

How Ganesh got his head

A Hindu story

Key ideas: loyalty, the consequences of anger, regret

Shiva and Parvati had a son called Vinayaka.

Every morning Parvati took a bath. While she was doing so guards stood by the door to make sure that no one could enter. One day the guards were ill and Parvati asked her son to guard the door for her. She explained to him that on no account must he let anyone disturb her. Vinayaka stood proudly in front of the door with a large spear in his hand.

He had not been on guard very long when he saw Shiva coming towards him. Vinayaka told him that Parvati had ordered that no-one was to enter. When Shiva realised he would not be allowed in, he developed the most terrible rage. He took his axe and chopped off his son's head.

Parvati, of course, was very upset about what had happened. When Shiva saw this he was sorry and looked around for Vinayaka's head so that he could try to put his son back together, but the head was nowhere to be found. As Shiva was searching in the woods for the missing head, he met an elephant. Shiva asked the elephant if he would give his head so that the boy could live again and the elephant agreed.

Shiva returned to where his son's body lay and fixed the elephant's head on to it. Then he breathed life back into his son. The boy slowly sat up, rubbing his neck. Parvati was overjoyed to have her son given back to her. Lord Shiva announced from that day his son's new name would be Ganesh.