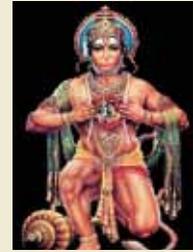


HINDU DEITIES



BALAGOKULAM - HINDU TEMPLE OF CENTRAL INDIANA, INDIANAPOLIS

“EKAM SAT - TRUTH (GOD) IS ONE”



*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Niramayaah
Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu
Maa Kaschit Dukha Bhaag Bhaveta*

TRIMURTI - THE HINDU TRINITY

These three powers are personified as BRAHMA, VISHNU and MAHESH.

Brahman, Supreme *Ishwara*, manifests Himself as three mighty powers, namely, the Creator, the Preserver and the Dissolver.

Each performs different tasks, has different qualities and energies.

Dissolution is an integral part of progress and change, as spiritual success can be achieved only when undesirable thoughts and habits have been eliminated.

Brahman is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

Although formless, He can assume various forms by His divine magical power called *maya*.

The Trimurti is also shown as the three Gods seen to represent earth, water, and fire. The earth as the originator of all life is regarded as Brahma. Water the sustainer of life is represented as Vishnu. Fire consumes or transforms life and is therefore represented as Shiva.

Rig Veda, the oldest of the Hindu scriptures has proclaimed "*Ekam Sat Vipraha, Bahudhah Vadanti*" (God is One, Sages call it by different names).



*Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu
Gurur Devo Maheshwarah
Gurur Saakshaat Parabrahma
Tasmai Shree Gurave Namah*

BRAHMA

Creator of the Universe.

White beard represents His eternal nature. *Chaturmukha*, His four faces represent the sacred knowledge of the four Vedas.

The crowns symbolize superior power.

The four arms represent the four directions and symbolize His omnipresence and omnipotence.

The *akhsamala*, a rosary, represents that the pursuit of knowledge should be continuous.

The *kamandala*, a water pot, represents the water from which this universe evolved. Carries a *kusaa* grass and sacrificial ladle which represent His familiarity with Vedic rituals.

Carries a sacred book (veda) to represent knowledge used in any creative work.

The lotus symbolizes the Supreme Reality.

His *vahana* is the *hansa* or swan, a beautiful and graceful bird that signifies His decision making abilities.

Resides with Goddess Saraswati in *Brahmalok*.

*Om Chathur Mukhaya Vidmahe
Hamasaroodaya Dheemahi
Tanno Brahma Prachodayat*



*Mangalam Bhagwan Vishnu
Mangalam Garudadhvajah
Mangalam Pundarikaksha
Mangalaya Tano Hari*

VISHNU

Provider and Operator of the whole universe.

Is formless and immeasurable like the blue sky. Reclines on the *Sheshanaga*, to depict control over desires and vices.

Wears *Kasturbha* gem around His neck and *namam* on His forehead. Holds the *shankha* (conch), a symbol of the sound 'aum' a call to spiritual seekers and devotees. Carries the *padma* (lotus), a symbol of beauty, harmony and purity.

Holds the *sudharshana chakra* and *gada* (mace), indicating the power to protect the good and destroy the evil.

His *vahana* is Garuda, the swift-flying and powerful eagle, to assure fearlessness and quick response at the time of a calamity.

Resides with Goddess Lakshmi, in the milky waters of *Vaikuntha*.

Also known as Narayana, Rama, Krishna, Balaji, and other names.

Puranas have mentioned the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu (Dasha Avatar). Nine of these avatars have taken place and the tenth avatar will take place towards the end of *Kalyug*.

*Om Narayanaya Vidhmahe
Vasudevaya Dheemahi
Tanno Vishnu Prachodayat*



*Karpura Gauram Karuna Avataram
Sansara Saram Bhujagendra Haram
Sada Vasantam Hridayaravinde
Bhavam Bhavani Sahitam Namami*

MAHESH (SHIVA)

Dissolver and Rejuvenator of the Universe.

He has a simple deer or tiger skin as His clothes, sacred ash smeared on the body, long hair tied together in a knot, snakes around His neck and arms. Wears *rudraksha mala*.

Crescent moon symbolizes complete control over mind and the third eye which is usually closed symbolizes pure knowledge which burns away all duality when opened.

Trishul (trident) shows that he is beyond three *gunas*: *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

The river Ganga flows from his head, signifying that the Lord destroys evil and bestows purity on His devotees. He is embodiment of *Tapas* (Austerity), *Vairagya* (Non-attachment) and Knowledge. He is a master of Yoga and is always meditating for the welfare of the Universe.

His *vahana*, Nandi, stands for righteousness. He is worshipped in the form of a *Lingam*. '*Siva*' literally means 'auspiciousness'.

