

THE DESTROYER OF OBSTACLES

by Kalkinath

*You of the twisted trunk and the massive body
With the dazzle 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.*

Ganesha, the elephant-headed one, is one of the most popular deities of the Indian sub-continent. Prayers to Ganesha precede all other acts of worship and ceremony. He is invoked to remove obstacles from one's path and to pass luck, he grants prosperity to those who deal in commerce, and freedom to those who seek liberation. Ganesha: vermilion coloured, with the head of an elephant; the body of a man. In his four hands he holds a tusk, a noose, a goad, and makes the gesture of granting boons. He holds in his trunk a pomegranate and the crescent moon is upon his forehead. A serpent is entwined around his split belly. He has the strength of an elephant, the intelligence of man, and the subtlety and cunning of a mouse, which is his vehicle.

Ganesha may be invoked to remove obstacles. In Tantra, this is known as Klesha-smashing. The Kleshas (blocks) are the veils of conditioned belief and response - habitual patterns of attitude and emotional loops which maintain the boundaries of our Achievable Reality. Some Tantrics say that the root Kleshas are: Ignorance, Ego, Revulsion, Attachment, and Clinging to Life. Like Chaos Magic, Tantra places an emphasis on deconditioning. Invoke Ganesha to illuminate the dark corners of your psyche, to look into the doors marked "I dare not enter here." Find out what is there, and act to reconfigure it. Ritual is not enough - what matters is thought, word and deed - action in the everyday world. The results of magic must be made flesh: Samarasa - Natural. Each knot unbound is a release; an orgasmic realisation of the dizzying freedom open to us beyond the limitations that we set up for ourselves. The *Upa Parana* details eight incarnations of Ganesha, who fought and overcame obsessional demons: Kaamaasura (lust), Krodhaasura (unjust anger), Lobhaasura (greed), Mohaasura (infatuation), Maatsara (jealousy), Mamaasura (attachment), and Abhimaansura (egotistic pride).

The origins of Ganesha worship can be traced back to the pre-Vedic Naga tribes of India. The

elephant is of prime importance in Indian agricultural life, and it is possible that Ganesha was originally a harvest deity, venerated by farmers in respect of the elephant's usefulness, both as a worker and a destroyer of pests. Later, his association with wisdom and learning led to the growth of an aspect of Ganesha as a scribe, holding his broken-off tusk in the manner of a pen (it can also be seen as a weapon, or plough). Ganesha acted as the scribe to Vyasa, the author of the epic Mahabharata. Over time, Ganesha has become one of the most popular Hindu Gods.

Ganesha is often depicted as dancing, for he is playful and filled with joy and delight. Although he subdues demons, he lacks gravity and pride. The son of Shiva and Parvati, he is the beloved one of all the Gods, a very Puckish figure respected by all. Place Ganesha in your belly, and meditate upon his ecstatic dance, for he is freedom personified. He grants wealth, but he is free of attachment to wealth. He is wise, yet not ponderous. He has many talents, yet he is not fettered by them. In most parts of India, he is considered to be celibate, although some Tantric icons of the god show him seated with a Shakti (power). In the aspect of Lakshmi Ganapati (the giver of success) he is flanked by the goddesses Siddhi (achievement) and Buddhi (wisdom). One of his most popular contemporary forms is a benign form, holding a noose, an elephant goad, a vessel of sweets, and giving a protective gesture.

There is a rich variety of symbolism contained within the figure of Ganesha. His huge, pot-bellied body represents the Universe - Nature, mankind, and the gods themselves reside within his belly. His elephant's head represents the qualities of the elephant - thus he is affectionate, wise, gentle, and loyal; yet when aroused, he can be extremely ruthless and destructive. His large ears, 'like winnowing baskets', sift truth from fiction, and recall the Vedic axiom that learning can only take place by listening at the feet of the Guru. A Tantric interpretation of this idea is that liberation can only be achieved by *paying attention* to what is around you - by stilling the chatter of the internal dialogue and experiencing the world as it is, rather than how you think it is. Ganesha's trunk is symbolic of the quality of discrimination - the first great lesson for any would-be magician. The elephant can use its

trunk for heavy tasks, such as moving a log, or very delicate acts. The curved trunk also symbolises the root mantra OM, the sound from which the universe was created. The broken tusk has many associations. It shows, for one thing, that Ganesha is not bound by the desires for balance and symmetry (which are central obsessions in Hindu philosophy). By breaking off a tusk to use as a weapon or pen, Ganesha demonstrates the sacrifice of deities to humanity.

