

[Importance of Religious Rites](#)

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Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 1984

Importance of Religious Rites

Swarup, Ram Man is a psychic being. He seeks to praise, to adore, to invoke the invisible at every step. So we must recognize the importance of worship in the life of an individual as well as a nation. There is a constant interchange between men and gods. They sustain and nourish each other, as the Gita says. It further adds that the ayajna belongs neither to this world nor [?] the next.

The best worship is the worship of the heart, but form and discipline in worship are also important. Collective worship works for social vitality and cohesiveness. Those who pray together stay together. Hence, all nations have built temples of one kind or another for themselves.

Once the Hindus had mighty temples and an active temple worship. But these edifices, in the North, were systematically destroyed by the Muslim invaders. In the South some of the temples still stand in their old glory, but they are in a sad state of neglect. They lack the means of self-sustenance. Even urgent repairs are not undertaken, and many of them are not even properly dusted and cleaned. They were deprived of their traditional revenues by the British rulers, and no suitable alternative arrangements have yet been made.

India has acquired some sort of independence, but its deeper spiritual life has yet to come into its own. The new rulers carry on the old tradition of the alien predecessors and discriminate against Hindu institutions. Hindus have yet to acquire a government of their own. Thanks to a thousand years of exploitation by the Muslims and the British, the Hindu society has become impoverished and has fallen into a state of apathy, indifference and self-forgetfulness. Its temples have fallen into disuse; and [?] its Gods are not properly attended to.

Not only the temples, but the priests too have been neglected. They have become

illiterate and indigent. Consequently, they have lost in self-esteem and social prestige. They may be the poorest and the most neglected class among the Hindus.

Besides service in the temples, priests in the past were needed for other functions as well. Hinduism conceived life sacramentally. It invested everything secular with the spiritual, individual with the cosmic, visible with the invisible. So all events in life-birth, name-giving, wedding and death-were fortified with the religion rites. All these functions needed trained priests. But in their absence now these functions are being neglected, and Hindu society is falling apart. The quality of Hindu life is suffering irreparable damage.

We are happy to note that our brothers on the other side of the globe in Hawaii, the monks of the Saiva Siddhanta Church, under the leadership of His Holiness, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, have taken up this matter in right earnest. They have taken up the question of the Saivite priesthood, and their answer should hold good for all of us, whoever be our Ishta Devata, our chosen Deity for worship. As one American Hindu leader noted: "Hindu priests should be well paid so they are never dependent on gifts. Training programs and community support are vital, for today it is true that Hinduism can create a brave new world."