



Šri Ganeša Chaturthi Celebrations Nava-Dina Mahotsavam

Friday, Sept. 2nd thru Sunday, Sept. 11th, 2016



Significance of the Rituals



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ŚRI GANEŚA CHATURTHI CELEBRATIONS

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It is believed that if one were to pray to Lord *Ganeśa* sincerely on *Ganeśa Chaturthi* (Monday 5th), considered to be His most auspicious day, He would remove all our obstacles, especially in our hearts.

One of the main purposes of this nine-day *Chaturthi* celebration is to give an extra boost of divine *śakti* (energy) to the main *vigraha* of *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*. This is done mainly through *japa* (repetitive chanting of a *mantra*) and *homam* (fire worship) where the divine vibrations of the *mantras* are infused in the water kept in the *kalaśas*. This sanctified water is subsequently poured on Lord *Ganeśa's* *vigraha*.



The *Nava Dina* (nine-day) *Ganeśa Chaturthi Mahotsavam* (great festival) is the most important annual celebration of our Temple. Devotees with varied interests and skills, come to the Temple either individually or collectively, to pray, mingle, express themselves, serve and/or expand their horizons. This celebration offers something for everyone.

Keeping in mind the diverse ways in which people worship HIM, our wise sages have devised different rituals into our religion, thereby providing something of interest for everyone to participate in and connect with divine powers, which is the ultimate aim of all rituals.

Whether we participate in *japa*, be mesmerized by the *abhishekam* (holy bath) or gaze with devotion at the *alankāram* (special decoration) of the day, dance along with the *prākāra utsavam* (palanquin) or the *ratha yātra* (chariot procession), sing *bhajans* (devotional songs), do *seva* (serve fellow-devotees selflessly), or just enjoy the melodious music of the *nāgaswaram*, all these avenues lead us to the same goal - arresting the agitations of our mind and deriving serenity while focusing on Lord *Ganeśa*.

There are many rituals to be completed each day, each with its own rationality. Understanding their meaning would give us an appreciation of the philosophy of *Sanātana Dharma*, (a.k.a. Hinduism), and also the clairvoyance of the ancient sages. This could give us Hindu awareness which in turn would help us take pride in being an informed Hindu.

BRIEF EXPLANATIONS OF SOME OF THE RITUALS OF THE NAVA DINA UTSAVAM (NINE DAY FESTIVAL)

On Friday, September 2nd, the first day, the sacred cow is brought in for the *Go (cow) Pooja*. The presence of the sacred cow ensures an auspicious beginning and the smooth sailing through all nine days.

Anujña or permission (and blessings) are sought from *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati* and also *Guru Sage Agastiyar*. The main priests are chosen during the *āchārya ritvik varanam*. *Punyābhavāchanam* cleanses and purifies the surroundings. *Śri Ganeśa* is invoked on a clay image and placed next to the *Utsava Ganeśa*, prayed to for the next nine days, and dissolved on the last day.

As is done before beginning any elaborate ritual, benevolent spirits are appeased to stay by the *Vāstuśānti*, and the malevolent energies are coaxed to leave the Temple by the *Paryagni karanam* by setting on fire a readily combustible black effigy and taking it around the Temple to drive the negative spirits out. To keep them out, a white pumpkin is cut, coated with red vermilion, and offered as *praveśabali* (sacrifice).



Mritsangrahanam is the collecting of soil to be distributed in odd number of pots, collectively called *pālīka*. *Nava dhānya* (nine traditional grains) are sown in the *pālīka* and watered during the *yāgaśāla pooja*. The sprouts are offered (*Ankurārpanam*), for the *yajña*'s growth, and disbursed on the ninth day.



Saturday Sept. 3rd starts with the *prākāra utsavam* (*utsava Ganeśa* on a palanquin) and after *devata āvhanam* (invoking the benevolent spirits), *dhvaja ārohana* (flag unfurling) is held to the accompaniment of *Vedic* chanting and the *Nāgaswara*. This festive flag is kept hoisted for the duration of the festival, and on the final day, it is brought down, concluding the festival.

