Tiruntya mutualayn teluttun telivay, Poruntave vantten
 ulantanirpuantu
 Kuruvati vakik kuvalayan tannil, Tiruvati vayttut tiramyitu
 porulena

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Vata vakay tan makilntenak karulik, Kotayutattar kotuvinay
 kalyante
 Uvatta upatesam pukatti en ceviyil, Tevittata nanat telivayyun
 katti
 Aympulan tannay atakkum upayam, Inpuru karunayyininitenak
 karulik
 Karuvika lotukkum karuttinay arivittu, Iruvinay tannay aruttirul
 katintu
 Talamoru nankum tantenak karuli, Malamoru munrin mayakka
 marutte
 Onpatu ayil oruman tirattal, Aympulak katabay atayppatun katti
 Ara tarat tankuca nilayyum, Pera niruttip peccuray arutte
 Itaypin kalayyin eluttari vittuk, Katayyir cuumunayk kapalamun
 katti
 Munru mantalattin muttiya tunin, Nanrelu pampin navilunarttik
 Kuntali yatanir kutiya acapay, Vintelu mantiram velippata
 uraytu
 Mula tarattin muntelu kanalayk, Kala lelupplun karuttari vitte
 Amuta nilayyum atittan iyakkamum, Kumuta cakayan
 kunattayyun kuri
 Itayc cakkarattin irettu nilayyum, Utar cakkarattin uruppayun
 kattic
 Canmuka tulamun caturmuka cutcamum, Enmuka maka
 initenak karulip
 Puriyattakayam pulappata enakkut, Teri ettu nilayyun tericanap
 patuttik
 Karuttinir kapala vayil katti, Irutti mutti initenak karuli
 Ennay arivit tenakkarul ceytu, Munnay vinayyin mutualayk
 kalyantu
 Vakku manamu milla manolayan, Tekkiye entan cintay telivittu
 Irul veli yirantuk onrita menna, Arul tarum ananta talutti en
 ceviyil
 Ellay yilla anantam alittu, Allal kalyante arulvali kattic
 Cattattinulle catacivan kattic, Cittatti nulle civalinkam kattic
 Anuvir kanuva yappaluk kappalayk, Kanu murri ninra
 karumpulle katti
 Vetamu nirum vilanka niruttik, Kutumeyt tontar kulattutan kutti
 Ancak karatti narumporul tannay, Nencak karuttin nilayyari
 vittut
 Tattuva nilayayt tantenay yanta, Vittaka vinayaka viraykalal
 carane.
 (Excerpted from Navaratnam, Aum Ganesa,45-52)

10. Line fifteen. This line can also be translated, "Wish-yielding elephant enshrining the mystery beyond the reach of

words."

Chapter 9:
Who Is Ganapati/Ganesa?

1. Rup Goswami in his *Laghu Bhagwat*.
2. For more on Varada Vinayaka of Mahad, see *Ganesa Purana*,chaps. 19-37 and *Mudgala Purana*,chap. 17, *kanda* 5.
3. See *Rg Veda* 2.1.3.
4. *Skanda Purana* 1.1.9.91-10.9.75; *Padma Purana*, *Srstikhanda* 67.22-56.
5. This is a story that Swami Muktananda was very fond of telling. See "A Million Times Brighter," *DARSHAN* vol. 41-42, September 1990, p. 57. SYDA Foundation, South Fallsburg, NY.

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