Lord Shiva, resides on the mountain named Kailasa, where He sits in a state of perpetual meditation along with His consort Parvati.

*Om Tat Purushaya Vidhmahe
Mahadevaya Dheemahi
Tanno Rudra Prachodayat*



*Vakratunda Mahaakaaya
Sooryakoti Samaprabhaa
Nirvighnam Kurumeva Deva
Sarva Kaaryeshu Sarvada*

SHRI GANESH

Son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.

First God to be invoked before any undertaking.

His elephant head denotes wisdom and trunk represents 'Om'. The flexible trunk can pick a small peanut or a big tree means high efficiency and adaptability.

His large ears and forehead, show how knowledge can be gained through listening and thinking.

Ekadanta, has only one tusk, which he broke for writing, as a pen, the Mahabharata which was dictated by Maharishi Ved Vyas.

Pot-belly signifies His ability to digest all experiences.

On His upper right hand he carries an axe to destroy desires and attachments and uses His lower right hand to bless devotees. A bowl of sweets are the rewards of *Sadhna* and hard work.

His *vahana* is a *moushak* (mouse), with the ability to see in the dark, He can lead man from darkness to light.

Ganeshji's elder brother is Kartikeya (Murugan) who is the slayer of Tarakasur.

Vighnesha, the remover of obstacles.

*Om Ekadantaya Vidmahe
Vakratundaya Dheemahi
Tanno Dantih Prachodayat*



*Sree Rama Rama Raameti
Rame Raame Manorame
Sahasra Nama Tattulyam
Rama Nama Varaanane*

BHAGWAN SHRI RAMA

Seventh avatar of Bhagwan Vishnu in which He annihilates the demon king Ravana.

Hero of the epic Ramayana, written by poet Valmiki in Sanskrit and by Goswami Tulsidas in Hindi.

Holds the *kodanda* bow indicating His readiness to destroy evil.

Dark complexioned, a sign of divinity.

Symbol of courtesy and virtue; adheres to *dharma* despite the harsh test of life.

Wins the hand of Sita by breaking the *Rudra Dhanush* (bow of Lord Shiva) at Her *swayamvara*.

Perfect son, who abandons His claim to the throne and serves in exile to honor His father's vow. Wife Sita and brother Lakshman accompany him for 14 years in exile.

'*Rama*' means 'light from within'.

Also known as *Maryaada Purushottam*, the Ideal human being.

*Om Dasharathaya Vidhmahe
Sita Vallabhaya Dheemahi
Tanno Rama Prachodayat*



*Vasudeva Sutam Devam
Kansa Chanoora Mardanam
Devaki Paramanandam
Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum*

BHAGWAN SHRI KRISHNA

Eighth avatar of Bhagwan Vishnu in which the wicked King Kamsa is killed. Son of Vasudev and Devaki.

'*Krsna*' means dark-blue and the one who attracts. He is blue like the infinite sky.

The peacock feather represents the eye of wisdom or '*jnana drishti*'.

The flute, a hollow instrument, spreads the melody of love and shows that being ego-free can help attain moksha.

Yellow of the *dhoti* is the color of peace and mental development.

Gopala or sustainer of the cow, a sacred animal.

'*Tribhanji mudra*' or standing with one leg bent in front of the other.

'*Sudarshana Chakra*' his weapon on His right hand.

The Bhagwat Gita contains advice given by Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Janmashtami is the joyful celebration of Lord Krishna's birth at midnight, as Krishna made his divine appearance at that hour.

He is also known as Jagatguru.

*Om Damodaraya Vidhmahe
Rukmani Vallabhaya Dheemahi
Tanno Krishna Prachodayat*



Govinda Hari Govinda Venkataramana Govinda

SHRI BALAJI

Balaji/Venkateswara is a form of Bhagwan Vishnu.

Venkateswara means “the lord who destroys the sins of the people.”

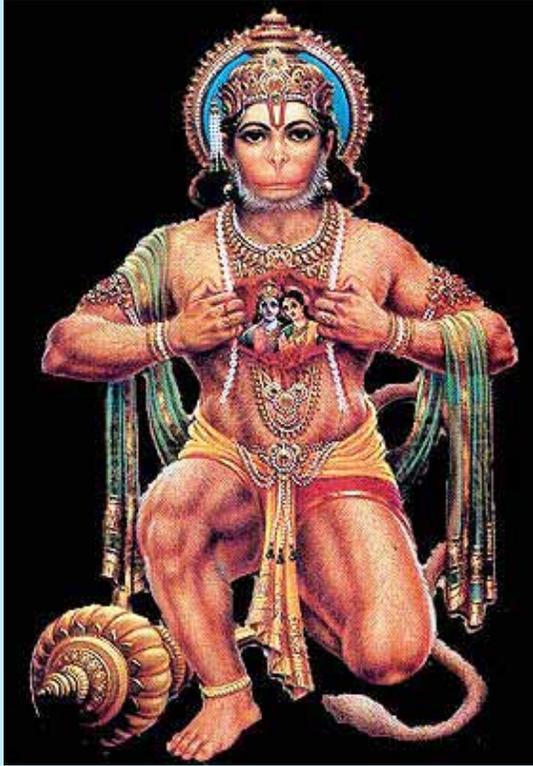
He wears a gold *kiritam* (crown) and a thick *namam* (tilak) on His forehead. His ears are bedecked with *kundalas*. He wears *pitambaram* and is adorned with precious ornaments.