In the *yāgaśāla*, Lord *Ganeśa* is invoked on (1) the *Bimba* (His image in the far back), (2) *kumbha* (the main central *kalaśa* or ceremonial pot), (3) *agni kunda* (the fire pit), (4) *mandala* (a colorful geometrical pattern representing Lord *Ganeśa*), and sometimes also on (5) a *yantra* (a geometrical representation of Lord *Ganesa*'s different roles and energies, on a thin metal sheet). The *pradhana archaka* (the main priest) is also empowered to become one with Lord *Ganeśa* as a result of perfect harmony of his body, speech and mind. *Agni*, the fire God, is both a representative and a messenger.

Agni (fire) for the *yajña* had been drawn the previous day, directly from the sun God, *Surya*. The hot sun's rays were focused through a magnifying glass on cotton and wood shavings while chanting Vedic verses. To this fire, more flammable materials are added and preserved overnight. This fire will now be used to start the *yajña*.

At the *yāgaśāla*, 52 *kalaśas* representing various supporting Deities are arranged. **Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Pradhāna Kalaśa Sthāpanam** installs the main *kalaśa* of Lord *Ganeśa*. The *yāgaśāla pooja* invokes the spirits into the other *kalaśas*. Now that the *yāgaśāla* has divine presence, the **Chatur Laksha Śri Mahā Ganapati Moola Mantra japa/homa** (the chanting of the *moola mantra* 4000,000 times, along with the *homa* by priests) **begins**.



Around the *prākāra* (the space around the Temple), nine *bali peethas* (raised stones for offerings) are established to honor the *ashta dik pālakas* (the divine spirits that rule over the eight directions). In the *Nava Sandhi*, offerings are made every morning and evening to these spirits - *Indra*, *Agni*, *Yama*, *Nirrtuti*, *Varuna*, *Vāyu*, *Kubera*, and *Eśāna*, and *Brahmā*, and to appease and also thank them for their blessings.

On all the nine days, after the **abbishekam** for *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*, both the *moolavar* (the large main stone idol) and the *utsavar* (the smaller metal idol) give us *darśan* (sight) in different **special alankārams** (decorations). This is followed by *ashtotthara śata nāma archana* - the reciting of 108 descriptive names of *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*.

After the conclusion of every *japa/homa* session, **poornābhuti**, the final offering of a *homa*, takes place. A sample of all that was offered during the *homa* and other materials are bundled up in silk cloth and offered into the fire. The priest then symbolically gathers up the *śakti* (energy) from the fire and offers it to the main *kumbha* (*Śri Ganapati Kalaśa*), and to the *Bimba* of Lord *Ganeśa*. It is believed that all the Deities invoked in the *homa* gather around for their share of the offering and so this is an auspicious moment to get Their blessings.



At the completion of the evening session, and the morning sessions during weekends, *utsava* *vigraha* of *Śri Ganapati* is taken for the *prākāra utsavam* to the *yāgaśala* to accept the offerings of the *poornāhuti*, and back into the *mahā mantapa* (main Temple hall). This is followed by *bhāratī*, completing all rituals for that session.

In the afternoon, the *nava sandhi* and *bali pooja* gets underway. The nine directional Deities are invoked by specific *rāgās* (musical scales), *tālās* (rhythm), *mudras* (hand gestures) and *bharata nāṭyam* (classical Indian dance) compositions. Offerings (*bali*) are for receiving their blessings and protection. *Sahasranāma archana* (reciting 1,008 names of Lord *Ganeśa*) is performed every evening in the *Mahā Mantapa*, followed by *Śri Mahā Ganapati Upachāra Pooja* (offering special hospitalities).