One of the most common 'vehicles' (mounts) associated with Ganesha is the mouse. This is a strange relationship, because, unlike other vehicles, such as the Garuda bird on which Shiva rides, the mouse is never venerated in its own right. This may harken back to Ganesha's aspect of a harvest deity, when he was propitiated to destroy rodents that threatened crops. The mouse is often associated with small desires and doubts - the kleshas which we continually assail ourselves with.

Ganesha is commonly depicted with four arms (though some icons show him with eight or as many as sixteen). One hand is usually depicted as giving a mudra (gesture), such as the mudra of granting boons, or giving protection. Two of the weapons which are commonly attributed to him are the *ankusha* (elephant goad) and the *paasha* (noose). The goad is used to steer those who invoke him onto the path of liberation, and the noose is a warning against false attachment and desires. If Ganesha is invoked in his aspect of crushing demons, he holds weapons of power, such as the trident, snake, spear, or bow.

The crescent moon on Ganesha's brow is symbolic of illumination and attainment. The snake entwined about his belly is symbolic of energy and wisdom. He is sometimes shown as having three eyes, representing Surya (sun), Chandra (moon) and Agni (fire).

GANESHA PUJA

Ganesha may be invoked before beginning any act of magic, for he ensures success and sweeps away obstacles and hindrances. Shiva, his father, decreed that he should be invoked before any auspicious undertaking, by both gods and men. You will find that any wily businessman will have, somewhere on his premises, a shrine to Ganesha. A swastika is one of the most common symbols associated with Ganesha, and this can be drawn as a simple yantra upon which a statuette of the god can be placed.

A simple and effective invocation of Ganesha is to meditate upon him growing inside your belly, in an appropriate aspect to the nature of your work, and meditate upon the qualities which you wish to draw

upon. A mantra may be recited, such as *Om Ganapataye Namah*, to assist your concentration. This is known as 'internal worship'.

The next stage in the Puja is 'external worship'. The Ganesha which you have grown inside yourself is breathed out into the icon you are using. This may be a statuette or picture of the god in one of his many forms. Unlike western magic, the relationship between man and deities is not always distinct. In Tantra, the gods and goddesses are separate beings and, at the same time, parts of us. Sankatahara Chaturthi is a special day for rituals to remove sorrows. There is also the Tantric equivalent of a magical retirement whereby Puja is performed daily for 41 days. Ganesha may be invoked here in his form, Mulahadra Ganapati. Mulahadra is the root-support chakra, whose symbolic vehicle is an elephant, and which is the seat of Kundalini-Shakti - the serpent power which binds all forms in equilibrium. The aim here is not so much to force the arousal of Kundalini, but to strip away the veils of conditioning and illusion until you feel the power of Kundalini working through you. Westerners have been misled by the depiction of Kundalini as sleeping, but sleeping does not refer to inactivity but to the 'world-bewildering' sleep which maintains the forces of the universe. Some Tantrics believe that the chakras are themselves 'knots', to be dissolved in the attainment of ecstasy and liberation.

In India, the great celebration of *Ganesha Chaturthi* takes place once a year. Huge images of Ganesha are specially made, and after several days of celebration are taken in procession to be left in the sea or rivers, where they are 'sacrificed' to become one with the elements.

Ganesha is particularly useful for works relating to Wealth Magic and Healing. As shown above, he can also be invoked to assist in the Illuminatory work of Ego-Magic, in identifying, binding and integrating demons and conditioning. Through invocation and Bhakti (Results Mysticism) you can form a Ganesha-Self who can embody the qualities of the god, whilst remaining unfettered by them.

Ganesha, alone amongst the Indian deities, was 'born' to Shiva and Parvati. Complex as his symbolism is, he is venerated by both the educated and the illiterate, and there is no formalised style of worship necessary, beyond that which springs from the heart. He is both playful and wise, stern and gentle, loyal and persuasive, calmly powerful and peaceful. Like many Hindu deities, his cult has spread across Asia, to Nepal, China, Japan and South-East Asia. Some scholars believe that elephant-headed gods in Mexico and Central America are forms of Ganesha.