# How Ganesh got his elephant head

When the Lord Shiva went away to war, he left his wife, Parvati, at home. One morning, on taking her bath, she gathered the saffron paste from her body and moulded it into the shape of a little boy. She gave life to the child, made him handsome and strong, and claimed him as her beloved son. Giving him a staff, she told him to guard the entrance whenever she went to bathe: “Do not allow anyone to enter without my permission.” Eager to please his mother, the boy took on the task with great enthusiasm.

In due course, Lord Shiva returned home and was astonished to find a little boy blocking his entry. Enraged, he drew his sword and cut off the child’s head.

When Parvati discovered what her husband had done, she was furious. In order to appease her, Shiva sent his guards to look for a replacement head. He told them to bring the head of the first living thing they found with its head to the north, this being associated with wisdom. It so happened that the first creature they encountered sleeping with its head to the north was an elephant. So they chopped off its head and brought it back to Shiva, who positioned it on Parvati’s son and breathed life into him.

Parvati was overjoyed and Shiva, apologetic, accepted him as his own: “Henceforth, this valiant boy will be respected and worshiped before any other God. He will be called Ganesh, or Ganpati, chief of the Ganas.”

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