Bhādrapada (Aug-Sept) *śukla paksha* (bright fortnight) *tṛtīya* (third lunar day), *Śri Swarna Goweri Vratam* is observed on Sun. 4th, in the *Mahā Mantapa* to honor Goddess *Pārvati*, the mother of *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*. In the *Skanda Purāṇa* Lord *Śiva* narrates to Lord *Shanmukha* that Goddess *Pārvati* had undertaken intense austerities for sixteen years and was finally reunited with Him. He proclaimed that anyone who prays to Goddess *Pārvati* sincerely on this day would be rewarded with a good husband and a happy married life.

ŚRI GANEŠA CHATURTHI DAY - MONDAY, 5th

108 *shankhas* (conch shells) are installed (*sthāpanam*) and is sanctified with a special *pooja*. The sanctified *teertha* (sanctified water) from these shankhas is used to perform a special *abhishekam* on this auspicious day. *Trīṣaṭināma* (300 names) *archana* follows the special *alankāram*. The *Mālā mantra* is also chanted on this day.



As devotees, we get an opportunity to offer our devotion through the *Mṛithigai Ganapati Pooja*, where we can do *pooja* to a small clay *vigraha* of Lord *Ganapati*. Once this is done, we can take Him home to continue expressing our devotion and receive His blessings. This is followed by the reciting of the *Chaturthi Vrata Katha* (the holy story behind why we observe austerities on *Chaturthi* for Lord *Ganeśa*.)

The other special celebration for *chathurthi* day is the *dolotsavam* also known as *oonjal seva* (placing Him on a swing), where the *utsava Šri Ganeša* is placed on a swing and is gently swung while singing slow melodious songs meant to relax Him. In the *oonjal seva* we can envision ourselves giving Him tender parental affection to our Lord.

In the evening, the *Ganapati Sabhasranāma Modaka Archana* with 1008 *modaka* is done while offering *modaka* (rice paste balls filled with a sweet center) for each of the 1008 *nāmā* (name). Offering Him *modaka* is special as He is believed to love *modaka* and also holds it in his one of His right hands.

The concluding highlight of this most auspicious day is the simultaneous *panchamoorthy* (five *vigrahas* of Šri *Ganapati*, Šri *Šiva*, Šri *Shanmukha*, Šri *Venkatešvara*, with their respective consorts and Šri *Hanumān*) *prākāra utsavam* - as a symbolic celebration by all the *Devatas* of this Temple.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th

In the morning, the first highlight of the day is the *Šri Siddhi Buddhi Šri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Thiru Kalyana Utsavam* (Divine wedding of Šri *Ganeša* with Šri *Siddhi* & Šri *Buddhi*). As we witness this Divine union Šri *Ganeša* would bless us and empower us with *siddhi* (success) and *buddhi* (wisdom) as we move forward on our spiritual path.

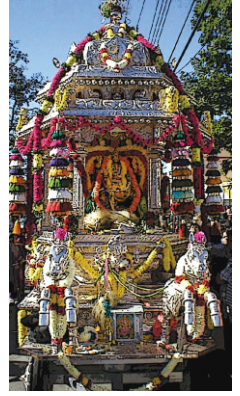
Ganapati pooja by children is another popular highlight. Parents and children look forward to this event eagerly. It has become the tradition of the Temple to encourage children to participate in both the *japa* and the *pooja*. This encourages them to not only get involved in the Temple activities, but develop devotion, and an understanding and liking for rituals. This ensures the continuation of our religious culture and traditions. It is encouraging to notice that the popularity of this *pooja* has been increasing every year.



CONCLUDING DAY – SEPTEMBER 11th

Chaturāvritti Tarpanam is offered by some of the male devotees to *Śri Ganapati yantra* drawn on a plate, while chanting the *moola mantra*, asking Lord *Ganeśa* for His blessings, and also offering back the *phala* (fruits) derived by the *japa* done by the devotee.

In the *Ratha Yātra*, *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati* is visualized as the king coming around His Kingdom, blessing everyone with His *darśan*, especially devotees who are physically unable to visit the Temple. This is perhaps the much awaited portion of the entire celebration. Chanting His name and taking Him around in a chariot enables one to offer their prayers as a group and develop a feeling of unity as the entire community comes together. The entire community participates in this joyful event.



