



Ganesh Puja

By Govind Cornelison

I once observed a Brahmin priest perform a ritual in a way that was a great lesson about the nature of puja. Unlike priests at other shrines who performed their pujas according to the cookbook as a well-worn ritual of familiarity, this priest's every gesture and word came from an open heart, trembling with the passion of devotion. As he progressed through the ritual, his focus became more intense, until at its end he entered the *garbagriha* (the secret womb or house of the deity that a temple has for each) and closed its curtains to commune with the deity. After a moment, a shocking flood of shakti came from its door, the grace of the deity's presence. The priest came out, looking both exalted and humbled. He was a wonderful example of the power of devotion--the puja of the open heart.

Why might we do Ganesh puja? Ganesh is associated with Nityananda, the fountainhead of our lineage. The Adivasi tribal folk of the Thana Valley considered Nityananda to be the incarnation of Ganesh—hence the name of the village, Ganeshpuri. As the offspring of Shiva and Shakti, Ganesh represents their union. He is generally considered to be seated at the root chakra, which according to the Shri Vidya tradition is also the seat of siddhi, matrika, and mudra—all that may either bind or release one.

Ganesh is placed before most Hindu temples to remove any obstacles before entering, so that one might actually have the darshan of the deity inside. In the same way, Ganesh should be invoked in order to remove all the obscurations from the realization of one's Self.

The actual puja may be as simple as you like, as all the offerings act as supports to the natural opening of the heart, and that is entirely a personal affair. It could include some basil leaf, sacred to Ganesh, as an offering to the soul of earth; a flower to represent the expanse of ether, continually unfolding; incense burning, to enter the expanse of wind, the *hamsa-prana*; a cup of water or tea to remember the pure nectar of the Guru; sweets of your preference, a reflection of the sweetness of self-awareness. Arati, the waving of the light, may be done with a simple candle, representing the circulation of the light; it's best done while ringing a bell—creating the sacred space of awakened presence. So all the offerings, which are basically an offering of one's senses and sense organs, all have a higher octave of meaning, as reflections of the Self.

After doing the puja to Ganesh, it's best to sit in the silence of the Heart, or if that isn't readily present, one may do the Ganesh mantra Swamiji has given us in his infinite kindness, remembering that any mantra received from the Guru embodies his presence.

The main thing about puja that I try to remember is that simplicity is not a place of beginning, but a place of arrival. Puja is yoga, not ritual actions according to a cookbook. True puja reveals one's identity with the deity. ॐ