

## [Happy Pancha Ganapati!](#)

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Yuletide is not a Hindu holiday, but we have our own December gift-giving festival

Daddy, why don't we have Christmas? what do we do? Don't we get presents, too?" Those questions were heard in so many Hindu homes some 20 years ago that it inspired us to create a new holiday based on time-honored traditions. Pancha Ganapati, a five-day festival celebrated from December 21 through 25, has since become a favorite in homes all over the world. The winter solstice has always been a festive time of year in all countries, religions and among Hindus especially, for it is a traditional season for the worship of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed Lord of Culture and the Arts.

Since most Hindus do not celebrate Christmas, they often find it difficult to relate in a meaningful way to those who do. Their children are often embarrassed when asked why they don't receive gifts like their friends. Adults feel the need to give gifts and mail greeting cards as well as accept them from relatives, neighbors, friends and business associates. The five days of Pancha Ganapati offer a Hindu expression of this natural season of worship, gift-giving and celebration.

During each of the five days of Pancha Ganapati, a special sadhana, spiritual discipline, is focused upon by the entire family. A shrine is created in the main living room of the home and decorated in the spirit of this festive occasion. At the center is placed a large wooden or bronze five-faced murti of Lord Pancha Ganapati. If this is not available, any large picture or statue of Lord Ganesha will do. Lord Ganesha is often depicted as coming from the forest; therefore, pine boughs (or banana leaves) may be used. Flashing lights, tinsel and colorful hanging ornaments may also be added. Each morning the children dress or decorate Ganesha anew in a different color: golden yellow on December 21, then royal blue, ruby red, emerald green and finally brilliant orange--the colors of His five powers, or shaktis.

Each day a tray of sweets, fruits and incense is offered to Lord Ganapati, often prepared and presented by the children. Chants, songs and bhajanas are sung in His praise. After puja, the abundant, diverse sweets are shared by one and all as prasada. Each day gifts are given to the children, who place them before Pancha Ganapati to open only on the fifth day. Greeting cards, ideally made by the children, offer Hindu art and wisdom, such as verses from the Vedas.

Now we shall explain the special significance and observances for each of the five days of Pancha Ganapati:

December 21, yellow: The family sadhana for the first day of Pancha Ganapati is to create a vibration of love and harmony among immediate family members. The day begins early, and the entire family works together to design and decorate the shrine with traditional symbols, rangoli, lamps and more. Then a grand puja is performed invoking the spirit of Pancha Ganapati in the home. The sadhana of the day now begins. The family sits together for the purpose of easing any strained relationships that have arisen during the year by making amends one with another. When forgiveness is offered to all by one and all, they speak of each other's good qualities and resolve that in the days ahead they will remember the futility of trying to change others. Gifts are then exchanged and placed unopened before Pancha Ganapati.

December 22, blue: Day two is devoted to creating a vibration of love and harmony among neighbors, relatives and close friends and presenting them with heartfelt gifts. The sadhana of the day is to offer apologies and clear up any misunderstandings that exist. Relatives and friends in far-off places are written to or called, forgiveness is sought, apologies made and tensions released. Each day, gifts received are placed unopened before Pancha Ganapati.

December 23, red: The sadhana for the third day is to create a vibration of love and harmony among business associates, the casual merchant and the public at large. This is the day for presenting gifts to fellow workers and customers and to honor employers and employees with gifts and appreciation. The sadhana today is the settling of all debts and disputes.

December 24, green: The sadhana of day four is to draw forth the vibration of joy

and harmony that comes from music, art, drama and the dance. Family, relatives and friends gather for satsang to share and enjoy their artistic gifts. Then all sit together before Ganesha, Patron of Arts and Guardian of Culture, discussing Hindu Dharma and making plans to bring more cultural refinements into the home.

December 25, orange: The family sadhana for the final day is to bring forth love and harmony within all three worlds. Because of sadhanas well performed during the first four days, the family is now more open and aware of Ganesha's grace, and their love for Him is now overflowing. On this day the entire family experiences an outpouring of love and tranquility from the great God Himself. His blessings fill the home and the hearts of everyone within it, inspiring them anew for the coming year. Jai Ganapati!