He bears Sri Lakshmi Devi on His right chest and Sri Padmavathi Devi on His left chest. His lotus feet are covered with gold anklets. A strong curved belt of gold encompasses his legs.

The right hand has a *chakra*, and to the left is a *shankha*. The slightly outstretched front right hand, has its fingers pointing to His lotus feet, as the only recourse for His devotees to attain oneness with Him and enjoy eternal bliss. His front left hand is akimbo to assure His devotees of protection, and to show that the *samsara sagar* is only hip-deep if they seek His refuge.

Sridevi and Bhudevi reside next to him.

*Om Govindaya Vidmahe
Venkateshaya Dheemahi
Tanno Srinivasa Prachodayat*



*Manojavam Maaruta Tulyavegam
Jitendriyam Buddhimataam Varishtam
Vaataatmajam Vaanarayutha Mukhyam
Sri Raamadootam Sharanam Prapadye*

SHRI HANUMANJI

Great devotee of Bhagwan Shri Rama and bears a picture of Him on his chest.

Highly intelligent, truthful speech, ocean of knowledge and complete control of his senses.

Holds a *gada* or mace, a sign of bravery.

Endowed with extraordinary valor and speed. Reached for the sun thinking it was a ripe fruit.

Unaware of His own strength, till He has to use it.

Endowed with power to change His size at will.

Body of a Monkey with divine qualities who risked His life to help Bhagwan Rama rescue Sita from Ravana.

Brought Rama a mountain with the *Sanjeevani* herb, to save Lakshman's life.

Blessed with immortality, invulnerability and enduring devotion to God.

Also known as Bajrangbali, Anjneya, Pavanputra, Maruti, Kesari Nandan, Sankat Mochan and various other names.

*Om Aanjaneya Vidhmahe
Maha Balaya Dheemahi
Tanno Hanumat Prachodayat*



*Sarva Mangala Maangalye
Shive Sarvaardha Saadhike
Sharayanye Tryambake Gauri
Narayani Namostute*

DEVI DURGA

Powerful form of Goddess Parvati.

Represents the supreme power that preserves moral order and righteousness in the Universe.

Red attire symbolizes action necessary to ensure that evil is destroyed.

Carries different weapons given by the Gods to kill the demon Mahishasura. They represent various powers and capabilities hidden within us to overcome negativity and allow positivity to blossom.

Carries a lotus to represent the protection of the good.

The tiger or lion is her *vahana* and it symbolizes uncontrolled animalistic tendencies in us (such as anger, arrogance, greed, jealousy, etc.) can be tamed.

'Durga' means 'inaccessible' or 'invincible'.

Navaratri or nine nights, followed by Vijaydashmi, is a festival to worship the Mother Goddess.

*Om Katyayanaya Vidhmahe
Kanya Kumari cha Dheemahi
Tanno Durgaya Prachodayat*



*Aum Namaste Astu Mahaa Maaye
Sree Peethae Sur Poojite
Shankha Chakra Gaddaahaste
Mahaa Lakshmi Namostute*

DEVI LAKSHMI

Lakshmi is the Goddess of wealth and prosperity.

The word 'Lakshmi' is derived from the Sanskrit word *Laksme*, meaning 'goal.' Lakshmi, therefore, represents the goal of life, which includes worldly as well as spiritual prosperity. Wealth not only means money, but also the higher values and qualities of life.

The lotus, which Lakshmi is standing on, tells us that while living in this world, one should enjoy its wealth, but not become obsessed with it. Such a living is analogous to a lotus that grows in water but is not wetted by water.

The four hands represent the four ends of human life: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (genuine desires), and *moksha* (liberation from birth and death). She carries a lotus in her hands. The golden coins falling illustrate that She provides wealth and prosperity. Her front right hand is shown bestowing blessings upon the devotees.

Goddess Lakshmi is the consort of Lord Vishnu and resides in *Vaikunta*.