As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this *Nava-dina Chaturthi* celebration is to give an extra boost of divine *śakti* inherent in the *Ganapati moola* (main) *mantra* to the main *vigraha* (image) of *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*. By the end of this nine-day celebration, this purpose would be effectively accomplished.

Mahā poornābhuti is the final *ābhuti* (offering) of the entire *nava dina yajña*. The *kalaśas* with the now sanctified water are ceremoniously lifted up (*Kalaśa uttāpanam*) and reverentially carried into the *Mahā Mantapa*. In the *pradbāna kalaśa abhishekam* and *avabhruta snānam*, only the sacred water (*teertha*) from the main *kalaśa* designated as Lord *Ganeśa* is poured on the *moolava Ganapati*. No other ingredients are used in this *abhishekam*. Also, no special *alankāram* (decoration) is offered for Lord *Ganeśa* after this *avabhruta snānam*.

Dvaja avarohanam, the bringing down of the flag from atop the *dhwajastambha* signals the end of the nine day celebrations. *Pālika visarjanam* is the dispersal of the new growth in a tub of water. *Kummi-kolāttam* is an informal joyous dance, where the devotees clap their hands and go around the tub. *Teerthavāri* is the immersing of the clay image of Lord *Ganeśa* (which was kept near the *utsava Ganapati*) in the tub of water. *Mahā mangala bhāratī* is offered in conclusion of the entire celebration.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A YAJÑA

Lord *Krishna* declares in the *Bhagavad Gita*, that *yajñas* are vital for the sustenance and growth of life. Without *yajñas*, rains may still fall, but could be out of season, scarce or excessive, destroying crops and lives. In a *yajña*, God's grace is sought for the welfare of the whole world.

Japa is the repeated chanting of a *mantra*. *Chatur Laksha Moola Mantra Japa* is the collective, repetitive chanting of the *moola mantra* of Lord *Ganeśa* 400,000 times. It consists of root syllables, which are inherently very potent, profoundly impacting both Lord *Ganeśa* and the chanter. The chanter focuses on the Deity, calming his/her mind.

Homa/Havan is the performing of *āhuti*, the offering of *dravyas* (holy materials), into the *homa kunda*, the fire pit, while chanting a *mantra*. *Agni*, the fire god carries the spirit of the offerings to Lord *Ganeśa*. The *yajamāna* (one who performs the *yajña*) chants the *mantra* aloud and engages his body as well, by performing *āhuti*. This results in perfect harmony of his body, speech and mind as he merges with the Lord.

Chaturāvritti (multiples of four) *Tarpanam* (offering) is the offering of water and milk to *Śri Ganapati yantra* drawn on a plate, while chanting the *Ganapati moola mantra*. *Tarpanam*, offered by male devotees, is said to purify his body, mind and soul, bringing prosperity to himself and the community. Here, we offer back the fruits of performing the *japa/homa*, as an expression of our selflessness. The above three parts of a *yajña* have the power to spiritually elevate the participant.

Mārjanam is the act of cleansing by sprinkling water on the *pradhāna* (main) *kalaśa* designated as *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati*. This is done by the head priest before the commencement of each *japa/homa* session.

Bhojanam, the ceremonial feeding of the priests, is the final component of the *yajña*. In this Temple during this *nava-dina mahotsavam*, beyond the stipulated *bhojanam* for 40 priests, more than 40,000 free food *prasādam* packets are distributed as *Annadānam*.

In this *Yajña*, the above five parts are aimed for 10% of the prior. The aim is for 400,000 times of *japa*, 40,000 *homa āhutis*, 4,000 *tarpanam* offerings, 400 *mārjanams* (sprinkling), and at least 40 *bhojanams*.

*Om Sreem Hreem Kleem Glaum Gam Ganapatayé
Vara Varada Sarva Janam Mé Vaśamānaya Svāhā
(Śri Ganapati Moola mantra)*