*Om Mahadevyai cha Vidhmahe
Vishnu Patnyai cha Dheemahi
Tanno Lakshmi Prachodayat*



DEVI SARASWATI

Goddess of Wisdom and Knowledge.

Dressed in white for purity.

Sits on a *padma* (lotus), a flower that is beautiful in spite of its surroundings.

Carries an *Akshamala*, a rosary signifying the passage of time.

Carries a holy manuscript signifying knowledge.

Plays the *veena*, a symbol of fine arts which requires using both the mind and intellect.

Her *vahana* is the *Hansa* (swan), a symbol of purity and discrimination.

Mother of the Vedas, vedic lessons begin and end with the '*Saraswati Vandana*.'

Resides with Brahma in *Brahmalok*.

'*Sara*' means essence and '*swa*' means life, implying that knowledge is the essence of life.

*Om Vakdeviyai cha Vidhmahe
Virinji Patnyai cha Dheemahi
Tanno Vani Prachodayat*

*Ya kundendu tushar har dhavala ya shubhra vastravruta
Ya veena vara danda mandita kara ya shveta padmasana
Ya brahmachyuta shankara prabhurutibhih devahisada vandita
Sa mam patu Sarasvati Bhagavati nihseshesa jadyapaha*



*Aum Bhoor Bhuvah Swaha
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi
Dhiyo Yo Naha Prachodayat*

GAYATRI MATA

Gayatri Devi is an incarnation of Saraswati Devi, consort of Lord Brahma.

With the blessings of Lord Brahma, she is said to have given the four Vedas to mankind.

Gayatri is typically portrayed as seated on a lotus, signifying wealth.

She has 10 hands. In eight of her hands she carries the discus, mace, utensil, conch, axe, lotus, noose and the Vedas. Two of the hands are depicted in the *abhaya* (gesture of fearlessness and granting protection) and *varada* (gesture of granting wishes) *mudras*.

The five faces represent the *Pancha Mahaboot* (five basic elements), earth, water, air, fire and space.

Gayatri, Savitri and Saraswati are the presiding deities of the famous Gayatri Mantra.

Gayatri mantra is a jewel among the treasures of our Vedas that is handed down from generation to generation.

This mantra of Goddess Gayathri is also a prayer to the Sun, the giver of light and life.



NAVGRAHA

Navagraha - the nine (*nava*) major celestial bodies (*grahas*) of Hindu astronomy. The placement of the nine planets in the Horoscope points out the karmic influence on the behavior of the individual.

These celestial bodies are:

Surya (Sun)

Chandra (Moon)

Mangala (Mars)

Budha (Mercury)

Brihaspati (Jupiter)

Shukra (Venus)

Shani (Saturn)

Rahu (Head of Demon Snake - Ascending/North Lunar Node)

Ketu (Tail of Demon Snake - Descending/South Lunar Node)

*Brahma Murari Tripuraantkari
Bhanu, Shashi, Bhoomi Suto Budhascha
Gurus cha Shukra Shani Rahu Ketavah
Kuruvantu Sarve Mam Suprabhatam*

TIPS ON HOW TO CONDUCT GODS AND GODDESSES BOOK

1. Discuss one God per month.
2. Start the class with a shloka in praise of the God for the month.
3. Talk about the one God (Bhagwan) belief system. They should not be confused or overwhelmed with all the Gods. We only have one God but we see them in different forms. (Please elaborate as you see fit.)
4. Please tell a story about the God that you are discussing. Give specific examples of qualities and traits they possess. Also talk about what you can learn from the God. Expand these points with very simple examples.
5. Spend some time discussing the God with the children. Explain, that when we come to the Temple and pray, we say the *shloka* or *stuti* for each God by standing in front of them.
6. Ask the children to think about the God. Encourage them to share their insights about the God and to be thankful for all the nice things they have in their life.

BRAHMAN/ISHWAR/BHAGWAN (THE CLOSEST ENGLISH WORD IS 'GOD')

1. The essence of everything is Brahman: the Ultimate Reality. Recommended reading - *Chandogya Upanishad*.
2. There is ONLY Brahman and nothing else. He is the creator, sustainer and dissolver of this universe.
3. He is Sat-Chit-Anand (supreme existence, pure consciousness, and unlimited bliss).
4. Out of devotion and love, we may call him Brahman, Ishwar or Bhagwan.
5. Brahman is one and only one, but devotees call him by different names and see him in different forms – Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, Durga and so on.
6. The flowing rivers, sun, moon, forests, blue sky, mountains, flowers and everything that we see around us is created and sustained by Ishwar (his *aishwarya* / grace).
7. Our rishis have also thought of Brahman to assume both male and female forms.
8. The word “Brahman” is not to be mistaken with Brahma (as in Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh) or Brahmin (a learned person who seeks Brahman).